

**EXPLORING PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION IN CORE CURRICULUM  
SERVING FIRST YEAR STUDENTS  
IN A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY**

**by**

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## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Kimberley A. Porteus, hereby solemnly declare that the work contained in this thesis is entirely my own original work with the exception of such quotations or references which are distinctive of their own sources or authors. All the sketches and tables were produced by me with the exception of where I have acknowledged that they were taken from another source.

This thesis has not been submitted to and will not be presented at any other University for an equivalent or any other degree award.

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the potential for critical pedagogical innovation to expand student learning activity, meaning making and learning agency of first year undergraduate students. The study is located in a larger critical project. Rather than looking to support 'unprepared' students to better adapt to the current culture of higher education, the larger critical project looks to the generative potential of new students to elaborate the structure of higher education itself over time.

The study emanates from a process of reflective self-critique of one higher education institution in South Africa serving a student population with little access to educational advantage. The emerging critique was located at the interface of institutional practice, student learning activity and the meaning making processes mediating the two domains. This critique gave birth to the pedagogical innovation at the centre of this study. The pedagogical innovation took the form of an activity system, with three sets of pedagogical tools mediating the system: tools to expand the learning practice of students, symbolic tools to expand the critical meaning making toolkit available, and tools designed to build a new learning community better aligned with interactive learning activity.

This study is an intervention case study, theoretically grounded in the work of activity and socio-cultural theorists. The pedagogy was embedded within a semester long credit-bearing core course for entering first year students. The study follows the experience of the 652 students participating in the 2010 pilot experience.

Upwards of 70% of students suggest that their reading (76%) and writing (71%) practice had changed by the end of the course. Over 80% indicated that the course made them better readers (85%) and writers (84%).

Students suggest that they read and write more and enjoy reading and writing more. They suggest that as motive expanded, activity of reading and writing expanded, complimentary activity expanded (e.g. expression and critical engagement), and

participation across a number of domains expanded. Students with less historical access to educational advantage made stronger claims about the pedagogical toolkit than students with more access to educational advantage.

This study suggests that under the right conditions, critical pedagogy focusing on student learning activity and meaning making can expand learning practice and meaning making of first year undergraduate students, contributing to an expanding claim on learning agency. It tentatively suggests that this type of learning architecture is well aligned for appropriation of students with less access to historical socio-educational learning privilege, but remains sensitive to the situated nature of historic disadvantage (for example, in campus sites.) The study points to the specific potential of three toolkits: toolkits to mediate expanded learning activity, toolkits to expand meaning making, and toolkits designed to directly reconstitute the learning community itself.

The study concludes by extracting some lessons for critical pedagogical innovation serving first year studies into the future. It points to the importance of the domain of learning activity and meaning making, and suggests the kind of changes within the culture of higher education required to better unleash innovation in this area. It points to the generative potential of methods that better combine students and lecturers within pedagogical innovation processes.

The study concludes by pointing to the relatively unoccupied area of critical research, whereby the work to expand the learning activity of first year students is aligned to the potential of students to elaborate the structure of higher education itself over time. The study points to three specific research areas: research building stronger pedagogical tools for first year students; research to better understand the critical meaning making project of students; and research to better understand the transformation of the pedagogical inheritance within higher education.

**KEY WORDS:** First year studies, higher education, critical, pedagogy, activity, meaning, learning agency, South Africa

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~

Mila. Ayi Kwei Armah got it wrong. The beautiful ones are born every day. We just need to take care of them all better... How lucky am I to walk by your side...

Ngenxa yakho.

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to the first year undergraduate students at this University.  
And to your contribution toward our collective future.

## ACROYNMS AND GLOSSARY

LKA	‘Life, Knowledge, Action.’ The formal name of the course at the centre of the study.
GP	‘Grounding Programme.’ Alternative name of the course at the centre of the study.
Umzi	isiXhosa word for ‘home’ (imizi (plural.)) Used to refer to the smallest pedagogical level combining 6 students.
Ekhaya	isiXhosa word for ‘home.’ Used to refer to the midlevel pedagogical level, the ‘extended family’ made up of 30 students.
Abakhwezeli	isiXhosa word for ‘keepers of the fire.’ Used to refer to special senior student facilitators at the level of the Ekhaya.
Village	English word for small community or town. Used to refer to the largest pedagogical level combining roughly 100 students.
Umthamo	isiXhosa word for ‘module.’ Used to refer to the 6 themes or modules within the course architecture.

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## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

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#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the potential of critical pedagogical innovation to shift the patterns of learning activity, and the meaning making processes attached to learning activity, amongst first year undergraduate students at one university in South Africa.

While only 16% of students in South Africa have access to higher education, cohort data from 2000 suggest that after five years of entering, only 30% of students had graduated, with 56% leaving without graduating. The greatest attrition from higher education occurs at the end of the first year of study (Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2007).

The South African literature considering the first year experience in higher education remains limited. The emerging literature focuses primarily on supporting 'unprepared students' to better integrate into higher education. This study approaches the domain of pedagogy from a critical perspective, looking to expand the learning activity of first year students, embracing the generative potential of this activity to elaborate the structural domain of higher education itself (Archer, 2010).

The study is designed as an intervention case study, guided by the work of activity theorists (Daniels, 2008, pp. 115-147). The study focuses on the cohort of 652 students participating in the 2010 pilot of a pedagogical intervention organised as a semester core course for all entering undergraduate students. This represents the first experiment of critical pedagogical innovation for first year undergraduate core coursework focused on activity and meaning making within South Africa.

This introductory chapter begins by summarising the unique context and history in which this study is embedded. The chapter goes on to locate this intervention study within a cycle of 'expansive learning' (Engeström, 2001, 2007). Engeström's

expansive learning cycle encompasses three phases: critique of current practice, critical redesign, and intervention testing. This study can best be understood as the third phase within a cycle of expansive learning. This chapter presents the first two phases of the cycle. It first summarises the dialogic processes within the university in 2007, culminating in the 'radical' critique of current practice. It then summarises the process of critical redesign in 2008, establishing the basis for the pedagogical innovation that stands at the centre of this study, popularly known as the 'Grounding Programme'. The detailed design of the intervention will be discussed in Chapter 3. The chapter will then proceed to present the research questions, and suggest the motivation, significance and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes by defining core concepts, and outlining the structure of the remainder of the study.

## **1.2. HISTORIC BACKDROP**

### **1.2.1. Historic Backdrop: Institutional Context**

The historic backdrop to the study is characterised by the contradictions and discontinuities at the interface of the emergence of a largely 'historically black' liberal missionary institution and the turbulent century of dispossession and resistance in South Africa throughout the twentieth century (Swartz, 2005; Maharaj, Motala and Scerri, 2011).

The case study is undertaken at a university that was founded in 1912 by Scottish missionaries as a 'liberal college' focused mainly on teacher education and Christian studies (Swartz, 2005, p. 17). In its founding period, the student body was primarily, but not exclusively, 'black' students, with students coming from across southern and eastern Africa. Swartz (2005, pp. 17-20) summarised,

Set up by missionaries, and subsequently incorporated as a state university by the apartheid government in 1959, its founders saw its role to prepare the black elite for serving in the colonial state and civil administration. The range of academic programmes, and career paths, was restricted to teaching education, Christian theology and classical studies. It was assumed that after completion, graduates would go into teaching and religious institutions of colonial South Africa. (ibid, p. 17)

Swartz goes on to argue that its historical character reflected the contradictions of its time. During the two decades between 1940 and 1960, the university became a generative site for student activism; many students from this period would come to play a leading role in liberation movements across southern Africa. This culture of militancy and intellectual engagement was largely cultivated outside of the formal classroom. Swartz emphasised, 'the militancy of the Fort Hare student movement stood in contrast with the official disposition and philosophy of the university authorities at the time, which was philanthropist and steeped in the traditions of colonial rule' (2005, p. 18).

When the Nationalist Party came into power in 1948, the university was brought in line with the philosophy of racial separation. As Swartz reflects, the impact was devastating in at least three ways: the university was de-internationalised (with students from other African countries dramatically decreasing); the curriculum was further degraded (with curriculum essentially restricted to strict compliance with the assumptions of so called 'native education'); and independent-minded academics and administrators left in mass through appointment and promotion strategies valuing loyalty to the state. Swartz summarises, 'under its aegis, a highly conservative Calvinistic academic and intellectual culture was nurtured, which strongly discouraged and often suppressed student militancy' (ibid, p. 18).

The repression of this period was unable to suppress the emergence of a new generation of student activists, largely inspired by the emergence of the black consciousness movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the emergence of the mass democratic movement and other civic and political organisations in the 1980s.

Despite the waves of student militancy, the administrative and academic cultures remained highly authoritarian and deeply conservative (Bunting, 1994, p. 45). Under apartheid the funding framework reflected apartheid intentions, with institutions designated as 'black' deliberately stunted in their growth and development, despite rising student numbers.

### **1.2.2. The Birth of the Democratic Era**

With the formal inception of democracy in 1994, the expectation for dramatic transformation was at a high. The social imagination of the university as the cradle of leadership of the liberation movement, counter-imposed on a landscape of institutional and intellectual neglect, created special expectations (and contradictions) longing to express themselves in a period of re-birth and renewal.

In his 2005 Professorial Lecture, Swartz, the Vice Chancellor of the university from 1999, reflects on the decade following 1994, and the forces that would divert energy away from this process of intellectual renewal, toward a politically charged process of institutional survival. Like other universities, the highly authoritarian governance structures became the first site of struggle at the university (Bunting, 1994, pp. 45-46; Swartz, 2005, p. 20). Early policy transformation focused on the transformation of governance structures, absorbing early energies for transformation. The policy work of this period legislated basic de-racialisation, while at the same time establishing a new national funding formula, based on a combination of student enrolment and graduation rates, with little space for redress and reliance on access to non-state funding streams. Opening the university up to market forces brought the university to its administrative and financial knees; or, as Bundy (2006, p. 13) summarised, the university 'went to the wall.' From 1994 to 2000, Swartz (2005, pp. 20-21) describes the rapid institutional decline resulting primarily from decreased student subsidy; neither efforts to rapidly downsize or collect student debt could counteract the rising institutional debt. Implementation of such measures led to an institutional backlash that resulted in a new leadership team being appointed in 1999.

In late 1999, in a unique institutional response, a wide range of university stakeholders came together in what came to be known as the Strategic Plan 2000 ('SP2000') process. Years later, people would remember the period as inspiring, hopeful and a period of collective purpose. Swartz (the new Vice Chancellor) would

describe SP2000 as a ‘turnaround strategy’. While emphasis was given to the administrative and financial pressures of the day, emphasis was also placed on a new intellectual project, with special emphasis on the relationship between teaching and research as it interacted with the socio-development challenges of its agora.

Any leadership energy focused on the transformation of the intellectual project was quickly diverted by another storm. During this period, the National Department of Education was undertaking its national review of the ‘size and shape’ of the higher education landscape. During this highly politicised and charged debate, the Minister of Education would argue for the closure (or merger) of the institution, emphasising its administrative and financial weaknesses. While political players and citizens alike joined in the fight to protect the university, and the university was finally retained as an autonomous multi-campus institution (gaining a second more urban campus in 2003/04), leadership energies were largely consumed by the process during this period (CHE, 2010, p. 2; Swartz, 2005, p. 21; Bundy, 2006, pp. 14-15).

With leadership attention diverted toward survival, the radical reconstitution of the intellectual project was, despite clear intentions otherwise, left largely unrealised. Like other institutions, highly traditional approaches to the teaching and learning nexus persevered, both as it relates to curriculum frameworks as well as routine academic practices (Scott *et al.*, 2007, p. 56). The renewal of the intellectual project remained the object of unrealised energy, both at the individual and the collective levels. In the words of Nkomo, *et al.*, it represented an object of reflective longing for an intellectual project birthed in the notion of African liberation (2006, p. v.).

### **1.2.3. Legacy of Public Schooling**

The other backdrop to the study is the specific history of the public schooling system in South Africa, leaving the most talented of public schooling students with little confidence in relationship to expanding learning activity.

The devastating history of public education in South Africa is widely recognised (Kalloway, 1984; Bloch, 2009). The impact of this history on the socio-cultural

inheritance of public education at the transition to democracy is less than fully understood. From the 1950's, after the Eiselen Report (1951) and the Bantu Education Act (1953) governance of the exclusive schooling system was shifted away from mission churches and brought under state control (Kalloway, 1984, p. 2). While the public schooling system expanded, it was systematically differentiated on the basis of so-called 'race' with so called 'Bantu' education largely handed over to so-called homeland authorities. Over the coming years, the system of public education for the majority of children would come to be characterised by extreme neglect and framed by 'Fundamental Pedagogics' largely focused on promoting a set of narrow religious and cultural beliefs and behaviours aligned to 'creating docile citizens' purposefully isolated from wider contemporary influence (ibid, p. 11).

Even less understood than the historic legacy is the way in which this devastating history mixes with contemporary choices to trap the majority of students in South Africa into existences with very little access to learning confidence. A full analysis of this painful contemporary phenomenon reaches beyond the scope of this study.

The inability to transform the system in line with a better learning experience for the majority of learners is largely a reflection of the extreme structural inequity characterising the national landscape. Policy makers, researchers and teacher educators predominantly live and work in middle class, English-dominant settings, with social imaginations strongly influenced by a Western discourse on curricular practice and educational outcomes. The majority of learners and teachers enact their lives in a multiplicity of mainly African languages, with little access to socio-economic privilege. There are two devastating results. First, while resource inputs have been equalised, they have not focused on historic redress. The basic conditions of teaching and learning for the majority of teachers and learners are not in place. Second, the tools of learning and teaching have not been aligned nor well tested in the socio-educational context of the majority of learners (Ramadiro, 2012).

Ramadiro's (2012) work begins to point to the devastating result. With curriculum that is neither built to release literacy in local languages nor build toward additive

bilingualism, students' relationship with the written word has become increasingly contracted. From the earliest phases of education, the system appears to work against the expansive fluency potential inherent in a child's home language. The results are common cause. Comparative results for literacy and numeracy consistently place the South African education system among the worst in the world (Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) II (van der Berg and Louw, 2006) and III (Spaull, 2011), Third International Mathematics and Sciences Study (TIMSS) (Reddy, 2006); Monitoring Learning Achievement (UNESCO / UNICEF, 2003)). While the students entering higher education represent the top 15% of students (and the top decile of students for 'black' students), a contracted relationship with learning activity remains a common rather than isolated inheritance of this student cohort.

### **1.3. EXPANSIVE LEARNING CYCLE**

#### **1.3.1. Introduction**

The work of Engeström (2001, 2007) is well known amongst third generation activity theorists for building upon the notion of expansive learning. In more conventional approaches to learning, the learner is set up to acquire some identifiable knowledge, which, once known, can be observed within some relatively lasting known observable practice.

Expansive learning looks to a level of learning that seeks new patterns of knowledge and activity. Pointing to Bateson's (1972) three level hierarchy of learning, Engeström (1987, pp. 158-159) suggests that expansive learning is a methodology to unleash learning beyond levels one (where learners learn correct answers or behaviours) and two (where learners learn more hidden curricular lessons) to the more creative and unpredictable level of three - a more radical questioning of the sense of meaning leading to the construction of a wider alternative context. Engeström argues that this form of learning involves a new understanding of current problems, and the creation of new tools for re-engaging with these problems. He

argues that this process of producing problem-solving tools gives subjects agency to expand the object of their activity, and finally transform entire activity systems.

He has developed a method to better structure processes of dialogue designed to promote cycles of expansive learning. At its essence, he suggests three methodological phases to promote this cycle: 1) a critical and informed analysis of current practice with an emphasis on historical origins of practice; 2) a critical design phase where a future imaginary potential is specified through the expansion of the objects of the activity and the creation of new mediation tools; and 3) intervention research, that is, implementing the new model of activity, and learning from the anticipated and unanticipated events that unfold.

This intervention case study is most fully appreciated as nested within this kind of expansive learning process, roughly mapped out in Table 1-1 below.

Table 1-1: Locating Study within an Expansive Learning Cycle

<b>EL Phase</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Time Line / Description</b>	<b>Role in Study</b>
<b>Phase 1</b>	Critical Analysis of Practice: Present and Past	2007 Expansive Dialogue	Backdrop to Study (Chapter 1)
<b>Phase 2</b>	Critical Design: Imaginary Horizon / New Activity System	2008 Activity System and Pedagogical Development	Intervention: Design of Pedagogical Innovation (Chapter 3)
<b>Phase 3</b>	Intervention Research	2009 and 2010 Pilot Experience	Current Study: Activity and Meaning Making

### **1.3.2. Expansive Learning Phase 1: Critique of Practice**

#### **1.3.2.1. Background**

The expansive learning cycle was initiated through processes of university dialogue ('iincoko') in 2007. Emerging out of the five year struggle for survival, the leadership of the university hoped to use the semiotic tool of its Centenary to re-animate the university project. While effort was still focused on establishing more sustainable sources of funding, the Vice Chancellor sought to 'shake up' the 'black box' of the

intellectual project of the university. Using the term 'curricular renewal', the Vice Chancellor reached out to a number of stakeholders to help him strategise about the levers available to support a process of institutional transformation of the teaching and learning project of the university.

Among others, he reached out to a newly constituted organisation based within the university, interested in the interface between the university project and society, with an emphasis on education and rural development. The author of this study was the Executive Director of this organisation at the time. Without a doctorate to their name, and known more for their commitment to social activism, the 'academics' he invited 'in' did not represent the conventional currency of higher education institutions. He chose to devolve institutional authority and creative space during this formative period outside of formal institutional hierarchies.

Academics, particularly those with energies for creative transformation, had by this time become weary of discussions under the banner of 'curriculum'. Over the recent past, discussions about the 'quality' of the university had mostly emanated from institutional leaders and national departmental officials through discussions of quality assurance, with an emphasis on building greater efficiencies through technical compliance. Weary from the battles for administrative survival, many academics, in particular, had receded into their more individualised work fronts.

#### 1.3.2.2. Reflective Dialogue

Acknowledging this academic wariness, it was decided to invite the university community into two different kinds of horizontal dialogic processes, animated by the semiotic notions of 'iincoko', 're-imagination' and 'African liberation'. The question that framed the dialogic invitation was, 'If this university can be proud of its contribution to African liberation in the past, what does this mean for our intellectual project in the future?'

'iincoko' is an isi-Xhosa word that roughly means to engage in reflective discussion. This word was occupied collectively with an emphasis on reflective and horizontal

engagement, whereby voice is distributed outside of every day hierarchies. The use of an isi-Xhosa word, the first language of the majority of students, lecturers and employees of the university, touched a sensibility of (or longing for) a socio-cultural context that was epistemologically affirmative of a wider human existence, beyond the narrow, largely Western, inheritances of our recent past. The word 're-imagination' invited the discussion to engage in a 'new space,' unhinged from the pressures and limitations of the past-present. A tool for expansive dialogue, it created both more space for listening, and for moving beyond the discourse of 'the efficient' embodied both institutionally and individually over the past period. The notion of 'African liberation' allowed us to individually and collectively re-occupy one of the most important symbols of the university's narrative of itself and its own agency.

There were two distinct dialogic invitations. The first was a series of sessions where the entire university community was invited to participate in an open discussion. Classes were cancelled for each of the four afternoon sessions spread across the year. The first session was more structured: each of the Deans provided a critical analysis of the intellectual project of the university, and their imagination of the core project moving into the future. They took the opportunity to establish a non-defensive dialogue, sharing self critique as well as ideas for the future. Students quickly found their voice, and contributed their critique of (and imaginations for) the university experience, through speeches, poetry and song. From the second session onward, the sessions were organised as 'open microphone.' While the university leadership participated visibly, the 'microphone' was distributed openly – allowing students, faculty and community members to 'have their say.' Over 1500 stakeholders participated in these open 'iincoko' over the period.

The other dialogic invitation was organised in the form of overnight 'retreats'. Again, the university community was invited outside of institutional hierarchy, on the basis of interest rather than position, with friendly pressure laid to bear by senior management on other senior leaders to participate. Approximately 40 people

participated, including senior administrators, academics and interested students. Like others, the students did not represent organised student politics, but rather had expressed interest in the question of the transformation of the intellectual project of the university. They would become a driving force behind the emerging intervention. The retreats took place off site, and included the participation of key intellectual 'dreamers' from outside of the institution, designed to shake the boundaries of the conversation about the project of the university. The sessions were facilitated by a widely respected intellectual interested in the interface of the university and society, with little reverence for institutional protocol or hierarchies.

Care was taken methodologically to frame the conversation beyond the common discussions (and tensions) associated with 'efficiency' and 'compliance' that had come to dominate this period. Discussions were framed to move the collective thought process beyond the 'institution', locating analysis and discussion on the bigger questions of society, processes of social change, and the role of the knowledge project in an inclusive and dignifying democracy. Both forums of iincoko focused on a critique of present practice by examining the past and present, as well as approaching the future through its imaginative potential.

### 1.3.2.3. Historic Critique: The University Knowledge Project

After reviewing the transcripts and other documentation from these dialogic engagements, one could characterise the dialogue as energetic and optimistic. At the same time, there was a kind of shared 'longing' – a sense that the current activity patterns and meaning of the day to day life of the university did not live up to people's internal longing or imaginations. There was a sense of disjuncture between current institutional practices on the one hand, and the promise of an institution aligned with 'African liberation' in the post-apartheid period on the other.

Four interrelated concepts emerged as expansive critiques of the form and function of the university 'curricular' project: the notion of 'transdisciplinarity', 'humanising pedagogy', 'Africanisation', and 'community engagement'.

In the evening of the first retreat, the late Professor Dani Wadada Nabudere (2006a, 2006b), from the African Study Centre based in Mbale, Uganda, brought the group into a discussion of the knowledge project of African universities through a discussion of transdisciplinarity. His work on transdisciplinarity transcends the technical differentiation between terms (disciplinarity, inter/intra-disciplinarity, transdisciplinarity) to reclaim a knowledge project with more freedom from narrow Western epistemologies and academic conventions. He emphasised two conclusions. First, the common structure of knowledge underlying the academy, inherited largely through the process of Western colonialism and contemporary domination, was not neutral. Any attempt for contemporary African based scholars to contribute to notions of liberation in Africa, must have the ability to look at the knowledge project itself from a critical perspective. As importantly, he suggested that if a knowledge project were to be inclusive of the majority of human beings, it would have to pull down disciplinary borders – as most of the human experience lay not only at the boundaries between disciplines, but in spaces that were often blind spots to current disciplinary structures.

His suggestions held the power of affirming the possibility of a new kind of knowledge project, unleashed from the formalities of the present. As such, this academic community was not only bound to try to perfect a 'game' that was already established, but to think critically about the boundaries of the 'game'. Moreover, a response to this challenge was not going to be found through currently constituted debates and divisions within this community, but through establishing a new approach to work within the community.

The second generative theme was first voiced by the Executive Dean of Education at the time, Professor Denise Zinn, when she articulated a longing for what she termed a 'humanising pedagogy.' Inspired by the work of critical pedagogues, and recent

exposure to notions of 'border pedagogy,' she suggested that an animating concept in thinking about the university's future was building a theory and praxis consistent with a 'humanising pedagogy.' There are at least six reasons why this quickly became an important symbolic tool. First, like the suggestions proposed by Nabudere, it was an open, unoccupied space. Zinn did not point to a model in the world, but rather an 'idea' whose solution could only come from within us, through local praxis. There was no 'expert' to follow, imitate or emulate – it suggested a space for new creation. Secondly, through the process of expansive dialogue itself, there was already a sense of creating new ways of engaging with each other, across hierarchy, and across the usual topics of compliance, financial efficiencies, and judgement – the term 'humanising pedagogy' helped 'name' the process emerging. More importantly, within the notion was a recognition of a dehumanising past – a history that brutally divided, relegating people into different categories of social worth, undermining the very notion of the value of the human contribution in the diversity of its form. Related to this, was the provision of a semiotic tool containing a recognition of the complexity of identity formation in the contemporary period. There was a common longing, expressed strongly by students, that the process of becoming 'a human in the world' could not be boiled down to the absorption of a specific set of knowledge or capacities divorced from the complex process of 'becoming self'. And, finally, the concept tacitly recognised a critique of the history of elitism within the working of the academy, whereby the majority of the people were relegated 'outside' of the academy. The academy had little recognition of, nor humanising engagements with, the majority of people in the country, especially those living in impoverished communities without access to the elite language of English. The suggestion of a 'humanising pedagogy' suggested not only that the prior experience and knowledge of students should be respected more systematically, but that the way the university engages with knowledge itself must be re-established on the basis of a common humanity.

This provided a link with the third animating idea, namely, community engagement. This notion had been an animating idea for the process of SP2000 discussed above. There were three suggestions emerging from this theme. First, an emphasis on community engagement was a reflection of the painful disjuncture between the University and its most local social environment in the past (Swartz, 2005, 2006; Morrow, 2006). The local town in which the university resides was largely stagnant with regard to agriculture, industry, and the emergence of cultural life. If one of the roles of a university in a democratic society was to engage with knowledge in such a way that contributes to local community development and innovation, then the university was currently not demonstrating its strength. Second, related to this was a discussion of the history of academic practice in relationship to engaging with impoverished communities, that too often took the form of quick engagements, often paternalistic in nature, with little accountability on the academy to contribute toward sustainable solutions. Finally, there was recognition of the extractive nature of the academy as it related to rural development and impoverished communities in general. While the most talented young people from rural areas participate in higher education, these young people are largely prepared for making a contribution in the context of urban economies, their skills ultimately extracted from rural development possibilities. Affirming that all students have the right to choose their future, students questioned why so little was done to prepare students to think about knowledge in relationship to issues of rural community development.

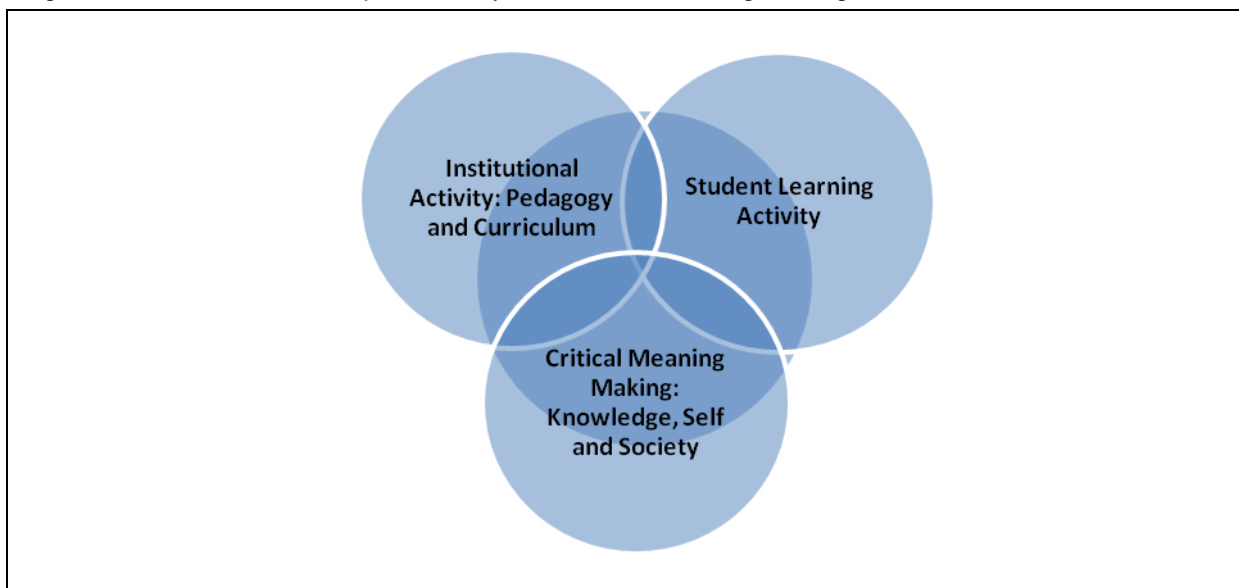
The suggestion of the 'Africanisation' of the intellectual project of the university was woven across the discussions. Like other concepts, this was understood differently by different people, and has a long history of debate within the university. Within these conversations, focus was not placed on the definition or boundaries of 'African' but used to point to a knowledge project that had more space from the prescriptions of colonial history specifically and Western academy in general. The discussion did not polarise the two laying claim on a universal knowledge project, inclusive of global traditions. It pointed to the structures, hierarchies and languages of the Western

academic traditions that provide exclusive boundaries rather than an inclusive structure related toward a more creative knowledge project dialectically engaged with the 'African local.'

#### 1.3.2.4. Critique of Present Practice: The 'Curricular' Project

This historic critique created a safer space for a more open and critical reflection on *current practice*. The reflections of both students and lecturers unleashed a radical critique at the interface of the student and institutional culture. On the one hand, it constituted a wider critique of the cultural norms of contemporary higher education. On the other hand, it established a more specific critique about how this culture is enacted locally. Figure 1-1 illustrates the structure of the critique at the interface of institutional activity, student learning activity, and the critical meaning making process at their interface. Each of the three elements of this critique is briefly discussed below.

Figure 1-1: Institutional Critique: Activity and Critical Meaning Making



- *Critique Element 1: Student Learning Activity*

The first element of the wider critique emanating from the process of expansive dialogue was a critique of student learning activity. This critique simply served to

bring the fragile reading and writing cultures, inherited from a largely dysfunctional public schooling system, into the open. The critique focused on reading, writing, dialogic activity and the meaning made of these activities by students.

The critique suggested that, as a general trend, first year students were not self generative readers. Students entering the university had excelled in a poor schooling system. While they all 'can read' (and compared to their peers in secondary school 'read well') their personal reading cultures are fragile. Few have the fluency, speed, or strategies to read widely for understanding, or to actively self-expand the complexity of their reading practice during their university studies. Student reading activity reflected a calculated engagement with the curriculum, perfecting the art of guessing what lecturers would value in the context of exams.

The critique went on to suggest that students are not self generative writers. It suggests that there is little student writing detached from completing assignments. Student writing activity largely reflected a last minute scramble to submit assignments, with weak or non-existent traditions of revision. Students expressed little confidence in constructing a written argument, and leaned heavily on simple web-based searches to extract written text to emulate. Lecturers expressed an increased frustration with web linked 'plagiarism.'

Students discussed the 'art of avoiding' both reading and writing. When discussions became deeper and safer, there was a student discourse of 'if I am really honest'. At these moments, students say that if they were 'really honest' they did not like to read/write, they did not read/write well, and they did not read/write beyond academic survival.

As discussed above, the majority of students came from home environments where English is not spoken. The schooling system is not organised to provide learners with academic confidence in their home language, nor to experience any sort of meaningful break-through in additional languages such as English. Many students enter University with weak to non-existent confidence in verbal and written academic English. Despite this linguistic context, the University enacts its life exclusively

through the medium of English. Students discussed the impact on a range of learning activities – from reading and writing in academic English, to understanding and participating in lecture sessions.

Students further noted that the activities of reading and writing were not woven into student culture. They reported that there was little if any discussion of the curriculum outside of the classroom, whether formally or informally. They reported that it was rare for students to discuss either the process or content of reading or writing – whether it be at the level of frustration or inspiration. Moreover, students reported that their learning practice was largely privatised; that is, academic activity constituted a ‘private world.’ There was a pretence that ‘nobody studied.’ Students who enacted more open learning activity were viewed with some suspicion. There was little collective value placed on the activities of academic learning.

- *Critique Element 2: Institutional Activity - Curriculum and Pedagogy*

The critique of institutional activity suggested that curricular and pedagogical practice was largely complicit with the weak learning practice of students. That is, the institutional practice largely served to reinforce rather than disrupt the fragile learning activity of entering students. Elements of this critique are discussed here.

The cultural assumption amongst university lecturers was that first year students should have consolidated their basic academic skills, especially reading and writing skills, prior to entry to the University. It was assumed that students were able to expand their skills autonomously. Providing students with scaffolding for academic activity (including reading and writing) was not considered to be the ‘problem’ of lecturers nor an appropriate component of university coursework.

Despite its linguistic context, the university enacted its life within English. Moreover, the cultural assumption amongst university lecturers was that first year students should have consolidated a workable relationship with academic English. Providing students with an environment sensitive to weak access to academic literacy, let

alone one that takes advantage of multilingual student resources, was not considered to be the 'problem' of lecturers nor required to be an activity of university coursework.

The structure of reading and writing activity within university coursework propagated the culture of survival rather than break through. Courses were organised by course notes. If more extended reading lists were provided, they were not organised in a way that would support expanding cultures of reading. It was tacitly accepted that most students did not go beyond course notes. There were no structured tools to support students to get into a culture of reading and writing regularly, rather than merely using reading and writing as a mechanistic tool for academic survival. There was little support provided to students to read beyond disciplinary boundaries, or beyond the academic genre. Reading content that may be better oriented toward deepening a culture of reading was largely relegated out of the curricular space.

In terms of writing, students overwhelmingly said they would individually scramble in the last few days. When assignments were given back, they rarely contained more than a mark and a few notes. There was no systematic experience of getting feedback, and being supported to write again. As such, students were denied the experience of writing and re-writing required to produce work at expanding levels. First year exams were either multiple-choice or based on narrow course notes. Essay questions were recycled across the years. Students became skilled at 'guessing the exam' and passing without reading and writing regularly.

The pedagogical practice was largely lecturer centred. This reflected both the large class size as well as an enduring culture of lecture-centred pedagogical practice. Lecture time was dominated by lecturers presenting material from course notes. Even the most extroverted students said they rarely asked questions or engaged during lecture time.

The institution was not successful in mobilising more senior students to animate the learning activity of first year students. Many courses were attached to a system of tutorials. In theory, tutorials were designed for more senior students to have special

smaller sessions with students to clarify and deepen the understanding of curricular content. Student tutors did not receive any special training or support. In practice, students reported that the student 'tutor' largely re-enacted the lecturer culture, where they prepared mini-lectures with little student discussion. Students reported that most tutorials were not attended until the exam period. During this period, students attended tutorials in their numbers, looking to the tutorial to help them guess the exam, where previous exam questions would be circulated and discussed.

Assistance with 'academic skills' was in essence 'outsourced' away from the academics to the Teaching and Learning Centre. While students who had specifically 'weak' writing skills could seek some support at the 'teaching and learning centre', such support was not woven into the day to day academic life of the university.

Students discussed playing their role in a 'theatre', where everyone seemed to 'pretend' that reading and writing were going on. At an individualised level, lecturers were frustrated and students internally doubted their ability. At a social level, the conversation was rarely if ever externalised, with few activities designed to provide lecturers and students with a more productive interface.

- *Critique Element 3: Critical Meaning Making*

The final critique emanating out of the expansive dialogue were the narrow boundaries of meaning making that accompanied teaching and learning activity. The critique suggested that the institutional curriculum and pedagogical practice did little to engage students (or lecturers) in a meaning making process with regard to their learning experience.

First, students reported that the current student culture did not place value on intellectual engagement or debate – whether curricular or extracurricular in nature. In contrast to the animating stories from the institution's past, where vibrant student debate constituted the informal curriculum of the institution, students said there was little discussion or contestation around ideas. Formal student politics placed

emphasis on political affiliation over and above a contestation for ideas. The informal praxis of student self organisation for reading, discussion and debate was weak to non-existent.

Second, there was very little opportunity to relate the curriculum to the 'real world' of students' lives or society more generally. Students said that the university curriculum, as a general fabric, had little meaning to them beyond its importance for achieving their degree. The notion that the knowledge that they gained was important to their personal lives or to society more generally constituted was weak at best. There was little opportunity – whether in formal or informal spaces of the university – to discuss the meaning of curricular content beyond academic performance. There was little support to engage the relationship between knowledge and the future at both the individual (self) and collective (social) levels.

Finally, there was little opportunity to engage with wider social issues, outside of the more disciplinarily conceived curriculum structure. Students pointed to little access to the 'big questions' of society with little space for interpretation of these questions in their own times. Students participating in the retreats continually pointed to the discussions of the retreats themselves as the most exciting forum of learning they had experienced since entering university.

These elements of the critique contributed to an overarching critique of the social purpose of a university education, and the social purpose of the life of a university graduate into the future. Both lecturers and students were concerned that students seemed to be having an increasingly individualised and mechanistic relationship to their university studies, whereby the purpose of study became more and more narrowly focused on access to a specific understanding of employability and material acquisition in the future. While it was understood that this reflected larger social forces, students suggested that the university was at least complicit in this growing individualism and narrow materialism. They pointed to the lack of pedagogical space to help think and talk about the student in relationship with society more broadly. They longed for space to engage with generative words and notions imbued with

meaning beyond the classroom (like life, love, collective future, local, village, social purpose, action, participation, life-well-lived, liberation, anti-colonisation, being human.) Students pointed to a growing social discourse blaming ‘youth culture’ for the growth of a narrow materialism. They responded that there were few spaces in the university which both supported and trusted students to make critical meaning of their lives beyond narrow individualism.

### **1.3.3. Expansive Learning Phase 2: Critical Design/Imaginary Horizon**

As suggested by Engeström’s theory of expansive learning (2001, 2007), the critique of present practice led to a ‘radical’ view of the potential future. Engeström calls this the critical design phase. In this case, the radical vision moved away from longing for a ‘more prepared student’ entering the university toward transforming the institutional culture to more effectively scaffold the learning experiences of incoming students – accepting the students as they are. While the discussion was expansive and multidirectional, the vision emerging can be summarised by five interrelated imaginative activity horizons.

The first two activity horizons were student expansive reading and writing activity. The imagined ‘future state’ is one in which students enact and experience reading and writing as valuable in their lives, delinked from a tight association with the completion of specific academic assignments. The imagined future was one in which the institution provided the required support for students to expand reading and writing activity to a level of strategic fluency, giving students the tools to build the complexity and depth of their reading and writing activity effectively into the future. This state included building a student culture that inherently valued reading and writing, where both the process and content of reading and writing became the object of open student activity and debate.

The third activity horizon is roughly termed ‘a culture of student led learning organisation’. The ‘radical vision’ was for the institution to support the emergence of effective student organisation around learning activity. This horizon encompasses

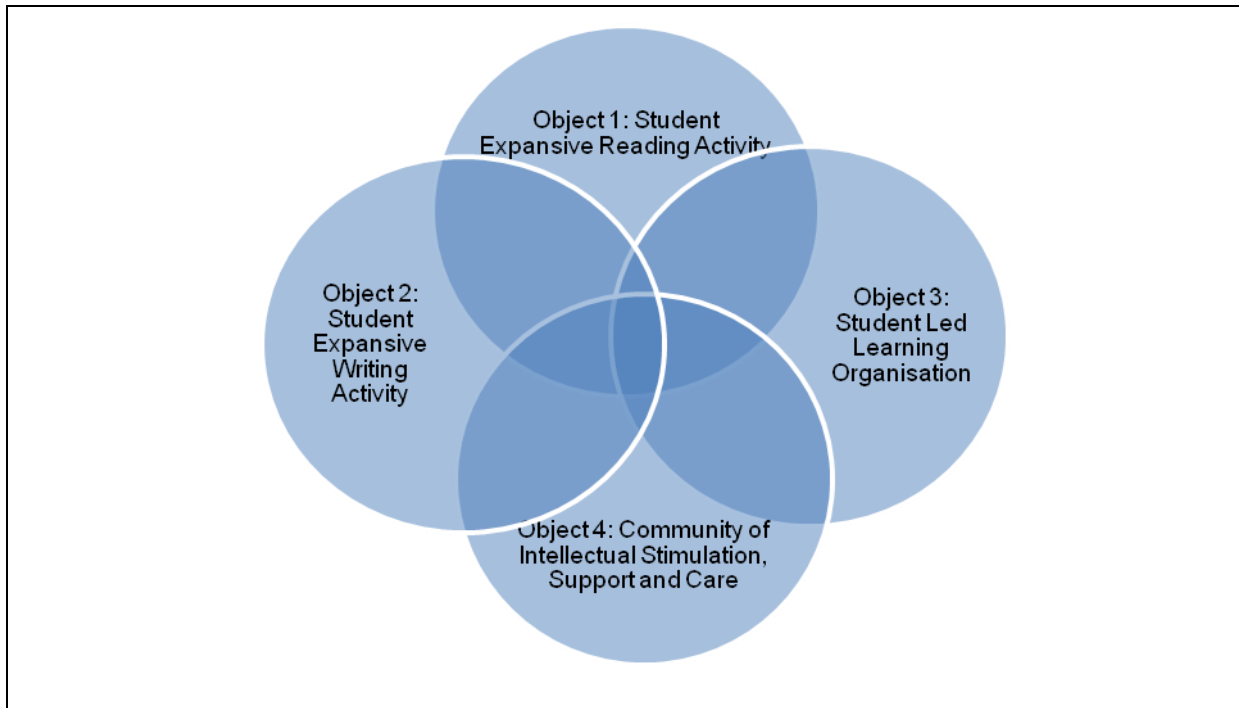
several interrelated objects: students organise to support their individual and collective learning practice, students build an autonomous culture of intellectual dialogue and debate, and learning practice comes to enjoy more social meaning for their lives, both individually and collectively.

The fourth activity horizon was the creation of a community of intellectual stimulation, support and care. This activity sought to re-establish the activity system of the university, mobilising limited institutional resources in support of intellectual stimulation, support and care.

The fifth activity object was expanding the boundaries of the university knowledge project to animate the interface between the university and its local surrounds. This included several notions. It implied shifting the epistemological boundaries to let other voices engage in the dialogue of the academy. It meant a stronger interrogation of the knowledge project from the perspective of local challenges. It also meant a critical stance toward the largely extractive nature of the knowledge project in reference to the rural poor.

For a range of reasons this fifth expanded object was never fully taken up in the pedagogical design, despite its generative importance. As such, the pedagogical design was finally motivated by the four expanded objects summarised in Figure 1-2 on the following page.

Figure 1-2: Imagined State: Expanded Activity Objects (Motives)



## 1.4. THE BIRTH OF THE IDEA: THE GROUNDING PROGRAMME

### 1.4.1. The Birth of the Idea

With this new imaginative horizon as the backdrop, a range of ideas emerged about how to 'get there.' In order to consolidate limited energies, it was decided to take one 'big idea' as a collective project into the future. One of the ideas that enjoyed the most energy was to establish a core first year course, across faculties, which provided *students and lecturers* with a space for pedagogical innovation responding to some of the ideas emerging through these discussions. This idea became known as the 'Grounding Programme (GP)' and over time was named 'Life, Knowledge, Action (LKA)'.

The idea was to create a core transdisciplinary course for all incoming first year students, motivated by the activity horizon mapped above. The initial vision was to build a year-long first and final year course. The idea was that the 'course' would create an environment for lecturers and students to come together, and experiment with pedagogical tools to better achieve the imaginative horizon. The founding idea

was to build a collective of lecturers and students to co-create the pedagogical tools and curriculum of the course, upon which to learn together over time.

### **1.4.2 Early Developments**

A group of students immediately formed themselves into an autonomous working group called, the 'Grounding Programme Student Round Table', meeting twice weekly and engaging in a process of student- supported engagements (writing, community service and dialogue).<sup>1</sup> Mobilising the energies of interested lecturers proved much more difficult. While far weaker in terms of time and energy, a small group of lecturers came together to try to see the idea develop.<sup>2</sup> A 'Steering Committee' was put together, made up of representatives from the Grounding Programme Student Round Table (GPSRT), as well as this smaller group of interested academics.

In September 2007 a proposal was tabled at the university Senate to launch a semester 'core course' for all incoming first year undergraduate students. With little debate, the proposal was accepted. The 'motion was passed', less through wide understanding and support but more through the efforts of a few dedicated lecturers supported by senior institutional leaders. In December that same year, the proposal was tabled at the university Council, where there was more animated discussion and support.

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<sup>1</sup> The dynamic students of this formative period included: Nomsa Mazwai (Management and Commerce, Third Year), Nqaba Mpofu (Management and Commerce, First Year), Jacqueline Ndove (Social Work, Third Year), Khanyisile Ngalo (Management and Commerce, Third Year); Ndimphiwe Mkuze (Communications, Third Year), Sibusiso Mnyanda (Philosophy, Second Year), Thembeke Dube (Social Work, First Year), Martin Mutopa (Social Work, First Year), Abigail Muhango (Social Sciences and Humanities, Second Year), Emmanuel Mugoni (Social Sciences and Humanities, Third Year), David Garwe (Management and Commerce, Honours); Tarisai Kadungure (Social Work, Second Year); Victor Mahamedi (Masters, Law); Brian Mubiwa (Social Sciences and Humanities, Masters); Vuyisile Silo (Social Sciences and Humanities, Second Year); Khayaletu Quilie (Social Sciences and Humanities, Third Year), Mandisa Ndindwa (Law, Third Year); Nqaba Mbande (Social Sciences and Humanities, Third Year); and Kudakwashe Chipendo (Management and Commerce, Second Year).

<sup>2</sup> The academics that dedicated the most time to this process, beyond the author of the current study, included Andy Gilbert (Executive Dean of Research), Brian Ramadiro (Nelson Mandela Institute), Denise Zinn (Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education), Gary Minkley (Director, Post Graduate Studies), Fhulu Nkwhevhha (Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities), and nhlanganiso dladla (former Dean of Education, Management and Commerce).

With a growing and energetic student core, a smaller group of lecturers spent their time working with students to build the pedagogical tools for the course development.<sup>3</sup> Grounded in neo-Vygotskian theory, and postcolonial<sup>4</sup> critical pedagogy, the group sought to create a pedagogical infrastructure with the potential to unleash expanded activity in a mutually generative if somewhat unpredictable way.

The year of 2008 was spent building pedagogical ideas. As ideas emerged, students within the Grounding Programme Student Round Table would immediately experiment with the idea in practice. As far as students in the GPRST were concerned, the 'Grounding Programme' was 'launched' in 2008. The final pedagogical tools emerged at the interface of theory and this praxis. In 2009, the course was piloted with 360 students in the main campus of the university. In 2010, the course was piloted with 652 students across the two largest campuses. This study focuses on this 2010 experience.

## **1.5. MOTIVATION FOR STUDY**

In 2007, Scott, Yeld and Hendry wrote the first comprehensive analysis of student access and graduate output from institutions of South African higher education. Due to data system weaknesses, comparable national cohort data was unavailable before this time. They analysed data tracking the 2000 and 2001 intake of students entering undergraduate studies for the first time. Their work helped to refocus research attention on the crisis of teaching and learning in higher education.

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<sup>3</sup> The three most active academics were the author of this study, Brian Ramadiro, and Andy Gilbert (1987; 1995) (Dean of Research). The students most actively involved in this pedagogical design phase included: Nomsa Mazwai, Nqaba Mpofu, Sibusiso Mnyanda, Khanyisile Ngalo, and Ndimphiwe Mkuzo.

<sup>4</sup> 'Postcolonial' is used roughly across this study to refer to the socio-cultural inheritance of nations and spaces which were previously formally colonised (Said, 1993; wa Thiongo, 1986.) The author recognises three difficulties with the terminology. First, 'imperialism' is as much a contemporary as historic phenomenon, and therefore a reference to a post state can be problematic. Second, there is much debate as to whether the South African context was 'colonial' in the usual sense of the word or what has been termed 'colonialism of a special sort.' Finally, there is no common 'postcolonial' existence as such. The word is used to emphasise a context in which current hegemonic patterns were largely inherited through historic processes characterised by violence and far reaching social and economic domination.

The work first emphasised that access to the system of higher education in South Africa remains highly exclusive, serving only 16% of young people. The majority of so called 'black African'<sup>5</sup> students who achieve entry are in the top decile in terms of prior performance in schooling. Their work spoke to the view that many current students 'do not belong in higher education', and concluded that this view is not tenable (Scott, *et al*, 2007, p. 11).

Their analysis placed emphasis on output rates as opposed to enrolment rates. The 2000 cohort data suggest that after five years of entering higher education, only 30% of students had graduated, with 56% leaving without graduating. Taking only universities, excluding UNISA figures that reflect mainly distance education students, 50% of entering students had graduated after five years (from three and four year degree programmes), with 38% of students having left without graduating. In almost all of the sub-analyses that looked through the lens of qualification types, the graduation rate of 'black' students was less than half of the rate for 'white' students. Combining these analyses, this data suggest that the higher education sector (in its totality) is effectively serving less than 5% of 'black' young people.

The 2000 cohort study confirmed, moreover, that the greatest attrition from higher education occurs at the end of the first year of study. For first time entering students, the attrition rate at the end of the first year was approximately 20% (excluding distance institutions) (Scott *et al.*, 2007, pp. 28-29). There have been no studies to better understand this 20% experience. The termination or suspension of studies reflects a multiplicity of factors; financial exclusion is likely to be the most significant. Scott *et al.* (2007, p. 29) argue that to the extent that poor academic performance

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<sup>5</sup> Data management systems for higher education continue to be weak and fragmented. Demographic data held on students continues to place emphasis on apartheid racial classifications. Higher education research often uses this data uncritically. On a methodological level, there is a common conflation of 'racial classification' and socio-economic status. The acceptance of the use of 'race' as a proxy for socio-economic disadvantage means that we are likely to misunderstand and misrepresent socio-economic equity over time. Moreover the continued use of 'racial classifications' places momentum behind racialised analyses, suggesting some sort of absolute (rather than historically constructed) difference between students merely on the basis of so called 'race'. The discourse of 'race' will be used in the current study only to the extent that existing literature makes it difficult to avoid. Italics will be used to remind readers to treat the concept with some caution (Motala, 2010).

contributes, the low participation rates combined with the high first year attrition rates defines structural articulation failure.

The basic conclusion Scott and his colleagues put forward is that given the 'persistence of underlying performance patterns,' they are not likely to change 'spontaneously'; 'more of the same' approaches, or emphasising enrolment growth in isolation, without improving the educational processes of the university system is unlikely 'to produce optimal returns' (Scott et al., 2007, p. 21).

They suggest, moreover, that while the student body has 'diversified,' the educational processes within higher education remain largely unchanged and unexamined (ibid, p. 40). While acknowledging the contribution of the poor quality of basic education, they argue that the higher education sector has the responsibility (and agency) to establish appropriate articulation between schooling and the university sector. They go on to suggest that the way forward requires nothing less than systemic change, with special emphasis on the teaching and learning domain.

This study, attempting to learn more about the interface between pedagogical innovation and the learning practices of first year undergraduate students, was motivated within this context.

## **1.6. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The promise of democracy for higher education in South Africa included at least two social aspirations. First, the coming of democracy promised substantively increased access to institutions of higher education, particularly for students previously marginalised from participation. Secondly, the coming of democracy promised the beginning of a substantive transformation of the epistemological and pedagogical domains, a transformational process that would bring the higher education sector in better alignment with the challenges and aspirations of a democratic society.

In terms of the latter, Odora Hoppers (2006, 2009) is one of the few to articulate the special transformational challenge implicit to 'historically disadvantaged institutions',

to spearhead a new intellectual project serving the previously dispossessed sections of our society through radical pedagogic and epistemological innovation. From this theoretical starting point, the challenge of higher education is not to solve the 'problematic' of 'historically disadvantaged students' but rather to create new pedagogical states in which their emergence as critical intellectuals and social actors is better supported. As such, the goal of higher education transformation must reach beyond getting more students through the current system more 'efficiently' to the transformation of the pedagogical domain calibrated with expanding the learning activity of students in the university system, and generative of and responsive to the individual and collective meaning making processes at the interface of students and society at large.

Despite these social promises, there has been relatively limited research or empirical experimentation, from a critical perspective, within the teaching and learning domain within higher education during this period; nor has there been a substantive attempt to theorise the basis for pedagogic transformation, consistent with the above stated challenge. Evidence suggests that students are left on their heels, trying to 'survive and pass', with a 'curricular project' holding little meaning to students beyond passing.

The Council on Higher Education (2010) argues that there is a paucity of research, oriented from a critical view of the university, engaging in the pedagogical domain. While there have been some attempts to support the so-called 'under prepared student', these experiences have largely been divorced from a critical view of the normative practices of the university in a democratic era. Moreover, research has largely been rooted in the 'problematic of the under prepared student'. As such, there have been no large scale innovations theoretically rooted in the normative space of the current first year student, building pedagogical tools with today's student at the generative centre.

The research area of 'first year studies' has grown internationally across the past twenty years (Astin, 1993, 1998; Barefoot, 2000; Tinto, 1987, 1997, 2005; Yorke and

Thomas, 2003). The emerging literature in this area considers innovations in institutional arrangements, the curriculum, and the pedagogical domain to cater better to the academic and social needs of first year students in higher education. There is little research or large scale empirical innovations to contribute to this field as applied to the democratic era in South African higher education. Moreover, there is little theoretical work to ground such research from the perspective of expanding the learning activity and meaning making of first year students in this context.

### **1.7. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The primary research question facing this study is, how can critical pedagogical innovation focused on student learning activity and meaning making ('the Grounding Programme') impact first year undergraduate students in one university in South Africa?

The four sub-questions guiding this study are:

1. How did the pedagogical intervention impact the learning activity of participating students?
2. How did the pedagogical intervention impact the meaning making associated with learning activity of participating students?
3. How did the pedagogical intervention impact learning agency of participating students?
4. What are the lessons and implications for pedagogical innovation serving first year undergraduate students' core curriculum in higher education in the South African context?

## **1.8. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to understand the experience of a cohort of first year undergraduate students as they mediate a critical pedagogical intervention designed to expand student learning activity and the meaning making associated with this learning activity. The study aims to understand whether this pedagogical architecture has the capacity to shift the patterns of learning activity and meaning making in a way that promotes student learning agency. Through this process, the study seeks to extract lessons to inform pedagogical interventions serving first year students in South African into the future.

## **1.9. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

While working from different intellectual perspectives, a growing number of analysts of higher education (Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2007; Odorra Hoppers, 2006, 2009; CHE, 2010) point to the domain of pedagogy as critical for addressing the crisis of the through-put rate facing South African universities. However, there has been little if any large scale experimental work focusing on the pedagogical domain in higher education that is: 1) specifically calibrated to expanding the learning activity of first year undergraduate students; 2) generative and responsive to the critical meaning making process of students; 3) places the student at the epistemic centre; and 4) aligns itself within a larger critical project to reconstitute higher education to better serve the emergence of a more inclusive democracy. As an exploratory study, the significance lies in its ability to provide new insights at the interface of first year student learning activity, meaning making, learning agency and critical pedagogical innovation.

## **1.10. METHODOLOGY**

The study is designed as an intervention case study guided by the methodological work of third generation activity theorists (Daniels, 2008, pp. 115-147; Engeström, 2001, 2007). As such, the methodology is articulated at two levels: the design of the intervention (pedagogical innovation of the course) and the design of how the intervention experience is systematically observed, documented and analysed.

The pedagogical innovation takes the form of a second semester required course for all incoming undergraduate students. The pedagogical architecture combines a number of material and symbolic tools designed to reconstitute the learning activity and learning environment of first year students. The theoretical basis and activity system representing the pedagogical innovation are presented in the first half of Chapter 3.

The study design takes the form of a mixed method intervention case study. The study population included the 652 students participating in the 2010 pilot of the course. There were three sources of data. The first source of data was a myriad of artefacts collected during the design and implementation of the course itself – from field notes to curricular tools. The primary data collection instrument took the form of a series of quantitative and qualitative student questionnaires administered upon course entry, at the midway point, and as students finished the course. Analysis of the quantitative data was designed to describe data patterns and consider the influence of a number of co-variables. Analysis of qualitative data was designed to provide a more nuanced understanding of activity patterns and processes of student meaning making, with an emphasis on reading and writing activity. The final dataset represented student second and third year course marks comparing the first year undergraduate cohort who participated in the course with those who did not participate. A quantitative analysis is undertaken to investigate whether or not there is any evidence that participating in the course had any influence on student success, as measured by second and third year course marks.

## 1.11. DELIMITATIONS

The original intention of the study was to look at the intervention experience through a wider lens. Given the sheer scope of the study, and the size of the data set emerging, the study had to narrow its focus in two ways. First, the initial intention was to consider learning activity in its broadest form. The study was narrowed to place analytic emphasis on the activity of reading and writing. Second, the initial intention was to consider critical meaning making broadly, trying to understand, especially, whether students' patterns of social meaning making became more critical of hegemonic inheritances (see below). The study was narrowed to focus on the meaning making more tightly associated with the activity of reading and writing. A more extensive analysis of the critical meaning making project deserves its own study. Both of these choices relegate large parts of the experience to the periphery of this study. The activity and meaning making related to the dialogic experience, in particular, is largely excluded from this study.

Moreover, it can be argued that the most important question facing this intervention experiment is whether this experience had any long lasting effect on the activity and meaning making of *lecturers*. However, due to a number of considerations, this exploration falls outside the ambit of this study. Further limitations and delimitations will be discussed in Chapter 3.

## 1.12. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

The core concepts will be discussed in more detail in the literature review. They are approached as follows:

- **Critical Pedagogy:** The notion of pedagogy is approached through the lens of activity theory (Daniels, 2001). Emphasis is placed on the tools (mediating artefacts in the form of tools, signs and animating ideas) that can be brought into play through explicit educational scaffolding. In this study, 'critical pedagogy' is

distinguished in two ways. First, the objectives of the pedagogy itself are influenced by an understanding of the role of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) in reproducing society in the interest of narrow dominant interests (Giroux, 1997, 2009). Second, the pedagogy seeks to expand meaning making tools beyond hegemonic inheritance. As such, a critical pedagogy seeks to build the critical capacity of students to question, think and act beyond hegemonic suggestion (Giroux, 1997, p. 71).

- **Core Curriculum:** Unlike institutions historically structured through the liberal arts tradition, students commit themselves to a discipline of study before they enter higher education in South Africa. Curriculum is almost exclusively discipline specific. Core curriculum refers to curricular space designed to serve students across disciplinary boundaries. In this case, it refers to coursework designed to serve all students in their first year of study. While there are few institutions with core curriculum for first year students, this domain is receiving more interest amongst researchers interested in the first year experience.
- **Activity:** This study approaches 'activity' through the theoretical tools established by Vygotsky, and extended through three generations of activity theory (Leontiev, 1978; Engeström, 1999). An activity is defined through the mediation of the triad of subject, object (or motive) and mediating tool or artefact (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 138). It represents the interface between the intra-psychic and social world, whereby the intra-psychic world is secondary and largely derivative. Moreover, an activity is situated. The subject, tool and object dialectically reflect the socio-cultural setting. An activity transforms through the transformation of its motive (Leontiev, 1978). The words 'learning activity,' and 'learning practice' are used interchangeably through this study.
- **Meaning Making:** One of the central tenets of activity theory is that the process of human development involves mediation with external tools and artefacts. The approach to meaning used in this study is attributed primarily to the work of Bruner (1990, 1996). Bruner suggests that mediation is rooted in the semiotic

process of meaning making. As such, it stands at the centre of the dialectical relationship between an individual and her socio-cultural environment. Meaning making is inherently social, drawing upon the tools available in a local setting. He suggests that the process of meaning making can be approached methodologically through the act of narrative, which inherently structures agency, sequence, and a sensitivity to change (1996, pp. 70-71).

- **Learning Agency:** Learning agency is approached as the autonomy to carry out intended learning activities. It looks to the expansion of intended learning activities, and the expansion of capability in reference to these intended acts. Its gaze focuses on whether or not the tools are appropriated ('made one's own') or not (Wertsch and Stone, 1985). At a higher level, it focuses on externalisation -- that is, the ways in which the individual, albeit constrained, influences and transforms the social plane.
- **Activity Theory and a Socio Cultural Approach to Education:** Several generations of theorists have built upon the theoretical foundations established by Vygotsky. The search for the appropriate unit of analysis generated differentiation among the extensions and re-workings of Vygotsky's work. The three most known distinctions emerge from emphasis being placed on word meaning (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986, 1987), mediated action (Wertsch, 1985), activity (Leont'ev, 1978) and activity systems (Engeström, 1999). While some theorists have emphasised the differences between these streams of theoretical work, contemporary work is increasingly demonstrating their integration and compatibilities (Daniels, 2001, p. 85). Rather than focusing on distinguishing between streams of this theoretical work (socio-cultural theory, socio-historical theory, cultural historical activity theory), this study uses 'activity theory' and a socio-cultural approach to refer to this school of theoretical work. Borrowing from Cole (1996, p. 108) 'activity theory' in this study is used to refer to work generated by the central thesis originally articulated by the Russian cultural-historical school, namely that 'the development of human psychological

processes emerge through culturally mediated, historically developing, practical activity.’ This study uses the term ‘socio-cultural approach to education’ to refer to the broad body of work undertaken by theorists (Bruner, 1990, 1996) to reapply the work of activity theorists back into an integrated theory for education.

### 1.13. OUTLINE OF STUDY

The study is presented in seven chapters, as follows.

- **Chapter 1 – Introduction and Background:** This chapter attempts to describe the unique backdrop and purpose of this intervention study. It summarises the context, critique of practice, and critical design work upon which the pedagogical intervention was built (Engeström, 2007.) The chapter then presents the research questions guiding the study process, and summarises the motivation, significance, problem statement and delimitations of the study.
- **Chapter 2 – Literature Review:** This chapter is divided into two distinct parts. The first half of the chapter locates the study in the rapidly expanding field of first year studies. This literature largely seeks to identify the factors that increase student retention and learning success (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993), and examine the wide range of institutional responses to better cater for the first year student (Barefoot, 2000; Tinto, 1997; Yorke and Thomas, 2003). This study briefly examines lessons emerging from international research, and then turns its attention to the emerging work in the South African context. The second half of this chapter shifts its attention to the theoretical tools used across this study. It summarises the theoretical tools emerging through the three generations of work rooted in the early work of Vygotsky, and establishes an approach to the core concepts facing this study: learning activity, meaning making and learning agency.
- **Chapter 3 – Methodology:** The study is a mixed method intervention case study. As such, it must be discussed at two distinct levels: at the level of the

design of the intervention itself, and at the level of how the process of the intervention is studied. This chapter is again divided into two parts. The first half of the chapter briefly reviews the requirements of intervention research, and presents the pedagogical intervention standing at the centre of the study. The second half presents the mixed method case study strategy through which the intervention experience is observed, documented and analysed.

- **Chapter 4 – Data Presentation and Analysis Part 1:** The findings are presented across two chapters. This first chapter begins by describing the study population and presenting data that speaks to the limitations of the intervention process itself. It then presents findings related to the first two activities of the pedagogical intervention, namely, student reading and writing activity.
- **Chapter 5 – Data Presentation and Analysis Part 2:** This chapter presents students' experience of the pedagogical architecture more widely. Emphasis is still placed on the activities of reading and writing, but the gaze extends to consider these activities interacting with the elements of the wider activity system. The chapter presents students' summative assessment of their experience as a whole, the interaction between reading, writing and the nested pedagogical architecture, and student reflections on the meaning they make of the course for their lives. The chapter concludes by presenting the analysis of second and third year course mark data, examining whether there is any evidence to suggest a more sustaining impact on the learning activity of participating students.
- **Chapter 6 - Discussion:** This chapter first explores the quantitative evidence in reference to changing patterns of learning activity. It then explores the complex interaction between students, tools and expanding activity motive. Informed by the work of Leontiev (1978), the discussion focuses on the process of expansion of the activity motive associated with reading and writing. Tools are discussed as they interact with motive transformation. This discussion attempts to better understand the dialectical relationship between activity, meaning making and

learning agency. The chapter concludes by presenting a summary of findings emerging from the study.

- **Chapter 7 – Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations:** This chapter begins by summarising the study experience. It then attempts to summarise some of the lessons emerging for pedagogical innovation serving first year student core coursework. It concludes by considering both the limitations of this study, and the research agenda emerging.
- **Post Script:** The postscript comments on the developments of the Grounding Programme since the 2010 pilot phase, and points to both the limitations and the developmental horizon emerging from this experience.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**  
**FIRST YEAR STUDIES AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

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**2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The first half of this chapter seeks to locate this study in the rapidly expanding field of first year studies in which this study is located. The field of first year studies has exploded onto the scene of higher education within the industrialised North over the past 30 years (Barefoot, 2000; Tinto, 1987, 1997; Astin, 1993). The research has sought to identify the factors that increase student retention and learning success in the context of first year transitions (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993), and examine the wide range of institutional responses to better cater for the first year student (Barefoot, 2000; Tinto, 1997; Yorke and Thomas, 2003). The field is only just germinating in the context of South African higher education research (Schalkwyk, Leibowitz and van der Merwe, 2012; Scott, 2012). This chapter starts by summarising this research landscape, establishing the lessons and limitations important for the current study.

One of the limitations of research in this field has been its relative abstraction from an explicit theoretical approach to learning. As such, its ability to help generate, challenge and build upon theoretical tools over time has been restricted. The second half of this chapter will shift its attention to the theoretical tools used across this study. It will briefly establish the theoretical tools emerging from the early work of Vygotsky, explore the three generations of activity theory emerging, and the integration of this theoretical work into a socio-cultural approach to education. It will establish an approach to three core concepts facing this study: learning activity, critical meaning making and agency.

## 2.2 FIRST YEAR STUDIES

Over the past 25 years, first year studies has emerged as a distinct field of study, with global journals, institutes (National Resource Centre for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition, based at the University of South Carolina), conference series (International Conference on the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition; European First Year Experience Conference; Pacific Rim Conference on First Year Experience) academic bodies (International First-Year Experience Movement) and coordinated national research projects established for the sole purpose of studying the experience of first year students, and the institutional, social, and curricular requirements to better serve their needs (Barefoot, 2000, 2001; Austin 1993; McInnis, 2001).

The proliferation of this research has largely coincided with periods of state expansion of higher education, forcing institutions to consider institutional practice and notions of learning in the context of an expanding student body, on the one hand (Nutt and Calderon, 2009, pp. 4-5), and the contraction of resources and stronger calls for institutional efficiencies and accountability, on the other (McInnis, 2001, p.105; Schreiner, Louis and Nelson, 2012, vii). As such, the motivation for the expansion of this research has existed on the continuum of seeking to better understand how to 'do the right thing' for first year students on the one pole, and how to better respond to institutional pressures of efficiency on the other pole. The research methods, assumptions, theoretical tools and conclusions often reflect different points on this continuum.

The majority of research undertaken consciously within the field of first year studies is from the context of highly industrialised nations. While there is a lot of work coming out of the UK (Yorke and Thomas, 2003) and Australia (McInnis, 2001), these do not compare with the sheer volume of work coming from the United States (Tinto, 1987, 1997; Barefoot, 2000, 2001; Astin, 1993). McInnis (2001, pp. 108-109) suggests that there were a set of economic and social conditions available to researchers based in the United States that supported the proliferation and growth of

the field. He suggests that while this rich research experience represents an asset for the field globally, it must be carefully re-translated and tested within alternative socio-cultural contexts (*ibid*, p. 108). This section will begin by extracting lessons from this important, albeit historically skewed, global literature.

Like other fields of research in higher education there is some unresolved tension about whether or not the first year students constitutes a 'discipline' as such, or a 'practical area' that lends itself to some academic exploration (McInnis, 2001). The emergence of first year studies as a distinct area of study appears to be less grounded in new theoretical territory, and more grounded in a series of shared social challenges emerging in the second half of the twentieth century.

Two common phenomena appear to be at the generative base of the field of inquiry. First, across global literature it is well established that university students are at their most vulnerable in the first year in relationship to retention, academic success, and a range of potential financial, social, health and emotional challenges (McInnis, 2001, p.106). Regardless of socio-economic challenges, the nexus of transitions located at the first year of university appears to be more complex and challenging - academically, socially, economically, and psychologically.

The second observation reflects the shared historical fingerprint of expansion of Westernised higher education. Several researchers make reference to the elite history of higher education (McInnis, 2001, p. 108; Tinto, 1997). Up to the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, institutional developments were aligned tightly to serve a homogenous male social and economic elite. As such, the socio-cultural assumptions of the institutions themselves (linguistic, psycho-social and economic) were strongly aligned to the socio-cultural assumptions and embodied realities of the global dominant class. When the socio-cultural and education contexts and interests are highly aligned, the 'science' of learning becomes more transparent. Learning, it appears, just seems to happen.

McInnis and James (1995) emphasise important institutional assumptions embedded within this elite history. First, universities assumed that first year students had

access to elite secondary schooling, strongly aligned to the requirements of specialised study that had come to be internalised in the higher education landscape. Second, universities assumed that the social, linguistic and cultural basis of students' families and home environments were in strong alignment with institutional norms. Third, institutions assumed that the values and norms embedded within their practices were aligned to an uncontested notion of 'value' into the future.

