

**Educational journeys of international postgraduate students
studying at UKZN (University of KwaZulu-Natal):
A Narrative Inquiry**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment
for the degree of Master of Education**

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is my own work. It has not been submitted for degree purposes at any other University. All sources used have been indicated and acknowledged accordingly.

Student's signature

Date

Supervisors signature

Date

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

My beloved late parents **Duthie and Chundee Ramdhani**, for being my inspiration: you would have been so proud of me.

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Abstract

This research study is entitled Educational Journeys of international postgraduate students studying at UKZN: A narrative inquiry.

In studying postgraduate students' lived experiences and their learning moments in their postgraduate studies, my study offers a deeper understanding of who these African, international, postgraduate students are and how they negotiate their learning experiences within the various social, personal and professional spaces at University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). I explored postgraduate students' lived experiences in higher education within the context of internationalisation.

My study is located within a qualitative research approach which allows me to understand the postgraduate students' lived experiences in higher education from the perspective of the participants, as they negotiate and construct particular meanings of self and learning. Using a narrative inquiry approach offered me the opportunity to reflect on the diversity, richness and complexities involved in understanding the personal and professional learning experiences of postgraduate international students studying in higher education.

The research methods used included life history interviews, collage and photo voice to understand the complexities, challenges and highlights of studying in a foreign country. The data generated enabled me to produce rich and vivid narrative accounts of their learning. Through narrative analysis, two reconstructed students' stories were produced.

The findings of the data show that international students are faced with both positive and negative learning experiences. Particular meanings of self shaped by dominant discourses and practices in their homeland shape who they are as international postgraduate students. The study concludes that these African, international, postgraduate students' personal, social and professional identities are negotiated on a daily basis within the postgraduate learning. Their professional space offered them a platform to realise their goals at UKZN as international students.

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List of Abbreviations

B Ed	Bachelor of Education
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
IEASA	International Education Association of South Africa
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
MEd	Master of Education
PG	Postgraduate
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SA	South Africa
TEPD	Teacher Education and Professional Development
UNESCO	United Nations Education and Scientific Organization
UK	United Kingdom
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal

Chapter One

Introduction

“When I decided to leave my homeland, it was like crossing a huge bridge. This crossing over symbolised the transition from my homeland to a foreign country. This decision to come to South Africa however impacted on my family life. I was married but had to leave my family behind in Zimbabwe. I was now entering a new marriage with the university, lecturers and students at UKZN.”

(Interview with Arthur on 19 May 2011.)

I introduce this chapter with a story about Vapili, an African international student from Namibia. My interest in studying students’ lived experiences and their critical learning moments began when I enrolled for my Masters programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s (UKZN) Edgewood Campus. Vapili (pseudonym) was an international student from Namibia studying Teacher Education and Professional Development (TEPD). I remember the moment when we made a drawing about an incident we had encountered as a learning experience. This is when I got to know about Vapili’s life as a Namibian woman and the circumstances in her homeland which resulted in her seeking out an international learning experience. Until then, I never realised that Vapili was a foreigner because she looked like the other ‘Black’ females in the lecture.

My bias as an Indian female had set in. I had limited opportunities to get to know people of other groups because of the apartheid regime in which I grew up. Furthermore, the students in the lecture rooms sat next to those students with whom they could identify. Therefore, we Indian students grouped ourselves together and the local Black students did the same. Vapili kept to herself in the lecture room and I never really understood why until I realised that she was a ‘foreigner’. Vapili’s experience correlates with the research findings of Shindodola (2002, p. 27), who states that “Black African foreign students can expect to experience the same level of abuse, discrimination and stereotyping endured by any other black foreigner in the country”. Shindodola’s (2002) findings draw our attention to the important aspects of the social relations that foreign students have to negotiate at a foreign university. This compelled me to ask what

sort of learning experiences other international postgraduate students have within the postgraduate learning community. Therefore as a postgraduate student myself, I needed to enter into social relationships with other postgraduate students to exchange or seek professional assistance and to scaffold my learning since postgraduate studies involve more than just independent work.

After listening to Vapili's encounter as a teacher living and working in Namibia, I became curious about her international status and experience of studying at UKZN. I also became aware of the number of international students studying at the university. Why have they chosen to study in South Africa? What learning experiences did they have and how did they negotiate their learning within the community of the university? Are they accepted and given support within the social and learning communities at UKZN? These were some of the questions that needed answers, and which prompted me to undertake a narrative inquiry to explore the lived experiences of international postgraduate students here.

Rationale for the study

When reference is made to African international students in this study, I am referring to non-South African students who have their permanent residence outside of SA but who for the duration of their postgraduate studies temporarily obtain the status of legal foreign students who are living in South Africa due to study purposes. Because most international students intend to return to their country of origin once they have completed their studies, their temporary stay in the new environment has been termed as a 'sojourn' (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

As a Masters student, I was part of the postgraduate learning community that was made up of a diverse group of postgraduate students. From my own experiences within this small community, I realised that not knowing who we are within this learning space made collective and collaborative learning a problem.

Learning happened within that community but in a very superficial way because the relationships that were forged were marked by 'issues of race and nationality'. If and when I encountered any problem I would naturally seek the help of my 'Indian' colleagues because they were people I could identify with; I felt comfortable around them and with them. Being an Indian female and

growing up surrounded by Indians I rarely had the opportunity to ‘mix’ with people of multiple origins within a postgraduate learning community. This was due to the legacy of apartheid that kept us apart. Unfortunately this conditioning mapped my existence in a profound way. Thus my propensity to steer myself towards other Indian students had its roots in my upbringing and manifested within the lecture room. Engaging in this study offers me a way of confronting my own prejudices and biases as a local, Indian South African postgraduate student. Doing the study helps me better understand the dynamics of the postgraduate learning community as a social space in and through which learning happens. Critical relationships formed in this space are necessary for learning to happen. This complexity informs how learning communities work in deeper ways. But what happens when this complexity is layered by foreign students choosing to engage in postgraduate studies in South Africa and who are critical to the learning in the social space of the postgraduate community?

In this study, I focus specifically on the learning experiences of African international postgraduate students studying at UKZN and how they negotiate their learning within a foreign university. Understanding the learning experiences of African international postgraduate students in higher education will inform the policy decisions in respect of the international student. Education White Paper 3 (1997) and the National Plan for Higher Education (2001) outline what the higher education sector in South Africa should look like, and how the government could go about achieving its goals for this sector (Council on Higher Education, 2006). However, there seems to be a lack of national policy to address the internationalisation of higher education from a South African perspective (McLellan, 2006). As a result of a lack of a clear policy framework, UKZN has its own policy plan (UKZN Strategic Plan 2007-2016). This plan offers a framework against which to examine the role of institutions of higher education and its place in internationalisation.

Prior to 1994, South Africa had been isolated from the rest of the world and from other African states. After 1994, South Africa fostered close ties with neighbouring states within Sub-Saharan Africa. As a result of this, universities opened access to international students. UKZN promotes and supports internationalisation by encouraging student exchange programmes that bring students from other countries to the University and further expand the students’ international opportunities by enriching the learning experience (UKZN Strategic Plan 2007-2016). South Africa became the top host nation to international students within Africa (McLellan, 2006) as a

result of the influx of international students after 1994. I believe that it is important that students are exposed to global developments and trends in an environment that is very competitive. According to the (UKZN Strategic Plan 2007-2012), the university has to reposition itself as an institution in terms of governance, teaching and research. There are also many reasons why a country or an institute encourages international students to come to its country or institute to study, including academic, cultural, financial and political benefits not only to the institution but to the country as well (Ramphela, 1999; Ward et al., 2001). The importance of postgraduate learning at higher institutions needs to be established when focusing on professional imperatives. According to the UKZN Strategic Plan (2007-2016), the vision and mission of the University of KwaZulu-Natal provides an overview of the institution's strategic framework for action. With regard to the Strategic Plan (2007-2016), the university has clear policies regarding accommodation, financial aid and curriculum to be offered to international students. While the university ensures that the necessary systems are in place, how does the institutional culture encourage and cultivate learning for personal and professional development?

Research study

There is very little literature on the learning experiences of postgraduate students within universities in sub-Saharan Africa. While there has been significant research on international students globally, there is also a lack of research on international students in South Africa. In my research study, I found literature pertaining to the learning experiences of international students within the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Australia (Forland, 2006; Klomegah, 2006; Özturgut & Murphy, 2009; Mori, 2000). It is important to highlight the issue of the learning experiences of international students within the South African context. Studies conducted (Rouhani, 2002; Kotecha, 2006; Moja, 2006; Ramphela, 1999; McLellan, 2009) within South Africa and in sub-Saharan Africa highlight the problems, difficulties and challenges faced by international students. Adopting a narrative inquiry stance, this study explores educational journeys of African, international postgraduate students studying at UKZN.

Research Questions

To explore the postgraduate students' experiences of learning at UKZN, the following critical questions were framed to gain clarity on the experiences of their educational journeys at UKZN:

- Who are the postgraduate international students studying at UKZN?

The emphasis in this question is on how identities and meaning of self are negotiated and choices are made to give rise to being an international student.

- What are African international students' learning experiences through postgraduate studies at UKZN?

The emphasis here is on learning experiences, knowledge production and interchange that takes place through the African international postgraduate students' learning experiences. I attempt to gain a better sense of their social, personal and professional experiences within the postgraduate community and also within the broader university community.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study is located within a qualitative research approach which allows me to explore the internationalisation of postgraduate students' lived experiences in higher education. The methodology is narrative inquiry. Using narrative inquiry allows me to engage critically with students' lives as constructed by their own narratives. This methodology has the potential to offer me an opportunity to reflect on the diversity, richness and complexities involved in personal and professional experiences of postgraduate international students studying in higher education.

Narrative inquiry in this study will enable me to discover how identity is defined or shaped by the students and how these identities influence their personal and professional learning experiences at UKZN.

Life history interviews will be conducted with two international students from African states (Zimbabwe and Lesotho) outside South Africa, to understand the complexities, challenges and highlights of studying in a foreign country. Life history interviews, collage and photo voice will be used to generate data. Collage and photo voice are research strategies that were used

alongside life history interviews to generate a deeper and nuanced understanding of their challenges, possibilities, views and experiences through words and images.

The argument that I develop in my study is that the ‘self’ does not work in isolation but within a broader social community. The theoretical framework that will be used in this study is social identity theory (Britzman, 1992), the social theory of learning (Wenger, 1998) and Bell and Gilberts’ (1996) model on professional learning. These theories are appropriate to the research study because the focus is on creating an awareness of the participants’ identity that they adopt in their hometown and their learning experiences at UKZN.

Definition of key concepts

Postgraduate student: A student who has obtained a degree from a university and is pursuing studies for a more advanced qualification (Collins English Dictionary, 2000).

International Student: An international student, according to the Institute of International Education, has been defined as “an individual who has moved from one country to another primarily for the purpose of study” (as cited by the Council of Higher Education, 2006, p. 69).

Internationalisation: The process of ‘integrating an international perspective into the teaching and learning, research and service functions’ of a higher education institution (Knight & de Wit, 1997, p. 8).

Globalisation: The flow of technology, economy, information, persons, principles, and data across borders. Globalisation shapes each country in diverse ways due to a nation’s individual history, institution, customs and concerns (Knight, 2001).

University: Institution of higher learning or education, usually with a high reputation in teaching and research (Collins English Dictionary, 2003).

Educational Journey: The literal meaning of the journey refers to the concrete steps taken, the progression from one level to another, as well as to understand the subjective, experiential, relational aspects of the educational journey from the home country to the host university.

Organisation of the thesis: Overview of the chapters

Chapter One: Introduces the study, offering background information. It offers a brief overview of the study, and discusses its statement of the problem, significance and critical research questions.

Chapter Two: Provides a synthesis of the literature and research on international postgraduate students studying in higher education. I will introduce Social Identity Theory (Britzman 1992); Wenger's (1998) Social Learning Theory, and Bell and Gilbert's (1996) model of professional learning as the theoretical framework which I will use for my interpretation.

Chapter Three: Deals with the research process and methodology. I will describe the methodology and its techniques to generate data for my studies. Life history interviews, collage and photo voice will be utilised to document the participants' lived experiences. Ethical considerations will also be outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Focuses on the reconstructed version of the African international postgraduate students' narratives in their homelands and their learning experiences at UKZN.

Chapter Five: Provides an analysis of the data on African international postgraduate students' lived experiences in response to the two critical questions. Key concepts of Social Identity Theory, Wenger's (1998) Social Theory of Learning and Bell and Gilbert's (1996) model of Professional learning direct the analysis of the data.

Chapter Six: Contains the findings and recommendations of the study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of studies undertaken by several national and international academics on the concept of internationalisation, specifically with reference to international postgraduate students within higher institutes of learning. This study explores the educational journeys of international postgraduate students studying at UKZN.

The learning experiences of the international postgraduate students are discussed within the context of their impact on UKZN only. It reflects their perceptions on different aspects of their identity and learning. Higher education institutions therefore need to adopt an inclusive framework with regard to internationalisation, where emphasis is placed on including international aspects in the course content (Rouhani, 2002). UKZN also acknowledges the need to foster closer ties with its neighbouring countries and in this way to allow for the interchange of knowledge across borders. Such relationships have the capacity to encourage research and promote scholarship within sub-Saharan Africa.

Section A will focus on the concept of globalisation and internationalisation in relation to its impact on higher education. Higher education institutions worldwide have been vigorously recruiting international students. For some countries, international students provide the funds needed to sustain their higher education sectors. For other countries, internationalisation is a way to recruit the skilled workforce that is needed. And still for others, it is a way to foster closer ties with their counterparts. Whatever the reason, the internationalisation of higher education is a reality. This section will also discuss briefly why South Africa is regarded as an appropriate destination for international students.

Section B will offer a view of the experiences, constraints and challenges of international students who choose to pursue postgraduate studies. The following themes will be discussed:

- Class, Gender and Patriarchy
- Cultural surprise and cross border mobility
- Financial constraints and their impact on international students learning

- Language as an obstacle to socialising
- Foreigner as an obstacle to acceptance within the international community
- Positive learning experiences of international students

Section C provides the theoretical framework of my study.

Section A

A focus on globalisation: An international perspective

Globalisation is one of the main reasons for internationalisation. Countries around the world are looking for skilled labour and these results in higher education institutions recruiting the best students. The internationalisation of higher education is an avenue used by countries to respond to the impact of globalisation, nonetheless it also affords countries the respect that is due to it. (Knight & de Wit, 1999). Globalisation is said to have resulted in economic success (Bakhtiari, 2006), with economic, political and societal forces pushing 21st century higher education towards greater internationalisation (Altbach & Knight, 2007.p. 290). However, it is also responsible for many of the current problems (Bakhtiari, 2006).

As nations are becoming more interconnected in a time of globalisation, the movement of students from their countries of origin to another country for the purpose of higher education is dramatically increased by the internationalisation of higher education (UNESCO, 2004). In 2004 it was estimated that more than 2.5million foreign students had been enrolled in an international education programme at tertiary level in countries other than their home (UNESCO, 2004).

Scott (1998) looked at the differences and similarities between these two concepts. The globalization of education takes into account those social and economic practices that influence the way educational establishments function, while the internationalisation of higher education illustrate the policy-based responses that learning institutions implement as a result of the impact of globalisation (Scott, 1998). Such an intricate link suggests that the internationalisation of higher education should be understood within the broader context of globalisation.

The impact of globalisation on the internationalisation of universities

Internationalisation should be seen as an inclusive strategy which is relevant and adaptable to the multicultural aspects of society. Within this context, internationalisation strategies should be accepted and supported as part of educational policies which will enrich the quality and relevance of education (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004). Postgraduate international students living together and learning from each other in a multicultural context will lessen bias, stereotyped images and thus reduce conflict situations. The starting point for internationalisation should be on the process, function and delivery of the curricula in a varied and contextualised higher education system (Knight, 2004).

Trends within the international and national context on the internationalisation and globalisation of higher education

There are four types of rationale, as identified by Knight & de Wit (1999) and de Wit (2002), driving the internationalisation of higher education. These are political, social, economic, cultural and educational, with the economic rationale overshadowing the other three. Nonetheless, it has also been agreed that these rationales are not set in stone and that they do change (de Wit, 2002). Another rationale that has also been introduced is name branding, which involves building a solid international reputation (Knight, 2006). As a result, institutional name branding is important as institutions are in competition to attract international, fee paying students.