From the second half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, under pressure from a range of globalised economic and social developments, higher education was under pressure to expand beyond its homogenous elite starting point. Researchers overwhelmingly use the notion of 'diversification'. While access increased, student retention and success rates did not keep up. Frustrations grew as attrition and failure seemed to spiral upwards. In 2009 graduation rates for first bachelor degrees averaged only 38% among OECD countries (OECD, 2010). While the rate climbed as high as 50% in some countries (often reflecting a value placed on older student re-entry), it dropped to fewer than 20% in countries such as Argentina, Belgium and Mexico. (Note that South Africa is not included within these comparative statistics but will be discussed below.) In this context, academics have been increasingly drawn to the questions at the interface of the first year student experience, the university, and notions of student success.

The international research focusing on the first year experience was initially widely inspired by what was conceptualised as the 'first year problem', with an emphasis on poor first year student retention rates (Barefoot, 2000). In the context of the US, the attrition rate of first year students across the past several decades remains steady at approximately one in three students. Barefoot (2000) and others suggest that the majority of university faculty and senior administrators allocate blame for the attrition and lack of learning success on students themselves: 'new students are disengaged academically, unmotivated, can't write, can't spell, have a ten-minute attention span, expect instant gratification' (Barefoot, 2000, p. 13). She summarises the dominant discourse – students are not what they 'used to be'.

On the other hand, researchers started to consider the work of Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) whose work emphasises that working class students are less successful because the curriculum is biased in favour of middle and upper class students, who are socio-culturally prepared to enact successfully within its boundaries. These suggestions began to put institutional practice, and curriculum and pedagogy in particular, under the spot light. Barefoot (2000) credits the early work of Gardiner (1980, 1986) to helping to ensure that the field of first year studies did not get mired in the corner of solving the 'problem' of the student. He suggested that, while the entering student body has expanded in a number of ways, the 'predominant structure' of the first year of university is the same basic structure that was designed to serve the population of elite male mono-cultural students of the past. While students change with the times, and university has in theory opened up to wider socio-cultural constituencies, the socio-cultural traditions of the university have remained largely stagnant. The goal of first year studies, then, is expanded beyond 'remediating' the individual student, to embracing the possibility of large scale institutional reform to better serve a dynamic and growing student body.

Another important shift in emphasis across the field over recent years is a call to de-link the work from its narrow emphasis on student retention, to establish stronger tools to approach the notion of student success (Kinzie, 2012, p. xiv; Schreiner, 2012, pp. 1-18; Barefoot, 2000). New emphasis has been placed on learning success, student involvement, and more integrated notions such as 'student thriving' (Schreiner, Louis, and Nelson, 2012). While there is little consensus on what should constitute the nexus of first year 'success', this work helps the field hold itself accountable to higher education aims beyond mere institutional survival.

### **2.3. CONDITIONS FOR FIRST YEAR SUCCESS**

One of the most common pursuits within this field of research is searching for conditions that seem to support student retention and wider notions of first year success (Tinto, 1997; 1997; Barefoot, 2000). Early research emphasised the

identification of 'factors' (related to the student or institution) that may 'account' for or even 'predict' student success. There is overwhelming evidence that the socio-economic background of a student, regardless of measures of 'ability', academic background, or other characteristics, has a strong impact on the attainment or otherwise of positive outcomes in university (Astin, 1997, p. 12) However, elevation of these factors to predictive models served to implicitly contribute to the notion that institutions had little responsibility, *let alone* agency, to better serve a student with less access to socio-economic privilege. This was challenged by smaller scale research demonstrating that university practice was capable of better supporting successful learning experiences across socio-educational backgrounds, as discussed below. Over time, the emphasis on 'factors' has been replaced by an emphasis on 'conditions' for success. Research seeks to identify the socio-cultural conditions that contribute toward student retention and success, especially those theoretically within the ambit of institutional reform.

While there are a large number of studies that contribute to understanding in this area, the discussion that follows draws heavily from four important sources. First, the discussion draws heavily from the work of Astin (1993) and his colleagues. In 1985 and again in 1989 they undertook a massive investigation of over 25,000 first year students within more than 200 higher education institutional settings, considering a wide range of income and output measures, from academic and personal development to social activism. They sought to understand the relationship between student outcomes and institutional environments. Second, the discussion draws heavily from the work of Barefoot and Gardiner from the University of South Carolina's National Resource Centre for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Over the years, they have worked with over 300 institutions across the United States to build assessment criteria and instruments to speak to first year innovation programmes. In 2000, they undertook the first national descriptive study in American higher education aiming to look broadly at the first year (Barefoot, 2000). Since then, they have been working to coordinate research, tools and

analytic understanding across this sector (Gardiner, 2009). Third, the discussion will draw heavily from the work of Tinto, widely considered to be a pioneer in the field, conducting some of the earliest longitudinal work in the area. Finally, the discussion will draw from the work of Yorke and Thomas (2003). Using annual data on student retention, Yorke and Thomas identified a number of institutions in the UK performing higher than their benchmark, despite having a higher number of students whose demographic backgrounds are associated with weaker academic performance. They undertook intensive case studies at each of the six outlying institutions to better understand the experience of these institutions. While the work described above is multifaceted and does not seek strict synthesis, there are at least several common suggestions emerging. Note that across many studies emphasis is placed on financial challenges as the basis for student attrition (Yorke and Thomas, 2003, p. 71; Kinzie, 2012, p. xvi). This literature will not be included in this review, as its impact is largely relegated to the policy rather than pedagogical realm.

### **2.3.1. Involvement**

The first theme that these studies point to is the theme of 'student involvement' (Astin, 1993, p. 6; Barefoot, 2000, p. 16; Tinto, 1987, 1997). They use the notion of 'involvement' to reflect the amount of physical and psychological energy invested by a student into the educational process. Astin's work identified two sub-themes of involvement – involvement in learning activity itself, and involvement in co-curricular activities within an institutional setting.

The most important predictor of student retention and success (even more than socio-economic inheritances) in Astin's massive study was the number of hours spent studying. There is a body of evidence that suggests that the 'quality of student effort' is an important predictor of retention and success. As summarised by Tinto, 'The more students invest in learning activities, that is, the higher their level of effort, the more students learn' (Tinto, 1997, p. 600). The work of Astin (1993), Haggis (2006), Tinto (1997) and Barefoot (2000, p. 17) place emphasis on the importance of

raising (rather than lowering) expectations. Their work suggests that students who are challenged to make positive meaning of high academic expectations, and whose academic activities are supported from the beginning are better able to thrive (Barefoot, 2000, p. 17). Related to this theme are a number of institutions that are looking to enhance the 'intellectual' culture of the institution through strategies such as first year seminars and collective reading projects (*ibid*).

Most researchers use this theme to place emphasis on the second sub-category – namely, involvement in co-curricular activity. Astin (1993) suggests that 'almost any form' of student involvement benefits both learning and student development. Two conclusions are drawn (Barefoot, 2000; Tinto, 1997). First, first year students benefit from the provision of quality co-curricular experiences. Second, first year students benefit from the integration of curriculum and co-curricular activity. Barefoot (2000) gives the examples of service learning, residential based education, and the inclusion of 'involvement requirements' within formal course syllabi to support student engagement with the co-curricular opportunities on hand.

### **2.3.2. Student to Student Interactions**

The most common suggestion emerging across the literature is that perhaps the single most important source of influence (whether in the direction of growth or decline) are the first year student's peer group (Astin, 1993, pp. 8-9) Astin's work suggests that the amount of interaction between peers - from curricular (group projects) to co-curricular (sports, informal discussions, student politics, social clubs and organisations) - has far reaching effects across a broad range of academic, personal development and civic orientation indicators.

Tinto is largely credited with the earliest work in this area. He suggests that the initial focus of new students is to make social connections with their peers (Tinto, 1997; Tinto and Godsell, 1994). He suggests that only once social 'belonging' has been achieved in some way can student attention shift more fully to academic

endeavour (Tinto, 1987, 1997). He places emphasis on the potential for both alignment and integration of the social and academic functions of the institution to better serve first year students.

The work of Astin (1993) and his colleagues further suggest that students tend to change their 'values, behaviour, and academic plans' in the direction of the dominant orientation of their peer group (*ibid*, p. 8). The data also suggest that in many campuses peer groups often propagate the social differentiation of gender, race and class. Left un-interrupted, social differentiation (gender, race and class) is often consolidated rather than challenged within higher institutional settings. Astin suggests that the high effect of peer interactions may play itself out more powerfully inter-institutionally. With institutional selectivity highly correlated with the socio-economic status of students, students from high socio-economic backgrounds have unequal access to peer influence dominated by students who share socio-economic privilege. Astin suggests that to the extent that institutions can help to re-craft peer engagement opportunities beyond common academic and social fault lines, it benefits first year students.

As emphasised by Barefoot (2000, p 15), potential institutional responses to the importance of peer interaction can take two forms. First, institutions can work to provide more opportunities for first year students to engage systematically with each other during the first year. A significant number of innovations designed for first year students (first year seminars, the organisation of residential life, learning communities) are focused on enhancing students' experiences of relatedness. Second, institutions can work to better structure the early interactions between first year students and upper students, whereby upper students constitute mentors during orientation processes, residential life, and through systems of student tutorials.

### **2.3.3. Student and Lecturer Interactions**

The next condition identified as especially influential for first year student success is the engagement between first year students and lecturers (Barefoot, 2000, p. 15; Tinto, 1987, 1997; Astin, 1993, 1998). Astin's work suggests that after student to student interaction, the level of student/lecturer interaction has the most significant influence over first year students' academic, social and personal development. The relationship between student - lecturer interaction and learning gain is supported by a number of other studies (Endo and Harpel, 1982; Tinto, 1997; Barefoot, 2000).

Most analysts have placed emphasis on the opportunities for interaction beyond the classroom (Barefoot, 2000), from visiting a lecturer's home, to working on a research project, to talking with a faculty member outside of class (Astin, 1993). Emphasis is placed on building opportunities for student interaction with lecturers in co-curricular and more informal spaces (Barefoot, 2000). Subsequent work has focused on increasing the interactive potential between lecturers and students within the classroom (Tinto, 1997). This will be discussed in more detail below.

### **2.3.4. Support for 'Unprepared' Students**

There is a plethora of research, particularly within the academic development community, pointing to the importance of special support programmes for students who have had insufficient preparation for the level of early academic work currently being expected of first year students. Tinto's early work (1987) established the concept of 'academic integration'. His work suggests that students must have a level of prerequisite academic skills, providing an *entree* into academic conversation toward belonging. The most common approach to the so called 'articulation gap' (Scott *et al.*, 2007) between university expectations and first year student learning practice is through specialised academic support programmes. These programmes often take the form of identifying so called 'at risk' students, and targeting them for academic support programmes – either during holidays, as co-curricular

opportunities, or through extended curricular pathways. Barefoot's (2000) review of first year experience across the US suggests that, while these programmes are subject to a wide array of controversy, they make the 'essential difference' for some students' ability to graduate from university (*ibid*, p. 17).

### **2.3.5. Institutional Priorities and Orientation Toward Teaching**

Across the research, emphasis is placed on the socio-cultural orientation of the institution itself. The most important suggestion is that institutions will not succeed to serve first year students if their learning requirements are addressed through add-on or peripheral support programming (Tinto, 1997; Yorke and Thomas, 2003, p. 67).

The work of Yorke and Thomas (2003) concludes that the strongest commonality between the institutions that stand out in their service to first year students is both a broad conception and commitment to 'the student experience' in general, and the first year experience in particular (Yorke and Thomas, 2003, pp. 67-70). They point to the research that suggests the importance of an institution's 'habitus' – the deep values, relations and interests that inform daily practice, often subconsciously. They suggest that the institutions that are succeeding with first year students place more value on teaching. While many institutional leaders insisted that they encouraged research, their institutional culture placed unambiguous value on teaching and student support. Many of the institutions placed value on a sense of 'belonging' where lecturers sought to know their students as individuals.

The work of Astin supports this claim, suggesting that institutions where academic staff place value on teaching, in general, and the student experience, in particular, are more successful at serving first year students. Within the massive quantitative exercise undertaken by Astin and his colleagues (1993, pp. 16-17), they developed several faculty environmental measures through aggregating certain questionnaire items. Research orientation aggregated a faculty's research publication with the time and value they allocated to research. Student orientation aggregated

colleagues' perceptions about a faculty's orientation toward students. Institutions who reflect a high 'research orientation' demonstrate weaker results for first year student success, while institutions who reflect high 'student orientation' demonstrate higher effects. (Note that many institutions demonstrated neither high research nor student orientation.) This must be understood within the landscape of higher education in the United States, whereby the institutions with high research orientations were large public institutions, while institutions with high student orientations were smaller private institutions. (A small number of highly selective private colleges and private research universities combined high scores on both.) Interestingly, the study did not suggest an inherent contradiction between a faculty member being oriented toward research, and also being a strong teacher. The effect was seen at the institutional level but not at the faculty level, suggesting that institutional policies and values (hiring on the basis of research orientation) have an important impact on the socio-cultural environment for first year students.

Barefoot (2000) and Tinto (1997) both suggest that the most common limitation of initiatives to better serve first year students is that they are relegated to the periphery of institutional power. Most initiatives are not oriented toward changing the dominant socio-cultural assumptions of practice as a whole. They are relegated away from academic practice 'as usual' toward centres of academic development and student services, involving few academic faculty members. They often have an isolated champion rather than broad-based support, with little financial support (Barefoot, 2000, p. 17). Moreover, for many institutions, first year undergraduate students contribute disproportionately to the overall financial viability of institutions. Cost effectiveness measures justify increasingly large survey courses, based largely on teaching assistances of some sort or the other. As Barefoot suggests, 'Often institutions and new students strike a sort of implicit bargain – don't expect too much of us, and we won't expect too much of you' (Barefoot, 2000, p. 18).

Tinto summarises,

What would it mean for universities to take student retention seriously? Among other things, universities would stop tinkering at the margins of institutional life and make enhancing student retention the linchpin about which they organize their activities. They would move beyond the provision of add-on services and establish those conditions within universities that promote the retention of all, not just some, students. (Tinto, 2005, p. 1)

Until the status of the student experience gains more socio-political and institutional value, programmes are likely to be fragmented, peripheral and unsustainable.

## **2.4. CLASSROOM PRACTICE: THE CURRICULAR AND PEDAGOGIC DOMAIN**

### **2.4.1. Overview**

A striking feature of the early literature on first year support is the relative lack of emphasis on classroom practice. While work pointing to the potential of the domain of the classroom is available, it is isolated as one of many competing factors, with emphasis placed more on co-curricular experience. Moreover, while there is widespread critique of the enactment of classroom practice in higher education, there is less research on how classroom practice shapes first year student learning practice, as well as a relatively small body of research considering radical and sustainable alternatives. Tinto (1997) suggests that even at institutions which have paid more attention to the first year experience, they have largely located these efforts outside of the academic classroom, mainly through a range of co-curricular experiences supported by academic support centres and offices of student affairs. As such, while student experiences outside of the classroom may have changed, their experiences within the classroom have largely been left unchanged (Tinto, 1997, pp. 599-600). Tinto (1997) critiques his earlier work in this regard. While he called for integration of the academic and social domains, he largely conceived of them as separate domains. His more recent work begins to focus on the potential of the curricular and pedagogical domains to integrate these domains more fundamentally.

Tinto (1997, p. 601) suggests that, while much remains to be understood about the experiences of first year students within the classroom, the over-arching socio-

cultural fabric of the teaching and learning interaction is one sided. As an overarching horizon, learning appears to be a 'spectator sport' largely relegating students to passive observers, with the metaphoric stage dominated by lecturer monologue.

Beyond the implication of the suggestions reviewed above, Astin's (1993) analysis makes two suggestions more directly related to the classroom domain. First, he suggests that the methodology of assessment matters. One of the most important factors influencing success across the massive data base of first year experience is the nature of the learning activities that are assessed in some way. His work suggests that the substance of the learning challenges placed in front of students matters. That is, learning activities that challenge students to engage themselves beyond the skill of 'guessing an exam' (making class presentations, essay exams, and independent research projects) were strongly correlated with first year student success, while frequent use of multiple choice exams was negatively correlated with first year student success. A large body of work (York, 2001, 2003; Rust, 2002; Yorke and Thomas, 2003) points to the importance of assessment strategies on first year performance, pointing to the importance of formative over and above summative assessment strategies.

The other controversial suggestion emerging from Astin's work is the relative lack of importance of 'content' questions *per se*. Their study suggested that the 'content' at the centre of any coursework made little difference to student success. The work suggests that the 'manner in which curriculum is implemented' plays a much bigger role than the actual content. The work places more profound importance on pedagogical choices (how we teach) than choices of curricular content (what we teach.) He acknowledges that this works against the socio-cultural values of most academics, who pride themselves on specific content expertise. He suggests that academic contestation around curricular planning often focuses on content choices. He suggests that this contestation would be more productive if it were directed more in the direction of pedagogy (Astin, 1993, p. 9).

A range of institutions have sought to reconstitute the classroom experience in some way to enhance the experience of first year students. By far the most common form is the 'first year seminar'. A particularly interesting subset of this is known as cooperative learning.

#### **2.4.2. First Year Seminars**

The most work undertaken to understand the experience of first year seminars has been undertaken by the National Centre for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, located at the University of South Carolina (Barefoot and Fiddler, 1996; Padgett and Keup, 2011). Their work has established a historiography of the first year seminar in the US context, pointing to evidence for first year seminars from the early 1800s, addressing needs similar to those that frame the work today (see below). They suggest that by the early 1900s the first year seminar was extremely popular, and reflected the socio-cultural expectations of 'in loco parentis', whereby institutions explicitly sought mechanisms to address the social, personal and academic adjustment needs of first year students. They proliferated as the number of students increased after World War 1. By the mid 1930s, value was placed on their form, even amongst the most elite institutions. Sometime after the 1930s first year seminars went into retreat. As the culture of 'in loco parentis' was replaced by 'sink or swim' (Gahagan, 2002), faculty resisted the seminars as lacking academic rigour, suggesting that 'life adjustment' content was inappropriate to the academy. By the late 1970s and earlier they were the subject of a resurgence of interest (*ibid*), whereby they were in essence 'rediscovered' as a tool, leading to a new 'renaissance' of sorts (Padgett and Keup, 2011, p. 2). Whereas they were initially designed for specific 'at risk' students, their success led to their application more generally.

The Centre undertook the first national survey of first year seminars in 1988. The 2009 survey represented the ninth triennial administration of this survey (Padgett and Keup, 2011). They define a first year seminar as, 'a course intended to enhance

the academic and/or social integration of first year students by introducing them (a) to a variety of specific topics which vary by seminar type; (b) to essential skills for college success; and (c) to selected processes, the most common of which is the creation of a peer support group (Barefoot, 1992, p 49 as cited in Padgett and Keup, 2011, p. 2). Barefoot is largely credited with establishing a system of typology of seminars to allow for some large scale data gathering and analysis. She established typologies for first year seminars: extended orientation programmes; academic programmes (combining academic content and skills, with either uniform or different content across seminars); pre-professional or discipline linked programmes; basic study skill programmes; and programmes that were hybrids of the above typologies (*ibid*, p. 3).

The 2009 survey, covering 890 institutions, affirmed earlier reports that 94% of four year institutions offer a first year seminar to at least some students. A plethora of data emerged. In approximately 30% of institutions, all entering students participate in some sort of first year seminar. Just over 60% of institutions had a first year seminar reflecting an extended orientation programme. Almost one quarter of institutions had a seminar focusing on common academic content, different academic content and basic study skills - or they were hybrid in nature. Topics included study skills, academic planning, writing skills, critical thinking, relationship issues, time management, career exploration, diversity issues, health and wellness, and orientation to university resources. The majority were one semester in length (68%), and were letter graded (82%) rather than pass-fail (*ibid*, p. 30). Whether or not a course was required or not reflected institutional types, with 20% of public institutions requiring students to participate and 60% of private institutions requiring participation (*ibid*, p. 14).

The survey tried to understand more about pedagogical and instructional design. For many seminars, different types of faculty are involved. Over 60% of institutions report that tenure-track faculty teach the first year seminars; approximately 50% report that teaching is undertaken by full time non-tenure track faculty (54%), student

affair professionals (48%), and adjunct faculty (46%). Only 5% of institutions report that they are taught by graduate or undergraduate students. For tenure track faculty, this was largely incorporated within formal workloads; for student affairs professionals, this was largely an extra responsibility. A stipend was the most commonly reported form of first year instructor compensation (*ibid*, p. 39).

In terms of broad pedagogical choices, over half of the courses incorporated some sort of online component, 40% indicated a service learning component, and 35% reported some sort of linked course structure or learning community (discussed below.) There appears to be uneven and uncoordinated approaches to impact evaluation, making comparisons and generalisations difficult (*ibid*, pp. 49-62).

While a great deal of excitement has been raised by the sheer volume of the first year seminar experience, Barefoot remains cautious about their impact (2000, p. 15). She suggests that this form of intervention remains the most accessible to institutions, without requiring any fundamental shift in the institutional culture as a whole. She suggests that the seminars are often 'add-on' in nature, and loosely tied to the academic project of the university more fundamentally. Moreover, she suggests that there is little evidence at scale to suggest whether the 'first year seminar' lends itself to different curricular or pedagogic practice in anyway. Moreover, while pointing to interesting innovations, she concludes that too little research has been done in the area to begin to identify with any certainty the parameters of 'best practice.'

### 2.4.3. Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning takes a number of forms. The goal of these innovations is to better articulate the academic project with structured opportunities for peer to peer and peer to lecturer interaction. Astin's work (1993) suggests that peer influence retains the strongest power over first year student behaviour and priorities. He hypothesises that the efficacy of cooperative learning innovations lies at the interface of peer to peer interaction and building a peer culture more aligned to academic life. He suggests that cooperative learning may have its strongest impact on increasing the time students expend on academic activity, both because peers begin to hold each other accountable for learning activity, and because they sense a certain amount of responsibility for the learning success of their peers (*ibid*, p. 4).

Tinto's (1997) recent work has focused on building what he calls 'learning communities'. As described by Barefoot (2000), the use of 'learning communities' in first year studies has come to represent the strategy to link two or more academic courses through a common theme, with the same group of students enrolled in each course, with a few linked to residential life (2000, p. 15). These initiatives seek to build a sense of social connection and academic coherence – a sense of 'academic camaraderie' that appears to be especially important in the context of first year transitions (*ibid*).

In 1997, Tinto presented his findings of such an innovation known as the 'Coordinated Studies Programme' at Seattle Central Community College. Rather than enrol in disparate courses, a group of students enrol in a stream of common courses pulled together by an animating theme ('Ways of Knowing', 'Of Body and Mind', *ibid*, p. 602). Meeting between 11 and 18 hours per week, all instructors are present in most collaborative meetings. Students share not only a curricular content, but are also expected to participate in learning activities that require active involvement with peers. Successful learning activity at the group level depends upon the learning activity of each member. Emphasis was placed on challenging students'

assumptions about how knowledge is constructed, challenging students to establish a more critical, trans-disciplinary and proactive relationship with their own learning. As such, they were made more 'conscious' of their learning activity (*ibid*, p. 612). The carefully organised quantitative analysis, which suggested that, even controlling for prior student learning ability, participation in such a pedagogical innovation was a significant predictor of higher learning and social activity during university, and higher student persistence through higher education (*ibid*, pp. 606-609). On a qualitative level, the innovation was suggested to be most important through its ability to create small communities of peers aligned with academic learning activity. It eliminated the perceived 'competition' between academic and social activity in this formative period (*ibid*, pp. 609-611). His work supported the work of others who point to the generative terrain of learning communities and collaborative pedagogy, particularly with reference to influencing student 'involvement' in learning activity (*ibid*, p. 614). Recognising that 'involvement' matters, this study confirms that this factor is dependent upon learning conditions theoretically situated within the influence of pedagogical choices. Tinto concludes that this experience 'leads us to the recognition of the centrality of the classroom experience and the importance of faculty, curriculum and pedagogy to student development and persistence' (*ibid*, p. 617). He goes on to conclude,

This is true not only because contact with faculty inside and outside the classroom serves directly to shape learning and persistence, but also because their actions, framed by pedagogical assumptions, shape the nature of classroom communities and influence the degree and manner in which students become involved in learning in and beyond these settings. (*ibid*)

Rather than the 'social' being slightly more important than the 'academic' in early transitions, as posed in Tinto's early work, we can reconceptualise a space in which the social and the academic are an integrated concept, placed at the centre of the academic endeavour.

## **2.5. THE EMERGING SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE**

### **2.5.1. Introduction**

The South African literature considering the first year experience remains in its infancy. This section will begin by summarising the work of Scott, Yeld and Hendry (2007) which has contributed toward pointing attention to the crisis facing first year students, and the teaching and learning domain more generally within South African higher education. The section will then attempt to summarise the emerging field of research on the first year experience, specifically, and, more generally, within the pedagogical domain in higher education. The section will then consider how emerging literature builds upon an understanding of the conditions for first year success, as well as potential institutional responses emerging.

### **2.5.2. The First Year Crisis in South African Higher Education**

In 2007, Scott, Yeld and Hendry completed the first comprehensive analysis of student access and graduation output. Due to data system weaknesses and the lack of stability in institutional form and function, comparable national cohort data were unavailable before this time. The analysis used the data set following the 2000 and 2001 intakes of first time entering undergraduate students.

The analysis by Scott *et al.* (2007) places specific emphasis on graduation rates as opposed to enrolment rates. The 2000 cohort data suggest that after five years of entering higher education only 30% of students had graduated, with 56% leaving without graduating. Taking only universities, and excluding the main institution serving distance education students, 50% of entering students had graduated after five years (from three and four year degree programmes), with 38% of students having left without graduating. In almost all of the sub-analyses of qualification types, the graduation rate of 'black' students was less than half of the rate for 'white'

students. Combining these analyses, this data suggest that the higher education sector (in its totality) is 'effectively serving' less than 5% of 'black' young people.

The 2000 cohort study confirmed, moreover, that the greatest attrition from higher education occurs at the end of the first year of study. For first time entering students, the attrition rate at the end of the first year was approximately 20%, excluding distance institutions (*ibid*, 2007, pp. 28-29). There have been no studies to better understand this 20% experience. The termination or suspension of studies reflects a multiplicity of factors; financial exclusion is suggested to be the most significant. The work of de Klerk *et al.* (2006) suggests that attrition rates are strongly influenced by the grade point average of students entering university (2006, pp. 160-161). While grade point averages themselves mask financial inequalities, this data suggest that some of the attrition may lie at the interface of teaching and learning practice. Scott *et al.* (2007, p. 29) argue that to the extent that poor academic performance contributes, the low participation rates combined with the high first year attrition rates defines structural articulation failure.

Scott and his colleagues conclude that the 'persistence of underlying performance patterns' are not likely to change 'spontaneously.' They suggest that, 'more of the same' approaches without improving the educational processes of the university system is unlikely 'to produce optimal returns' (Scott *et al.*, 2007, p. 21).

### **2.5.3. The Terrain of South African Literature**

The terrain of research on the first year experience is in its infancy. The recently published book, 'Focus on First Year Success: Perspectives Emerging from South Africa and Beyond' (Leibowitz, van der Merwe, van Schalkwyk, 2012) roughly emerged from the inaugural conference in 2008, *Southern African Conference on the First Year Experience: Opening Conversations on First-Year Success*. This important contribution represents the first coordinated attempt to gather and coordinate the South African experience as it relates to the first year. A brief review

of the research content and networks represented in the book provide some understanding of both the potential and limitations of the emerging literature. The collection of work is roughly divided into three sections – work that contributes to understanding the field more generally conceived, work that speaks to responses at the institutional level, and work that reflects innovation within specific case studies. Three of the five chapters speaking to the field more generally are written by researchers in either the US or the UK. One of the chapters presents the work of Ian Scott (2012), discussed in some detail below. The final chapter presents the work of Strydom and Mentz (2012), who focus on ‘managing diversity’ through innovations in orientation programmes at the University of the Free State. Two of the four chapters focusing on institutional responses come from outside of South Africa (University of Botswana and University of Cincinnati.) One focuses on the experience of Stellenbosch University, discussed below. The final chapter in this area focuses on academic development work within North West University. The final group of chapters represent case studies, often located within a specific faculty and discipline within the university (accounting, chemistry, law, and engineering.) More institutions are represented in this work. Five of the chapters reflect innovation experiences within ‘historically advantaged universities’. Three chapters demonstrate emerging work within ‘previously disadvantaged universities’. Working from within student support services at the University of the Western Cape, Schreiber and Davidowitz (2012) speak to the experience of infusing ‘adjustment issues’ within foundational programmes for science students (see below.) Ngcobo (2012) presents the innovative work to create effective bilingual curricular programming at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Jacobs (2012), the teaching and learning coordinator in the Engineering Faculty at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, presents her work on making disciplinary discourse more explicit. Her work points to the interface of academic development professionals and lecturers as a method to shift lecturers to the ‘margins’ of their own field, giving them explicit access to their tacit knowledge as a basis for better teaching.

Looking toward research that explicitly identifies itself with the emerging field of first year studies is limiting. Research across the world is undertaken in the pedagogical domain of higher education. While it may not make explicit reference to 'first year studies', it speaks to how to better align the university teaching project to notions of student success. The Council of Higher Education undertook a review of the South African higher education literature, establishing three generations of work, with a tight association with the shifting political environment (CHE, 2010). Several observations can be extracted from this comprehensive review.

The first generation (from roughly 1970 to the late 1980's) focused on a structural critique of the higher education system, located within the demands of student, staff and civic organizations (Kalloway, 1984; Nkomo, 1990; Cross and Chisholm, 1990). With the backdrop of massive mobilisation of civil society, progressive researchers asserted the importance of fundamental reform (associated with fundamental socio-economic change), with an emphasis on student experiences, the oppressive physical environment, authoritarian governance structures, and the meaning of higher education in the democratization of society. This work focused primarily on access in relationship to formal admission, with less systematic work on epistemological and pedagogical transformation, which was implicitly assumed to emerge more spontaneously through the realisation of a structural democratic order.

The second generation of work delineated by the CHE is the work that focused on access and student performance, as a larger number of so called 'black' students gained access to the academy for the first time in the late 1980s and 1990s. Under the backdrop of the massive social changes and the optimism brought about by democracy in 1994, a new set of literature emerged placing the notion of 'educational disadvantage' and so-called 'underprepared' students at the centre of analysis (CHE, 2010, pp. 33-38). While there was some critique of the institutional form and function (Janson, 2001), increasingly energy was absorbed into the 'problematic of the student'. Most work was undertaken through the notion of 'increased diversity', with emphasis on better integrating so called 'black' students

into previously 'white' institutions. Diversity was overwhelmingly approached through the lens of so called 'race'. The most striking characteristic of this period is what we do not see. Given the social expectations of this period, there is strikingly little large scale empirical work or theorisation within the epistemological and pedagogical domains. With administrative attention diverted increasingly toward building 'managerial efficiencies' (Swartz, 2005; Bundy, 2006), there was little structural support for research or innovation in the teaching or pedagogical domains.

The final generation of work is roughly the work emerging from 2000, with overwhelming emphasis placed on notions of efficiency, approaching student success through a discourse of institutional efficiency, and with emphasis on quantitative benchmarking exercises. The policy response gave some voice to the notion of academic development programmes and curricular changes; little clarity or conceptual guidance accompanied these broad suggestions (DoE, 2001). This was combined with a proliferation of more inward-looking, institutionally sponsored research on academic performance (CHE, 2010, p. 37). These reports gave voice to the persistence of racism, sexism and Eurocentrism within institutional cultures. Within this mix, there was some concern about the relevance of curriculum, academic's attitudes, and experiences of alienation among students. Even so, there was limited systematic discussion or theorisation of the pedagogical and epistemological domains of transformation.

The work of Johnson (2006) goes further to suggest that the fabric of teaching and learning has not only been denied research attention during this period, but also was itself undermined by a combination of increasing student numbers, pressures for cost containment, compliance-driven accreditation, income supplementation through outsourced work, and institutional value allocated to research qualifications at the expense of teaching. Class sizes were increased, lecturers sought for increasingly manageable assessment tools for large numbers, with a shift toward 'survival' rather than substantive innovation.

While there was some literature on teaching and learning in higher education, these studies were often not only small scale, but were unable to articulate with broader notions of institutional transformation. There was a striking gap between policy analysts (Cloete and others) and academics focused on the work of teaching and learning. There was a striking absence of research on wide scale, curricular innovation. While there was important innovative work during this period (for example, the Distance Education Project (DEP) and Educational Leadership and Management (ELMD) programmes at the University of Fort Hare), they did not receive the kind of support required to translate these experiences into research outputs or to coordinate the experiences within a more collective theoretical movement across institutions. Without a substantive or generative critique emerging through the literature, the assumptions woven within the day to day practice of higher education were tacitly upheld and reaffirmed. If universities were failing, the 'problematic of the student' (with its racialised undercurrents) began to outweigh the 'problematic of the institution', un-disrupted from its devastating historical roots.

#### **2.5.4. New Insights: Conditions for Success**

The South African literature looking at first year student success is still largely oriented toward identifying the 'factors' rather than the 'conditions' for success (Fraser and Killen, 2003; Eiselen and Geyser, 2006; Jones, Baily and Wickham, 2008).

The work of Eiselen and Geyser (2006) identify two cohorts of students which they approach as 'achievers' and 'at risk'. Using a range of quantitative tools (from language proficiency tests to GSAT examinations) and qualitative interviews, they attempt to identify the 'differences' between these two groupings. While their approach to 'intelligence' and their understanding of the relationship between language access and learning confidence is limited at best, their findings are worth noting. The only demographic indicator that demonstrated significance between groups was home language. On a quantitative level they suggest that the 'at risk'

group demonstrated weaker language 'confidence', weaker study habits (less strategy, more procrastination), weaker 'diligence' to study, and weaker scores in higher education entry assessments (General Scholastic Aptitude Tests). On a qualitative level, they conclude that 'at risk' students believe that successful students have a 'natural talent', have a more difficult time 'expressing themselves', feel more insecure, have a greater need for support and guidance, allocate 'responsibility' to external factors, and experience the first year in more negative terms than the so called 'achievers' (*ibid*, p. 128).

The work of Fraser and Killen (2003) attempts to compare the post-enrolment factors that students and lecturers believe impact student success at the University of Pretoria. They compared the perceptions of faculty, senior students and first year students on 52 factors associated with student 'success' and 55 factors associated with an unsuccessful university experience. The sheer number of indicators makes interpretation somewhat unwieldy. The differences of priority (rankings differed by more than 20 places) are especially significant. In comparing lecturers' prioritisation of success factors with that of first year students, lecturers place more emphasis on 'effective written communication skills', while students place more emphasis on the 'reason for doing a specific course', 'ability to handle stress', 'appropriate balance between academic commitments and social life', and 'family support' (*ibid*, p. 256). In comparing lecturers with senior students, lecturers place more emphasis on students' love for learning and regular attendance of lectures, while senior students place more emphasis on a stable personal life, ability to manage stress, dedication to a career goal, and family support (pp. 256-259). In comparing first year students and senior students, first year students placed more emphasis on regular attendance of lectures, encouragement, motivation and support from lecturers, and willingness to ask for help from lecturers. Senior students appear to place less hope in the role of lecturers to support their learning than is expected by students upon entry.

There was even more divergence on understandings and prioritisation of 'failure factors'. Lecturers and first year students' prioritisation of factors was largely

divergent. As an overall trend, first year students place much more importance on the lecturer and the learning environment (e.g. 'course requirements unclear') than lecturers (*ibid*, p. 259). This trend continued with lecturers and senior students: lecturers blamed student attributes for their failure; students largely blamed the learning environment in some way. First year and senior students largely agreed on the prioritisation. However, senior students allocated more emphasis to 'lack of insight in field of study', 'lack of provision of bridge between theory and practice', 'perceived lack of relevance of course content', and 'uncertainty about where the content fits into the course' (*ibid*, p. 260). Interestingly, the authors of this study suggest that first year students' expectation that the quality of the lecturer should matter to their success, reflects poorly on the 'responsibility' students take for their own learning. While different conclusions could arguably be made from this data, some of its results are useful.

The fact that most of these studies have been undertaken in the context of 'historically advantaged institutions' makes the work of Jones, Coetzee, Bailey and Wickham (2008) significant. They undertook an investigation of 'factors that facilitate success', focusing on rural and poor students participating across a range of institutional typologies. Their work places special emphasis the specific pressures on students at the interface of financial access, language access and access to prior educational advantage. Their work highlights the way in which the confluence of these factors influences academic and social integration within institutions of higher education. One of the factors that is not discussed in the international literature is course selection, whereby students often end up enrolled in courses in which they have little interest. They suggest that the 'support' programmes for 'disadvantaged students' are widely disarticulated from the mainstream academic life of the university, fragmented and difficult to understand. They conclude by questioning the gap between 'good intentions' of the university on the one hand, and the experienced reality of 'disadvantaged students', on the other. Despite clear institutional intentions to support students, they suggest that students coming from

less privileged backgrounds are not supported to reconstruct the inadequate learning activity inherited from the secondary system of education, and are often left feeling 'alienated' in a number of ways (*ibid*, p. 11).

### **2.5.5. South African Institutional Responses**

There appear to be three common responses to the first year challenge in South African higher education: relegation to academic support programmes, foundational provision, and extended programmes. The comprehensive review on teaching and learning published by the Council on Higher Education in 2010, found no other substantive institutional response to addressing what they called the 'pedagogical distance' endemic in these institutions (CHE, 2010: p. 99). One institution, Stellenbosch University, has attempted to establish a more comprehensive response, coordinated through a 'First Year Academy'. Each of these responses will be briefly discussed below. While there are lessons to be learned, none of these responses has yet served to challenge the core curricular or pedagogical practices embedded within institutions.

- Academic Development Centres

The most common response appears to be to relegate the problem to the private frustrations of the student (and lecturer), on the one hand, and establish fragmented centres for academic development and support, on the other. In essence, the response is to try institutionally either to ignore or 'outsource' the 'problem', relegating it to a frustration rather than a core problematic facing academics themselves.

De Klerk, van Deventer, and van Schalkwyk (2006, pp. 151-154) have done some work to try to place 'academic development' work in its historical context in South Africa. They suggest that academic development centres originated in the 1970s and 1980s. As a response, in part, to the pressure being laid on historically white

universities by activist movements at the time, they were designed to address the perceived 'under preparedness' of 'black' students entering the academy at the time. This typically took the form of special courses outside of the mainstream of academic work, often compounding a sense of difference and alienation from the mainstream. From the late 1980s through to the present, there has been a stronger critique of this form and function, with increasing emphasis on integration of the work of academic development within the domain of mainstream academics.

De Klerk *et al.* (2006, pp. 152-153) points to the unpublished work of Leibowitz (2004) who attempted to develop a three-tiered model for academic support combining three dimensions: the provision of limited support available on a voluntary basis to specific students, more extensive support over time to a specific student sub-population, and wider improvement of teaching and learning at scale.

Despite these developments, the majority of academic development centres have remained largely marginalised. While the work of academic development researchers across the country places emphasis on the need for the integration of academic support work within the wider academic project, these voices appear to have little power within the established academy. While pockets of research exist, there has been little systematic research to better understand the experience, impact and lessons arising from these academic development programmes to date (de Klerk *et al.*, 2006, p. 150).

- Foundation and Extended Degree Programmes

The second response has become known as 'foundational programmes' (CHE, 2010: 177; Scott *et al.*, pp. 43-47). 'Foundational provision' has its roots in the 1980s, when students from 'historically disadvantaged backgrounds' were first gaining access to 'historically white universities'. Scott (2007, pp. 43-47) explains that 'foundational programmes' have become integrated into 'extended' degree programmes, and have the 'aim of enabling talented students from disadvantaged

educational backgrounds to build sound academic foundations for succeeding in their programmes of choice' (*ibid*: 43). Such programmes have been a part of the overall machinery adopted by formal policy to address articulation problems (NCHE, 1995; DoE, 1997; DoE, 2001: 2.3.2). The provision of funds for such programmes was enabled through the education funding framework of 2003 (DoE, 2003: 4.1), with approximately R600 million allocated between 2004 and 2009.

The theoretical, structural and practical limitations of such programmes have been vast, as has been their reach. Even the most positive of analysts agree that they have remained 'on the margins' (even the 'fringes') of higher education practice, and tend to be isolated and uncoordinated (Scott *et al.* 2007, 47; CHE, 2010,p. 177). They have almost exclusively been applied with the 'problematic of the student' at the analytic centre, with much less recognition of the 'problematic' of the learning and teaching domain itself. Moreover, they have been largely applied to students who do not meet minimum entry criteria, and thus, despite proclamations otherwise, have been largely 'remedial' in intent. They continue to come under critique in their tendency to structuralise paternalistic (and some allege racist) assumptions about so-called 'underprepared students'. The 2008 report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion reports that, despite their best intentions, they are often perceived as 'dumping grounds' for 'black' students (Soudien, Michaels, Mthembu-Mahanyele *et al.*, 2008, p. 64). Even at their most expansive, they have accounted for no more than 10% of the student population. As such they relegate the problem to a 'group of underprepared students' rather than to the system as a whole.

Despite their limitations, Scott *et al.* (2007) argue that the experience of these programmes provides promise for the pedagogical domain. They argue that there is evidence that well conceived programmes have succeeded to provide so called 'under prepared students' with a stronger basis to further their studies. They report that programmes that were conceived less on a 'remedial' basis and more on re-centring the student experience have demonstrated particular promise. In

summarises the lesson that can be learned from the experience of foundational programmes to date, they state,

... 'more of the same' approaches, such as providing more standard tutorials within the parameters of traditional first-year courses, are seldom effective in addressing educational disadvantage. A key feature of successful approaches is that they are not 'remedial' but in various ways recognise and build on the capabilities that students bring with them into higher education, rather than being bound by traditional assumptions about what these capabilities should be. Alternative curriculum and course structures, particularly at entry level, are needed to make this possible. (*ibid*, p. 45)

Extended degree programmes (EDPs) are programmes, mostly within a given faculty, that extend the degree period, usually by one year. The 'foundation programmes' are often expressed through extended degree programmes. In their review of the experience of EDPs at Stellenbosch University, de Klerk, van Deventer, and van Schalkwyk (2006) explain that they are designed for 'students capable of benefiting from higher educational studies at degree level, but who lacked the prior preparation – mostly due to previously disadvantaged school and social factors' (2006, p. 151). De Klerk *et al.* (2006) undertook a quantitative analysis of ten cohorts of students (from 1995 to 2004) across six faculties of the university, and combined this with a qualitative study to better understand the experience of participating students. The numbers involved in this programme were relatively small, with cohorts ranging from 62 to 154 students. The quantitative work was difficult to interpret, as many of the students were still in the process of completing their degree. The data suggest that this group of students, selected for their fragile learning histories, probably still graduate in fewer numbers and slower than the mainstream students. However, there were enough success stories to suggest that the programme was achieving at least 'small victories over time'. The qualitative work suggests that, while most students appreciate the programme (pointing to the support received, smaller classes, and improvement of their study skills), many suggested that it entailed too little work, making the 'mainstreaming' after two years even more difficult.

Scott (2012) places particularly strong emphasis on the potential of extended degree programmes. He strongly advocates for structural curricular reform at the policy level, and especially re-shaping undergraduate degrees with an emphasis extending the formal time allocated to undergraduate degrees and national diploma programmes (Scott, 2012, p. 30).

- First Year Academy: Stellenbosch University

The First Year Academy at the Stellenbosch University was established in 2006, as a culmination of a range of institutional dialogue and collaborative reflection on the first year literature (van Schalkwyk, Leibowitz, van der Merwe, 2012, p. 7). The 'Academy' took the form of a virtual structure focusing on first year success primarily through coordinating university wide activities and faculty initiatives designed to support the first year experience. In 2011, an evaluation was undertaken of the academy, placing emphasis on student narratives through focus group interviews (Stellenbosch University, 2011). Evaluators spoke to students about the application process, welcoming week, the orientation programme, issues of transition from school to university, sport, residential and their academic experiences. While the study acknowledges a range of limitations facing the programme and hesitates to draw any major conclusions from the experience to date, the study points to four overarching conclusions. First, it reaffirmed that the first year represents a massive and often stressful transition in the life of most students, and even more so for students who do not have access to family support. Second, sources of social support (friends, family, residential advisors, friendly faculty) represent the most prized asset during this period of life. Third, supporting the first year experience will require institutional focus across the student experience as a whole – from application to admission to registration to orientation to academic and residential life. The interrelationships between these facets of experience are so intensely experienced, that focusing on one while excluding others is likely to be of little benefit. Finally, students experienced lecturers as being more accommodating than

is reported in many student perception studies. While this cannot be ascribed simply to the academy, to the extent that faculty have been influenced by the priority given to first year students through this institutional effort is worthy of attention over time.

- Bilingual Curriculation

One of the most important curricular innovations taking place across a few isolated institutions are efforts to create meaningful bilingual curricular tools and intellectual projects to support the expansion of student multilingual resources (Ramadiro and Sotuku, 2011; Ngcobo, 2012). South African literature suggests that the most intense challenge for the majority of South African students lies at the nexus of student language competency, and the lack of institutional capacity across the schooling sector to both expand multilingual resources, and expand both the access to and creation of knowledge through African languages. Developments include bilingual curricula, academic assessments undertaken through students' language of competence, and building mechanisms for bi- and multilingual involvement in academic practice. A fuller discussion of these developments lies beyond the scope of this study.

- Other Discourses

Before closing this section, comment should be made on the competing discourses at the time. The discourse of remediation has been discussed above (de Klerk *et al.*, 2006). There was continual pressure and expectation for this 'course' to conform to remedial expectations, and especially 'target' a subset of 'underprepared students'. The course had to turn down better state funding in order to constitute itself outside of the more traditional remedial structure for foundational programming. Two additional discourses were strong at the time. The first discourse placed emphasis on teaching young people 'values'. With a strong political movement growing under the banner of 'moral regeneration' at the time, many people understood the course

through the notion of teaching 'morals' and 'values'. In this domain, the pedagogy of inter-generational engagement was largely pulpit and lecture like, where spiritual and political leaders pleaded with the young to be more 'honest', 'tolerant' and 'responsible'. This orientation threatened to move the course emphasis away from activity and toward an emphasis on 'teaching' 'values.' The second dominant orientation was toward 'skills development', aligning student 'failure' with the lack of a wide range of skills. As such, there was pressure to occupy the course primarily with a number of 'skills' initiatives (computer, library, budgeting and banking.) With limited course time available, the pressures to occupy the course with skills based interventions threatened to move the emphasis on learning activity to one side. While the pedagogy did attempt to help students widen their learning activity through the use of wider resources, it resisted the pedagogy of 'skills transfer' per se.

## **2.6 CRITIQUE AND LIMITATIONS**

### **2.6.1. Introduction**

As reinforced by McInnis (2001) care must be taken when trying to apply this research to alternative national contexts. While there is much to be learned, there are several ways in which the international literature remains unsatisfactory, especially as applied to the South African context.

Researchers within the field internationally are themselves quick to point out the limitations of the body of research. McInnis (2001) points to the methodological problems and tensions plaguing the field (2001, p. 105). He suggests that an over-emphasis on the quantitative investigation of technical factors underlying equity on the one hand, combined with a plethora of literature about relatively isolated institutional responses on the other, may reduce the legacy of the literature in the end to 'relatively massive but trivial' (McInnis, 2001, p. 105). Even academics taking part in massive cross institutional studies are quick to point out that the research is still in its infancy. They suggest that, while researchers are becoming better at

asking the questions, there is still little empirical evidence that stabilises solutions, or points to 'best practice' (Yorke and Thomas, 2003, p. 71; Barefoot, 2000, pp. 12-13). There is certainly no blue print for success. Moreover, while some of the puzzle pieces may be commonly understood in theory, there are few institutions that have been able to enact a radically different institutional culture reflecting these lessons in practice over time. A more thorough critique of this body of research from the perspective of South African higher education developments has not been undertaken, *let alone* consolidated. Several limitations are immediately evident.

### **2.6.2. Promise of Massification**

First year research across the globe is often framed by the challenge of 'massification' of higher education. Even researchers from South Africa commonly cite 'massification' as a background phenomenon to their discussion. While policy ambition has included increasing participation in higher education since the advent of democracy in 1994, gross participation rates have remained almost stable at 16% (Bundy, 2006, pp. 11-12). While enrolment of so called 'black students' almost doubled in the period of 1993 to 2001 (CHE, 2004, pp. 64-70), only 12% of 'black' students had access to higher education. As such, while there has been some so-called 'diversification of access', the promise of 'massification' has been largely unrealised (CHE, 2004, 2010; Scott *et al.*, 2007; Bundy, 2006). As emphasised by Scott (2012), the current cohort of students in South Africa cannot be viewed through the lens of 'massification', as they represent a small elite of the highest performing students in the country.

### **2.6.3. The Postcolonial Context**

While some analysts internationally try to retain emphasis on radical institutional reform, the challenge of fundamentally reconstituting the socio-cultural practice of institutions of higher education themselves is relatively muted across the literature. Analytic emphasis is placed on integrating the student within the institutional culture

as constituted – both social and academic. In the context of South Africa, an emphasis on integrating new students into the institutional cultures as already constituted is especially unsatisfactory.

A more complete discussion of the historical (and more contemporary) basis of the socio-cultural assumptions of higher education goes beyond the scope of this discussion. The institutional landscape of higher education in South Africa largely reflects its colonial roots. Cole (1996, pp. 7-37) reviews the devastating connections between the epistemological basis of the European academy and the development of the ideological basis for colonisation and the subjugation of the ‘other’ required to justify the violent occupations of the twentieth century. He further establishes the historical links between these basic knowledge frames and the expansion of higher education into the colonised world. The liberal intellectual project was, at best, to ‘civilise’ the subaltern into Western sensibilities of morality, rationality and knowledge (*ibid*).

In terms of epistemological and pedagogic orientation, ‘historically black institutions’ received a double blow. They were further distorted by the influence of apartheid policy, both defining and confining the knowledge project in ‘historically black institutions’ to the boundaries of the so-called ‘Bantu project’, shifting from a paternalistic but nevertheless ‘academic’ approach to a so called ‘appropriate’ approach, with an emphasis as much on intellectual containment as growth (Morrow, 2006, p. 89; Bunting, 1994, pp 43-46; Nkomo, 1990; and Naidoo, 1990). The knowledge project was not only a ‘watered down’ version of education in historically white universities (CHE, 2004,p. 94), but systematically designed to promote the kind of skill and intellectual compliance required of a black administrative class within the overall system. In the words of Morrow, the design was as much to ‘contain’ as to ‘assist’ black students (Morrow, 2006, pp. 93-95).

As such, the critique goes beyond the suggestion that the institutions serve the interest of a small minority of homogenous elite students (as is the case internationally.) In this context, they arguably have served an elite project that has

profoundly undermined the well being of the country more generally constituted (Nkomo, 1990). If efforts to support the first year student merely succeed in helping the student to better 'fit' within the current institutional cultural habitat, the result may be, ultimately, detrimental to the well being of the country as a whole. Until we find mechanisms that serve to unleash better academic success of students and, at the same time, open space for the shifting of institutional culture to better align with the democratic objectives of the nation more widely, the work itself may continue to be counterproductive. Moreover, until we approach pedagogical innovation by placing the local student at the ontological and epistemic centre, we are likely to propagate an externalised trajectory of institutional cultural development. The work of supporting student activity to structurally elaborate (see the work of Archer, 2010, discussed below) the social basis of higher education itself is largely absent from the current literature.

#### **2.6.4. Critique of South African Literature**

The South African literature is still in its infancy. A scan of the first year studies research, as well as complimentary research within higher education, suggest a paucity of research has been undertaken within the pedagogical and curricular domains, let alone from a critical perspective (Scott *et al*, 2007; CHE, 2010, pp. 169-179). The emerging literature is largely dominated by building support innovations for 'underprepared' students in the context of 'previously advantaged institutions' (Leibowitz, van der Merwe, and van Schalkwyk, 2012). Moreover, the work appears still to focus on establishing support architecture for a subset of students who are deemed 'less prepared' in some way for institutional survival. In this way, institutions seek to help these students 'catch up', rather than face the more massive suggestion that all students require a new interface for learning in the first year.

There are at least four limitations of this emerging local literature. First, there is little evidence of work that has been done within less advantaged institutional contexts. Second, there is little work that attempts to serve students as a whole, rather than to

isolate specific student sub-populations. Third, there is little evidence of work that takes a concerted critical stance on the historical inheritance of the knowledge and learning project woven within the culture of higher education institutions. Moreover, there is little work that approaches students with less access to socio-economic privilege both as 'normal' and as a source of generative potential for transformation of the higher education sector, and society more generally. As such, there has been little work that focuses on expanding the generative activity of all students, rather than 'preparing' them better for institutional assimilation and survival.

#### **2.6.5. Conditions for Success**

The findings emanating from the research establishing conditions for first year success are useful to guide our efforts, but again remain unsatisfactory. In essence, they establish a starting gate, but have little to say about the race course itself.

Both international and local literature places ultimate emphasis on the motivation and learning activity of the student on the one hand and the motivation for serving first year students of lectures and the institution at large on the other. The fact that 'time on task' matters is not surprising. It does not answer the underlying question of how to shift the socio-cultural priorities and practices of institutions, under the specific confluence of socio-cultural pressures that face South Africa. Moreover, it does not answer the question of how to successfully expand the motivation and learning activity of first year students, when that activity and motive is contracted upon entry through a complex confluence of socio-cultural inheritances.

The work of Eiselen and Geysers (2006) is illustrative. As discussed above, they conclude that 'at risk' students have weaker academic English language 'confidence', 'weaker study habits' and weaker 'diligence' to study'. They do not suggest how these practices are historically reproduced through higher educational practice. Nor do they suggest how they could be better disrupted.

A great deal of the emerging literature is descriptive, and relies on extracting 'factors' and 'conditions' from large scale quantitative exercises, or the 'impact' of local innovations, extracted from learning theory itself. Much of the literature ultimately places emphasis on learning activity and involvement, pointing implicitly to the complex domain of learning motivation. With little work undertaken to understand the patterns emerging on the basis of competing theories of learning, the solutions arising are invariably fragmented and difficult to learn from, beyond the importance of sensitivity to local institutional culture and purpose.

#### **2.6.6. Conclusion**

The chapter thus far has attempted to locate this study in the field of first year studies. Much of the literature has sought to establish the conditions for first year success, pointing ultimately to the importance of institutional commitment and culture. Across the literature, emphasis is placed on student to student and student to lecturer interaction, within a wider emphasis on student involvement. The early work did not venture deeply into the curricular domain, pointing to the importance of 'integrating' the academic and social domains primarily through co-curricular programming. More recently, work has focused on integrating the curricular and 'social' domains within a unitary space, most commonly through the form of seminars and cooperative learning innovations. The South African literature places special emphasis on the issues of financial and linguistic exclusion. There are important gaps in the literature. First there is very little literature emanating from 'historically disadvantaged' institutional settings. Second, there is very little literature which approaches the first year student as generative potential in relationship to the transformation of the socio-cultural agora of the institution itself over time. Third, there is little literature that attempts to theorise the more 'descriptive findings' with the tools of socio-cultural learning theory. This study seeks to contribute to the field in these ways.

## **2.7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.7.1. Introduction**

Up to now, this chapter has attempted to locate the current study in the context of the emerging literature on first year studies, internationally and within the South African context. One of the limitations of the research in this growing field is its relative limited engagement with the tools of learning theory. While ‘factors’ and ‘conditions’ are identified, and innovations are assessed for impact and lessons learned, less work has been done to understand their theoretical basis. Moreover, few studies make transparent their analytic approach to the process of human development and learning. The remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to laying out the basic theoretical tools employed by this study. It is hoped that by making these tools more explicit, the study will be in a position to contribute to the long process of building better conceptual instruments through which to approach the question of first year learning and pedagogy over time.

This study will employ the theoretical tools built through the early work of Lev Vygotsky, and the extensions of this early work located within both activity theory and a socio-cultural approach to education. The remainder of this chapter will summarise this conceptual landscape.

### **2.7.2. Higher Mental Functioning**

Vygotsky’s vision was to respond to what he considered to be a ‘crisis’ in psychology of his time. He was deeply concerned about the lack of an overarching theoretical framework to understand the workings and development of the human mind that was both internally consistent and mutually integrative (Bakhurst, 2007, p.51; Wertsch, 1985, p.186). Vygotsky was interested in the study of mental *processes in transition* to disclose and manifest their ‘causal dynamic basis’. As such, his approach is ‘genetic’ or developmental, where emphasis is placed on genotypic (explanatory)

factors rather than on the phenotypic (descriptive) characteristics (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 62).

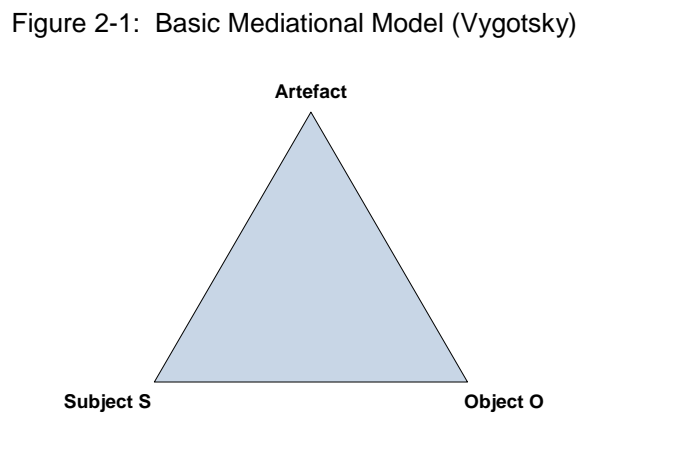
Vygotsky acknowledged that all human beings learn as a natural process of being alive. He was specifically interested, however, in the potential and form of intellectual development that he assumed was not a 'natural' function of the functioning of the human mind; that is, he was interested in an intellectual potential that is likely to be expressed only with conscious and explicit pedagogical support. He used the term 'scientific knowledge' (as opposed to 'everyday knowledge') to point to socially agreed information, tools and concepts that have been culturally, socially and historically created – that are not necessarily transferred by individuals without effective and structured instruction of some sort. Wertsch (1985, pp. 24-27) summarises the four factors that distinguish what Vygotsky called 'higher mental functioning'. First, higher mental functioning is characterised by a shift of control from the environment to the individual; that is, there is emerging voluntary regulation. Second, there is emergence and growth of conscious realisation of mental process. The third and fourth distinctive characteristics of higher mental processes are their social nature, and their origin in the social mediation of signs and tools.

### **2.7.3. Mediation**

Vygotsky rejected the concept that higher mental functioning is reducible to elementary functions, and rejected the Piaget notion that they logically (or embryonically) emerge through a set of biologically determined developmental stages. The centre of Vygotsky's theoretical contribution is that higher mental functioning emerges through mediation with the external world through a culturally developed set of signs and tools.

The following basic triangular representation of mediation is often cited together with Vygotsky's explanatory text as follows:

'In natural memory, the direct (conditioned reflex) associative connection A-B is established between two stimuli A and B. In artificial, mnemotechnical memory of the same impression, instead of



this direct connection A-B, two new connections, A-X and B-X, are established with the help of the psychological tool 'X' (e.g. a knot in a handkerchief, a string on one's finger, a mnemonic scheme)' (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 138).

Central to Vygotsky's dialectical approach is the suggestion that in order to understand the human mind we must look to mediation by external means. The development of higher mental functions, and human consciousness itself, is mediated by what Vygotsky refers to as signs and tools. Vygotsky emphasises that signs emerge in the landscape of the individual before the individual fully understands or appreciates their meaning. A continuation of the process of mediation further transforms the landscape of the individual, transforming the meaning of tools that may have been long familiar. Thus, humans use signs before they understand their use – they can 'perform' before they become 'competent' (Wertsch, 2007, p. 186).

Mediation is a form of dialectical engagement. As Wertsch summarises, 'It always involves an element of collision and conflict between a sign vehicle ... belonging to a pre-existing semiotic community on the one hand, and the unique spatiotemporally located intention of the individual on the other' (Wertsch, 2007, p. 185). He emphasises that mediational action is historically situated, requires material mediational means, and can work to either constrain or open up possibilities for further action.

Wertsch differentiates between explicit and implicit forms of mediation (Wertsch, 2007, p. 180). Explicit mediation has particular significance for educators. Wertsch suggests that the mediation is explicit in two ways. First, a person overtly and purposefully introduces a 'stimulus means' (tool, sign) into a stream of activity. Second, the stimulus itself is manifestly material, obvious, describable. This form of mediation emphasises the role played by other human beings and symbolic intermediaries placed between a learner and 'what is to be learned'.

#### **2.7.4. Social Basis for Higher Mental Functioning: Internalisation**

Vygotsky emphasises that new tools are first encountered in the social plane, before they undergo a transformation into the internal plane. Participation within the social plane affords the first level of interpretations as the basis for becoming available, in certain circumstances, to individual internalisation. Vygotsky approaches internalisation as a process of transformation of social phenomena, structures and function into internal phenomena, structures and function. As such, social reality plays a determining role in internal intra-mental functioning.

The suggestion that patterns of activity in the external plane come to be translated into the internal plane is shared by other theorists, including Piaget. What distinguishes Vygotsky is his emphasis on semiotically mediated social processes as the specific key to understanding the emergence and development of internal thought and functioning (Wertsch, 1985, p. 62).

Vygotsky (1978) formulated this basic principle into what has come to be known as the 'general genetic law of cultural development':

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57)

This does not mean that the external reality is simply transferred into the internal realm. Rather, the relationship relies on the semiotic mediation of signs and tools – the process of mediation itself dialectically transforms the phenomena itself. That is, the social becomes individual not through transmission, but rather individuals construct their own ‘sense’ from available social meanings. Vygotsky (1987, pp. 275-6) defines ‘sense’ as ‘... the aggregate of all the psychological facts that arise in our consciousness as a result of the word.’ He goes on to describe sense as a ‘dynamic, fluid, and complex formation’ with ‘meaning’ as only of one formative zone. The final endpoint of ‘internalisation’ is a process of mastery, commensurate with the emergence of gaining voluntary internal control over external sign forms (Wertsch, 1985, p. 65). Thus, as a human being masters sign forms, their internal plane is transformed.

Some of the most important work through which the notion of learning activity has developed over time was the work of Gal’perin (1902-1988) who undertook detailed work to understand the stages of formation of learning activity, or what he called ‘mental acts’. His work (1969) uncovers the intra-psychic active processes that are required of internalisation, suggesting that it is only under very specific social and instructional conditions that learning activity is fundamentally made ‘one’s own’, internalised within the creative domain. His work focuses, in essence, on both the *processes* and *qualities* of internalisation of mental activity. In terms of ‘quality’ or depth, he considers the transformation from initial exploration, to generalisation, to abbreviation, to mastery (*ibid*, p. 250). He defines ‘mastery’ as the ability to independently repeat an activity with new material to obtain a new result (*ibid*).

The work suggests that the formation of higher mental acts (or the process of learning activity) passes through a series of stages; each stage establishes the conditions required for the next phase of learning activity. The work of Gal’perin (1969, p. 250) and his colleagues suggest five stages, or ‘levels’, of development of learning activity: 1) familiarisation with the task and its conditions; 2) activity based on material objects or their material representations; 3) activity based on audible

speech without direct support from objects; 4) activity involving external speech to oneself; and 5) activity using internal speech. The process of a learning act becoming internalised 'as one's own' requires the consolidation of each of these levels of activity.

## **2.8. ACTIVITY THEORY**

Activity theory has its generative roots in the Russian term 'deyatelnost' which roughly translates into praxis, or practical social activity. The word refers to activity of long duration with some developmental function, characterised by transformation (Daniels, 2001, p. 84). Activity theorists are concerned with the impact of organised activity on the human mind, and the social conditions and systems which are produced in and through this activity (Daniels, 2001, pp. 83-84).

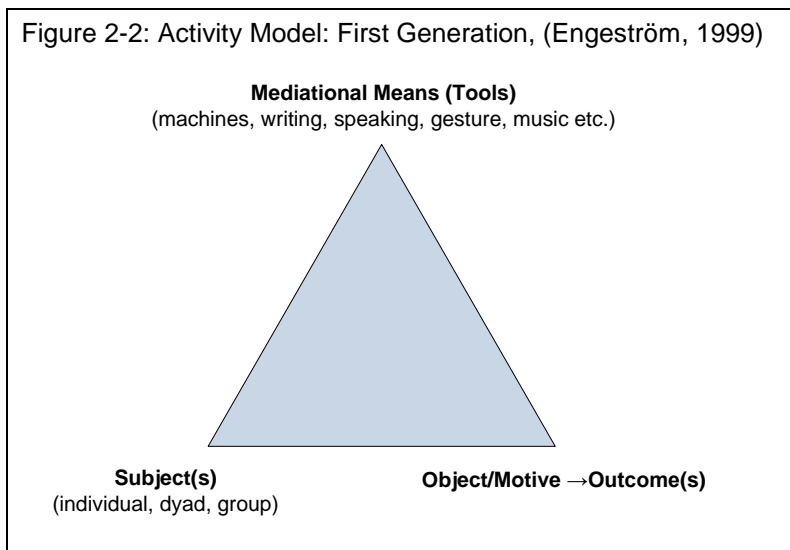
Engeström (1999) was the first to discuss the emergence of activity theory within three generations of theoretical developments. This dynamic historiography provides a useful map to understand the theoretical developments within the broad banner of activity theory, and the implications of these developments. The generations are largely distinguished by a widening focus on the settings of development.

### **2.8.1. First Generation**

The first generation, associated with Vygotsky's early work, focuses on the transformative relationship between the inter- and intra-psychological planes, with little empirical focus on wider settings. Empirical work focused largely on individuals and dyads.

This generation focused on the mechanisms of mediation (often micro in nature) through which the inter- and intra-psychological influences are enacted. The first generation work is represented by the well

Figure 2-2: Activity Model: First Generation, (Engeström, 1999)



known triangular model, depicting the relationship between a subject and object through a complex mediated artefact (Daniels, 2001, p. 86).

### 2.8.2. The Second Generation

The second generation of work continues to focus on the processes of mediation, but insists that the study of activity must include the study of the complex interrelations between the individual and his or her community (Leontiev, 1978, p. 135). In the words of Leontiev (1978), the real significance of first generation work ‘may be understood only in the wider context of the study of the unity of the subject and object, of the social historical nature of the connections between man (sic) and the object world’ (Leontiev, 1978, p. 14). While acknowledging the methodological difficulties of analysis at this level, this generation of work insists on the examination of an activity in relationship to its collective/social context.

Leontiev (1978) elaborates the relationships between (collective) activity (associated with an object or motive), (individual) action (associated with a goal), and operation (reflective of specific conditions). While described in hierarchical terms, he emphasised the transformational and dialectical relationships between the levels.

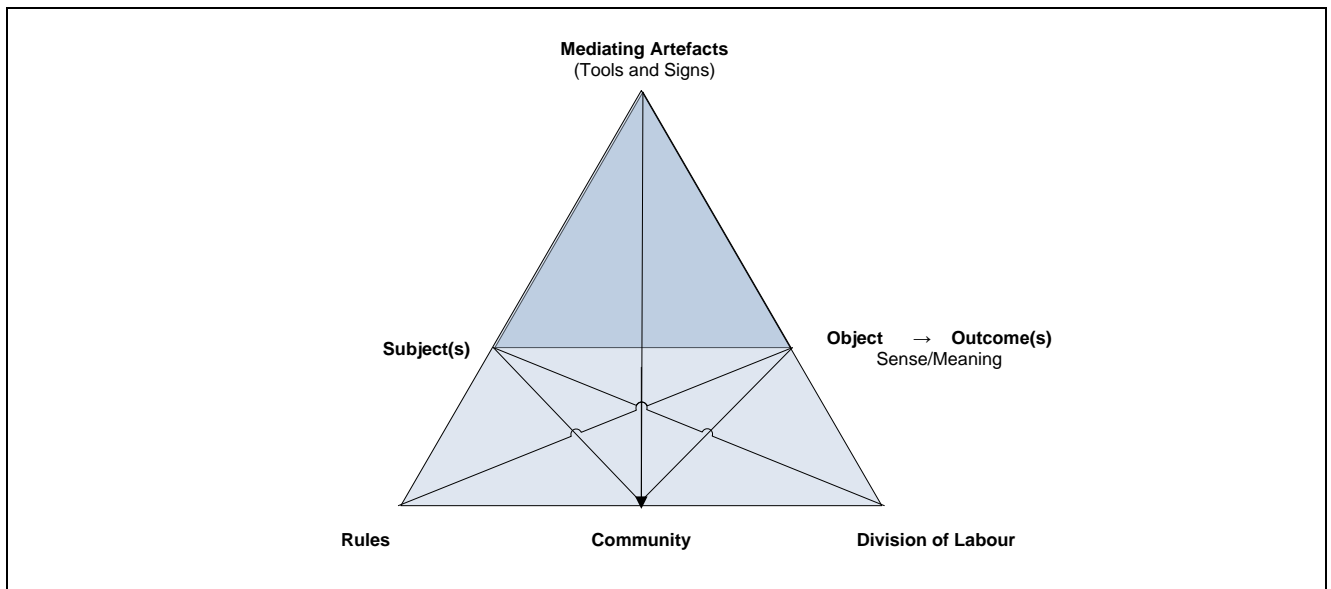
Leontiev (1978) argues that activity cannot be understood outside of an understanding of the ‘object’ (or ‘motive’) of the activity. He argues that it is the

transformation of the object/motive that leads to integration of the elements of the system:

It is exactly the object of an activity that gives it a determined direction. According to the terminology I have proposed, the object of an activity is its true motive. It is understood that the motive may be either material or ideal, either present in perception or exclusively in the imagination or in thought... Activity does not exist without a motive; 'non-motivated' activity is not activity without a motive but activity with a subjectively and objectively hidden motive. (Leontiev, 1948, p. 54)

Engeström (1999, 2001) represents the work of second generation theorists in the model presented in Figure 2-3. The uppermost sub-triangle represents individual and group actions, embedded in a collective activity system (Engeström, 2001, pp. 134-135). This diagram reflects the social/collective emphasis of the analysis frame, through the inclusion of the elements of community, rules and division of labour. He places analytic emphasis on the 'object' to emphasise that 'object oriented actions are always, explicitly or implicitly, characterised by ambiguity, surprise, interpretation and potential for change' (Engeström, 2001, p. 134).

Figure 2-3: Activity Model: Second Generation (Engeström, 1999)



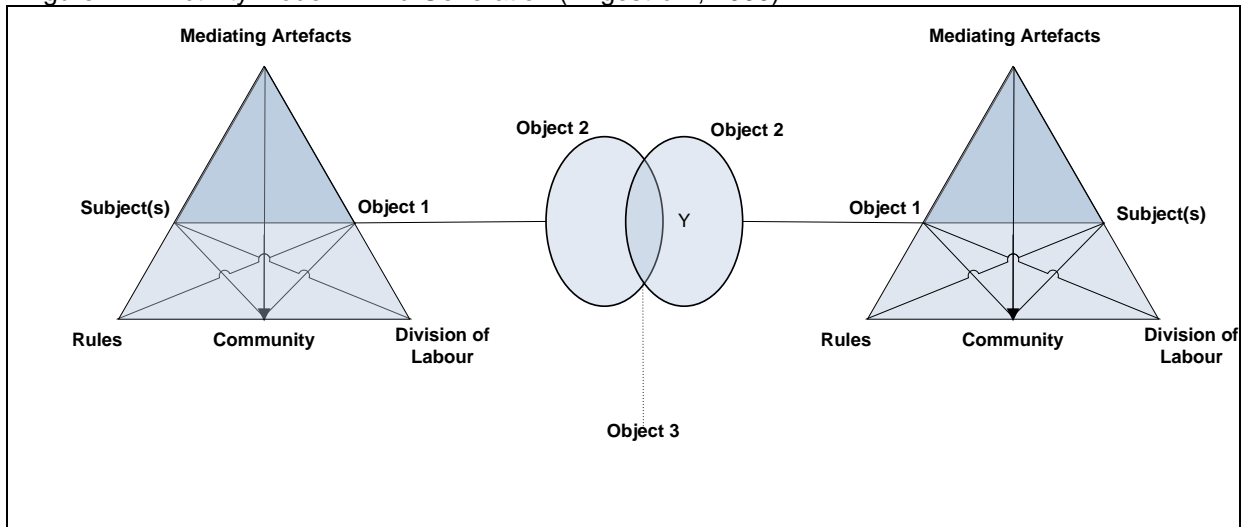
### 2.8.3. The Third Generation

The third generation of work is marked by two fundamental developments Engeström (1999, 2001). Firstly, third generation theorists focus on networks of activity systems with a stronger emphasis on processes of socio-cultural and historical influence. The unit of analysis, as such, is joint activity within an activity system. Secondly, third generation theorists critique the over-reliance on vertical understandings of knowledge and the lack of stronger dialogic engagements in earlier periods of work (Engeström, 1999, 2001; Daniels 2001, 2008; Wertsch, 1985).

Engeström (1999) argues that the first and second generations of work were bounded by a discourse of vertical development toward higher psychological functions. When the theory was applied in larger contexts, questions of diversity and dialogue between different traditions of knowledge and function became bigger theoretical challenges. The third generation seeks to develop 'conceptual tools to understand dialogues, multiple perspectives and networks of interacting activity systems' (Engeström, 2001, p.135). Value is placed on the historical dimension of an analysis of any learning activity, with its objects approached as socially productive practice, 'or the social life-world, in its full diversity and complexity' (Engeström, 1999, p. 383).

The basic model for the third generation minimally includes two interacting activity systems. See Figure 2-4 below. Object 1 and 2 move from an initial state of 'unreflected, situationally given raw material' from distinct activity systems to a transformed Object 3 emerging from their mediational co-influence (Engeström, 2001, p.136). Practice exists in its present dominant form, as well as its historic and future potential forms. New learning activity (transformed activity reflecting Object 3) is the result of the interaction of these forms (Daniels, 2001, p. 93).

Figure 2-4: Activity Model: Third Generation (Engeström, 1999)



Engeström (2001, pp.136-137) has consolidated a set of principles emerging out of third generation work that have come to be known as cultural historical activity theory (CHAT).

The first principle focuses attention on artefact-mediated, object-oriented activity systems:

The first principle is that a collective, artefact-mediated and object-oriented activity system, seen in its network relations to other activity systems, is taken as the prime unit of analysis. Goal directed individual and group actions ... are relatively independent but subordinate units of analysis, eventually understandable only when interpreted against the background of entire activity systems. (Engeström, 2001, pp. 136-137)

The second principle emphasises the multi-voiced nature of activity systems. He writes,

An activity system is always a community of multiple points of view, traditions, and interests. The division of labour in an activity creates different positions for the participants, the participants carry their own diverse histories, and the activity system itself carries multiple layers and strands of history engraved on its artefacts, rules and conventions. The multi-voicedness is multiplied in networks of interacting systems. It is a source of trouble and a source of innovation, demanding actions of translation and negotiation. (*ibid*)

The third principle emphasises the importance of the historical lens of analysis. Activity systems take shape over long periods of time. As such, their potentials, inheritances and transformations can only be understood against their own history.

Engeström summarises, 'History itself needs to be studied as local history of the activity and its objects, and as history of the theoretical ideas and tools that have shaped the activity' (*ibid*, pp. 4-5).

The fourth core principle reflects the dialectic nature of change – the central role played by contradictions as a source of change and development. He emphasises contradictions not as problems or conflicts as such, but as 'historically accumulated structural tensions within and between activity systems' with the potential for transformation.

Engeström's final core principle is the 'possibility for expansive transformation' in and between activity systems. He explains,

As the contradictions of an activity system are aggravated, some individual participants begin to question and deviate from its established norms. In some cases, this escalates into collaborative envisioning and a deliberate collective change effort. And expansive transformation is accomplished when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualised to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of the activity. (*ibid*)

These principles germinate from the early work of first generation theorists. As such it could be argued that the consolidation of 'cultural historical activity theory' is not a new school. While embracing the inter- /intra-psychological work of the earlier generations, it simply places analytic focus on the complexity of the cultural, social and historical contexts that mediate human reality.

## **2.9. LEARNING ACTIVITY**

Jerome Bruner (1987, 1990, 1996) is one of the most well known contemporary theorists to bring the generations of work emerging from Vygotsky back to an integrated theory of education, roughly referred to in this study as a socio-cultural theory of education. His work places analytic emphasis on the interrelated triad of concepts that are at the centre of this study: learning activity, meaning making and agency. This study approaches each of these domains through a critical lens. The

following sections will briefly establish an approach to each of these concepts and emphasises through a critical lens.

A socio-cultural approach to education focuses on the unit of analysis of learning activity, retaining an emphasis on mediated action in the development and functioning of the human mind (Bruner, 1996, p.151). Learning activity refers to the learning space that lies beyond autonomous or spontaneous engagement with one's environment, reflecting the 'societal conditions on the one hand, and the quality of teaching activity on the other' (Lompscher, 1999, p. 140). Emphasis is focused on the triad of subject, artefact and objective (or motive) of action, that is, the interaction between human beings, their activities and tools, both physical and symbolic (1987, p. 3). Lompscher and Hedegaard (1999, p. 12) define learning activity as the 'special kind of activity directed towards the acquisition of societal knowledge and skills ... by means of special learning actions upon learning objects.'

Emphasis is placed on the subject of activity (the student), the mediational tools and the object or *motive* of activity. The 'motive', whether material or symbolic, gives the activity direction (Leontiev, 1978). Motivation cannot be simply 'transferred' to students, but either emerges (or does not emerge) through activity. The quality of the organisation of learning reflects the ability of the learning activity to create and renew motive.

Lompscher (1999, pp. 139-166) builds and expands upon the work of Davydov (1999) in developing an 'activity and formation strategy'. Lompscher suggests that teaching strategies that are aimed at the transmission of ready-made knowledge are unlikely to facilitate learning activity. Effective teaching strategies must be 'oriented toward the learner's own activity and, at the same time, towards the conscious and systematic formation of that activity' (*ibid*, p. 140). He further suggests that, 'in order to be successful in forming an effective learning activity, teaching strategies have to correspond to the learners' subjective prerequisites, one of them being their learning strategies' (*ibid*, p. 140).

Lompscher (*ibid*, pp. 140-141) emphasises that learning is based on a person's own activities, interacting with others, in accordance with accomplishing tasks with concrete means. He elaborates, '...the organisation of learning processes ... has to be oriented toward the learner's activity, which is necessary for mastering the learning material and toward the psychic regulation of activity. ... The learning material is not acting upon the learner, the learner can acquire the material only by actively working with it. Therefore, the teaching material has to be transformed into a learning object' (*ibid*, p. 141).

He emphasises that the organisation of a successful teaching activity requires a conscious integration of the learning activity and learning (*ibid*, p. 141). He identifies the alignment of three 'logics': the logic of the teaching material or teaching object, the logic of learner acquisition (prior knowledge and learning actions required for transformation into a learning object), and the 'psychic logic' (including emotions and sources of motivation) (*ibid*, pp. 141-142). That is, an appropriate learning activity requires not only an understanding of the material to be taught (the objective demands of the teaching object) but also the subjective prerequisites for acquisition. In order to engage successfully in a learning activity, a learner must have certain knowledge, skills, or other capabilities – which learners often do not have. As such, a successful teaching strategy must focus on the, 'necessary activities and conditions under which it may be formed and carried out' (*ibid*, p. 142).

A second feature of a socio-cultural approach is that it places value on the situated nature of learning and human development (Bruner, 1996). Different theorists focus on different levels of collective influence: a specific site of learning, learning communities, networks of learning communities, culture and socio-historical spaces. Wells (1999) is known for using the analogy of learning how to dance to point to both the implicit and explicit ways in which an external collective context provides a 'scaffolding' for human development (*ibid*, pp. 322-324). As a collective artefact, dance both transforms and retains some fundamentals as it is shared and passed on. A new participant is guided by a range of scaffolding 'tools': the structure of the

music, the movement of other dancers, reactions from others, even, in some cases, a more active process of being 'led'. At some point the novice 'gets a feel for' the dance, and is not only able to participate with more ease, but is able to contribute to new innovation that, in turn, will come to impact on others. The novice participant may be little aware of the instructional scaffolding that is implicit in this community context. He suggests that, 'Within the framework provided by the structure of the activity as a whole, of which the entraining movements of other participants are just one part, the novice gradually constructs the organising cognitive structures for him or herself and brings his or her actions into conformity with the culture-given pattern' (*ibid*, p. 323). Wells (1999, p. 323) quotes the conclusion of a poem by W.B. Yeats when he asks, 'How can we know the dancer from the dance?'

## **2.10 MEANING MAKING**

### **2.10.1. Introduction**

A third characteristic of a socio-cultural approach to education is an emphasis on the process of meaning making. The unit of analysis of 'meaning' has always been central to Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian work. 'Meaning' has been theoretically emphasised on three levels: word meaning, the meaning of tools and artefacts, and the more complex process of interpretive integrative meaning making. In his concluding chapter to *Thought and Language*, Vygotsky writes, '...the transition from thought to speech is an extremely complex process ... thought does not correspond with word, why it does not even correspond with the word meanings in which it is expressed. The path from thought to word lies through meaning' (Vygotsky, 1986). Bruner (1990, 1996) has done some of the most important and widely cited work to apply the notion of meaning making more widely to human learning and development.

## 2.10.2. Mediation as Meaning Making

Bruner identifies the act of meaning making as central to explaining the dialectical process of co-construction between the individual and his/her socio-cultural environment (1990, p. 33). If a socio-cultural approach focuses on situated activity, with an emphasis on motivation or 'intentional states' then one must focus on the relationship between activity and intentional states, and the relationship between intentional states and the cultural tools and systems available for interpretation. In essence, 'meaning making' is a tool of mediation, externalising the transformation at the interface of the triad of subject, motive and tool.

Bruner emphasises that the process of meaning making is inherently social, or interactional and thick with interpretation. It involves some sort of collective – minimally two people, or at least a person and a symbolic tool that carries the work of others. He writes, 'The symbolic systems that individuals used in constructing meaning were systems that were already in place, already 'there', deeply entrenched in culture and language. They constituted a very special kind of communal tool kit whose tools, once used, made the user a reflection of the community.' (Bruner, 1990, p. 11) It is worth quoting at some length:

Culture ... shapes the minds of individuals... Meaning making involves situating encounters with the world in their appropriate cultural contexts in order to know 'what they are about.'. Although meanings are 'in the mind', they have their origins and their significance in the culture in which they are created... On this view, knowing and communicating are in their nature highly interdependent, indeed virtually inseparable. For however much the individual may seem to operate on his or her own in carrying out the quest for meanings, nobody can do it unaided by the culture's symbolic systems. It is culture that provides the tools for organising and understanding our worlds in communicable ways. The distinctive feature of human evolution is that mind evolved in a fashion that enables human beings to utilise the tools of culture. Without those tools, whether symbolic or material, man (sic) ... is but an empty abstraction. (Bruner, 1996, p.3).

He emphasises the thick process of interpretation,

...in any act of speech, then, cultural and historical as well as personal and idiosyncratic demands are expressed by the speaker and must then be interpreted by the listener. Learning to *speak*, acquiring the *use* of language, must then be viewed not only as mastering the words of grammar or of

illocutionary conventions, but of how to textualise one's intent and to situate a locution appropriately in a personal context involving another person who shares a history, however brief. (Bruner, 1987, p. 6.)

As such, a focus on meaning making does not bring us back to more subjective and introspective notions of psychological analysis. Rather, through our participation in a culture, meaning is inherently public and shared. Bruner summarises, 'we live publicly by public meanings by shared processes of interpretation and negotiation' (1990, p. 13).

### **2.10.3. Meaning Making and Normative Backdrop**

Bruner suggests that the process of meaning making can be best approached against a backdrop of cultural constructions of normative 'common sense' (what he calls 'folk psychology'.) He argues that 'Human beings, interacting with one another, form a sense of canonical 'ordinary' as a backdrop against which to interpret and give narrative meaning to breaches in and deviations from 'normal' states of the human condition' (Bruner, 1990, p. 67). He describes this culturally normative 'common sense' as '...a set of more or less connected, more or less normative descriptions about how human beings 'tick', what our own and other minds are like, what one can expect situated action to be like, what are possible modes of life, how one commits oneself to them, and so on' (Bruner, 1990, p. 35). It is a '... system by which people organise their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world' (*ibid*). He suggests that we believe 'that our beliefs should cohere in some way' (*ibid*, p. 39), that is:

...when anybody is seen to believe or desire or act in a way that fails to take the state of the world into account, to commit a truly gratuitous act, he is judged to be folk-psychologically insane unless he as an agent can be narratively reconstructed as being in the grip of a mitigating quandary or of crushing circumstances. (1990, p. 40.)

When things are 'as they should be' the 'folk psychology' is transparent. When values, beliefs or assumptions of 'common sense' are violated, then we need a way to bring them back from the abyss.

#### 10.2.4. Meaning Making and the Narrative Structure

One of Bruner's (1990) most important methodological contributions is the suggestion that the organising structure of the act of meaning making is 'narrative' as opposed to 'conceptual'. He points to a human predisposition, or 'readiness', to organise experience into a narrative form (*ibid*, pp. 45-46). He identifies the characteristics of the narrative structure that make it a suitable substrate for meaning making.

First, the narrative form structures the notion of human agency. It distinguishes Yeat's 'dancer' from 'the dance' – a story is somebody's story (whether individual or collective) (*ibid*, p. 54). Second, the narrative form is inherently sequential: '...a narrative is composed of a unique sequence of events, mental states, happenings involving human beings, characters or actors... Their meaning is given by their place in the overall configuration of the sequence as a whole – its plot or fibula.' (Bruner, 1990, pp. 43-44). Third, the narrative structure can be 'real' or 'imaginary'. The domain of narrative is used to discuss life in the past, present and future tense, whether real or imagined.

Fourth, narrative structure is able to forge 'links between the exceptional and the ordinary' (*ibid*, p. 47). He summarises, 'The function of the story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern' (*ibid*, pp. 49-50). When faced with a deviation from the canonical norm, we use the narrative to re-construct our relationship to it. He writes, 'All such stories seem to be designed to give the exceptional behaviour meaning in a manner that implicates both an intentional state in the protagonist (a belief or desire) and some canonical element in the culture' (*ibid*).

The final characteristic of narrative form is its reliance on interpretation. Rather than being a disciplined subject for atomised investigation, the narrative form lends itself only to interpretation - 'metaphoric, allusive very sensitive to context' (*ibid*, p. 61). He

argues, 'The very shape of our lives – the rough and perpetually changing draft of our autobiography that we carry in our minds – is understandable to ourselves and to others only by virtue of those cultural systems of interpretation' (Bruner, 1990, p. 33).

Bruner's work goes on to suggest that 'It is through our own narratives that we principally construct a version of ourselves in the world, and it is through its narrative that a culture provides models of identity and agency to its members' (Bruner, 1996, p. XIV). Bruner's work on cultural framing emphasises the significance of the act of meaning making. Framing is the basic way we make sense of our worlds. He writes, 'Framing provides a means of 'constructing' a world, of characterising its flow, of segmenting events within that world, and so on. If we were not able to do such framing, we would be lost in the murk of chaotic experience and probably would not have survived as a species in any case' (1990, p. 56). His work suggests not only that the typical form of framing is constituted in the narrative form, but that what is not structured in a narrative form is often lost to memory altogether. As such, the process of individual memory is less about individual storage and more a reflection of access to the tools supporting the 'act of narrative'. That is, both the trajectory of meaning making as well as whether something is remembered at all, reflects the socio-cultural tools available for meaning making.

As such, the 'act of meaning making' becomes the domain of education. If the act of meaning making is not embryonic, but rather reflective of access to the act of narrative, '... education must be conceived as aiding young humans in learning to use the tools of meaning making and reality construction, to better adapt to the world in which they find themselves and to help in the process of changing it as required' (Bruner, 1996, p. 20). Bruner suggests that the job of inquiry is to seek '... rules that human beings bring to bear in creating meanings in cultural contexts.' He goes on to say that, 'These contexts are always contexts of practice: it is always necessary to ask what people are *doing* or *trying to do* in that context' (Bruner, 1990, p. 118).

### 10.2.5. Critical Meaning Making

This study locates itself within the field of critical pedagogy. Critical educational theory emphasises the role of ideological hegemony in the process of human meaning making. While recognising that social structure profoundly delimits the space for human action, they resist overly deterministic accounts that place power and agency solely in the sphere of dominant interests and the institutions they control (Giroux, 1997, p. 71). They are interested in the pedagogical spaces that open space for counter-hegemonic thought and action (Giroux, 1997, 2009; McLaren, 2009; Freire, 1970). They argue that a critical understanding of meaning making is at the heart of reformulating the 'dualism between agency and structure' making possible '... a critical interrogation of how human beings come together within historically specific social sites such as schools in order to both make and reproduce the conditions of their existence' (Giroux, 1997, p. 71). See discussion of agency below.

Giroux approaches ideology as a combination of discourse and social relations that assumes a status of hegemonic 'common sense' in Gramscian (1971) terms. That is, rather than using the notion of 'folk psychology' to point to canonical norms of society (Bruner, 1996, p. 67), they place emphasis on hegemonic ideology ('where meaning is produced, reproduced and consumed' (Giroux, 1997, p. 85)) as the basis for every day meaning making, unless specifically contested. He argues,

Ideology is something we all participate in, and yet we rarely understand either the historical constraints that produce and limit the nature of that participation, or what the possibilities are for going beyond existing parameters or action in order to think and act in terms that speak to a qualitatively better existence. (Giroux, 1997, p. 76)

They suggest that supporting students to 'make meaning' with the tools that are easily available is unlikely to create the conditions for agency beyond hegemonic reproduction. As such, they place emphasis on the act of critique, 'penetrating beyond the discourse and consciousness of human actors to the conditions and foundation of their day to day experience' (*ibid*). Said another way, they point to the domain of critique as 'a critical analysis of the subjective and objective forces of

domination, and at the same time ... the transformative potential of alternative modes of discourse and social relations rooted in emancipatory interests' (*ibid*, p. 76). Giroux argues that day to day meaning making is located at the nexus of the domain of the unconscious and the domain of the 'common sense.' It is only through the activity of critical consciousness that humans can expand their tools of meaning making beyond hegemonic interests.

### **2.11. SELF: MEANING MAKING AND AGENTIAL ENCOUNTERS**

This study is interested in the interface of the transformation of activity, meaning making and learning agency. Bruner's work suggests that the act of creating (and recreating) a narrative notion of Self lies at the interface of meaning making and agential encounters. Bruner's approach to 'Self' and the tools he establishes for the exploration of 'Self' prove useful to this study, particularly as a basis upon which to approach the notion of learning agency, discussed below.

While his work emphasises the fundamentally social nature of human development, Vygotsky never negated the notion of an 'autonomous self'. As emphasised by Bakhurst (2007, p. 73), Vygotsky placed the idea of the development of the individual human mind as 'conscious, self-aware, rational, creative and autonomous' as the ultimate focus of inquiry. Bruner suggests that 'perhaps the single most universal thing about human experience is the phenomenon of 'Self' (Bruner, 1996: 35). He emphasises, as a starting point, that all human languages make obligatory grammatical distinctions between agentive forms: 'I hit him; he hit me.'

Over the decades, analysts have approached the territory of 'selfhood' like approaching a wild lion – a few tentative steps forward, and then running for cover. In the words of Bruner (1990, p. 99) the study of 'Self' has a 'peculiarly tortured history'. Through his work, Bruner makes four contributions toward an understanding of the formation of 'self' that provide an important backdrop to an approach to agency.

His first suggestion is that the formation of 'Self' is inextricably linked to formation of 'Self' in others, at the level of group, culture and society. That is 'Self' is not the same thing as an 'individual.' The construction of 'agent-Self' operates as a protagonist within a recognisable socio-cultural setting; '...its central thesis is that culture shapes mind, that it provides us with a toolkit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conceptions of ourselves and our powers.' (Bruner, 1987, p. X).

Bruner's second suggestion is that notions of 'Selfhood' are extremely sensitive to what he calls 'agential encounters'. His work suggests that the notion of 'Selfhood' 'derives from the sense that one can initiate and carry out activities on one's own' (Bruner, 1996, p. 35). He claims that what distinguishes human Selfhood is,

...the construction of a conceptual system that organises, as it were, a 'record' of agentic encounters with the world, a record that is related to the past (that is, autobiographical memory) but that is also extrapolated into the future – self with history and with possibility. It is a 'possible self' that regulates aspiration, confidence, optimism and their opportunities. While this 'constructed' self-system is inner, private, and suffused with affect, it also extends outward to the things and activities and places with which we become involved. (Bruner, 1996, p. 36)

Bruner (1996, pp. 36-39) argues that agency inherently implies the capacity for completing intended acts. Multiple implications emerge. First, agency is impacted by what 'acts' we intend to do, and the sense of 'skill' or 'know how' to achieve these acts. Yet, both the boundary of 'intended acts' as well as definitions of success and failure are often accorded from 'the outside', commensurate with socio-cultural criteria available in a local setting.

The work of socio-cultural psychologists have long recognised that human beings can be actively engaged in learning (and other activities) or more passively alienated largely as a function of the social conditions in which humans enact their lives (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 68). Some of the most well respected work from a socio-cultural perspective on motivation has been undertaken by Ryan and Deci (2000). Their work goes further than Bruner's. Rather than pointing to the broad notion of 'agential encounters with intended acts', the work of Ryan and Deci suggests three specific

domains of encounters that have a deep impact on human motivation. They suggest that an environment facilitates or undermines the expansion of intrinsic motivation to the extent to which it contributes or undermines three specific domains: competence, autonomy and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000, pp. 69-78). By competence they refer to the interface of optimal challenge and feedback that promotes effectiveness, free from demeaning evaluations. Like Bruner, they suggest that humans need to feel that they can achieve intended acts. Their work suggests, however, that competence on its own will not enhance motivation, unless the experience enhances a sense of 'autonomy' or 'self determination' with regard to that activity whereby the locus of causality is brought under more local (as opposed to external) control. Finally they suggest that the activity must have 'secure relational support' whereby the act contributes rather than diminishes a sense of 'safety' and relatedness with others. Autonomy and relatedness are not in any way posed in opposition to each other. If an activity can be achieved with others, and the condition for working with 'others' are available through one's actions, an experience both enhances autonomy and relatedness. While it is beyond the scope of this study to consider the wide literature on learning motivation, an understanding of the sensitivity of 'motivation' to the experience of competence, autonomy and relatedness is useful to this discussion.

Third, Bruner points to the human capacity for reflexivity and to envision alternatives. He points to, 'our capacity to turn around on the past and alter the present in its light, or to alter the past in light of the present ... the 'immense repository' of our past encounters may be rendered salient in different ways as we review them reflexively, or may be changed by reconceptualisation' (Bruner, 1990, pp. 109-110). Our narrative and stance toward our past, present, and future is related dialectically with either our relationship with available tools, or the expansion of the tools available in a local setting. Human capacity for reflexivity and to envision alternatives, taken together, establish an interpretive method through which to consider the 'Self.' He concludes,

So while it may be the case that in some sense we are 'creatures of history,' in another sense we are autonomous agents as well. ... the Self, using its capacities for reflection and for envisaging alternatives, escapes or embraces or re-evaluates and reformulates what the culture has on offer. Any attempt to understand the nature and origins of Self is, then, an interpretive effort akin to that used by a historian ... trying to understand a 'period' or a 'people.' (Bruner, 1990, p. 110)

His final suggestion is that the integrated 'Self' is developed through the act of meaning making through the construction of narrative, applied to individuals and wider collectives or cultures (Bruner, 1996, pp. 35-42). He suggests that 'it is through our own narratives that we principally construct a version of ourselves in the world, and it is through its narrative that a culture provides models of identity and agency to its members' (Bruner, 1996, p. XIV). As such, he suggests that the act of narrative is both a vehicle for meaning making, and a mode of thought for the integrative and agential Self.

## **2.12. LEARNING AGENCY**

### **2.12.1. Introduction**

As a philosophical concept, agency is the capacity of an 'agent' to act in the world. The concept has long been at the centre of both philosophical and sociological debates, where the boundaries of 'free will' and space to 'act independently' are theorised against the backdrop of notions of social structure, the recurrent structural patterns that serve to reproduce social relations over time. This study extracts a much smaller subsystem of analysis, namely learning agency, approached through a socio-cultural and critical lens.

The well known work of Archer (2010) establishes a conceptual approach to the relationship between structure and agency, useful to this study. This section will begin with a brief description of the theoretical contributions of Archer used in this study, and then conclude the review by discussing a critical socio-cultural approach to learning agency.

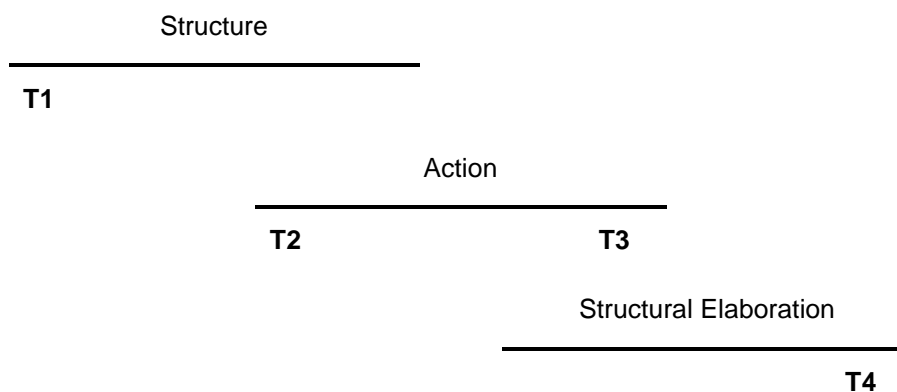
### 2.12.2. Morphogenesis

Archer (2010) argues that the two dominant approaches to the interface between agency and society, whereby either social structure is relegated to aggregate individual action (what she calls 'upward conflation') on the one hand, or social norms and structures become so dominant that there is little analytic room for human action (what she calls 'downward conflation'). She is equally critical of the well known response of Giddens (1979), whose 'structuration' approach, she argues, overly conflates agency and structure, providing little analytic space to understand the workings of agency and structure as co-creative but distinct (Archer, 2010, pp. 226-237). Her work establishes an alternative methodological approach, known as 'morphogenesis'. Morphogenesis asserts that social structure is constantly changing, taking its form, over time, from both the intended and unintended consequences of human activity. As such, action and structure are mutually generative, 'structural patterning is inextricably grounded in practical interaction' (Archer, 2010, p. 226). Where she differs with Giddens, however, is that social structure and human activity are not reducible within a common entangled web, but rather can be understood through iterative and overlapping cycles of structural conditioning, social interaction and structural elaboration, as depicted in Figure 2-5 below (*ibid*, p. 228).

This contribution is useful to this study. This approach is rooted in the suggestion that structure and agency work within different time intervals (*ibid*, p. 238). Structure predates action, which, in turn, potentially transforms structure. She establishes a relationship between structure, action and structural elaboration (*ibid*). While these processes are continuous, they help break up useful analytic intervals. She elaborates the usefulness by applying it to the history of literacy work in Cuba. The initial structural conditions influence the activity of national literacy work before it starts. That is, the specific 'potential' for literacy work is embedded within the structure (T1) of Cuban society. That is, action (T2) takes place in a context not of its own making' (*ibid*, p. 240). As literacy work is enacted (between T2 and T3)

human action exerts both a temporal (speed up, delay) and directional influence on its inheritance. Moreover, real things happen. For example, more people become literate. As action occurs, the process is not merely a reversal of illiteracy, but the emergence of new conditions, in essence transforming the 'structure' that enters subsequent cycles of iteration. This becomes a powerful tool to understand the notion of agency as the relationship between activity and larger process of social change. While this study does not purport to engage with Archer's work deeply, it will benefit from this conceptual and methodological elaboration.

Figure 2-5: Morphogenesis: Structure, Action, Structural Elaboration (Archer, 2010, p. 238)



### 2.12.3. A Socio-Cultural Approach to Learning Agency

While different words have been used, the concept of 'agency' has been central to Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian work. By placing the concept of mediation at the centre of his understanding of human development, Vygotsky moved away from a deterministic relationship between the human mind and its environment. In *Mind in Society*, Vygotsky summarises the basic demand of a dialectical method, namely to study something historically, in the process of change, whereby not only nature and society transform the internal world of human beings, but human beings transform nature and society, and through this process create new conditions for existence (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 60-5). It is worth quoting Vygotsky further,

The person, using the power of things or stimuli, controls his (sic) own behaviour through them, grouping them, putting them together, sorting them. In other words, the great uniqueness of the will consists of man (sic) having no

power over his own behaviour other than the power that things have over his behaviour. But man (sic) subjects to himself the power of things over behaviour, makes them serve his own purposes and controls that power as he wants. He changes the environment with the external activity and in this way affects his own behaviour, subjecting it to this own authority. (Vygotsky, 1997a, p. 212, cited in Engeström , 2007, p. 365)

That is, culture not only impacts the formation of the individual, but the individual (and groups of individuals) have some agency in impacting and transforming culture through externalised activity.

This study narrows its focus to the domain of 'learning agency.' It uses 'learning agency' to point to a domain beyond 'learning' whereby the activity of learning itself becomes expansive in some way. At one level of analysis, expansive learning implies appropriation of the tools of learning, where the tools of learning themselves 'become one's own' (Wertsch and Stone, 1985). At another level, expansive learning implies a process of structural elaboration (in Archer's terms) or 'externalisation' (in the words of socio-cultural theorists (Leontiev, 1978)).

Wertsch and Stone (1985, p. 66) contribute to an approach to 'learning agency' through their approach to appropriation. They distinguish between 'appropriation' and 'cognitive mastery'. They use mastery to refer to 'knowing how to do', while they use 'appropriation' to refer to the process of 'making something one's own'. Mastery of tools involves following the cultural, historical and institutional requirements of a tool, whereas appropriation of tools refers to making tools one's own, including making one's own compensations for limitations within a tool. They draw strongly from the work of Bakhtin who writes,

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language... but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions; its from there that anyone must take the word and make it one's own. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 11)

Bakhtin goes on to say that not all words

...submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation to private property; many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks

them; they cannot be assimilated into his [sic] context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker. Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – over-populated – with the intentions of others. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293-4)

While recognising that 'appropriation' can occur without conscious reflection, Wertsch regards the act of reflection as an important strategy toward appropriation. Wertsch writes,

Mediational means are often used with little or no conscious reflection. Indeed, it is often only when confronted with a comparative example that one becomes aware of an imaginable alternative. This conscious awareness is one of the most powerful tools available for recognising and changing forms of mediation that have unintended and often untoward consequences. (Wertsch, 1991, p. 126.)

While the notion of 'appropriation' speaks to learning agency, it arguably falls short of the kind of dialectical influence suggested through the work on externalisation. Leontiev (1978) is well known for his early work on externalisation. He approached it as the process that produces the changes in tools and artefacts that enter subsequent cycles of mediation. The process of externalisation is conceptually linked to the notion of 'creativity'. Socio-cultural theorists approach creativity not as a product of inter-psyche inspiration, but as a transformation of existing activity patterns through the creation of new tools, or new uses for old tools.

Leontiev's (1978) work suggests the forms of activity that are conducive to externalisation. First, he suggests that externalisation is characterised by processes of expansion, rooted in what Glassman (1996) calls the 'development of symbols in a joint community'. Second, supporting the suggestions of Wertsch, he suggests that these expanded symbols must be the object of conscious reflection, what Leontiev calls, 'consciousness of consciousness'. As such, Leontiev emphasised that the process of externalisation is promoted when the production of cultural artefacts are brought into processes of conscious reflection.

A socio-cultural approach to agency confronts the dominant view within the West, whereby agency is the property of a sovereign individual. Wertsch, Tuviste and Hagstrom (1993) summarise three interrelated ways in which a socio-cultural

approach to agency challenges the notion of agency as private property. First, the very structure and processes of intra-mental functioning are derived from the social plane (*ibid*, p. 338). As reflected in Vygotsky's theoretical starting points, the 'social dimension of consciousness' is primary, while the individual dimension is secondary and derivative (*ibid*, p. 338). Second, agency in general, and learning agency in particular, is more often situated across collectives than atomised within an individual. Third, a socio-cultural approach shifts the analysis toward 'mediated agency'. They point to the work of Palincsar and Brown (1984) who established a programme of reciprocal training to support active reading for children who had previously struggled with reading skills. After intensive assessment, they concluded that reading skills had not only expanded, but that much of the expansion was sustainable over time. As suggested by Wertsch *et al.*, this 'agency' was not only distributed (rather than individualised), but largely contained within the pedagogical tools (rather than within the 'subject' *per se*) (1993, pp. 346-347). Taken together, the unit of analysis for agency is shifted away from an individual in isolation toward a collective together with mediational means.

The work of socio-cultural theorists points to the unequal power relationships imbued within cultural tools and artefacts. As a collection of work, however, their work has largely not given expression to the massive challenge of making meaning and learning agency beyond the ideological space of hegemony across the world, and intensified within a postcolonial context. From a perspective of critical theory, the notion of learning agency is approached through a critique of dominant hegemonic practice (Giroux, 1997). As such, emphasis is placed not only on the act of reflection, but also on the act of critique. Analysis is placed not only on expansive learning, but also on whether or not the structural elaboration potential of this activity works to reproduce or disrupt hegemonic inheritances. At its most simple, it shifts analytic attention to whether new patterns of learning activity serve to entrench simple self interest (aligning student futures with hegemonic practice) or disrupt this

trajectory, aligning students' narratives and actions with non-hegemonic interests over time.

#### **2.12.4. Learning Agency: Conclusion**

The notion of learning agency, *let alone* critical learning agency, is not well defined in current research literature. However, the discussion above establishes an approach for the current study. Bruner's work on 'Self' establishes the starting point. He suggests that the notion of 'Self' is social in nature, highly sensitive to agential encounters, and reflective of the process of meaning making through a narrative form. Learning agency reflects the relationship between learning activity and the narrative construction of 'Self', and thus is ultimately social in nature. Learning agency focuses attention on agential encounters – the sense that one can carry out intended learning activities on one's own. It looks to the expansion of intended learning activities, and the expansion of a sense of capability in reference to these intended acts. Its gaze focuses on whether or not the tools of learning activity are appropriated ('made one's own') or not. As learning agency develops, it focuses attention on the promotion of externalisation, when cultural artefacts are brought into processes of critical reflection, ultimately creating new tools or new uses for old tools, contributing to what Archer calls processes of structural elaboration.

#### **2.13. SUMMARY**

This chapter was roughly divided into two parts. The first half of this chapter located this study in the literature focusing on the first year experience. Gaining wider recognition as a distinct field of study over the past 30 years, the international and domestic literature begins to suggest the conditions and pedagogical possibilities to better articulate institutional practice with the learning needs of first year students. The second half of this chapter turned its attention to the theoretical tools used in this study, laying the basis for an approach to learning activity, meaning making and

learning agency. Flowing from the socio-cultural tools presented in this chapter, the following chapter will present the intervention case study method.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

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#### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

The study is a mixed method intervention case study. Intervention methodology must be discussed at two distinct levels: at the level of the design of the intervention itself, and at the level of how the process of the intervention is studied. The first half of the chapter briefly reviews the requirements of intervention research, and presents the pedagogical intervention standing at the centre of the study. The second half of this chapter presents the mixed method case study strategy through which the intervention experience is observed, documented and analysed.

Given the relatively new terrain of intervention research in this area, the study is exploratory in nature. As opposed to studies which seek more final explanation, exploratory research design attempts preliminary investigation into less known areas of research, often employing more open, creative, inductive and flexible methods designed to point to new insights in the emerging terrain (Durrheim, 2004: 44).

#### **3.2. RESEARCH ORIENTATION**

This study is located in the epistemological view of socio-cultural theorists laying the basis for intervention research, as discussed above. Further, the study draws upon the special epistemological emphases emerging from critical educational theory.

The epistemological basis for intervention research is discussed in more detail below. Shared by other constructivist and interpretivist world views, a socio-cultural approach to intervention research accepts that the experience of reality is a constructed one. As discussed in the previous chapter, the relationship between the 'outer' and 'inner' world is a mediated one. Reality is constructed by a subject

(individual or collective) through his/her/their interaction with both the material and symbolic tools available for meaning making in any local cultural setting (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996). At the same time, the social context is mediated by individual and group action through the ongoing dialectical processes of externalisation (Leontiev, 1978). As such, while a socio-cultural approach views reality as mutually constituted, it views the intrapsychic, interpsychic and social spaces as inherently 'real,' in constant dialectical engagement. Each domain is a potential subject of investigation, through a dialectical understanding of historical process.

The epistemological basis of socio-cultural theory is anti-reductionist. In contrast to the Cartesian worldview, a socio-cultural epistemological starting point suggests that an understanding of any social or psychic phenomenon will not be illuminated simply by splitting the phenomenon into smaller and smaller elements of investigation. Rather, analysis must focus on the mediation between elements, creating phenomenon qualitatively different from the sum of its parts (Daniels, 2008, pp. 34-35.) Moreover, the backdrop to the process of socio-historical interpretation, is the historical process of transformation of cognition and understanding of the world itself. It places little emphasis on static processes of knowing, and more emphasis on the dialectical process of knowledge development.

A weakness of the socio-cultural literature is arguably that it has been relatively ambiguous (even detached) from the specific historical process of social formation emanating from colonialism and reproduced through current patterns of global economic and social relations. As such, this study draws some from the work of critical theory. While critical theorists share the epistemological basis of a socio-cultural approach, they set themselves apart from other constructivist paradigms by placing explicit emphasis on the analytic lenses of domination and emancipation (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000; Giroux, 2009). They not only insist that interpretive analysis must adopt a historical lens, but that this lens must appreciate the historic role of ideas (through hegemonic ideology and discourse) in either reproducing or disrupting historic patterns of domination. A critical lens aims to make explicitly inter-

subjective objectivity through dialogue and critique. As such, 'knowledge' is not viewed as historically neutral, but rather as part of a contested and unequal process of social production.

### **3.3. INTERVENTION RESEARCH**

Intervention research is a developing set of methodological tools built by Engeström (2007) and other third generation activity theorists (Daniels, 2008, pp. 115-147), located. The overarching term 'intervention research' is used by Daniels (2008) to describe a common methodological approach known by different names. Vygotsky referred to 'experimental genetic method', 'historical-genetic method' and 'method of double stimulation' interchangeably (Engeström , 2007, p. 364).

Pointing to the work of Valsiner (1999), Daniels (2008) points to Vygotsky's methodological starting points (Daniels, 2008, pp. 32-50). Intervention research reflects each of these four methodological emphases. First, Vygotsky critiqued methodological reductionism (Daniels, 2008, p. 34). He believed that the study of human higher mental functioning could not be achieved simply through the study of elementary parts. His work continued to search for a unit of analysis capable of preserving the 'essence of the whole' (ibid, p.35).

Second, intervention research answers to Vygotsky's developmental (or 'genetic') perspective, whereby focus is placed on processes of development rather than on units of functionality that have already developed (Engeström , 2007, p. 364; Daniels, 2008, p. 131). Thirdly, intervention research reflects Vygotsky's dialectical approach, focusing on the synthesis or qualitative transformation of items (from mental processes to tools) in the context of contradictions and oppositions (Daniels, 2008, p.32.) Both of these methodological commitments reflect the theoretical centre of Vygotsky's work as articulated in the 'general genetic law of cultural development' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 78), placing analytic focus on the dialectical

process of influence between the intra-psychic and social domains. See the discussion in Chapter 2.

Perhaps most importantly, intervention research reflects Vygotsky's methodological concept of 'double experience' (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 74-75). Vygotsky was deeply dissatisfied with research method considering human mental functioning at the time, and sought to build research method better able to explore the *process* of human mental functioning, with emphasis placed on dynamic causal relationships. He developed a series of experiment in which the research subject was presented with two stimuli. The first stimuli represented a problem, the second stimuli represented an auxiliary means potentially used to solve the problem or to construct alternative tools to solve the problem. As summarised by Valsiner, 'it creates the conditions under which a subject's course of action toward an experimentally given goal makes explicit the psychological processes involved in that action' (Valsiner, 1990, p. 66). Vygotsky summarises,

By using this approach, we do not limit ourselves to the usual method of offering the subject simple stimuli to which we expect a direct response. Rather, we simultaneously offer a second series of stimuli that have a special function. In this way, we are able to study the process of accomplishing a task by the aid of specific auxiliary means; thus we are also able to discover the inner structure and development of higher psychological processes. (Vygotsky, 1978, pp.74-75)

Human beings have the capability of both perceiving an object, and, under certain circumstances, we are also able to become aware of perceiving an object. We have the ability to have 'experience of experience' (Bakhurst, 2007, p.52), a reflective awareness of our own mental states, and an ability to act and produce ourselves in a way that is transformed by this awareness. Vygotsky was less concerned about the awareness itself, but with the unique functions that are enabled by this awareness.

Engeström (2007) is widely credited for building upon these starting points to build tools of intervention research capable of exploring processes of change within activity systems. Building upon this set of methodological insights, intervention research moves the focus away from measuring mental outputs, and places focus on examining learning through the process of engagement between subjects, mediating

tools / artefacts and activity motive. The learning challenge represents the ‘problem’ or the ‘first stimuli’; the mediating means representing the second stimuli. Analytic focus is placed on the process of dialectical change, focusing on the subject’s course of action as it mediates the double stimuli in predictable or unpredictable ways.

The method releases the requirement of the more traditional experimental design whereby the researcher retains maximum control over the experiment. The researcher, at best, can ‘trigger’ (rather than ‘produce’) the learner’s ‘construction of new psychological phenomena’ (Engeström , 2007, p.365). The method is designed not only to reflect subject’s agency, but to produce, transform and observe it through new forms of culturally mediated intentionality.

Engeström (2007, p. 368) emphasises that the tools of intervention research are developed to bridge the gap between research and intervention practice. As compared to more well known experimental research designs, more emphasis is placed on the design of the intervention (the second stimuli) itself. In more conventional experimental design, it is largely taken for granted that researchers have determined the intervention and the desired endpoints, looking to research primarily for design refinement. As such, the process of making the design (and the consideration of who makes the design, under what conditions, and informed by what theory) is often left under scrutinised. In comparison, intervention research demands more explication of the intervention itself, drawing upon the three generation of activity models (Engeström, 1999) discussed in the previous chapter.

### **3.4. PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTION**

#### **3.4.1. Introduction**

Intervention research, then, requires explication in two forms: explication of the intervention itself, and explication of the method through which the experience will be studied. This chapter turns its attention to presenting the pedagogical intervention that lies at the centre of this study. The pedagogical intervention took the final form

of a 16 credit-bearing semester long course for all first year undergraduate students across faculties. The activity model and tools that constitute the pedagogical architecture are described below.

### **3.4.2. Pedagogical Architecture: Activity System**

#### **3.4.2.1. Introduction**

As discussed in the introductory chapter (Section 1.3), the intervention design can be best understood within a cycle of expansive learning (Engeström, 2007). The 'radical' critique of practice and critical design phases established an alternative activity horizon. The alternative activity horizon consisted of four transformed activities, each defined by an expanded object: student expansive reading activity, student expansive writing activity, student led learning organisation, and a community of intellectual stimulation, support and care, as summarised in Chapter 1, Figure 1-2. This activity system established the 'motive' (or 'object') of the pedagogical intervention design.

However, due to the scale and complexity of the intervention itself, the study limited its analytic focus to the activities of student expansive reading and writing, interacting within the larger activity system. This chapter will present the pedagogical architecture focused on these two activities. The activity models will be presented below, followed by a presentation of the tools and the 'rhythms and rituals' that integrated the architecture into a coordinated course experience.

#### **3.4.2.2. Activity System: Second Generation Models**

Figure 3-1 and Figure 3-2 present the two activity models that stand at the centre of the intervention. Figure 3-1 presents the activity as defined by the expanded object of student expansive writing. Figure 3-2 presents the activity defined by the expanded object of student expansive reading.

Second generation activity theorists emphasise the influence of the wider social setting on the enactment of activity. Engeström’s (1999) model for second generation work makes explicit that the triad of subject-tool-object reflect implicit arrangements of community, rules and divisions of labour.

There are three sets of mediating tools in this pedagogical system. See Table 3-1. One set of tools is more tightly linked to student reading and writing activity directly. Another set of tools is shared across the activities and provide a shared meaning making toolkit. The third set of tools is also shared across the activities, but seeks to more directly mediate the ‘community’ in which the activity is located. These toolkits will be discussed below.

Table 3-1: Summary of Activities, Objects and Mediating Tools

Activity	Expanded Object	Mediating Tools and Artefacts		
		Common Meaning Making Tools	Activity Specific Tools	Common Community Tools
1	Self Generative Writing	Participation Points Core Animating propositions	Tool 1: LKA Journal Tool 2: LKA Essay	Umzi – Ekhaya – Village – Jamboree Nexus
2	Self Generative Reading		Tool 1: LKA Reader Tool 2: Reading Log	

Figure 3.1: Activity Model: Expansive Writing Activity

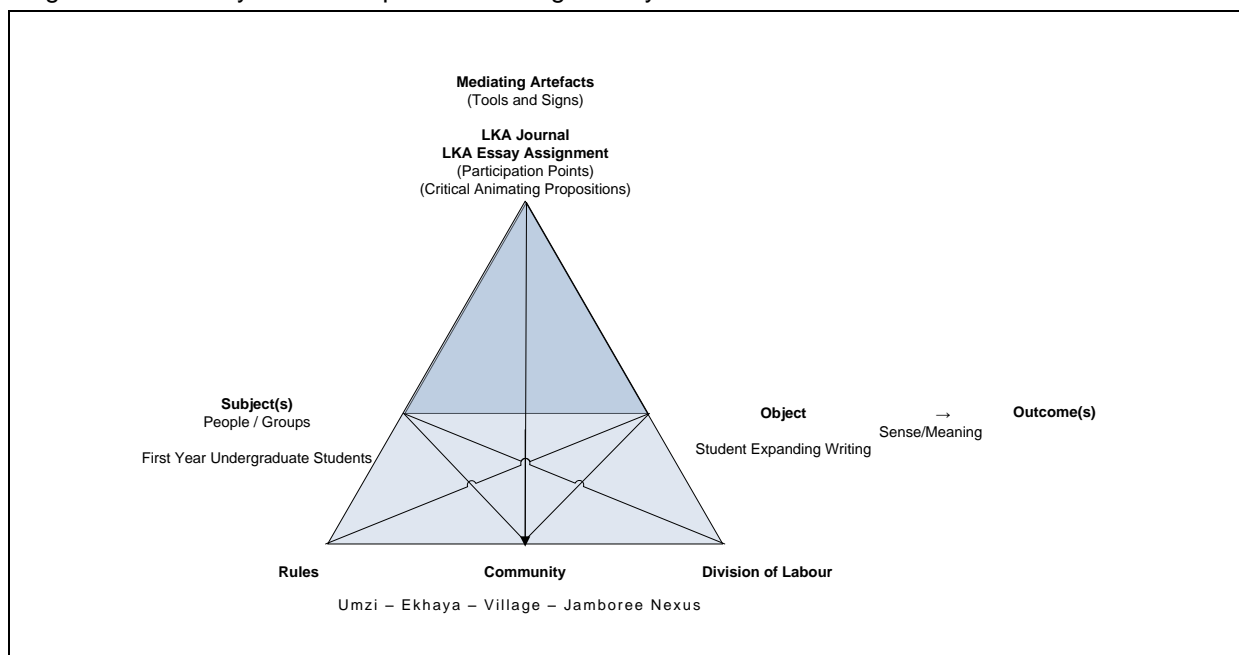
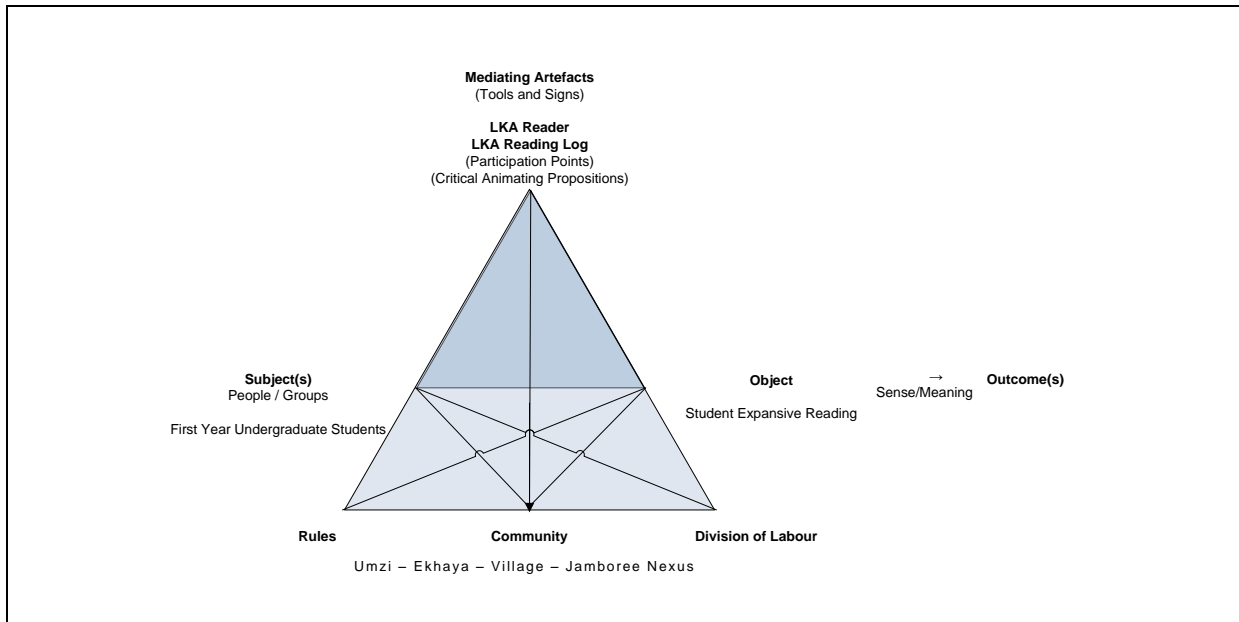


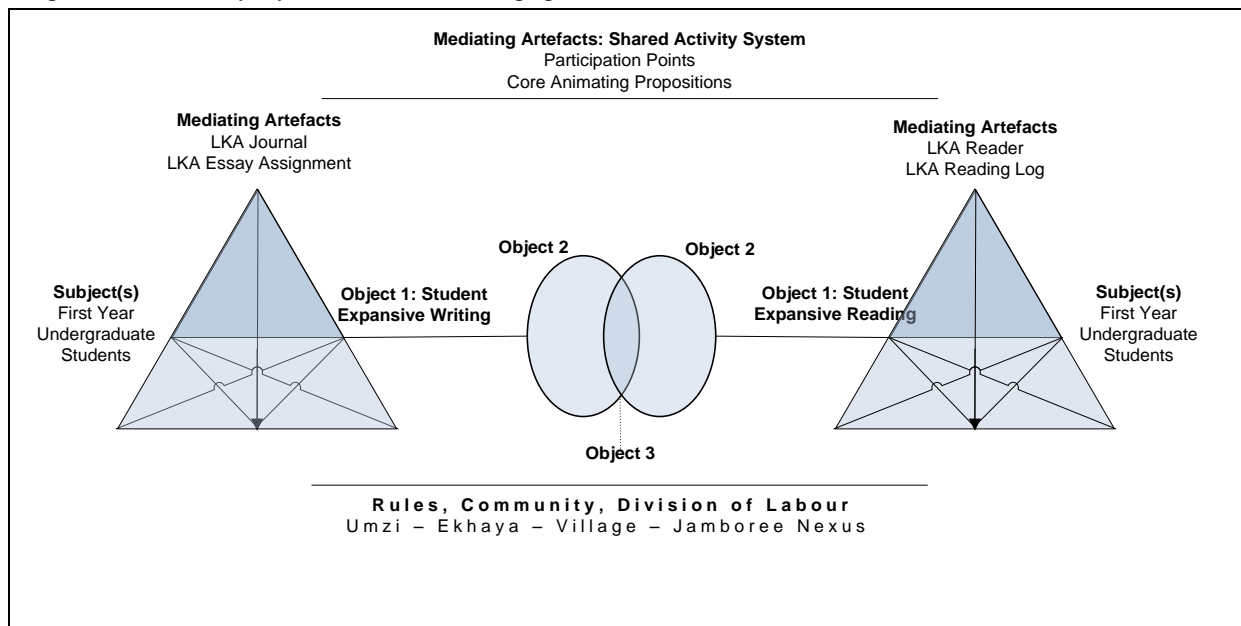
Figure 3-2: Activity Model: Expansive Reading Activity



### 3.4.2.3. Activity System: Third Generation Model

Figure 3-3 presents the two activities within an interactive activity system. As discussed in the previous chapter, the third generation of work (Engeström, 1999, 2001) is marked by an emphasis on the interaction of systems of activity and multidirectional dialogic activity. Figure 3-3 presents the activity system at the centre of the pedagogical innovation using the tools of third generation activity modelling. This model helps place analytic emphasis on the transformed object ('Object 3') emerging from the mediational co-influence of the two activities (Engeström, 2001, p.136). Again, there are three toolkits - activity specific tools, shared meaning making tools, and shared community tools - discussed in more detail below. The objective of the study, then, is to understand the new learning activity resulting from the interaction of present (dominant) forms and future (desired) potentials, across the interaction of these activity elements (Objects 2 and 3).

Figure 3-3: Activity System Model: Pedagogical Intervention



### 3.4.2. Pedagogical Architecture: Mediating Tools and Artefacts

#### 3.4.2.1. Introduction

As illustrated in the activity models above, and summarised in Table 3-1, the pedagogical architecture combined three distinct toolkits. First, the architecture included tools that were more specifically designed to mediate student learning activity. Second, the architecture included tools that were shared across both activities, providing an expanded toolkit for meaning making. Finally, the architecture included tools that explicitly sought to transform the learning community in which learning activity is enacted. Each of these toolkits will be briefly summarised here.

#### 3.4.2.2. Common Toolkit: Meaning Making Tools

There were two tools that were shared across the activities that contributed toward expanding the meaning making toolkit available. The tools, firstly, served to mediate the activity of the course designers themselves. With a curricular culture occupied

by notions of remediation, moral regeneration and skills development, these symbolic tools sought to guide the activity of the pedagogical design team toward a more expansive learning horizon. Secondly, the symbolic tools sought to expand the meaning making toolkit available to participating students, to assist students to confront more contracted forms of activity and meaning making. There were two tools within this toolkit, as discussed below.

#### a. Critical Animating Propositions

Vygotsky's earliest work emphasised that mediating artefacts are often symbolic in nature, taking the form, for example, of ideas. Located within critical pedagogy, the intervention sought to expand students' meaning making toolkits beyond more contracted hegemonic inheritances (Giroux, 1997, 2009; Gramsci, 1971). As such, an important contribution to the pedagogical architecture was a set of 'critical animating propositions'. The propositions themselves emerged at the interface of critical education theory (Freire, 1970; Gramsci, 1971; Giroux 1997, 2009; hooks, 1994, 2003; McLaren, 2009), postcolonial theory (wa Thiongo, 1986; Said, 1993; Fanon, 1961) and the praxis of the students within the Grounding Programme Student Round Table (GPSRT) summarised in the introductory chapter.

The animating propositions were imbued across the course architecture, through the readings, facilitator training, and structure of learning activity itself. There were six critical animating propositions, each imbued with space for critique of the past and present, and aligned expanding student agency in reference to the design of the future (McLaren, 2009; Giroux, 2009; Hooks, 1994; Freire, 1970; Engeström, 2001).

- *Proposition 1: Students as Significant to 'Our Collective Future'*

The first animating proposition simply suggested that this group of students represent a special resource for society at large (hooks, 1994). The proposition attempted to confront the internalised questions of 'does my experience at university matter?' and 'who cares?' Through this proposition, students are provided with an

opportunity to re-imbue their existence and their learning activity with socio-historical meaning.

It was noted that the 'knowledge project' to date has had little success in finding sustainable solutions to human suffering (Nabudere, 2006; Odora Hoppers, 2006). The majority of students have intellectual and social links with spaces that have been largely under-served by the tertiary sector and the academic knowledge project more generally. It was proposed that the knowledge project animated by these students has potentially special importance for society in the future (Odora Hoppers, 2006, 2009).

The proposition challenged students to re-consider the 'purpose' of their participation in higher education. It was suggested that the future is changeable, and that the 'collective future' will reflect our individualised and collective praxis.

- *Proposition 2: Fragility of Student Learning Culture*

The second animating principle was an open recognition and discussion of the fragile learning practice of students inherited from a highly inequitable system of basic education. By opening up the discussion of the fragility of learning cultures, dialogue could confront internalised notions of deficit to re-locate it in the living legacy of an education system that is not aligned to providing students with educational confidence (Bloch, 2009). Further, it allowed for more open dialogue about the strategies available to strengthen learning praxis, and the agency students have in choosing to adopt these strategies.

- *Proposition 3: 'Stepping In'*

Despite the living legacy of contracted learning activity, it was proposed that students have the agency of confronting their fragile learning cultures through a philosophy of 'stepping in'. It was proposed that there are several activity strategies that can be

adopted by students who want to transform weak learning activity into authentically strong learning activity.

It was proposed that there were a set of day to day activity habits (or 'daily rituals') that characterise an emerging intellectual. It was proposed that the system of secondary schooling is largely failing to support students internalise these habits. As such, the question facing students is not whether or not they are strong readers and writers, but whether they are willing to 'step in' to establish these rituals in their lives during their university experience. The course was seen as both an invitation and a challenge to 'step in' more deeply.

- *Proposition 4: The Individual and the Collective*

The fourth proposition reflected the foundational propositions of activity theory, that is, the mutually constituent process of creation between an individual and wider cultural collectives (Vygotsky, 1987; Leontiev, 1978). Rather than posing individual development and collective/social development against each other, they were suggested as mutually constitutive. Both individual and collective development were further animated through the notion of a 'winning team'. The challenge of the course was not only to 'step in' as an individual, but to build different levels of collectives supporting the social choice of 'stepping in'.

- *Proposition 5: 'A High Bar'*

The notion of the 'high bar' was used to confront the internal collective landscape that potentially emerges from a history of educational neglect and systemic low expectations. With a school system that structures success around the notion of mediocrity, students used the notion of 'high bar' to reanimate an activity project for life. The symbolic tool was used to shift motivation from the notion of 'passing' toward 'stepping in' in ways that exceed internalised expectations for performance. Students sought to constitute a challenge such that, when students achieved the

'high bar', it would constitute a meaningful victory, both individually and collectively. While emerging organically, the importance of this notion is supported by the literature which suggests that the expectations for first year student performance were simultaneously supported and raised (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1997; Barefoot, 2000).

- *Proposition 6: Critical Lens on a Dehumanising History*

The final proposition was that we are created, both as individuals, as collectives and as society through historically shared practice (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986, 1987). Given that we come from a recent and deeply dehumanising history, we are likely to propagate this history unless we understand it, confront it, and establish new patterns for future activity (Gramsci, 1971; McLaren, 2009; Giroux, 1997, 2009).

It was proposed that one of the largest contradictions for social change is that our current consciousness is largely a reflection of our past (ibid). In order to achieve social change – new patterns of relating and creating society – we will have to transcend a whole range of inherited intra-mental and inter-mental structures. As such, it was proposed that one of the most powerful tools available for social change is the activity of individual and collective reflective praxis (Leontiev, 1978; Giroux, 2009; Bruner, 1990, 1996).

#### b) Participation Points

The second tool shared across the activity systems that sought to promote new meaning making was known as 'participation points'. The pedagogy sought to place less value on traditional academic outputs (assignments, examinations) and more value on learning *activity*. As such, one of the most important pedagogical innovations was to align assessment value directly with the enactment of learning activity ('the doing'). The tool that was developed as scaffolding for this intention was 'participation points'.

Half of the students' course mark was derived from participation points. Students earn participation points through their activity in the different dimensions of the course. In the course curriculum it was suggested that 'participation points' reflect a life philosophy of 'stepping in'. (See Table 3-2.)

Table 3-2: Curricular Extract: What is a Participation Point?

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The philosophy of this course is a philosophy of life... A participation point is an echo of life – when you jump in, you, and we all, win. One student explains a participation point like this: 'A participation point is recognition of an action done. This action is not simply done to please someone else, but it is a reflection, over time, of living life to the fullest. Over time, and in life, it is an action done not because a teacher or parent tells us we have to, but because it is part of our devotion and dedication to life.'

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(LKA Core Document D, Assessment, Assignments and Participation Points)

The intention of the pedagogical design team was both to establish a 'high bar' and, at the same time, to ensure that students ultimately succeed. That is, the design intention was not to fail any students. This balance was theoretically approached by: 1) recognising students who excelled at a very 'high bar' through forms of public recognition that went beyond a course pass; 2) retaining a discourse of 'high bar' but ensuring that if students 'stepped in' they would earn high marks; and 3) tracking students who were not earning participation points, to provide clarification and support for them to 'step in'.

It was intended that participation points would be reported accurately and frequently to build up social meaning across the course. The intention was to report scores at the end of each two week cycle.<sup>6</sup> This was to contribute to three objectives. First, it would enable students to engage course administrators if their participation points were not reflected accurately. Second, it would allow students to build social meaning and inspiration (individually and collectively) as the course progressed. Third, it would help identify the students who were not participating, and provide specialised scaffolding to ensure that these students were encouraged to 'step in'.

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<sup>6</sup> Ideas for making this more public, like externalising the points through a set of 'beads' were discussed.

### 3.4.2.3. Learning Activity Toolkit 1: Expansive Writing

As discussed above, the next set of tools was designed more specifically to mediate expanded activity. There were two specific pedagogical tools developed to scaffold the writing activity horizon: the 'LKA Journal' and the 'LKA Essay Assignment'.

The 'future state' imagined by the activity horizon of expanding writing is one in which students enact and experience the activity of writing as valuable in their lives, delinked from a tight association with the completion of specific academic assignments. Writing practice becomes expansive in breadth, complexity and application. Over time, the activity of writing becomes associated in some way with the narrative of Self (Bruner, 1996, pp. 36-39).

Tools to mediate expanded writing were informed by expanding literacy research (Temple et al., 2008). Research suggests that students learn to write when they write a lot. This becomes increasingly sustainable when writing takes on a sense of personal meaning, and becomes woven into the practice of daily life. However, writing on one's own is not enough. Effective breakthrough relies heavily on at least three types of scaffolding. First, students must be supported to embody the 'writing process' (planning, drafting, writing, reviewing, redrafting). Secondly, students must receive constructive feedback on their writing from more experienced writers. Finally, the activity of writing must become woven into a meaningful cultural collective, wherein writing becomes a valued subject of dialogue and support.

- *Writing Tool 1: LKA Journal*

The first tool became known as the LKA Journal. Students were expected to write one A4 page in their journal each day. For each day that they wrote one page, they would earn one participation point (see below). The LKA Journal was a physical A4 notebook<sup>7</sup> imbued with imaginary potential. A curricular documents entitled, 'Writing for Ourselves' (LKA Curriculum Team, 2009: Core Document H) set out several

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<sup>7</sup> The 2010 cohort of students were provided with a physical A4 'counter book' on the first day of the course.

propositions, attempting to seed a process of new meaning making around the activity of writing, reflecting the critical animating propositions discussed above.

- *Writing Tool 2: LKA Essay*

The second tool designed to scaffold writing activity was the 'LKA Essay' ('Taking a Thoughtful Stand' (LKA Curriculum Team 2009, Core Document F)). This was the only 'written assignment' that was marked during the course. Emphasis was placed on the activity of writing (drafting, reviewing and re-writing) rather than on the quality of any specific iteration. Students were provided with an activity map to construct their first argument, leading students into a process of proposing, researching, questioning, drafting and re-drafting. Students earned points through iterations of the writing cycle (Templeton, et al., 2008), with iterative reviews located at different levels of the pedagogical community, as discussed below.

#### 3.4.2.4. Learning Activity Toolkit 2: Expansive Reading

Like writing, two specific tools were developed to scaffold the reading activity horizon: the 'LKA Reader' and the 'LKA Reading Log'.

The 'future state' imagined by the activity horizon of expanding reading was not dissimilar from writing. It is a state in which students enact and experience the activity of reading as valuable in their lives, delinked from a tight association with the completion of specific academic assignments. Reading practice becomes expansive in breadth, complexity and application. Over time, the activity of reading becomes associated in some way with the narrative of Self (Bruner, 1996, pp. 36-39).

Research makes some of the same broad suggestions about strategic reading as it makes for strategic writing. First, students increase their strategic reading skills only when they read a lot, and particularly as it becomes woven into the patterns of daily life. This can only be sustained if reading takes on a sense of personal value. However, like writing, reading on one's own is not enough. Effective breakthrough in

reading practice is largely dependent on at least three types of scaffolding. First, students must be 'introduced' to the 'right' reading at the 'right' time. The 'right' reading reflects both content and accessibility, and locating reading within a student's zone of proximal development (Daniels, 2008, pp. 19-25). Second, strategic reading breakthrough requires tools that help the emergent reader to self-support expanded reading activity. Minimally, students must have access to tools to learn new words, and strategies to support strategic reading reflective practice (Billmeyer, 2004). Finally, the activity of reading must become woven into a cultural collective, wherein reading becomes socially valuable.