There is also evidence that there is correlation between income generation and overseas recruitment of international students. For example, the fees from international students are said to make up a third of the income for British universities (Carroll, 2005). Thus internationalisation activities are seen as a way to generate income for universities, especially in the face of decreased funding and an increase in the operational costs of the university (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2006; Moja, 2006). However, a survey of international students in the UK has revealed that while international students were generally satisfied with their learning experiences, over “53% did not regard the experience in the UK as value for money” (Forland, 2006. p. 3).

International students can be found in most countries’ higher learning institutions around the world, and is a vital part of any internationally recognized institution (Ramphele, 1999; Sam,

2001). The volume of international students enrolled at higher learning institutions international has been increasing progressively over the last few decades, with over two million international students studying annually in 2003 (IEASA, 2009).

South Africa's entry into the global arena post-1994 saw an increase in international students seeking to study at higher education institutions within South Africa's borders. The objective of the new democratic government was to get rid of segregation, racism and apartheid and replace it with unity and equality (Harris, 2002). About two thirds of international students studying in South Africa came from neighbouring African countries and only a small number from Europe and North America (Ayliff & Wang, 2006; Rouhani, 2002). There were over 13 000 international students enrolled in South African universities in 1996, and in 2007 that figure rose sharply to over 53 000 (Ramphela, 1999; IEASA, 2009). While South Africa emerged as a sought-after study destination, universities also have to address the challenges that these students bring with them and which the host countries pose to foreign students (IEASA, 2009). Research has found that international or foreign students encounter more problems than host or local students (Ward, *et al.*, 2001) although they are a vital part of higher learning institutions.

Reasons why international students seek an international learning experience within South African higher institutes of learning

There are many reasons why international students seek an international education for the purpose of learning. If we look at the South African context, there are numerous explanations for the swell of African international students in South Africa. Higher Education South Africa and IEASA (2009) put forward the following reasons:

- South Africa is in close proximity to several sub-Saharan African countries
- English is employed as the principal language of instruction
- South Africa has a lower fees structure than most developed nations
- The cost of living is within reach of most students
- South Africa also prides itself as having a sizeable higher education sector that is within reach
- It also offers globally accredited qualifications

The need for the internationalisation of higher education is both the ideal and reality for higher education institutions within the present context of globalisation. There are many reasons why students study abroad, from wanting to get a better education than they can acquire in their own country, to experiencing a different culture from their own (Ward et al., 2001). There are also many reasons why a country or an institute encourages international students to come to their country or institute to study. Some of these reasons include academic, cultural, financial and political benefits not only to the institution but to the country as well (Ramphele, 1999; Ward et al., 2001). Host countries that have international students within its borders also benefit from these students as such students also add to and enrich their own higher education sector. It also fosters closer relations and a strengthening of ties in respect of trade and the encouragement of global understanding (Chapdelaine, 2004).

Section B

Institutions of challenges and constraints of international students

This section focuses on the challenges and constraints that the international students encounter in their host countries. The review of literature on the learning experiences of international students has revealed that international students experience myriad problems (Khoo et al., 2002; Forland, 2006; Klomegah, 2006). Some of these are adjustment to the new culture (Kenyan & Amrapala 1993; Mori, 2000); scholastic differences (Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel, 2005; Aubrey, 1991); language problems (Brown, 2008; Guilfoyle, 2006); disagreements and disputes among fellow nationals; the impact of advancement in home countries; male-female relationships; monetary difficulty; discord with the local population; racial discrimination; the ability to handle their new-found freedom; misunderstandings and isolation, and uncertainty and despair (Khoo et al., 2002).

Class, gender and patriarchy

Most families within the African context were normally set up on a patriarchal basis, according to a study conducted by the History World International (1992). Family decisions were normally determined by husband and father, where the male controlled the patriarchal family structures. In

contrast, the roles assigned to women, such as caring for families and keeping a home, have a low prestige in African culture (Blackmore & Kenway, 1993). Men have benefited more from access to education and employment than women especially in the rural areas (Parpart, 1995). The dominance of and the importance attributed to the males within society has inhibited women's advancement within society. Thus it is accepted that females will assume the role of mother, wife and homemaker. The current economic crisis has reinforced the notion that women should stay home and leave the men (the breadwinners) to work (Batezat & Mwalo, 1989).

According to Kariuki (2006), given the patriarchal nature of African societies, male dominance is clearly evident and extends to the consideration of who gets what level of education, if there are male and female siblings in one family. Abanyie (2002) argues that families see the education of the girl as a waste of money or an unnecessary luxury. In contexts where female children do get opportunities to attend formal schooling, education offers them an improved opportunity, for it serves as an eye opener and an empowerment exercise (Abanyie, 2002). Where this occurs, women have come closest to equality with men and it is for this reason that Abanyie (2002) argues that no one will disagree that education has a powerful influence on the lives of individuals.

Cultural surprise and cross border mobility

According to Lawson and Garrod (2001, p. 57), 'culture shock' refers to "the feelings of disruption that individuals might feel when confronted with a different and seemingly alien culture which challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions of their own perspectives". Therefore, cultural (or culture) shock is a "multifaceted experience resulting from numerous stressors occurring in contact with a different culture" (Winkelman, 1994, p. 121). Further, Winkelman (1994) emphasises that cultural shock is normal in the environment of a foreign culture. When people find themselves in an unfamiliar cultural milieu for the first time, "a person can be overwhelmed by the 'otherness' of the other culture and by the amount of new experience that has to be assimilated" (Mumford, 1998, p. 149).

International students experience social isolation, hostility and feelings of hopelessness and these are considered a part of the culture shock as well as adjustment and distress faced by international students (Pedersen, 1991). Pedersen's (1991) advice should be considered that

international students require a complete social life and support to facilitate living in a new environment and adapt to a new culture.

The term 'acculturation', which implies changes in "attitudes, values, and behaviours...and cultural identity" (Ward et al., 2001, p. 99), seems to be preferred to describe how one deals with the new environment. Acquainting oneself as an international student to the culture of the host institution is fundamental in the success of and transition into a new learning environment (Biggs, 2001; McInnis, 2001; Ramburuth, 2001). Learning in a foreign university context while coming from a different culture can pose significant difficulties. International students face difficulties in developing independent learning skills in the learning-teaching context while adjusting to a new social and cultural environment (Ranabahu & Tamala, 2006).

Cross border mobility also requires that students be accompanied with the cultural knowledge of studying in a foreign country and to be familiar with different personal, social and economic living conditions (Tremblay, 2005). Mobility allows students to take up the cultural and social habits of their host country and thus proceed as representatives for both for their own country and their host country (Tremblay, 2005). It is assumed that these cultural links could help reduce prejudice, hostility and discriminatory behaviour and to help increase international understanding and cooperation (Tremblay, 2005). On the same note, internationalisation strategies should be accepted and supported as part of educational policies which will enrich the quality and relevance of education (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004). This will develop global citizens through academic collaboration in a multicultural context. Students living together and learning from each other in a multicultural context will lessen bias and stereotyped images, and thus reduce conflict situations. However, the students' experience, not only in academic matters but also in their day-to-day life, is crucial in forming and influencing their perceptions about higher education abroad because their life is characterised by socio-cultural, economic and academic issues. Scott (1998, p. 100) is therefore of the view that "education, in general, and higher education, in particular, lay the foundations for such an evolution of society".

Cambridge & Thompson (2004) state that higher educational institutions should have the resources for training students to help them develop a critical perspective and to prepare them to work and live comfortably in a global context. Diversity usually represents characteristics that are associated with race, gender and cultural differences or anything that gives the student an

identity. International students need to feel that they have a rightful place in an institution, and the institution must be seen as multi-culturally diverse in its policies (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004).

Financial constraints and their impact on international students' learning

Financial stress and pressures are one of the central concerns for international students (Khoo et al., 2002; Lin & Yi, 1997). As full time students international students are also not permitted to engage in full time employment. Even if they are fortunate to be engaged in part time employment, it is not sufficient to sustain their expenses. They also do not enjoy or have limited access to social security or welfare benefits, loans, and scholarships. They have further problems where they have to pay for accommodation and are responsible to pay full tuition. Coupled with their financial difficulties are their isolation experiences as a result of social and cultural isolation. Such adversities create a sense of hopelessness for the international student (Lin & Yi, 1997).

Language as an obstacle to socialising

The international arena

Language can also be a matter of concern for a large number of international students. Their limited understanding and use of isiZulu prevents them from optimal interaction with the local population (Leong & Chou, 1996; Wan et al., 1992). Research in the United States showed that international students experienced difficulty adjusting to the English language and the educational system in the foreign country. Some of these difficulties included adjusting to the accents of the lecturer and different teaching styles, which makes them hesitant to contribute in class discussions (Lin & Yi, 1997; Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992). International students from non-English-speaking backgrounds also experience difficulty in comprehension of text and in turn require extra time to read, write and process understanding and comprehension (Ryan & Twibell, 2000). Due to their limited language, they are often unable to express and convey their knowledge in their written tasks (Lin & Yi, 1997; Wan., et al, 1992).

Overall, academic and language difficulties are central problems for international students. Their expectation of good performance can often lead to depression or insecurity and anxiety if these expectations are not met. The ability to reflect critically is essential to good performance at

university in Britain, where some international students may be criticised for their lack of critical thinking skills (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004).

The local context (South African)

While in the international context the English language presented a challenge to the international students, within the local SA context it was not the English language that was their nemesis but the inability to converse in a local African language. African international students feel discriminated against because they do not speak a local African language and this result in the locals being unfriendly with them (McLellan, 2009). Foreigners who converse in their own language are not welcomed by the locals and if they attempt to communicate in English it creates hostility towards them. The isolation that they feel as a result of being excluded forces them to stop talking in their own language and this result in a rejection of their identity. The inability to speak the local language, specifically KwaZulu -Natal alienates them from the local population. Therefore the lack of opportunities to speak their indigenous language may result in their culture being stifled (Mnyaka, 2003). This results in international students being open to xenophobic attacks because of their inability to communicate in a local language (Moja, 2006).

Foreigner as an obstacle to acceptance within the international community

There are various categories of foreigners living in South Africa; however, for my study I will highlight 'foreigners' or 'immigrants' who are legally within our borders. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1978, p. 1275) indicates that the word xenophobia is derived from the Greek words 'xeno', meaning stranger or foreigner, and 'phobia' meaning fear. It means an 'unreasonable fear and dislike of foreigners or strangers'.

The term *foreigner* refers to anyone without South African citizenship (Harris., et al 2001). An international or foreign student in South Africa is anyone who is not a South African citizen or a permanent resident or does not have a diplomatic exemption (Ramphela, 1999, p. 1). Xenophobia can also be related to a fundamental fear of difference that can result in cultural shock (Kleg, 1993). This refers to a situation of being uncomfortable among individuals of other cultures. The participants in this study will therefore fall within this category. Racism is a key feature of South Africa's immigration legislation and practice. (Harris., et al, 2001) further states that racial discrimination further reinforces xenophobic practices, especially on black African

foreigners who receive the full force of xenophobic discrimination, both at society at large and even at institutional level.

Foreigners in South Africa have to also bear the brunt of certain racist remarks because they are perceived as being inferior and destitute than the local black population. Tshitereke (1999) argued that this skewed fear and hate seems to have resulted in tension and violence by South Africans towards foreigners. The same treatment is meted out for all irrespective whether these foreigners are legal or illegal (Tshitereke, 1999).

Positive leaning experiences of international students

Several studies have been selectively choosing specific understandings of internationalisation, often leaving out essential elements that inform us about the international postgraduate students themselves. They do not dwell on the positive aspects about the students, or what makes their learning interesting.

Huang (2007) conducted a study on postgraduate work amongst international students in the UK. In particular, he looked at dissertation writing. Although students reported experiencing difficulties initially, many students benefited in the long run. Some students indicated that this exercise was a positive experience for them and indicated that writing a long piece of work in English helped improve their writing and language skills. The research also found that the students received positive support from classmates which provided them with the impetus to complete their writing. These findings seem to agree with Olsen's (1998) view that peer support was a significant feature influencing students' positive experience in writing dissertations.

Conclusion

Literature points to the learning experiences of the international students as being both positive and negative. From the review of literature it is also evident that for international students to benefit fully from their international experience, acceptance within the various learning contexts is important. The international student needs to feel wanted and accepted within the social, personal and professional dimensions of their life. Literature has shown how social exclusion hampers their learning and leads to feelings of inadequacy. Cultural isolation also prevents full

integration into the learning community. Thus it is important that full acceptance in all aspects of the international students' life is essential, for effective learning to be realised.

Section C

The Theoretical Framework

This study focuses on the learning experiences of international students within the context of internationalisation. However, it is important to constantly bear in mind that these international students are not isolated beings within this context but constantly negotiate their learning within the broader social context of the university. The self is always working in relation to the social, personal and professional context and the learning community.

With this in mind I have selected as my theoretical framework the Social Identity Theory (Britzman, 1994), the Social Theory of Learning (Wenger, 1998) and Bell and Gilbert's (1996) Dimensions of Learning. The social identity theory was chosen because the way in which the students approach their learning is grounded in their backgrounds, biographies, and past experiences in their homeland. Together, all factors constitute their identity.

Also identity is regarded as a 'fluid concept'; as such, within the homeland, the students may have had the identity of father, son, daughter and provider. At UKZN, they now also have the identity of an international postgraduate student. Identities tend to reflect various facets of our lives, and this is the reason Connelly & Clandinin (1999) argue that each person has several identities. For example, a man would be identified by his daughter as 'dad', but by his students as 'teacher' (Preston, 2006).

Social identity theory

Britzman (1992, p. 23) defines identity as constituted by "how the self is produced and reproduced through social interactions, daily negotiations, and within particular contexts that are already overburdened with the meanings of others". Sumara and Luce-Kapler (1996) believe that experiences, past, present and future, shape student identity. Gee's (2000) definition of identity - that is who we are - is mainly a result of the experiences we have had before. Gee (2000, p. 99) defines identity as a "certain 'kind of person' in a given context". Britzman (1994) argues that a person's identity describes who they are, who they are not, and who they can become. It is for

this reason that it is important to stipulate that identity is not fixed but complex and fluid. Britzman (1992) further argues that it is impossible to discuss postgraduate students' identity without exploring their experience and reflection on the meanings the students give to these experiences.

The students in this study, for example, constantly negotiated their personal and professional identities in relation to the social context, which happens to be UKZN. It is for this reason that Social Identity Theory was deployed in the process of understanding the participants in this study. Social identity theory argues that one's self is made up of a personal identity as well as a social identity (Foster, 2006). The personal identity consists of aspects that are unique to the individual, whereas the social identity consists of aspects of the self as a member of a group. The individual also tends to perceive other members of one's group to be similar and assigns positive attributes to them. Members of another group are perceived to be more different and are assigned negative attributions (Foster, 2006). This social comparison of groups is important for the individual's self-image and self-esteem, and so a person will therefore try to maximise his or her position in society in any way possible (Foster, 2006).

In this study, I draw from a sociological perspective because it allows me to look at postgraduate international students as social beings. I want to understand the social being, using the student in his or her inter-related personal and professional capacities within this particular social space of the university.

Sociology looks at Social Identity Theory as a social construct, 'I am who I am' in relation to the context and the people. For the study I am arguing that the self cannot work alone except in relation to a broader context. Social Identity Theory thus reveals that the postgraduate international student's self is a fluid one. A student portrays different identities during different moments of the day and there is no autonomous self. From a psychological perspective, the self tends to be viewed as fixed and autonomous. However, Social Identity Theory grounded in a sociological perspective, analyses dominant discourses that students adopt in constituting who they are and how they make sense of their lives as postgraduate international students. In this study, the dominant discourses are gender, class and language. It considers particular practices enacted through these discourses, and the way they give meaning to notions of identity in relation to the space and context in which they find themselves.

In this study I read Social Identity Theory through an international lens. What does it mean to be a student in a foreign social space? My overarching framework revolves around the question: what does it mean to be a student personally and professionally within the particular social space of the university? My study is looking at students from a sociological perspective and I am trying to understand a particular individual's personal and professional identities, and how he/she interacts within the social space of the university.