- *Reading Tool 1: LKA Reader*

A detailed discussion of the development of the 'LKA Reader' goes beyond the scope of this study. The vision laid out by the pedagogical team emphasised three design principles. Content was to be chosen both to sustain reading motivation beyond short term discomfort and to stimulate expansive dialogue, and critical reflection of the past and the present as a way of re-engaging the future. Second, reading material was to be pitched within the zone of proximal development of the 'average' student, capable of supporting the growth of a more authentic and expansive reading culture. Third, material was to be chosen to be reflective of widening genres (non-fiction, fiction, poetry, song lyrics, etc) and widening voice (including 'academic' and 'non-academic' sources).

The second principle was the most difficult in reality. There was very little research (or even open discussion between lecturers and students) about what constitutes challenging but ultimately accessible reading.<sup>8</sup> Methodology was developed to

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<sup>8</sup> Many lecturers resisted the discussion. Their reasons for resistance were different. Some claim that students 'should' be able to read well by the time they enter University. As such, a consideration of student reading levels should not be a decisive criteria for text choice. Others resisted the discussion seemingly from another perspective. These lecturers felt strongly about an 'affirming approach' to students. They reacted to a discussion of the fragile reading practice of students, interpreting the discussion as potentially demeaning of students. Those who had opinions differed widely. Some lecturers insisted that students should be able to read a number of complex articles a

mediate these principles, whereby the Reader would be developed through an iterative process of engagement between lectures and students participating within an integrated pedagogical design team. There were several pedagogical purposes for this iterative engagement. First, lectures and students were to jointly identify the 'animating themes', deciding what social issues animate the most student (and lecturer) dialogic energies. Second, lectures and students were to either jointly select or jointly write the essays and other content of the Readers. Most importantly, lectures and students together were to attempt to map the zone of proximal development shared most widely by students. All material was to be tested by a group of students, who would then reflect back to the lecturer-student design team on their reading experience. The vision for the development of the reader was iterative. With the course envisioned to be coordinated by a lecturer-student team over time, the Reader would be reviewed and at least partially revised on an annual basis.

Moving into the 2010 pilot, a small group of lecturers and students worked to try to put together a more structured Reader reflecting these principles. The 2010 LKA Reader consisted of two types of readings. The first were called 'Core Documents'. These documents jointly mapped out the pedagogy (and mediating artefacts) of the course: the philosophy, tools, invitations and expectations. The remainder of the reader was organised into six modules (or 'umthamo') corresponding to a two week course cycle, organised by a theme. See Table 3-4 below. Each Umthamo Reader started with an introductory document.<sup>9</sup> The remainder of each Umthamo Reader consisted of one or two essays or articles, a historic speech, a document that

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week, while leaders of the centre for teaching and learning insisted that readers could read no more than 10 pages of simple text weekly.

<sup>9</sup> This introductory document had six sections, each less than one page. The first section outlined a one page 'welcome' to the theme. The second section listed a number of words or 'core concepts' within the theme. The third section presented several 'big propositions', provocative statements designed to provoke Umzi level debate, and assist students to develop their own understandings, views and arguments relating to each theme over time. The fourth section presented several big questions woven into the theme. These were big question located at the meta levels of self and society (What is a life well lived? Who does a university serve? What is liberation?) The fifth section laid out a 'check list' of activities associated with this umthamo cycle. The final section provided a small message of care, support and good luck.

included smaller passages from a larger breadth of voices ('Other Voices'), and poems and lyrics from contemporary youth culture related to the theme. There was a constrained process of presenting each Umthamo Reader to the Abakhwezeli team for their engagement.

#### *Reading Tool 2: LKA Reading Log*

The second tool designed for the reading activity horizon was called the 'LKA Reading Log'. It provided scaffolding for students to structure their approach to reading into a series of activity steps, externalised through a writing process (Billmeyer, 2004). As such, the tool sought to provide students with effective strategies to become their own reading 'coach'. Emphasis was placed on three strategies: a) the activity of written reflection before, during and after reading; b) the activity of making written inferences and predictions during the course of reading; and c) the activity of note taking, summarising and questioning (ibid). Participation points were received for completing this 'Reading Log' during each umthamo cycle.

#### 3.4.2.5. Common Toolkit: Social Learning Architecture

As illustrated in the activity models above, the pedagogical intervention included a final special toolkit designed to mediate the learning community within which learning activity was enacted. Accepting that activity is profoundly influenced by its social context, this toolkit was designed in hopes of mediating change of the learning context itself. The embedded learning architecture known as the Umzi, Ekhaya, Village and Jamboree are illustrated in Figure 3-4, summarised in Table 3-3, and briefly discussed below.

Figure 3-4: Activity Network: Dialogic Architecture – Umzi-Ekhaya-Village-Jamboree Nexus

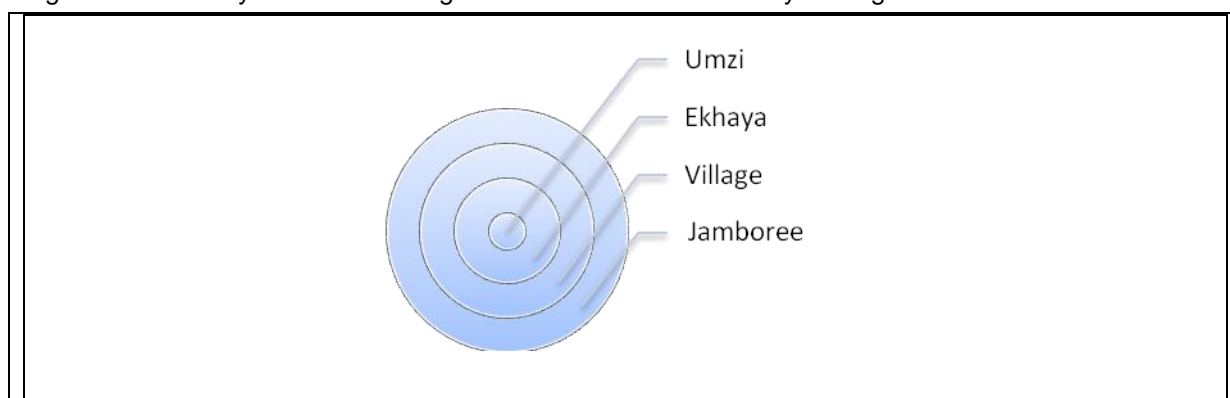


Table 3-3: LKA/GP: Pedagogical Levels: Summary

Level	Animator	Pedagogical Purpose
Umzi	Students	Safe and Expressive Home: intellectual engagement, questioning, sharing, discussion, support, meaning making, responsibility and reflection, learning accountability.
Ekhaya	Abakhwezeli	Intellectual Working Group: deepening intellectual engagement and critique, sharing, breaking down narrow approaches, seeing beyond first impressions, constructing and deepening 'arguments'.
Village	Lecturer	Intellectual Community: feedback from lecturer-facilitator team, addressing emerging questions, widening horizons, deepening implications, establishing 'learning map' forward.
Jamboree	Community	Celebration of Ideas / Group Artefacts: expression, affirmation, critique, celebration, synthesis, publication, proposing to the world.

- *Community Tool 1: Umzi*<sup>10</sup>

The 'Umzi' was to represent the 'engine room' of the pedagogical architecture (isiXhosa word for home; imizi (plural)). Imizi were theoretically groups of 6 students, coming from across faculties, tasked with meeting once per two week course cycle. One of the explicit challenges posed by the course was the challenge of building Imizi into effective working collectives or 'winning teams' (see above). While minimal support was theoretically available, students were largely left to their

<sup>10</sup> The notion of the 'Umzi' emerged through the praxis of the Grounding Programme Student Round Table discussed in Chapter 1. While a suitable account of this experience lies outside of the scope of this study, the Umzi vision and the tools largely emerged through their praxis.

own devices. Neither the time nor the venue for the Umzi sessions were formalised into the University time table.

The meaning, objectives, expectations and challenges imbued within the Umzi were laid out in the curriculum. There were four stated objectives: dialogue, support, accountability and the experience of 'building a winning team'. The objective of the Umzi was to bring together learning activity with processes of more collective dialogic meaning making.

A tool was developed to provide stronger scaffolding for the Umzi for the 2010 course, in the form of a one page document. One side contained the one page 'Umzi Report'; the other side contained the one page 'Umzi Log'.

The one page 'Umzi Report' template supported students to work jointly through the propositions laid out in the introduction to each theme cycle, summarise their arguments, and articulate a set of new, emerging questions. The one page 'Umzi Log' was an 'administrative' template for the allocation of participation points. The majority of participation points were allocated at the level of the Umzi (writing points (LKA Journal), reading points (LKA Reading Log), and points for participating in Umzi sessions themselves.) Woven into this log was the activity of building and navigating the complexity of student to student learning accountability.

- *Community Tool 2: The Ekhaya*

The next level of the pedagogical architecture was called the 'Ekhaya', used roughly to refer to the 'extended family', consisting of up to 5 imizi (approximately 30 students). Ekhaya also met at least once per two week cycle. The time and venue were formally specified, although many met in 'off hours' due to difficulty with formal scheduling. The objectives of the Ekhaya included clarifying the course itself, providing support to the learning activity required, exploring wider meaning making and animating deeper discussion and debate. The Ekhaya were facilitated by a trained peer facilitator known as an 'umkhwezeli' (plural: 'abakhwezeli').

- *Community Tool 3: Abakhwezeli*

The third mediating tool within the social learning architecture was the notion of 'abakhwezeli'. The word 'abakhwezeli' is an isiXhosa word roughly meaning 'keepers of the fire'. This word was given meaning by a group of animated educationists in the late 1990s to replace the vocabulary of 'facilitator', 'lecturers', and 'tutor'. They grew this word through their praxis to point to a more experienced person with the ability to help facilitate the process of knowledge acquisition and meaning making in a way that brings more 'energy' to the student, facilitator and the knowledge itself.

In this course, abakhwezeli were to be specially selected and supported students, with an appetite for intellectual engagement, community activism and dialogue. Recognising the multifaceted gap between lecturers and students, abakhwezeli were to be the 'near peers' helping to bridge the meaning making process between students and lecturers. Imagined through the experience of the Grounding Programme Student Round Table, these students were to be feisty, loving, provocative and interested in the relationship between life, knowledge and social action. Building its own sense of intellectual confidence, this group was also imagined to build its capacity to engage more critically with lecturers. As such, the relationship with lecturers was hoped to be multidirectional. First, it was hoped that lecturers would channel their energies into intellectual engagement with these students. It was thought that this process, over time, would enable these students to move beyond passive coordination of discussion to more actively animate the intellectual content of discussions with students in their Ekhaya. Second, it was hoped that lecturers would be changed over time through their engagement with these students.

- *Community Tool 4: The Village*

The 'Village' was theoretically the space for lecturers to have more structured engagement with first year students. It was hoped that, in the future, there would be a stronger culture of more organic and spontaneous engagements between lecturers and students on social issues. In the meantime, it was hoped that the Village would be a scaffolding for lecturers to experiment with a new pedagogical relationship with students. From the beginning, this was seen to be the most pedagogically limited space. Due to institutional constraints, combined with the lack of mobilisation of the lecturer community within the University, the Village level ended up to be large, with upwards of 90 students. In 2009, every two week cycle was *initiated* by a Village Lecture, where lecturers were asked to establish a learning map for each two week cycle theme or umthamo (see below). At the end of the 2009 pilot, students suggested that lecturers largely fell back on a more traditional lecture style: lecturer centred with little space for engagement or meaning making for students. In 2010, the Village played a different role. Each learning cycle *ended* with a Village Lecture (rather than started with one). The Village lecturer was tasked to study the work of students during the two week cycle and the arguments and questions articulated through the Umzi Log. Rather than 'introduce the content' of the theme, lectures were tasked with helping students confront unexamined assumptions and questions emerging.

- *Community Tool 5: The Jamboree*

The Jamboree was a collective demonstration and celebration of the learning activity of the course. This emerged from the experimentation of the GPSRT, who organised the first Jamboree ('Celebration of Ideas') in 2008. This was an opportunity for all Villages on a given campus to share and celebrate their work through creative production. Students were supported to consider creative ways to express their opinions, questions and social critique emerging from the course thus

far. Each Ekhaya was allocated time for their presentation. Most Ekhaya undertook collective creative productions. Others chose specific students to present their work. Students produced drama, poetry, short stories, comedy, speeches, lectures, songs, and dance. The entire university campus was invited to the event. It was hoped that these would become important events for the university community as a whole.

### 3.4.3. Pedagogical Intervention: Learning Cycle

While presented as separate activities with a set of isolated tools, the pedagogical intervention brought these activities into mutual influence within one activity system. This section briefly describes the system that brought these activities and tools into one pedagogical experience.

The 12 week semester was divided into 6 two week imithamo. An animating theme was chosen for each umthamo, based on three criteria. A selected theme needed to stimulate a certain kind of dialogic ‘energy’ amongst students, and needed to reflect a critical social issue that cannot be well considered through one disciplinary lens. Moreover, a selected theme needed to represent an issue located at the precarious interface of the past, present and imaginary future. The themes chosen for the 2010 pilot are summarised in Table 3-4.

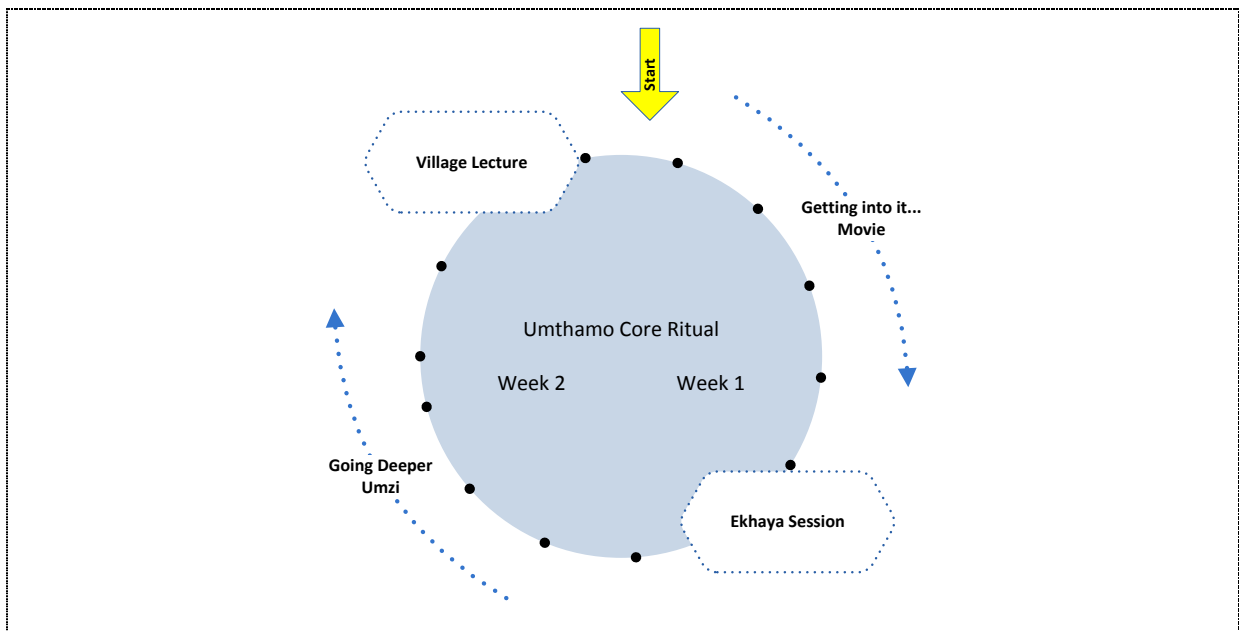
Table 3-4: Umthamo Themes

Umthamo	Theme
Umthamo 1	Introduction: Life, Knowledge, Action
Umthamo 2:	The African Scholar and Becoming a ‘Proud Graduate of [University]’
Umthamo 3	Democracy, Diversity and Identity: Considering Oppression and Liberation
Umthamo 4	Science, Technology, the Environment and Society
Umthamo 5	Poverty, Inequality and Development
Umthamo 6	Living, Loving and Learning

The basic rhythm and ritual of each two week umthamo cycle is illustrated in Figure 3-5. The cycle began with a movie, stirring up questions related to the umthamo theme. The movie was followed by a meeting of the Ekhaya, where both the movie and the reading material were discussed in more depth. The Ekhaya was followed by the meetings of the Umzi, where the reading material was discussed in more detail. Arguments and questions emerging were articulated, and participation points were distributed. Each cycle was concluded with a Village Lecture.

During each umthamo cycle, a number of participation points were available. Points were earned through individualised learning activity as well as participation in the dialogic levels of the course. In terms of individualised activity, students could earn 1 point for each day they wrote one full page in their LKA Journal (14 per umthamo cycle), as well as for the depth with which they engaged with the Reading Logs (7 per umthamo cycle). In terms of collective activities, points were earned for going to movies (1) and for participating in the Umzi (2), Ekhaya (3), Village (1), and Jamboree (1).

Figure 3-5: Umthamo Two Week Activity Cycle



Source: LKA Design Team 2010, Core Document B

### 3.5. STUDY DESIGN

With reference to observing, documenting and analysing the intervention experience, the study is designed as a mixed method case study. Unlike the surveyor looking for causal significance and generalisable findings, case study work seeks to explore a more nuanced understanding of a smaller unit of analysis – located at the level of a learner, a group of learners, or an educational experience (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 106). As emphasised by Stake (2000, p. 435), a ‘case study’ is less a reference to methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. The ‘case’ at the centre of this study is the 652 students participating in the 2010 pilot experience of the pedagogical innovation, known as the ‘Grounding Programme’.

The choice of mixed methods reflects the theoretical basis of the study discussed above. As discussed by Gelo, Braakmann and Benetka (2008), use of quantitative and qualitative methods have been historically polarised, purportedly reflecting different meta-theoretical assumptions (ibid, p. 268). They review the relatively recent methodological history whereby methodological work became increasingly integrated, within and for different philosophical paradigms. Emphasising the complementarities rather than polarity of these methodological arenas, the emergence of mixed methods research suggest that it is possible to subscribe to one set of theoretical assumptions, and yet successfully employ methods across this boundary (ibid, p. 279). Mixed methods are motivated for their ability to ‘enhance understanding of a particular set of concepts in a particular context,’ enabling the study of more complex questions, and the emergence of more complex understanding (ibid, p. 279). Quantitative methods are released from their positivist origins. That is, while quantitative methods continue to seek to simplify experience within summarised data points capable of exploring causal influences for example, under more constructivist paradigms, they can be approached as equally constructed, socially situated, and demanding of socio-historical interpretation.

This study adopts a one phase multiple method approach, whereby qualitative and quantitative methods are applied simultaneously. Quantitative methods are employed to establish activity meta-patterns of the cohort of students, and explore causal influences. Qualitative methods are employed to expand on the more nuanced embedded experience.

### **3.6. INSTRUMENTS AND DATA**

#### **3.6.1. Introduction**

The study is based on one primary dataset and three supplementary datasets. The primary data set emerges through a set of three questionnaires, combining qualitative and quantitative elements. The supplementary data took the form of course notes and artefacts, participation points, and University course marks. Each of these data sets is discussed below.

#### **3.6.2. Primary Research Instrument: Set of Questionnaires**

##### **3.6.2.1. Introduction**

The instrument that stands at the centre of the study is a set of three questionnaires, administered as students entered the course, midway through the course, and at the conclusion of the course. The questionnaires successfully generated a massive data set exploring student experience of the course, with an emphasis on activity and meaning making processes. The process of design, piloting, and administration are summarised below.

##### **3.6.2.2. Instrument Design, Piloting and Development**

The questionnaire was first designed in 2009. Items took three primary forms. First, there were a series of questions that sought to quantify learning practice or perceptions of learning practice in some way. Second, there were a series of questions that were organised as statements corresponding to a four level likert

scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree). These statements were designed to probe students' activity as well as meaning making processes related to self, learning activity, and wider social issues. Select statements were repeated (in reverse statement order) as a mechanism to gauge reliability of responses. Finally, there were a series of more open ended questions that provided an opportunity for students to better share their meaning making processes.

The initial questionnaire was reviewed by three student facilitators and two lecturers. Discussions were held with these students and lecturers to clarify intentions and associated questionnaire content. The revised set of questionnaires was administered to the 360 students participating in the first pilot of the course, taking place in 2009. The completed questionnaires were reviewed with an emphasis on face validity and reliability. A small subset of questions that seemed to be poorly understood by students were either discarded or reworked to enhance clarity.

### 3.6.2.3. Structure and Content

The entry questionnaire was ten pages in length, structured into seven sections. The first six sections were primarily quantitative, while the last section provided space for more qualitative open ended reflection. The first section focused on basic demographic data. The next three focused on patterns of learning activity (reading, writing, and use of the library/computer lab). The next section explored students' thoughts and beliefs about themselves and society more generally (optimism, future aspirations, understandings of Africa, etc). The next section probed students' conclusions about the experience of the university to date. The final section put forward some 'big questions'. The first questions asked students to engage with provocative myths about race and society. The final three questions invited students to share more of their life story – their story to date, their strengths, weaknesses and visions for their future. See Annexure A: Entry Questionnaire.

The midterm questionnaire was eight pages in length, divided into four sections. The first section asked students to evaluate their experiences with the course activities to date, through both structured and open ended questions. The second section asked students to reflect on their learning activity, and especially whether the course had impacted their learning activity in any way. The third section asked them to reflect more widely on their course experiences to date, both through structured and more open ended questions. The final section probed their understanding and calculations of participation points. See Annexure A: Midterm Questionnaire.

The exit questionnaire was thirteen pages in length, divided into ten sections. It was structured similarly to the entry questionnaire, adding questions related to the course experience. The first three sections were focused on learning activity (reading, writing and library use). The next section probed student beliefs and thoughts about provocative issues facing society. The next sections probed student's analysis of the experience of the course. The final section repeated the 'big questions' posed in the entry questionnaire, with the intention of comparing students' engagement with these questions before and after the course experience. See Annexure A-3: Exit Questionnaire.

#### 3.6.2.4. Questionnaire Administration

The questionnaires served the purpose of research, as well as informing the course designers about how students were engaging with the course. As such, students participating in the course could earn participation points by completing the questionnaires.

The first questionnaire was administered by student facilitators (abakhwezeli) as students entered the course. This questionnaire was distributed during the first 'Village Lecture', when the architecture and intention of the course was first presented. Student facilitators gave special meaning to the questionnaires. They emphasised that the course was a pilot experiment developed by lecturers and

students as an invitation for students to 'step in' more actively to the learning experience represented by the university. They emphasised that the questionnaire would allow lectures and students to make the course better over time. The entry questionnaire was labelled their 'entry ticket' into the course. Given its length, the questionnaire was handed out to students in the first week, and collected the following week. The facilitators placed high value on the course, and this 'energy' (combined with the opportunity to earn participation points) translated into relatively high return rates, as well as an unusual level of depth of engagement (discussed below).

The midterm questionnaire was administered differently. It was handed out during the Ekhaya session midway through the course. Students were given time within the Ekhaya session to complete the questionnaire, and asked to submit it before leaving the session.

The exit questionnaire was administered differently again. Student facilitators were concerned that due to exam pressures students may not hand in the final questionnaires if they were simply handed out. As such student facilitators established several afternoon open sessions during exam week where participating students were invited to come and 'complete the course.' Tea and coffee was served. Light music was played to set up a 'reflective environment', what they called a 'cafe' of sorts. Student facilitators gave meaning to the process of completing the questionnaire, encouraging students to spend at least an hour in reflective contemplation about their experience of the course.

#### 3.6.2.5. Questionnaire Completion Rates

The completion rates for each questionnaire are summarised in Table 3-5. 94% of the study population completed at least one questionnaire, with 6% of the population completing none of the questionnaires. 39% of the population completed all three

questionnaires. An additional 37% completed at least two of the three questionnaires. 17% completed only one of the questionnaires.

Table 3-5: Questionnaire Completion Rates

Questionnaire	N	Percent
Entry Questionnaire	408	63%
Midterm Questionnaire	461	71%
Exit Questionnaire	498	76%

A striking feature of the responses to the questionnaires is the care and depth in which they seem to be completed. While the self completed questionnaire is notoriously limited as a data collection strategy, the sheer quantity of engagement with these questionnaires is noteworthy. Extracting only the six 'big' open ended questions at the end of the 10 page entry questionnaire alone, 135,000 words were produced across 408 students, averaging just over 330 words per student. Extracting the six 'big' open ended questions at the end of the 13 page exit questionnaire, just over 341,000 words were shared, averaging just over 685 words per student.

While there is some suggestion that the questionnaires themselves were interesting to students ('...the GP has made a huge change by giving us the questionnaires and I find it very exciting'), this is likely to be more profoundly a reflection of the value placed on the questionnaire process by the student facilitators. Student facilitators during this period had a strong claim on the potential historic importance of the process, and exerted a great deal of energy to encourage students to take the questionnaire process seriously.

#### 3.6.2.6. Data Capturing and Cleaning

Both the quantitative and qualitative data elements of this massive data set were captured onto Excel. The data capturing process was systematically monitored, with one in every three electronic records checked with the original. If the data were clean, the checking would be extended to every four records, reaching a maximum

of 10. If errors were found, the checking would be intensified to every two records. When errors were found, all data records were checked.

### **3.6.3. Supplemental Data Set 1: Course Artefacts**

The researcher was involved in the processes leading up to the intervention, the design of the intervention and the processes leading up to the intervention itself, as discussed below. Through the process, a myriad of artefacts were collected from field notes, student reflections, flip charts, curricular artefacts, and minutes of meetings. These course artefacts were reviewed to help construct an understanding of the intervention experience across time.

### **3.6.4. Supplemental Data Set 2: Participation Points**

The second set of supplemental data took the form of participation points and course marks. The philosophy and structure of participation points were discussed above. The aspiration of the pedagogical design was that the course community would come to place special value on the notion of ‘participation points’. In reality, energies were not invested in creating the required tools to track participation points as a valuable asset. The collection of points was allocated to a student intern, with weak tools for support and oversight.

By the end of the course, there were three different sources of participation points available for analysis. First, there was a participation point total that was submitted by the student interns to the University toward the final course mark. Second, there was a spreadsheet kept by the student intern which attempted to record participation points as they related to course activity, upon which the final mark total was theoretically based. Third, participating students were asked to report back on their participation points in both the midterm and the final questionnaire.

The following observations emerged from an initial analysis of the three sources of participation point data:

- The total participation points submitted for final course marks did not correlate with the detailed data provided by the student intern responsible for participation points.
- There seemed to be a number of participation point totals that were 'estimated' to the nearest ten, particularly at the lower level of the scale.
- Data from the midterm were incomplete. Located at the end of the questionnaire, a notably small number of students completed the data in full.
- The exit questionnaire asked students to estimate their participation point total. There was no correlation between this data set, the set emerging at the midterm, and the sets kept by the student administrators.
- A few significant independent variables emerged from the linear model analysis, but they were not consistent across alternative sources.

An attempt was made to re-capture participation points directly from course documentation. The following further observations were made:

- The documentation providing evidence for participation points was limited. It seemed that documentation was either not kept, or was lost by the time this analysis was undertaken. The documentation from Campus A was much weaker than the documentation from Campus B. In terms of raw quantity alone, Campus B had at least four times more documentation than Campus A.
- It was difficult to construct complete participation point totals from the available documentation.

In the initial study design, the analysis of participation point data were imagined to lie at the centre of the study. The poor reliability across sources meant that the data were excluded from the analysis. The significance of this experience itself is discussed at the end of the study.

### **3.6.5. Supplemental Data Set 3: Course Marks**

The final set of data collected for analysis were the second and third year course marks of the cohort of undergraduate students entering in 2009 and 2010, including both those participating in the programme pilot and those who did not participate. The 2009 cohort was included in this particular analysis. In 2012, on the basis of ethical clearance, data were sourced from the Office of the University Registrar of the course marks of all entering students in 2009 and 2010 for the academic years of 2010 and 2011. This represented second and third year course marks for the 2009 cohort, and second year course marks for the 2010 cohort.

### **3.7. STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

The course was first piloted in 2009, with 360 students located on the largest campus of the university (Campus A). In 2010, the course underwent its second year of piloting, expanding to two campuses (referred to in this study as Campus A and B). In theory, 720 students were to be accommodated in this pilot process.

The Deans of each Faculty were responsible for identifying the students to participate in the course. The institutional memory of how these students were selected is weak. In some cases, the course 'replaced' a computer literacy course that had been recently eliminated from the Prospectus. There is some evidence that some students may have been chosen because they were perceived to be requiring foundational support. From 2011, all entering undergraduate students would enrol in the course.

The study population that stood at the centre of this study were the students who formally participated in the 2010 pilot. Data generated from the 2009 pilot was only included for the final course mark analysis, described below.

There were enormous challenges with course administration. These challenges impacted the 2010 study sample in two ways. First, there was a group of students

with no evidence of participation (in terms of course documentation) beyond a 'blunted' participation point score of '30' at the end of the course. Second, the records of the student course administrators did not fully correlate with the records of the Office of the Registrar. There are two explanations for this discrepancy. Given the high level of energy around the piloting of the course, some students chose to participate in the course, knowing that they were not officially registered. Alternatively and more problematically, the administrative and communication weaknesses led to both a group of students who were registered but did not participate and a group of students who participated as if they were registered but, in reality, were not.

Table 3-6 summarises the 2010 student cohort data. 839 students submitted at least one questionnaire. These data were merged with the official data from the Office of the Registrar, reflecting the students who were formally registered for the course. The 124 students who were not officially registered for the course were excluded from the study sample. Further, the 57 students who had submitted no questionnaires, had no evidence of other course documentation, and received a blunt '30' participation point total at the end of the course, were eliminated. After a detailed investigation, evidence suggests that these students did not participate in the course. The final study sample then included 652 students.

While it is arguable that the elimination of the 57 cases (7%) contributed some bias to the study, the benefits of their elimination were considered to outweigh their inclusion. As the study is interested in the potential for pedagogical innovation, student experience that mostly reflected simple administrative and communication weaknesses, where it was unclear whether any real participation had been enacted, was not seen to contribute to the learning objectives of the study.

Table 3-6: Study Population: Summary of Excluded Cases

Excluded Cases				
Total N (Questionnaire)	Not Officially Registered	No Questionnaire / Blunt PPoint	Duplicate	Study Population
839	124	57	8	652

### **3.8. QUANTITATIVE DATA DESIGN AND ANALYSIS STRATEGY**

There were two separate quantitative analyses undertaken within this study, the first using questionnaire data, and the second using second and third year course mark data. The design of each of these two quantitative analysis elements is described below.

#### **3.8.1. Quantitative Analysis 1: Questionnaire Data**

The primary analysis focused on the quantitative data elements from the set of three questionnaires. There were two overarching objectives for this analysis. First, it was designed to help understand the larger patterns of activity and meaning making across the study population. Second, it was designed to explore the influence of a series of independent variables on the patterns of activity and meaning making.

Three primary analyses were undertaken with the quantitative data emerging from the set of questionnaires. The first analysis provided basic descriptive outputs. The second analysis sought to combine dependent variables which enjoyed enough reliability and construct validity. The third analysis was designed to explore the relationship between the dependent variables (and constructs) and a set of independent variables. The data design and analysis strategy is described here.

##### **3.8.1.1. Independent Variables**

There were three sets of independent variables – university related, demographic and pedagogical, as presented in Table 3-7. Three independent variables related to the location of the student in the University: faculty, campus and residential typology. Seven independent variables related to the demographic background of students: gender, age, nationality, home language, preferred language of learning, secondary school typology and levels of parental education. Three variables related to the pedagogical architecture itself: the Village, Ekhaya and Umzi.

Table 3-7: Data Design: Independent Variables

University	Demographic	Pedagogic
Campus	Gender	Village
Faculty	Age	Ekhaya
Residence Type	Nationality	Umzi
	Home Language	
	Preferred Language of Learning	
	Secondary School Typology	
	Parental Education	

### 3.8.1.2. Dependent Variables

The dependent variables were organised into rough groups. Each group reflected one of four categories: a) activity patterns before the course; b) activity patterns during and after the course; c) meaning of course activity; and d) the meaning of course experience as a whole. These variable groups and the relationships between groups are presented in Table 3-8 below. A map of the questions that are contained within each variable group is presented in Annexure B.

As can be seen from Table 3-8, three variable groups relate to the activity of reading. A1 represents 6 questions probing the pattern of reading activity before the course. A2 represents 8 questions probing the pattern of reading activity during the course. C1 represents 5 questions probing the meaning students gave to the LKA Reader.

A similar pattern is used for variables relating to writing activity. A2 represents 2 questions probing writing activity before the course. B2 represents 5 questions probing writing activity during the course. C2 represents 7 questions probing the students' relationship with the LKA Journal.

The questions within Variable Group B3 explore the experience of students with peer engagement, primarily within their Umzi, while the questions in Variable Group C3 consider the meaning students gave to their Umzi experience.

Variable Group B4 includes questions that explore students' activity patterns across the main activity elements of the course, while Variable Group C4 explores the extent to which students perceived these activities to be useful or not.

Category D includes four groups exploring the meaning students made of the course experience as a whole. These Variable Groups explore how students rate the experience overall; the relationship between the course and the process of becoming 'Self'; the relationship between the course and a sense of self expression; and, finally, the relationship between the course and students' relationships to knowledge.

Table 3-8: Data Design: Dependent Variables

	CATEGORY A	CATEGORY B	CATEGORY C	CATEGORY D
	Activity Before	Activity During/After	Meaning of Activity/Tools	Meaning of Course Experience
1	A1 Reading Practice	B1 Reading Practice	C1: Tool - LKA Reader	D1: GP Experience
2	A2 Writing Practice	B2 Writing Practice	C2: Tool - LKA Journal	D2: Becoming Self
3		B3: Umzi / Peer Engagement	C3: Tool – Umzi	D3: Expression / Voice
4			C4: Usefulness of Activity Elements	D4: Relationship to Knowledge

### 3.8.1.3. Data Analysis

There were six analysis strategies relating to the questionnaire data:<sup>11</sup>

1. **Univariate Analysis:** Descriptive statistics for all independent and dependent variables were generated for the overall group and tabulated by campus.
2. **Participation Point Analysis:** The frequency distribution and univariate statistics for the alternative sources of participation points were explored and compared. Given the lack of reliability, further analysis was not undertaken.

<sup>11</sup> The researcher sought technical support to undertake the data analysis, and to oversee the validity of the data analysis design. The author is grateful to Dr. Petra Gaylard, Data Management and Statistical Analysis (DMSA), Wits University. Data analysis was carried out in SAS (SAS Institute Inc., SAS Software Version 9.3 for Windows, Cary, NC, USA: SAS Institute Inc. (2002-2010)

3. **Development of Constructs:** The dependent variables within each variable group (listed above) were examined to explore whether they could be statistically combined into constructs. That is, each variable group was examined to determine whether variables shared enough construct validity and reliability to be considered one statistical construct. Cronbach's alpha was used to explore reliability, while a Factor Analysis was used to measure construct validity. Constructs were accepted with a Cronbach's alpha score greater than or equal to 0.8 and with variables loading onto one factor, with factor loadings greater than or equal to 0.7. For the 9 constructs identified, the average responses of the group were used to create a composite score.
4. **General Linear Model 1:** A General Linear Model (GLM) was applied to each dependent variable (and construct), using the independent variables relating to the University (campus, faculty and residence) and demographic data (gender, age, nationality, home language, learning language and parental education).<sup>12</sup> In the case of binary or categorical dependent variables, binary/multinomial logistic regression was used. In the case of skewed count data (for example, the number of books read), a negative binomial regression was used. Pair-wise multiple comparisons (of all possible pairs) within significant independent categorical variables were carried out using Tukey-Kramer's multiple comparison adjustment for the *p*-values and confidence limits. A 95% confidence level was used throughout.
5. **General Linear Model 2:** A third General Linear Model (GLM) was applied to each construct and selected dependent variables using the independent variables associated with pedagogical elements (Village, Ekhaya, and Umzi). The specification of the model was similar to the GLM1 discussed above.

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<sup>12</sup> 'Preferred Learning Language' and 'School Type' were only available from the exit questionnaires. Values for Accommodation, Home Language and Highest Parental Education were also drawn from the exit questionnaire. The analysis was thus restricted to, at most, the 498 students who had also completed the exit questionnaire.

### **3.8.2. Quantitative Analysis 2: Academic Performance**

The second quantitative analysis was undertaken with academic course mark data. In 2009 and 2010, only a subset of students from the first year undergraduate student population participated in the course. This analysis sought to compare the course marks during the second (and third) years of study of the students who participated in the course, with the students who did not participate in the course. The objective of the analysis was to consider whether there was evidence that the experience of the course had any longer lasting effect on learning activity of participating students, observable through academic performance data.

In June 2012, data were sourced from the Office of the Registrar on the entire student population entering their undergraduate degree in 2009 and 2010. For 2009 students, second year (2010) and third year (2011) performances were analysed. For 2010, only second year (2011) performance was analysed. (Note that the first year final course marks were not analysed due to the possible influence of the course itself.)

The 2010 data contained 2412 unique cases (students). Analysis of second year performance was restricted to the 1784 students who were registered as first year undergraduate students in 2010, and as second year undergraduate students in 2011.

The 2009 data contained 2188 unique cases (students). Analysis of second year performance was restricted to the 1671 students who were registered as first year undergraduate students in 2009, and as second year undergraduate students in 2010. Analysis of third year performance was restricted to the 1259 students who were also registered as third year students in 2011.

The analyses were run as a General Linear Model (GLM) with average grade (for each year 2010 or 2011 respectively) used as the dependent variable and course participation, qualification and the demographic covariates (gender, age, language, nationality) as the independent variables. The 95% confidence level was used.

It was assumed that qualification type may have a large effect on the distribution of final course marks. As such, groups for more detailed comparative testing were identified by tabulating qualifications (by campus) by whether or not students had done the course. Groups were selected for analysis where the number of students who took the course and who did not take the course per qualification type was 25 or more.

### **3.9. QUALITATIVE DATA DESIGN AND ANALYSIS STRATEGY**

The qualitative data set emerging from the three questionnaires was massive. The data set included 575,000 words.<sup>13</sup> In its totality, the data set provides the basis to build a student narrative – both a version of his/her autobiography, his/her perceptions about important social issues, and his/her course experience.

Given the size of the data set and the scope of the study design, only a very small sample of the qualitative data were analysed for the purposes of this study. Rather than taking advantage of the deep narrative potential of the data, the study selected specific elements of the data set (disarticulated from their narrative whole) to consider more carefully.

The data set, and related analysis methods, were chosen to balance three objectives: first, to enhance the ability of the data to ‘tell its own story’; second, to maximise the ability to ‘see’ the larger patterns of activity and meaning making demanded of an exploratory study; and, third, to find strategies to maximise the interpretive strength of investigating more limited samples of available data.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the study was narrowed to place analytic focus on student reading and writing activity. As such, analysis focused on how students discussed their experience with reading and writing activity directly, or on the ways in which students discussed the broader pedagogical experience making direct reference to reading and writing activity.

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<sup>13</sup> Roughly 2000 pages worth of data, assuming roughly 300 words per page.

Eight qualitative variables were analysed, organised into four sets in Table 3-9. The table presents the item, where it is located within the questionnaires, its focus, the length provided for answers, how many students answered the question, and the average number of words written per student who answered this question.

Set A included two questions asking students whether or not their reading and writing 'habits' had changed in any way from participating in the course. If students indicated that their habits had changed, they were asked to explain their answer. A systematic sample of answers was selected for detailed theme analysis. Theme analysis began with a process of repeated reading of the data. Over time, dominant interpretive themes were underlined and labelled. Clustered items were re-studied, re-clustered (as necessary) and re-analysed to the level of subtheme. Each subtheme was further investigated in more detail, with an attempt to identify more nuanced interpretive evidence.

Set B included two items. The first asked students to write in their top two favourite activity elements of the course and explain their answer. The second asked students to write in their least favourite course activity and explain their answer. The answers of all students who indicated that their favourite or least favourite activity elements were related to reading (as represented by the LKA Reader) or writing (as represented by the LKA Journal) were subject to a theme analysis, as discussed above.

Set C included three questions asking students about their understanding of the purpose of the embedded levels of the course architecture, namely the Umzi, Ekhaya and Village. These answers were searched for the words 'read' and 'write' ('writ.'). All answers that included explicit reference to either reading and/or writing were subject to a theme analysis, as discussed above.

Set D is made up of one element. In this question, students were asked if the course 'impacted' them 'as a person' in any way. Again, these answers were searched for the words 'read' and 'write' ('writ.'). All answers that included explicit reference to either reading and/or writing were subject to a theme analysis, as discussed above.

Table 3-9: Selected Qualitative Data Elements

Location	Focus	Design Length <sup>14</sup>	Item	N	Average Word / Student
Exit B3	Activity: Reading	Mid	Have your reading habits changed in any way from participating in the LKA/GP? If yes, describe how they changed.	390	21.8
Exit D1	Activity: Writing	Mid	Have your writing habits changed in any way from participating in the LKA/GP? If yes, describe how they changed.	373	18.6
Exit H2	Favourite Activity	Short	Which of the 7 course activities listed above are your favourite? Select two of the activities. Explain your choice.	475	19.6
Exit: H3	Least Favourite Activity	Short	Which of the 7 course activities listed above did you not like or consider a waste of time? Explain your choice.	453	8.8
Mid: B2.3	Umzi Purpose	Short	What do you believe is the role and purpose of the Umzi?	444	15.1
Mid: B1.2	Ekhaya Purpose	Short	What do you believe the role and purpose of the Ekhaya?	444	14.8
Mid: B3.2	Village Purpose	Short	What do you believe the role and purpose of the Village?	436	13.1
Exit: J1	Changed Me as a Person	Long	Has the experience with participating in the GP impacted you as a person? Have you changed in any way? Please explain your answer.	482	23.7

### 3.10. RESEARCH QUALITY AND THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

In their historiography of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2000, pp. 1-28) discuss what they call the ‘double-faced ghost’ facing research in its formal interpretive form emerging in the early twentieth century. On the one hand, it was assumed that a qualified ‘competent’ observer can report on his/her own observations, and interpret the experiences of others with a sense of objective, detached precision. On the other, there was a belief in a human subject who was

<sup>14</sup> Answers that were designed as ‘short’ provide one fifth of a page (A4) or less for student open ended answers. Answers that were designed as ‘mid’ length provided more than one fifth and less than one third of a page. Answers that were designed as ‘long’ provide between one third and one half of a page.

both able and willing to represent his/her life experiences in an uncontested mutually integrative sense (ibid).

Since at least the 1980's, these starting points have come under increased assault (ibid). Poststructuralists of many sorts have helped to unveil the more complex and embedded nature of interpretive work. They have debunked the notion of the objective observer, emphasising that not only are observations socially situated, but the act of interpreting is mediated through filters of language, class, gender and other formations of cultural identity (ibid). Moreover, human beings as research 'subjects' are, by definition, unable to give full explanation of their experience, but rather present a set of narrative accounts of their experiences, representing at best partial identities reflecting their interpretation of the research process itself (Tedlock, 2000, p. 455). As such, theorists of qualitative interpretation emphasise that qualitative research in particular is 'endlessly creative and interpretive' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 23). Rather than a simple 'objective' process, interpretive practice is artistic, political, and socially situated.

The socio-cultural critique of the process of research itself (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, pp. 11-18) has shifted the focus of attention away from finding 'objective' solutions to questions of validity and reliability, toward a more complex understanding of research trustworthiness. Insisting that we should not even try to 'solve the problem' of trustworthiness, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest rather that the tensions emerging at the interface of interpretation and quality, and the associated demand for a more circumspect consciousness of the research process itself are themselves productive.

Critical theorists point to two tools to mediate the quality and trustworthiness of the interpretive process: critical reflexive practice and critical analytic bracketing. Reflexivity demands that the researcher becomes critically circumspect of the interplay between her own socio-cultural assumptions and interests and the research process itself, with an emphasis on both methods of data collection and interpretation (Fine, Weis, Wessen and Wong, pp. 107-109). Gubrium and Holstein

speak to sustaining a 'critical consciousness' throughout the interpretive process. Rather than denying that preconceived ideas inherently interact with the research process, a reflexive approach demands the researcher to become increasingly clear of his/her preconceived ideas and biases through the process of interpretation itself. In the words of Leontiev (1978), it insists that the researcher must set up conditions for the consciousness of consciousness. Analysts suggest that trustworthiness cannot be guaranteed outside of the quality of reflexive practice through the activity of interpretation. Critical theorists place special emphasis on the relationship between the researcher, the research participants, and the socio-cultural patterns of ideological hegemony, demanding that the research be reflective of his/her own relationship to social power and its implications on the interpretive process (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000, pp. 290-292).

Secondly, the interpretive process of analytic bracketing (Gubrium and Holstein, pp. 499-503) points attention to the interplay between discursive practice (what people say) and discourse-in-practice (whereby what people say is mediated by historically constructed patterns of ideological discourses). In the language of socio-cultural theorists, an analysis of any text must be historically situated, with an understanding of the dialectical relationship between the Self, the social and the historical. The process of analytic bracketing ensures that neither the discursive practice or the discourse-in-practice are left out of any analytic activity.

Intervention research opens the metaphoric 'can of worms' surrounding the 'objective' 'researcher–subject' relationship even wider. Intervention research attempts to open up space for the researcher-practitioner to engage more effectively with the contested world of applied intervention work. The strength (and challenge) of this methodological work is that it begins to develop methodological tools to better locate research in the world of intervention, accepting the space as less controlled, less linear, more contested and more unpredictable than many other research designs demand (Engeström, 2007).

As such, this study recognises as a starting point that the author was not a dispassionate observer. The author's relationship to the intervention design and implementation process itself was uneven and contested. The author was centrally involved in the expansive learning process leading to the intervention, as well as centrally involved in the design of the pedagogical intervention itself. Moreover, supported by a team of students and lecturers, the researcher was responsible for the design and development of the majority of curricular tools for the 2010 pilot intervention. At around the time of the 2010 intervention, as discussed in the postscript to this study, the author became much less involved in the intervention of the course itself, observing from a more peripheral position. Through 2011 and 2012, the author was not involved in the course itself. While intervention research places value on the participation of the researcher in the intervention design, criticising methodological aloofness, the alternative 'closeness' and 'distance' of the researcher to the project arguably establishes a different lens for analysis than a more dispassionate stance.

On the level of intention, the study was not designed with the assumption of a dispassionate stance. The author is motivated to finding pedagogical innovations that work better for first year students in this context, and is inspired by the potentiality of some of the tools tested in the course of this study. This may be seen as an observational bias. Alternatively it contributes to what Gubrium and Holstein (2000, pp. 503-505) term sustaining a 'critical consciousness' throughout the interpretive process. When the researcher critically cares, the act of interpretation becomes accountable to the importance of finding authentic solutions to complex interpretive problems. The strengths and limitations of the unique location of the researcher – at times close and at times more distant – represents an interpretive backdrop across this study.

The more specific mechanisms for trustworthiness have been highlighted in the course of the discussion above. The quantitative work was overseen by a more experienced and dispassionate statistician who monitored the validity of the analysis

strategies. The questionnaires were structured with a number of checks for basic reliability, including repetitive distributed questions. The methods of interpretation of the qualitative data were presented above. The systematic and repetitive nature of the analysis process goes some way to support the quality of the interpretation. As a reflexive tool the author retained contact with a group of students who had been facilitators within the 2010 pilot experience. As interpretive questions emerged, the author sought counsel on interpretive meaning emerging. This informal dialogue (verbal and over email) helped to deepen the interpretive process over time. Emphasis was placed on dominant themes rather than outlying experiences. Even so, the process of interpretation, like all qualitative interpretation, remains open to critique (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, pp. 1-28).

### **3.11. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The study received ethical approval from the University of Fort Hare's Higher Degrees Committee. (See Annexure C.) The study was supported by both the senior management of the university, as well as the course director. Beyond a careful consideration of the quality of interpretation as discussed above, there were two distinct sets of ethical considerations facing this study.

The first set of ethical considerations relate to the broad principle of respect for the dignity of research participants (Wassenaar, 2006, p. 67). The four pillars of ethical considerations for education research include confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent and freedom to withdraw.

As discussed above, the study population included all of the students who were formally registered and participated in the course in 2010. At the beginning of the course, an informed consent form was circulated and signed by students by the course director. (See Annexure D.) Both the informed consent and the cover page to each questionnaire explained the purpose of the questionnaires and the wider study. The phone numbers and email addresses of the course director and researcher were distributed to students ensuring direct access to students should

concerns arise at any time. Students received participation points for completing the questionnaires. The structure of the participation points ensured that students who chose not to complete the questionnaires (or withdraw their questionnaires at any time) were not penalised.

Research was designed with respect for anonymity and confidentiality. Questionnaires included student identification numbers, but did not include names. The student ID numbers were used for the purpose of capturing participation points within the course itself. The research used student identification numbers to combine data across questionnaires, and then discarded them. No identifiers were attached to contributions. Care was taken to exclude any data that may include any identifiable information. In this way anonymity and confidentiality was protected.

The second set of ethical considerations facing this study focuses attention on 'emancipatory implications' and whose interest the study ultimately serves (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 21; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000), going beyond Wassenaar's final criteria of beneficence and justice (2006, pp. 67-68). Critical research theory sets itself apart from other constructivist paradigms by placing emphasis on evaluation in terms of 'emancipatory implications' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 21; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000). Kincheloe and McLaren critique the more common emphasis on instrumental method over 'humanistic' purpose (2000, p. 282). They suggest that methodological and ethical demands are often posed as 'how to' rather than for what purpose, and in whose interest? Kincheloe and McLaren seek to redefine the relationships inherent within research through notions of solidarity and mutual accountability. They further suggest that while some research is suggested to benefit certain ends, it is often divorced from emancipatory action in the longer run.

While conscious of the complexity of solidarity between researcher-lecturer and students in this context, the study has always been located in a praxis involving lecturers and students within a horizontal (and challenging) engagement. The findings of this study are deemed important not only for potential contribution to

theory, but to the redesign and further development of the programme at the centre of this study, as well as extensions to other contexts. The philosophical orientation of the pedagogical tools themselves, as described above, contribute toward holding the analytic tools accountable to the expanded activity of students into the future.

### **3.12. LIMITATIONS**

There are many limitations to this study. The study design itself is not above critique. The research question is dependent upon the notion of a critical pedagogical innovation focused on activity and meaning making. This could arguably take limitless pedagogical forms. Whether or not the choice of pedagogical innovation represented in this study is the most generative or the most theoretically sound remains a matter of discussion.

While intervention research method has more theoretical space for the discontinuities, contestations and messiness that characterises intervention in the 'real world' (Engeström, 2007, p. 365), these 'disturbances' may represent 'limitations' through the lens of a more controlled research approach. Given that the researcher did not have formal authority over the intervention process, there were several ways in which the data quality was undermined. First, institutional value was not placed on the administrative aspects of the course design. As such, administration was left on the shoulders of student facilitators, with few tools provided to support this activity. As such, a range of data points, and participation points in particular, were not administered effectively. Further, there was little oversight of the questionnaire process, resulting in versioning problems. As such, a range of data points could not be used as they were not comparable items in the entry and exit questionnaires.

Given the scope of the design and size of the dataset, the study narrowed its focus on the activity of student reading and writing, emphasising student's narrative description of their activity and meaning making process. The study did not employ any of a number of well known evaluative instruments to measure the competency of

students' reading and writing activity (speed, comprehension, fluency) more objectively either before or after the course. Nor did the study attempt to locate the analysis in the literature on academic literacy development in higher education. Arguably, different insights would have been gleaned if this study had been positioned along these lines.

There are a number of alternative ways to have approached the analysis. For example, one could have selected a smaller sample of students, and attempted to follow their course and autobiographical narrative in more detail. The choice of analysing across the activity system and across the student population invariably means that some of the nuances that could have been gathered through a more detailed analysis of a smaller subsystem of the experience will be lost.

Finally, the study shares the well known limitations of survey based research. Where students have had little access to quality educational care and support, it is likely that there may be higher levels of appreciation for smaller attempts to 'do better'. Further, in a socio-cultural context rooted within massive power differentials between 'researcher' and 'research subject', it appears that the socio-cultural relationship with questionnaires in general is mediated by a fall-back position of 'it is good'. An understanding of the limitations of survey research informs the analysis and discussion across the study.

### **3.13. SUMMARY**

This chapter undertook the unusual work demanded of intervention research. After establishing the theoretical basis of intervention research, the chapter presented the pedagogical intervention lying at the centre of the study. Using both second and third generation activity models, the chapter presented the activities, activity system, and mediating tools that define the pedagogical intervention. The rest of the chapter presented the case study methodology of the study process itself. The following chapter proceeds to present the data emerging.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS PART 1

#### BACKGROUND DATA, WRITING ACTIVITY AND READING ACTIVITY

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#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the first of two chapters presenting findings. The chapter begins by presenting descriptive data of the student cohort as well as data that points to some process limitations within the intervention itself. The chapter goes on to present data focusing on student writing and reading activity. The next chapter continues to place a focus on student writing and reading, but it explores the interface of this activity with the pedagogical architecture as well as summative meaning making across the course as a whole.

#### 4.2. STUDENT COHORT

As discussed in the previous chapter the study sample includes the 652 students formally participating in the 2010 pilot of the 'Grounding Programme'. Table 4-1 presents the independent variables used within the study. Each of these variables is briefly discussed below.

Table 4-1: Independent Variables

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University Location	Demographic	Pedagogic Architecture
1. Campus	1. Gender	1. Village
2. Faculty	2. Age	2. Ekhaya
3. Residence Type	3. Nationality	3. Umzi
	4. Home Language	
	5. 'Language of Learning'	
	6. Parental Education	

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#### **4.2.1. Student Cohort: University Location**

The distribution of students across campuses and faculties is presented in Table 4-2 below. In 2010, the University had 10,756 registered students, and 2,295 first year undergraduate students divided across three campuses. Campus A is the historical centre of the University. With a history tracing back over 90 years, this largely residential Campus is based in a rural town with a total registered student population of 6,354 in 2010. Campus B is located approximately 130 kilometres from Campus A. Historically established as a satellite campus within the constellation of a previously advantaged university, this campus was transferred into the institutional landscape of the current University in 2004. The Campus, located in a medium sized urban centre, had a total registered student population of 4,080 students. Campus C is located midway between Campus A and Campus B, accommodating 322 students in 2010.

The course took place only at the larger two campuses ('Campus A' and 'Campus B'). The cohort of students participating in the course was skewed toward Campus B. While 56% of the course population came from Campus B, only 37% of the overall first year cohort studied at Campus B.

There are five faculties within the University. The Faculties of Education and Humanities and Social Sciences are distributed across the two campuses. Science and Agriculture is located solely within the more rural Campus A. Law is offered exclusively at Campus B. Management and Commerce is located only at Campus C, and, therefore, was not included in the 2010 pilot. As such, the study sample was distributed across four faculties: Education (31%), Humanities/Social Sciences (28%), Law (23%), and Science/Agriculture (17%). The only independent variable

that influenced student distribution across faculties was gender, with more female students in Education as compared to the other faculties ( $p < 0.0001$ )<sup>15</sup>.

Table 4-2: Student Cohort: Distribution Across Campus and Faculty

Faculty	Campus A		Campus B		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Science and Agriculture	105	17%	0	0	105	17
Education	51	8%	139	23%	190	31
Humanities & Social Sciences	114	19%	56	9%	170	28
Law	1	0%	142	23%	143	23
Management and Commerce	0	0	4	1%	4	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Total Entering Class</b>	<b>1400</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>848</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>2295</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: 2% of students were formally registered at 'Campus C', which did not participate in the LKA/GP in 2010.

The typology of student accommodation is presented in Table 4-3 below. 82% of students in Campus A live in residences. Residential capacity is limited, with few non-residence accommodation options available. As such, students informally share residential space beyond official capacity, known as 'squatting'. By the end of the course, 6% of students at Campus A were still 'squatting'.

Unlike Campus A, Campus B has not historically been a residential campus. Over 52% of students in Campus B were living off campus – either at their 'homes' or in rented accommodation, while only 44% of students resided in student residences. First, more students in Campus A lived in residences, rented or squatted, while more students in Campus B lived at home ( $p < 0.0001$ ).

Table 4-3: Student Cohort: Distribution by Accommodation Type

Faculty	Total		Campus A		Campus B	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Residence	277	22%	158	71%	119	44%
"Squatting"	28	6%	25	11%	3	1%
Living at Home	110	22%	5	2%	105	39%
Renting Off Campus	71	14%	35	16%	36	13%

<sup>15</sup> p values indicate the significance of the finding. A p value less than 0.05 was considered to be significant. A p value of 0.05 indicates that there is less than 5% chance that the difference between groups could be explained by chance alone. A p value less than 0.0001 indicates that there is less than 0.01 percent chance that the significance can be explained by chance alone.

Other	6	1%	1	0%	5	2%
Total	<b>492</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### 4.2.2. Student Cohort: Demographic Distribution

The distribution of the student cohort across seven demographic variables is discussed below.

##### 4.2.2.1. Gender

The distribution of the cohort by gender is presented in Table 4-4 below. The course had a higher proportion of female students (60%) than the overall first year class (56%). Consistent with the spread of students across the University, Campus B has a significantly higher proportion of female students than Campus A. Female students were disproportionately distributed across faculty, with more female students within the Faculty of Education. Further, both age and secondary school typology demonstrated a significant influence over gender. Females were more represented in the younger cohort of students, and less represented in the older cohorts ( $p=0.004$ ). More female students had attended private secondary schools than male students ( $p=0.030$ ).

Table 4-4: Student Cohort: Distribution by Gender

	Total	Campus A	Campus B
Study Sample	60%	61%	60%
First Year University Cohort	56%	54%	59%

##### 4.2.2.2. Nationality

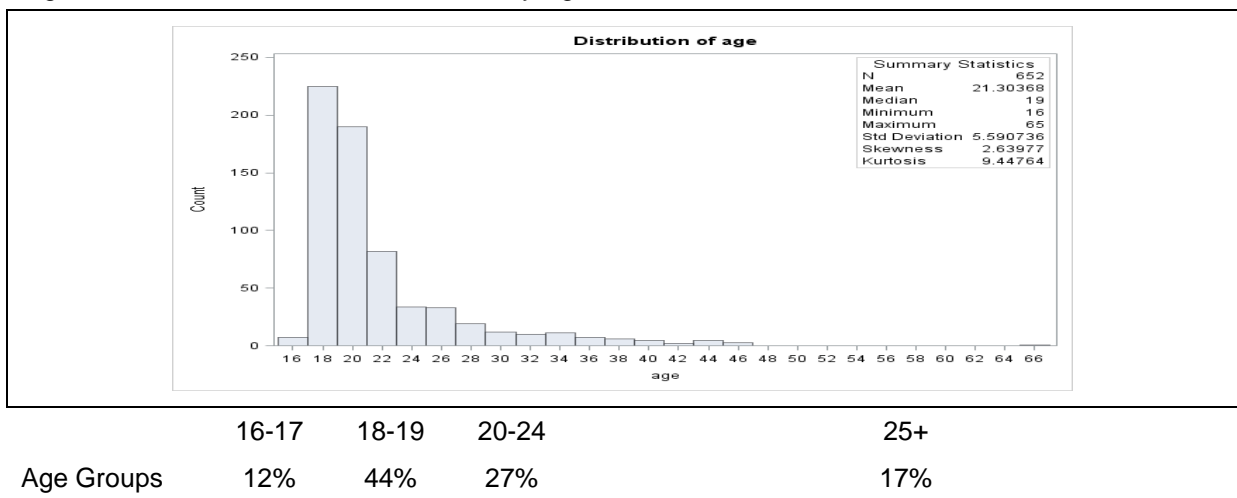
The majority of students were South African (91%). 8% of the respondents were Zimbabwean and 1% (all male) of the respondents were from other African countries. The Zimbabwean students (52% male, 48% female) were distributed only amongst the Humanities and Law Faculties. The students from Zimbabwe are

largely recipients of a special government scholarship programme that is distributed, at least in part, on the basis of student performance in secondary school. While the strongest of students from South Africa tend to select other universities, the stronger students from Zimbabwe are often represented in this bursary cohort. The significance of ‘nationality’, must be interpreted within this context.

#### 4.2.2.3. Age

The frequency of age distribution is presented in Figure 4-1 below.<sup>16</sup> The mean (median) age was 21.3 (19) years. The youngest and oldest respondents were aged 16 and 65 years, respectively. There was no significant difference between the median ages of the students from the two campuses. The difference in distribution by gender was discussed above.

Figure 4-1: Student Cohort: Distribution by Age



#### 4.2.2.4. Home Language

The most common home language of students was isiXhosa (68%) followed by English (13%).<sup>17</sup> A small number of students indicated that their home language was one of the remaining South African languages, and/or African languages from

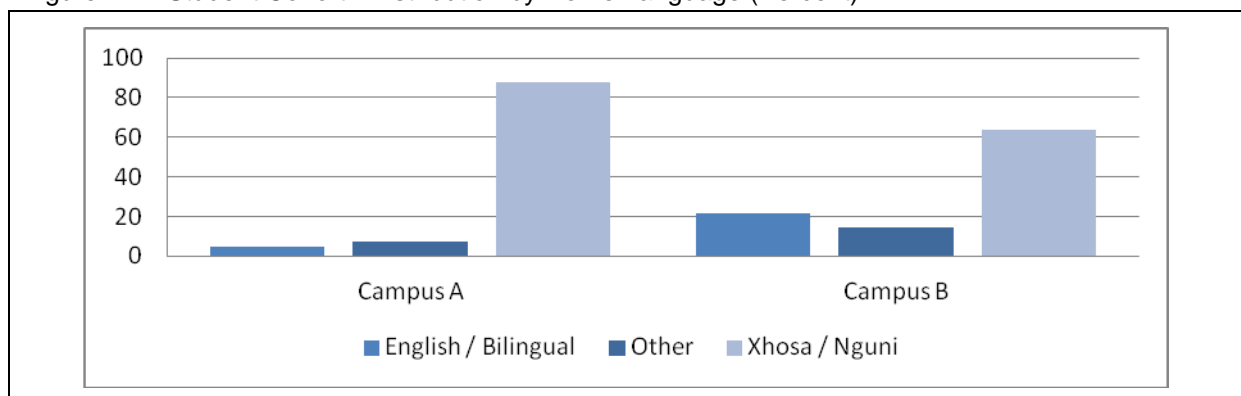
<sup>16</sup>The ages for all students were imported from the academic record database. Age was calculated from DOB as at 1 Jan 2010.

<sup>17</sup>Home language was recorded in all three questionnaires. Data from the Entry Questionnaire was used for analysis.

nations outside of South Africa. 71% of students came from Xhosa and/or other Nguni speaking households. 13% came from English and/or bilingual households. 13% came from households that spoke another language.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 4-2 demonstrates the home languages by Campus cohort. Students in Campus A were more likely to speak isiXhosa as their home language, and less likely to have access to English in their home environment ( $p=0.010$ ). isiXhosa was the home language of just shy of 90% of students from Campus A, and just shy of 65% from Campus B. Campus B had a larger English home language cohort than Campus A. Just over 20% of students from Campus B had access to English in their home environment compared to less than 5% from Campus A. The cohort of students from Zimbabwe were more likely to have access to English at home than the overall population ( $p<0.0001$ ).

Figure 4-2: Student Cohort: Distribution by Home Language (Percent)



#### 4.2.2.5. Language of Learning

In the final questionnaire, students were asked to indicate both their home language and their preferred language of learning (What language(s) do you best learn through?). In contrast to home language, the most common ‘learning language’ was English (78%), followed by an indication of bilingual learning language preference (English + one African language - 17%). The remainder of the sample consisted of

<sup>18</sup>The small number of students speaking other Nguni languages (isiZulu, isiNdebele, isiSwati) were combined with isiXhosa. The small group of students who claimed that English as well as an African language were spoken at home (bilingual) were combined with the ‘English’ group. All other languages were combined into a third category, ‘Other’.

many languages with low proportions. The students whose home language was neither Nguni based nor English/bilingual were more likely to indicate a preference for a non-English language of learning ( $p=0.17$ ).

Table 4-5 compares students' home language to their indication of preferred language of learning. The data reflect the complexity and problematic of the social and educational history of South Africa. Where 372 of the students indicated that they speak isiXhosa or another Nguni language at home, only 11 of these students indicated that their preference for a language of learning was isiXhosa. Doing justice to the complexity of language and learning in higher education falls outside of the gambits of this study. That said, these language dynamics provide an important analytic backdrop across the discussion presented in this study.

Table 4-5: Home Language by 'Learning' Language (N)

'Home Language'	'Learning Language' (N)				Total
	Missing Data	Xhosa / Nguni	English / Bilingual	Other	
Xhosa / Nguni	3	11	355	3	372
English/Bilingual	0	4	65	1	70
Other	0	0	50	6	56
Total	3	15	470	10	498

#### 4.2.2.6. Parental Education

Data on parental education is presented in Figure 4-3 and 5-4. The profile suggested a relatively highly educated parent population. Only 15% of students came from households where their parents attended only primary school, and only 2% indicated that their parents had had no formal education. A higher proportion of fathers had access to education beyond secondary school than mothers.

Figure 4-4 combines parental education into one variable, which privileges mother education.<sup>19</sup> Campus B demonstrated a higher parental education profile, with 44% of students having a matric or higher education, as compared to 34% in Campus A.

<sup>19</sup> Where no mother education was provided, father's education was used.

Figure 4-3: Parental Education: Mother, Father, Caregiver<sup>20</sup> (Percent)

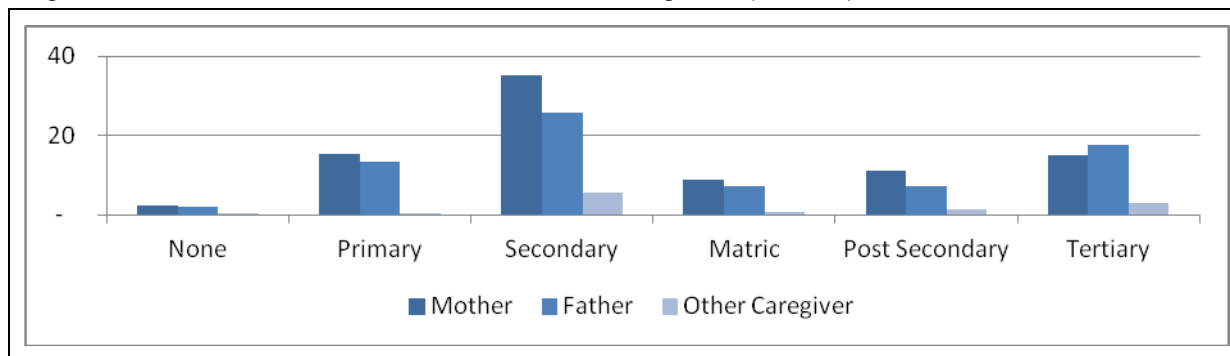
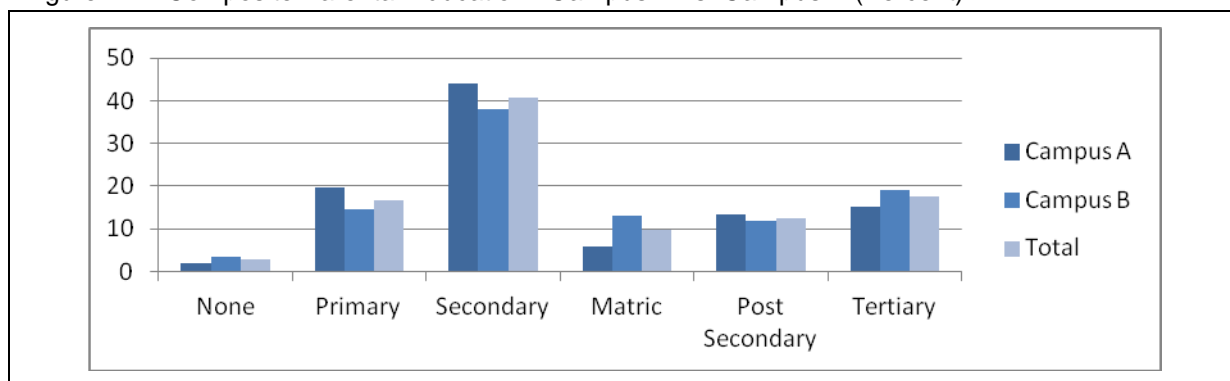


Figure 4-4: Composite Parental Education: Campus A vs. Campus B (Percent)



#### 4.2.2.7. Secondary School Typology

The distribution of students by school typology is presented in Figure 4-5. 22% of students did not complete this item, with more missing data from Campus A. The questionnaire design privileged the South African schooling typology, differentiating not only ‘private’ schooling from ‘public’, but also public ‘ex-Model C’ from ordinary or so called ‘normal’ public schools. The ‘ex-Model C’ differentiation is a proxy for historical privilege, whereby so-called ‘ex-Model C’ schools predominantly served white learners prior to 1994, and continue to represent a privileged system within the South African public schooling system.

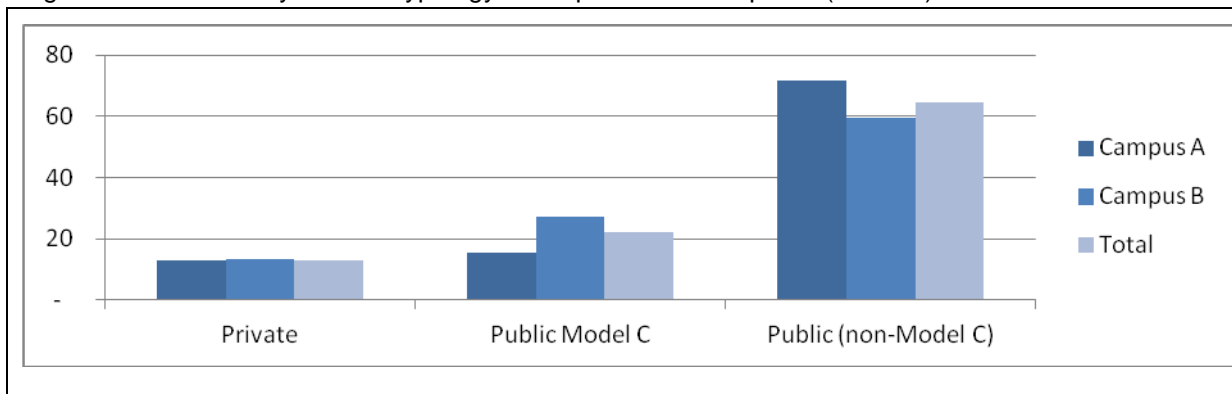
Across campuses, 65% of students came from normal public schools, 22% from public ex-Model C schools, and 13% from private schools. While equal numbers of

<sup>20</sup> Data was missing more frequently for fathers (27%) than for mothers. Very few students used the category of ‘other caregiver.’

students came from private secondary schools, Campus A had more students from public ex-Model C schools.

Students whose parents had less access to higher education were more likely to go to normal public schools as compared to students whose parents had access to higher levels of education ( $p=0.010$ ). Male students were more likely than female students to come from a normal public school ( $p=0.039$ ). Students whose home language was isiXhosa were more likely to come from a normal public school than a ex-Model C school as compared to students with access to English in their home environment.

Figure 4-5: Secondary School Typology: Campus A vs. Campus B (Percent)



Percent	Campus A	Campus B
Private	13%	13%
Public ex-Model C	15%	27%
Normal Public	72%	59%

#### 4.2.3. Student Cohort and Course Architecture

The design and purpose of the pedagogical architecture was discussed in Chapter 4. The size and relationship between the nested levels of the umzi, ekhaya and village are presented in Table 4-6.

Table 4-6: Course Architecture: Size and Scale

	Umzi		Ekhaya		Village	
	Number	Average Students	Number	Average Students	Number	Average Students
Campus A	75	3.5	15	17.7	3	83
Campus B	85	4.0	15	22.7	3	114

Total	160	3.8	30	20.2	6	101
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The umzi was designed as the intellectual ‘home’ and pedagogical ‘engine’ of the intervention. See Chapter 3, Section 3.3.2.5. The administration of imizi was left to student interns with little support. While the umzi level was designed for 6 students, almost all umzi were smaller than this design goal. The average number of students per umzi was 3.5 at Campus A and 4.0 at Campus B. 40% of imizi were allocated three or less students. (Just under 15% of imizi across campuses had two or fewer students. Four imizi consisted of only 1 student each.)

Consistent with the design, each Ekhaya brought together between 5 and 6 imizi. Given the small size of the imizi, the ekhaya numbers were smaller than initially intended on both Campus A (averaging 17.7) and Campus B (averaging 22.7).

Given the financial structure of the University and the limited success in mobilising lecturer resources across the University, the Village was designed to combine three ekhaya, approximately 90 students. There were three Villages at each campus. The Villages were smaller at Campus A (averaging 83) than Campus B (averaging 114).

### **4.3. INTERVENTION LIMITATIONS**

Before introducing the main findings of the study, this section presents some data that suggests some of the process limitations within the intervention itself. The previous chapter discussed the data limitations relating to participation points. This section presents students’ indication of their understanding of the course, as well as the administration of ‘final marks’. This data provide important backdrop to the study findings which follow.

#### **4.3.1. Student Understanding of Course**

There were several questions posed to students designed to understand whether or not students felt that they understood the course. They focused on both student

understanding of participation points, and students' understanding of the course as a whole.

#### 4.3.1.1. Student Understanding of Participation Points

Three questions were asked during the midterm questionnaire about student understanding of participation points. See Table 4-7. Over 90% of students either strongly agreed or agreed that they understood that they could not pass the course without a certain number of participation points. Only 40% of students 'strongly agreed', suggesting some hesitation.

While almost 80% agreed that they understood how participation points are earned, only 30% 'strongly agreed'. 20% of students disagreed. Students from public secondary schools claimed to have a stronger understanding of the course than students coming from private secondary schools ( $p=0.036$ , 0.5 LL<sup>21</sup>). Given that students from private schools reflect a stronger learning confidence across the data, several suggestions emerged. It may be that these students have more ability to recognise disorganisation (and have less tolerance for the confusion), have less ability to create understanding in the context of new expectations, and/or some of the 'confusion' represented a form of resistance. Even fewer students claimed to be keeping track of participation points, with the majority of answers hovering between 'agree' (41%) and 'disagree' (35%). None of the independent variables were suggested to be significant.

Table 4-7: Understanding of Participation Points

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I fully understand how participation points are earned in this course.	30%	49%	15%	5%
I keep track of participation points that I earn during this course.	16%	41%	35%	8%
I understand that I cannot pass this course unless I have a certain number of participation points.	41%	51%	6%	2%

Source: Midterm Questionnaire (N= 461)

<sup>21</sup> 'LL' is used to refer to the rough estimation of difference in terms of likert levels. 1 LL indicates a difference of one unit of difference on the four point likert scale.

#### 4.3.1.2. Overall Understanding of Course

A question probing student overall understanding of the course was posed both in the midterm and the final questionnaire. The questions were worded differently making direct comparison difficult. At midterm, almost one in three students indicated that they did not understand the course and were often confused. The small cohort of students who indicated that they were 'squatting' in another person's room expressed more confusion than students with more stable accommodation ( $p=0.009$ , 0.5 LL). While it appears that students from Campus A faced greater levels of confusion, the difference between campuses was not statistically significant. By the end of the course, roughly one quarter of the students claimed that they did not participate fully in the course because it was not explained clearly. None of the independent variables were suggested to have significant influence at the end of the course. See Table 4-8.

Table 4-8: Course Understanding: Midterm vs. Exit

		Campus A	Campus B	Total
I do not understand this course. I am often confused.	Mid	36%	26%	30%
I did not participate fully in the GP because it was not explained clearly.	Exit	24%	24%	24%

Source: Exit and Mid/ 4 Level Likert Scale. Figures presented combine 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree'.

#### 4.3.2. Final Course Marks

Table 4-9 summarises the final course marks. The course marks are presented to share two observations. As was described above, the course was designed to provide a 'winning experience'. If students chose to 'step in', a course distinction was available. 72% of students from Campus B were awarded a distinction, compared to 47% of students from Campus A. Fewer students were supported to achieve a distinction level performance at Campus A.

Secondly, the course was initially designed to prevent student failure. This would require strategic intervention by course management along the way. Since

participation points were not given senior support, and they were not posted regularly, there was not an effective mechanism to ‘catch’ non-participating students early on. In the last weeks of the course, recognising the large number of students who were falling under the ‘pass’ line, the course manager worked with interns to give ‘extra credit’ work to students who had not participated (either purposively or due to confusion). While there is documentation for this process being implemented on Campus B, there is little evidence that it happened, or is documented well on Campus A. 16% of students from Campus A (n=47), and 4% of students from Campus B (n=11) failed the course at the end of the term. While students were not aware of their final mark at the time of the exit questionnaire, this experience and pattern of ‘failure’ provided an important backdrop to the findings presented below.

Table 4-9: Final Course Marks: Campus A vs. Campus B

	Campus A	Campus B
Distinction	47%	72%
Pass	38%	24%
Fail	16%	4%

Source: Institutional Academic Records

## 4.4. STUDENT WRITING ACTIVITY

### 4.4.1. Introduction

The data presented so far has provided the reader with some understanding of the profile of the student population, as well as some of the limitations within the process of the intervention itself. The study now turns to present the central findings of the study. This section will focus attention on the student writing activity. The section will first present quantitative data suggesting the overall patterns of activity and meaning making in reference to writing practice. The section will then present some of the qualitative data, providing a more detailed understanding of how students discuss the activity and the meaning of their writing practice through their course experience.

#### 4.4.2. Writing Ability: Student Self Ratings

At the beginning and end of the course, students were asked to rate their writing abilities using a four point Likert scale. Table 4-10 presents the results comparing their answers before and after the course. 56% of the students indicated that their writing was 'good' or 'very good' at the beginning of the course; over 90% assessed their writing to be 'good' or 'very good' at the end of the course. While only 7% of students rated their writing skills 'very good' before the course, nearly one quarter indicated that they were 'very good' after the course.

Law students rated their writing abilities higher than other students: before,  $p=0.015$ , 0.5 LL and after,  $p=0.002$ , 0.5 LL. The Zimbabwe cohort of students rated their writing as stronger than the overall population when they entered the course ( $p=0.030$ , 0.5 LL); this effect fell away by the end of the course. While there was no difference between campuses before the course, by the end of the course students from Campus A rated their writing abilities higher than students from Campus B ( $=0.042$ , 0.5 LL).

Table 4-10: Student Self-Assessment of Writing Ability (Percent)

	Before Campus A	Before Campus B	Before Total	After Campus A	After Campus B	After Total
Very Good	9	5	7	25	23	24
Good	42	52	49	70	72	71
Poor	41	40	40	5	5	5
Very Poor	8	2	4	0	0	0

Source: Entry and Exit Questionnaires/Four Point Likert Scale: Very good, good, poor, very poor.

At the end of the course, 10% of students were still convinced that 'no matter how hard I try, I will never be a good writer'. Students whose home language was isiXhosa agreed more frequently than students who had access to English at home ( $p=0.009$ , 0.6 LL).

Table 4-11: Exit Questionnaire: I don't think I will ever be a good writer...

Strongly Agree / Agree Percent	Campus A	Campus B	Total %
No matter how hard I try, I don't think I will ever be a good writer.	10%	11%	10%

Source: Exit / 4 Level Likert Scale. Figures presented combine 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree'.

#### 4.4.3. Change in Writing Habits

In both the midterm and exit questionnaires, students were asked whether their ‘writing habits changed in any way from participating in the LKA/GP’. The results are presented in Table 4-12. At the time of the midterm, 62% of students indicated that their writing habits had changed. This figure increased to 71% by the end of the course. Whereas results from the midterm did not demonstrate any significant variables, by the end of the course female students indicated that their writing habits had changed more frequently than their male counterparts ( $p=0.002$ ). Students whose parents had less than tertiary education indicated that their writing habits had changed more than students whose parents had attended tertiary education ( $p=0.019$ ).

Table 4-12: My Writing Habits Changed: Midterm vs. Exit

Campus	Midterm			Exit		
	A	B	Total	A	B	Total %
My Writing Habits Changed	65%	61%	62%	73%	69%	71%

Source: Mid and Exit Questionnaires/Ordinal: Yes/No.

The final questionnaire included two additional questions probing whether or not students thought that their writing activity had shifted as a result of their participation in the course. These are summarised in Table 4-13. 84% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the course had made them a better writer. The Zimbabwe student cohort ( $p=0.046$ , 0.5 LL) as well as students from the Law Faculty ( $p=0.020$ , 0.25 LL) were more likely to agree than the overall study population.

81% agreed or strongly agreed that the course increased their *interest* in writing. Female students agreed with this more frequently than male students ( $p=0.003$ , 0.25 LL). The cohort of students from Zimbabwe agreed more frequently than the rest of the student population ( $p=0.014$ , 0.5 LL). Students whose home language was isiXhosa agreed more frequently than students who spoke English at home ( $p=0.000$ , 0.5 LL). Finally, students ( $p=0.007$ ) whose parents had secondary

education or less agreed more frequently than students whose parents had post secondary schooling ( $p=0.007$ , 0.25 LL).

Table 4-13: Exit Questionnaire: Writing Ability and Interest

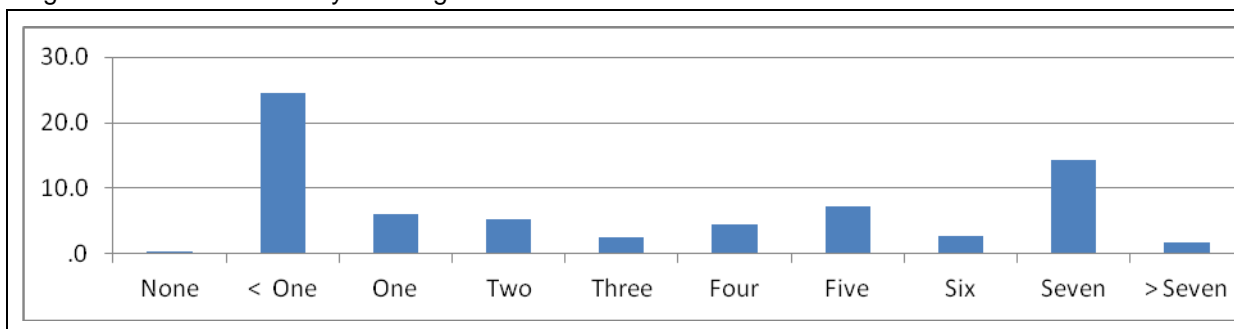
	Campus A	Campus B	Total %
The LKA has made me a better writer.	88%	81%	84%
Participating in the LKA has made me more interested in writing.	83%	80%	81%

Source: Exit / 4 Level Likert Scale. Figures presented combine 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree'.

#### 4.4.4. The LKA Journal Experience

At the end of the course, students were asked how many days they managed to write at least one page in their LKA Journal. The data are presented in Figure 4-6 below. Approximately one quarter of students reported that they wrote less than one day per week. 30% indicated that they wrote for 4 or more days a week. 15% reported that they had managed to write every day per week during the course. Students from Campus B (mean = 32 pages) indicated that they wrote much more often than students from Campus A (mean = 22 pages) ( $p=0.032$ ). Students whose home language is English (mean = 40 days) indicated that they wrote much more often than students whose home language was not English (mean = 22 days) ( $p=0.008$ ).

Figure 4-6: Number of Days Writing in LKA Journal



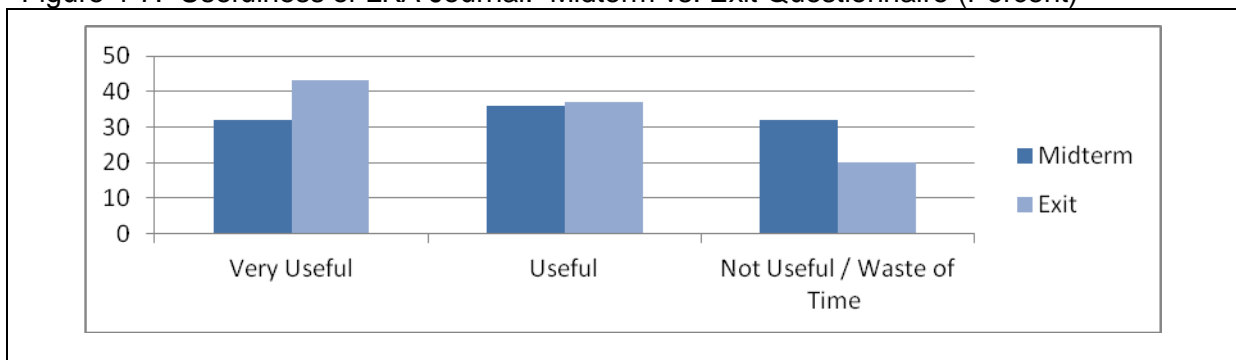
Source: Exit Questionnaire, N=453

At the midterm and the end of the course, students were asked to rate the usefulness of the LKA Journal within a four level Likert scale, presented in Figure 4-7. At the midterm, just over 30% of students indicated that it was very useful, and another 30% indicated that it was either not useful or a waste of time. By the end of

the course, over 40% rated the journal very useful. The students rating the journal as not useful or a waste of time fell to 20%.

There were no significant variables underlying the midterm patterns. By the end of the course, several variables were suggested to be significant. Female students rated the tool of the 'LKA Journal' as more useful than their male counterparts ( $p=0.013$ , 0.3 LL). The Zimbabwean cohort rated the tool as much more useful than the rest of the student population ( $p=0.000$ , 1.1 LL). Students who speak isiXhosa as their home language rated the tool as much more useful than students who spoke English at home ( $p=0.001$ , 0.5LL). Students whose parents had secondary school or less education rated the tool to be more useful than students whose parents had some sort of post secondary education ( $p=0.014$ , 0.4 LL).

Figure 4-7: Usefulness of LKA Journal: Midterm vs. Exit Questionnaire (Percent)



Percent		Very Useful	Useful	Not Useful / Waste of Time
LKA Journal	Mid	32%	36%	32%
LKA Journal	Exit	43%	37%	20%

In the midterm questionnaire, students were asked whether they agreed that the LKA Journal was too much work, and therefore should be eliminated. See Table 4-14. At the time of the midterm, approximately 45% either strongly agreed or agreed that the LKA Journal was too much work, and should be eliminated the following year. This question was, unfortunately, not asked again at the end of the course. None of the co-variables were suggested to have significant influence.

Table 4-14: LKA Journal: Too Much Work – Eliminate It

	Campus A	Campus B	Total %
The LKA Journal is too much work. I think it should be eliminated from the GP next year.	46%	43%	44%

Source: Mid / 4 Level Likert Scale. Figures presented combine 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree'.

During the midterm and the exit questionnaire, students were asked whether or not the LKA Journal had come to hold value or importance to them. Table 4-15 presents these results. At the time of the midterm questionnaire, 72% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the 'importance of the LKA Journal for their personal development'. No co-variables were suggested to be significant.

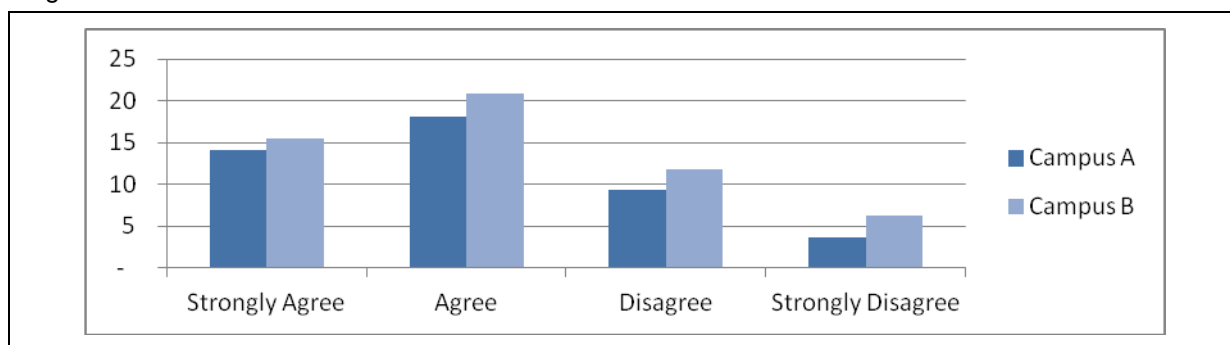
Table 4-15: The LKA Journal is Valuable to Me (Percent)

		Campus A	Campus B	Total
I understand the importance of the LKA Journal in my personal development.	Mid	75	70	72
The LKA Journal has become valuable and important in my life.	Exit	84	73	78
I will continue to write a journal after the end of the LKA.	Exit	71	67	69
The LKA Journal was a waste of time.	Exit	10	11	10

Source: Exit / Mid Questionnaires/4 Level Likert Scale. Data combine Strongly Agree and Agree.

By the end of the course, 78% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the LKA Journal had become 'valuable and important' in their lives. By the end of the course, 10% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the LKA Journal had been a waste of time. Approximately 70% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they would continue to write the journal after the course ended. Roughly 50% 'agreed' while 30% 'strongly agreed' with the intention of continuing to write the LKA Journal after the course. See Figure 4-8.

Figure 4-8: I Will Continue to Write the Journal After the LKA/GP



The three questions posed at the end of the course about the LKA Journal enjoyed enough reliability and construct ability to be combined into one construct. Across this construct two variables suggested significance. Female students placed a slightly higher value on the tool than their male counterparts ( $p=0.005$ ). Further, students whose home language was isiXhosa placed a higher value on the tool than students speaking English at home ( $p=0.047$ ).

#### 4.4.5. LKA Journal as Favourite Course Element

During the midterm and final questionnaire, students were asked to write in their favourite course element, their second favourite element, and their least favourite element. The number of students indicating that the LKA Journal was either their favourite or least favourite course activity is presented in Table 4-16.

Table 4-16: Favourite and Least Favourite Course Activities (Percent)

	Favourite 1			Favourite 2			Favourite Combined			Least Favourite		
	C-A	C-B	Tot	C-A	C-B	Tot	C-A	C-B	Tot	C-A	C-B	Tot
LKA Journal	8	8	8	22	12	17	30	20	24	8	11	10

Source: Exit / Mid Questionnaires. C-A: Campus A; C-B: Campus B.

Just shy of 25% of students ( $N=115$ ) wrote that the 'LKA Journal' was either their most favourite activity or second most favourite activity, competing with elements like the movie and the Jamboree.

Students were asked to explain why they selected the LKA Journal as a favourite element. All 115 students provided an explanation. One in two were selected for analysis. 10% did not provide further information. Approximately one quarter

indicated that the LKA Journal was a favourite element because it helped them to improve their writing skills and/or practice. Over 60% indicated that the Journal became a vehicle for expression.

There were four sub-themes among students who indicated that the journal was a vehicle for expression. The first group wrote more generally about expressing themselves ('I was able to express myself freely'; 'Taught me the best way to express myself'). The next group indicated that the Journal was an important vehicle for expressing their *thoughts* or *views* ('Because that is where you explain and voice your thoughts through writing'; 'Because it's where I am expressing my different views). Some answers suggested that it was experienced as a semiotic tool to widen the space for internal creativity ('[it] was like one's own jungle where one could go wild, hey-wire and even seem mad in just expressing your wisdom in written form'; It made me creative in this course and all the other courses as a whole).

The next group suggested that the journal became an important vehicle for engaging and expressing their *feelings* ('I wrote what I felt'; 'That is where I expressed my feelings without fear'). They spoke of it being a tool to help them process the stress and pain of life ('even when I am stressed, I talk to my Journal'; 'Journal, that is how I relieved my stress and off-loaded my worries'; 'you write things that hurt you and make you happy when you have no one to talk to'), contributing to a sense of 'well being' ('it helped me in my well being') and 'knowing oneself' ('it allowed me to get more in touch with myself').

The final sub-group was distinguished as they articulated that the Journal as a tool had become woven into the enactment of day to day life. These students said that the Journal 'is where we write our stuff', that is, write down 'what is happening in my life' and 'everything that you want to do'. For these students the journal seemed to have become a tool for reflection on day to day life ('I can reflect on my daily experiences; I never thought of it in my entire life. Now I write everything in it!').

#### **4.4.6. LKA Journal: Least Favourite Course Element**

10% of students (44) indicated that the LKA Journal was their least favourite course element. The entire set of explanations provided by these students was analysed. Approximately a quarter of these students did not provide any explanation for why it was their least favourite activity. The most common explanation, cited by approximately 50% of these students, was that the LKA Journal takes too much time ('Because it takes a while. I have a lot to do'; 'LKA journal is a waste of time because it takes the time of reading other courses'; 'most of us don't have time to write every day'). Three students said that they didn't like the journal because they do not like writing ('I don't really think I love writing'; 'I just don't like writing because I don't have anything to write about'). Another indicated it was 'boring'. Five students indicated that they did not like to write about their 'personal' life ('I dislike writing, it is worse about my personal life'; 'I don't like writing about my feelings and thoughts'; 'Because I don't have to remember my past'). These students suggested that emphasis was placed on the LKA Journal as a place for personal introspection, which they resisted. Two students indicated that the expectations of the Journal were too demanding ('Cause I had to write even if I was tired, dead tired' and 'it is in some way useful but we too much work in other courses it is impossible to record everything in the journal').

#### **4.4.7. My Writing Habits Have Changed**

##### **4.4.7.1 Introduction**

Table 4-12 above suggested that just over 70% (N=341) of students by the end of the course indicated that their writing practice had changed through participating in the LKA/GP. That is, they suggested both that their writing practice had changed in some way and that they associated this change with their participation in the course.

They were asked to explain their answers. All but one of these students responded. A total of 6,894 words were written, with an average word count of 20.

One record of every five was systematically sampled for qualitative analysis, and coded into emergent themes. Answers spoke to four interrelated suggestions: a) some students' writing practice changed because of the heavy writing load (8%); b) some students developed a habit of writing (they write more and more regularly) (11%); c) the writing practice of some students *improved* in some way (43%); and d) some students place more value (or significance) on writing in their lives (35%). Each of these themes is reviewed briefly below.

One of the most striking features of the students' responses is the emphasis students placed on the LKA Journal ('I love the journal thing. I am going to continue writing in a journal even after this course ends'; 'I used to write a journal everyday and that has helped me a lot as i write to my journal, my life experiences even after the LKA'). Just over 60% of answers pointed to the LKA Journal explicitly by name ('my journal motivates me to write'). The essay assignment, representing over one half of the course mark, was discussed much more rarely ('I have also improved on my referencing style, because my assignment draft helped me a lot'; 'in my first semester i was always bored when we were given a long essay question because i was not used to writing a long essay about one topic so in my second semester i have learned to write and enjoyed').

#### 4.4.7.2. Theme 1: Quantity of Writing

The first group of students suggested that their writing practice changed simply because of the *quantity* of writing activity. These students emphasised that they wrote more during the LKA than they had ever written before. ('I write a lot more than I have been doing in university'). The 'challenge' imbued in the tool of the LKA Journal seemed to hold enough meaning for these students to use it to increase the

quantity of their writing practice ('I became a good writer and I spent more time than ever writing. It is the LKA journals that boosted me to write a lot').

#### 4.4.7.3. Theme 2: Writing as a Habit

The next group builds upon the first theme. These students suggested that they had developed a habit of writing – they write more and more regularly ('it is changed by writing in my journal now I don't like to sleep even a single day without writing.')

Some extracts from this group are presented in Table 4-17.

Table 4-17: Theme Extracts: Writing as a Habit

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- Because I was forced to write so it became part of me now. I am used to it
  - It has become part of myself to read every day and write as well
  - My writing habits changed because in LKA I get to write every day. And my journal I carried it everywhere I am
  - Since ever I started LKA, I have changed in terms of writing. LKA has changed my writing habits in a way that I go no day ending without writing something no matter it is not serious. Now I like writing.
  - It has changed me because I had to write my journal everyday. I have to be honest before I joined the LKA. I never owned any journal, so writing a journal was kind of an extra writing for me and because I had to write it every day it became a habit.
- 

There is a common narrative of internalisation. At first they were 'forced to' or 'made me get used to' or 'I get to'. Over time they 'get used to' ('I am used to write in my journal everyday so I am used to write every day'). Over time, they 'carry it everywhere'. The transformation of activity was inextricably tied to new patterns of meaning making. This appeared to first be expressed as an emergence of enjoyment and interest ('now I like writing;' 'it became a hobby to me'). As it takes on more value, overtime it becomes part of the self ('it has become part of myself'). This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 7.

#### 4.4.7.4. Theme 3: Improvement in Writing Practice

The largest theme built upon the first two themes with students suggesting that their writing had improved in some way through their participation in the course. Three sub-themes are discussed: a) the interrelationship between improvement, enjoyment and interest; b) the importance of technical improvement in writing skills; and c) the expansion of fluency and breadth. The interrelationships between improvements in writing and wider study skills will be discussed at a later stage.

- *Improvement, Enjoyment and Interest*

First, there was a strong association between the notion of improvement, enjoyment and interest. 30% of answers within this theme combined notions of improvement, enjoyment and interest. Any attempt to separate those who claimed improvement from those who claimed greater enjoyment gets quickly frustrated. While the relationship between improvement and enjoyment works in both directions, most students emphasised the relationship between improving skills ('I started using unfamiliar but interesting words') leading to increased enjoyment ('as time went on I started to enjoy').

They placed emphasis on the scaffolding of the LKA Journal ('this writing of journal has made me to love writing'; 'the journal helped me a lot and it developed my skill in writing'). Many suggested that they started by resisting the tool ('first I thought it was just a waste of time'). They initially leaned heavily on this tool to 'turn on' their writing. Because the tool succeeded in supporting them to experience some success (sense of improvement), they began to 'enjoy'. The emerging 'enjoyment' meant an expansion of the 'motivation' for the activity of writing as well as ability to act more expansively ('I started to enjoy it because i started using unfamiliar but interesting words when writing. That practice made me improve a lot').

- *Improvement in Writing Skills*

A number of students spoke to improvements at the level of word meaning, spelling, and sentence construction ('my spelling and language got better;' 'now i can write some words without incorrect spellings'). These students suggested that they were able to use the pedagogical tools to shift their writing practice ('writing in the journal and using dictionary often has improved me in my academics because now I know words which I firstly leant in LKA and I use them in essays and assignments').

Another group of students pointed to improving their writing speed ('I have improved my speed of writing before I took 20 minutes to finish a page but now I take 15 minutes'; 'I was too slowly in writing even in my test you will find out that I'm always did not get the marks I deserve because I did not finish writing, but now I am quickly and I get what I deserve because This journal of LKA makes to be faster writer'; 'Yeah! I at least improved on my writing and I am little bit faster now than before').

The significance of these seemingly technical breakthroughs was reflected in the discourse of their explanations. The sense of 'success' at the level of writing practice was associated with 'confidence' ('I now can write with confidence and I can also check my spelling mistakes and re-read my assignment before handing them in'), a sense of being able to express oneself accurately ('I can actually admit it now that before the LKA my writing was very much poor for my level. I would think about something and then write the opposite of what I thought but now that is not happening') and a sense of being able to be heard ('my sentences are more coherent and make more sense now'; 'everyone is now able to read and understand my writing').

While most students associated the improvement of their writing practice to the LKA Journal, there were several students who made reference to the tool of the essay assignment. One student wrote, 'I write more and practise doing writing drafts now.' Another student said, 'I used a lot of referencing and consult people for their opinion.'

- *Expanded Fluency and Breadth*

Another subgroup within the theme of writing improvement were those who pointed to increased fluency ('I am able to write from what comes to mind anytime and anyplace'; 'since I filled my journal, I feel I can now do more in terms of writing') and breadth ('I now write every thought that comes to mind'; 'I think I now show more depth in it. I write mostly about things that affect me rather than my fantasies') of their writing practice.

Students pointed to the relationship between an improvement in writing fluency and a release of more meaningful content ('I can actually admit it now that before the LKA my writing was very much poor for my level. I would think about something and then write the opposite of what I taught but now that is not happening'; 'through writing in my LKA journal I am now able to write a lot of essays not only a lot but also meaningful essays'). Several students referred to a deepening interest expanded writing genres including short stories, drama, poetry and song ('now I write even songs and poems and just write a poster and hang on my wall in my room').

#### 4.4.7.5. Theme 4: Writing has a Wider Meaning to Me

Approximately 35% shared more explicitly the meaning making process associated with the change in their writing practice. These students indicated that writing had become more important, or valuable to them in some way. Their responses were organised into five overlapping themes, whereby students spoke to: a) a sense of self confidence; b) creativity; c) expression; d) the quality of their process of thinking; and e) a sense of success.

- *Writing and 'Self Confidence'*

Several students equated the changing practice of their writing with an increase in what they call 'confidence'. It appears to be inextricably linked with reflecting on an experience of improvement or success. Confidence is discussed explicitly in at least

three ways. First, some students pointed to gaining confidence in the activity of writing ('It helped me for gaining confident on what I am writing and to improve my language'). Second, some students suggested that the experience of improving their writing translated into more generalised life confidence ('My academic writing has improved and I'm more confident now'). Thirdly, a group of students suggested that the confidence they gained from other activities of the course increased their confidence, which, in turn, helped them to improve their writing ('This has improved because aspects of the LKA like the Jamboree and movies instilled self-esteem in me').

There were even more students who pointed to a sense of pride or agency, without using the word 'confidence' explicitly ('Because that journal made me get used two writing every day. It shows em that I can write about anything every day'; 'I think I can now write like an academic student').

- *Writing and Thinking*

Another large group of students discussed the relationship between an improvement in their writing practice and their process of thinking. These students made several suggestions.

First, many of these students pointed to the generative relationship between the activity of writing and the process of thinking ('I think a lot when I am writing a journal'; 'I take time to think what to write and I write every day'). They pointed to the relationship between writing and remembering ('everything I read I store it in the brain and retrieve it by writing it down by doing so I remember it very well'), research ('[because of my writing] I liked to research more on what had been said') and argument construction ('[I am now] able to make some argumentative essays and write down some pieces of work').

Another group of students suggested that the *quality* of their thinking process had changed due to greater writing fluency ('... my hand is fast and my mind thinks quickly because I am used in writing every day before I sleep'). They pointed to a

transformation in their thinking process ('change on how I am trying to address an idea'; 'you know that my writing now is changed even my vocabulary also changed even the way of thinking way of writing things.' Some pointed to a greater fluency of thought ('[I] can construct essays more confidently and play around with ideas'). Finally, they suggested the relationship between writing praxis and the expansion of the meaning and importance of content ('through writing in my LKA journal I am now able to write a lot of essays not only a lot but also meaningful essays. So GP helps me a lot').

The final observation is that the process of writing itself seems to have helped to externalise their thought process, where they can 'see' and 'think' about their thinking more consciously. That is, students have started to see the 'activity' or method of their own thinking('my way of thinking'; 'now there is a change on how I am trying to address an idea') for themselves giving them more conscious access to their own thinking process. ('because it made me describe a lot of things in black and white my vocabulary as well as how I think').

- *Writing and Expression*

The relationship between writing and confidence, as well as writing and thinking, contributes to a wider theme relating writing praxis and a widening sense of self expression. This theme was also prominent for the students who identified the LKA Journal as their favourite course activity, presented above.

There was a strong discourse of writing and expression. The first group pointed to the broad relationship between writing and the practice of expressing oneself. This group built upon the notion that improved writing praxis contributed to stronger thinking skills and an emerging sense of confidence.

- 'I can express myself through writing. I learned also that there are some things that cant be expressed verbally but through writing. Writing my journal everyday helped me do this;'

- 'I write a lot in my journal. I can write anything at any time I feel like writing or expressing something;'
- 'I enjoy writing now because I have seen through writing I can express myself and I didn't know that before and the GP has helped me understand that;'
- 'In the previous months, writing was rare to me but now after acquiring LKA knowledge, I am able to write down my ideas for the future.'

There is a sense that students had released themselves from the school inherited judgement of whether or not it is 'good enough' ('I go no day ending without writing something no matter it is not serious').

An alternative discourse about the relationship between writing and expression focused more on the LKA Journal as a tool for emotional processing and reflection. These students interpreted the LKA Journal as an invitation (if not an instruction) to allow their 'emotions and feelings' into their writing practice ('the LKA journal has helped me so much because I have to write what I feel') as well as to use the writing space for personal reflection on day to day life experiences ('I used to write once a week in my diary, but now I write every day. I reflect on my journal my everyday experiences').

Students spoke of processes of reflection on day to day experiences and 'self examination skills'. Beyond just introspection, students seemed to find this written practice of reflection helpful in dealing with their life problems. Again, these comments were extracted from students' explanation of how their writing activity had changed.

- Writing on a journal to be me was a good thing to me because everything I felt painful or make me happier I wrote it down then when it passed I will must pick up my journal and try to find out what makes me in that way then I compare with the pamphlets of GP then i find a way out;
- I am able to put more of my own personal feelings into my work. The reflection and self-examination skills obtained through the LKA journal were very useful to me;
- The journal was my favourite part.-) I looooved having a way of getting rid of frustrations with writing. It made me love it.

Perhaps most interestingly, there were students who used the journal to open up a discourse of knowledge that embraced the relationship between ‘thoughts’ and ‘feelings’. Whereas most university based approaches to knowledge ask students to avoid this interface, many students identified this interface as generative for them (‘I write what I feel my opinions and thoughts’; ‘[I put] more of my own personal feelings into my work’). The connection, rather than fragmentation of thought and ‘feeling’, helped some students to better relate the knowledge project to a sense of social purpose: ‘I have come to a point now where I write about my feelings thoughts and expectations, however, what I have discovered is that all this point out to pertinent issues around me-hence I believe the pen is the new gun, I may be able to impact my society positively.’

- *Writing and Creativity*

The fourth subtheme was students who explicitly linked the change in their writing practice with the notion of creativity and inspiration. These students implied that the change in their writing practice translated into a wider sense of creativity. There are two subtle suggested relationships. First, some students suggested that the practice of writing in the LKA Journal helped students to both express (and see) what they consider to be their creative selves.

- I write more often, I get inspired all the time;
- Writing my journal has made me creative and like reading. LKA taught me to write my journal and it worked for me;
- My writing habits have changed a lot in this program we had time to write in our journals and it inspired me to be creative about anything and everything. I now find reading and writing fun coz basically it is but i didn't know.

Second, the process of writing itself, and the greater sense of ease or fluency developed, opened up space to focus on the ‘creativity’ of their ideas, rather than the labour of writing *per se* (‘I have become more creative and a better writer who now concentrate on the bigger picture’).

#### **4.4.8. My Writing Habits Have Not Changed**

The presentation of data above relates to the 71% of students who indicated that they thought that their writing habits had changed through their participation in the course. Nearly 30% of students indicated that they did not think that their writing habits had changed. The question was structured to encourage students to explain the change they observed, but did not encourage students who did not see a change to explain their answer.

Female students indicated that their writing habits had changed more frequently than their male counterparts ( $p=0.002$ ). Students whose parents had less than tertiary education indicated that their writing habits had changed more than students whose parents had attended tertiary education ( $p=0.019$ ).

An additional multivariable analysis was undertaken to explore this variable further, which included both the initial set of independent variables, as well as five additional variables: proxies for initial relationship to reading, writing, optimism, verbal academic English, and understanding of the course. Several of these co-variables demonstrated significance. Students who indicated that they struggle with academic verbal English were more likely to indicate that their writing practice had changed ( $p=0.001$ ). Students who said, on entry, that they were optimistic about the future of South Africa were more likely to say that their writing habits had changed ( $p=0.002$ ). Students who, by the end of the course, agreed that they did not participate in course activities because the course was not explained well were less likely to indicate that their writing practice had changed ( $p=0.011$ ). 35% of the students who said their writing habits had not changed said they did not understand the course.

Reflecting the limitation in the question as described above and/or a hesitancy to engage more readily, only 20 of these students explained their answers, giving relatively short answers (average word count of 13.5). 8 students did not provide any further information, beyond restating that their writing habits had not changed. 4 of the students indicated that their writing habits had not changed as they had always been a strong writer ('I was writing for enjoyment long before the course'; 'I

have always loved to write’). 8 students implied that their writing practice was weak before the course, and remained unchanged after the course (‘I am not spending much time on writing. I only write where there is a need’; ‘my writing habits have not changed since I joined LKA. Maybe as time goes on they will change. I want to feel its impact on my life’; ‘no, because I am not the person who enjoys writing too much’).

Table 4-18 compares the variables for students’ relationship to writing before the course, with their indication of whether their writing practice changed after the course.<sup>22</sup> While the variable was problematic, roughly 60% of the students who indicated that their writing habits had not changed had either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the notion that they were a ‘verbal not a writing person’ before the course. This tentatively supports the qualitative suggestion that the students who indicated that their writing habits had not changed were distributed into two rough groups. Those who entered with strong writing practice indicated that their practice had not changed because it was already strong. It is the second group (roughly 10% in real terms) who entered with a weak relationship with writing and experienced no change in their writing practice that deserves special attention. The experience of these students will be explored more carefully at the interface of reading and writing practice. See Section 4.5.10 below.

Table 4-18: Relationship with Writing (Entry) and Writing Habits Changed (Exit)

	Percent of Overall Sample	Writing Habits DID NOT Change	Total Sample Represented
I am an oral person, not a writing person...			
Strongly Agree	9%	47%	4%
Agree	26%	24%	6%
Disagree	45%	21%	9%
Strongly Disagree	20%	33%	7%

<sup>22</sup> As variables come from both the Entry and Exit questionnaire the total N decreases to 321.

## 4.5. STUDENT READING ACTIVITY

### 4.5.1. Introduction

The previous section presented data focusing on the first activity horizon, namely, student writing activity. This section turns its attention to student reading practice. Like the previous section, the section will first present quantitative data suggesting the overall patterns of activity and meaning making in reference to reading practice. The section will proceed to present some of the qualitative data, providing a more detailed understanding of how students discuss the activity and the meaning of their reading practice through the course experience.

### 4.5.2. Reading Ability: Student Self Ratings

At the beginning and end of the course, students were asked to rate their reading abilities using a four point Likert scale. Table 4-19 presents the results comparing their answers before and after the course. 71% of the students indicated that their reading was 'good' or 'very good' at the beginning of the course; over 95% assessed their reading to be 'good' or 'very good' at the end of the course. Almost 15% of students rated their reading skills 'very good' before the course, climbing to almost 40% after the course.

Before the course, students whose home language was English rated their reading ability as higher than students whose home language was isiXhosa ( $p=0.030$ , 0.5LL). This effect fell away at the end of the course. By the end of the course, there was a suggestion the students from the Faculty of Law rated their reading ability slightly higher than other faculties ( $p=0.016$ ).

Table 4-19: Student Self-Assessment of Reading Ability (Percent)

	Before Campus A	Before Campus B	Before Total	After Campus A	After Campus B	After Total
Very Good	15	13	14	37	40	38
Good	56	57	57	60	57	58

Poor	24	29	27	2	3	3
Very Poor	5	1	2	0	0	0

Source: Entry and Exit Questionnaires/Ordinal: Very good, good, poor, very poor.

### 4.5.3. Reading Enjoyment

Before and after the course, students were asked about their reading enjoyment. These data are presented in Table 4-20 and 4-21. Answers from the entry questionnaire congregated around the non-committal answer of 'liking reading'. Taken at face value, 83% of students claimed to either 'like' or 'love' reading before the course. Students from Campus A indicated a significantly higher level of enjoyment of reading than students from Campus B ( $p=0.035$ , 0.25 LL); the cohort of students from Zimbabwe indicated they enjoyed reading more than the rest of the course population ( $p=0.048$ , 0.5 LL).

At the beginning of the course, students were posed with the statement, 'honestly speaking, I don't like to read much'. 34% of students agreed or strongly agreed, and only 5% of students 'strongly disagreed'. The inclusion of 'honestly speaking', seemed to give more students the space to 'admit' their relative dislike of the activity of reading. Male students agreed with the statement more than female students ( $p=0.041$ , 0.4 LL). Students whose home language was isiXhosa agreed more frequently than other students ( $p=0.047$ , 1 LL).

83% of students claimed to 'love' or 'like' reading before the course, climbing to only 87% after the course. The difference between campuses fell away, with female students indicating stronger reading enjoyment than their male counterparts. There was an indication of a shift in students who moved out of the 'non-committal' category of 'liking reading' to the more emotive category of 'loving reading'. Whereas 17% of students before the course indicated that they 'loved' to read, 33% of students indicated a 'love' for reading after the course.

Table 4-20: Relationship to Reading: Before and After (Percent)

	Campus A		Campus B		Total	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After

Missing	-	2	3	3	2	3
I love to read	17	37	18	30	17	33
I like to read	73	54	63	55	66	54
I don't like to read	10	4	16	10	14	7
I really don't like to read	-	3	0	3	0	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

#### 4.5.4. Construct: The Course Positively Impacted Reading Practice

Three data points relating to reading enjoyed enough reliability and validity to be analysed as one construct. These reflect three questions about the extent to which the course experience impacted their reading practice. See Table 4-21. Several variables were suggested to influence this construct. Female students ascribed a more positive influence of the course on their reading practice than their male counterparts ( $p=0.011$ , 0.2 LL). Law students ascribed a more positive influence than students from Education ( $p=0.032$ , 0.25LL). The Zimbabwe student cohort indicated a more positive influence than the rest of the students ( $p=0.020$ , 0.5 LL). Students whose home language was isiXhosa indicated a more positive influence than students who had access to English in their home environments ( $p=0.003$ , .4 LL). Students who had attended a normal public school indicated a more positive influence than students who had attended private or public ex-Model C schools ( $p=0.026$ ).

Table 4-21: My Reading has Changed: Improvement, Interest, Enjoyment

	Campus A	Campus B	Total
The GP has made me a better reader.	88%	83%	85%
Participating in the GP has made me more interested in reading.	88%	82%	85%
GP has helped me to start to love reading.	82%	77%	79%

Source: Exit Questionnaires/4 Level Likert Scale. Data combine Strongly Agree and Agree.

#### 4.5.5. Reading Habits Changed

Table 4-22 presents students' indication of whether they thought that their reading habits had changed in any way, both at the middle and the end of the course. 65%

of students indicated that they thought their reading habits had changed by the middle of the course. There was no evidence of significant influence of co-variables. By the end of the course, this increased to 75%. Female students were modestly more likely to indicate that their reading habits had changed as compared to male students ( $p=0.010$ , 0.2 LL), and students from normal public schools were more likely to indicate that their reading habits had changed than students from public ex-Model C schools ( $p=0.019$ , 0.3 LL).

Table 4-22: My Reading Habits Changed: Midterm vs. Exit

	Mid			Exit		
	Campus A	Campus B	Total	Campus A	Campus B	Total
Reading Habits Changed	66%	65%	65%	81%	71%	76%

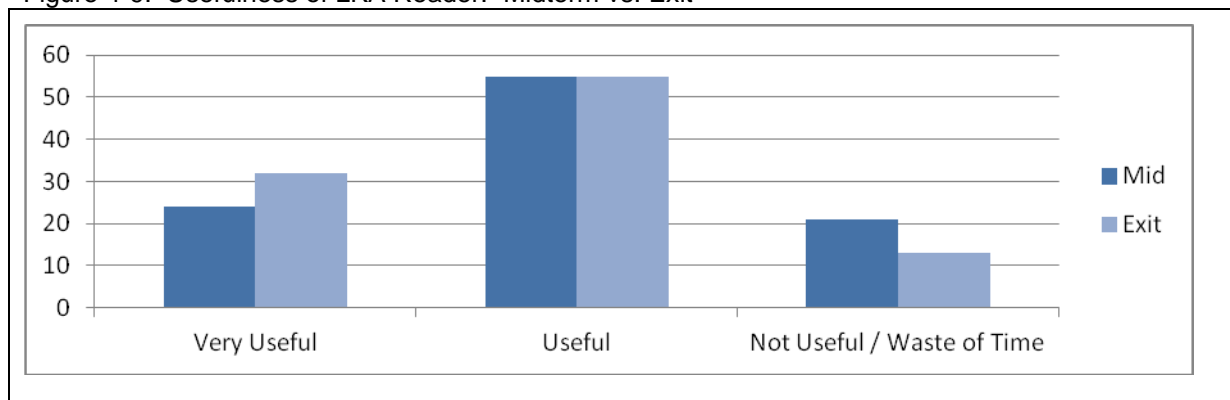
Source: Mid and Exit Questionnaires/Ordinal: Yes/No.

#### 4.5.6. The LKA Reader

At the midterm and the end of the course students were asked to rate each of the course activity elements according to a four level Likert scale. The results relating to the LKA Reader are presented in Figure 4-9. Across the midterm and final, 55% of students rated the Reader as useful. At the midterm, just shy of 25% of students indicated that it was very useful, climbing to just over 30% at the end of the course. Just over 20% of students considered the Reader either not useful or a waste of time before the course, dropping to 13% at the end of the course.

No co-variables were suggested to be significant at the time of the midterm. By the end of the course, there were three groups that indicated the Reader was more useful than others. The cohort of students from Zimbabwe considered the Readers more useful than the rest of the students ( $p=0.013$ , 0.7 LL). The students who spoke isiXhosa as a home language considered the readers more useful than students who spoke English at home ( $p=0.000$ , 0.5 LL). Finally, students whose parents had access to a matric qualification or less considered the Readers as more useful than students whose parents had higher levels of education ( $p=0.017$ , 0.1 LL).

Figure 4-9: Usefulness of LKA Reader: Midterm vs. Exit



Percent	Q'aire	Very Useful	Useful	Not Useful / Waste of Time
Reader	Mid	24%	55%	21%
Reader	Exit	32%	55%	13%

#### 4.5.6.1. LKA Readers: Did Not Read Much

At the middle and end of the course, the following statement was posed to students: I did not read very much in the Readers of the GP. Findings are presented in Table 4-23. 20% of students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement at the time of the midterm, *increasing* to 25% by the end of the course. No indicators demonstrated significant influence at the time of the midterm. At the end of the course, the only significant influence suggested was that students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities agreed slightly more than others that they did not read very much in the Readers ( $p=0.009$ , 0.1 LL).

Table 4-23: Reader: I did not read very much: Midterm vs. Exit

	Q	Campus A	Campus B	Total %
I did <u>not</u> read very much in the Readers of the GP.	Mid	28%	15%	20%
I did <u>not</u> read very much in the Readers of the GP.	Exit	32%	19%	25%

Source: Exit / Mid Questionnaires/4 Level Likert Scale. Data combine Strongly Agree and Agree.

#### 4.5.6.2. LKA Reader: Too Difficult

28% of students indicated at the time of the midterm that they either agreed or strongly agreed that the readers were too difficult. This figure fell to almost half, with 15% of students indicating that they agreed or strongly agreed that the Reader was

too difficult at the end of the course. There were no variables with significant influence identified at the time of the midterm. At the end of the course, students from the Law Faculty considered the Readers to be less difficult than students from other faculties ( $p=0.24$ , 0.3 LL).

Table 4-24: LKA Reader Difficulty: Midterm vs. Exit

		Campus A	Campus B	Total	Missing	Total N
The readers have been too difficult.	Mid	30%	27%	28%	7%	461
The GP Readers were too difficult.	Exit	15%	15%	15%	8%	498

Source: Exit / Mid Questionnaires/4 Level Likert Scale. Data combine Strongly Agree and Agree.

#### 4.5.6.3. LKA Reader: Interesting/Boring

The questions relating to how interesting students found the Reader were posed differently in the midterm and final questionnaires. 65% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the readers were 'very interesting' at the time of the midterm questionnaire. Older students ( $p=0.014$ , 0.5 LL) and the cohort of students from Zimbabwe ( $p=0.040$ , 0.5 LL) agreed more frequently than the rest of the students. Almost 20% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the Readers were 'boring' by the end of the course, with more students at Campus B agreeing that they found the Readers to be 'boring'. Students from the Faculty of Education found the Readers 'boring' more frequently than students from the Faculty of Law ( $p=0.006$ , 0.5 LL). Students who spoke English in their home environment found the Readers more 'boring' than students who spoke isiXhosa as a home language ( $p=0.021$ , 0.5 LL).

Table 4-25: LKA Reader: Interesting / Boring: Midterm vs. Exit

Strongly Agree / Agree (%)		Campus A	Campus B	Total
The readers have been very interesting.	Mid	65%	65%	65%
For me, the Readers of the GP are boring.	Exit	13%	23%	19%

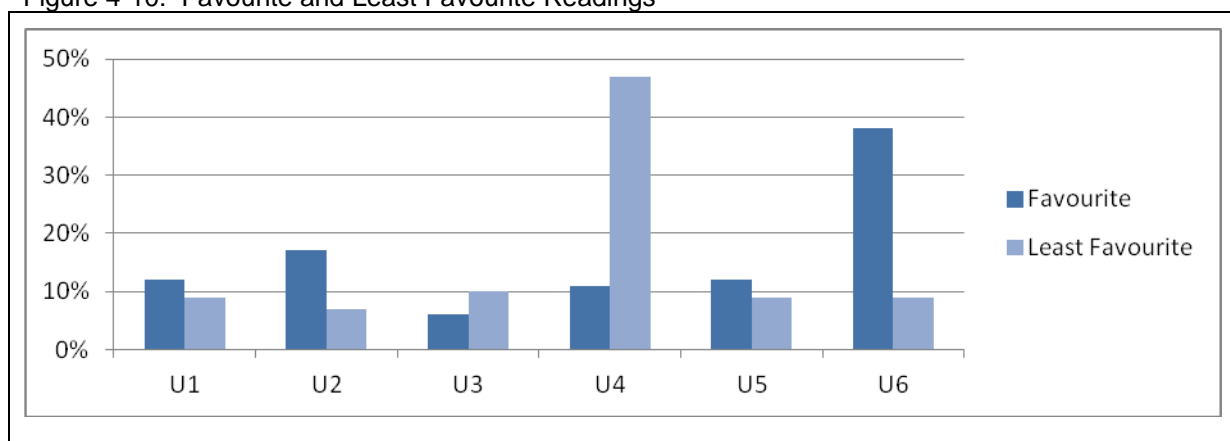
Source: Exit / Mid Questionnaires/Likert 4 Scale. Data combine Strongly Agree and Agree.

#### 4.5.7. Favourite and Least Favourite Readings

At the end of the course students were asked whether they had a favourite reading from the course. If they did, they were asked to indicate it. They were asked the same with regard to a least favourite reading.

78% of students completing the questionnaire indicated a favourite reading. Only 35% of students indicated a least favourite reading. The low level of response to the least favourite reading prevented a more detailed analysis of underlying trends. Most students referred to their favourite or least favourite reading at the level of the 'umthamo' (or module) rather than a specific reading within a module. Organised by umthamo set, the favourite and least favourite readings are presented in Figure 4-10 below.

Figure 4-10: Favourite and Least Favourite Readings



Source: Exit Questionnaires. U1 indicates Umthamo 1 / Module 1.

By far the most favourite reading came from the last umthamo, with the theme of 'Living, Loving and Learning'. The topic gave an opportunity for students to engage in a discussion about the interface of living, loving and learning. It may be that this umthamo was privileged because it was last, and therefore most recently in the minds of participating students. The content of the Reader was simpler than others, and contained writings that were more 'inspirational' in nature. The main 'essay' was a three page speech made by the 11 year old HIV/AIDS activist Nkosi Johnson at

the 13<sup>th</sup> International AIDS Conference in Durban, telling his life story, and calling on people to step up to the HIV/AIDS challenge by caring more. This umthamo was preferred more by female students than male students ( $p=0.000$ ). Students from the Faculty of Education identified this umthamo as their favourite reading more than students from the Faculty of Science and Agriculture ( $p=0.013$ ).

The second favourite readings were from Umthamo 2, exploring the notion of 'Becoming an Engaged African Scholar'. 17% of students identified this umthamo as their favourite. This theme originated from the students of the Grounding Programme Student Round Table. In 2009 it was called, 'Becoming a Proud Graduate of this University.' Lecturers deemed this sentimental and overly normative. In 2010, it was recast as 'Becoming an Engaged African Scholar'. There were two primary essays for this Umthamo. The theme was animated by an interview of well known author and critical intellectual, Ayi Kwei Armah, entitled, 'Awakening'. The other document was written by the 2010 LKA curricular team. This document put forward eight propositions about the daily practice of an 'African scholar' including writing for him/herself, reading for him/her self, engaging in dialogue, keeping creativity alive, applying knowledge to the 'real' world, cultivating a culture of self reflection, and making friends and having fun. In essence, this essay put forward the activity system underlying the course pedagogy. Students who identified isiXhosa as their preferred language of learning identified this umthamo more frequently as their favourite than others ( $p=0.041$ ).

The first umthamo ('Introduction to Life', Knowledge and Action') and the fifth ('Poverty, Inequality and Development') were each selected as a favourite for reading by just over 10% of students. Both of these imithamo were more frequently cited as a favourite reading by students whose home language was isiXhosa ( $p=0.048$ ).

Two articles were cited by name by more than 10 students – that is, not only through their association with an umthamo. 46 students mentioned the essay discussed above that laid out the 'rituals of an African scholar'. 32 students named the

introductory essay within Umthamo 1 entitled, 'The Monster, the Invitation and the Love Letter'.

This essay sought to lay out the core animating principles of the pedagogical intervention, as discussed in Chapter 3. It is noteworthy that the only two essays that were *written* through a process of engagement between lecturers and students were the two essays that students remembered most frequently as their favourite. Moreover, these umthamo were identified as a favourite for reading more frequently by students whose language was isiXhosa than by those who had access to English at home ( $p=0.048$ ).

The least favourite reader was Umthamo 4, with the theme, 'The Environment, Science and Society'. While 10% of student indicated this was their favourite umthamo, almost 50% of students indicated that it was their least favourite umthamo in terms of reading. This was the only umthamo that was not compiled by the founding lecturer-student design team. The lecturers who prepared this content had not been brought into the student-lecturer engagement process. The implications of this data will be explored further in Chapter 6.

#### 4.5.8. LKA Reader: Favourite and Least Favourite Activity Element

As mentioned above, in the midterm and final questionnaire, students were asked to write in their favourite course element, their second favourite element, and their least favourite element. Very few students pointed to the LKA Reader as either their favourite or least favourite element of the course. 6% of students indicated that it was one of their favourite elements, and 5% of the students indicated it was their least favourite element.

Table 4-26: LKA Reader as Favourite and Least Favourite Course Activities (Percent)

	Favourite 1			Favourite 2			Favourite Combined			Least Favourite		
	C-A	C-B	Tot	C-A	C-B	Total	C-A	C-B	Tot	C-A	C-B	Tot
<b>LKA Reader</b>	1	1	1	6	4	5	7	5	6	2	6	5

Source: Exit Questionnaires. C-A: Campus A; C-B: Campus B.

#### 4.5.8.1. LKA Reader: Favourite Activity

6% of students indicated that the LKA Reader was either their favourite or second favourite course activity. 28 students explained their answers. 13 students indicated that the LKA Reader had helped them to improve their reading skills and reading confidence in some way ('I became a good reader since I have the Reader'; 'it improved my reading ability and speed'; 'it improved my reading skills and help me to be more concentrated on reading'). Eight students indicated that the content of the readers was interesting or useful to them in some way ('[they] gave me important information that I never knew existed'; 'they are containing a very useful information for us and even about life in general'). Two students spoke about enjoying the process of reading the Reader ('it is not difficult and is enjoyable' 'because I like reading the book just for happiness'). Two students spoke of the Reader impacting on their confidence in a wider sphere of learning activity ('it is my favourite because it didn't help me on LKA only. It has influenced me to the other courses I am doing'; 'it makes me not to be shy, even when presenting in front of other people').

#### 4.5.8.2. LKA Reader: Least Favourite Activities

5% of students indicated that the LKA Reader was their least favourite course activity element. Of these, six students did not explain why they disliked the LKA Reader. 10 said they were too long and demanded too much time ('Reader because there was a lot to read and take in'; 'the reader yes it was useful but it wasted our time'; 'LKA reader is boring and too long and doesn't have anything interesting to read'; 'LKA reader, they were too long and time consuming'). Two students had seemingly positive things to say by the end ('LKA reader because I didn't see their use. I think they are too big but now I like them'). Of the remaining five, two said they were repetitive ('was at times too long and conveyed the same point again and again'), one said they were boring ('was too long and boring'), one said they used

difficult language ('LKA Reader was a mouthful at times it used language that I found difficult to understand'), and one said that he just didn't like to read ('LKA Reader because I don't like reading but now I am reading a lot').

#### **4.5.9. My Reading Habits Have Changed**

As presented in Table 4-22 above, just over 75% of the students (n=361) indicated that their reading habits had changed through their participation in the course, slightly higher than the 71% of students who said that their writing habits had changed. All but one provided an explanation. Over 7000 words were shared in response to reading habits, with answers averaging 23 words.

One in every three answers was coded into emergent themes. Answers spoke to four interrelated themes, similar to those emerging through the discussion of writing practice above. Students: a) associated their changed reading practice with the heavy reading load (7%); b) suggested that they now read more regularly (23%); c) suggested that their reading had improved in some way (40%); and d) that they now placed more value/importance on reading in their lives (27%). Each of these themes is discussed briefly below.

##### **4.5.9.1. Theme 1: Heavy Reading Load**

The first theme presents students who suggested that their reading habits changed because the course reading load was heavy. These students understood the course to have reading at its centre ('because LKA is based on reading so it boost my readings'). Some indicated that they believed there was quantitatively more reading in this course than in other courses. Others implied that, because the 'act of reading' was the centre of attention, it forced them to read more in practice than they actually had done in other courses. These students indicated that the very process of moving through this 'quantity' of reading had made them 'better readers'.

One suggested frustration with the load ('I read more often than I used, because you (LKA) give us too much to read, so yes, you have changed me a bit'). The majority of responses seemed to view the 'reading load' as an ultimately positive experience ('because of LKA I was forced to read a lot more, this has really improved my reading'). We begin to see a sense of 'break through' from the simple process of having been 'forced' or 'supported' to 'read a lot'. This group felt the 'high expectations for reading' woven into the course ('I just got so used to reading it became a routine for me to read, whereas at first it was difficult to actually discipline myself to read'). Some answers suggested recognition by students themselves of the relationship between the scaffolding of high expectations and changing practice over time ('LKA has taught me or force me to read as we had to read every time we meet as umzi. Getting used to reading helped me to improve my reading skills'; 'afterward I realised that I learned a lot because every day I am supposed to read something or to write an A4 full page so that i can earn more points. That is where my skills improved a lot').

#### 4.5.9.2. Theme 2: Reading as a Habit

Students in the second theme built upon the first, suggesting that they now 'read more' and that the activity of reading has become a 'habit'. The majority of these students made specific reference to reading becoming a bigger part of their ('almost') daily lives ('since the GP I read a lot. I don't sleep without reading anything either my prescribed reading or one of the umthamos (sic)'; 'now at least I read each day even if its for 30 minutes and during the weekends I read my books. Before the GP I didn't bother reading during weekends so I should say LKA has changed my reading habits'; 'I like to read now but not every day at least 3 times a week'). They used the word 'habit' (a word also used in the question itself) as well as the word 'culture' ('now I feel that reading is my culture every time, everywhere'; 'reading is now my engrained culture. It is really amazing. I have been changed. No more difficulties in reading at all').

Many students reflected on their lack of reading habits in their past, and compared them with their present practice, suggesting that reading had become a more 'normalised' activity in their lives ('before LKA I would just go to sleep without reading anything but now I make sure that before I got to bed I read'; 'as I spent more than 1 to 2 hours a day, before I didn't afford to do that, now I enjoy reading than before').

These students placed less emphasis on choosing to read more and more on now being able to read more ('before I didn't afford to do that'; 'it let me have a habit'; 'I learnt how to read for more than an hour'). As such, emphasis was placed less on the content of the reader, and more on the experience of being supported to improve reading abilities. Students pointed to a learning experience (albeit not structured formally) of 'learning how to read properly'. The answers point to a disruptive experience where before 'I could not' and now 'I am able to' make the choice to read every day or at least 'three times a week'!

#### 4.5.9.3. Theme 3: Reading Improvement

The above two themes make implicit reference to an underlying experience of improving their reading abilities. 40% of students' answers spoke more explicitly to an experience of reading improvement, and the relationship between reading abilities improving (I can) and reading more (I choose to/I like to). There were four prominent sub-themes within this group: improved reading skills, improved relationships with reading methods and tools, improved reading breadth, and the interrelationships between improvement, interest and enjoyment. The comments about the relationships between reading, writing and larger study practices will be discussed in Section 4.6 below.

- Improved Reading Skills

The largest sub-group within this theme pointed to improvements in their reading skills. Over 15% of the students overall pointed specifically to an improvement in a skill related to reading.

A large group of these students pointed to an improved relationship at the level of the meaning of words ('because I learned how to read big words in imithamo. It was my best reading ever'). As discussed, a dictionary was presented to each umzi group. One of the more common sub-themes referred to the activity of using a dictionary to expand vocabulary. This became a productive tool for the first time for a number of students ('we were also having dictionaries to check the word that we don't understand. Now I am able to read a book and understand it easy').

The improved relationship with word meaning was linked to a wider 'ability' of reading ('now I am able') and a sense of excitement ('I learned how to read big words ... it was my best reading ever!'; 'I am able to read bombastic words and understand them because I use a dictionary').

A subgroup of these students specifically associated their improved reading practice with enhanced academic verbal competency within a second language context. They associated access to reading improvement with improved verbal and reading fluency ('I am able to pronounce words much better than before'; 'when I am reading, I am not stuttering...'; 'I am more fluent when I am speaking English and my vocabulary change'). These students also pointed to the breakthrough at the level of word meaning and vocabulary ('I am reading well and when I am reading, it is easy to read words that are not familiar'; 'my reading have become better. I am not English speaking. So it is difficult to read and pronounce words I don't know, but LKA helped me to learn').

The final subtheme relates to the students who suggested that both their reading speed and concentration had improved. They spoke of being able to read 'faster' and more 'fluently'. They spoke of increasing both the pace ('now I am capable of reading fast') and understanding of their reading ('I think by now I understand more. And the reading pace has increased'). They spoke about 'now being able' to read for longer periods of time ('I read a book so many times in each week. I have learned to read for longer hours than before, and as I am reading, I am getting new words every day'; 'before I got the LKA I was so lazy in reading but today I can read more than 5

hours per day') with higher and more enduring levels of concentration ('I can read for a long time and understand what I am reading').

While students across this theme pointed to a set of relatively 'technical' skills, they placed more than 'technical' significance on the improvements, using words like 'excellent' and 'perfect' to describe their practice ('I am now able to read excellently now'; 'I wasn't reading regularly but since the introduction of this course my reading habit and skills has improved because now I read every day and learn reading perfectly!'; 'I am properly reading now!'; 'I am now able to read and write in a comprehensive manner like a university student!'). The discourse of 'I can now do', appeared to start at the level of the technical ('I can look up words'), built to the level of the wider activity of reading ('I can now read'), built to the level of enjoyment ('I am enjoying') and then built to the level of identity ('I am a university student'). This will be explored further in the following chapters.

- Reading Breadth

Roughly 10% of students indicated that they had started to read beyond curricular imperatives, and associated this change with their participation in the course. Students discussed reading novels, magazines, newspapers, and material both inside and outside of their academic discipline for their own enjoyment for the first time ('I can read other materials beyond only curriculum and this has helped me to improve my general understanding and appreciation of literature. It is now possible for me to even finish a novel which I couldn't do before I came or started LKA'; 'I have developed this strong liking of books and any other material that I can read. I can now enjoy reading academic and non academic articles'). Two claims were made. First, reading habits were broadened by increasing their interest in reading ('I was not interested in reading things'). Second, reading habits were broadened by improved reading capacity ('it is now possible for me').

- Improvement, Enjoyment and Interest

Similar to the discussion of writing practice above, it was difficult to separate notions of improvement from notions of increased enjoyment and interest. Students suggested that they previously read because they ‘had to’, and they now found themselves reading simply because it was ‘fun’ or ‘interesting’. Some used the word ‘love’ (‘I love reading and I am more into accepting the challenges I was approximately read for few hours and I was not interested on reading. I was reading just because there was a need. But now I am a perfect reader...’) and ‘friendship’ (I love books now. They are my friends. I used to sleep while studying now I don’t. All I do is to read before I sleep everyday getting knowledge is the key’) in reference to books and reading. For some there seemed to be a sense of surprise (‘I seem to enjoy reading more this semester’; ‘One thing I notice is that since I have attended LKA, I like reading my books’).