In the context of this study, the focus is on a particular category of postgraduate international students from African states studying at UKZN's Edgewood Campus. The investigation is focused on how they see and express themselves as international postgraduate students in a particular context of university. Palmer (1998) points out that identity is an evolving nexus where all forces that constitute a person's life join together to make up the self. Drawing from Social Identity Theory, I was able to explore and understand the complex and multiple dimensions of international students' lives as they negotiated daily within a range of forces and factors at UKZN. It is precisely for this reason that Social Identity Theory is potentially useful in understanding the ways in which students actively construct, and simultaneously are constructed by, the university and their relationship with people. Social Identity Theory thus has value in this study as it enables me to engage in a critical manner with the way participants' responses represent different meanings (Hargreaves, 1994).

The Social Theory of Learning

My study draws on the learning experiences of international postgraduate students at UKZN. Learning is a change in behaviour or understanding (Smith, 1999). It takes place within social co-participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learning is viewed as being present in all sorts of activities and not only in training and apprenticeship. This feature of practice, which might be theory, focuses on the relationship between learning and the social situation in which the learning takes place (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Wenger (1998) focus on the kinds of social engagements that provide the appropriate context for the learning to take place. He proposes that learning should be viewed as a social phenomenon within a social situation. Learning in this context is not something that is imparted into an individual as the result of teaching but is part of peoples' day-to-day activities as they become

involved and engaged in activities at work. He further states that learning becomes part of a person's working life so that the context of the learning is situated within their everyday practice.

According to Wenger (1998), learning is both contextually relevant and a social activity where we are viewed as social beings. Therefore social participation is both an activity or action and a form of belonging which needs to be understood as a process of learning.

A person's identity is constructed through participation in social situations (Wenger, 1998). The African international postgraduate students in this study constantly negotiate their social, personal and professional identities in relation to the social context in which they find themselves. A positive learning environment will impact on the construction of their identity, thus influencing their learning. Therefore the Social Identity Theory provides the lens in understanding the participants' lived experiences within this study.

Bell and Gilberts' dimensions of learning

Bell and Gilbert's (1996) model on professional learning draws on the three domains of learning. The domain refers to the type of learning that is taking place - personal, professional and social. Bell and Gilbert (1996) suggest that the impetus for change originates within the personal aspect of professional learning.

Although Bell and Gilbert's (1996) dimensions of learning focuses more on teachers within the classroom, for the purposes of this study I will be using the theory to analyse learning within the social context of the university. It is also important to note that these international students were employed as teachers in their respective countries of Zimbabwe and Lesotho. The personal aspects refer to the beliefs, values and attitudes that are considered to be important for effective learning to take place. The values, beliefs and attitudes shape 'who' the postgraduate international students are and also how they learn in an international context. The social aspects refer to relationships between individuals and groups, and suggest that the contexts need to be supportive so that risks can be taken (Bell and Gilbert, 1996). The African international students have to constantly negotiate their learning within the social community of the university. Bell and Gilbert (1996) also stress that there needs to be strong ties between theory and practice.

In this study it is important to focus on the postgraduate students' beliefs, values, attitudes and social interactions when they are recounting critical moments of their lived experiences. Their

learning within the lecture rooms and in one-to-one supervision contributes to their professional learning. Learning in isolation is viewed as problematic and challenging (Bell and Gilbert, 1996). The reason for drawing on these theories is because the self is constantly evolving and continuously negotiating itself in different situations and contexts. Learning is a process of interacting with the environment which in my study is the context of UKZN's Edgewood Campus. The university is regarded as social context. Wenger (1998) focus on learning taking place within a context and community. Because the participants are international postgraduate students and come from different countries (Lesotho and Zimbabwe) they bring different experiences and different background knowledge to the learning community. The students in this study negotiate their various learning situations even if they learnt in a negative context. They make/made the changes in their life by constructing their life in relation to the contexts in which they find themselves. Language plays an important role in situated learning since it entails multiple participatory skills which allow for social interaction and participation (Wenger, 1998).

Conclusion

The choice of the Social Identity Theory in this study stems from an acknowledgment that identity is not fixed and that there are different moments in our lives where we are pulled and pushed by different forces (Samuel, 1998). We make choices that give meaning to our lives and shape who we are. In the context or space of UKZN, as everywhere else, there are choices to be negotiated on a daily basis. As postgraduate international students share their stories, a sense of space, time and place is obtained. This is also related to their childhood days and community experiences in their homeland.

Thus, I was able to understand how they consciously and unconsciously constructed "a life" through the telling, and how it created opportunities for me to explore their professional and personal lives in all their complexities. Forland (2006) is of the view that despite international postgraduate students being successful learners in their home country, they are required to adapt to the new learning environment of the country in which they are studying. This is a cultural adaptation as much as an academic one and, unsurprisingly, 'learning shock' is prevalent.

After reading the different frameworks and theories that anchored other studies in my literature review, it was apparent to me that my study is located within a critical paradigm. Employing a critical paradigm to document the multiplicity of identities and meanings that emerge draws attention to change in the postgraduate international students' lived experiences. This need for change becomes the opportunity to challenge and question oppressive practices. From these emerge moments of a new freedom, a space for the post graduate international student's 'voice', and the knowledge that every voice will count for a better understanding of these students who study in higher education.

In the next chapter I attempted to provide an overview of studies related to postgraduate international studies conducted by several national and international researchers. The findings of internationalisation are discussed within the context of their impact on UKZN.

Chapter Three

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

The concept ‘methodology’ in the context of research refers to the way in which researchers approach problems and seek answers. Research requires that researchers clearly indicate the choices they have made in investigating the phenomenon in the study. My study therefore attempts to investigate the educational journeys of international postgraduate students studying at UKZN. I draw on Social Identity Theory, Wenger’s (1998) social theory of learning and Bell and Gilbert (1994) dimensions of learning as my theoretical framework, which focuses on the participant’s experiences as international students and the practices they adopt as members of the postgraduate learning community at UKZN.

There are two critical questions that clarify the subject of the educational journeys of international postgraduate students studying at UKZN. These are:

1. Who are the postgraduate international students studying at UKZN?
2. What are international students learning through postgraduate studies at UKZN?

In this chapter, Section A, the focus is on the research design that has been employed in order to generate data for this study. The study adopted the qualitative research design in order to understand lived experiences of African international postgraduate students in Higher Education. This section also focuses on the selection and biography of my participants and the context within which the research was carried out. Narrative inquiry as the most appropriate research methodology is also explained as it allowed me to engage critically with students’ lives as constructed by their own narratives (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Section B focuses on the fieldwork that was engaged to generate the necessary data. In order for me to obtain optimal data and for reasons of authenticating the data generated I used multiple data generating instruments. I commenced with life history interview as this method allowed me to delve for responses about deep, underlying compound issues (Cohen & Manion, 2007). I collected more data using visual methodology in the forms of collage-making (Dhunpath &

Samuel, 2009) and photo voice (Wang & Burris, 1997). Collage fills in spaces and pieces that are missing in order to shape stories about a person's life (Todorova, 2007). In my study, collage and photo voice will give the participants an opportunity to visually represent themselves through pictures and photos at different stages of their life in their home country and at UKZN as a student.

Section C concludes with the data analysis plan, issues around trustworthiness and rigour, and possible limitations of my research study.

Section A

The Research Design

My study is located within a qualitative research approach which “in its broadest sense refers to research that elicits participants’ accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions” (De Vos, 2002, p. 79). Qualitative research approach centres on people, their purpose, intentions and relationships, and ‘how’ and ‘why’ they cooperate with each other (Maree, 2007).

The term ‘qualitative research’ means any type of research that tries to find “subjective understanding of social reality rather than statistical description” (Limb & Dwyer, 2001, p. 6). Strauss & Corbin (1998, p. 11) view the present study as “research about persons lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions and feelings.” In view of this, I believe that qualitative methodology and its techniques are ideal to my research, as it is characterised by an in-depth and subjective approach (Limb & Dwyer, 2001). My study therefore used the qualitative approach to view the students’ lived experiences because the self is not an isolated being in relation to the broader social context.

One of the major distinguishing characteristics of qualitative research is the fact that I attempted to understand people in terms of their own definition of their world. I am also reminded that the concept of identity is fundamental to this research study. By utilising a qualitative approach, an attempt was made to understand postgraduate students’ experience, from the perspective of the participants involved because the complexities and diversity of their lives can only be captured by describing what really goes on in their everyday lives (Mouton, 2001, p. 194). Asking who the international postgraduate students are, and what their learning experiences at UKZN are,

establishes the bases for my ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations. My research study looks at the personal experiences of the participants in “understanding the way in which the individual creates, modifies and interpret the world in which he/she finds himself or herself” (Cohen *et al.*, 2009, p.8). Therefore in this study I search for a deeper and richer understanding of the complex lives of the postgraduate students and their lived experiences as constructed or deconstructed by themselves and how this has been shaped over time by a chain of social, political, economic and cultural factors in relation to the broader social and cultural context of the real world.

Selection of Research Participants

I adopted the purposive sampling strategy because it allowed me to use my own judgment in identifying the participants. This method enabled me to select unique cases that are especially instructive in addressing the research questions, with the cases providing a “rich contextualised picture” of the educational experience under study (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004, p. 96). Purposive sampling is sample that has been chosen for a specific purpose (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Ball (1990) concurs that purposive sampling is used to get data from people who have knowledge about the field of study based on their experience, profession and their expertise. Purposive sampling chooses participants according to the criteria that are relevant to the research question (Maree, 2007). Therefore in my study I have chosen specific participants to suit the needs of my criteria. Given the fact that the purpose of my study was to understand international students’ lived experiences in higher education, the participants were selected from two African states, Zimbabwe and Lesotho. The participants in the study had to fit the following criteria:

- They had to be postgraduate students.
- They had to be from African states outside of South Africa.
- They had to be studying at UKZN’s Edgewood Campus.

The selection of these particular participants was deliberate, for this required in-depth qualitative research. Cole and Knowles (2001) argue that it is much more important to work thoroughly and meaningfully with one participant, than to end up with very partial and sketchy understandings when working with many participants. Following this argument, I therefore purposively chose two participants for the study. One participant is a MEd student and the other a PhD student One

student was a male and the other was a female and this allowed me to gain an inclusive perspective on gender.

Context

The research was conducted at UKZN in the Faculty of Education at Edgewood Campus. The participants felt at ease being in a natural setting where they live, work and study. They also did not experience the inconvenience of leaving campus and travelling out. Creswell (2009) concurs that this close up information gathered during the interview within the context of the participants is a major characteristic of qualitative research.

Description of each Participant

A short, brief description of each participant's biography and country will be given. Both participants are full-time students at the UKZN Edgewood Campus and have been given a pseudonym to protect their anonymity.

Arthur

Arthur is a male in his mid-thirties, married and has no children. He comes from Zimbabwe where he was a deputy principal at a school. Zimbabwe is in central Southern Africa and it is bordered by Mozambique, South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, and Zambia. Freehold landowners are predominantly men, although women have rights to succession and inheritance by widows and daughters is rare. As with land, property is predominantly male-owned. Gender roles and gender stereotypes are facilitated by the system of patriarchy. This ideology is based on the supremacy of the father which supports and justifies the subordination of women (Mosetse, 1998). Customary law is for the most part defined and controlled by men and because of this; it can often be manipulated to protect male interests (Maboreke 1987; Shenje 1992). Parpart's (1995) paper considered the relationship between economic development, women's status and patriarchy in Zimbabwe. She found that at the macro level, statistics revealed continued bias towards men and males in Zimbabwe. Most of Arthur's schooling was undertaken at mission and boarding schools which were multiracial. He is presently studying towards his PhD at UKZN.

Monica

Monica is a female in her late thirties, unmarried and has a daughter. She lives in extreme poverty in a rural area in Lesotho. Lesotho is a small country which is completely surrounded by

the Republic of South Africa. Basotho women are subordinates of men; even widows depend on their husband's brother or any male in-laws (Eldredge, 2002). As in most African countries, a female has no power, authority, right, or privilege, unless it is granted by a male. Patriarchy is “primarily responsible for the neglect of women’s education in Lesotho since women are expected to grow up, be wives and thus focus on their nurturing abilities rather than on their capabilities” (Goduka, 1999, p. 12). This belief is based on the myth of the motherhood mandate, the maternal instinct and children needing their biological mother, as well as the myth of males being breadwinners (Goduka, 1999, p. 129). Monica was the only one of her siblings to complete schooling and to further her studies. She is the breadwinner and supports her family and extended family with her salary. After 1994, students from Lesotho began coming into South African colleges and universities. There was only one university in Lesotho (The National University of Lesotho), meaning that it could not accommodate all Basotho students, and there are some programmes which are not offered in the university. Monica left her teaching post in Lesotho to further her studies at UKZN, where she is presently studying towards her Masters’ Degree.

By using two participants I was able to make a comparison with the data I received. My participants were also from different African states because I am studying international students. One of my participants is a female and the other is a male because I think that gender plays an important role when collecting data on diversity. Both the participants are qualified teachers in their home country.

Narrative Inquiry Approach

This section discusses the reasons for choosing Narrative Inquiry as the research methodology for my study. It also considers the methods I have chosen for understanding students’ lives, as told and experienced, and to understand the connection between the personal, social and professional dimensions of learning. This study with two participants utilised life history interviews, collages and photo voice. I considered narrative inquiry because it drew on understanding lived experiences, spaces and location of the participants. According to Polkinghorne (1998), people without narratives do not exist. Life itself might thus be considered a narrative inside which we find a number of other stories. Narrative inquiry is a combined exercise which supports dialogue and understanding (Adams, 2000). Therefore, this study hopes

to identify the identities of the different social groupings from participants' construction of their narratives. It is possible to examine gender inequalities, racial oppression and other practices of power through narratives (Riessman, 1993). This point is important in the study because the participants negotiate meanings through particular discourses as well as gain insight into how students' construct their perception of self and others at UKZN, through narratives.

“The manner of the telling, the authoring of oneself through story provides a space for understanding the self (Munro, 1998, p. 5). Narrative inquiry is the study of experience as story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2007). Stories shape and categorise the way in which we relate with people within our society and it reflects a journey through life (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Sparkes (2004) concurs that narratives focus on the formation of stories and the manner in which the stories are told, and in this case between the post graduate student and the researcher. Narrative inquiry captures and analyses life stories (Webster & Mertova, 2007). However, it must be noted that the use of narrative inquiry is time consuming and it is unsuitable to work with a large population (Bell, 2002). For this study, I focused on the lives of just two African international postgraduate students studying at UKZN.

In order to understand students' lived experiences in this qualitative study, I was able to show how using Social Identity and Learning Theory assisted in elucidating the complex and multi-dimensional identities and learning of the post graduate students in the context of the university. It is through their telling that African international postgraduate students make meanings of their lives and negotiate their learning experiences in relation to the larger postgraduate learning community at UKZN.

To achieve this, I chose approaches such as life history interviews, collage and photo voice to gain access to the students' lived experiences as part of the narrative process. These methods enabled the students to begin to restore and reconstruct their lives in higher education. In this way, I was able to understand the complex identities and the multiple and inconsistent meanings they created in their daily lives. Employing these approaches helped me to understand the students' lives as complex, and identities as fluid and multiple. In the narrative approaches to qualitative research, various methods are used to gain understanding of the content, structure and function of a person's lived experiences. Some approaches focus on the 'what' is being said, while the others focus on the 'how' of what is being told (Smith & Sparkes, 2006). Narrative

inquiry allows for diversity and difference in the responses that the participants provide and it focuses attention on individuality (May, 2003). Therefore, a person's identity is produced through narrative. Webster & Mertova (2007) view stories as relating the life journeys of a person. Creswell (2009) concurs that narrative research is the study of the lives of people through stories. My study focuses on the experience of educational journeys of international postgraduate students in higher education and how they negotiate their learning experiences as postgraduate students in relation to the social situations and contexts that they find themselves in and also in relation to the larger postgraduate learning community at UKZN.

Section B

Data Generation

Since the narratives are about human beings telling their life stories, it was imperative that I created a space for their representation of voice and that I showed respect for the postgraduate students. After all, this study would not have been possible if they did not take the time to reveal their personal stories. Within the narrative representation of my study, I included the following research tools: collages, life history interviews and photo voice for the collection of data relevant to a qualitative approach, to allow for voices and differences in the research process. These methods were chosen to understand the social, personal and professional dimension of the postgraduate students' learning experiences. In my study, the research questions guided the data gathering process. Interviewing is a suitable method for qualitative research purposes in general and for narrative inquiry in particular. It involved spoken descriptions and reflections of the participants' (as in my study 'lived') experiences, and their effect on their identities (De Vos., et al, 2002) and personal and professional learning.