As has been observed in reference to writing practice above, students implied a multi-directionality to the notions of enjoyment, interest and capability. First, students enjoyed reading more because they found the reading of the course to be interesting. Several students placed value on the content of the Readers (‘it was interesting to read the umthamo speeches and poems and lyrics to songs and that helped me to develop a keen interest to study. I can read any material now and enjoy it at the same time’; ‘well this course required a lot of reading and so i first prejudiced reading but after a while i began to love it and it really inspired me to read other modules as well. It was really inspirational reading for this course’).

Second, as discussed above, students enjoyed more (and were more interested) because they had a sense of increased capacity (‘I increased the period of my studying. I studied more with knowledge and understanding. The interest in what I am studying increased’). That is, enjoyment and interest were the end products of an effective reading experience (‘I am able to read for fun without being forced’). Finally, capacity and interest were reinforced and expanded through their enjoyment (‘because I enjoy reading now, I improved my reading’; ‘my reading habits have

changed for the better because now I enjoy reading a lot. I sometimes target that I have been reading for many hours and I lose count of time when I read’).

#### 4.5.9.4. Theme 4: Reading has a Wider Meaning to Me

Almost 30% of students shared more explicitly the meaning making process associated with the change in their reading practice. These students indicated that reading had become more important, or valuable to them in some way. Students suggested that previously they had read in tight association with passing academic exams. They suggested that reading practice had taken on a sense of purpose beyond curricular survival. See Table 4-27. There were two interrelated discourses. One spoke to now ‘being able’ to read more widely; the expanded ability leads to expanded purpose. Others placed emphasis on expanded sense of internal motivation (‘now I am passionate and willing).

Table 4-27: Theme Extracts: Significance of Reading Beyond Curricular Survival

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- I was the kind of a person who read only when there is going to be a test but now i am reading every day before going to bed. So LKA has done a lot to my interest of reading;
  - Now I am passionate and willing to read just for fun, not only when it is necessary to do so;
  - I get improved in my reading skills because LKA gives us imithamo to read for knowing, enjoyment and love learning. When there was no LKA was just learning for passing the course, not now;
  - Because at first I usually read when I was about to write exams but now I can read even magazines, newspapers especially the gossip column and also I attended reading classes in English.
- 

Some students pointed to the content of the LKA Reader as motivating a wider purpose of reading. See Table 4-28

Table 4-28: Extracts: LKA Readers as Motivating Wider Reading

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- Life knowledge action encourage me in reading because the more I read imithamo ... I learn more important things and this makes me to be interested to read my books and magazines;
  - My reading habits have changed in the sense that I found myself interested to keep up
-

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with my imithamo as they have greatly changed my perspectives on life.

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Other students placed explicit emphasis on the relationships between reading and knowledge or knowing. They suggested they were more motivated to read because they placed more value on the process of engaging with new knowledge ('finding out new things'; 'research and read up on all topics and things that pop up in and around me'; 'I became eager to know'). See Table 4-29.

They pointed implicitly to a prior state where they had little access to reading with understanding. Their increased access to understanding has helped them place more value on reading for knowledge, knowing or 'finding out things' ('I no longer force myself to read my varsity work, I do it for understanding'). This new meaning has helped them to 'wake up', both literally and metaphorically, to the process of reading ('I used to sleep while studying now I don't').

Table 4-29: Theme Extracts: Reading, Knowledge and Understanding

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- I am wanting to read more and more. I find it difficult to put any book down. I enjoy finding out new things now which motivates me to read;
  - Now I read on a regular basis as it is to enhance my knowledge unlike before only read for exams. Now I read any book I find at my disposal whether relevant to my degree or not;
  - LKA has encouraged me to research and read up on all topics and things that pop up in and around me. It has got me interested in not just googling the topic/problem but looking up other voices, poem and songs that relate and all;
  - I used to do skim reading, thus reading for the sake of having a general or overall idea of the reading. I used to read for the tests only. But due to the participation in the life I developed my reading skills. Now I read for the benefit of knowledge and practise. In the future specifically for the benefit of the society or the nation;
  - I have become more interested in my reading with more understanding and not just to pass the course that I am studying but to gain more knowledge out of what I am reading.
- 

A closely related discourse is an association between new reading and the praxis of critical thinking. Students talked about becoming more critical readers ('I read more now and I am more critical in my reading'; 'I now read more critically than before. I read twice a week. I read with understanding.' Others associated their expanded reading practice with the growth of their critical thinking capacity ('I can read and

think critically from what I used to do'; 'the thing is it improves my reading skills and also it makes me to be a critical thinker and think abroad about life that is most relevant to the one I live').

Another group suggested that reading has taken on more value as a mechanism to both understand and engage in society more broadly. A few suggestions were woven into these answers. First, there was an appreciation for reading as a tool to understand society better. Second, the course seemed to have helped students place value on both understanding society better and engaging with society ('reading and applying what you have read or learnt'). Third, there was some evidence that the course contributed toward students' sense of wider social purpose, as well as helped students to link the tools of learning to the achievement of that purpose.

Table 4-30: Theme Extracts: Reading Improved: Application to Society

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- I have become interested in reading, especially about society;
  - I think I have achieved a lot from this program and I am happy that I managed to finish and be given a chance to explore lots about the things happening in the world;
  - Because now I just read nonstop because LKA is all about reading and applying what you have read or learnt;
  - To be interested to what is happening around the world by reading through magazines and newspapers. Also gave me the impression that for me to be successful, for the profession I am embarking on, I have to know the news around the world;
  - I didn't like reading before. I only read stuff that I need for marks, LKA has helped me improve that because it requires that you participate that means I need to go read and get to know the world I live in to be able to argue about it;
  - I have developed to read everything I come across in order for me to be fully aware of the things around me. To read the newspaper and ensure that I gain a lot of knowledge by reading various aspects in order for me to teach others and inform them;
  - I have developed reading skills. I develop a strong desire to read beyond my curricular. I am interested in social issues and other stories related to our well being as humans.
- 

The expanded purpose for reading was reflected in the value students placed on reading resources. Many students suggested that evidence that their reading practice had changed was that they were much more active in seeking out reading materials. These students implied that they now used their limited personal resources to buy reading materials ('Yes! I have decided to improve my reading by

even buying myself a novel, therefore instead of watching TV and could read a book before I go to bed'; 'I bought more magazines and I just bought a book yesterday. I love it. It was on my plan to buy it!'). They also implied that they expended more energy to source reading material from other sources ('I even go to the library taking out books and read every day. This means the GP helped me a lot. It let me have a habit for reading. Thanks LKA for that').

- Reading and Student Identity

The relationship between reading and student identity cuts across the themes above, and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. There is evidence across this discussion that the practice of 'stepping in' to reading more deeply, and the changing patterns of practice that result, have shifted the way students see themselves. One student explained, '[my reading practice] changed because one day I was attending the village lecture where we were discussing the umthamo about breaking the wounds of a monster, stepping in. And I learn that if I can read every day I will break through the wounds of the monster. And I did.'

One discourse was unusually prominent and specific in its word choice. Nearly 10% of student responses made specific reference to the notion of being a 'lazy' person before, and now they were no longer a 'lazy' person. That is, these students suggested that they had internalised the label of being 'lazy', linked to their reading praxis. They suggested that their changing reading activity led them to re-evaluate this label.

Table 4-31: Theme Extracts: I am No Longer Lazy to Read

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- Because I am no longer lazy to read and write because I used to write a journal everyday so to me now writing is my favourite thing;
  - Before I became an LKA learner I was lazy when it comes to read but then since I started LKA I got influenced and I suddenly liked my books and I got very curious in reading every article i come across;
  - I used to be lazy to read but honestly since I have done this course, I am a good reader. I have seen improvement from grammar, language and writing;
-

- 
- I can read fluently and I am not lazy to study now anymore. I am more interested and can relate to any topic that I come across with;
  - I learn to read because I was lazy to read books by the coming of LKA change my mind
  - I was lazy in reading books and newspapers but since I have started to attend life knowledge and action, things seem to change to my life now. I am enjoying reading at all times and my reading also improves a lot in LKA;
  - I was lazy to study but LKA came and changed me. After some 3 weeks the LKA started, I was interested to study.
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#### **4.5.10 My Reading Habits Have Not Changed**

The presentation of data above relates to the 75% of students who indicated that they thought that their reading habits had changed through their participation in the course. Just below 25% (n=117) of students indicated that they did not think that their reading habits had changed. The question was not structured such as to ask this group of students to explain their answers. As was discussed above, male students and students from public ex-Model C schools were more likely to indicate that their reading habits had not changed.

Of these, twenty students explained their answers, giving relatively short answers (average word count of 13.5). Eight students did not provide any further information, beyond restating that their reading habits had not changed. Ten of the students indicated that the course had not changed their reading habits as they had always been strong readers ('I have always been a good and wide reader'). Only two of the students who provided an answer implied that their reading practices were weak before the course, and remained unchanged after the course ('nothing has changed. I am still the same person who didn't like to read even today'; 'no, but hopefully they will soon').

An additional multi-variable regression was undertaken including both the initial set of independent variables as well as five additional variables, reflecting an initial relationship to reading, writing, optimism, verbal academic English, and understanding of the course. The variable for initial relationship with reading was

significant, whereby students who said they did not like reading before the course were less likely to say that their reading habits had changed after the course ( $p=0.016$ ). Close to 50% of the students who said their reading habits had not changed either agreed or strongly agreed that they did not really like reading before the course. Further, the variable reflecting overall understanding of the course was significant, with students indicating that they did not participate fully in the course because it was not explained fully being less likely to say that their reading habits had changed after the course ( $p=0.031$ ), with 35% of students who said their reading practice had not changed indicating that they did not understand the course well.

Table 4-32 compares the variables for students' relationship to reading before the course with their indication of whether their reading practice changed after the course. While the numbers are small, the group of students who strongly agreed upon entry that they did not like to read were much more likely to indicate that their reading habits had not changed by the end of the course ( $N=12$ ). The students who said their reading habits had not changed were evenly divided between the group of students who strongly agreed or agreed that they did not like to read, and those who disagreed or strongly disagreed – each reflecting about 11% of the total sample.

Table 4-32: Relationship with Reading (Entry) and Reading Habits Changed (Exit)

(N=322)	Overall Sample	Reading Habits DID NOT Change	Total Sample Represented
Honestly speaking, I do not like to read much...			
Strongly Agree	5%	71%	4%
Agree	29%	23%	7%
Disagree	46%	18%	8%
Strongly Disagree	20%	21%	4%

Table 4-33 compares the indications of change in reading habits with change in writing habits. 63% of students indicated that they saw a change in both their reading and writing habits. When breaking this group down by the variables reflecting student's relationship with reading and writing on entering the course, this group had proportionately more students who had indicated a stronger relationship

to reading and writing as compared to the entire population (51.6% compared to 46.8%).

Table 4-33: Relationship Between Reading and Writing Habits Change (Exit)

	My Reading Habits HAVE Changed	My Reading Habits HAVE NOT Changed
My Writing Habits HAVE Changed	63%	10%
My Writing Habits HAVE NOT Changed	13%	13%

Table 4-34: Relationship Between Reading and Writing Relationship (Entry) and Change (Exit)

		Write Change	Write Change	Write No Change	Write No Change	Total
		<b>Read Change</b>	<b>Read No Change</b>	<b>Read Change</b>	<b>Read No Change</b>	
Write Weak	Read Weak	7%	2%	2%	4%	16%
	Read Strong	12%	3%	3%	1%	19%
Write Strong	Read Weak	11%	1%	2%	3%	18%
	Read Strong	32%	3%	6%	5%	47%
<b>Total</b>		<b>63%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Entry / Exit Questionnaires/Likert 4 Scale. Data combine Strongly Agree and Agree.

13% of student said they saw no change to either their reading nor writing habits. This group becomes especially interesting. Just over one third of this group indicated a weak relationship with both reading and writing at the beginning of the course, while another one third indicated a strong relationship with reading and writing before the course. Due to limitations in the questionnaire design, only 17 of these 63 students explained their answers. Of these, 8 did not provide any information. Five emphasised that they had strong writing skills on entering the course ('I am a diligent student. This course didn't need to change anything'; 'I have always had my own way of studying'). Two indicated that their reading or writing practice continued to be weak ('I still write only when it is necessary'; 'I am still the same person who didn't like to read even today').

27 students indicated that they had a weak relationship with either reading or writing before the course, and that neither their reading nor writing practice had changed during the course. 13 of these had indicated a weak relationship with reading and writing before the course. The experience of this small student cohort will be discussed again toward the end of the following chapter.

## **4.6. INTERACTION: READING AND WRITING ACTIVITY**

### **4.6.1. Introduction**

The data presented in the previous two sections focused on the activity of writing and the activity of reading in some isolation from each other. Across both the quantitative and qualitative analyses, there was strong evidence that these two activities were in dynamic interaction, the result of which was qualitatively different from considering them in isolation. This section briefly presents the data that seems to talk to this interface.

### **4.6.2. Quantitative Constructs**

Three constructs emerged at the interface of the questions about reading and writing activity. That is, several questions enjoyed enough reliability and construct validity at the interface of reading and writing activity to join into shared statistical constructs. The variables included in each of these three constructs are summarised in Table 4-35. They combine notions of improvement, enjoyment and interest across the activities of reading and writing. For all three constructs, the cohort of students from Zimbabwe indicated that the GP had a more positive impact than the rest of the student cohort (C1 ( $p=0.020$ ); C2 ( $p=0.00$ ); ( C3 ( $p=0.017$ )). For all three constructs, students who spoke isiXhosa as a home language indicated that the GP had a more positive impact than students who spoke English as a home language (C1 ( $p=0.009$ ); C2 ( $p=0.0003$ ); C3 ( $p=0.007$ )). For all three constructs, female students indicated that the GP had a more positive impact than male students (C1 ( $p=0.027$ ); C2 ( $p=0.002$ ); C3 ( $p=0.011$ )). Similarly, students from the Faculty of Law indicated that the GP had a more positive impact than students from the Faculty of Education. For the second and third construct, students from normal public schools indicated that the GP had a more positive impact than students from public ex-Model C schools (C2 ( $p=0.042$ ); C3 ( $p=0.019$ )).

Table 4-35: Constructs: Reading – Writing Interface (Percent)

Strongly Agree / Agree	Campus A	Campus B	Total %
Reading – Writing Construct 1: Enjoyment and Improvement			
The GP has made me a better reader.	88	83	85
GP has made me a better writer.	88	81	84
Participating in the GP has made me more interested in reading.	88	82	85
Reading – Writing Construct 2: Interest, Enjoyment, Improvement			
The GP has made me a better reader.	88	83	85
Participating in the GP has made me more interested in reading.	88	82	85
GP has helped me to start to love reading.	82	77	79
GP has made me a better writer.	88	81	84
Reading – Writing Construct 3: Interest and Enjoyment			
Participating in the GP has made me more interested in reading.	88	82	85
Participating in the GP has made me more interested in writing.	83	80	81
GP has helped me to start to love reading.	82	77	79

Source: Exit Questionnaires/Likert: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

### 4.6.3. The Activity Interface: Reading and Writing

#### 4.6.3.1. Introduction

Many students who described how their reading and writing habits had changed referred to the interface of reading and writing. There were several students who approached the activities as almost inseparable, suggesting that the activities were not only related but mutually generative:

- The reading change because the LKA reading forced someone to read and write. This encouraged and improved my reading and writing, even the communication has improved;
- I was a person who was lazy in reading and even writing, but now I have joined LKA. At least I can read not just read, but to be interested and my journal has improve my spelling, because I had to write at anytime I get and it has caused me to check though words in the dictionary to understand the text that i am reading;
- While i write an essay i used to be bored and tired during the exams but since LKA/GP started, i trained myself to write for a quite long time, or occasionally by doing so i trained myself to be used to reading;
- I am now a good reader and a good writer and now I am interested. It has improved my language and experiences a lot.

Students most commonly discussed the activity of writing as an expansive tool for reading practice. That is, writing practice transformed reading practice, which became mutually generative. While experienced as interactive, there was less explicit discussion of reading practice as the initial impetus for expanded writing practice.

#### 4.6.3.2. LKA Journal: Reading and Writing Activity Interface

The largest number of students placed specific value on the LKA Journal as a tool for reading and writing breakthroughs. See Table 4-36. They primarily suggested that their Journal became a motivation to read more; they were motivated to read so that they had more to write about. This interface was generative of wider learning action (I engage, I bring evidence, I fill up the journal).

Table 4-36: Theme Extracts: LKA Journal: Writing as Motive for Reading Activity

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- LKA helped me to love to read because I was encouraged by writing my journal. I had to write it each and every day to increase my habit;
  - I have to keep on reading so that I am able to write;
  - Since I have joined LKA I spend more time in books so that I could fill up my journal that make me like reading books. That also increases my level of understanding in passage;
  - It changed in such an extent that I engage in reading umthamos (sic) and writing my journal. In other time I was having reading in other books to bring an evidence in my journal entry so in this semester the standard of reading is change because of LKA interesting reading.
- 

#### 4.6.3.3. LKA Reading Log: Reading and Writing Activity Interface

Other students pointed to the suggestions imbued within the tool of the LKA Reading Log ('I have implemented some strategies and methods of reading'). See Table 4-37.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the LKA Reading Log supported students to increase their capacity to read with understanding through a series of externalised written reflective practices. These students discussed the relationship between externalised

written activities (for example, note taking and written reflection) and internalising reading content. These students had successfully used writing praxis to increase their reading comprehension.

Table 4-37: Theme Extracts: LKA Reading Log and Reading / Writing Activity

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- I was becoming more familiar with reading because at first I was just browsing through my books now I read with understanding and even make notes of what I've read so that I could remember it more often;
  - At first I was only reading, but now I have learned to write down and reflect on what I've read and experienced;
  - I have learned to focus more when I am studying and not only study to pass but to know ... so whenever I write my intentions is to know better;
  - Now I can take down notes when I am reading, I both read and write;
  - When I was reading, I wasn't used to jot down some ideas and questions. Now I can write more by being encouraged by the writing of journals. ... I will be a teacher who can write on the chalk board also.
- 

#### 4.6.3.4. Reading, Writing and Wider Study Practice

The final theme emerging at the reading-writing interface related to wide study practice. These students suggested that not only had they experienced success in relationship to their reading and writing capabilities, but that this success had also translated into a sense of widening confidence relating to their studies as a whole.

These students pointed to the generative potential between the more isolated activities of the course and more generalised confidence in the activity of study. See Table 4-38.

Table 4-38: Reading, Writing and Wider Study Practice

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- I am now putting more effort. Even my marks have upgraded and improved. Lecturers are also complimenting my results;
  - In LKA I learnt about reading and writing so that it encouraged me and it also improved my reading and writing skills so that I gained more knowledge by joining this program and it also helped me in other courses;
  - I have started reading more often than the last semester and my grades have improved for the better Definitely my writing has changed also in some positive ways for example in class now can write notes by listening when a lectures is in process;
-

- 
- In my first semester I always go to class and write some notes and when I am in my room I don't even look at the notes so in my second semester I always read my notes and my books even if we are not going to write a test but just to know my work.
- 

#### **4.7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

This chapter presented data describing students' reading and writing activity through the course experience.

Upwards of 70% of students suggested that the course directly impacted their learning activity in a positive way. Over 60% said their reading (65%) and writing (62%) practice had changed at the time of the midterm. This climbed to over 70% for reading (76%) and writing (71%) by the end of the course. At this stage, over 80% of students indicated that the GP made them better readers (85%), and better writers (84%) and increased their interest in reading (85%) and writing (81%).

Student suggested that they read and wrote more frequently, their reading and writing had improved in some way, and their interest and enjoyment had increased. Over time, many students claimed that the reading and writing activity had become a 'habit' in some way. Students suggested that, over time, this activity expanded in three ways. First, their reading and writing activity expanded (in fluency, depth, breadth, speed and activity application.) Second, the expansion of the reading and writing activity was associated with an expansion of study skills more generally for some students. Finally, complementary activity expanded. Students associated expanded writing with expanding the complementary activity of expression. Students associated expanded reading with expanding the complementary activity of thinking, exploring and 'finding out'.

Students with less access to previous socio-cultural educational advantage placed more value on the course and made stronger claims about the course impacting their learning activity. Students whose home language was isiXhosa made stronger claims about their reading practice than students who had access to English in their

home environment. Students attending normal public schools made stronger claims than students who had attended ex-Model C schools. Students whose home language was isiXhosa, as well as students whose parents had less access to education, made stronger claims about their writing practice. Students whose home language was isiXhosa and who attended normal public schools made stronger claims in reference to the constructs that combined ability, interest and enjoyment of reading and writing practice.

Two other student cohorts made stronger claims, both about the value of the course and its tools as well as about the impact of the course on their learning practice. Both female students and the cohort of students from Zimbabwe (largely strong student recipients of a competitive state bursary) consistently responded to the experience in more positive terms.

Students appeared to have made meaning of a range of learning tools at the interface of reading and writing. They placed special value on the experience of the LKA Journal, as it related to expanded writing and reading. For many students, the LKA Journal appeared to have been both the initial source of mediation of expanded learning activity, as well as the source of expansion of activity over time. The source of expansion of activity over time appeared to be more widely distributed across the learning tools, with importance placed on tools that mediated a sense of expansive improvement.

There was less convincing data to understand the experience of the roughly 30% of students who did not claim that their reading and writing activity had changed through the course. The questionnaire was less well designed to extract the experience of these students. One third of these students claimed that they did not understand the course well. Approximately half of this group considered their reading and writing practice to be strong upon entry. That is, they said that their reading and writing activity did not change, because it was strong to begin with. The remaining half who indicated that their learning practice was not strong and did not change through the course, remained an important group for further understanding.

## CHAPTER 5

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS PART 2

#### PEDAGOGICAL ARCHITECTURE AND SUMMATIVE EXPERIENCE

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##### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented data describing the experience of student reading and writing activity. This chapter will continue to place analytic emphasis on the activities of reading and writing, but will consider them in interaction with the elements of the wider pedagogical activity system. The chapter begins by presenting quantitative data demonstrating students' formative assessment of the course as a whole. It goes on to present data about students' experience of the pedagogical architecture. The chapter then considers student reflections on the meaning they make of the course as they reflect on whether the course had any impact on them 'as a person'. The chapter concludes by presenting the analysis of second and third year course mark data, examining whether there is any evidence to suggest a longer term impact on learning activity for participating students.

##### 5.2. ACTIVITY SYSTEM: OVERALL ANALYSIS OF BENEFIT

###### 5.2.1. Overall Benefit

At the midterm, just over three quarters of students agreed or strongly agreed that the GP had been a good experience for them so far, with nearly 70% agreeing or strongly agreeing that it is good for the students of the University.

By the end of the course, 90% agree or strongly agree that they were glad, overall, that they participated in the course. Female students were more likely to give a positive answer than male students ( $p=0.026$ ; 0.2 LL). Students whose parents had

more access to tertiary education were less likely to give a positive response than other students ( $p=0.008$ ; 0.5LL).

Table 5-1: Summative Course Assessment

		C-A	C-B	Total
I think the GP is good for students at [University]	Mid	64%	71%	68%
So far, the GP has been a good experience for me.	Mid	77%	76%	76%
Overall, I am glad that I participated in the GP.	Exit	92%	89%	90%

Source: Exit and Mid / 4 Level Likert Scale: Figures combine 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree.'

Students were further asked whether they thought that students *who actively participated* in the GP benefited a lot. Just over 80% of students either agreed or disagreed at the midterm, climbing to just over 90% at the end of the course. isiXhosa speaking students were more likely to agree with the overall course benefit than students where English is spoken in the home ( $p=0.021$ , 0.25 LL). Similarly, students attending normal public secondary schools were more likely to see the benefit than students attending either private or public ex-Model C secondary schools ( $p=0.022$ , 0.25 LL). The cohort of students from Zimbabwe also agreed more frequently than the student population as a whole ( $p=0.001$ ; 0.75LL).

Table 5-2: Students Benefited: Midterm vs. Exit

		Campus A	Campus B	Total
I think that the students who have participated actively in the GP have benefited a lot.	Mid	81%	82%	81%
	Exit	93%	90%	91%

Source: Mid and Exit / 4 Level Likert Scale: Figures combine 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree.'

The items in Table 5-1 and 5-2 enjoyed enough construct reliability and validity to combine into one construct. None of the independent variables demonstrated any significant influence over this construct.

### 5.2.2. Usefulness of Course

Within the midterm and final questionnaire, students were asked whether they considered the course experience as a whole to be useful or not. See Table 5-3. The questions were worded differently, making direct comparisons difficult. At the

time of the midterm, approximately 10% of students across both campuses indicated that they had not participated in activities of the course because they did not think they were useful. At the end of the course, almost double the number of students agreed or strongly agreed that they did not think the activities of the GP were useful. Beyond the small Zimbabwe student cohort who were more likely to reject the notion that the course was not useful, there was some suggestion that students whose parents had higher levels of education (college and tertiary) were more likely to consider the course not useful than students whose parents had less education (none, primary and secondary) ( $p=0.003$ , 0.5 LL). None of these indicators were significant for midterm answers.

Table 5-3: Overall Usefulness of Activities: Midterm vs. Exit

		Campus A	Campus B	Total
I have not participated in many activities of the GP because I don't think they are useful for me.	Mid	10%	9%	9%
I don't think the activities of the GP are useful for me.	Exit	15%	21%	18%

Source: Mid and Exit / 4 Level Likert Scale: Figures combine 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree.'

### 5.2.3. Too Much Work

65% of students across campuses agreed or strongly agreed that the course was too much work, with higher numbers agreeing at Campus A (73%) compared to Campus B (58%). The student cohort from Zimbabwe agreed less than the overall student population ( $p=0.004$ ; 0.7LL).

Table 5-4: The GP is too much work...

	Campus A	Campus B	Total
Strongly Agree	27%	22%	24%
Agree	47%	37%	42%
Disagree	22%	32%	28%
Strongly Disagree	4%	9%	6%

Source: Exit Questionnaire

### 5.3. ACTIVITY SYSTEM AND ACTIVITY ELEMENTS

#### 5.3.1. Comparison of Usefulness: Activity Elements

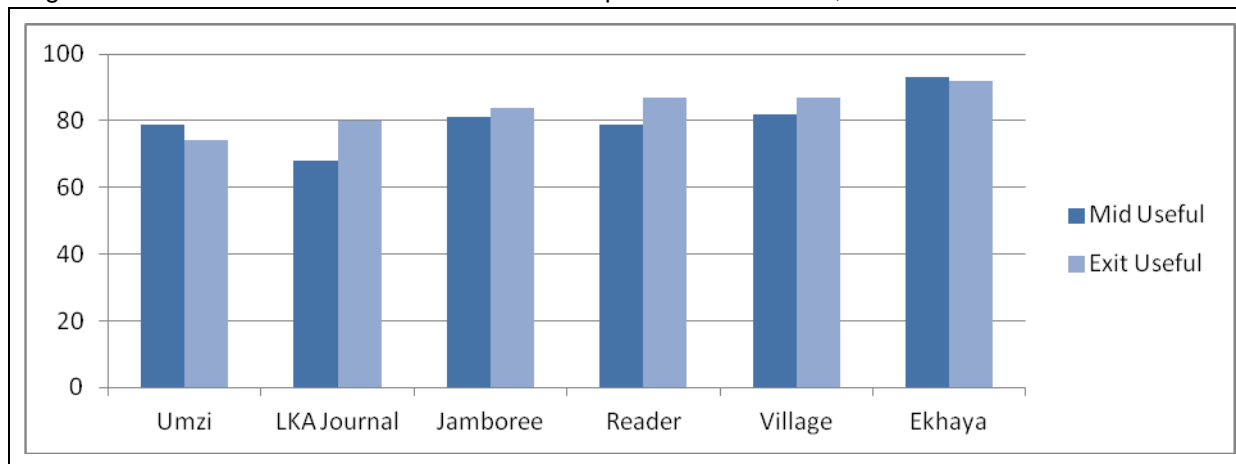
During both the midterm and final questionnaire, students were also asked to rate each of the core activities of the course as either ‘very useful’, ‘useful’, ‘not useful’ or ‘waste of time’. The results for the six core activities are presented in Table 5-5 and Figure 5-1 below.

Table 5-5: Usefulness of Course Activities: Midterm vs. Final

Percent	Midterm Questionnaire			Exit Questionnaire		
	Very Useful	Useful	Not Useful <sup>^</sup>	Very Useful	Useful	Not Useful <sup>^</sup>
LKA Journal	32	36	32	43	37	20
Reader	24	55	21	32	55	13
Umzi	29	50	21	35	39	27
Ekhaya	35	58	7	43	49	8
Village	34	48	19	43	44	13
Jamboree	42	39	19	47	37	16

<sup>^</sup>Combines answers ‘not useful’ and ‘waste of time.’

Figure 5-1: Usefulness of Course Activities: Comparison of Activities, Midterm and Final



Source: Mid and Exit / 4 Level Likert Scale: Figures combine ‘Very Useful’ and ‘Useful.’

By the end of the course, the three more common pedagogical forms (the Ekhaya, Village, and Reader) were the least controversial, with over 85% indicating that they found the elements useful, and almost 50% indicating that they were ‘useful’ rather than ‘very useful’. The three newer pedagogical forms (the Umzi, LKA Journal and the Jamboree) were more controversial. Students had differing experiences of the

LKA Journal and Jamboree, with almost 50% of students indicating that they found these activities 'very useful' and almost 20% indicating that they were 'not useful'. The most controversial activity element was the Umzi. Students were divided almost across the three categories ('very useful', 'useful', and 'not useful'.) The assessment of the Umzi was strongly influenced by the Village, whereby students in some Villages rated the Umzi as particularly useful, and students in other Villages rated it as particularly un-useful ( $p < 0.0001$ ), See Figure 5-5 below.

### **5.3.2. Favourite Activity Elements**

At the end of the course, students were asked to identify (by writing in) their favourite course 'element', their second favourite course 'element', and their least favourite course 'element'. The answers are presented in Figure 5-2 and Table 5-6 below.

The favourite course activity was the movie, followed by the Jamboree. Just shy of 60% of students identified the movie as either their most favourite or second most favourite course element, while almost 50% identified the Jamboree. The other activities had to 'compete' with these activities (strongly aligned to student enjoyment) to receive any attention at all.

Almost one quarter of students (climbing to 30% in Campus B) indicated that the LKA Journal was either their favourite or second favourite activity in the course, with only 10% identifying the journal as their least favourite activity. Approximately 5% indicated that the Reader was one of their favourite elements, with an equal number identifying it as their least favourite element.

The Umzi was the most controversial element. While 17% of students identified it as one of their top two favourite elements, nearly 30% of students identified it as their least favourite element, with Campus B demonstrating a significantly more positive relationship with the Umzi than Campus A. The Ekhaya was less controversial, representing one of the top two favourite elements for almost a quarter of the students, and the least favourite element for only 5%. Finally, there was a mixed

review of the Village. While 18% identified the Village as one of their top two elements, 13% identified it as their least favourite element, with more critique of the Village emanating from Campus B. There was no significant relationship between the independent variables and the choice of favourite and least favourite element.

Figure 5-2: Favourite and Least Favourite Course Activities

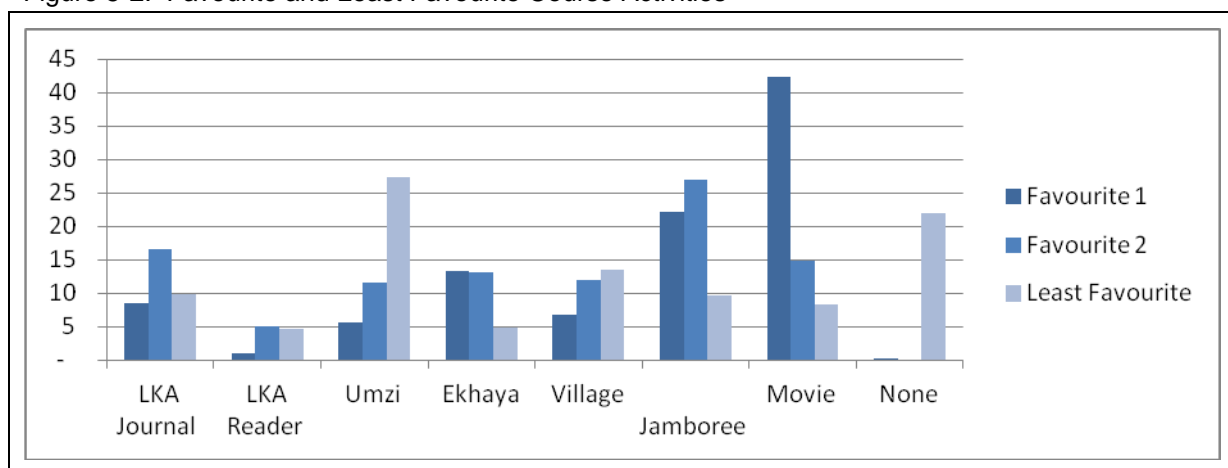


Table 5-6: Favourite and Least Favourite Course Activities

Percent	Favourite 1			Favourite 2			Favourite Combined			Least Favourite		
	C-A	C-B	Tot	C-A	C-B	Total	C-A	C-B	Tot	C-A	C-B	Tot
<b>LKA Journal</b>	8	8	8	22	12	17	30	20	24	8	11	10
<b>LKA Reader</b>	1	1	1	6	4	5	7	5	6	2	6	5
<b>Umzi</b>	5	7	6	6	16	12	10	22	17	38	19	27
<b>Ekhaya</b>	12	15	13	10	16	13	21	30	26	5	4	5
<b>Village</b>	9	5	7	14	10	12	23	15	18	6	19	13
<b>Jamboree</b>	19	25	22	29	25	27	47	49	48	8	11	10
<b>Movie</b>	46	40	42	13	16	15	58	56	57	12	6	8
<b>None</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	23	22

Source: Exit Questionnaire, N=498. Favourite 1 Missing: 24; Favourite 2 Missing: 39; Least Favourite Missing: 49

#### 5.4. PEDAGOGICAL ARCHITECTURE: INTERFACE OF READING/WRITING

Due to the massive data set emerging, a more detailed discussion of students' experience of the pedagogical architecture is beyond the scope of the current study. This section aims only to extract some of the experience that is articulated at the interface of reading and writing activity. This section briefly reviews students' analysis of their experience with the Umzi, Ekhaya, and Village, where they simultaneously comment on their reading and writing activity in some way.

## 5.4.1. Umzi

### 5.4.1.1 Introduction

The Umzi was designed as the centre of the pedagogical architectural experiment. A thorough discussion of the experience of the Umzi deserves a study of its own. As discussed above, when rating the 'usefulness' of the Umzi, it was the most controversial course element. A more detailed breakdown of this data is presented in Table 5-7. At the time of the midterm, just over 20% of students rated the Umzi as 'not useful' or a 'waste of time'. This increased to 27% by the end of the course. The increase was prominent in Campus A, whereby almost 35% of students rated the Umzi not to be useful. Just shy of 30% of students indicated that the Umzi was 'very useful' at the time of the midterm, increasing to 35% at the end of the course. This increase was only seen in Campus B. The remainder of students rated the Umzi as simply 'useful'.

Several variables were suggested to be significant. First, the strong student cohort from Zimbabwe found the Umzi more useful than the general course population both at the midterm ( $p=0.019$ ; 1.0 LL) and the end of the course ( $p=0.002$ ; 1.0 LL). Second, South African students from 'normal' public schools considered the Umzi more useful than students from private or public ex-Model C schools, both at the midterm ( $p=0.012$ ; 0.75 LL) and end of the course ( $p=0.001$ ; 0.75 LL).

Students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences rated the Umzi as more useful than students from the Faculty of Science and Agriculture at the midterm, but this effect fell away by the end of the course when students from Campus B considered the Umzi to be more useful than Campus A ( $p=0.002$ ; 0.5 LL).

The second general linear model, focusing on the influence of the pedagogical architecture itself, was applied to this variable. There were several Ekhaya and Villages that demonstrated significance. That is, students from some Ekhaya ( $p=0.004$ ) and some Villages ( $p<0.0001$ ) were much more likely than others to rate the Umzi as useful.

A detailed qualitative analysis of this experience was undertaken but falls outside of the ambit of the study. In summary, the students who indicated that they had had a poor experience with the Umzi indicated that they had not succeeded in getting their Umzi to meet. They expressed frustration with the lack of support from the course and their peers to get the Umzi to meet (pointing to lack of suitable times, venues, and a frustration that other students did not show up). The students who said the Umzi were useful were students who had effectively managed to meet with their Umzi. It appears that once students could overcome the initial logistical and social inertia, they were relatively successful at building a positive experience. There were only 3 students who indicated that they had actually participated in their Umzi but indicated that it was not a positive experience.

Table 5-7: Umzi Usefulness: Midterm vs. Exit

Percent	Mid Very Useful	Mid Useful	Mid Not Useful	Exit Very Useful	Exit Useful	Exit Not Useful
Campus A	26	49	25	26	40	34
Campus B	31	51	18	42	37	21
Total	29	50	21	35	39	27

Source: Mid and Exit / 4 Level Likert Scale: 'Not Useful' combines 'not useful' and 'waste of time.'

#### 5.4.1.2. Purpose of Umzi

Just about 20% of students (N=69) referred to reading or writing when they discussed their understanding of the purpose of the Umzi. Approximately one third of them mentioned both reading and writing, another third only mentioned reading, and another third only mentioned writing.

There were four dominant themes connecting the Umzi with the activity of reading and writing. First, students had a strong discourse associating the Umzi with the tools (Journal, Reader and Reading Log) that provided scaffolding for the reading and writing activity. 33 students referred specifically to the LKA Journal. 32 students referred to the reading material within an umthamo. 13 referred specifically to the Reading Log by name. In reference to the tools of reading and writing, some

students placed emphasis on accountability, discussion and support as discussed below. Other students placed specific emphasis on the role of the Umzi as a place to share from students' journals by reading aloud to each other ('the purpose of our umzi is to read our journal...'; 'to allow for interaction, it gives us time to read through our journals and give our own opinions on the umthamos').

The next theme was students' association of the purpose of the Umzi with reading and writing practice through a discourse of accountability and oversight. Some of this discourse is relatively technical, pointing to the role of the Umzi in allocating participation points for reading and writing ('[the purpose of the umzi is] to check if everyone has written on their journal'; 'to see if people read their themes and write their journals'; 'for us to do our work and give it to each other like after you have read Umthamo, written your journal etc, they should give you marks').

Other students pointed to the role of accountability, but placed less emphasis on compliance and more emphasis on mutual accountability to ensure that a common valued purpose was achieved. The discourse demonstrates more of a sense of solidarity than technical compliance, a shift of doing this 'with each other' as opposed to 'to each other'. See Table 5-8.

Table 5-8: Theme Extracts: Purpose of the Umzi: Mutual Accountability-Support

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- to discuss the umthamo with each other. Check if everyone has read the Umthamo we check if everyone has written on their journal then we fill our Umzi log;
  - to check the journals of your fellow members and give advice;
  - to help us make sure we write in our journals;
  - to learn to each other to see all our works like journals;
  - Umzi role is to see to it that every member do reading, writing and many other LKA activities. Purpose is to have every member stepped in.
- 

The third theme was to do with students who associated the relationship between the umzi and reading and writing practice with the activity of discussion. Just shy of half of the students who associated the Umzi with reading and writing, specifically used the word 'discuss' in their answers. Some students pointed to discussing what they have written ('it is for the LKA members of a particular Ekhaya to meet and

share ideas, share about what they have written in their journals, talk about the movie and discuss each Imithamo'; 'it gives time to us as Umzi members to discuss and share our views written in the journals'). Even more students pointed to discussing what they have read, as a way of promoting their understanding of the reading ('to discuss what we understand about the umthamo that we have read'). They pointed to the opportunity to build a stronger understanding of reading content through discussion ('[the purpose of the umzi is] to meet and discuss what have we read over a certain period and deliberate on that'; '...to go through the reading in smaller groups and to analyse it'). They pointed to the externalised process of discussion as a way to improve their understanding and thinking ('it is about being able to reflect on what you have read and apply your reasoning or thinking about the topic to be discussed'; 'we check the readings as a group and we ask ourselves questions and we get a deeper understanding of the readings'). They pointed to the interface of discussing, sharing views and opinions and supporting each other ('[the purpose of the umzi] is to come together and discuss about what we were reading as individuals and to raise our views and opinions as Umzi members try to help one another'). Some students placed emphasis on the kind of discussion that helps create meaning for students' lives ('the purpose of umzi is to engage in our journal writings and umthamo and get into details on how to approach the essays and link them to our lives'). While more emphasis was placed on 'discussion' than 'debate', some students point to an emerging practice of debate ('the Umzi session helps us to improve our understanding and also our reading and writing. It gives us confidence to debate').

The fourth theme concerned students who placed specific emphasis on the role of the Umzi for students supporting each other to improve reading and writing practice. These students identified the Umzi as a place where students both encourage and more actively support each other to improve their reading and writing practice. These students described the purpose of the Umzi:

- for working together for each and every work you are given to do or to help each other and for the betterment of our reading skills;
- meet and share LKA journals, reading logs and encourage each other to read. Moreover, we discuss umthamo theme;
- to give points for attending, reading and writing. To share information and to share experiences and also to teach one another to understand better.

The data suggest that some students began to sense some responsibility for each other's learning success. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

#### **5.4.2. Ekhaya**

The Ekhaya combined approximately 30 students, and was facilitated by a trained facilitator called 'abakhwezeli' ('keepers of the fire'). The Ekhaya sessions were located part way through each two week learning cycle, after students had viewed the movie, and in theory after students had read through the related reading material. The primary purpose of the Ekhaya was for student facilitators to help guide a discussion to deepen the relationship with the material of the Umthamo. See Chapter 3.

The second general linear model sought to understand whether the level of the Ekhaya or Village had a significant impact on the dependent variables across the study. While the Ekhaya did not have any significant impact on the reading and writing constructs directly, the Ekhaya had a significant effect on questions exploring students' experience with the umzi. How students perceived the umzi, the number of times their umzi met, and the number of reports they wrote were all strongly influenced by the Ekhaya they were in ( $p=0.0002$ ), suggesting that the quality of pedagogical support applied within the Ekhaya has a significant impact on the umzi experience discussed above.

Approximately 10% of students ( $N=39$ ) referred to reading or writing when they discussed their understanding of the purpose of the Ekhaya. All of these students referred to reading. Seven of them referred to the combination of reading and

writing. None referred to writing outside of the practice of reading. None referred to the LKA Journal. Three referred to the word 'book' in their answer.

When associating the Ekhaya with reading and writing practice, almost all students referred to the activity of discussion. They referred to discussion in different ways.

While the Ekhaya was designed to engage students after they had read the material for the first time, there was evidence from one student that some students still saw the Ekhaya as the place where they would be informed about the reading without having to read the material themselves ('discuss the umthamo before we read it'). The majority of this group, however, said that the purpose of the Ekhaya was to discuss the movie and the reading ('to discuss the movie and the reading'; 'to discuss what we have read in the reader'), reflecting some understanding of the pedagogical cycle. Six students implied the more passive act of 'being informed' by the facilitators in some way ('I think it is to basically tell us more about the imithamo readings'). They either received more 'information' or more 'instructions' ('it is to tell us things we should do').

About one quarter of students linked the purpose of Ekhaya discussion to the goal of enhancing understanding, particularly of the reading process ('to get a better understanding of our readings'). Students placed value on peer interaction, asking questions, and sharing knowledge as a way to promote the process of understanding of reading previously undertaken more individually. See Table 5-9.

Table 5-9: Theme Extracts: Purpose of the Ekhaya: Promote Reading Understanding

- 
- Discuss the umthamo with each other and ask questions about what we didn't understand when we read the Umthamo individually;
  - I think the role of Ekhaya is for students to discuss and explain what they have read and understood about each umthamo;
  - Is to sit and discuss about what we have read previous day and make clear about the reading;
  - To discuss and share knowledge about our prescribed readings;
  - To promote reading, writing and understanding skills as well as social interaction.
- 

Students emphasised four additional links between the purpose of the Ekhaya and their reading and writing practice. First, they associated the Ekhaya with the

interface of reading skills, writing skills and communication skills ('Ekhaya sessions give an individual a chance to communicate with others and it give us the skills to read'; 'it helps the student to write, read and communicate'; 'to communicate with other people that you don't know. It gives us writing skills, listening and speaking'; 'the purpose of the Ekhaya session is to make us understand what we have read. It helps us to communicate'; 'it is to help us to socialise with other people and also motivates us in reading/speaking writing').

Second, students associated their reading and writing practice with the Ekhaya as a place where students were able to express their opinions and ideas. These students seemed to suggest that the Ekhaya were successful at breaking through a lecture-dominated paradigm, to better encourage students to share their 'opinions', 'understandings' and 'ideas'. See Table 5-10.

Table 5-10: Theme Extracts: Purpose of the Ekhaya: Expression

- 
- To share ideas on the Umthamo we have read and discuss the importance of their role;
  - Do discuss the movies and readings and then everyone gets to share their opinion;
  - Is to impress and express our knowledge about LKA and about the themes we read;
  - The role of Ekhaya is to let us discuss a certain Umthamo and its purpose is to prepare to be able to comment about what we have read;
  - To hear about everyone's thoughts. What they feel and think. To give us better information on the readings and give understanding towards it;
  - The Ekhaya sessions we put all our findings and understandings together when unpacking the readers;
  - To let people grow their minds broad able to write and read in a formal way able to work with groups.
- 

Finally, students associated the discussion activity in the Ekhaya with reading and writing activity by pointing to thinking skills and a process of wider making meaning:

- To expose people in more positive thinking and more positive doing in community and to become a good reader and writer;
- To discuss the importance of life knowledge action read. To look at our day to day life situation and how to cater to our daily and community problems which spread to national level.

Students pointed to the nexus of reading, writing, discussing and thinking ('it is to help us to have good writing, thinking and reading skills. We also improve on discussing skills'). Other students pointed to the skills of linking the material across learning tools ('to discuss and link the movie to the umthamo reader essay').

### **5.4.3. The Village**

The Village brought together three Ekhaya, with an average of 101 students across the six Villages of the course. The Villages were designed as the opportunity for lecturers to engage with and guide students, to both deepen and widen students' engagement with course material. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Village sessions were theoretically located at the end of each two week cycle. As such, rather than giving the lecturers the job of 'introducing' the material, the lecturers were challenged to engage with the propositions and questions emerging from the material, as articulated in the Umzi Log.

The second general linear model sought to understand whether the level of the Ekhaya or Village had a significant impact on the dependent variables across the study. While the Ekhaya level was specifically important for students' relationship with the umzi, the Village level had a broader influence. The five constructs relating to reading and/or writing are illustrated in Table 5-11. In two of the five constructs, the Village had a significant influence, with two Villages (one in each campus) demonstrating a significantly higher score than others. See Figure 5-3 and 5-4. While the Village did not impact on the construct relating to the LKA Journal, it did significantly influence the average number of days a student wrote in the journal.

The Village also demonstrated significant influence over how students assessed the usefulness of their experience of the Ekhaya ( $p < 0.0001$ ) and the Umzi ( $p < 0.0001$ ). See Figure 5-5. Out of the six Villages, one appears to have excelled over others (C-B2). Three appear to have lower scores across a number of indicators (C-B1; C-A1; C-A2). The final two seem to be more inconsistent, with C-B3 indicating a

relatively better experience with the Umzi as compared to the read-write construct, while C-A3 demonstrated a less favourable experience of the Umzi and stronger results for the read-write construct.

Table 5-11: Village Influence over Reading / Writing Constructs

Construct	Discussed	Village Influence
Construct: Read	Chapter 5, Section 4.5.4.	None
Construct: LKA Journal	Chapter 5, Section 4.4.4.	None
Construct: Read-Write 1	Chapter 5, Section 4.6.2.	Village CB2/CA1 higher (p=0.007)
Construct: Read-Write 2	Chapter 5, Section 4.6.2.	None
Construct: Read-Write 3	Chapter 5, Section 4.6.2.	Village CB2/CA1 higher (p=0.017)

Figure 5-3: Construct Read-Write 1: Influence of Village: LS Means for Village, 95% Confidence

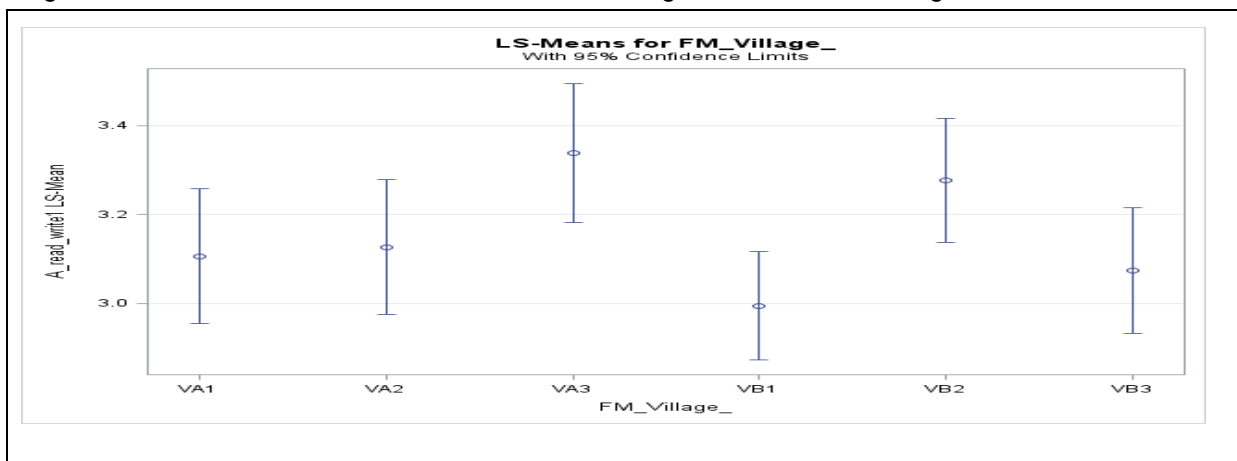


Figure 5-4: Construct Read-Write 3: Influence of Village: LS Means for Village, 95% Confidence

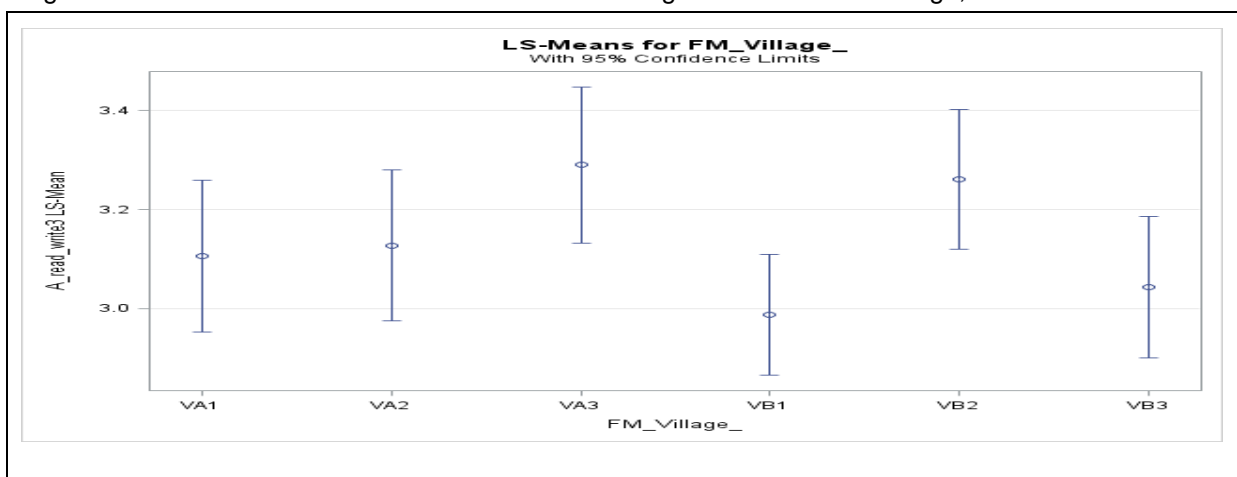
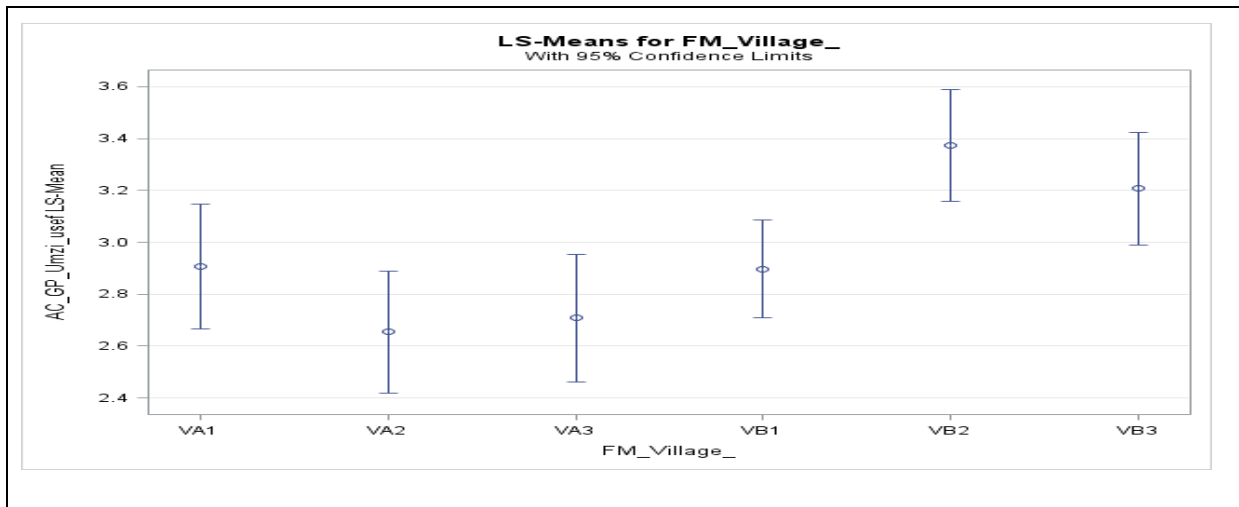


Figure 5-5: Umzi: Influence of Village: LS Means for Village, 95% Confidence



In comparison to the Umzi and Ekhaya, relatively few students (5%;N=24) referred to reading when they discussed their understanding of the purpose of the Village. None of them made reference to writing or the LKA Journal.

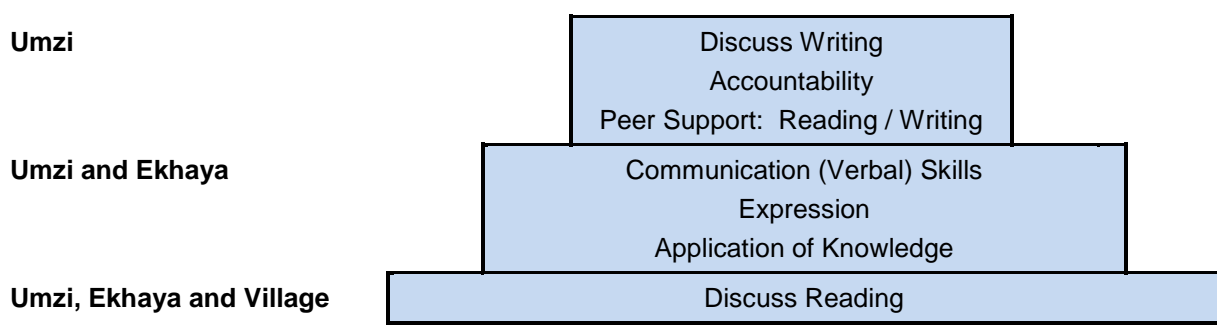
The small subset of students making reference to reading primarily referred to the notion of ‘discussing’ what they have read. This small sample seemed to have an understanding of the Village as ‘tying up’ the ‘work’ of a cycle (‘[the role of the village is] to discuss the work we have done already and to start a new cycle’; to elaborate more on what we already learnt from umzi sessions’; ‘to elaborate more on what we have read and what the facilitators have said’). A quarter of these students made specific reference to having their questions answered. That is, they understood the Village as the place to discuss the questions they had articulated (either through their Reading Log or Umzi Report) which had not been answered within the Ekhaya (‘to discuss in detail the questions on the reading log and answering the unanswered questions’; ‘to go through the readings and answer any unanswered questions from the ekhaya’). Another subset of students emphasised that the role of the Village is to increase the understanding relating to reading (‘[the purpose of the Village is] to summarise imithamo and make sure that we understood what the reader was about’; ‘to understand the reader and to cover new topics’). The remainder of the students spoke about the discussion of reading at the Village level as providing an opportunity

to get some feedback on the understanding of the reading they had developed thus far ('to discuss the understanding of umthamo and get some feedback on what we have read'; 'to discuss the issues in more detail'; 'we are getting into details about what is affecting') and to talk in more 'depth' ('to talk more into depth about the readings and movies').

#### 5.4.4. Comparing Activities: Umzi, Ekhaya, Village

Figure 5-6 attempts to summarise the complimentary but different activity purpose of the three core levels of the pedagogical architecture, associated in some way with reading and writing. The activities allocated to each level are additive, with the highest number of activities allocated to the level of the Umzi.

Figure 5-6: Activity Purpose: Umzi-Ekhaya-Village and Reading / Writing Activity



The Umzi, Ekhaya and Village were all associated with the common activity of 'discussion' in close association with the reading material. This appears to be the common 'base' shared across the architectural levels. The discourse used when speaking to discussion within the Umzi and Ekhaya emphasised discussing 'with each other'. Students emphasise discussion through the verb of 'supporting each other'. Students expressed a sense of intimacy and belonging, with emphasis placed on establishing relationships. They pointed to 'sharing' their understanding and knowledge ('discuss and explain what we have read and understood'; 'to discuss and share knowledge') and asking questions ('ask questions about what we didn't understand when we read the Umthamo individually').

In reference to the Village, students explained the act of discussing differently. Given the large size of the Village architecture, there was less sense of intimacy. While some pointed to the more passive process of 'being informed', many pointed to a slightly more active sense of having their questions answered, the material elaborated, and getting feedback in some way. They spoke of accessing more summative discussion whereby the 'work' of a cycle is tied up in some way.

Beyond the emphasis placed on discussing reading material, students emphasised peer to peer discussion in three additional ways within both the Umzi and Ekhaya. First, they placed emphasis on the act of 'communicating', which they closely associated with building upon their verbal capabilities. Second, they placed emphasis on the act of expression. They suggested that both of these spaces were conducive to developing their 'thoughts', 'opinions' and 'views' as well as expressing their 'thoughts', 'opinions' and 'views'. Finally, they associated these pedagogical levels with the act of applying knowledge to their day to day lives.

For the students who managed to get their Umzi to meet on a regular basis, they attributed the most diversity of activity at this level. There were three activities that were associated with the Umzi and were not associated with the Ekhaya, namely, writing activity, accountability (for reading and writing) and peer support for reading and writing. In theory these activities were woven within the imaginative potential for both the Umzi and Ekhaya. These activities were better expressed at the level of the Umzi, presumably reflecting the size and special tools allocated at the level of the Umzi. As such, the potential for building a student culture placing value on student writing appears, in the first instance, to be rooted in the Umzi experience. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

#### **5.4.5. The Jamboree**

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Jamboree brought together all Villages within a campus. It was designed to happen three times during the course, but was

undertaken only twice. Each Ekhaya is given an opportunity to present a creative product reflecting their work for the course period.

Students were not asked specifically about the purpose or their experience with the Jamboree within the questionnaires. Students only reflected on the Jamboree when they identified it as a favourite or least favourite course element. As discussed above, 102 students identified the Jamboree as their favourite course element; an additional 124 identified it as their second favourite element, while 43 identified it as their least favourite element.

Of the students who indicated that the Jamboree was their favourite element, only 1 referred specifically to reading and writing ('it is a fun way of expressing opinions on the readings'). Given that this was the only source of reflection on the Jamboree experience, these answers were analysed further even while they did not refer to reading and writing directly. There were six primary themes emerging that may have a relationship with reading and writing activity. First, students suggested that the Jamboree was an opportunity to 'express' their 'talents' ('we were expressing our talents and the beautiful gifts that we share'; '[the Jamboree] is my favourite activities because everybody in Jamboree is given a chance to show his/her talent'). Second, students say that it was the place where they discovered their 'talents' and their 'potential' ('it is my favourite because it is where you see that you have a talent'; '[the Jamboree] unleashes the talent within us'; '[the Jamboree was] full of life, exciting and made me realise potential of other people that I had not even known and even my potential'). Third, it took the curriculum outside of the classroom ('it is fun to watch people and see their talents outside of the classroom'). Fourth, it gave meaning to the material, as it was a forum to 'express' oneself in relationship to the issues discussed '[The Jamboree] helps us to express our views'; 'you express your views and opinions'; 'it is fun and exciting and we could creatively express ourselves'; 'able to share ideas with the Jamboree'; 'was very exciting because students were able to explore their minds'). Fifth, students say that it was a place where they learned from other students ('[The Jamboree] has the actual activity for

the LKA and it should do it more because there is so much to express and learn there'; 'I like it very much because I learn a lot from it. It was like a sketch or play to me'; 'Jamboree helps us in knowing things that we didn't know'; 'gave me the opportunity to get attached to the creativity of other students which also improved my own'. Finally, through the Jamboree the course took on significance in student culture outside of the classroom ('Jamboree, because by that you get famous around school'; 'this was where you can see people's talents and they all did what was expected and to top it all I had fun. I even talked about it at home').

## **5.5. IMPACT: THE COURSE CHANGED ME AS A PERSON**

### **5.5.1. Quantitative Patterns**

There were a series of questions distributed across both the midterm and exit questionnaire seeking to understand whether students thought that the experience of the course had an impact on the way students saw themselves in any way. The reliability and construct validity across items allowed the combination of these items into two variables – those representing answers at the midterm, and those representing answers at the end of the course. These constructs, and the variables they include, are presented in Table 5-12.

Over 60% of students agreed or strongly agreed at the midterm that the course had 'changed me as a person,' climbing to over 70% by the end of the course. Just fewer than 70% suggested that their ideas and beliefs had started to change in response to some things they had learned in the course. This number climbed to 80% by the end of the course. Over 80% agreed or strongly agreed that the course helped them to 'become a better human being'. Just short of 65% agreed or strongly agreed that their life goals had shifted in some way due to the course.

While the construct representing answers from the midterm did not demonstrate any significance influence from the independent variables, several variables were suggested to influence the construct representing answers from the end of the

course. isiXhosa home language speakers agreed more frequently than students where English was spoken in the home environment that the course had ‘changed them as a person’ in some way ( $p=0.001$ , 0.5 LL). Students whose parents had had less education more strongly agreed that the course ‘changed them as a person’ than students whose parents had received post-secondary schooling ( $p=0.006$ , 0.5 LL). The cohort of students from Zimbabwe agreed more strongly than the student population as a whole ( $p=0.008$ ; 0.5LL). While the magnitude of difference was smaller, there was also the suggestion that students from ‘normal’ public secondary schools agreed more than students from private and/or ex-Model C secondary schools ( $p=0.042$ , 0.2 LL).

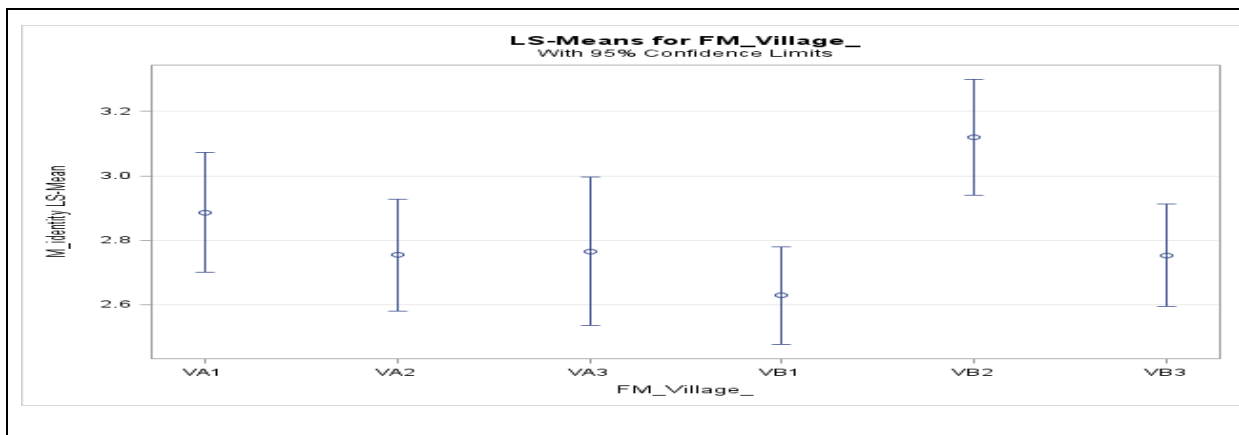
Table 5-12: Constructs: The GP has changed me...

Percent	Missing	C-A	C-B	Total	
Construct: The GP has changed me. Midterm					
The GP has changed me as a person			70	58	63
Some of my ideas and beliefs have changed because of things I have learned in the GP			69	65	67
I can see that participating fully in the GP can change my life.			74	71	72
Construct: The GP has changed me. Final					
The GP has changed me as a person			76	70	73
Some of my ideas and beliefs have changed because of things I have learned in the GP			84	77	80
I think the GP has helped me to become a better human being.			86	80	83
My goals have started to change in part because of this course.			64	64	64
I think more deeply about life than I did before I participated in the GP.			86	80	83

Source: Exit Questionnaire / 4 Level Likert Scale: Figures combine ‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Agree.’

The second general linear model focusing on the pedagogical architecture, suggests that the organisation at the Village level was significant, with one Village at Campus B having a significantly more positive experience as compared to other Villages ( $p=0.003$ ). See Figure 5-7.

Figure 5-7: Exit Construct - GP Changed Me: Influence of Village: LS Means, 95% Confidence



A further set of questions was distributed across the final questionnaire seeking to understand whether students thought that the experience had an impact on students' sense of self expression and creativity. The reliability and construct validity across these items allowed them to be combined into one construct, presented in Table 5-13.

Across these questions, between approximately 80 and 90% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the course had led to increased expression or creativity in some way. More students agreed with the proposition that the course had encouraged them to express their ideas and opinions (91%), while relatively fewer agreed that the course had given them more confidence to speak in class (79%). The cohort of students from Zimbabwe answered this construct more positively than the rest of the student cohort ( $p=0.006$ ; 0.5 LL). Students from normal public schools answered this question more positively than students from ex-Model C public schools ( $p=0.002$ ; 0.5LL).

The second general linear model looking at the influence of the levels of the pedagogical architecture on this construct, suggested that students from certain Villages answers this construct more positively than students from other Villages ( $p=0.033$ ). While Villages from Campus A hovered close to each other, the Villages

at Campus B demonstrated significant differences, with one Village demonstrating particularly high scores, and two villages demonstrating particularly low scores.

Table 5-13: Construct: The GP helped me express myself more widely.

Percent	Campus A	Campus B	Total
The GP has given me more confidence to speak in class	83	76	79
The GP has encouraged me to ask questions.	87	82	85
The GP has encouraged me to be creative.	92	85	88
The GP has encouraged me to express my ideas and opinions.	93	90	91

Source: Exit Questionnaire / 4 Level Likert Scale: Figures combine 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree.'

### 5.5.2. Qualitative Patterns

Toward the end of the exit questionnaire, students were asked an open ended question about whether the experience of participating in the course had 'impacted you as a person' or 'changed you in any way'<sup>23</sup> 481 students answered the question, with an average word count of 23.6. See Table 5-14.

The full data set was searched for the following words: 'read' (picking up read, reading, Reader, etc.); 'book'; 'writ' (picking up write, writing, writer, etc.); and 'journal'. 33% of students mentioned at least one of these words in the context of describing whether (and how) the course had impacted them 'as a person'.

Table 5-14: 'GP changed me' and Reference to 'Read'/'Book'/'Write'/'Journal'

	Read / Book	Write / Journal
(Course has changed me) making reference to...	28%	26%

Source: Exit Questionnaire. Percentage of students using the word ('read' or 'book') / ('write' or 'journal')

60% of this group (N=96) mentioned both reading and writing in their answers. Only 8% (N=38) mentioned reading without mentioning writing. Only 5% (N=24) mentioned writing without mentioning reading. 95% of the students who mentioned either reading or writing in their answers indicated that the course had changed them

<sup>23</sup> Has the experience of participating in the Grounding Programme impact you as a person? Have you changed in any way? Please explain your answer.

positively in some way. The answers of these 150 students were evaluated for themes.