Life History interviews

My study employed life history interviews as a method for collecting data about post graduate international students' lived experience at UKZN. The use of interviews for obtaining data is common in research. According to Cohen & Manion (2007), interviews enable the participants to interpret the world in which they live and to view situations from their standpoint. In life history interviews, the interviewer can probe not only for complete answers but can also delve for

responses about deep, underlying compound issues (Cohen & Manion, 2007). Plummer (1983) states that the strength of life history methods is based on the emphasis placed on the subjective reality, change and on the individuality of the participant. It is a supportive technique in which the researcher becomes involved. This type of interview enables the interviewer to probe and to go deeper to get clarity and clear misunderstandings (Cohen & Manion, 2007). Therefore life history interviews provide a lens into each participant's personal and professional identities and culture.

Role as a Researcher

After forming a friendly bond with the students, I conducted in-depth interviews in the Boardroom of the School of Education at UKZN, Edgewood Campus. The environment I chose was important for the interviews to happen because it was quiet and my participants were able to reflect on their past without being disturbed by noise. During the interviewing process the issue of voice, and how I made the students feel about their voice, was critical. By listening attentively and making sure that what they said was important, I gave them a sense of power and representation in this research (Pillay, 2003). A series of three interviews of about 45 minutes to an hour was held with each participant. "In the process of conducting the interviews, the interviewer must maintain a delicate balance between providing enough openness for the participants to tell their stories and enough focus to allow the interview structure to work" (Seidman, 1991, p. 13). This openness afforded me the opportunity of forming a close working relationship with the participants. If they drifted from the topic, I would skilfully bring them back to the topic on hand without making them feel that their narrative was unimportant.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The interviews offered the opportunity to understand the complex and contradictory discourses that postgraduate international students in higher education adopt in constructing their lives, told histories and experiences. According to Cohen et al (2007), interviews are a principal means of gathering information about what a person knows, what a person likes or dislikes and what a person thinks. I arranged my interviews in three sessions:

- **Interview 1** - The first interview was on their biography – their early life.
- **Interview 2** - The second interview focused on their experiences in higher education.

- **Interview 3** - The interview focused on collage and photo voice.

These interviews allowed me to understand how the relations between the students' private lives and professional lives evoked the complexity and ambiguities of their lived experiences. At the beginning, I anticipated that the interviewees would disclose sensitive information and that they may become uncomfortable. Accordingly, I made sure that I created a relaxed, non-stressful atmosphere which encouraged openness and honesty. In creating this atmosphere, the interview served a useful purpose as it gave a detailed picture of a participant's attitude, beliefs, perceptions or views on the topic (De Vos, 2002).

There were some advantages of using life history as research method in my study. Firstly, there was the ability to gain an idea of how these African students interact with place, space and people as their lives change (Hay, 2000). Secondly, it showed the dreams and ambitions they brought all the way from their respective countries to South Africa. Through the narratives, it was learned how postgraduate international students experienced UKZN with respect to their learning.

Collage

In my study, the voices of postgraduate international students are critical. It should be regarded as a sign of hope that we have students themselves creating some visual representation of their lived experiences "through their own eyes" (Wood, Olivier & de Lange, 2009). The participants were asked to reflect in various modes how they make sense of who they are and what they are learning as postgraduate international students. The use of collage, for example, was an easy way of gaining access to their worlds. It allowed me to go beyond the spoken word of the students to submerged layers of their worlds. I believe that looking at postgraduate international students' lived experiences in this way removed their passive, researched status, and affirmed their participant roles in the research process.

Life history interviews depend on memory and at times all cannot be recalled, so the students engage in collage. "Collage has the potential to help children and adults narrate aspects of their consciously lived experience as well as uncovering the unrecognized or 'unsayable' stories that they hold" (Leitch, 2008, pg. 37). I used collage as a means of collecting data as an alternate form of narrative (visual form of narrative from pictures and words). Using the collage as a

stimulus (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009), the participants were asked to reflect on their life experiences through certain images, thus enriching the data.

Collage is used to elicit data from international students about their identity and learning as possibilities and challenges and the spaces and places that are available with regard to their status. This will make available a more participatory approach and address issues of voice, representation and power relations. These alternate approaches will open up opportunities for the less clearly articulated discourses or silences as they move the participants from telling to perceptions of events, moments, critical incidents and significant others as experienced and lived. Pictures are used to produce associations and connections that remained unconscious within participants (Knowles & Cole, 2008).

The main objective of a collage is to tell a story about the participants and how they came to be the person they are today (van Schalkwyk, 2010). Collage fills in spaces and pieces that are missing so as to shape stories about a person's life (Todorova, 2007). Collage usually exposes information that "had been hidden from our thinking" (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009, pg. 157.) In this study, collage gave the participants an opportunity to visually represent themselves through pictures at different stages of their life in their home country and at UKZN as a student. The participants composed the collage with pictures and words that recalled their past and present experiences that connected events to their lives. They freely expressed whatever came to mind as 'authors' of their own life stories. Seeing that identity was the central concept in this research, the identity of the participants came through in the collage.

Photo voice

Wang & Burris (1997) developed the concept of photo voice. This method allows the participants to capture images that have made an impact on their daily lives in any way. Therefore a sense of place is a collection of meanings, beliefs, symbol, values and feelings that individuals or groups are associated within a particular locality (Tuan, 1977). By sense of space, I mean the subjective and emotional attachment people place on that space. In this sense, place is a way of understanding the world (Creswell, 2009). While conducting the life history interviews I discovered that there are certain spaces within UKZN that impacted on the lives of the participants either in positive or negative ways. A disposable camera was given to each of the participants to take pictures of spaces they felt were safe or unsafe to them. This afforded me the

opportunity to see their world through photographs or images. Capturing images complemented the data that I had generated in life history interviews where the participants disclosed that there were certain safe and unsafe spaces within UKZN that had impacted on their lives in positive or negative ways.

Section C

Data Analysis

Initially, I was overcome by the volume of the data that my research generated and it was not an easy task to decide what to include and what to leave out. I focused on selected elements of the data. However, as I engaged in more discussions with my supervisor over my data, and on reviewing the literature, my understanding of life history research increased. I began to understand how to reconstruct and interpret, code, and categorize the data into themes, and to look more deeply for patterns. One of the key elements of narrative research according to Plummer (2001) is the analysis of key themes that organises the way the story is told. The goal of narrative analysis is to reveal common themes or plots that are found in the data (Polkinghorne, 1998). A process of inductive analyses of the frequent, significant themes that emerged from the interview (tape-recorded) or raw data were done which allowed research findings to emerge (Maree, 2007). My aim was to make sense of what was in the data. An example from my study was that many gender and class issues popped up in my data which I had initially overlooked. As Cole & Knowles (2001, p. 36) point out, “no matter how hard I tried, they would always be incomplete; such is the nature of narrative research”.

The stories (in Chapter Four) are the constructed storied narratives that emanated from the data. But, as Connelly & Clandinin (1999) show, the researcher needs to tell their stories and in the telling of the researcher’s stories, the stories of the participants merge with that of the researcher’s and this forms new stories that are reconstructed. In these reconstructed postgraduate narratives, lives are portrayed as unique. Descriptions, according to Vithal and Jansen (2002), allow the researcher to engage in ‘descriptive narratives’ about a sequence of events which in my study is about the lived, educational experiences of postgraduate students which affords the participants an opportunity to tell their stories. Once I completed writing up the student’s narratives, I then sent the completed copies to them for their comments. I felt that this

would protect the participants from being alienated from the story telling (Sikes, 1992). Allowing the students to read "their reconstructed story" proved to be a very valuable activity because the participants are afforded an opportunity to tell their stories (Sikes, 1992). It enabled the participants to add, alter, and delete any information from the story, as they thought appropriate.

Possible limitations of the study

According to Richardson (2000, p. 923), "although we are free to present our text in a variety of forms to varied audiences, we have different limitation arising from self-consciousness about claim to authorship, authority, truth, validity and reliability". My small in-depth study was limited to UKZN's Edgewood Campus only and therefore the findings could not be generalised to other universities within South Africa. However, it can still raise important issues and act as a platform for change in universities to accommodate international students. Also, the instruments that were used in my study would have limitations because the participants could have been reluctant to divulge certain information about their country or about themselves. Since they engaged in life history interviews, they could have forgotten to provide important information. Engaging in collage or photo voice could have 'jolted' their memory where pictures were used as visual stimuli. This type of interview is also prone to a lot of bias on the part of the interviewer (Cohen & Manion, 2007). Purposive sampling may have satisfied me as the researcher but it did not represent the wider population. I did not use random sampling because I only selected two participants for my interview and conducted my analysis from that data. However, I was more concerned about acquiring in-depth information from those who were in a position to give it to me.

Trustworthiness

In my study, I felt it was important to know the extent to which I could find the research findings trustworthy. By employing the criteria of trustworthiness, rigour and honesty, I wanted to determine to what extent the reconstruction of the data fit the realities and views that the students expressed throughout the study (Pillay, 2003). At the same time, I hoped this would allow me to build a relationship of trust with my participants. In deciding what was accurate and believable, I relied on the different approaches used during data collection. Tapping into the different data sources such as life history interviews, collages and photo voice challenged my privileged

position, and encouraged me to interpret the narratives flexibly (Pillay, 2003). I informed the participants of the purpose of my interview and that by being truthful with them without evoking any biased responses, the participant would feel at ease at all times (Tuckman, 1972).

Ethical Issues

I sought written permission from the participants to conduct life history interviews with them. I also informed them that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Cohen *et al* (2007) stresses that by being anonymous guarantees that the information that the participants provide does not in any way reveal their identity. On the issue of anonymity, my participants signed consent forms. They were assured that their identities would be withheld from public knowledge, and their names would not be used in the research. I therefore used pseudonyms. While this approach may afford the students some degree of protection from outsiders, I realised that the use of pseudonyms would offer little protection among insiders (Muchmore, 2002). I also added fictional events to their stories to prevent insiders from identifying the participants (Cohen *et al.*, 2009). Ethical issues also had to be considered around the use of photo voice. The participants were reminded not to take pictures or images that showed the face of a person.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the research design and methodology was discussed in order to explore the lived experiences of postgraduate international students' experiences at UKZN. It was fit for the purpose of my study because the data I collected addressed my critical questions. Trustworthiness and ethical issues were considered.

In the next chapter I present the reconstructed stories of my two participants. The stories told by the participants are an interpretation of the way they perceive their lives.

Chapter Four

The Storied Narrative

Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to present the reconstructed stories that emanated from the data yielded by the participants in the study. I will endeavour to look at the stories of the two participants whom I have named Arthur and Monica. I have used pseudonyms to safeguard the identity of my participants. Their early childhood memories, their teaching patterns in their home country and their lived experiences as African international postgraduate students studying at UKZN, Edgewood Campus, will be the focus of this chapter.

This approach is in line with Connelly & Clandinin's (1999) assertion that researchers also need to reconstruct stories. In the process of retelling their stories, every detail of the story must be filtered through the researcher. In this process new stories are collaborative and reconstructed in nature. They provide critical and reflective elaborations on the lives of the researcher participant, an aspect crucial to the purposes of this study. When you tell a story through a viewpoint character using 'I' or 'we', you are using first person point of view (Richardson, 2000). This can be a comfortable point of view as it allows the researcher to get right into the character's head and reconstruct the narrative. I assumed the role of the first person narrator in the storied narratives of Arthur and Monica. In a first-person narrative, the narrator is always a character within her own story. Most importantly, these stories expose aspects about identities and learning as they emerged in the various contexts and across various relationships with others.

The narratives of Arthur and Monica have been organised thematically. This structure is in response to my two critical questions:

1. Who are the African international students studying at UKZN?
2. What are the international students learning through postgraduate studies at UKZN?

In my study I generated data from two African international postgraduate students - Arthur and Monica – which are pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The methodology I adopted in this study was Narrative Inquiry because it enabled me to understand the lived experiences of the participants' educational journeys. Sparkes (2004) concurs that narratives focus on the formation of stories and the manner in which the stories are told between the postgraduate students and

myself. I conducted Life History interviews with two postgraduate international students from UKZN. Life history interviews with postgraduate students enabled me to produce rich and vivid accounts of whom/what they are and what/how their learning happens at UKZN.

Arthur's Story

My early childhood years in the rural village

My name is Arthur Mlolo and this is my story.

I was born in 1976 in Zimbabwe and I'm the third child in my family of four children. I have a brother and two sisters. We are very humble people coming from a conservative background. My father and mother were both teachers. When my parents married they lived on their own. Now, this was unusual in my community because families always lived together in the home of their forefathers. This did not create a problem because my father, Samuel, was respected for the decision he had taken. Coming from a religious, Christian background, he wanted to become a church minister. Luckily he undertook his training where we were living in Harare. This meant that we were not separated from my father. When he completed his training in 1982, we had to move because he was allocated a church. It was such a coincidence because we were actually located to our rural home where we had originally come from. Here we lived on a mission station. My father tried his best to provide us with all the basic necessities. It was not very special but we made ourselves 'comfortable' and life wasn't bad in the rural community.

Entering a multi-racial boarding school

I was in Grade 1 when we moved from Harare to the rural mission school. I completed Grade 2 to Grade 4 at the mission school. In 1980 segregation ended, which meant that schools could admit pupils of different races. I forced my parents to send me to a boarding school. This was the only school in the district where you would find all race groups. I was really curious and wanted to go there in terms of opening myself to a new world and meeting people from different racial backgrounds. Besides, I heard that it was the best school. My father agreed and I went to boarding school from Grade 5 until Grade 7. It was an eye-opening experience for me because this was the first time I made friends with people of different race groups. As pupils we shared a cordial relationship and we all got on with each other.

My decision to study at a mission school

When I completed Grade 7, my parents allowed me to choose my own school. The school of my choice was not necessarily exceptional but it was good because I chose a mission school. It also had a few white and Indian pupils. I think this was so because it was rural. Most of the government schools had closed because of the destruction caused by the war. The mission schools, private schools and former white schools were the only schools that were still functioning. I attended a former white school from Grade 1 to Grade 6. I had the opportunity of attending many schools and this widened my horizons.

Making career choices?

While I was in high school I had to choose three subjects as my specialisation or career choice. That means if I want to be a doctor I will take the three science subjects. We had to choose our career and decide on what we wanted to study at university whilst still at school. This was before we even got our results. The anticipation of waiting for our results was short-lived because once the results were announced the struggle to find a suitable place to continue with the next leg of our studies had to commence. However, while awaiting our results, we had personnel from the university who would come and provide information on the various options opened to us at university. We were then allowed to make our choices.

Making informed choices on what to study

This was a difficult time as our teachers at school did not provide us with much guidance so that we could make informed choices and decide on what options to choose. This resulted in some of the students making bad career choices. Luckily for me I had an influential father. My father being the church minister and a teacher was a huge influence. People would ask why I didn't choose to be a lawyer or a doctor. I did not want to be a doctor because I am not good in handling wounds. But I chose to study History because my father studied History. So, when I finished my History course, I was allowed to go and teach. After five years of experience I had the option of going back to university to complete my PGCE level. I completed my Bachelor of Arts degree in 1997. I chose my career wisely. Prior to coming to South Africa, I was the Deputy Principal in my school.

Deciding where to study

The education system in Zimbabwe is different. In 1994 in Zimbabwe, there were only 3 universities. As a result we were very limited in our choice of universities. Now there are about nine universities. The foremost university was the University of Zimbabwe which everyone hoped to go to. However, I decided that if I had the opportunity I would choose to study away from my country. My cousin was studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Pietermaritzburg Campus and he used to constantly urge me to come to South Africa to study. However, the catalyst to leave Zimbabwe and venture in to South Africa was when things started getting bad with the government in Zimbabwe. My cousin then brought me here.

Robert Mugabe, a leader with big goals for education

However, credit must be given to Robert Mugabe on the improvement of the education system in Zimbabwe. The standard of education in Zimbabwe was very high compared to the standard of education in South Africa. It was a huge challenge to achieve 75% in your schooling and at university and you were exceptional if you achieved 90%.