Approximately one third of these students simply equated the 'impact' of the course on them 'as a person' with the change they saw in their reading and/or writing practice. These students suggested that they had 'changed as a person' because their reading and/or writing practice had changed. The subthemes emerging within this theme are similar to those described in the previous chapter. Their answers included a combination of improvement in skills and fluency, increased interest and increased enjoyment. The strongest discourse was of a change in 'ability' or 'improvement'. They speak of now being 'able' to read and write more ('I have changed because I can now write and read more'). Beyond reading more, they pointed to qualitative changes where they are able to read more purposefully ('my life today is not the same as before because now I have started to read carefully'). Some speak to the specific tools that helped them to breakthrough ('it has improved my reading and writing especially because I saw how I could improve on it in the process of drafting and redrafting').

Students discussed increasing their interest and enjoyment of reading and/or writing ('Yes I changed by it to love reading and writing, I had to push myself before now I like to read and write'; 'Yes, I have changed now. I am passionate about reading and writing. This LKA has helped me a lot and being motivating to me as I was learning it through the year'). Building upon the subtheme of having more interest and enjoyment of reading and writing, students spoke of having a new 'attitude' in relationship with reading and writing ('I developed a new attitude of reading'; 'I am now enjoying reading like I have never done before'), as well as changing their 'way' and 'style' of reading and writing. They speak about being more avid readers ('it changed my reading habits, I now read almost anything that comes my way because I know it is of essence to me in one way or the other'), and they speak of reading and writing becoming a habit in their lives ('I am changed because it introduced a reading

and writing culture in my everyday life'; 'I write a lot these days, whether it is school work or just for fun').

The remaining students went beyond discussing the change in their writing practice, to discuss either the meaning they associated with this change, and/or another way in which the course impacted their lives (that may or may not be directly associated with their reading and writing practice.) Five subthemes emerged. Two of these were discussed in association with reading and writing practice. They suggested that the course has changed them as a person because they can express themselves better and more widely, and their relationship with thinking and/or knowledge has shifted in some way. The other three subthemes were much more pronounced than they were when discussing their reading and writing practice in isolation. They suggested that they generally participate more, their sense of confidence has increased, and their wider relationship with the idea of life has shifted in some way. These subthemes are briefly reviewed here.

#### 5.5.2.1. Expression

As discussed in the previous chapter, students had a strong association between their expanding writing practice and a sense of increased capacity for expression. Students pointed again to this when they discussed the way in which the course had 'changed them as a person'. Students speak about 'expression' in different ways. Students sensed a wider space for expression and a wider capacity through which to express themselves. While it was previously linked to writing activity, by the end of the course students associated this expanded relationship with expression to a successful experience across a number of learning activities. The activity system (over and above a particular activity) seemed to translate into a wider capacity for expression ('I have an experience in GP to have confidence to express something or to participate in class and also improve my writing skills and my reading skills and also learn about something that is happening outside the school'). Some placed emphasis on gaining the capacity (or 'ability') of expressing themselves effectively

(‘now I am able to express my view through explaining and writing’). Other students suggested that the experience of building capacity in the learning activities of reading and writing had translated into wider confidences related to self expression (‘yes it did because now I am a better reader and writer than before and I am not afraid to express my thoughts in public’). Others placed emphasis on finding more ‘safe space’ for expression within the structure of the course itself (‘it has because I had to express my views and be listened to and for most not told that what I am saying is wrong or doesn’t apply or irrelevant. It also encouraged me to write more often each and every time I read about something’).

Some suggested that previously they had less ‘interest’ in expressing themselves; the course experience increased their interest or motivation (‘it has impacted me as a person because I wasn’t interested in reading and express about I have read but this program encouraged me to do so’; ‘yes, because before it was very boring to read, writing and having a confidence of expressing what I want to say in the lecture’). Other students point to the notion of creativity (‘I have become more confident, outspoken, creative, an avid reader’; ‘interested in writing and reading. Became creative and innovative’). There is a sense that they had broken through to a wider arena for their self expression (‘yes, now I can write and read. I am not afraid to do a presentation in front of so many eyes. I think without LKA, maybe I will be stuck. LKA helped me a lot’).

#### 5.5.2.2. Thinking and Knowledge

In the second subtheme, when students explained how the course has impacted them as a person, they made mention of reading and/or writing as well as referring to a shift in their relationship with ‘thinking’ or ‘knowledge.. Students in this theme made three different suggestions. First, some students pointed to specific knowledge they have gained through the course. These students mentioned their new relationship with reading and writing, as well as specific knowledge they gained from the course that has value to them:

- Long way before the GP I wasn't keen at all to write and read. Now I am able even to write poems and lyrics on my own. I have gained knowledge on many things for example science, technology and poverty;
- Yes because I am a good reader and writer so far because of it. And I know more about Africa.

Even more students pointed to the second suggestion, namely, that the course (and their experience of reading and writing) impacted the 'method' or 'way' that students think. See Table 5-16. They link the skills of being able ('I am able to look at any book from a different perspective') to achieving a qualitatively different state of thinking ('I am more critical').

Table 5-15: Theme Extracts: GP changed me...: The Way of Thinking

- 
- Yes, yes, because the way I was thinking has been improved and the way I read and the way I participate to group work. Also the way I talk has improved. Also the way I study for tests changed by the addition of LKA;
  - Yes it has. My reading skills and my writing is improving and the way I see things now is improving;
  - Yes, now I am more socially aware and I am able to look at any book from a different perspective. I don't just expect what is written, I am more critical;
  - In writing I am a good writer now is better than before. I like reading books I am always interested of reading stories etc. At least the way I think about things now is also changed;
  - Yes I became a good reader and writer and a critical thinker too;
  - Yes I am more interested in reading and questioning events.
- 

The final suggestion made by students is that their perspective (views, beliefs) have changed in some way. They talk about placing new value on the application of knowledge ('I have changed in my reading. I now read for understanding and application of knowledge hence acquired. Life is not about a lavish job but working for yourself and others'). They also talk about thinking more 'deeply' about the relationship between learning and their lives ('yes I have changed. I like writing, reading and talking now. I have changed in many things. It made me to think deep about my background because some of us tend to forget why we are here while others didn't have this great opportunity'; 'it has helped me think more deeply about life and love and learning . It has changed me in many ways, I read more often, surround myself with positive people, etc.')

### 5.5.2.3. Participation

The most common theme that emerged was from students who suggested that they participated more actively in a range of opportunities around them as a result of their participation in the course. See Table 5-16. This theme did not emerge when students discussed their reading and writing experience directly, but rather emerged strongly as students reflected on the experience of the course as a whole. They speak to having more confidence in participating in discussion, in participating in class, and participating in group and social activities. For some students there seems to be a direct relationship between stronger fluency in reading writing on the one hand, and more confidence in participating more widely in learning activity on the other.

Table 5-16: Theme Extracts: GP changed me...: Reading, Writing and Participation

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- I read more, I write beautifully since and just love writing. I just want to write and write some more. I can participate in a discussion in class. And my spelling has somehow improved at least I think;
  - Yes it has changed me in many ways, like for instance, I use to hate writing but since ever I did like LKA, I changed now. I like to write also as reading. I became more active in participating with others;
  - Yes now I love to read, write as compared to before. I now participate in discussion. I am no longer shy. I take part in every discussion;
  - My life was transformed to a larger degree. Confidence was built in me, socialisation, participation socially. Thinking and writing skills were improved greatly. My life or I can say aspects of my life were rejuvenated;
  - Yes I have managed to appreciate reading outside my curriculum. I have begun to see the importance of participating in class. I have started to believe in self reliance as well as group reliance to overcome problems;
  - Yes it did, it changed me in many things, including reading and writing and participation in class and getting involved in debates;
  - I became a good writer because I first start writing for the sake of getting points and I ended up enjoying it. Village and Ekhaya participation helped me to become confident and participate in group discussions and debate.
-

#### 5.5.2.4. Confidence

Several students who mention reading and writing said that the course has improved their 'confidence' or 'self esteem' in some way. See Table 5-17. Students spoke about confidence in different ways. Some pointed to increased confidence relating to learning activity itself. Many students related confidence to the interface of reading, writing and communicating in some way. Some students placed emphasis on the increased speed of reading and writing ('I learnt to deal quickly and also to write many stuff') giving students a stronger sense of ability in reference to learning practice. Others spoke about their general sense of confidence expanding in some way. Most students pointed to the interface of learning confidence and wider sets of confidence, suggesting that having a successful experience at this activity interface (reading, writing and communicating) translated into a stronger sense of self confidence more generally. Some students went on to suggest that this increased sense of confidence translated into building a different relationship between themselves and their environment ('interest on what is happening around me'; 'have the thoughts of positive life all the time'). Some students pointed to the experience of speaking in front of others translating into a stronger confidence in 'standing up' for themselves ('stand for my own'; 'stand up for myself').

Table 5-17: Theme Extracts: GP changed me...: Reading, Writing and Confidence

- 
- It build me as an individual, made me to believe in myself. It build my confidence, my public speaking skills, my reading and writing. It made me to be now interested on what is happening around me;
  - I am writing and reading. Confidence in terms of stand for my own;
  - It made an impact in my life. My self confidence has improved. My communication skills are much better I read and write more often;
  - I have changed a lot. Before the GP I didn't like to stand up in front of other people. Now it had improved my writing reading and listening skills;
  - I think I have changed because now I am no longer lazy in writing and reading. Improve my self esteem to have the thoughts of positive life all the time;
  - I changed a lot in GP. I was a low learning student and also I was a student with no confidence as I was engaged with GP now I can call myself a good student anyway and
-

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speed of writing also increases. Now I can be able to finish a 3 hour paper within an hour and also i can be able to grasp more information when studying than before;

- Yes now I can stand up for myself. Read, write, communicate, respect others and love others;
  - Oh yes, there are many things that I have learnt during this program and speaking in front of many people is one of them. Before this program was introduced I wasn't a good reader and writer but after it I was able to read well and right properly.
- 

#### 5.5.2.5. Life

This last subtheme is interrelated with the subthemes discussed thus far. They are comments that suggest that the course began impacting on students' relationship with their notion of their future in some way. These students made reference to reading and/or writing activity, as well as learning about 'life' in some way. See Table 5-18. These students made two suggestions. Some of these students made the suggestion that the course started to engage with their ideas about 'life' – what is important in life, how they want to conduct their lives into the future. Some students suggested that their life had changed, because the activity of reading and writing was better integrated into their daily practice.

Table 5-18: Theme Extracts: GP changed me...: Relationship to Life

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- I think I have changed a bit because I am trying to live my life well lived by doing good and positive thing. Before I wasn't too much into reading but now I am encouraged by LKA and I think it is a very good course that prepares one for today and the future ahead;
  - I'm better than ever now and I think have learn a lot through writing and reading and talking something which is very much important about life;
  - Yes I have become a better reader and writer, a good leader and I have learnt a lot about life and its experiences things that I didn't know;
  - Yes the journal its where you experience who you are;
  - Yes indeed it has because I am energetic about anything. I even tell my friends about interesting the program is. It has changed. I am a good writer and good reader too;
  - Yes I change because now I enjoy reading and am well equipped of how to live life the right way. I am able to share the idea I have. I was very reserved;
  - Yes I have been rejuvenated in all areas. First, I now enjoy to read. It has become part of my life to read. Secondly, I have been nurtured in a way to appreciate the fact that
-

humans depend on each other. Thirdly, I have developed a common sense of responsibility.

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#### 5.5.2.6. Student Cohort: Reading and Writing: Weak and No Change

In Section 4.5.10 in the previous chapter, a special cohort of 27 students was identified. This was the small cohort of students who had indicated that neither their writing nor reading habits had changed through the course, and who reflected a fragile relationship with reading and writing as measured by reading and writing variables within the Entry Questionnaire. One quarter of these students did not provide any answer to the question about whether the programme had changed them as a person. Of the students who answered, none of them indicated that the course had not changed them in some way. Another quarter referred directly to reading or writing in their answers. Interestingly, none of this group emphasised their lack of progress on this front. There appears to be two groups. One group seemed to contradict their earlier answer ('yes, I have changed. In fact I have totally changed, in reading, writing and also speaking in front of everyone without being nervous'). The other group seemed to point to a more humble change that may not yet be at the level they interpreted to constitute a 'change of habit' as implied in the initial questions. These students made reference to 'starting to read carefully' ('yes it changed my life. My life today is not the same as before because now I have started to read carefully'), and 'making sure I read a little bit everyday' ('my reading has changed. I like to read more now. Even in other courses my reading has changed. I make sure every day I read a little bit of work store in my brain then retrieve it to my journal'). Another student suggested that while she found the journal to be meaningful on a personal level ('sort of, I am not as shy as I used to be and found that I really enjoy writing in a journal, its really theroputic' (sic)). One student stood out in this group, attributing the course for motivating her to write a book,

Yes it has. This program has been my place of peace, life, love and where humanity is embedded. I even find it a bit sad I had to do it only in a period of 6 months, a semester but I believe it has contributed a lot to my novel I

think I will dedicate the novel to this exciting program. The most important thing that changed me as a person is my book and that is why i have to link the LKA with it.

The remaining half of these students indicated that the course had impacted them without referring to reading or writing practice. Of these 13 students, two said the course was generally a good experience ('my participation in GP was well for me and nothing can be changed. I satisfied and they can treat us in a good manner'). Three spoke about gaining confidence in public speaking and debate ('it was having good impact to communicate and debate with other students now I have confidence in debate'; 'the participation of me in the GP helps a lot. I am at least now not a fear to raise my point before the crowd than before'. Three said that they had generally become 'better people' ('yes, it changed my personality and made me become better person'. Three spoke about the course shifting and broadening their relationships with people ('Yes I got the chance to meet new people from different faculties. I have changed because I learned to love and to take care of people whether I know him/her. I learned to love back'). One spoke of thinking differently about life ('Yes I think differently. I am more positive about life. I now have goals'), and one spoke to increased confidence (yes because today I can step in whatever in my country because LKA create a good confident for me and even to love myself so that I can love others too').

## **5.6. UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE**

### **5.6.1 Introduction**

The aspiration of the pedagogical design was that participation in the course would impact learning activity into the future in some way. The aspiration was less about a one semester course shifting learning activity in a sustainable way, and more about the aspiration that the course could impact lecturers, and thus seeding the potential for longer term shifts in institutional culture. As will be described in the postscript to this study, the aspirations at this level were left largely unrealised.

Nevertheless, the study explored whether or not there was any evidence that participation in the course impacted the second and third year course marks in any way. In 2009 and 2010, only a sample of the total first year undergraduate student population participated in the course. As such, it allowed for an analysis of second and third year course marks comparing the cohort of students who had participated in the course with the cohort who had not.

While the rest of this study focuses exclusively on the 2010 student cohort, this analysis included both the 2009 and 2010 cohorts. The analysis considered both second (2010) and third (2011) year course marks for the 2009 cohort, while it considered only the second (2011) year course marks for the 2010 cohort. First year course marks were not analysed due to the direct influence of the Grounding Programme course marks themselves. Two analyses were undertaken. The first analysis was a multi-variable analysis comparing course mark averages of students who had participated in the course with those who had not participated in the course, organised by campus, with qualification type used as a covariate. The second analysis isolated and analysed comparable 'qualification groups'. These analyses are briefly discussed below.

The detailed historical memory of the criteria by which different Deans allocated students to the course has been lost. Some Deans recollected that the allocation was relatively random, while others indicated that they attempted to place students requiring more foundational support into the course. Given this bias, it may be expected that the cohort would perform weaker in the long term than the cohort which did not participate.

### **5.6.2. Analysis of Performance: 2010 Cohort**

The second year course marks (from 2011) were the object of the analysis for the 2010 cohort. The first analysis was undertaken at the level of campus, including qualification as a covariate. That is, the grade point average of second year

undergraduate students in 2011 who had participated in the LKA during their first year of study in 2010 were compared to their counterparts who did not participate in the LKA.

The overall model for Campus A (n=1116, with 457 participating in the course) was significant ( $F=17.5$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). However, participation in the LKA/GP was not significant. The covariate of qualification was highly significant ( $p<0.0001$ ). No other covariates were significant. The overall model for Campus B (n=381 with 230 participating in the course) was significant ( $F=8.32$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ). The effect of participating in the LKA was significant for this group ( $p<0.016$ ), with students who had participated in the LKA achieving a 2011 average of 64% as compared to 60% for those who had not participated in the course. The covariates of qualification ( $p<0.0001$ ) and language ( $p<0.0001$ ) were also significant, with students having access to English at home performing better than other students.

Given the significance of the qualification, qualification cohorts were found. A qualification cohort represented a group of students who studied toward the same degree at the same campus, whereby there were a number who participated in the course and a number who did not. These groups were relatively limited in nature. None were found in Campus B; that is, either all students within a qualification stream participated in the course or none did. The four comparable qualification cohorts from Campus A are presented in Table 5-19.

The overall models for three of the cohorts (Bachelor of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, Bachelor of Administration, Human Resource Management, and Bachelor of Science) were not significant, nor did participation in the LKA demonstrate significance. While not significant to the 95% confidence level ( $p=0.071$ ), there was marginal evidence for the Bachelor of Education students that the students participating in the LKA had done marginally *worse* than their counterparts, with students participating in the LKA having a collective average grade of 57% as compared to 60% for those who did not participate.

The overall model for Bachelor of Administration, Public Administration was significant ( $p=0.000$ ,  $F=6.95$ ). The impact of participation in the LKA is suggested to be significant ( $p=0.003$ ). The students who had participated in the LKA/GP achieved a 2011 average of 70% as compared to 64% for those who had not participated in the course. The effect of language was also significant in this student cohort, with students speaking isiXhosa as a first language performing less well than their English counterparts ( $p<0.0001$ ).

Table 5-19: Comparable Qualification Cohorts: 2<sup>nd</sup> Year - 2011 (2010 First Year Cohort)

Bachelor of		Campus	LKA	Non LKA	p/LKA
Education	Humanities and Social Sciences	Campus A	30	37	0.071
Administration	Human Resource Management	Campus A	31	60	0.21
Administration	Public Administration	Campus A	25	43	0.003
Science	Science	Campus A	45	107	0.72

### 5.6.3. Analysis of Performance: 2009 Cohort

For the 2009 cohort, final grade point averages were available for both their second and third year of study, namely 2010 and 2011. Only Campus A participated in the 2009 pilot.

The overall model for the second year final marks (2010) ( $n=1072$  with 243 participating in the LKA/GP) was significant ( $F=14.7$ ;  $p<0.0001$ ). However, participation in the LKA/GP was not significant ( $p=0.38$ ). Both the covariate of qualification and language were highly significant ( $p<0.0001$ ). Similarly, the overall model for the third year final marks (2011) ( $n=836$  with 169 participating in the LKA/GP) was significant ( $F=13.3$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). However, the effect of participation in the LKA GP was not significant ( $p=0.44$ ).

Six qualification cohorts were found for comparison, four during the second year of 2010, and two for the third year of 2011. See Table 5-20. The overall model for all

but one was significant. In three of these qualification cohorts - Bachelor of Commerce (Year 2), Bachelor of Science (Year 2) and Bachelor of Social Work (Year 2) - there was no evidence that participating in the LKA/GP had any significance on final year marks. However, in the second year cohort of Bachelor of Commerce Business Management, and in both of the third year cohorts (Bachelor of Commerce, Business Management and Bachelor of Social Work) there was evidence for the significance of participation in the LKA on final year mark averages. For the second year cohort of Bachelor of Commerce, Business Management students who had participated in the LKA achieved a 2010 average of 66% as compared to 61 % for those who had not done the course. This same cohort of students who had participated in the LKA achieved a third year average mark of 65% as compared to 60% for those who had not done the course. Similarly, while the Bachelor of Social Work students did not demonstrate any difference in Year 2, by their third year they achieved, on average, a slightly higher mark of 70% as compared to the students who had not participated in the course, who achieved an average mark of 67%.

Table 5-20: Comparable Qualification Cohorts, 2010 and 2011 (2009 Entering Class)

Bachelor of		Year	LKA	Non LKA	P value /Model	P value /LKA
Commerce	Accounting	Year 2: 2010	25	35	0.25	0.23
Commerce	Business Management	Year 2: 2010	38	81	<0.0001	0.002
Science		Year 2: 2010	29	130	<0.0001	0.94
Social Work		Year 2: 2010	27	169	<0.0001	0.13
Commerce	Business Management	Year 3: 2011	33	72	<0.0001	0.005
Social Work		Year 3: 2011	24	154	<0.0001	0.0009

## 5.7. CRITICAL REFLECTION: DATASET EMERGING

Before proceeding with a discussion of these findings in the following chapter, it is important to take a step back, and ask whether or not this kind of data can be interpreted literally in the first place. The author's own experience suggests that in the socio-cultural context of these students, questionnaire data must be considered with great caution. Where many students have had little access to quality educational care or support, it appears that there is a higher level of appreciation of small attempts to 'do better' than is necessarily deserved. Moreover, while there is little reported research on the topic, it appears that the socio-cultural relationship with questionnaires in general (imbued with historic power relationships) is mediated by a fall-back position of 'it is good.'

There are at least five qualities of this dataset, however, which make it difficult to relegate to one side. At a technical level, the quantitative data set enjoyed a high degree of internal reliability. Similar items distributed across a given questionnaire were approached in a similar way by students, even when they were posed in reverse order. Students were not simply filling in the questionnaire with generalised patterns.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the data set emerging is its mere size. Across the questionnaires, students shared just shy of 600,000 words. Distributed evenly across students, this represents almost 1,000 words per student. While questionnaires in these contexts are renowned for superficiality of answers, these students were motivated, for some reason, to 'have their say.'

The other notable feature of this dataset is its patterns of change and discontinuities. The work of activity theorists in general, and Leontiev (1978) in particular, emphasise that the study of learning ('development') lies at the dialectical interface of change. While it may not be possible to make sense of a given item extracted on its own, there is more interpretive power to consider the patterns of change (or non-change) over time. Further, the patterns of the data demonstrate differential change patterns across independent variables that reflect authentic dividing lines in terms of socio-

cultural histories, and particularly access to educational advantage. The ability of this data set to highlight potential indications of change, as well as its reflection of differential socio-historical contexts increases its analytic strength in the context of the current study.

Finally, the last section reported on second year course marks comparing students who participate in the experience with those who did not. While the results did not demonstrate overwhelming differences, there was some suggestion that students who participated in the course received modestly higher academic marks over time. This evidence also contributes to the tentative suggestion, there might be something going on here.

## **5.8. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

This chapter presented four sets of interrelated data. It presented data describing: a) students' summative evaluation of the course experience; b) students' reading and writing experience as it articulated with the pedagogical architecture; c) students' discussion of how the course impacted them as a person associated with reading and writing; and (d) the analysis of second and third year course marks.

Depending upon the variable, between 70% and 90% of students agreed at the end of the course that the experience had been positive. Their assessment of the course climbed by just over 10% from the midterm to the final questionnaire.

By the end of the course, the three newer pedagogical forms (the Umzi, LKA Journal and the Jamboree) were more controversial than the more common forms (the Reader, Ekhaya and Village.) The most controversial activity element was the Umzi. Students were divided almost across the three categories (very useful, useful, and non useful.) Students with less access to historic educational privilege placed more value on the new pedagogical elements, particularly the Umzi and the LKA Journal than students with more access to educational privilege.

The second general linear model suggested that the course architecture had a significant effect over the learning experience of students. The Ekhaya had a significant effect over how students experienced their Umzi. The Village had a significant effect on students' reading and writing practice, their experience of the Umzi, and their overall evaluation of the impact of the course.

Students associated each of the learning levels with different yet overlapping activity. Each of the levels was associated with dialogic activity related to reading and writing, but the dialogic activity was described differently across levels. While dialogic activity relating to reading was ascribed across levels, dialogic activity ascribed to writing activity was largely confined to the Umzi. The Umzi, moreover, was associated with the widest range of learning activity.

70% of students indicated that the experience had 'changed them' as a person. Just over 80% claimed that their 'beliefs' had changed and that they had become a 'better person.' Again, students with less access to educational privilege (who spoke isiXhosa as a home language, attended 'normal' public schools, and whose parents had less access to education) made stronger claims than others. This study only considered this set of qualitative data to the extent that students spoke about their reading and writing activity. Students who mentioned reading and/or writing when they discussed how the course had 'impacted' them suggested that their experience of expanded reading and writing activity had influenced their narrative of Self. They suggested that they read and write more and more regularly. Many students suggested that the activity of reading and writing had become a 'habit' in their lives. They spoke again of expanding the breadth, fluency and creativity of their activity. They spoke about expanding complementary activities, including expression and widening critical capacities. Three new suggestions were more pronounced. They suggested that their confidence increased, their ways of thinking about 'life' changed in some way, and they had become people who participated more widely in the activities around them.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

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#### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

The primary research question facing this study is how critical pedagogical innovation focused on learning activity and meaning making can impact the patterns of learning activity, meaning making and agency of a group of first year undergraduate students in the context of one university in South Africa. The study is particularly interested in the potential impact of pedagogical innovation to transform the learning practice of students entering first year undergraduate studies with little access to quality educational scaffolding through their schooling experience.

As emphasised by the literature, it is highly unlikely that any first year semester course, no matter how effective, can, on its own, reverse the years of educational neglect internalised by many students. The literature strongly suggests that, in order for institutions of higher education to effectively serve the first year experience, a range of coordinated interventions are required, which serve to collectively re-focus the institution as a whole toward the teaching and learning domain (Astin, 1997; Barefoot, 2000; Yorke and Thomas, 2003). The more ambitious agenda of the innovation was indeed to seed a process of transformation of curricular culture of the institution more broadly. This potentiality will be briefly discussed in the postscript to this study. While this potential has been largely left unrealised in the current context, it may locate the most important work for the future.

It is theoretically possible, however, that a such a short lived experience begins to establish new patterns of activity and meaning making among first year students in ways that are generative into the future (Tinto, 1997). It is possible that these patterns of activity and meaning making increase students' sense of agency. It is possible that these shifts are the germs of more sustainable activity change if

supported over time. These potentialities frame the core questions facing this study. Using the conceptual tools provided by activity theory and a socio-cultural approach to education, this chapter seeks to explore this potentiality more carefully.

The questions facing this study imply that learning activity, meaning and learning agency can be approached separately. The theoretical tools presented in Chapter 2, however, emphasise their interrelationships. While this chapter will attempt to isolate these notions to some extent, the discussion is inherently both inseparable and inter-generative. The chapter begins by summarising the quantitative data suggesting that the majority of students consistently reported that the intervention impacted their learning practice in some way. The chapter will go on to understand better the way in which learning practice was changed, largely through tracing the transformation of student activity motive (Leontiev, 1978). This discussion provides an opportunity to reflect on the process of the transformation of motive and the tools that appear to be aligned to this process of transformation. The chapter will then consider whether the changes in activity and meaning making have contributed or not to an expansion of student agency.

## **6.2. IMPACT ON LEARNING ACTIVITY: QUANTITATIVE PATTERNS EMERGING**

The first question facing this study is whether the course had any impact on the learning activity of participating students. The quantitative data make two overarching suggestions. First, the majority of students claimed that participating in the course impacted their reading and writing activity. Second, students with less advantaged educational histories made stronger claims on the impact of the course than students with more educational advantage. This data are briefly explored here.

### **6.2.1. Course: Positive Impact on Learning Activity**

In terms of the quantitative data, the majority of students suggested that the course had a positive impact on their learning activity in general, and their reading and writing practice in particular. Upwards of 70% of students consistently suggested that the course directly impacted their learning activity in a positive way. They suggested that they read and wrote more frequently. They said their reading and writing had improved. They said that their interest in reading and writing had expanded.

There were two primary types of quantitative questions posed to probe student perceptions of learning activity through the questionnaires. The first type of question asked students to rate their 'ability' and 'interest' in each activity through a four point Likert scale before and after the course. The second type of question asked students whether they perceived the course to have changed their activity practice at the middle and the end of the course.

Bruner (1990, 1996) emphasises that the act of meaning making continually works to make sense of the 'exceptional' in the context of the 'ordinary' (1990, p. 47). As such, meaning making is both calibrated from and reflective of a canonical 'normal' individually and collectively imbued (*ibid*). Any engagement with a Likert scale, then, is reflective of both students' sense of 'the canonical ordinary' as well as students' interpretation of their ability in relationship to this 'ordinary'. If we assume that students' sense of 'ordinary' is roughly calibrated with 'good' (through the narrative structure, students at university are 'good' readers/writers), we will interpret the data differently than if we assume it is calibrated with 'very good'. Calibrated at 'good,' 50% of students calibrated their writing abilities within the notion of 'normal' before the course with 45% rating their abilities below 'normal'. By the end of the course, 70% of students rated their ability within the notion of 'normal' with only 5% rating their abilities as below 'normal'. They rated their reading abilities as slightly higher. 60% of students rated their reading ability at the normative 'good' both before and after the course. The quarter of the students who rated their reading practice as

'poor' before the course shifted to 'good' after the course. Another quarter who rated their practice as 'good' before the course rated their practice as 'very good' after the course.

The course experience can theoretically impact the way students approach this question in at least two ways. First, the course has the potential to shift a student's perception of his or her capacity in this activity area, calibrated to a relatively stable 'normal'. Second, the course can potentially shift a student's calibration of canonical 'ordinary'. Given that the normative background for first year students is largely defined by their secondary school experience, one 'positive' contribution of a learning experience theoretically could be to increase their expectations for 'ordinary'. In theory, if the course served to disrupt students' calibration of 'ordinary', and if this new 'ordinary' was imbued with a higher ability expectation, an 'effective' course experience may result in a lowering of self-rating, even if the student saw some positive change in his/her practice.

As an overall trend, however, students self-rating of their ability (and interest) either remained the same, or increased from the beginning to the end of the course. While this type of quantitative item does not lend itself well to deep interpretation, these patterns suggest that the experience had more impact on increasing students' assessment of their own ability, within a relatively stable understanding of 'normal' practice. To the extent that the experience had an impact on re-calibrating the notion of 'ordinary', there is little evidence that it was recalibrated at a significantly higher level.

The second type of quantitative data reflecting whether or not students' activity patterns changed took the form of students' perceptions of change associated with their participation in the course. In the midterm and the final questionnaire, students were asked whether they thought that their reading practice and writing practice had changed in any way through their participation in the course. Over 60% said their reading (65%) and writing (62%) practice had changed at the time of the midterm. This climbed to over 70% for reading (76%) and writing (71%) by the end of the

course. By the end of the course, over 80% of students indicated that the GP made them better readers (85%), and better writers (84%) and increased their interest in reading (85%) and writing (81%). The frequency only dropped marginally when the word 'love' was inserted into the question ('GP has helped me to start to love reading' (79%)).

The proposition that learning activity was changed in some way was also supported by the analysis of second and third year course marks. For the 2010 cohort, the course was suggested to have a significant influence over second year course marks for students within Campus B. While the results were less clear within Campus A, four out of the ten qualification cohorts (drawn from the 2009 and 2010 cohorts) suggested that students who had participated in the course had significantly higher second or third year marks. While these results are far from definitive, they support students' claims that the course may have had a positive influence on their learning practice.

### **6.2.2. Differentiated Impact**

The second overarching suggestion is that students with less access to previous socio-cultural educational advantage placed both more value on the course and made stronger claims about the course impacting their learning activity. Students whose home language was isiXhosa made stronger claims about their reading practice than students who had access to English in their home environment ( $p=0.003$ ). Students attending normal public schools made stronger claims than students who had attended Model C schools ( $p=0.026$ ). Students whose home language was isiXhosa ( $p=0.000$ ) as well as students whose parents had less access to education ( $p=0.019$ ) made stronger claims about their writing practice. Students whose home language was isiXhosa ( $p<0.009$ ) and who attended normal public schools ( $p<0.042$ ) made stronger claims in reference to the constructs that combined ability, interest and enjoyment of reading and writing practice. While the claim is only tentative, these data start to suggest that the tools of the course were

appropriated more effectively by students with less educational advantage. This thesis will be explored further through the discussion that follows.

There are two other student cohorts who made stronger claims both about the value of the course and its tools, as well as about the impact of the course on their learning practice. Both female students and the cohort of students from Zimbabwe (largely strong student recipients of a competitive state bursary) consistently responded to the experience in more positive terms. Neither the Zimbabwe cohort nor the female cohort demonstrated specific educational disadvantage in this study context. Both constituencies are considered to have a more marginal voice in the context of the current institutional culture (Soudien *et al*, 2008). While hypotheses can be made, it is beyond the scope of this study to understand why the tools of the study aligned themselves better to the particular experience of these student cohorts.

Another important quantitative pattern emerging was the differentiation by campus of course outcomes. Even while controlling for socio-economic and educational backgrounds, students from Campus A had dramatically poorer course outcomes than on Campus B. The course was designed so that students who chose to participate ('step in') at a reasonably high bar could receive distinctions. In theory, students should have been supported to avoid failure altogether. 72% of students from Campus B received distinction while only 47% from Campus A. 4% of students from Campus B failed the course while 16% of students from Campus A failed the course. The second and third generation activity theorists emphasise that activity – the relationship between subjects, tools and objects - is situated in nature. While any definitive explanation would require further analysis, it is likely that the intervention was supported through the structure of historic 'advantage' woven within Campus B. While emphasis is often placed on 'historic advantage' at the level of the individual, pedagogical work must better recognise the structure of 'disadvantage' that is reproduced at the level of the institution.

These findings raise more questions than they answer. Is it possible that in twelve weeks, a course can 'change' the reading and writing practice of over 60% of

students? Can it serve to authentically expand students' relationship with reading and writing, and particularly those who have inherited more fragile learning activity from the past? How was activity expanded? How was the activity motive transformed? What was the process of interaction between subject, tool and motive that was productive of this change? The following discussion engages these conclusions.

### **6.3. MEANING MAKING: TOOLS AND EXPANDING MOTIVE**

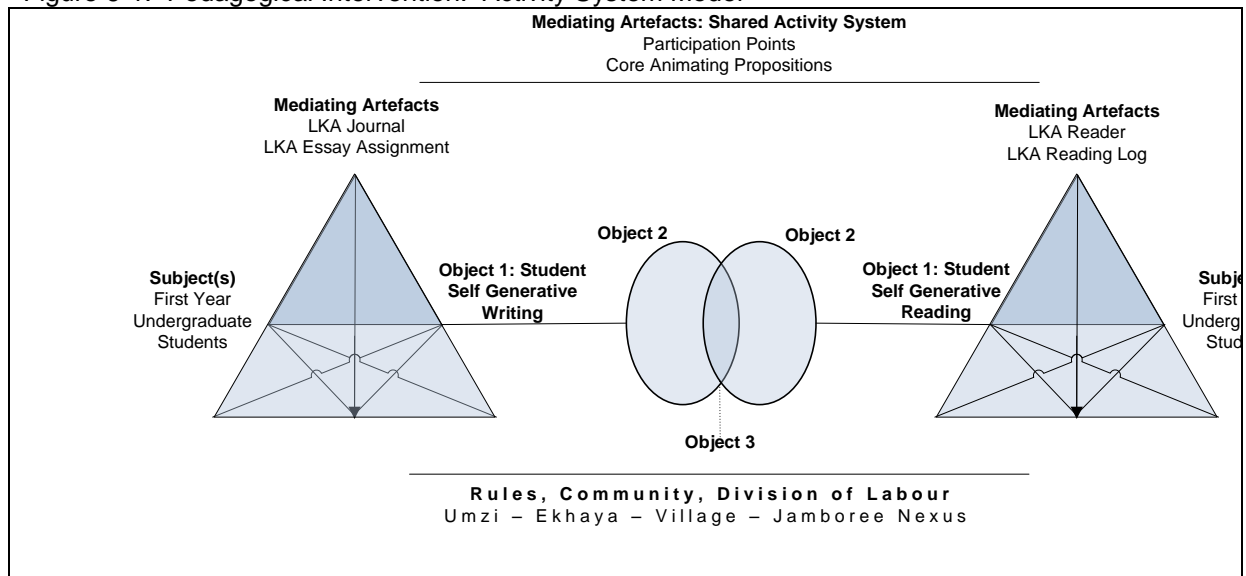
#### **6.3.1. Introduction**

The second half of Chapter 2 presented the theoretical tools at the centre of this study emanating from activity theory and a related socio-cultural approach to education. Activity theorists approach activity through the notion of mediation between the triad of subject, tool, and object (or motive) (Leontiev, 1978; Daniels, 2008). As an activity transforms, so its motive transforms (Leontiev, 1978). If a socio-cultural approach focuses on situated activity with an emphasis on motivation, then one must focus on the relationship between activity, intentional states and the cultural tools and systems available for interpretation (Bruner, 1990, 1996).

The pedagogical architecture at the centre of the study was described in Chapter 3. See Figure 6-1. Rather than a single mediating tool, scaffolding was provided by a system of mediating tools and artefacts, interacting within two activity systems – one defined by an expanding writing motive, and one defined by an expanded reading motive. While the process of meaning making is multidirectional and complex, this section explores the interaction between students, tools and expanding motive, focusing on common patterns emerging. Through this discussion we will consider the meaning making at the interface of first year students, the architectural tools and the object of each activity in interaction. Rather than discussing the tools sequentially, they will be discussed in the context of a discussion of meaning making. That is, informed by the work of Leontiev and other activity theorists, the

discussion will focus on the process of expansion of the activity motive associated with reading and writing. Tools will be discussed as they interact with motive transformation.

Figure 6-1: Pedagogical Intervention: Activity System Model



### 6.3.2. The Activity of Avoidance

By the end of the course, students shared a more open and critical process of reflection about their reading and writing activity before the course. The discussion below suggests the relationship between the expansion of activity and motive of students mediated through expansive agential encounters. The narratives of students suggest that it is only when students have started to expand their activity and motive in this way, and have experienced some of the 'safety' of the territory beyond activity avoidance, are they released into a space with more freedom to discuss their lack of writing practice in the past. Before then, students and their socio-cultural context construct a complicit 'normal' that reproduces the *status quo* ('I am fine'; 'I write ok'). Only once students experience the expansion of motive, that a new psychic space opens, able to interact more lightly with the experience of activity fragility from the recent past ('I can actually admit it now that before the LKA my writing was very much poor for my level').

Students suggest that before the course they largely avoided the activity of reading and writing beyond academic survival ('I was the kind of person who read only when there is going to be a test'; 'to be honest I never really wrote before'). By the end of the course, the motive had expanded in a number of ways. That is, from the beginning to the end of the course, the 'motive' for the activity of reading and writing had shifted from a more contracted form (tightly aligned with academic survival) to a more expanded form. Several questions emerge. How did the motive transform over time? What tools served to reproduce, expand or contract the motive over time?

Socio-cultural psychologists have done extensive work on activity avoidance, attempting to better understand the workings of motivation. They suggest that whether a human being is actively motivated and engaged or more passively motivated, detached, or alienated is largely a function of the socio-cultural conditions in which they enact their lives (Ryan and Deci, 2000). While suggesting that high levels of motivation, curiosity and creativity appear to be a 'natural state' of healthy children from birth (Ryan, 1995), the maintenance and growth of this propensity requires supportive conditions and is readily disrupted by non-supportive conditions (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Approached through the theoretical tools of activity theorists, like any activity, the 'activity of avoidance' reflects its motive (Leontiev, 1978.) Its motive is reflected in a narrative formation ('I am not interested'; 'it is boring'; 'I do not like') (Bruner, 1996, pp. 45-50). Consistent with the work of Ryan and Deci (2000), Bruner (1996) suggests that our narrative of 'Self' is extremely sensitive to agential encounters (1996, pp. 36-39). Our integrated socially reasonable 'Self' requires a sense of capacity for the completion of intended acts. When we do not have agential encounters (particularly with reference to socially valued activity) we (individually and collectively) construct alternative narratives that compensate by providing us with another form of agency ('it is boring'; 'I do not like to'; 'I am not the reading kind of person'; 'I am the verbal type, not the writing type'). This narrative shifts the motive

for the activity, relegating the activity away from the domain of 'intended acts'. Un-agency with activities that are not 'intended' is less dangerous to an agential notion of 'Self'. A 'new move' (used to indicate both intending to write or read again, and taking the risk to act purposefully again) represents dangerous psychic territory.

The history of inequitable education has made the territory even more encumbered. First, the philosophical orientation toward education has placed little emphasis on learner autonomy. The implicit suggestion emerging from the apartheid educational inheritance is that learning 'ability' is a reflection of innate capability rather than a reflection of participation in well structured learning activity (Kalloway, 1984; Eiselen and Geyser, 2006). Second, learning resources of competence, autonomy and relatedness in the context of learning have been distributed unequally. The conditions for achieving any of these three self-generative seeds for human motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000) are secure for only a small number of largely middle class children. Combined, this legacy establishes dangerous territory for a student (with little prior access to sound educational tools) who 'intends' again. First this student has little experience of autonomy to provide buoyancy. Second, if a student 'intends again' and does not come upon an agential encounter, this student's tools of meaning making are narrowed, bringing her to the dangerous psychic possibility of affirming the dominant suggestion ('you do not belong here'.) We see this in the discourse that emerges when students emerge from the dangerous territory, speaking to this dominant suggestion with declarations of success like 'it shows 'em''.

The territory is even more treacherous in the higher education landscape within a highly inequitable education system such as that in South Africa. The 'normative' expectations (implicitly held, for example, by lecturers) are calibrated less through local student praxis, and more through dispersed hegemonic higher education 'folk psychologies' calibrated to an imaginative middle class potential, extracted from local accountability. As such, the magnitude of deviance between what is 'real' and what is canonically expected is particularly wide for students who come from less

advantaged educational contexts. The act of avoidance (both individually and collectively) is a much less dangerous move.

As suggested in the international literature (Barefoot, 2000, p. 18), the act of avoidance is enacted by both students and lecturers. Having a canonical 'ordinary' calibrated to a middle class global context, with few tools to support students to mediate more effective practice from where they are at, there are a range of narrative and activity practices adopted by lecturers to 'make sense' and 'hold together' their world. These practices are often aligned to different forms of collective avoidance, such as never requiring students to re-write papers until they have achieved a specific level of achievement. The 'activity avoidance' of lecturers will be discussed more in the conclusion to this study.

### **6.3.3. The 'New Move'**

Given the inherent risk we are asking students to take, finding powerful enough tools to mediate authentic movement beyond activity avoidance (what will be referred to as a 'new move') is pedagogically significant. How did students make this move? What are the tools (and meaning making processes associated with these tools) strong enough to support students cross this treacherous territory?

#### **6.3.3.1. The 'New Move' and the Activity of Writing**

In terms of writing, students primarily point to the experience of the LKA Journal as mediating their 'new move'. Across the course, students place special emphasis on their experience with the LKA Journal. As discussed in Chapter 3, the LKA Journal was an A4 Notebook, imbued with a challenge of writing one page every day. Points were earned for each day a student wrote a full page. Students made more mention of the LKA Journal by name than any other tool. By the end of the course, almost one quarter of students identified the LKA Journal as either their favourite or second

favourite course element – placing their experience with the LKA Journal above the easily accessible movie and Jamboree.

The experience of students was neither linear nor uncontested. While just shy of 80% of students indicated that the journal had become an important part of their lives, almost 45% of students said that it was too much work and should be eliminated from the course. Approximately 80% of students said that they intended to continue writing in their Journal after the course, while only 30% indicated a strong intention to do so. Students who spoke English as their 'home language' wrote significantly more pages in their LKA Journal than other students. Students from Campus B (representing more educational advantage) wrote significantly more pages than Campus A. However, it was neither English speaking students nor students from Campus B who placed the most value on the tool of the LKA Journal. Despite writing quantitatively fewer pages, isiXhosa speaking students and students whose parents had less access to formal education indicated that the LKA Journal was more useful and had more value in their lives. They were also more likely to indicate that they intended to continue to write in their LKA Journal after the course. Similarly, students from Campus A placed more value on the journal experience. While the suggestion can only be made tentatively, the LKA Journal as a tool, and the learning activity and meaning making that emerged through it, appears to be more strongly appropriated by students who have had less access to educational advantage.

What made the LKA Journal suitable scaffolding to support students across the treacherous territory toward the 'new move'? There are at least five suggestions emerging.

First, the interface of participation points and the LKA Journal aligned with student's contracted motive in reference to writing activity at the beginning of the course (Lompscher, 1999, p. 140.) While writing in the LKA Journal was framed as an invitation (emphasising autonomy), there were 'extrinsic rewards' attached to the act of writing. As such, at the beginning of the course, many students wrote in order to

earn participation points in order to pass the course ('because I was forced to write...'; '[it] made me get used to'). The motive ascribed at this level is not only the least expansive but potentially the most dangerous. The combination of external rewards and imposed goals are, left to their own devices, likely to increase externalised locale of causality, and therefore undermine motivation in the long term (Deci and Ryan, 2000, p. 70).

Second, the LKA Journal (combined with the participation points) served to make a confrontation with the 'new move' maximally explicit. Interested in the process of mastery, the work of Gal'perin (1969) suggests that the first stage of internalisation toward the process of mastery is a process of familiarisation with a task and its conditions. He suggests that this phase requires making an external action maximally explicit (1969, pp. 249-273). While this is usually applied to a new learning task, it is arguably applicable to the task of re-confronting the activity of writing. The LKA Journal and the participation points served to establish a material representation for the day to day writing activity. When a student wrote, it is externalised as a page, which is further externalised into a point. When a student does not write, it is externalised into a non-point. As such, the participation point-LKA Journal nexus served to materialise the act of doing, delinked from the expectations of achieving writing quality at perceived normative standards. As such, the LKA Journal helped to establish a confrontation between the subject and the activity itself, externalising the many narrative forms that support activity avoidance at the moment of writing. As such, the contracted meaning making ('I write only to pass') is externalised as material for engagement.

Third, the tool itself was imbued with accessible but expanding activity potential. At the beginning, 'success' simply required the physical process of writing one page every day. The students were told that they 'win' (even had 'honour') with reference to the LKA Journal even if they were to write 'I don't have anything to say' enough times to fill up one page. The more expansive acts of writing were contained within the germ of the process of physically writing more, interacting with the expansive

potential imbued within the critical animating propositions and the Umzi. While the activity was immediately accessible, the bar was set high, expecting students to write every day. The structure of the tool was both aligned to students' learning activity, corresponding to what Lompscher calls students' 'subjective prerequisites', placing special emphasis on their own relationships to learning strategy (Lompscher, 1999, p. 140). Consistent with the literature on conditions conducive to first year student success (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1997; Barefoot, 2000, p. 17), the tool at the same time increased expectations for student achievement, supporting students to make new meaning of a 'high bar' (in this case, writing every day a page or more).

The fourth way the LKA Journal was structured to promote a 'new move' was its alignment to the meaning making potential imbued within the critical animating propositions. For some students the propositions actively supported the 'new move' ('I felt inspired to...'), for others they operated more as a background meaning making potential. The propositions expanded the meaning making tools beyond hegemonic narratives of non-agency. They served to make explicit the social basis for internalised activity avoidance. They delinked activity from notions of individualised deficit settled within subjective narratives of destiny ('I am not the writing type'). Moreover, they placed historical meaning on student learning practice, viewed through a critical historical lens. They externalised and confronted both the internalised discourse of 'I am not a writer' and 'my writing practice does not matter'. As such, students wrote because it was suggested to be both possible and important.

Finally, the LKA Journal was well structured to be appropriated as a cultural tool for the students who had a positive experience of building their Umzi. Many students took some time to establish their Umzi. As such, the Umzi appears to have played a stronger role in expanding the writing motive *over time* as opposed to mediating the initial new move, as discussed below. However, the socially rich potential for writing activity imbued within the Umzi, appears to have contributed to creating a socio-

cultural backdrop more conducive to the 'new move' for at least some students ('LKA has taught me or force me to read as we had to read every time we meet as umzi').

Taken together, the motivation to make a 'new move' appears to have been primarily mediated by the LKA Journal and the participation points, with an early backdrop of potential 'inspiration' (propositions) and 'relatedness' (for my Umzi.) Whether motivated by force, inspiration and/or relatedness, the meaning made of the LKA Journal interacting with these other artefacts, appears to be strong enough to help the majority of students to mediate across the dangerous psychic territory represented by the 'new move'. For many students this was the first time to engage in the act of writing as a regular practice.

#### 6.3.3.2. The 'New Move' and the Activity of Reading

If the LKA Journal was the central part of the toolkit capable of supporting the initial 'new move' for writing activity, what was the toolkit capable of mediating the initial 'new move' in relationship to reading activity?

Pedagogically, it was much more difficult to establish the basis for participation points in reference to reading. The LKA Journal leant itself to the notion of participation points; each page separated by a date provided the material representation for one point. Building a tool that could help to externalise (and make explicit) the process of reading that was also productive of expanding reading activity was more difficult. Indeed, the structures of the activity of reading and writing are different in part because the process of externalisation is different.

Building upon the work of strategic reading (Billmeyer, 2004), a strategic reading tool (LKA Reading Log) was built that had two main objectives. First, it helped to externalise the act of reading, establishing a basis for allocation of participation points, and the basis for stimulating discussion of reading content within the Umzi. Second, the LKA Reading Log represented an educational scaffold to support students to enact more strategic reading. It supported students to externalise the

process of establishing intentions, guessing, reflecting and summarising through the externalised practice of writing, before, during and after the processes of reading (*ibid*).

Students were much less clear about the specific tool that supported their 'new move' with reference to the act of reading. Students pointed to their experience with the LKA Reading Log, but it was much more muted than their experience with the LKA Journal. Four tentative suggestions can be made. First, it appears that students pointed to the high expectations for reading imbued across the tools as the scaffolding responsible for changing their practice over time ('LKA has taught me or force me to read as we had to read every time we meet as umzi. Getting used to reading helped me to improve my reading skills'; 'because LKA is based on reading so it boost my readings'). Second, it appears that the experience of the 'new move' with reference to writing in the LKA Journal may have established the conditions for a 'new move' in reading over time. The experience of the LKA Journal appears to have transformed the motivation not only toward writing, but also toward learning activity more generally. Viewed through the work of Ryan and Deci (2000), the LKA Journal seems to have contributed to a sense of competency and autonomy required to shift patterns of intrinsic motivation more widely. Already, the two 'objects' of the activity system interact, creating an expanded object with its own logic and structure. See Figure 6-1 above. Fourth, it appears that the 'new move' in reference to reading may have been less explicit and more gradual. That is, for many students, it appears that the 'new move' was enacted more gradually, reflecting the interaction of tools and the meaning making and social potential imbued within the course architecture as a whole, as discussed below.

#### **6.3.4. Reproduction and Expansion of Motive: Capable Tools**

After familiarisation with the task and its conditions, the next phase of internalisation emerging from the work of Gal'perin (1969, p. 250) is what some would call 'practice,' namely activity based on material objects or their material representations.

As emphasised by the work of Leontiev (1978), in order to sustain an activity over time, the motive must either renew or expand itself through the process of the activity. That is, the expansion of motive is not a one-off requirement. Motive can easily re-contract unless it is continually renewed and, especially, before it settles into a somewhat more static intentional state. The scaffolding that supports the initial move away from activity avoidance is not necessarily the same scaffolding that is capable of renewing and expanding the motive over time.

#### 6.3.4.1. Expansive Agential Encounters

The first expansion of motive that appears in students' narratives appears to be from its most contracted form ('it's not me'/'I don't like') to an ability claim. That is, students claim 'I see that I can' or 'I am now able'. While the process is inherently multidirectional, the claim of 'I can' or 'I am able now' appears to mostly *precede* the potential emergence of expanded claims, as discussed below. That is, it appears that the expansion of motive is first dependent upon an 'agential encounter' of some sort.

Student narratives make it possible to hypothesise about the structure of an agential encounter strong enough to expand motive over time. Student accounts suggest that an agential encounter is an explicit experience of learning autonomy, associated with a competence that is both meaningful and socially valuable. An examination of each constituent part of the structure of an expansive agential encounter is informative. First, the experience must be explicit. That is, students must experience the 'improvement' for themselves, in an externalised form. The experience must be explicit enough to stand out from learning-practice-as-normal. Bruner's work on cultural framing suggests that if the learning experience is not explicit enough, it is often lost to memory altogether (1990, p. 56). Further, it is the 'exceptional' nature of the experience that places it in front of a new round of meaning making, as the mind engages in the ongoing task of integrating the 'extraordinary' with potentially transforming 'normative'. Second, the experience has

to be structured with enough potential for ‘mastery’ to begin to disrupt the internalised narrative of un-agency<sup>24</sup>. That is, it must be ‘experienced’ as an experience of autonomy, whereby one is able to repeat it independently (execute it anew) with new material to produce a different result (Gal’perin, 1969, p. 250). An experience that qualifies is not necessarily profound. The experiences discussed by students ranged from expanded relationships at the level of words to expanded writing fluency and speed.

Student narratives appear to suggest that an ‘agential encounter’ is not merely an experience of learning autonomy, but also is constituted by its social meaning making potential. The ‘competence’ itself must be the object of new meaning making and social value. If an area of ‘competence’ has been unavailable, the human is able to protect agential claim by relegating it away from meaningfulness, as discussed above. An ‘agential encounter’ appears to increase in strength as a student ‘experiences autonomy’ and, at the same time, is given the tools to re-imbue significance (or imbue new wider significance) on the competence itself. This seemingly requires the confluence of three elements. First, it takes the form of exposure to a wider meaning making kit. Bruner suggests this to take the form of an immersion in the ‘world of possibility’ (Bruner, 1996, p. 41). For critical theorists, this takes the form of opening up meaning making beyond the hegemonic toolkit (Giroux, 2009; hooks, 1994). As Wertsch (1991, p. 126) suggests, it is only when confronted with a comparative set of meanings that one becomes aware of ‘an imaginable alternative’.

Second, such an agential encounter requires opportunities for conscious reflection (Wertsch, 1991, p. 126) or what Leontiev (1978) calls ‘consciousness of consciousness’. As suggested by the work of Leontiev, an agential encounter ‘becomes one’s own’ (and the potential object for externalisation) when the ‘production of cultural artefacts’ is brought into processes of conscious reflection. Thirdly, an expansive agential encounter appears to both sustain itself and expand

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<sup>24</sup> The use of the term un-agency in this study will be discussed in the closing chapter.

through the opportunity to build an alternative culture (a new sense of ‘community’), however small, whereby the toolkit is enacted upon socially.

This hypothesis of the structure of an ‘agential encounter’ capable of renewing motive over time largely reflects the work of Ryan and Deci (2000) who suggest that intrinsic motivation is expanded through experiences that increase a student’s sense of competence, autonomy and relatedness. However, rather than considering competence, autonomy and relatedness as separate realms, these students suggest that an expansive agential encounter encompasses each of these elements within a common experience over time.

#### 6.3.4.2. Tools and Expansionary Agential Encounters

The discussion then suggests that tools that are capable of expanding learning activity motive over time, contribute in some way toward expansionary agential encounters. The LKA Journal and LKA Reading Log were both capable of contributing toward expansionary agential encounters in some way, as discussed above. While some students experienced agential encounters at the interface of these tools in isolation, far more pointed to the interface between these tools and the backdrop of meaning making and relatedness created through other elements of the course architecture, especially the animating propositions, the pedagogical architecture, and the LKA Reader. The experience of these tools will be reviewed below.

- Critical Animating Propositions

Activity theorists appreciate the role of historically established patterns of socio-cultural practice and accept that power is unequally distributed across activity systems (Daniels, 2008, pp. 97-98, 127). However, there has been little work amongst activity theorists focusing on the hegemonic socio-cultural inheritances of

colonialism as they intersect with contemporary patterns of capitalist accumulation to undermine the agential potential of local spaces.

As such, the pedagogical intervention looked toward critical education theory and postcolonial theorists to suggest symbolic tools that may assist learners to experience socio-cultural space beyond the hegemonic suggestion of un-agency. The use and development of the notion of 'un-agency' will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. The propositions themselves emerge at the interface of critical education theory (Freire, 1970; Gramsci, 1971; Giroux 1997, 2009; hooks, 2003, 1994; McLaren, 2009), and postcolonial theory (wa Thiongo, 1986; Said, 1993; Fanon, 1961) and the praxis of the students within the Grounding Programme Student Round Table (GPSRT) summarised in the introductory chapter.

As emphasised by Bruner (1996), the toolkit for meaning making emerges from the culture in which we participate. The animating propositions expanded the meaning making tools available to students to engage more critically in the structural and narrative inheritances of a deeply divided and violent past. They suggested that the boundaries of the culture in which we participate may be less aligned to the interests of the majority of the people, and more aligned to the interests of a highly un-equalising past.

In their essence, the propositions make four suggestions that potentially expand the meaning making tools available to students. First, they suggest that the present is a reflection of historical inheritances, and is largely reproductive of an unequal past. Second, access to socially valuable activity (like reading and writing) is largely an inheritance of a highly un-equalising socio-historical process rather than a reflection of inherent individual capacity. Third, students with less access to educational advantage have the agency to re-constitute practice. Finally, they suggest that student learning praxis is significant for the transformation of society into the future ('our collective future'), both individually and collectively imbued. This is not simply some subjective exercise of postmodern meaning making. The propositions essentially back-map activity theory's dialectical understanding of historical process

with Engeström's (1999) tools for expansive learning (a critical and dialectical stance toward the past and present as a mechanism for more broadly creating new tools into the future) onto the fabric of society.

As such, it intimated that in a 'postcolonial' context the objective for public institutions of higher education cannot be only to support individualised learning practice, but to support students who see themselves as having a role in the reconstitution of society in the interests of the country as more widely constituted.

The propositions had two subjects: course designers and participating students. In terms of the pedagogical design team (and the wider influence of the institutional community), this symbolic toolkit was designed to mediate activity away from the dominant notions of remediation, moral regeneration and skills development toward a more expansive learning horizon valuing the generative (if unpredictable) potential of student activity. In terms of participating students, the animating propositions were designed to provide an expansive toolkit capable of mediating student meaning making beyond the narratives of local 'un-agency' (see discussion below) imbued within dominant global hegemonic narratives. Because the propositions were generative rather than prescriptive, trusting of student agency rather than concerned about their behaviour or morality, they appear to have the potential for expansive and multidirectional meaning making as they are mediated across different individuals and collectives, each embodying different socio-cultural histories.

- Pedagogical Architecture: Umzi-Ekhaya-Village-Jamboree Nexus

Research on the conditions conducive to first year student success places overwhelming emphasis on two domains, the domain of student-student interaction and the domain of student-lecturer interaction (Astin, 1993; Barefoot, 2000). The research suggests that placing emphasis on restructuring the opportunities for peer to peer and student to lecturer interactions may hold the most promise for reconstituting the first year student experience (Austin, 1993, pp. 8-9; Barefoot,

2000, p.15). In the earlier research (Tinto, 1987), emphasis was placed on the social integration of students within the 'culture' of the institution. Emphasis was also placed on expanding student to student as well as student to lecturer interaction (separately and together) especially within co-curricular opportunities. Over time, emphasis was shifted to the alignment of curricular and co-curricular programmes (Barefoot, 2000). Finally, emphasis shifted more centrally to the academic domain, pointing to the potential for integrating the academic and social domain into a unitary pedagogical project, often discussed under the banners of 'cooperative learning' and 'learning communities' (Tinto, 1997; Astin, 1993).

Second generation activity theorists emphasise that the nature of activity is situated. They emphasise that any activity is situated in a specific socio-cultural space, reflecting a community, set of rules and division of labour. This culture (whether small or large) impacts not only the subjects *per se*, but the tools and motive. Moreover, in any given context, practice as historically constructed, presently enacted, and how it may be potentially enacted in the future is theoretically available at any given time. The extent to which these potentialities are drawn upon is determined by the convergence of the tools available at any given point in time.

The pedagogical intervention was made up of several tools that sought to mediate expanded learning practice, as well as a number of tools that sought to *directly redefine the 'culture' in which activity was enacted*. The Umzi, Ekhaya, Village, and Jamboree were the toolkit built as collective scaffolding designed to support the transformation of the learning community itself.

A full discussion of this nexus falls outside of this study. Even the limited data presented, however, suggest the importance of the architecture in relationship to activity transformation. Five observations are tentatively extracted about the ways in which this pedagogical architecture contributed toward expanding motive for reading and writing activity over time.

The final stages of internalisation identified through the work of Gal'perin (1969, p. 250) involve the interaction between externalised dialogue and internal speech.

While this study is not designed to explore the dynamics of transformation of internal speech, activity theorists have placed emphasis on the relationship between appropriation and dialogue, and the process of making a tool one's own (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293-4). Activity theorists place emphasis on the interface of dialogue and conscious reflection (Wertsch, 1991, p. 126; Leontiev, 1978). The first suggestion emerging from the experience with the pedagogical architecture is that they established qualitatively different kinds of dialogue, interacting with learning activity in different ways. As discussed in the previous chapter, students discussed the purpose and experience of the levels of the architecture differently. The majority of students pointed to the Umzi as a space for more intimate peer to peer discussion. They discussed accountability and support for reading and writing on the one hand, and establishing relationships and a sense of belonging on the other. Students associate the Ekhaya with a sense of intimacy and belonging, as well as gaining a somewhat wider perspective on discussions of reading content. The generative potential within the Ekhaya seems to be a reconstitution of the structure for interaction and dialogue between first year students and more senior students (Barefoot, 2000). As suggested by the work of Yorke and Thomas, students appear to have valued the Umzi and Ekhaya as spaces capable of fostering a sense of belonging (Yorke and Thomas, 2003, p. 67). The dialogue at the level of the Village was qualitatively different. While some students imply that it quickly regenerated into a more traditional one-way monologue, at its best it allowed students to engage with lectures in a new way, as lecturers attempted to seriously engage students' questions to broaden the emerging learning horizon. Across these levels, students suggest that the architecture started to establish the conditions Leontiev (1978) suggests are required for externalisation namely, when the subject is able to consciously reflect on his/her activity within a community that is symbolically involved with the activity.

The second tentative suggestion is that there were important structural limits to the dialogic activity, reflecting the interface of the socio-cultural conditions and pedagogical potential. Critical theorists (Giroux, 2009; McLaren, 2009) place

emphasis on critique and critical consciousness. Like other critical theorists, Giroux argues that because day to day meaning making is located at the nexus of the domain of the unconscious and the domain of the 'common sense', it is only through the activity of critique (the act of building a critical consciousness) that humans can expand their tools of meaning making beyond hegemonic interests. The data suggest that students described dialogue with an emphasis on establishing a sense of safety and care. They used words like 'sharing' and 'support' far more than words like 'critique' and 'debate'. While these words are not mutually exclusive, the data suggest that the dialogue through this period remained mostly at the level of building a sense of belonging conducive to participation, and may not have been well constructed during this period for the act of debate and critique.

The third suggestion emerging is that the smaller the architectural unit, the more often students discussed the unit in reference to reading and writing activity. Just shy of 20% of students organically referred to reading or writing when they spoke about the purpose of the Umzi. This dropped to 10% in relation to the Ekhaya, falling to 5% in relation to the Village. The patterns were even more differentiated in relation to discussing writing as an activity. At the Umzi, two thirds of the answers referred to writing and one third of these referred to writing independently of reading. For the Ekhaya, writing was only mentioned in association with reading. At the level of the Village, there was no mention of writing. This may not be necessarily an expression of the structural form *per se*, but rather the meaning and activity responsibilities imbued within this nested architecture.

While there was almost no mention of reading and writing in association with the Jamboree, there is no question that the Jamboree contributed to the meaning making process of students, both individually and collectively. The way in which the Jamborees served students to both 'express' and 'discover' their 'talents', as well as served to link academic activity with student culture more organically deserves more attention. Moreover, the way in which the Jamboree supports the production of 'group works' or 'collective oeuvres' to constitute community and build upon solidarity, as suggested by Bruner (1996, pp. 22-25), deserves further study too.

The fourth observation relates to the significant influence each of these levels had on each other, as well as on the reading and writing activity of students. The second general linear model sought to explore whether or not dependent variables were influenced significantly by these pedagogical levels. Due to the large number of imizi, emphasis was placed on the exploration of the influence of the Ekhaya and Village levels. Four observations emerge. The Ekhaya had a significant influence over how the Umzi was experienced by students. The Village had a significant influence over how both the Ekhaya and the Umzi were experienced. The Village had a significant influence over two of the five constructs related to reading and/or writing. While the Village did not impact the construct relating to the LKA Journal, it had significant influence over the average number of days a student wrote in the LKA Journal.

A thorough investigation of the mechanisms of influence is beyond the scope of the study. There are at least two complementary hypotheses. The Village (and Ekhaya) represented a specific organisational sub-population of lecturers, abakhwezeli and administrative interns. The first hypothesis is that this sub-population had different relationships with and understanding of the pedagogical innovation and mediating tools themselves. As such, they were able to mediate the activity and the act of student meaning of the course in qualitatively different ways. That is, these levels represented different 'universes' of meaning making and conceptual support. Alternatively, these sub-populations represented different organisational/administrative capacities. That is, Villages represented different universes of administrative and organisational support. This suggests that students' reading and writing experience is sensitive to either the quality of meaning making and conceptual support and/or the administrative support ascribed by the architectural levels within which it is embedded.

The final suggestion emanating out of the experience is the particularly generative potential of the Umzi. The students who discussed reading or writing activity in relationship to pedagogical levels, discussed both reading and writing most strongly

in association with their Umzi experience. Students' experiences of the Umzi were highly divided. Approximately one third of students did not manage to meet successfully with their Umzi; their comments expressed deep frustration. The students who did manage to meet regularly had a positive, and at times, effusive experience ('my umzi I love them to bits!'). The Umzi experience was considered particularly valuable by students with less access to educational advantage (especially students participating in normal public schools).

The students who associated their Umzi experience with their reading and writing practice in some way established five relationships. First, they associated the purpose of the Umzi with sharing with each other from their 'LKA Journals'. These students established a supportive enough space to hold this inherently vulnerable activity. Second, they spoke about holding each other 'accountable' for reading and writing in their Journal through the distribution of participation points. Third, they spoke about encouraging and supporting each other to read and write. Fourth, they indicated that the Umzi was the place to discuss and expand their understanding of the reading material, indicating further that the discussions within the Umzi became the 'content' from which they drew to write their LKA Journal. Finally, they spoke of expansive improvements at the level of word meaning through their engagement with the Umzi Dictionary. Many students appear to have had their first expansive experience with a dictionary during the course, mediated by their Umzi. For some students, the Umzi represented an experience that brought a sense of competency, autonomy and relatedness into an integrated agential encounter.

The experience of students appears to support Austin's (1993, p. 4) hypothesis that evidence of potential impact of cooperative learning innovations resides, at least in part, through increasing the time students expend on academic activity, both because peers begin to hold each other accountable for learning activity and because they sense a certain amount of responsibility for the learning success of their peers.

The experience makes a few tentative additional suggestions. First, it suggests that the experience of building a successful Umzi (a ‘high bar’ challenge) represented an agential encounter unto itself for some students. It appears to have represented an agential encounter in Ryan and Deci’s (2000) domain of relatedness. Second, it suggest that the dialogic activity within the Umzi assisted students in taking advantage of expanded meaning making tools to transform the motive for learning activity. Finally, it suggests that both the ‘Umzi’ and ‘Ekhaya’ represented the germ of a new cultural experience for some. They both appeared to bring the act of reading out of a more privatised realm (with the Umzi bringing both reading and writing out of a more privatised realm.) Both appear to provide a new experience in building community, sharing and building upon an alternative set of meaning making tools.

- The LKA Reader

The LKA Reader appears to have contributed to the expansion of motive in two ways. For some, it contributed to an expanding agential encounter because the reading experience itself appeared to be better aligned with their zone of proximal development than other reading experiences (‘because I learned how to read big words in imithamo. It was my best reading ever’). For others, the readers appear to have been valuable in their ability to engage with the critical propositions.

As was discussed in Chapter 3, one of the most contentious processes of pedagogical development was in relationship to the LKA Reader. If the ‘Reader’ was, theoretically, to exist within the zone of proximal development of the ‘normal’ student, what did that mean in terms of content, complexity, length and style? If the goal was both to increase reading activity and to increase the act of student meaning making in reference to reading, what role does content, complexity, length and style play? The views amongst and between academic development staff and lecturers were divergent. As discussed in Chapter 3, this divergence, in theory, was to be bridged by an iterative process of engagement between interested and feisty

students on the one hand, and a group of interested lecturers on the other. In reality, some of the material was developed through this method, and some was not.

Students had a more complex and mixed relationship with the LKA Reader than the 'LKA Journal'. At the time of the midterm, 20% of students strongly agreed with the statement, 'I did not read very much in the Readers of the GP'. This *increased* to 25% by the end of the course. By the end of course just shy of one third of the students considered the 'Reader' 'very useful', while over one half were less committal, indicating it was 'useful'. A small group of students (13%) said it was not useful. Students whose home language was isiXhosa, who came from public non-Model C schools, and whose parents had less access to further education rated the 'Reader' as more useful than others. Students who had access to English in their home environment thought that the 'Readers' were more 'boring' than other students.