Crossing Over: Experience does not match reality

I had dreams. My dream was to further my education and especially engage in my postgraduate studies. This decision to come to South Africa, however, impacted on my family life. I was married but had to leave my family behind in Zimbabwe. When I decided to leave my homeland, it was like crossing a huge bridge. This crossing over symbolised the transition from my homeland to a foreign country. My decision to come was based on the positive feedback I had received from my cousin about his study experiences at UKZN. However, when I came here I found that I was stuck because what I was expecting in South Africa was not what I was experiencing. The feedback I received did not match the reality. The reality was that I did not have finances. I was now entering a new marriage with the university, lecturers and students at UKZN. Despite being here so long at UKZN I still do not see that bright light. I am still not any closer to reaching the end.

I was also not prepared for issues such as the financial constraints, accommodation and the hostility from local students. It therefore became important for me to find people at UKZN who could help me.

Financial difficulties

I had very little money that my father had given me. It was very difficult because I had to pay for my fees, accommodation and groceries. I was fortunate that the Pietermaritzburg Campus (PMB) had a programme for disadvantaged students. I registered and was given a monthly voucher of R100 to buy basics from Checkers. This voucher was a life-saver for somebody like me who had nothing. Unfortunately, the programme ran until year-end. The reason for this was because the local students felt embarrassed receiving the food parcels. We foreigners suffered because of this.

University accommodation

The university didn't allow me to stay in residence because there was no place, so I found accommodation with my cousin who was staying out of the university. This arrangement created its own set of difficulties as I had to foot the bill for the additional expense of travelling to campus daily and also pay my cousin for the accommodation.

Being a foreigner and the threat of xenophobia

My being a foreigner held some form of appeal to the local women. However, the men saw me as a threat. For example, one day I went out with some friends. In the taxi I heard them say that foreigners are coming to South Africa to take their jobs and I knew that they were talking about me. I was not comfortable with them and I felt threatened. I never went out again with friends but rather kept to myself. I was also present in South Africa during the height of the xenophobic attacks. Thankfully a local taxi driver warned us foreigners not to go anywhere. As a result of this, I became a prisoner on campus and did not go anywhere.

Surviving at UKZN: Pietermaritzburg Campus

My first challenging issue in South Africa was to find a job because I didn't receive any funding. Luckily for me I found a job at the university. I worked very hard because I was a full-time student and I helped the lecturers as well. I did any job the lecturer needed me to do. If somebody needed help, the lecturer would rather send them to me. I even worked as a gardener and a painter. I did a number of jobs because I was finding it very difficult to survive. I was not paid well. I had applied for a bursary but I received this at the end of the year. Luckily during the

year I had earned just enough to cover my tuition. I decided to put the money it into an account because I was not prepared to go through another year without money.

Surviving at UKZN Edgewood Campus

Despite the difficulties that I had experienced I passed at the end of the year. This gave me a sense of accomplishment. This provided the impetus do my Honours in Curriculum Studies. I moved from the Pietermaritzburg campus to Edgewood. I also applied for a job as a tutor. However, I was turned down for the job because I didn't have a driver's licence. Luckily, I was given another job as a student assistant. I was paid R2000 a month, which helped to pay for my accommodation, fees and also enabled me to send money home. In 2008, I did my Honours in History at Edgewood Campus. I passed with excellent results. I then continued with my Masters Degree and worked on campus with different contracts. I was just grateful that I had a job. I started tutoring the students during tutorials and eventually started lecturing as well. I am also grateful for the opportunities that different people afforded me. However, my desperation for a job resulted in some of the lecturers taking advantage of me as a student. Somehow these lecturers were constantly calling upon me to do favours for them. I helped them with their marking and consulted with their students. I helped to co-ordinate and supervise Honours and Masters programme. I thought that by doing this, I would get a better contract and a better salary. Foreign students receive half the salary of what the locals get. I felt despondent because I was doing more but I was getting paid half the salary which was just enough to support myself. I did apply for contract jobs that were advertised, only to be told that they were not taking foreigners.

I am not here to take away your jobs

The staff felt threatened that we were going to take over their jobs. Being a student and tutor I didn't want anything special from anybody. It was not my intention to take any person's job. I just want to study and achieve my degree and also to work to supplement my income. Although I struggled financially, I managed my learning and I passed. I never experienced problems achieving good results at university. I passed my Honours, PGCE and Masters (MEd) although the time factor was a challenge. I will finish with my Doctorate studies (Ph.D.) hopefully at the end of May 2013.

Language as a challenge

I experienced tension because I couldn't speak Zulu. I felt uneasy because of the manner in which the local students would look at me when I spoke in English. It could be that they felt threatened because I could talk English and they were experiencing a problem with the language. They expected us, foreigners, to learn the Zulu language easily because they considered us as being 'Blacks'. They would say, "Hey, you are Black and therefore you must learn the language". I didn't tell anyone but I slowly learnt the Zulu language so I could understand when local people spoke. A lot of international students have learnt the Zulu language as well. I therefore talk when I am convinced of what I want to say. However, I also prefer to keep to myself so I don't engage in unnecessary problems.

Do I really have 'Friends?'

Even within my Honours class when I told people where I came from, I noticed that the locals kept their distance from me. I had to prove myself to be accepted by the locals. Even here, their acceptance only extended to the help that they sought from me. For example, after the first assignment, the lecturer commented on how well I had done that I had topped the class. Only then did some people slowly open up. But even then it was for what help I could render to them. Although I do have a lot of friends on campus, I keep to myself if I suspect that they are going to make trouble.

My Future Dreams

Although I am studying in South Africa for a long time, I always think about going back home to my family and to my wife. My major regret is leaving my family in Zimbabwe and coming to South Africa. I miss my mum who is all alone. I would have liked for my wife to complete her studies in South Africa. My wife did try to study in South Africa but her application was turned down because it was late. However, when it was finally approved, she did not accept because of certain conditions. I had plans to move out of residence and find a new place for both of us to stay. I want to get a job where people acknowledge me for whom and what I am. The people in South Africa don't like foreigners and they usually block the process of us getting jobs. I went to Zimbabwe and things are not the same any more. The situation is bad with lots of problems with the government. My friends have moved on. I am positive that things will change with Mugabe. I

don't mind going back home and living in my homeland. However, I have been redefined at UKZN, not on the outside but on the inside. On the outside I may have gained weight but more importantly on the inside I have gained an education at UKZN.

Monica's Story

My Early Life in the village

My name is Monica. I come from a very small, poor country called Lesotho. We are a very poor country especially when we compare ourselves to South Africa. I live in a village where most of the people are not working. For us life was more about survival. Our country also experienced a severe drought around ten years ago. This resulted in children starving. Life was difficult in the village. Most of the children did not go to school. I was lucky because I was amongst the few of them that went to school. My friends and most people of my age were getting married and having many children.

The problems associated with poverty do not deter the people in our village from having children. Most of our fathers were also miners and when there were no jobs, or if the mine closed, they would come back home and there would be nothing for them to do. However, even if the men are unemployed they still father children.

I am the youngest of ten children in my family. However I only know five of them. I have three brothers and two sisters. I heard that the others did not make it (died) but I don't know the reason. I think that I was my father's favourite child. I was not like most of the girls who went out at night. Most of the girls were busy having children. I preferred to go home straight after school. On Sundays I went to church. I did not have boyfriends.

Unfortunately, my siblings did not complete high school. I was the only one who managed to finish my high school and go to the college of education. I wanted to study because I wanted to take care of my family. I wanted to help them because of the way they were struggling financially.

Family responsibility and financial hardships

My brothers have families and children. One sister of mine who was not married has since passed away. She had 3 children. My other sister who was married with 2 children is divorced. She now lives with my mother. I also have a daughter although I am not married. I am the one supporting all the families. I therefore see myself as the breadwinner in the family. I found it very hard to take care of my family with the salary I was earning. I was earning only R1500 a month with a teacher's certificate. The school I was teaching in was in another district. Because of this I had to stay in that district with my daughter and my nephew. This is when I decided to further my studies because in Lesotho you get a better salary depending on your qualification. If you further your studies, the Lesotho government sponsors you by paying your fees and accommodation and they give you an allowance.

My teaching career

I worked as a primary school teacher from 1999 to 2002 with my teacher's certificate. I taught 10 subjects to 60 learners from Standard 2 to Standard 6. My salary wasn't very good but I loved the students. They were my best friends. During the break I would spend my time in my class with my learners rather than being in the staffroom with the teachers.

My studying

In Lesotho I studied at a teachers college. It is different to South Africa. In Lesotho we call it a college but here it's a university. Being in college was like being in high school. We sat in a classroom. We had to listen to whatever the lecturer or tutor was teaching. We were given notes. For the exams we read the notes and just write the exams. It was easy.

However, college was a financial burden. I was not sponsored at college in Lesotho and so I had to pay my own fees. The funny thing is that the government sponsored all postgraduate studies out of Lesotho. However they have now changed this policy. They are sponsoring their own universities because they are now offering postgraduate studies in Lesotho. I was lucky because prior to this new arrangement I was already listed as sponsored international student. This allowed me to come to South Africa.

I didn't hear anything about UKZN but I knew people who were studying at The University of Free State. I met a former teacher of mine from high school who was studying in Pietermaritzburg (PMB). I told him that I also wanted to further my studies in Bachelor of Education. I filled the forms that he had given me. I was accepted to study at UKZN and I secured a sponsor from my government. The most difficult part was leaving my daughter but I found solace in that she was in the care of my mum.

Getting started at UKZN

I expected the orientation programme at UKZN to help me fit into university life as an international postgraduate student. However, this did not happen because it was rushed and not very informative. I feel they should have a programme with international and local students together to inform each other of our cultural diversity. I remember when I first started; I missed the lecture looking for venues. The orientation did not help. They should organise a get together where international students are given the opportunity to socialise with the local students. We only meet during lectures. They could organise workshops amongst us to engage in cultural discussions.

Finding a place to stay: My little box

Accommodation was a major issue that I had to contend with. From my homeland in Lesotho I applied for a place to study at UKZN. I was sponsored by my government which meant that they paid for my fees and accommodation and I was given an allowance. I paid a R500 deposit towards my accommodation. However, when I came to South Africa to do my Honours, I didn't get the accommodation I was expecting. I had to stay in Pinetown. I used to travel by taxi to get to the university which was an additional expense. I took up this matter with the housing section but they would not listen to me. It is only when I threatened to leave and go back home that they gave me a place.

Being a postgraduate student and knowing that postgraduate work is demanding, I expected to be given accommodation with other international postgraduate students. However, I was placed with first year students. There were about 15 or 18 of us sharing one bathroom and one kitchen. I could not study because of the loud music and the noise. It was not conducive for learning. I used

to lock myself in my room and keep to myself. My room was like a little box with a wardrobe and a bed and I used to pay R1500 rent per month.

I am strong despite life's challenges

I was only 6 months in South Africa when I lost my father in June 2003. In 2004, I lost my sister. That is when I realised that things were getting tougher in my homeland. The money from my government in Lesotho was supposed to cater for my studies but I had to share it with the family who were struggling financially.

I am strong. Through all these difficulties I focussed on my studies and passed each year and completed my degree. I decided to go back home in 2006. Luckily for me I went back to the same school and with a degree I was earning R4000 of which I was taxed R1500. I taught from 2007-2009 in Lesotho and I was still finding it hard to make ends meet. I decided to come back in 2010 and I completed my Honours. Presently I am studying towards my Masters Degree.

Language an obstacle to socialising and learning

When I first came to UKZN I didn't think that I will make it because language was a difficulty that I had to contend with. I am able to speak English. But here in South Africa the students talk in *isiZulu*, and I never understand what they say. I feel that maybe they are talking about me. When I talk in English they laugh at me and tell me that I must learn to talk in *isiZulu* because I chose to study and live in KwaZulu-Natal. They think that because I am black I must be able to speak *isiZulu*. They talk to me in *isiZulu* all the time and they will even tell me, "I don't understand why you are here, and I don't understand why you don't want to speak Zulu?" I had to learn Zulu. They don't appreciate that we do not understand their language.

I also had negative experiences in residence as many students are Zulu speakers. The few friends I do have are the ones whom I share the flat with at university. We just greet each other or meet in the kitchen and talk when necessary. Otherwise I spend most of my time in my room instead of sitting with them in the lounge chatting and laughing. They also never invite me to join them.

Also, most of the communication at meetings, at the residence, at the housing department including campus sports and church services are in Zulu. The lecturers as well feel that we are all the same in the lecture room, because we are seen as 'Black'. I don't think the lecturers

understand that we come from different backgrounds and that English is our second language. Due to this I had to work hard and put in extra hours in order to understand the content and language.

Even when the lecturers mark our assignments, they don't focus on the content of the work but rather on the construction of our English and we are marked down for this. They don't understand that we experience problems with reading and understanding. I struggle with the language and the content of the materials in my Masters course, and that is why I don't submit quality work. I am not privileged like the others who can read just one time and understand. Luckily I have a good supervisor who understands my plight and helps and guides me during the supervision sessions. I learn and understand better when I am with my supervisor.

Doors of opportunity shut because I am a foreigner

Last year in October 2010 I got a temporary job in one of the primary schools in Mayville because a teacher was involved in an accident. I was going to be paid by the department and I had to submit all my documentation to them. It was only then they realised that I was not a South African. I had to submit a permit to get paid. I experienced bigger problems at Home Affairs. The school provided them with the contract, motivation letters and everything that they needed because I was international. My documents never got processed and I never got paid despite all the running around that I had done.

My future aspirations

When I finish my Masters I want to get a job in South Africa. I would also like carry on with my PhD. But if I don't, then I will have to go back to Lesotho. I am not lost here in South Africa but it would be easier if only the university could help make it a better place for international students. But I will also be happy to go back home. Lesotho is a safe place and the people are humble. We don't have this diversity even if you are a foreigner in Lesotho. But in South Africa there is that gap if you are a foreigner.

I really want my education more than anything because it means a lot to me. As I told you before, a better salary depends on the qualification I have. Therefore I am making the sacrifice to study. The university must really help us. I am only thinking about my future and there is no way

forward because I am stuck in the past. I am still responsible for my family and their financial well-being.

Learning Experience: The education system

The education system in Lesotho is different from the one in South Africa. We are using the traditional method of teaching. We teach in English even though our students are not English speaking. The teacher will be the one with the source of information. The learners just take notes or listen to the teacher. The education system in South Africa is much better because the students are exposed to a lot of resources and the system of education is much higher than in Lesotho. I have a very positive learning experience at UKZN. I learn a lot in the one-to-one sessions with my supervisor. It is very challenging and interesting. I worked hard and passed. I came here in 2003 up until 2006. I graduated in 2007 with B.Ed Honours and then went back to Lesotho in 2007 after graduation. There are a lot of resources which makes it easy for us. The lecturers are helpful. However, issues such as fees, registration and personal issues impact on the learning process.

Conclusion

Narrative accounts of post graduate student's' learning journeys can serve as tools for self-reflection (Cole & Knowles, 2001). The two student's stories presented in my study provide me with the lens to reflect on their beliefs and practices. By actively weighing the students'experiences against their own life stories, I am able to gain deeper insights into who they are and the experiences that shape theirlearning. Engaging in this kind of self-reflection has been shown to be an essential part of students' professional growth and development (Cole & Knowles, 2001). After constructing the narratives, readers can gain an understanding of how the students, Arthur and Monica, consciously and unconsciously constructed 'a life' through the telling, and how they made sense of their lives in particular contexts.

Chapter Five

Analysis of the narratives

Introduction

In Chapter Four I presented the reconstructed stories of two African international students Arthur and Monica (pseudonyms), who form part of a cohort of postgraduate students from within sub-Saharan Africa. The reconstructed stories represent the international student's lived lives, told and experienced in the first person genre. As constructions of self through stories, they each provide narratives of their consciously and unconsciously constructed versions of "a life" told and experienced in particular contexts, moments, critical incidents and in relation to significant others. Living and working with particular social and political orders, I draw on specific discourses to analyse the meanings and practices that have been adopted by them (Mama, 1995). The discourses I am concerned with here are those that embody the collective knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of social groups and how these dominant discourses narrate and are being narrated in/through the lives of Arthur and Monica, in unique and personally meaningful ways. Charting the cultural and historical locations of Arthur and Monica assists me in understanding identities as multiple and dynamic, and as collectively and relationally produced.