The question of length and complexity of the 'Reader' was contested. While 30% of students at the midterm thought that the 'Reader' was 'too difficult', this decreased to 15% by the end of the course. Across the qualitative data, there was a stronger indication of feeling 'overloaded' by the reading load of the course by some students ('you, LKA, give us too much to read').

Some of the most interesting data on the LKA Reader emerged through students' discussion of their favourite and least favourite reading in the course. In the final questionnaire, students were asked to write in their favourite reading in the course. Most students wrote in the 'umthamo,' representing the module (set of readings) for a particular theme. As discussed in Chapter 4, by far the most favourite reading came from the last umthamo, which provided an opportunity for students to engage in a discussion about the interface of living, loving and learning. There are at least three alternative explanations for students' preference for this material. First, it may have been identified simply because it was the most recent reading material. Second, its content was simpler than others, containing shorter essays, more inspirational in nature. As such, it could be that the complexity, length and form were

more aligned with students' reading practices. Thirdly, it may be that the notions of 'living', 'loving' and 'learning' are better aligned for appropriation by students.

Bakhtin's (1981) work emphasises the process of appropriation of language. He suggests the difficult conditions through which 'a word' becomes 'one's own'. His work suggests that not all words 'submit equally easily to appropriation'. The appropriation of a word (or a tool) requires the speaker to adapt it to her own expressive intention. While some words, concepts and tools stubbornly resist transformation into the internal plane, others are more accessible – somehow more aligned with the socio-cultural plane that bounds a person within her specific time, space and process of meaning making (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293-4). Focus was placed throughout the early processes of engagement with the Student Round Table to find words, concepts and other tools that were both relatively unoccupied and stimulated a certain level of spontaneous dialogic energy among students. The emergence of this kind of energy was taken as a signpost for the emergence of tools with appropriate and generative potential. That is, not only are they 'accessible' for appropriation, but they are not overly occupied by prescriptive directions or rules. Moreover, they were thought to be expansive in some way, mediating activity beyond a hegemonising plane. These tools took different forms – from critical animating propositions to mediating tools. They also took the form of words. They were words like: 'being-human', 'a life well-lived', 'being alive', 'life', 'liberation', 'knowledge', 'action', 'love' and 'collective future'. It is suggested that one of the reasons this umthamo generated the most interest is because it sat on a generative fault line of concepts well aligned for expansive articulation.

The first and second imithamo were imbued most strongly with the critical propositions of the course. The readings of the first umthamo laid out critical propositions, in an essay entitled, 'The Invitation, the Monster and the Love Letter' (Porteus, 2011). Together with an interview of Ayi Kwei Armah (a well known essayist and critical intellectual concerned with pan-African agency), the second umthamo laid out the activity challenge of the course, presenting the daily rituals of

an 'engaged African scholar' (Porteus, Gilbert, Mpofo, Mnyanda, Ngalo and Mkhuzo, 2011.) Imbued with the critical propositions, these essays were focused on the notion of a critical stance toward history, and the re-constitution of social agency (and imagination) through activity in the present. Across students, these were the most common essays to be cited by name. Students whose home language was isiXhosa cited these umthamo as their favourite more than their English home language counterparts.

The least favourite umthamo reading, on the other hand, was the material associated with the environment, science and society. This was the only umthamo that was not framed by the founding lecturer-student design team. It was not designed through dialectical interaction with the mediating artefacts of the course (propositions, ideas or tools), nor through dialectical interaction between lecturers and students.

These patterns point tentatively to two interrelated suggestions. First, it points to the potentiality of dialectical student-lecturer engagement in building curricular tools. The very essays that were at the centre of a more externalised process of engagement between lectures and students were the reading material that generated the most positive feedback from participating students. Second, it suggests that the core tools upon which these imithamo were built (words, propositions and learning tools) appear to be aligned toward student appropriation. It suggests that this method can assist in both locating and expanding the zone of proximal development by aligning learning tools with the structure of activity, expanding practice and expanding meaning making of first year students.

This experience speaks to Astin's (1993) conclusion about the 'content' of first year curriculum. Across his massive analysis of first year student experiences, he suggests that the 'content' of curriculum made little difference to student success. He places emphasis on the pedagogical domain (the way the curriculum is implemented) over the content domain (Astin, 1993 p. 9). While this study experience largely supports his hypothesis, the experience of the LKA Reader suggests the potential of pedagogy in relation to curricular content choice. It may be

that content could make a bigger difference to students if it emerges through a process of intellectual engagement between lecturers and more senior students.

- The Interface of Reading and Writing Activity

The other source of expanding motive over time appears to be located at the interface of expanding reading and writing practice itself, in essence the emergence of 'Object 3' in the third generation activity model presented in Figure 6-1. The activities of reading and writing become increasingly inseparable in the narrative of students. Students placed more explicit emphasis on the activity of writing as an expansive tool for shifting the motivation for the activity of reading. While the activity of reading was supported by the Reading Log and the LKA Reader as discussed above, at some stage the tool for expanding reading motive shifts toward the LKA Journal. Students suggest that their Journal expanded their motivation to read; they were motivated to read more so that they had more to write about ('I have to keep on reading so that I am able to write'). The link made between writing and reading was through a wider narrative of learning motive, whereby students read to 'engage' their journal, 'bring evidence' to their journal, to 'fill up' their journal.

### **6.3.5. Expansion of Motive: An Affective Claim**

While the process is multidirectional in nature, the sense of 'I can' or 'I am able now' emanating from agential encounters for these students appears to mostly *precede* the potential emergence of a new set of narrative propositions, 'I am interested' or 'I enjoy'. That is, agential encounters with competency, autonomy and relatedness appear to be the basis upon which students start to expand their motive in more substantive way. The motive appears to undergo the next transformation through an affective claim, from 'I have to' toward 'I am interested' and 'I like'.

While it has received less attention, the interrelationships between 'intellect' and 'affect' have long been recognised by Vygotsky. He wrote, '[thought] is not born of other thoughts. Thought has its origins in the motivating sphere of consciousness, a

sphere that includes our inclinations and needs, our interests and impulses, and our affect and emotions. The affective and volitional tendency stands behind thoughts. Only here do we find the answer to the final ‘why’ in the analysis of thinking’ (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 282//). While the discourse of ‘now I like’ seems to be unremarkable, this may be an important moment to focus our analysis on the transformation of activity patterns, when the motive for writing moves away from ‘I have to’ (or other versions of ‘academic survival’) toward ‘I want to’/‘I am interested’/‘I enjoy’ and even ‘I love’.

### **6.3.6. Expanding Activity**

The shift in motivation from its contracted form (I can’t/I don’t like/I’m not interested/ but I have to) to its more expanded form (I can/I like/I am interested/I do because I want to) appears to be potentially generative of two additional activity expansions – expanded reading and writing activity on the one hand, and expanded complementary activity on the other.

- Expanded Writing

Students speak about expanding their writing activity over time. Under the right conditions, as the motive expands, activity expands in both breadth and depth. Over time, students start to write more, and more regularly, ‘as a habit’ (‘I go no day ending without writing’; ‘I carried it everywhere’). For at least some students, this expansive cycle of activity appeared to lead toward appropriation, where a tool increasingly becomes ‘one’s own’ (Wertsch and Stone, 1985). We see evidence in two forms. First, we see evidence of appropriation in the expanded activity of writing itself. Students said they ‘can do more’ with their writing (‘I can now do more in terms of writing’); they said they were better able to use writing to accurately reflect their own intentions (‘I would think about something and then write the opposite of what I thought but now that is not happening’); they said that they wrote more

fluently; and they said that they were venturing out to new writing territories (other academic work, other writing genres). Consistent with the approach of activity theorists, as students used tools and applied them to different products, students spoke to an emerging sense of creativity (...my writing habits have changed... we had time to write in our journals and it inspired me to be creative about anything and everything’).

We also see evidence of appropriation in the process of meaning making itself. As emphasised through the work of Bakhtin (1981), a tool ‘becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic expressive intention’. Across the data, students began to use their own expressive intentional language divorced from the course narrative (‘[the LKA Journal] was like one's own jungle where one could go wild, hey-wire and even seem mad’).

- Expanded Reading

Students placed more emphasis on an expanded motive for reading, with more modest emphasis placed on expanding reading practice. The most frequent narratives described reading more regularly and detached from academic survival. The expansion of practice appears in the domain of understanding, whereby, before they could ‘read,’ they claimed now to have more access to reading for more understanding, placing more value on the notion of reading for ‘knowledge’ (‘now I read on a regular basis as it is to enhance my knowledge unlike before only read for exams’). It appeared that in reference to reading breakthrough, while the experience had been expansive, reading cultures were still in their early forms of transformation (‘first I usually read when I was about to write exams but now I can read even magazines, newspapers especially the gossip column’). The gains made in the culture of reading were suggested to be even more vulnerable than those on the writing front, in all likelihood particularly susceptible to contraction without further support.

- Expanded Study Habits

Finally, some students suggested a transformation of motive and activity attached to the wider notion of 'study habits'. They spoke of having more endurance (studying for longer) and more concentration while studying. These students suggested that the expansion of learning activity, and particularly learning strategies, had been structured such that they were applicable to other study contexts ('take notes', 'jot down some ideas', 'write my study intentions'). Again, these students pointed to early evidence of new levels of appropriation.

### **6.3.7. Expanding Complementary Activity**

The student experience suggested that the expansion of reading and writing motive had the potential to expand complementary activities beyond writing and reading. Students associated both their expanded reading and writing activity with expanded thinking. Students associated their expanded writing activity with expanded capacity for expression. Students associated their expanded reading capability with expanded acts of 'knowing' (finding out, exploring, looking up), as discussed above.

Students made several suggestions about the relationship between expanded reading and writing practice on the one hand, and their thinking process on the other. First, students pointed to the relationship between the externalised activity of writing and the internalised activity of thinking (I think when I write, I write when I think). Second, students pointed to the relationship between the activity of writing and the quality of thinking. For both of these groups, the process of writing itself served to better make explicit their thinking process. Through writing, they were better able to both 'see' and 'think about' their thinking process. As such, they were able to engage with their thinking process more explicitly, expanding the quality and breadth through more explicit dialectical engagement ('change on how I am trying to address an idea'; 'more confidently play around with ideas'). Students began to point to a new intra-psychic dialogue, not only achieving the activity through internalised

speech, but impacting internal speech through expanded activity (Gal'perin, 1969, p. 250).

The complementary activity discussed by students in relation to their expanding writing practice was the act of verbal communication, related closely to the act of expression, imbued with multiple meanings. The 25% of students who identified the LKA Journal as one of their top two favourite elements placed special emphasis on the relationship between expanded writing and expression. These students made four important suggestions. Students suggested that as the LKA Journal became woven into their day to day lives, they started to place more value on the process of 'expressing themselves' and reflecting on their lives. In essence, they began to place value on the experience of making narrative 'sense of their lives' through the activity of writing. Second, students suggested that the process of writing had a dialectical relationship between thinking and expression. The process of writing became associated with the act of expressing one's thoughts and views ('that is where you explain and voice your thoughts through writing'; 'its where I am expressing my different views). Third, students suggested that the dialectical relationship between thinking and writing, in turn, widened intra-psychic space for exploration ('[it] was like one's own jungle where one could go wild, hey-wire and even seem mad in just expressing your wisdom in written form'; 'it made me creative in this course and all the other courses as a whole'.) The final suggestion related to writing and expression of affect. They spoke about writing about and making meaning of the affective elements of their lives, and 'making sense' of these affective experiences through a widening narrative of 'Self' ('I now write my stuff'; 'that is where I expressed my feelings without fear'; 'even when I am stressed, I talk to my Journal'; 'it allowed me to get more in touch with myself').

#### **6.4. BECOMING SELF: MEANING MAKING AND AGENTIAL ENCOUNTERS**

In the review of literature in Chapter 2, it was suggested that Bruner (1996) makes an important contribution at the interface of agential encounters and meaning making. He suggests that the very notion of an 'integrated 'Self' lies at the confluence of meaning making and agential encounters (Bruner, 1996, pp. 35-42). His work distinguishes 'Self' from an autonomous individual. Not only does society influence the construction of 'Self' but, rather, the structures and processes of intra-mental functioning are shaped by the cultural tools and settings available in any local space. He suggests that the inquiry into Self is the investigation of the creation of meaning within a cultural context. He goes on to say that, 'these contexts are always contexts of practice: it is always necessary to ask what people are doing or trying to do in that context' (Bruner, 1990, p. 118).

At the end of the course, students were asked whether or not the course had 'impacted' or 'changed them' 'as a person' in any way. In essence, this question sought to understand whether or not students' narrative of Self had transformed in any way.

Over 70% of students by the end of the course claimed that the course had helped them to 'become a better person'. Students with less access to educational privilege were more likely to agree with this statement (students who spoke isiXhosa at home, whose parents had less access to education, and who attended normal public schools.) Without even attempting to understand what this may have meant for any particular student, it starts to suggest that students placed value on the activity of the course, and suggested that it interacted with their narrative of 'Self'.

The narrative explanations about how the course had impacted them 'as a person' were only analysed for students who made some reference to their reading and/or writing activity. The majority of these students pointed to expansive agential encounters with reading or writing, as discussed above. They discussed a sense of improvement and they discussed expanding motive. Students pointed to an early

sense of 'I see that I can', expanding to 'I like now'/'I am interested now', which seemed to create the conditions for more expansive transitions of activity (fluency, speed, breadth, widened application.) Students spoke about relating the activity of reading and writing becoming a part of their 'life' ('it has become part of my life to read'). Some students also expanded motive to the level of 'Self' ('me, I am a reader now').

The remaining students spoke to expanded activity and motive in complementary activity. They pointed to the domains already discussed above: expanded verbal abilities and confidence ('my communication skills are much better'), expanded ability to 'express' themselves, expanded thinking (such as critical thinking) skills, and an expanded motive in relationship to new knowledge. They spoke to an expanding sense of confidence related to learning activity ('I was a low learning student and also I was a student with no confidence ... now I call myself a good student').

The strongest new theme emerging was the domain of participation. They suggested that the experience translated into 'inviting themselves in' to social and academic life in a variety of ways. They spoke about participating in class, participating in 'every discussion', participating in wider social and academic domains ('I became more active in participating with others'; 'it changed me in many things, including reading and writing and participation in class and getting involved in debates'). Many made a direct association between expanded learning activity and wider patterns of participation ('reading more ... made me believe in myself ... made me to be now interested on what is happening around me'; 'now I can stand up for myself ... read, write, communicate, respect others and love others').

Was there evidence that this 'learning agency' in any way contributed toward expanding what critical theorists refer to as 'critical consciousness' (Giroux, 1996)? There is some indication that students believed that they were more 'critical' and better able to question ('I am more interested in reading and questioning events'). There is some indication that students had become inspired to help and love others,

and 'do the right thing' ('I think I have changed because I am trying to live my life well lived by doing good and positive thing'). There is evidence that the experience increased some students' interest in society, and expanded their imagination for their social role into the future. However, there is little evidence to suggest whether or not these germs will translate into expanded critical competencies over time. Data items that were designed to better understand the emergence (or not) of more critical capacities fell out of the scope of this study. As will be discussed in the conclusion, much more research is required to understand the potentiality of coursework in terms of building critical capacities in this context over time.

The final data set that spoke strongly to a transformed narrative of 'Self' emerged through student reflections on their reading practice. By the end of the course, there was a notable discourse of students who suggested that the course 'transformed them' because they were 'no longer lazy'. The narratives suggested that before the course, students' lack of reading activity was linked with an internal narrative of 'lack of discipline' and 'laziness'. It appears that the learning activity (and reading in particular) had been imbued with a specific historical burden. Essentially, contracted reading success had been constructed as a reflection of an individualised character trait of 'laziness' rather than as an activity. The relationship with reading activity has taken on the significance of reflecting the internal quality of 'Self'. Those who 'choose' to read are simply 'more disciplined'. Those who do not 'choose to' read 'are lazy'. This is a heavy and burdened narrative. The occupation of the word 'lazy' locates the 'Self' in a state that runs counter to expanding activity.

While the relationships are again multidirectional, a rough common narrative emerged. The narrative starts with I used to be lazy ('I was lazy to read'). Then there is an experience of both reading a lot (because I had a work load then I have to read a lot') and being supported to break through reading skills successfully ('I have seen improvement from grammar, language and writing'). This is internalised as a successful reading experience whereby reading activity translates into increased reading capacity ('after the LKA I can say I am good and confident reader'). This

success translated into an increase in a sense of interest ('I suddenly liked my books and I got very curious') and enjoyment ('I enjoy it now and use it to get rid of boredom'), which self generates more reading. Over time, the practice of reading changed the narrative of 'Self'. Seeing themselves reading more in practice, they concluded that they were no longer 'lazy' ('I am no longer lazy now').

## **6.5. LEARNING AGENCY AND ARTICULATION**

The discussion thus far has suggested that the pedagogical experience translated into expanded learning agency for the majority of students. The discussion has focused on the mutually generative relationship between expanded learning motive and expanded learning activity. A student enters with a contracted motive. She 'meets' a learning encounter (an action.) The word 'meet' is used to emphasise the coming together of two potentials; she 'meets' 'the encounter' the way someone shake a hand. The very existence of the 'encounter' reflects the interface of pedagogical design potential, the socio-cultural inheritance that frames the encounter, and her level of readiness to 'reach out' and 'try it out'. If she 'meets' the encounter and experiences an 'agential encounter' (as opposed to a more contracted one), this serves, over time, to transform motive. Borrowing from the conceptual vocabulary of Archer (2010, pp. 238-241), the motive 'elaborates'. (See discussion below). This expanded (or 'elaborated') motive creates new conditions that frame the next cycle of learning activity. The students' experience in this study make four suggestions about the structure of an agential learning encounter capable of shifting learning motive over time. That is, there are four characteristics of an agential learning encounter that increase its capacity to expand motive over time. First, it provides a sense of success in reference to an activity that is at a high enough level of expectation that it does not get stuck in historic patterns of patronising affirmation. Second, it serves to increase learning autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2000); in other words it must be structured for appropriation whereby students, over time, come to make tools 'their own' (Wertsch and Stone, 1985). Finally, it is

aligned to the expansion of social meaning making. This implies at least one of two conditions. The first condition is that students are simultaneously exposed to wider meaning making toolkits. For critical theorists, emphasis is placed on meaning making toolkits that allow learners to move beyond narrow dominant discourses (represented in this study by the 'critical animating propositions'). The second condition is that students are part of building local cultural collectives whereby new patterns of activity and meaning are re-generated and expanded.

This engages with the work of Archer (2010, pp. 238-241) in potentially two ways. As discussed at the end of Chapter 2, Archer establishes 'intervals' of interaction between structure, action and structural elaboration, allowing each concept to be considered in its own terms, but also respecting their mutually generative nature (See Figure 2-5). All three lines are continuous; interval breaks reflect the problem of analysis at hand.

Archer's theoretical work is most useful in helping to understand the interactions between social activity and the potential (and constraints) for social change through the intermediary concept of structural elaboration (see below), as applied to society more generally constituted. On a more micro level, her work talks to the dialectical process of interaction between subject and motive interacting with a mediating tool. As a subject mediates her external world, her motive either expands or contracts – said another way, the motive elaborates. This new motive establishes the new conditions for activity in the next time interval.

In terms of *learning* agency, we can suggest more directionality. If an agential learning encounter expands motive, then it represents a co-variable in the function of magnitude of the 'action line' from T2 to T3 in Archer's model. In essence, the slope of the curve of 'action' reflects both structural inheritance (for example, as expressed at the more micro level of a contracted learning motive) and the pedagogical potential to scaffold agential learning encounters. The micro relationship [intrapyschic motive – action – motive elaboration] may prove to be a conceptually useful micro unit of analysis within the larger universal dialectic between structure,

action and structural elaboration as educationists struggle with the relationship between learning and social agency. Moreover, given the directionality of learning agency (either a motive expands or contracts), it points to a conceptual vocabulary of 'agency' and 'un-agency'. A learning encounter (or institution) structured to expand motive contributes to learning agency. A learning encounter structured to contract motive in some way contributes to 'un-agency'.

The study also benefits from Archer's (2010) main conceptual contributions as we come to reflect on the meta questions facing this study experience. As was emphasised in the introduction and framing to this study, the higher ambitions of the pedagogical design were not simply to support students to enhance their learning activity (or to address the 'problem' of the 'underprepared student'). The higher ambition was to release student learning activity to contribute to the transformation of society in some way. As was suggested earlier, given the devastating inheritance of the past two centuries, helping students to simply better 'succeed' within current institutional frameworks is less than satisfactory. Rather, we look toward the expansion of student activity as a means toward the transformation of the culture of the institution itself. Even more far reaching, we look toward student activity as a dialectical seed through which social change may someday be enacted more widely. While these two suggestions reach far beyond the scope of this study, Archer's work helps establish the analytic field of investigation. She helps us focus less on 'social change' and more on 'structural elaboration', pointing to another set of questions. To what extent do the small seeds of change we observe in student activity and meaning making contain potential for structural elaboration at the institutional level? If a few students are asking more questions, thinking more critically, and expressing themselves more fully, does this have the strength over time to shift the practice, for example, of lecturers in other courses? What if more and more of these students ask more and more questions, express themselves more carefully and confidently, participate more fully? What combination of learning agency and 'critical consciousness' is required, and under what conditions, can the expansion of student

learning agency elaborate structure over time? These big questions require much more study.

## **6.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter discussed the findings, focusing its attention on the primary questions facing this study. The discussion began by briefly exploring the quantitative evidence, whereby upwards of 70% of students associated their participation in the course with some change in their reading and writing activity. The discussion went on to explore the transformations of learning activity and meaning making, focusing on expansions of activity motive. The chapter then turned its attention to considering whether or not the experience contributed to expanded learning agency.

The following chapter will summarise the conclusions emanating out of this discussion, extract potential lessons for pedagogical innovation, and point to the research horizon emerging.

## CHAPTER 7

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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#### 7.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter has three objectives. First, it seeks to briefly summarise the study experience and the conclusions emerging. Second, it seeks to extract lessons and implications for pedagogical innovation serving first year undergraduate students in higher education in the South African context into the future. Finally, the chapter seeks to roughly sketch the emerging research agenda in this area.

#### 7.2. STUDY SUMMARY

##### 7.2.1. The Crisis: Pedagogical Domain and First Year Students

In 2007, Scott, Yeld and Hendry wrote the first comprehensive analysis of student access and graduate output from institutions of South African higher education. The 2000 cohort data suggest that after five years of entering higher education, only 30% of students had graduated, with 56% leaving without graduating. The 2000 cohort study confirmed, moreover, that the greatest attrition from higher education occurs at the end of the first year of study.

Confronting the dominant discourse that students 'fail' because they are 'not prepared' for higher education, several analysts suggest that first year students fail because the teaching and learning domain of higher education does not support them to succeed (Scott, 2012; CHE, 2010; Tinto, 1997). Across the world analysts have observed that higher education traditions have remained largely unchanged (McInnis *et al.*, 1995; Barefoot, 2000; Gardiner, 1980.) In the context of post-apartheid South Africa the implications are even more far reaching, whereby the traditions are ill-equipped to serve the contemporary student population (Swartz,

2006; Odora Hoppers, 2006.) Under this backdrop, critical analysts point to the importance of the critical pedagogical domain, suggesting that student learning success is unlikely to spontaneously change without radical innovation in the teaching and learning domains (Scott *et al.*, 2007, p. 21; CHE, 2010).

### **7.2.2. The Birth of a Critical Pedagogical Innovation**

Across 2007, an institution for higher education serving a student population with little educational advantage undertook a reflective self critique. The critique landed at the interface of institutional practice, student learning practice and the meaning making connecting the two. The critique suggested that students' learning practices were fragile and vulnerable to activity avoidance. It suggested that the pedagogical practice of the institution itself was at least complicit with this practice, with few tools to confront or expand student learning practice effectively. Finally, it was suggested that students had little opportunity to make meaning of their learning activity more generally integrated in the context of their lives and society.

Out of this critique a new imaginative horizon emerged, namely, to develop a critical pedagogical experience for all first year students, known as the Grounding Programme. Of the many goals, it was designed to support students to expand their learning activity and meaning making associated with their learning activity during their first year. This exploratory study was designed to understand better and extract lessons from this experience. It was interested in understanding how critical pedagogy focusing on learning activity and meaning making could impact the patterns of learning activity and meaning making of participating students.

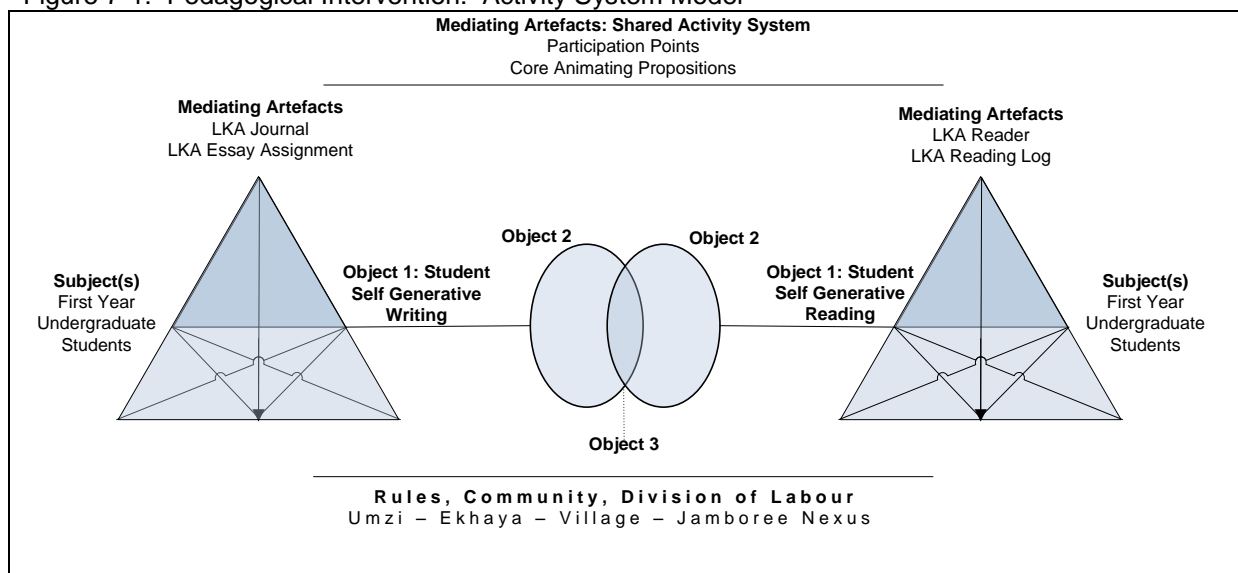
### **7.2.3. Intervention Case Study**

The study was designed as an intervention case study, informed by the work of third generation activity theorists (Engeström , 2007; Daniels, 2008, pp. 115-147). As

such, methodology is articulated at two levels, describing the intervention itself on the one hand, and the methods of studying the intervention on the other.

The intervention took the form of a multi-tool pedagogical activity system, organised within three toolkits, as re-depicted in Figure 7-1. One set of tools sought to provide scaffolding for each expansive learning activity itself. A second shared toolkit sought to expand the critical meaning making toolkit available to the learning architecture, primarily through establishing a set of animating propositions. The third toolkit sought directly to mediate the learning community, through establishing a tiered pedagogical architecture.

Figure 7-1: Pedagogical Intervention: Activity System Model



The case study focused on the population of 652 students participating in the 2010 pilot experience of the course. The primary dataset was collected through a series of three questionnaires, administered at the beginning, middle and end of the course, and including quantitative and qualitative elements. The quantitative data were analysed seeking to evaluate activity and meaning making patterns, and explore the influence of a number of co-variables on the experience of students. The qualitative data analysis allowed for a more detailed investigation of the meaning making activity of participating students.

#### 7.2.4. Summary of Findings

Upwards of 70% of students suggest that the course directly impacted their learning activity in a positive way. Over 60% said their reading (65%) and writing (62%) practice had changed at the time of the midterm. This climbed to over 70% for reading (76%) and writing (71%) by the end of the course, when over 80% of the students indicated that the GP made them better readers (85%), and better writers (84%) and increased their interest in reading (85%) and writing (81%).

Students suggested that they read and wrote more frequently, their reading and writing had improved in some way, and their interest and enjoyment had increased. Over time, many students claimed that the reading and writing activity had become a 'habit' in some way. Students suggest that, over time, their activity expanded in three ways. First, their reading and writing activity expanded (in fluency, depth, breadth, speed and activity application.) Second, the expansion of reading and writing activity was associated with an expansion of study skills more generally. Finally, complementary activity expanded. Students associated expanded writing with expanding the complementary activity of expression. Students associated expanded reading with expanding complementary activity of thinking, exploring and 'finding out'.

Students appeared to have made meaning of a range of learning tools at the interface of reading and writing. They placed special value on the experience of the LKA Journal, both as it relates to expanded writing and reading. For many students, the LKA Journal appeared to have been both the initial source of mediation of expanded learning activity as well as the source of expansion of activity over time. The source of expansion of activity over time appeared to be more widely distributed across the learning tools, with importance placed on tools that mediated a sense of expansive improvement.

By the end of the course, the three newer pedagogical forms (the Umzi, LKA Journal and the Jamboree) were more controversial than the more common forms (the Reader, Ekhaya and Village.) The most controversial activity element was the Umzi.

Students were divided almost across the three categories (very useful, useful, and non useful.) Students with less access to historic educational privilege placed more value on the new pedagogical elements, particularly the Umzi and the LKA Journal, than students with more access to educational privilege.

The second general linear model suggested that the course architecture had a significant effect over the learning experience of students. The Ekhaya had a significant effect over how students experienced their Umzi. The Village had a significant effect over students' reading and writing practice, their experience of the Umzi, and their overall evaluation of the impact of the course.

Students associated each of the learning levels with different yet overlapping activity. Each of the levels were associated with dialogic activity related to reading and writing, but the dialogic activity was described differently across levels. While dialogic activity relating to reading was ascribed across levels, dialogic activity ascribed to writing activity was largely confined to the Umzi. The Umzi, moreover, was associated with the widest range of learning activity.

70% of students indicated that the experience had 'changed them' as a person. Just over 80% claimed that their 'beliefs' had changed and that they had become a 'better person'. Again, students with less access to educational privilege (who spoke isiXhosa as a home language, attended normal public schools, and whose parents had less access to education) made stronger claims than others. This study only considered this set of qualitative data to the extent that students spoke about their reading and writing activity. Students who mentioned reading and/or writing when they discussed how the course had 'impacted' them suggested that their experience of expanded reading and writing activity had influenced their narrative of 'Self'. Three new suggestions emerged. They suggested that their confidence increased, their ways of thinking about 'life' changed in some way, and they became people who participated more widely in the activities around them.

Students with less access to previous socio-cultural educational advantage placed more value on the course and made stronger claims about the course impacting their

learning activity and lives in general. Students whose home language was isiXhosa made stronger claims about their reading practice than students who had access to English in their home environment. Students attending normal public schools made stronger claims than students who had attended Model C schools. Students whose home language was isiXhosa, as well as students whose parents had less access to education, made stronger claims about their writing practice. Students whose home language was isiXhosa and who attended normal public schools made stronger claims in reference to the constructs that combined ability, interest and enjoyment of reading and writing practice. Students from each of these subgroups made stronger claims about the value of the course architecture, and the impact of the course on them 'as a person'.

Both female students and the cohort of students from Zimbabwe (largely strong student recipients of a competitive state bursary) consistently responded to the experience in more positive terms.

There was less convincing data to understand the experience of the roughly 30% of students who did not claim that their reading and writing activity had changed through the course. The questionnaire was less well designed to extract the experience of these students. One third of these students claimed that they did not understand the course well. Approximately half of this group considered their reading and writing practice, claiming that their practice did not change, because it was strong at the beginning. The remaining half who indicated that their learning practice was not strong and did not change through the course, remained an important group for further understanding. When responding to the question whether the course 'impacted them' as a person, these students made positive claims. Understanding the experience of this group of students better requires further study.

### 7.3. CONCLUSIONS EMERGING

This study suggests that, under the right conditions, critical pedagogy focusing on learning activity and meaning making can expand learning practice and meaning making of first year undergraduate students, contributing to an expanding claim on learning agency. It tentatively suggests that this type of learning architecture is well aligned for appropriation of students with less access to historical socio-educational learning privilege, but remains sensitive to the situated nature of historic disadvantage (for example, on campus sites).

The majority of students in this study made significant claims about the impact of the course on their learning activity, in general, and their reading and writing activity, more specifically. Upwards of 70% of students consistently said that the experience of the course impacted their reading and writing practice in some way. They spoke about reading and writing more and more regularly and about improving their relationship with reading and writing. They spoke about expanding the breadth and depth of their reading and writing activity, and they spoke about these activities slowly emerging as habits in their daily life.

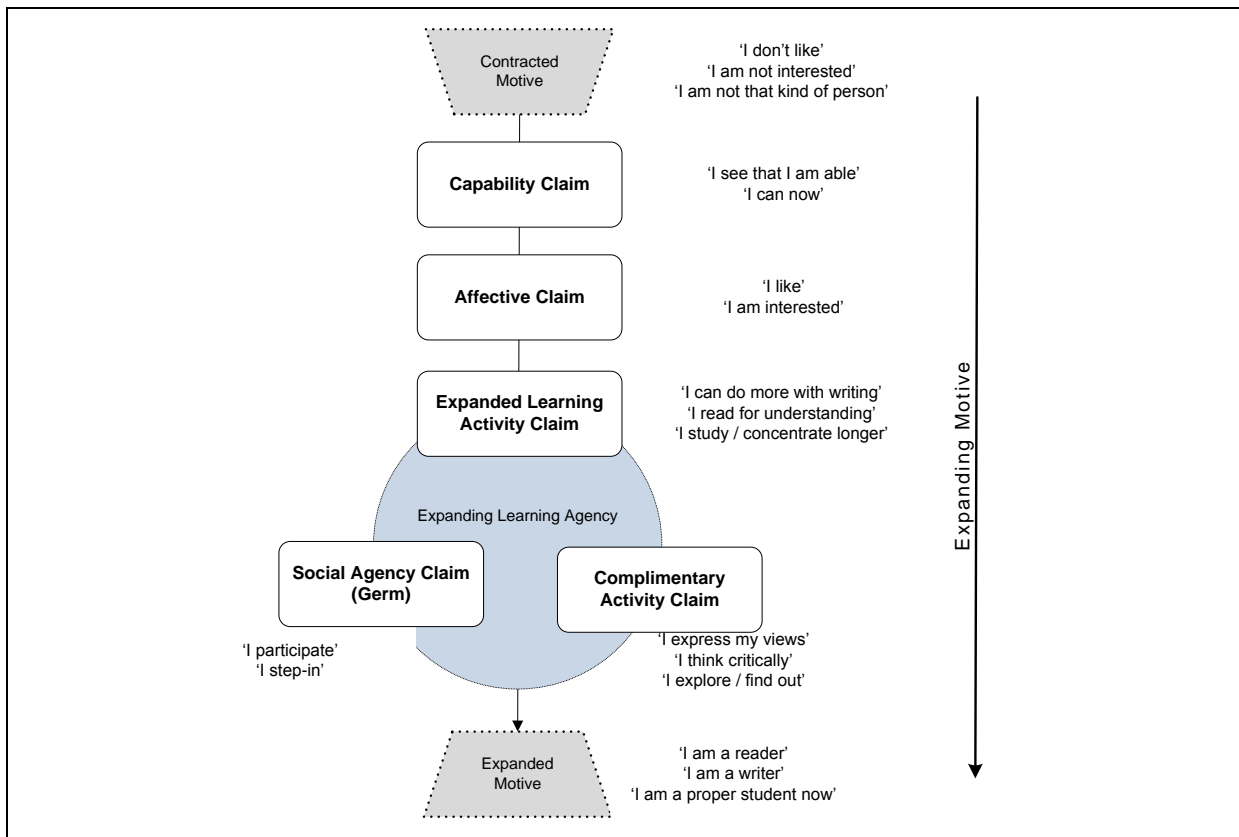
While inherently dynamic and nonlinear, the expansion of motive (and requirements for the expansion of motive) appear to have a common backbone, as sketched in Figure 6-4. Students enter the course with a contracted motive for learning activity, tied tightly to academic survival. Initially, the conditions have to be established to support students to take the psychically dangerous move away from activity avoidance. This study suggests that this move requires a toolkit which achieves three things simultaneously. First, it initially aligns with student's contracted learning motive. Two, it is capable of rapid expansion, serving to increase expectations for learning activity. Third, it is placed within a toolkit that expands the social meaning making potential of the activity itself.

Subsequent expansions appear to be dependent upon the quantity and quality of what have been called 'expansive agential encounters'. An expansive agential

encounter is an explicit experience of learning autonomy, associated with a competence that is both meaningful, and socially valuable. Rather than approaching competence, autonomy and relatedness as separate realms as in the work of Ryan and Deci (2000), an expansive agential encounter appears to encompass each of these elements within a common experience over time.

It is hypothesised that the motive expands over time, as a reflection of both the quantity and quality of expansive agential encounters. There appears to be several distinguishable expansive claims from the initial contracted form ('I don't like'; 'I am not that kind of person'). The first expansion appears in the form of an early capability claim ('I can see that I am able). The second appears in the form of an affective claim ('I like now'; 'I am interested now'). The next three take the form of expansions of activity and motive in relationship to learning activity itself ('I write and read more, more fluently, more widely'), complimentary activity ('I think more critically;' 'I communicate better;' 'I express myself', 'I find things out') and wider notions of social participation ('I participate'; 'I step-in'). These appear to be mutually generative under the right conditions, and thus depicted in a cyclical relationship.

Figure 7-2: Expansion of Motive: Common Backbone Emerging



The study makes two overarching suggestions about the pedagogical tools. First, the potential of the tools were not only in their alignment with the learning activity of students, but in their potential to expand meaning making. Said another way, the effectiveness of the scaffolding was not a simple reflection of the material tools, but of the meaning imbued within the material tools. Second, the transformation of activity and meaning making require tools that are capable of expanding activity motive in different ways across time. As such, it appears that one set of tools, no matter how effective, may fall short of the learning infrastructure required for the transformation of first year learning agency in this context. This study suggests that it will take a set of tools, interacting with each other in different ways at different times to mediate more sustained expansion of activity, meaning making and agency. Much more research is required to understand and build the conditions and tools required for first year student success in this context. This study points to four generative elements of this pedagogical architecture.

The first element is a set of tools that focus on student ‘activity’. That is, a set of learning tools where the act of ‘doing learning’ is both recognised and externalised

as the basis for explicit and therefore conscious reflection. This tool must be aligned to the early learning practice (in its contracted form) but able to expand to increase (rather than decrease) expectations for learning activity. The best example of this in this study was the form and meaning imbued within the 'LKA Journal'. The second element is tools that scaffold learning agential encounters (e.g. Umzi dictionary; LKA Reading Log). There is a vast and rich literature about the kinds of instructional scaffolding that provides students with stronger autonomy in relation to the transformation of their learning activity. This research must be mined and translated into tools that support the experience of breakthrough in a materialised form.

The third element is a set of tools that seeks to disrupt the current institutional culture, and restructure it in better alignment with the learning conditions conducive to first year success. Specifically, the architecture must seek to establish space where the social and academic domain becomes more integrated, providing students with more opportunities for interaction within this integrated domain. The final suggestion brings together the importance of the meaning making domain, with the potential importance of critical meaning making, particularly in a 'post colonial' context. Outside of the critical animating propositions, it is unlikely that these tools would have held the same pedagogical power. This symbolic toolkit provided the meaning making potential imbued within the architecture as a whole. While more research is required to understand the potential and limitations of this thesis better, this study suggests that learning tools interacting with a set of symbolic tools drawn from critical theory hold generative potential for mediating first year learning success in this context.

#### **7.4. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The final object facing this study is to extract any implications for pedagogical innovation serving first year students in the South African context into the future.

While the experience of this pedagogical intervention to date raises as many questions as it answers, several implications can be tentatively extracted. This section highlights eight propositions emerging.

- **Proposition Emerging 1: It is possible.**

The most important proposition emanating from this study is simply that it is possible to transform the learning activity, meaning making and learning agency of first year students through a carefully constructed pedagogical intervention, placing the first year student at the generative epistemic and ontological centre. While there are no simple solutions, the experience suggests that the current enactment of higher educational institutional practice is at least complicit with the poor educational experiences distributed disproportionately to students who have the least access to socio-economic and educational power. Said another way, institutions of higher education have the agency to radically transform themselves to better serve more students, should these institutions choose to use it.

As such, this study supports the suggestion across the literature (Yorke and Thomas, 2003; Tinto, 1997; CHE, 2010) that student success in institutions of higher education is largely a function of deliberate action by institutions to reconstruct their practice to better align themselves with the learning needs of its current students.

The second part of this proposition is that this domain is complex, contested, and under-researched. While teaching as a domain of common sense, this study suggests its intellectual and theoretical complexities. Unless this domain becomes both re-valued and re-articulated with research, it is unlikely that the potential residing in radically reconstituted pedagogical practice will be tapped. This is discussed further below. Moreover, some caution is directed toward Scott's (2012) proposal to rapidly formalise extended degree programmes. While it may be true that many students could benefit from more learning time, until institutions are better equipped to use this time to expand learning activity, simply more time is likely to

lead to nothing but more of the same. At the point that more 'time' is allocated to specific degree programmes, the impact most likely will reflect whether or not this 'new space' can be allocated to new pedagogical arrangements, or whether they are quickly relegated to 'more of the same'.

- **Proposition Emerging 2: Transforming the Culture of Higher Education**

The literature suggests that in order to better serve first year learning success, the socio-cultural basis of higher education must be transformed (Tinto, 1997; Yorke and Thomas, 2003; McInnis, 2001). This study experience supports this suggestion with two propositions.

First, the course mark data suggest that, despite the course being well received by students, one course on its own is unlikely to sustain transformation in student learning activity over time. Until an institution itself is reoriented toward the requirements of first year students, any course, no matter how ambitious, is likely to contribute to limited results only.

Second, the evolution of the course, as described in the postscript of this study, suggests that the current 'folk psychology' (Bruner, 1996) embedded within current institutions will work against pedagogical innovation, unless the 'folk psychology' itself is transformed. Opening up this area of work will require strong tools and artefacts to mediate change at the institutional level. Without them, emerging new practice will be quickly mediated back within institutional canonical norms. (See postscript).

The culture of higher education institutions is largely hegemonic; the assumptions of the institution are often not made explicit. As discussed by Scott (2012), the hidden and hegemonic nature of academic culture makes it difficult to scrutinise; conservatism within the academy largely persists without an 'other' to reveal itself (Scott, 2012, p 33). The conditions required for the emergence and protection of

counter-hegemonic activity within the institutional landscape of higher education requires further study.

- **Proposition Emerging 3: Value and Undergraduate Teaching**

Building upon the proposition above, the third more fundamental proposition relates to the value afforded to undergraduate teaching. The dominant socio-cultural narrative within higher education approaches undergraduate teaching as relatively unproblematic and undistinguished. This assumption is deeply embedded within the global enactment of higher education (Johnson, 2006). This cultural assumption has been inherited into the post democratic higher education discourse, with little contestation, regardless that it runs counter to the lived experience of lecturers themselves. At least three problems emerge. First, value is not placed on undergraduate teaching and innovation on its own terms. This leads to lecturer 'activity avoidance'. The 'act of avoidance' by lecturers takes several dominant forms, including, for example, the dominance of summative rather than formative assessment strategies, limited to non-existent practices of writing revision, and lecturer dominated instructional practice. Confirming Barefoot's (2000) suggestion, the activity of lecturers is at best complicit and often more actively productive of student activity avoidance.

The second danger of the inheritance, is that undergraduate teaching has been largely extracted from an intellectual project more generally, and research more specifically (Leibowitz, 2012, Scott, 2012). Given the complexity of the challenges and lack of theoretical tools to guide this area into the future (McInnis, 2001; Barefoot, 2000), if teaching is not rearticulated with research there is unlikely to be sustainable progress in this area into the future (Yorke and Thomas, 2003, p. 71; Astin, 1993).

The third related problem is value placed on pedagogical innovation itself. Pedagogical innovation placing students at the centre requires time and senior

intellectual energies. Given the objective investment of time required to both build and support pedagogical innovations serving students with more fragile learning histories, more senior academic energies and influences are likely to run counter to these initiatives unless the value appropriated to undergraduate teaching is dramatically reconstituted in some systematic way.

- **Proposition Emerging 4: Higher Education and Learning Activity**

The next proposition emerging is that pedagogical innovation focused on student learning activity (on the act of ‘doing’ learning) has generative potential for building learning agency of first year students, particularly students with little access to previous educational advantage. That is, under the right conditions, pedagogical innovation placing the activity of learning at the evaluative centre, within a philosophy of expanding participation (or ‘stepping in’), may provide a special opportunity for students (and lecturers) to reconstitute their learning practice. There are at least three suggestions woven within this proposition.

The first suggestion is that providing scaffolding for expanding learning activity *is* the work of higher education. Said another way, the ‘work’ of assisting students to expand their relationship with learning activity cannot be outsourced (to centres, programmes or private frustration); it is part of the work of academia. As discussed in both the introduction to this study and the review of literature, the current ‘folk psychology’ of higher education asserts that students should have consolidated their relationship with learning activity before entering higher education, especially as it relates to reading and writing practice (McInnis, James and McNaught, 1995). Literature suggests that learning activity is far from consolidated for most students entering the higher education sector, despite socio-educational background (Barefoot, 2000; Astin, 1997). In the context of South Africa, where neither social conditions nor instructional practice are aligned toward student appropriation of learning tools (Ramadiro, 2012), the domain of learning activity becomes increasingly important.

Second, in order to serve students with less access to educational and related socio-economic privilege, the canonical 'ordinary' for higher education must be delinked from a global middle class imaginative, and re-linked to the local practice of students. A critical element of institutional assumptions are the institutional assumptions about 'appropriate' learning practice of entering students themselves. There are two historical aspects of the problematic facing the interface of student learning practice and assumptions of 'prepared' students in the South African context. First, reflecting a range of historical and contemporary global pressures, many institutions have made meaning of imaginary 'normatives' detached from the learning activity of local students. Second, to the extent that 'normatives' reflect local students, they are determined largely by students with historic access to socio-educational privilege (Scott, 2012). Given the massive patterns of inequity, these normative boundaries for practice remain an abstraction for the majority of students surviving the system of public education. Until expectations for learning practice are embedded in local student practice, it will be difficult to build pedagogical architecture that serves students to expand authentically and rapidly their learning practice.

Finally, this study begins to point to a few early lessons in relationship to pedagogical developments with an emphasis on student activity. The study suggests that tools must be designed toward promoting agential learning encounters. A learning activity aligned toward the promotion of agential learning encounters is aligned toward expanding learning activity, complemented by social meaning making potential. In terms of expanding learning activity, three suggestions emerge.

First, the study points to the importance of a set of tools that places strong value on the act of 'doing learning' (for example, the 'LKA Journal'.) As suggested by the work of Lompscher on activity and formation strategy (1999, pp. 136-166), the activity must be qualitatively oriented toward the student's learning activity. More challenging, the tools must be capable of quickly expanding beyond the structure of students' learning activity.

Second, the experience suggests that tools that focus only on 'doing' are not enough on their own. They must be complemented by tools that support expanding capacity – that is, technical improvements in learning activity (for example, the LKA Reading Log, Umzi dictionary.) These experiences must be made explicit through externalised activity (Gal'perin, 1969) and contribute to a sense of appropriation (Wertsch and Stone, 1985) or autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2000, pp. 68-78), expanding the 'psychic regulation' of the expanding activity (Lompscher, 1999, p. 140).

Finally, the activity itself must constitute authentic value. That is, if it implicitly constitutes an act of 'dumbing down' (Haggis, 2006, pp. 521-535), it is not structurally in line with an agential encounter. While students may feel relieved and happy to achieve such an activity they know to be simplified, it does not disrupt internalised narratives of learning agency. In the words of the students of the Grounding Programme Student Round Table, an agential encounter must be structured at the metaphoric 'high bar'.

- **Proposition Emerging 5: Higher Education and Critical Meaning Making**

The next proposition emerging from this study is that 'meaning making' is the work of higher education. There are three interrelated suggestions emerging from this study experience. First, the domain of meaning making itself represents generative pedagogical territory for expanding learning practice of first year students. Second, the study suggests that the meaning making potential imbued within pedagogical tools themselves contributes toward expanding motive. The symbolic tools of the critical propositions seemed to help students confront patterns of alienation from learning practice, as well as recalibrate present expectations at a 'higher bar'. That is, the tools handed over learning agency, whereby a critical understanding of socio-cultural inheritances can help reconstitute a more active and radical stance toward learning in the present and future. Extracted from the critical animating propositions, it is unlikely that the pedagogical architecture would have mediated learning activity

in the same way. Third, because 'meaning making' is enacted every day (whether in the institutional context - classroom/residence - or society more widely), it is the domain of higher education to make explicit both the hegemonic assumptions of institutional and social practice, and to widen the toolkit of meaning making beyond historic inheritances. These propositions run in the opposite direction of prescribing students' values or processes of meaning making. Rather, it suggests that the work of higher education includes: (1) the provision of widening critical tools for meaning making; (2) expanding the narrative meaning making capacities of students (and lecturers); (3) building tools with expanding meaning making potential; and (4) establishing more expansive curricular dialogic opportunities for students to disrupt, critique, re-engage and re-evaluate their meaning making activity more transparently.

Bruner's work suggests that while educationists have tacitly assumed that the narrative (and meaning making) act is one that is developed 'naturally', research suggests that this is unlikely to be true (1996, p. 40-41). Bruner suggests that we do not know enough about the support required for the flourishing of the narrative capacities of the mind. He suggests that there is strong evidence of the relationship between narrative development and an immersion in the 'feel' for local histories and stories, as well as immersion in the imaginary, through fiction and other writings that invite the human mind into the world of possibility (Bruner, 1996, p. 41). Bruner suggests that the pressures of contemporary times, with the vast dislocation and complexity of human life, makes the process of narrative ('feeling at home in the world, knowing how to place oneself into self-descriptive stories' (Bruner, 1996, p. 41)) immeasurably more difficult and complex. He suggests that what we mainly know is that, '...if narrative is to be made an instrument of the mind on behalf of meaning making, it requires work on our part – reading it, making it, analysing it, understanding its craft, sensing its uses, discussing it' (*ibid*, p. 41). He argues, '... a system of education must help those growing up in a culture find an identity within that culture. Without it, they stumble in their effort after meaning. It is only in the

narrative mode that one can construct an identity and find a place in one's culture. [Educational institutions] must cultivate it, nurture it, cease taking it for granted' (*ibid*, p. 42).

- **Proposition 6: University Purpose: Agency and un-Agency**

The next proposition emerging from this study is that more work must be undertaken on the notion of agency and un-agency, particularly in relation to learning agency and higher education.

Drawing from the work of Archer (2010) we can appreciate the interrelationships between structure and agency, but consider each separately within its own time dimensions. This study may assist in understanding the more micro interactions along the trajectory of Archer's line of 'action' (T2 to T3) as applied to learning activity. The discussion in the previous chapter suggests that the line of learning 'action' is constituted of 'units' of 'agential learning encounters' – each unit representing an interval of 'motive', 'learning action,' and motive elaboration, borrowing from the basic model established by Archer (2010, p. 238).

This study starts to suggest the structure of an 'agential learning encounter' for first year students in this context. It appears to reflect three axes: learning activity, meaning making, and associated social relatedness. As a learning activity it must both promote appropriation (learning autonomy) and constitute a learning success at a high enough bar. In terms of meaning making, agential capacity is enhanced to the extent that it is enacted in a context, whereby the tools of critical meaning making are expansive. In terms of social relatedness, agential capacity is enhanced to the extent that opportunities are made available for the dialogic activity required to build alternative learning cultures.

It is important to emphasise that an emphasis on learning agency does not promote more subjectivist notions of 'feeling good' nor lead us into a simple 'affirmative' approach. On the contrary, it maps out the difficult terrain of externalised activity at

the interface of expanding learning challenges and the support required to achieve them, appreciating the ontological process of expanding critical meaning making and relatedness required for human appropriation.

The first year literature is plagued by an over-emphasis on the evaluative tool of retention rates, with few conceptual tools to help understand learning success from a more formative perspective (Barefoot, 2000; Kinzie, 2012, p. xiv; Schreiner, 2012, pp. 1-18; McInnis, 2001). It is proposed that the notion of 'agency' and 'un-agency', through the unit of agential encounter may contribute a productive tool through which to evaluate pedagogy and the social role of higher education more broadly.

- **Proposition 7: New Pedagogical Learning Architecture**

The literature on the first year experience places emphasis on the pedagogical architecture in four ways. First, it emphasises the importance for spaces for student interaction (Astin, 1993; Barefoot, 2000; Tinto, 1997; York and Thomas, 2003). Second, it emphasises the importance of spaces for student and lecturer interaction (Astin, 1993; Barefoot, 2000; Tinto, 1997; York and Thomas, 2003.). Third, it emphasises spaces for 'involvement' of students in the wider activity of university life (Astin, 1993; Barefoot, 2000; Yorke and Thomas, 2003). And, finally, related to each of the above, more recent research moves beyond suggesting the integration of the social and academic domains (Tinto, 1987) to the alignment within a unitary domain (Tinto, 1997). The current structure of institutions of higher education, whereby the academic domain primarily enacts itself within the traditional lecturer-driven classroom, does not lend itself well to achieving these requirements. Achieving these conditions through the traditional structure of higher education is arguably even more difficult for under-resourced institutions, where academic resources are even more scarce.

This study points to the potentiality for reconstituting the institutional learning architecture to better achieve the conditions conducive to first year learning success.

The Umzi-Ekhaya-Village-Jamboree nexus sought to directly mediate the structure of the learning community within the institution itself. In the language of second generation activity theorists, it sought to directly reconstitute the community, rules and division of labour of the culture in which learning is enacted.

A more detailed analysis of the Umzi-Ekhaya-Village-Jamboree nexus fell out of the scope of this study. The experience at this nexus, and the potentials and limitations emerging deserve a study of their own. The limited data that were included suggest that the new architecture may have been the most important element in reconstituting students' relationship to learning activity. The study suggested that the dialogic activity structured at different levels took distinct and complementary forms. While the most controversial element, the study points to the particular potential of the 'Umzi' experience, associated with the widest learning activity. Moreover, this study suggests that the Umzi experience, and the meaning imbued within the Umzi, holds particularly important learning potential for students with less access to educational advantage.

- **Proposition 8: Shared Generative Space: Lecturers and Students**

The final suggestion extracted from this experience is the special potential of a new kind of shared space for students and lecturers in pedagogical design and development. As discussed earlier, the expectations for student learning practice (for example reading) has been largely extracted from local student practice. As discussed in Chapter 3, there was not only little consensus among academics about what constituted the zone of proximal development of students at the institution, but the difference between lecturers was vast. The experience of students in relationship to the 'LKA Reader' pointed to the special potential of lecturer-student interaction in pedagogical development itself. The reading material that was developed through a method of interaction between lecturers and students was much better received than the material that was developed by lecturers in isolation

from student critique. The reading material that was furthest extracted from this process were the least well received.

An understanding of what constitutes a 'shared space' will require further research. This experience suggests that it requires students and lecturers engaging with each other over time. It suggests that it requires lecturers who come to value (and invest time into) building the critical intellectual capacity of senior students expanding the basis of critique over time. The postscript of this study will reflect on how this in and of itself runs largely counter to the current institutional practices of higher education. Tools to support the development of this shared space must be developed to better encourage and build this shared space over time.

#### 7.4. RESEARCH AGENDA EMERGING

This study contributes to the delineation of a relatively unoccupied territory of research requiring both further intervention based research and theoretical elaboration.

Across the international arena, research focusing on the interface of the first year student and the institutional arrangements known as higher education have received more and more attention. While important work is beginning to point to the conditions for first year success (Astin, 1993, 1998; Barefoot, 2000; Yorke and Thomas, 2003) and the innovations that have been tested to create these conditions (Tinto, 1997; Yorke and Thomas, 2003), researchers agree that there is still little empirical evidence that stabilises solutions, or points to 'best practice' (Yorke and Thomas, 2003, p. 71; Barefoot, 2000, pp. 12-13) in the international arena.

The South African literature is beginning to grow. Researchers have contributed to building a more detailed understanding of the conditions for first year success of students in the South African context (Fraser and Killen, 2003; Eiselen and Geysler, 2006; Jones, Baily and Wickham, 2008) and pointing to classroom based and institutional based responses, notably extended degree programmes (Scott *et al.*, 2007; Scott 2012) and Stellenbosch's first year academy (van Schalkwyk, Leibowitz, van der Merwe, 2012; Stellenbosch University, 2011). However, most of this work continues to be undertaken within historically advantaged institutions, and continues to struggle with the question of supporting students to integrate better within institutional academic practice as currently constituted.

This study arguably points to a different horizon. At the conclusion of a detailed investigation of the teaching and learning domain across three institutions in South Africa, Cross *et al.* (CHE, 2010) conclude that the next generation of research must not only look more closely at the potentiality of the pedagogical domain, but must also take a more 'critical stance' to the knowledge project in society (Cross *et al.*, Jansen *et al.*, and Ravjee *et al.*, CHE, 2010, pp. 169-179). They conclude:

Mainstream multicultural frameworks theorise access and academic performance in relation to the individual student as a member of a specific group, such as a particular class, race or gender, with the particular group often being defined in stable essentialist terms. Liberal frameworks view access in terms of assimilation of students from historically excluded groups into existing institutions...without questioning the politics of knowledge around inherited categories or the hetero-patriarchal and middle class norms pervading academic cultures. By adopting an uncritical stance toward 'diversity' and 'culture' such approaches place the onus for change on the student, with universities making some surface-level changes to accommodate the diverse newcomers with the existing institutions status quo. (*ibid*, p. 179)

In her 2006 article, Odora Hoppers asks several questions to establish an imaginative horizon for the challenge of transformation, especially for 'historically disadvantaged institutions' in South Africa. She poses the following question:

...why have there never been any systematic attempts at presenting a radical critique of knowledge, its epistemology, its pedagogy or its use? Why is it that alienness and estrangement of the university from its local context have never been dealt with intellectually and pragmatically through practical strategies to undo or transcend their grip? ... It demands a different kind of creativity and radical innovations in pedagogy. (Odora Hoppers, 2006, pp. 53-54)

She concludes that the transformative agenda for these institutions 'needs to go beyond the reiteration of past disadvantage towards bold re-articulation of how these disadvantages can be retooled to become new points of departure' (*ibid*, p. 58).

The suggestions of the CHE team and the questions posed by Odora Hoppers help to point to the territory opening up through this research.

The horizon of imagination shifts away from the 'problematic' of the 'unprepared' student, and rather assumes that placing these students at the ontological and epistemic centre of pedagogical developments holds the 'compass' for reconstituting the institutional landscape away from its colonial 'ivory tower' and toward a horizon both universal and local, better able to articulate with the complex learning needs of a democratic society. Said another way, this territory does not simply seek to support new students to better integrate within the current culture of higher education (to 'break them in'). Rather, it seeks to build tools to support the expansion of learning agency of first year students such that they, in turn, contribute to democratic

structural elaboration (Archer, 2010) over time. It is founded in a space of 'love' (hooks, 1994, 2003) inspired by the interface of expanding student activity and critical capacities.

The study proposes that far from being simple or unproblematic, the field of pedagogical innovation placing the majority of students at the epistemic and ontological centre is both contested and complex. There are few research networks, theoretical tools or intervention experiences through which to build tools into the future. Sustainable development in this area will require building a new intellectual project over time, capable of expanding our tools through a wide arc of intervention based research.

This study points to four more specific research agendas within this overall research horizon. The first research agenda is the massive work still required to build generative learning architectures for first year students in the South African context. Across the world, universities are struggling to support entering students to expand their learning practices rapidly enough to satisfy the ambitious goals of higher education. This study has critiqued an approach to higher education performance relegating the problematic to the 'unprepared student'. This critique is not to negate or look away from the fragile learning practices of many of our best first year students, and particularly those who have endured a schooling system known for its dysfunction. It rather suggests that our students are simply a reflection of the public education system we collectively produce. Higher education holds the immense responsibility of building theory and pedagogical tools to support students to expand their learning activity rapidly through their participation in higher education. Much more research is required to understand and build these tools over time.

One component of this agenda deserves special mention. One of the unique ways South African higher education is unable to serve first year students is its inability to build upon the multilingual resources of first year students. Relatively little work has been done on a large scale to understand how to better align the linguistic practices of higher education with expansive learning in the country more generally. The lack

of engagement with this issue is an important limitation of the current study experience. The emerging research in the area of bilingual curricula (Ngcobo, 2012; Ramadiro and Sotuku, 2011) may prove to hold the most promise for expanding the opportunities for learning success of first year students in this context.

The second agenda ties the above agenda to a more critical project. This agenda emerges from the thesis that the current institutional landscape of higher education does not serve the democratic interests of the country more broadly conceived (Maharaj, Motala and Scerri, 2011; Odora Hoppers, 2006). It suggests, moreover, that building students who have successful learning experiences at university but who are unable to critique or unwilling to engage hegemonic inheritances is of limited value to a critical, humanising project more widely conceived. This study was unable to explore more fully the critical potential of the pedagogical intervention. Much more research looking to the pedagogical domain from a critical perspective is required to build upon knowledge and experience in this area. More important still will be research that undertakes to unite the above agendas into a common inquiry.

The final research agenda emerging considers the transformation of the socio-cultural inheritance of higher education itself. Analysts agree that the socio-cultural inheritance of higher education has endured from the colonial and apartheid period mostly undisrupted (*ibid*, Swartz, 2005). Research further suggests that conditions conducive to first year learning success (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1997; Yorke and Thomas, 2003) are largely inconsistent with this inheritance. As suggested by Scott (2012), more work is required to expose the conservatisms locked within this cultural inheritance. As importantly, more work is required to understand how this culture can be disrupted – in all likelihood only possible through a new kind of alliance between lecturers and students themselves.

## POSTSCRIPT

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Some readers will be interested in the broader developments within this course, against some of the more ambitious visions emanating from the early period. As discussed in the introduction of this study, the more fundamental vision emerging from the expansive dialogue of 2007 was to shift the curricular project at the centre of the University. The problematic of the University was not located with the entering students but rather with the enactment of a culture of teaching and learning rooted strongly in the historical inheritances of apartheid, within a wider system of global inequity. As such, the final ambition of the pedagogical intervention was less about 'changing students' and more about changing the culture of the institution over time. In the language of Bruner (1996), the intention was to shift the practice and related 'folk psychology' of the institution to better align it with local student practice and potential into the future.

Lecturers were identified as the vehicle through which socio-cultural change at the level of the institution could be enacted over time. There was little hope invested in the notion that a one semester core course could shift the learning experiences of students in a sustainable way. More generative potential was allocated to the potential for a 'shared space' of pedagogical innovation to shift the practice of lecturers, over time, in a sustainable way.

Three suggestions were made about this 'shared space.' First, the vision of building a core course to serve the learning activity and meaning making of both students and lecturers was not known territory. No person laid claim on knowing exactly what would work. There was a shared recognition that building pedagogical tools fit for purpose was complex, and would require detailed intervention testing and research over time. The 'shared space' was designed to ensure that whatever pedagogical tools were developed upfront as the 'best first guess', would be developed and transformed over time, reflecting lessons learned through experience.

Second, the space would be shared by lecturers across disciplinary boundaries. The 'shared space' with reference to lectures was itself seen as a mediating tool with at least two objectives. First, it was designed to build a new community of practice through which to enhance the socio-cultural value placed on pedagogical innovation within the institution. Second, it was designed to support lecturers to build more effective pedagogical and research tools, applicable to wider settings of practice.

The final element of the 'shared space' was that it was to be shared specifically with a group of 'feisty' students committed to the vision of the transformation of the curricular project of the University. Several comments about the nature of this cohort of students, and their imagined role are important. The word 'feisty' is chosen to describe the vision for this cohort of students to point to a combination of characteristics: energetic, curious and intellectually engaged, with a strong sense of agency in the present into the future. It was recognised that these students emerge through practice, and are supported through dialectical engagement over time. The word 'feisty' captures the notion that these students were to retain a sense of autonomy from the socio-cultural norms of the institution in general, and lecturers in particular, able to 'speak out' in new (and at times uncomfortable) ways. Building and supporting the emergence of this generative cohort of intellectually feisty students was approached as an internal pedagogical compass. While unpredictable and contested, this high energy 'compass' helped to calibrate accountability closer to the needs of students, a counterbalance to the power of the canonical norms of institutional practice over time. Said another way, the role of these students (and the power relegated to them) was designed as a tool to reproduce the conditions of accountability of innovation into the future. As such these students were seen dialectically to expand the boundaries of pedagogical innovation over time and, in so doing, mediate the transformation process of lecturers over time.

(Initially the 'shared space' was designed to be inclusive of voices and experiences usually relegated beyond the academy to help expand the curricular knowledge

project at the interface of wider systems of local action and knowing. As discussed in the first chapter, this element of the vision was never taken forward.)

The dialectical engagement between committed lecturers and students was to be institutionalised within a Steering Committee, designed as a reflective think-tank, with some institutional authority to make changes to the pedagogical innovation over time. This core design feature was to serve three overarching purposes. First, it was the internal compass, protecting the energy of innovation into the future. Second, it established an engine for pedagogical reflection and learning over time. Finally, it established a link between the ‘course’ and the wider vision of institutional transformation over time.

The vision for the course as a shared pedagogical space between lecturers and students, tied to an imagination of lecturer transformation over time, was not realised. This central design element of building a space for pedagogical experimentation shared by lecturers and students was quickly relegated to one side, justified through the narrative of ‘institutionalisation’. With a new director in place, accountable to a new senior institutional leader looking to consolidate a more conservative notion of the distribution of academic power, four fundamental shifts were consolidated by the end of 2010.

First, the initial cohort of students, who had developed the strongest critical capacity as the most active students participating in the pedagogical design process, had been removed in some way. This group of students were concerned about the narrowing of the space for autonomous student activity, as the role of student facilitators became increasingly accountable to the course director in isolation of wider engagements. The course director experienced these students as having too much power, and consciously sought to re-establish a new student cohort within a stronger structure of accountability to the central course management.

Second, the conceptualisation of a shared space for pedagogical innovation between lecturers and students was closed down. The Steering Committee was closed down, and was not replaced with another formation which would allow lecturers to learn

from and influence the space over time. The small cohort of lecturers who were most interested and involved had no structured space for engagement.

Third, by the end of 2010, the course narrative had shifted from a space for lecturer-student engagement to one of 'student run'. This received some positive attention, as it was seen to be innovative in its own right. While innovative at first glance, it was this narrative that served to protect the institutional socio-cultural narrative from any disruption. With more critical students relegated to one side, student facilitators being held accountable to a central course director, and no structural space for influence of a wider lecturer cohort, the course did not have enough dialectical energy to expand, either conceptually or in influence. After 2010, the course curriculum was re-worked and 'simplified'. Course expectations were lowered, decreasing the structural pressures for transformation for both students and lecturers.

Finally, by the end of 2010, the 'course' received 'value' primarily through the lens of 'transdisciplinarity' rather than through the lens of pedagogical, curricular or institutional transformation. Reflecting the low level of value placed on undergraduate teaching and innovation, the new leadership of the course placed emphasis on the research agenda of transdisciplinarity. As value was increasingly placed on a more academic and specialised approach to transdisciplinarity itself, academic gaze moved away from the domain of pedagogy, and away from an interest in student learning activity. Over time, the course would come to be located as 'one initiative' in a much larger 'Centre for Transdisciplinary Studies', aspiring to be known for its contribution to transdisciplinary research, rather than valuing teaching and learning as we see, for example, in the First Year Academy at the University of Stellenbosch.

These shifts, taken together, implicitly relegated the value placed on pedagogical innovation and the transformation of the institutional teaching and learning domain to one side. Moreover, they largely undermined the initial aspirations for the course to

dialectically engage with the transformation of the institution's culture of learning and teaching itself over time.

While the more far reaching potential may not have been realised to date, the experience continues to be an important learning opportunity for pedagogical innovation in first year studies. Currently all undergraduate students enrolled at the university participate in the course. Several cohorts of abakhwezeli have contributed toward building a more dynamic learning experience for their first year colleagues. Several cohorts of first year students have thrown themselves into the course experience. With a new course leadership in place, animated by a commitment to serve first year students better, the course may represent a renewed opportunity to push the boundaries of pedagogical learning forward into the future.

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