From a critical paradigm perspective, this study attempts to understand how individuals negotiate themselves within the structures and systems they live and work in to change and question oppressive practices that constrain and block what is possible for them as embodied beings. In exploring the question of 'Who are the international postgraduate students?' I draw on the definition of identity (Britzman, 1994; Gee, 2000): who we are is mainly a result of experiences we have encountered during our life's journey. With regards to the African international postgraduate students this will encompass their childhood and adult experiences in their homelands and their subsequent learning experiences at UKZN. In the context of this study, the African international postgraduate student self is constituted through multiple identities narrated by particular historical codes and categories. The African international students can choose to resist or comply with these historical codes as embodied beings, with the power to challenge and change who they are and how they see themselves in the world. For example, a woman can be

identified as a non- traditional mother, teacher or student, because of particular experiences and the meanings derived thereof. In addition, a sense of identity is formed and re-formed over a lifetime, within individual contexts and through social interactions in the broader society. Britzman (1994) argues that a person's identity describes who they are, who they are not, and who they can become. Identity is not fixed but complex and multiple (Britzman, 1994). Using the social identity theory as the framework to understand the 'who', I am then afforded the opportunity to explore the self in relation to the different discourses that constructed and continue to construct and shape who these students are in relation to where they come from.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Section A will attempt to respond to critical question one: **Who are the international students studying at UKZN?**

Section B attempts to respond to critical question two: **What are the international students learning through postgraduate studies at UKZN?**

Section A provides an interpretation of the international students' constructions of themselves both consciously and unconsciously within specific historical, cultural and political contexts. In analysing the narratives of the African international postgraduate students, I draw on the Social Identity Theory to provide a framework for analysing and interpreting the storied narratives. From the stories of the two participants we obtain an insider account of the different identities that constitute who they are and how they make sense of their lives. In this chapter, I also show how particular meanings of self both personal and professional are constituted through dominant discourses of gender, language and social class. The construction of self in relation to the broader socio-cultural context is critical in understanding 'who' the international student is and how particular meanings of self are worked, reworked and inverted in resisting or complying with the dominant discourses prevalent in their home countries. By focusing our lens on these different contexts, we obtain an insider account as offered by the African international students for their reasons for wanting to move from their home countries to take up formal postgraduate studies in South Africa.

In this section I will discuss the unique and personal meanings that my two participants, Arthur and Monica, adopt while living and working within the cultural context in their respective homelands, Zimbabwe and Lesotho. I show how Monica and Arthur negotiate and construct meanings in and around gender, class and language within the social-cultural context. Their lives

are read as a negotiation of social self within the broader social context. The vignettes of Arthur and Monica are presented, foregrounding identity categories that dominate and constitute how Arthur and Monica come to take up the position of African International student and the meanings associated with such a position.

In section B I present my understanding of what it means to be an African international postgraduate student at UKZN and the learning experiences within various spaces of these students. I will draw on The Social Theory of Learning (Wenger, 1998) and Bell and Gilbert's Model (1996) on Professional Learning, to analyse critical question two.

Section A

Arthur – The Adventurer

From an early age, Arthur was exposed to growing up in a family that broke away from traditional norms. He was exposed to the role of gender where he viewed his father as a dominant male figure in the family. Arthur was very adventurous when he enrolled at a multi-racial boarding school because of socialisation and particular meanings of self that Arthur received within his family, which held him in good stead. Arthur's sense of adventure and his curiosity for the unknown propelled him to take risks.

Arthur's - traditional family life

For Arthur, living with the family is the foundation of Zimbabwean society. Gender roles here were defined within the family. Most ethnic groups have patriarchal (male-headed) families, as was in the case with Arthur, where his father, Samuel, was the head of the household and made his own decisions. According to the constitution in Zimbabwe, men and women are equal. However, in terms of the law, there were many areas where women were discriminated against. In April 1999 the Supreme Court, in an inheritance dispute, ruled that women cannot be considered equal to men before the law because of African cultural or customary norms.

When Arthur's parents married, they broke away from traditions of living together in a patriarchal family: *When my parents married they lived on their own. Now, this was unusual in my community because families always lived together in the home of their forefathers.* In rural areas the family unit is composed of the husband, the wife or wives, children, and members of

the extended family (Riphenburg, 1997). However, here we see Arthur's father breaking away from traditional norms. Although Samuels's position as the head of the household and a church priest offered him the platform to exercise his authority in all the decision-making and responsibilities of his home, he nevertheless allowed Arthur the choice from an early age to question and also challenges particular patriarchal cultural norms in relation to families and how they worked. From the age of about seven or eight, girls start to help in the house, and in rural areas, boys of that age begin to learn to herd livestock. Children are encouraged to take on adult tasks from an early age (Riphenburg, 1997). From an early age the role of gender was also being identified.

In opposition to the dominant and traditional ways of growing up as a boy and as a member of the community, Arthur found that his parents offered an alternate position to what and how families live and work. This is also evident when his father changed from being a professional teacher to being a priest. The stance adopted by his father offered an alternate position that challenged the cycle of socialisation that dominated the African community within which Arthur lived.

Rural Life: "Being comfortable"

Arthur hails from a very close knit, family life in Zimbabwe. Coming from a rural area, his life was nevertheless made comfortable as his father provided all the basic necessities. Thus concepts of class and gender were core to Arthur's sense of self as an African male: *My father tried his best to provide us with all the basics. We made ourselves 'comfortable' and life wasn't bad in the rural community.* Life in the rural community was manageable and Arthur was able to make the best of what was offered to them, such as education and a stable family life. Arthur's father was a strong male figure in his life. We can see the dominance of gender and class in Zimbabwe because most Africans in the country believe in educating sons rather than daughters; when daughters marry, they take their family's resources to another family (Parpart, 1995). Arthur's father was an important role model for him in terms of socialisation. Most ethnic groups have patriarchal (male-headed) families where women play a subordinate role by being expected to serve their husbands, work for them, and bear children (Parpart, 1995).

However Arthur was also raised with the strong Christian values of humbleness and respectfulness. Arthur's father, Samuel was a teacher who later became a priest. We

acknowledge Arthur's complicity in not resisting the traditional patriarchal roles and rules that applied. Although Arthur's mother was also a teacher, it was Samuel that Arthur turned to when he needed advice and guidance on career choices. It was not surprising therefore that Arthur looked up to his father as a respected and caring parent and member of the community.

Boarding schooling: "A new world"

As a student, Arthur was also able to venture into a new world when he took up a place in a multiracial, heterogonous schooling community. This critical moment in Arthur's life provided the platform for other kinds of curiosities and interactions. This was the first time that Arthur came face to face with diversity. Socialisation and particular meanings of self that Arthur received within his family held him in good stead when he opted to study at a multiracial boarding school. Zimbabwe is one of the very fortunate countries in southern Africa to have basic education, especially for young people. Education is seen as valuable since it can be the way to a good job.

Arthur's father could afford to send him to a boarding school because of his social status/standing in the community. The end of segregation in Zimbabwe enabled Arthur to meet and intermingle with people of other races and cultures. Taking up a place in a *new world* opened up opportunities for Arthur to interact with confidence as a boy. His *curiosity of wanting to go there* and his adventurous nature saw him taking risks in wanting to *meet people from different racial backgrounds* and enter into a multicultural learning community, one that he was not familiar with. These experiences and concept of self that helped construct who Arthur was, were contributing factors when he decided to become an international student within a multicultural and multiracial university. Thus his experiences and the meanings that he acquired at boarding school helped make meaning of his identity. He was not afraid to venture into unknown territory when he entered both boarding school and the mission school without the constant presence of his family. He was a survivor and adventurer who saw to his own needs.

Postgraduate study: "I wanted to study away from my country"

A critical moment in Arthur's life is the choice to pursue his postgraduate studies in a foreign land. While Arthur was in his home country of Zimbabwe he was provided with the basic necessities to allow him to lead a comfortable life. However, his venture into a foreign space meant that he had to finance himself. This was an opportunity for Arthur even though he realized

it was 'a huge' challenge. Having the confidence in his capacity for risk-taking, he applied to study abroad: *We were very limited in our choice of universities. I decided that if I had the opportunity I wanted to study away from my country.* Choosing to study in South Africa was yet another adventure for Arthur.

Arthur's sense of adventure and his curiosity for the unknown once again propelled him to take risks. *My cousin was studying at UKZN Pietermaritzburg Campus and he used to tell me all the time to come to South Africa to study.* Postgraduate study opened up opportunities for him to cross over once more into the *new world*. However, this adventure that he was embarking on came on suddenly. Arthur did not expect to be accepted so soon after applying to pursue his PG studies in SA: *I didn't plan. I got a place and had to go. It was a huge bridge to cross. After crossing I got stuck because of issues that I was not prepared for like finance.*

Taking the risk to study away from his home country meant changing the comfortable and stable 'rural life' that he enjoyed in Zimbabwe. In his homeland, Arthur was provided with all the basics and he was held in high esteem because he was the son of a minister. Arthur was also fully aware that if he opted to study in South Africa he would need to finance himself. He had to pay his own costs for studying and accommodation. In a new, foreign environment, he had to adapt. He had to learn to budget his money and to 'make do with the basics' to survive. Arthur did experience problems: *I had very little money that my father had given me. It was very difficult because I had to pay for my fees, accommodation and groceries.* Class and gender discourses were the key issues that impacted on the meanings of self for Arthur, an African male. In his home country, he could be described as coming from a middle class as he had his needs met. However, coming to South Africa challenged his ideas of what it means to have a 'comfortable' life when he started experiencing financial problems. Also, in his home country, he relied more on his father for advice and direction.

Organizations are internally structured groups in which relations are characterized by power, status, and prestige differentials (Hogg & Terry, 2000). To varying degrees, people derive meanings and sense of self from the organizations or work-groups to which they belong. To conclude, Arthur's meaning of self is shaped by particular practices that he learnt from living within a nuclear family; his father's role as a male and the opportunities of studying as a learner

in a school where opportunities opened up for new and different experiences and meanings of 'who am I' and 'how do I make sense of myself'.

Monica: Educated caregiver

Monica was an African woman, breadwinner and soul supporter for her immediate and extended family. She had to support the entire family financially, including the children of her siblings. She felt constrained and burdened by this responsibility of being the caregiver in her home. However, she challenged this identity when she constructed for herself the identity of a successful student in a foreign country.

Life was difficult in the village

Monica hails from Lesotho, one of the poor countries in Africa. "Lesotho's economy is fragile, even with the benefits it derives from South Africa which include a partially shared customs union and a single currency". This level of poverty had an impact on Monica: *My country is very poor especially when we compare ourselves to South Africa*. It is very interesting to note that Monica has a view of South Africa as a country that offers better opportunities. Lesotho is seen as a very unprogressive country and labour for the working class was predominantly mining. Therefore the opportunities for progress were limited. The possibility of work in Lesotho was very scarce: *Life was difficult in the village*. There were limited opportunities especially for males like her father, who relied on particular kinds of jobs that were available. In terms of labour, most men were miners and poor because the mines would close for long periods. As a result, the men were not able to take care of their families as is traditionally practised: *Our fathers were miners and when there were no jobs or if the mine closed, they would come back home and there would be nothing for them to do*. Monica presents a very bleak picture of Lesotho in terms of opportunities for work.

The level of poverty in Lesotho impacted on Monica's sense of self and her work security. Monica saw herself as an African woman, breadwinner and sole supporter for her immediate and extended family. Although Monica still had both her parents living, she had to support the entire family financially, including the children of her siblings: *My brothers and sisters have families*

and children. I also have a daughter although I am not married. I am working to support my parents and all my families.

This was an inversion of particular ways of meaning-making for her as a woman and the traditional roles within the society that she lived in (Kariuki, 2006). It was the responsibility of the males to be the breadwinner; a responsibility that was forced onto Monica and which she complied with. However, Monica cannot be deemed to be a loser but a saviour for her family, as she was the only one that they could rely on: *I wanted to help them because of the way they were struggling financially.* The position of breadwinner that Monica adopts also ties in with the traditional view of being a woman as Blackmore and Kenway (1993) point out, that there are certain roles assigned to women such as caring for families or keeping a home. Britzman (1994) argues that a person's identity describes who they are, who they are not, and who they can become. Monica's experiences reflected an ongoing struggle as a woman. She felt constrained and burdened by this responsibility of being the caregiver in her home. However, she chose to challenge this identity of provider that defined her life in her home when she constructed for herself the identity of a successful student within society at large.

I chose to study

Monica was one of the few children in the village and the only child in her family to complete her schooling and college career: *I was the only one who managed to finish my high school and went to the college of education.* Education offered her the platform to threaten the dominant discourse of woman as caregiver with traditional ways that oppressed and constrained women. While she cared for others, she created the space to care for herself and her desires. Her positive achievement gave her a sense of pride and self-fulfilment.

Monica disrupts the notion of a traditional female by not staying at home but rather pursuing her university studies. By educating herself, she creates new meanings of self. Despite the reversal of roles, Monica accepts her role of provider. *I wanted to study because I wanted to take care for my family. They were struggling financially.* Interestingly, the responsibility of provider gave Monica the impetus to engage in studies to earn a better salary: *I decided to further my studies because in Lesotho you get a better salary depending on your qualification.* These spaces (home and education) worked in reciprocal ways to open up better possibilities for Monica and for new meanings of self as an African woman and a successful student.

Leaving my homeland to study

The decision to come to South Africa to continue her postgraduate studies was yet another threatening moment in her life as provider and student, contradictory to the discourse of poverty we see, which becomes the impetus for her to continue her studies. Usually, people who are poor do not study because they do not have the money. Monica remained positive and decided to further her education. She made meaning of who she is as a person within her family: *I was finding it very hard to cope taking care of my family with the salary I was earning. I was earning only R1500 a month with a teacher's certificate.*

The study also found that Monica came to South Africa because of inadequate opportunities to study in her home country: *The University of Lesotho did not offer postgraduate studies in Education, so I had to leave my homeland to study.* While Lesotho did not offer her postgraduate studies, contradictorily it was able to support her: *I was accepted to study at UKZN and I secured a sponsor from my government.* She decided to improve her educational qualifications to earn a higher salary. She was also sponsored by her government to study a postgraduate degree at any university. She did not have any information about the university in South Africa. However, she was encouraged to study at UKZN because of a teacher friend: *I didn't hear anything about UKZN. I met a teacher of mine from high school who was studying in Pietermaritzburg (PMB).*

Conclusion

Reworking meanings for Arthur and Monica

Both vignettes highlight particular meanings of class and gender that are at work in powerful ways, narrating and being narrated in and through varying and contradictory discourses that Arthur and Monica adopt in making sense of themselves and the world in which they live. Monica's vignette foregrounds particular cultural and political context in which poverty dominates the choices she makes through resistance or complicity as an African woman and student (Britzman, 1994). She is able to rework meanings of self as African woman, of family and her life as a successful student. As a breadwinner and caregiver, she engages in studying. Both positions (personal and professional) and the responsibilities that she takes up in these

positions, created possibilities for her to disrupt the traditional meanings of being a woman, African and poor.

Monica received favourable feedback on South Africa from her friend; her reason also in wanting to come to South Africa was to give her a space to realise her own dreams of furthering her education and freeing her from poverty. Poverty gives her reason to take the plunge to study in South Africa, where better opportunities will be available to her. Monica was not supported by her family as Arthur was. Instead she had to support her family. She realised that education would help her to progress. However, she could not progress in her country because there were limited or no opportunities for postgraduate studies.

Both the participants received information prior to their arrival about what to expect here in SA. But their expectations did not equate to the reality they were confronted with. Informed by friends and family who were already studying at UKZN, they were prepared in some ways for what to experience at UKZN. This supports the view of Mori (2000) that international students arrived in the host country with preconceived ideas of what their life as students would be like. Social identity theory assists me in interpreting identities as multiple and dynamic and through Monica and Arthur's stories, I learnt how one can choose or not choose to create, rework, invert dominant socially constructed meanings for new ways of being and acting in the world (Pillay, 2003). When Arthur went to the new boarding school, he was not scared. He was rather curious to go out there and experience the adventure. He always had the willingness to explore and take risks in order to create a new identity for him (Wenger, 1998).

Gender, class and race are key discourses in both the participants' narratives of their experiences. However, each is shaped in their unique way and is not identical. Monica is shaped by class and gender through her own financial constraints and family responsibility. She had a desire to further her studies. Here again, she is resisting the boundaries of being an 'African woman' engaging in household chores. On a personal level, her meaning of gender was being challenged. Monica had a personal desire to study and to educate herself. This challenge led her to care for her family in a different manner because she was now only sending money to her family as a caregiver. As an international student she was able to negotiate her own development and what she wanted. Her responsibility changed, where she had more time and space for herself. These spaces are important to her because they allow her to reflect on what she wants to do for herself.

In Arthur's case, meanings of class and gender worked in powerful ways to construct his meanings of self as one with knowledge and experience to change and challenge traditional ways of knowing and being. Socialized in a non-traditional family about what it means to live and learn differently, we are not surprised by his desire to continually search for something different, an alternative to the norm. Practices enacted within the home assisted him in adopting particular meanings as African male and a learner in search of new meanings in different spaces. Being a learner in a multiracial boarding school opened up a new world for Arthur who grew up and lived in a rural community. Therefore choosing to pursue his postgraduate studies in a place different from that which he is familiar with is not unusual. Learning was part of his adventure.

Section B

Section B responds to critical question two:

What are international students' learning through postgraduate studies at UKZN?

Section A provides an understanding of the meanings constituting African international postgraduate student's multiple and dynamic identities, as shaped and being shaped by particular cultural and historical experiences within their home and the broader social and cultural context within which these students lived. Social identity theory is important because both the participants' identities are important in understanding the experiences and meanings derived thereof to make sense of their lives in personally meaningful ways. As agented beings, they choose to take up particular discourses to disrupt dominant meanings around class and gender through the educational experience.

Question two provides an understanding of one of those multiple and dynamic identities that Arthur and Monica perform, that of being an International student in an internationally acclaimed university like UKZN. It focuses on their experiences as International students and the practices that they adopt as members of the postgraduate learning community at UKZN.

To assist in analysing these themes, I will draw on Wenger's (1998) Social Theory of Learning. Wenger's (1998) theory draws on his earlier work with Lave and Wenger (1991). Lave and Wenger (1991) propose that learning becomes part of a person's life so that the context of the

learning is situated within their everyday practice as they become involved and engaged in activities at work.

These are important considerations since both the students work, study and live at the campus and are part of a postgraduate learning community. Thus meanings created and adopted through particular learning practices and activities constitute and give them a sense of who they are and how they engage in what they do as part of a postgraduate learning community at UKZN. This social relationship refers to the affiliation of a person within a group membership (Deaux, 2001, p.1). This group membership is important because as international students they get a sense of belonging by being part of the community of learning.

However, Wenger's (1998) theory focuses on the social spaces (institutional and postgraduate community as social spaces) within which particular personal and professional experiences shape their learning as postgraduate students. I draw on Bell and Gilbert (1996) and their model of three dimensions to understand the personal and professional learning that happens. This personal and professional is understood within this postgraduate community and this forms the social dimension where the learning happens. Bell and Gilbert (1996) say that the learning happens in a social context. In the study, support, feedback and reflection are identified as being essential to development.

Using Wenger (1998) and Bell & Gilbert (1996), I extract the following themes:

1. Institutional space-constraints and challenges: This theme focuses on the participants' initial experiences at UKZN on arrival as international postgraduate students.
2. The postgraduate community space. This theme looks at the social and cultural differences that prevail at UKZN. These aspects have far-reaching consequences for the African international postgraduate students at UKZN. As a result of this, they were always seen as the 'outsider' at UKZN.
3. International students' professional learning experiences: While the first two themes focus on the social and cultural, this theme looks at what learning (personal and professional) happened at UKZN within these spaces.

Theme one

Institutional Spaces: constraints and challenges

Theme one zooms in on some of the experiences Arthur and Monica had when they arrived as international students at an acclaimed international university. The participants, however, constantly negotiated their personal and professional identities in relation to the social context, which happens to be UKZN in this study. I am trying to understand these particular individual's personal and professional identities, and how they both interact within the social space of the university. Lave & Wenger (1991) focus on learning taking place within a context and community. In this study I am using it to understand two types of community:

1. The institutional community which is UKZN within which international students' experiences are going to be interpreted.
2. The postgraduate community which helps understand this learning within the institution (Wenger, 1998).

Wenger says that learning happens within the context of the university where, according to the Strategic Framework, there are systems and structures in place. However in reality, this is not taking place. Wenger argues that if this is the larger community, learning happens within this broad community.

Mismatch – Expectations and Reality

The students in this study had certain expectations when they arrived in a foreign space (South Africa), for example, of being provided suitable accommodation. What they were offered did not meet their expectations.

At an institutional level, there are structures in place (policy structure) but the evidence from the extracted excerpts below, attest to the fact that no one listened to their needs. Their expectations were not met and they did not have a voice. The institutional structures were not in alignment with the cultural ethos of an internationally acclaimed university.

Arthur: My decision to come was based on the positive feedback I had received from my cousin about his study experiences at UKZN.

Monica: I did not hear anything about UKZN but I knew people who were studying at The University of Free State.

However, while Arthur had positive feedback from his cousin, his experience on arrival proved otherwise:

However, when I came here I found that I was stuck because what I was expecting in South Africa was not what I was experiencing. The feedback I received did not match the reality.

Monica on arrival also did not have a positive experience:

I expected the orientation programme at UKZN to help me fit into university life as an international postgraduate student. However, this did not happen because it was rushed and not very informative.

Monica's experience coincides with the findings of Forland (2006), that student encounter problems on the matter of orientation. Students deem it important for the university to have an induction process to assist in orientating them to the university's principles, methods and procedures implemented for teaching.

Falling on deaf ears

When international students find that their expectations of the host countries are not met, they may experience stress and problems focusing wholeheartedly on their studies (Guilfoyle, 2006). Venturing into a foreign country for the first time is a huge challenge, especially finding a roof over your head. Accommodation is a big problem that international students face especially if they have no family member or relative in the host country. The participants expressed their dismay at not knowing what was expected of them within this foreign context of the university. They did not know what behaviour was appropriate or inappropriate. However, they display a willingness to explore and to take risks and make connections in order to create new identities for themselves (Wenger, 1998). They were mostly concerned about the fact that they were not guaranteed a place to stay upon arrival at a university.

Both the participants' experiences proved contrary to the UKZN strategic plan (UKZN Strategic Plan, 2007-2016), which states that the university will see to the needs of their students with

regard to accommodation. Arthur chooses to pay his own fees and find his own accommodation. He found a way because he is very good at finding alternatives:

I had very little money that my father had given me. The university didn't allow me to stay in residence because there was no place so I found accommodation with my cousin who was staying out of the university.

Even though he had only the basics, Arthur always found new ways of managing things. This is part of his meaning making of finding alternate positions:

Monica: *However, when I came to South Africa to do my Honours I didn't get the accommodation I was expecting.*

From the narrative of Monica it seems that she did not have a voice at UKZN. Our Strategic Plan (2007-2016, p. 13) states that the University will provide “safe and secure residential options, social spaces and amenities, located, equipped and run with students in mind, that are geared to the changing needs of all types of students”. Yet Monica’s pleas seemed to fall on deaf ears:

I had to stay in Pinetown and I used to travel by taxi to get to the university which was an additional expense. I took up this matter with the Housing section but they would not listen to me. It is only when I threatened to leave and go back home that they gave me a place.

Fighting for her space

Monica’s experiences tie in with the findings of Deem & Brehony (2000) that international students may also encounter complications with issues such as poor living conditions and restricted or little office space. Living among 15 -18 first year students obstructs optimal learning opportunities. Monica could not discuss her learning programme or postgraduate studies with first year students.

Monica expressed her disappointment at the University for displaying a negative attitude towards foreign student’s dilemma for accommodation:

I was placed with first year students. There were about fifteen or eighteen of us sharing one bathroom and one kitchen. I could not study because of the loud music and the noise. My room was like a little box with a wardrobe and a bed and I used to pay R1500 rent per month.

While Monica cries foul on the one hand, the institution and policy are saying certain things on the other. Here we have two people responding differently. There is a social construction of self (Social identity theory) within this institutional constraint where Monica becomes despondent and threatens to and it was only when she *threatened to leave and go back home* that they gave her a place. Monica as a woman fights for a space to be heard. Education is the only space for her and when that is threatened, she responds. The international students had no voice because nobody wanted to listen to them. This institutional community cannot work at an institutional level (Wenger, 1998), and although there is a policy in place, it is not being adhered to.

Theme Two

The postgraduate (PG) community space

In this study, the participants are international students and come from different countries and with this they bring different experiences and background knowledge. Their identities are not constructed by themselves but through the social context that they are in, which is the relationship formed at the university and within the context of the PG community. Wenger (1998) gives a particular understanding of the postgraduate community and in this study the learning community is actually fraught with tension.

Experiencing challenges and finding ways to negotiate them

Cross-border mobility requires that students be accompanied with the cultural aspects of studying in a foreign country and also adapt to different personal, social and economic living conditions. Although the importance of these social issues is often underestimated in the evaluation of the process of internationalisation, it is believed that higher education and its impact should help to create more social cohesion (Scott, 1998). Staff and students at universities need to be aware of and trained to interact with people of other cultures and to understand the concept of differences and sameness. However, this is not the case with the participants in this study. In a foreign country, they not only needed to find a new place to live, they also needed to familiarise themselves with new values and customs, while making sure they achieved their educational success. One of the key themes emerging from the data is the issue of language in relation to one's cultural belief.

Speaking Zulu Speaking English!

Foreign students hold onto their language because it gives them a sense of their cultural identity. When foreigners speak their language or cannot speak the language of the locals, it is usually met with disapproval. They are referred to as speaking ‘animal language’ and this denies them the opportunity to talk freely in their own language, which is precious to them (Reitzes, 1997, p. 30). By not speaking the local language, the participants were unable to communicate: they were stigmatised and had to alienate themselves from South African locals. The pressure placed on the foreigners not to speak their language stifles their culture, creativity and development as people. This becomes very one-sided because the locals expect the foreigners to learn their language.

Arthur was not at ease amongst the locals because he couldn’t speak *isiZulu*: *I experienced tension because I couldn’t speak Zulu*. The participants felt they were being discriminated against by South Africans because language is a major obstacle or stumbling block amongst international students. “Competency in a local African language appears to be a fundamental criterion for acceptance and integration of foreigners into Black South African society” (Reitzes, 1997, p. 41). The Zulu language is so strong that the participants in the study had to learn the language. Norton (2000) argues that the learning or acquiring of a second language is not merely a skill that is acquired with hard work and dedication, but a complex social practice that engages the identity of those who are learning and which in this study fall within the category of linguistic minority international students.

The participants not only had a problem with *isiZulu*, but also with the English language which was their second language. They had to face a totally new teaching and learning context while going through a phase of adjusting in a new social context and environment.

Monica: *When I first came to UKZN I didn’t think that I will make it because language was a difficulty that I had to contend with.*

Monica had to put in extra hours into her studies so as to understand the content of what was being taught, evidence of her desire to be an assertive agent and not remain a victim: *I don’t think the lecturers understand that we come from different backgrounds and that English is our second language.*

Arthur: I felt uneasy because of the manner in which the local students would look at me when I spoke in English. It could be that they felt threatened because I could talk English and they were experiencing a problem with the language.

Here Arthur is experiencing the art of being powerful. He felt powerlessness because he couldn't speak Zulu but powerful because he could speak English since the locals were experiencing a problem with English. The international students must thus find ways of managing and negotiating this postgraduate community.

Black equals Zulu

The local students felt that the international students were expected to speak *isiZulu* because they were 'Black'. Arthur, as an international student, felt discriminated against because he couldn't talk the language:

They expected us, foreigners to learn the Zulu language easily because they considered us as being 'Blacks'. They would say, "Hey, you are Black and therefore you must learn the language.

Although Monica could speak English, she was a victim because she couldn't speak *isiZulu*. Monica felt that she was being undermined because the local Blacks spoke to her in *isiZulu* all the time and they would even tell her, *we don't understand why you are here and we do not understand why you don't want to speak Zulu?* African, Asian and West Indian students might experience more discrimination and prejudice because of their skin colour (Khoo et al., 2002). Like Arthur, she had to learn a new language to fit into the social context. Monica felt that the local students should also show respect and tolerance towards foreign students' language and culture: *They don't appreciate that we do not understand their language.* They are in some ways contributing to their alienation by feeling the separation of their language.

Keeping to myself

According to Wenger (1998) and Bell and Gilbert (1996), people are social beings and therefore needed to be seen as such. Being regarded as social beings entails being part of, and participating within communities of learning. However, from the narratives of the participants this is clearly not the case. The participants felt a sense of security when they were alone. Leaving your homeland and your family behind and coming into a foreign country, one would expect to find a

‘home within a home.’ Diversity usually represents characteristics that are associated with race, gender and culture differences or anything that gives the student an identity. International students need to feel that they are part of the institution and the institution must be seen as multi-cultural and diverse with regards to its policies. Monica stays in her room thus distancing herself from the locals. *I used to lock myself in my room and keep to myself.* She is “othering” or “marginalising” herself (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000). By Monica withdrawing, she is perpetuating her loneliness and creating a gap to be away from the local students. To a large extent this was shaped by her own personal belief about who she is. Learning within a postgraduate student cannot happen alone yet Monica isolates herself in her room.

The locals themselves kept their distance from the international students. This created a lonely space for Arthur because he also kept his distance from the locals as he did not want trouble: *I keep to myself if I suspect that they are going to make trouble.* However, because he was good and topped the class and was commended by the lecturer, the local students responded to him in a different way by seeking his help: *Even within my Honours class when I told people where I came from, I noticed that the locals kept their distance from me. I had to prove myself to be accepted by the locals.*

The narratives of Monica and Arthur also do not bode well for multicultural relations at UKZN. It is in opposition to the Education White Paper 3 (1997, p. 42), which expresses the expectations of the Ministry: “to create a secure and safe campus environment that discourages harassment or any other hostile behaviour directed towards persons or groups on any grounds whatsoever, but particularly on grounds of age, colour, creed, disability, gender, marital status, national origin, race, language, or sexual orientation.”

Theme Three

Personal and professional learning space

The two sections above focused on the institutional community and the postgraduate community. However, in order to understand what learning happens within that social space of the postgraduate community, I draw on Bell and Gilbert (1996), who states that there are actually different dimensions of understanding the learning; the personal and the professional.

Personal learning

Personal development is an important part of teacher development without which the other aspects of development would not be possible. Social development involves working in new ways with teachers and engaging in discussion of the learning process. For the international students studying at UKZN, on a personal level they experienced fear and isolation. However, there was also some change in attitude where they were able to learn a new language, and when Arthur was able to help the other students in the lecture room, this gave them a personal satisfaction. In learning, the students developed their beliefs and ideas and attended to their feelings associated with change.

Arthur felt that he needed to learn the language so that he is not isolated from the rest of the students at UKZN: *I didn't tell anyone but I slowly learnt the Zulu language so I could understand when local people spoke.* Learning the local language became a must for Arthur because the failure to converse in a local language is also a means of identifying the international/foreign students (Harris, 2002). Therefore, to a foreigner, the ability to converse in the local language is seen as a means of being received and thus incorporated into the local South African society (Reitzes, 1997). Social space, according to Wenger (1998), enhances learning but if you are feeling or experiencing loneliness and isolation, then this community of practice is also an alienating space. Key relationships are found in social spaces (Wenger, 1998), however there is tension within the relationships between locals and international students. The way in which the postgraduate community works also allows foreign students to distance themselves. In this study, the postgraduate community is constructed in a certain way, where Zulu is a dominant language and thus creates a challenging environment. This results' in the postgraduate international student feeling isolated and marginalised within that space.

Arthur's reaction resonates with the findings of McLellan (2009) that foreign/international student feel discriminated against because they do not speak a local African language and are the recipients of the unfriendliness and alienation of the locals. Cambridge & Thompson (2004) believed that students living together and learning from each other in a multicultural context will lessen bias and stereotyped images, and thus reduce conflict situations. They further state that higher educational institutions should have the resources for training students so as to help them develop a critical perspective and to prepare them to work and live comfortably.

Professional

Another aspect of development was the teachers' learning about professional development and change processes, and how they themselves are engaging in learning (Bell and Gilbert, 1996). Professional development involves changing and developing concepts and beliefs (Bell and Gilbert, 1996). It also develops the input of new theoretical ideas and new learning suggestions. In this study of the development of professional capacity, my participants tried new activities and developed new ideas in their learning. This tends to be present in current development programmes and is usually done in more formal situations, for example, in their lectures. From the narratives of both students we get a sense of their learning experiences within the lecture halls. While Arthur seemed to cope, Monica experienced some problems.

Arthur: I passed with excellent results. I never experienced problems achieving good results at university. I passed my Honours, PGCE, Masters (MEd) although time factor was a challenge. I will finish with my PhD. hopefully at the end of May 2013.

Monica: I had to work hard and put in extra hours in order to understand the content and language. I am not privileged like the others who can read just one time and understand. It is very challenging and interesting. I worked hard and passed.

At a professional level, Arthur felt powerful because he was clever and this developed into an interesting relationship between him and amongst the locals because they sought his help in their studies. Monica persevered, worked hard and obtained her PGCE and Honours, and is presently completing her Master's Degree.

Interactions in the lectures

When we analyse the African international student's experiences with the lecturers, we find that they differed. While Arthur had positive experiences, Monica had negative experiences.

Arthur's positive experiences could be attributed to the positive feedback he received from his lecturer on work submitted *after the first assignment the lecturer commented on how well I had done that I had topped the class.* This was coupled with the acceptance and recognition he was afforded in the lecture room by the local students. Initially the students used to keep their distance from him, but after his outstanding performance on work submitted their attitude changed. Arthur's professional learning had placed him on a positive platform which had

boosted his confidence. Dual emotions were displayed. He was powerless in the sense that he was a foreign student but he felt very powerful because he could help them. He helped the lecturers by supervising programmes but felt despondent because he received half a salary because he was a foreigner:

However my desperation for a job resulted in some of the lecturers taking advantage of me as a student. I helped them with their marking and consulted with their students. I helped to co-ordinate and supervise Honours and Masters programme.

Monica on the other hand did not find agency within her lectures. She faced a battle on all fronts.

Monica: The lecturers as well feel that we are all the same in the lecture room, because we are seen as 'Black.' Even when the lecturers mark our assignments, they don't focus on the content of the work but rather on the construction of our English and we are marked down for this.

Bias sets in for Monica where she is mistaken by the academic teachers for being local and isiZulu speaking because she is Black. However, Monica overcomes her hardship and resists the boundaries of giving up by pursuing on her own in understanding her postgraduate studies. Her only respite came from her supervisor who seemed to afford her the space to see herself as a winner.

Monica: Luckily I have a good supervisor who understands my plight and helps and guides me during the supervision sessions.

However, Monica finds solace and overcomes her challenges when she works one-to-one with her supervisor, who is compassionate and gives her the guidance she needs.

I appreciate what UKZN has given me

Both participants indicated that despite their difficulties, they appreciated being at UKZN.

Arthur: I have been redefined at UKZN, not on the outside but on the inside. On the outside I may have gained weight but more importantly on the inside I have gained an education at UKZN.

Monica: The education system in South Africa is much better because the students are exposed to a lot of resources and system of education is much higher than in Lesotho. I have a very positive learning experience at UKZN.

Conclusion

One of the major aims of the internationalisation of higher education is to prepare students to function in an international and intercultural context (Volet & Ang, 1998). Experience and awareness of their learning is important for their personal and professional development. Postgraduate African students enter, participate in and complete higher education in UKZN from different backgrounds and they reflect the diversity of African culture, identities and learning through their subjective appraisal of their experiences in the new place and space.

Drawing from Social Identity Theory, I was able to explore and understand the complex and multiple dimensions of international students' lives in this study as they negotiated daily within a range of forces and factors at UKZN. It is precisely for this reason that Social Identity Theory is potentially useful in understanding the ways in which students actively construct, and are constructed by the university and their relationship with people within that learning community. The social identity theory helps to understand the identity of being international and that identities are multiple. In this study the narratives indicated how meanings changed and contributed to a sense of self of how one became an international student. While meanings are changing, are fluid and multiple, Wenger (1998) fails to highlight the different tensions that are fraught in a postgraduate community of learning and that their learning within that community is not as 'smooth sailing' as he suggests.

Using Wenger's (1998) and Bell & Gilbert's (1996) theory of learning, the international postgraduate students in this study relate as social beings within this community and their meanings of self are working in relation to that. However, certain meanings of self created certain challenges such as the language issue. Yet certain meanings of self opened up opportunities within this community and this is what made this community a critical space. It is critical because it is a place where relationships and tensions are continually being negotiated. Wenger (1998) produces a romantic story of how learning takes place. In this study, data showed how international students who are part of this postgraduate community are confronted with key

challenges which constrain their learning and how these students negotiate that learning. Both participants felt powerless and yet powerful. They felt powerlessness because they could not speak *isiZulu*, but powerful when they learnt the language. However, in order to be accepted by the local students, Arthur had to prove his learning skills to them. He was powerless in the sense that he was a foreign student but he felt very powerful because he helped them. Meanings worked for Arthur when he became the resource in the class. Monica became the resource and become powerful despite her poverty when she completed her studies. Her meanings of self as successful women within this postgraduate community were enabled because she was able to create the space through many fights in which she could live, work and study. However, Wenger (1998) does not point to these tensions. The data picked up on the tensions and challenges and their stories helped understand and made visible what the tensions were and how the international students negotiated them in a foreign community like the university.

So what does it mean to be an international postgraduate student in higher education? How then are these post graduate students making meaning or framing their professional identities and learning as students within an international university? Are they becoming agents of change (Bell and Gilbert, 1996)? In the study, the participants are international students; they came from different countries and brought in different experiences and background knowledge. They made changes in their life and constructed their life differently even if they learnt under a negative context. Identities are not constructed by themselves but through the social context they were in, which was the relationships formed at the university and within the context of the postgraduate community. The identity of my participants are culturally constructed by the community from which they came as their learning was sometimes a result of the context and not the individual themselves (Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001).

Chapter Six

Summary of Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion

Introduction

The study set out to explore the educational journeys of postgraduate international students studying at UKZN. This chapter offers an interpretation of the research questions and synthesis of the findings. Finally, it provides some recommendations for research, policy and practice.

Context

In this study, I had undertaken a narrative stance to explore the lived experiences of African international postgraduate students studying at UKZN. African international students in my study are non-South African students who reside outside the borders of South Africa but within the continent of Africa. Exploring the workings of the postgraduate learning community in one particular campus opened up possibilities for understanding how these postgraduate International students negotiated their learning and development in a foreign university.

Methodological reflections

I chose narrative inquiry as the methodological approach because it offered me an opportunity to reflect on the diversity, richness and complexities involved in personal and professional experiences of postgraduate international students studying in higher education. The narrative approach helped me to understand the students lived experiences and showed how the personal interacts with the professional within the social space of the postgraduate learning community (Bell and Gilbert, 1996; Clandinin, 1986). Located within a qualitative research approach, which ‘in its broadest sense refers to research that elicits participants’ accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions’ (De Vos, 2002, p. 79), this study attempted to understand postgraduate students’ experience from the perspective of the participants. In this study, I reconstructed the stories the students told about themselves and how they negotiated and constructed particular meanings of self and their learning. As constructions of self through stories, they each provided narratives of their consciously and unconsciously constructed versions of "a life" told and experienced in particular contexts, moments, critical incidents and in relation to significant others. I drew on social identity theory, the social learning theory and Bell and Gilbert’s model on professional

learning to understand African international postgraduate students' lived experiences and to explore their learning experiences at UKZN.

By examining the narratives that the two students constructed of themselves and their learning, I have gained an understanding of how their personal, social and professional identities are negotiated in/through the postgraduate learning community as a social space. From a Social identity theory perspective, I was able to explore and understand the complex and multiple identities of the participants and how meanings of self formed/informed the particular positions they took up in the world and more specifically, as international students.

Narrative and life history allowed me to connect to the broader social context by understanding the international postgraduate students in relation to dominant discourses and the specific discourses that shaped these individuals lives. The use of life history interviews provided opportunities for the African international postgraduate students to express their desires, anxieties, wishes and feelings in ways that went beyond the discourse of language and provided a voice to tell their stories as experienced. Collage and photo voice as visual methods allowed me to move and delve beyond the confines of the spoken word. These approaches helped understand the students' lives as complex and identities as fluid and multiple. These strategies enabled me to produce rich and vivid accounts of their personal and professional learning and the challenges and highlights of studying in a foreign country.

The research questions

The learning experiences of the international students were highlighted and analysed by asking the following critical questions that provided direction for this study:

Who are the postgraduate international students studying at UKZN?

What are international students learning through postgraduate studies at UKZN?

Responding to “who” the international students are?

I have drawn on Social Identity Theory (Britzman, 1994) as the chosen theoretical perspective because the way in which the postgraduate students approached their learning was grounded in their backgrounds, biographies, and past experiences in their homeland. Understanding the ‘who’ as non-linear and fluid afforded me the opportunity to explore the self in relation to the different dominant and specific discourses that inform the identity of international students as socially

constructed in relation to the broader social context, in this case the country/village in which particular international students grew and lived. An understanding of the historical codes that narrated the lived experiences of the international postgraduate students within specific geographical, historical and political cultures was developed. The vignettes of both participants show how constructions of self in relation to the broader socio-cultural context are critical for understanding 'who' the international students are and how particular meanings of self are worked, reworked and inverted in resisting particular discourses. I understood through their personal narratives how participants multiple identities are negotiated on a daily basis to make sense of who they are and their choice to become international students.

The social identity theory enabled me to see the fluidity and the relationship between the individual and the context and how in each of the relationships, meanings were created and recreated to inform their becoming international students. Social identity theory assisted me in making sense of international students' multiple identities and how they intercepted and worked as international students. Discourses of class and gender shape and continue to shape their experiences within the social context and the choices the participants make within it. These meanings of gender and class are reworked to align with non-traditional ways of being. Social identity theory helped me to understand how meanings were negotiated and the choices they made in relation to the broader social context. In their relationship within the family, there are certain choices they made in relation to the broader traditions of the society. Either they are compliant or non-compliant and traditional or non-traditional.

Monica was able to negotiate both her traditional responsibility as caregiver and her desire to be an educated woman. Her choice to leave the country and continue her postgraduate studies was shaped by the fact that she was not offered postgraduate studies in her home country. As an international student, Monica is driven to continue her learning and development and at the same time satisfy her responsibility as the caregiver. Monica is able to negotiate a number of different positions and responsibilities as an international student.

Arthur's vignette foregrounds his meanings of class and gender as a non-traditional male. Growing up within a non-traditional family, his meanings were shaped by his curiosity and search of new spaces. However, within that non-traditional family, he was able to make choices. Arthur negotiated a number of roles as a male within his family and within the

multiracial schools he had chosen to study in. Social identity theory helped me to understand that as a non-traditional male his choices and the meanings he created from his experiences as he took up certain positions within different living and learning spaces such as boarding school.

Both vignettes highlight how particular meanings of class and gender work in powerful ways to open up spaces for change and non-traditional ways of being and acting. My study found through their narratives, that the participants possess multiple identities and this informs their choices of who they are. The narratives show how meanings were created that informs their choice to become international. As international students at UKZN, these meanings of gender and class that the vignettes foreground are once again open to change in relation to the broader normative framework of South African Higher education and UKZN in particular.

Responding to the question: What are international students learning through postgraduate studies at UKZN?

The issue of learning experiences of international students within a postgraduate learning community was a very complex and challenging one. Drawing on Wenger's (1998) Social Theory of Learning and Bell and Gilbert's (1996) Model of Professional Learning enabled me to better understand the community and what and how learning for international students happens. It is also important to ascertain the personal, social and professional dimensions of their learning.

Personal and professional learning of international students within the social space of UKZN and the postgraduate community

This study found that African international postgraduate student's educational journeys into a foreign space is not a pleasant one and is full of hardship. Wenger's (1998) Social Learning Theory and Bell and Gilbert's (1996) dimensions of learning theories informed the analysis and understanding of the personal and professional learning within that postgraduate learning community. While Wenger (1998) focuses on the social space for learning, Bell and Gilbert (1994) zoom in to the different domains for learning that are possible in and through such social spaces to enhance one's development and change. In this study, we understand the complexity of such a process through the lived experienced of Arthur and Monica. As foreign African students, their personal learning and development was marred by fear of xenophobia, financial problems, isolation and accommodation. Feelings of marginalisation and exclusion from the broader

student community were an ongoing psychological trauma where the 'foreigner' students did not feel a sense of alliance or being part of the group.

In this study, international students were confronted with language constraints to socialising and this resulted in hostility towards the African international postgraduate students by the local postgraduate students. The international students are looked upon suspiciously by the locals because of their inability to speak the local language and they also see them as a threat to their jobs. The study found that issues of exclusion and intimidation coloured the learning experiences within the social space of the postgraduate learning community. In particular, the discourses around language and being foreigner complicated the relationships that are critical for the learning community. Within the broader university community, students also experienced isolation and oppression in the residences and other social spaces. Postgraduate students could not exchange or share ideas and knowledge as a community of learners, contrary to UKZN's Strategic Plan (2007-2016) and its vision for internationalisation.

However, the students do demonstrate resilient ways to continue with their commitment to learn and develop in their postgraduate studies. International students do experience positive, professional experiences. Within the formal spaces of the lecture rooms, learning for both students through particular social formations are productive in their development as researchers. In Arthur's case, the reciprocity and interchange is clearly evident in his story as one who is capacitated with knowledge and expertise not only as a postgraduate student but as a tutor and lecturer. For Monica, learning happened within the one-to-one supervision sessions and in the modules she attended. Through positive supervision relationships as a Masters student, Monica was able to develop her capacity to engage in research. Within particular learning spaces of the postgraduate community, both students in the study expressed positive challenges within the more formal spaces of the lecture halls and in the one-to-one relationships with supervisors. In their development as postgraduate student researchers with skills, knowledge interchange is made possible and they could offer support to other students.

Theoretical Conclusions

While Wenger (1998) presents a particular understanding of how learning communities work to enhance learning, this study helps us to understand the complexity of learning when you try to understand it through the international students' experiences.

The choice of the Social Identity Theory (Britzman, 1994) in this study stems from a response that identity is not fixed and that there are different moments in our lives where we are pulled and pushed by different forces (Samuel, 1998). In the context of UKZN, there are different choices, meanings and judgements to be negotiated on a daily basis. The learning experiences of postgraduate international students studying at UKZN are contradictory and complex where they became powerless at a personal level. However, although it was constrained they were able to make/negotiate personal choices such that their professional development was still productive in a closed postgraduate community. While the students in the study were able to negotiate their personal self and pull back where they had the choice to pack and go back to their homelands, they however pushed forward in the sense of seeking new knowledge in a postgraduate learning community (Samuel, 2005). They were still able to excel and develop knowledge and skills as researchers. This also related to their childhood days and lived experiences in their homeland. As a result, I was able to understand how they consciously and unconsciously constructed “a life” through the telling, and how it created opportunities for me to explore their personal and professional lives in all their complexities.

According to Wenger (1998), learning is a social action which requires a person not just to engage in activities but to be an active participant within the social community for optimal learning to take place. In the case of the African international postgraduate students, their participation within the social learning community was both active and inactive at different moments. Through much hardship they were able to negotiate their learning and development and make meaningful choices and rework meanings of who they are.

While it did not work on the personal level within the social community, within the formal learning there was development and learning. Through them we can see that learning as a social phenomenon within a community is complex and informs how the community works. In the formal professional learning context, their engagement as postgraduate students is more productive. As postgraduate students, international students are seen as a resource as well as a support to other students. Forland (2006) is of the view that despite international postgraduate students being successful learners in their home country, they are required to adapt to the new learning environment of the country they are studying in.

Recommendations

Recommendations for this study will be mirrored against the UKZN Strategic Plan (2007-2016). The reason for this is that at the national level there is no policy in place to address the internationalisation of higher education. Therefore the recommendations for this study will be in relation to the policy and practice of UKZN. South Africa needs to address the internationalisation of higher education within the country by putting in place a national policy. An initiative needs to be taken by the university to improve the life of international students within our borders.

Kishun (2007, p. 464) states that “the higher education sector needs to make the international office an integral part of governance structures if internationalisation is to be handled in ways that benefit the sector.” It is recommended that the university sets up ‘functional’ administrative departments to assist international students with their paperwork, accommodation and to host workshops to acculturate international students to this foreign space (Kishun, 2007).

International students can narrow the gap by learning the culture of the host university (Ramburuth, 2001). International students as well should familiarise themselves with the ethos of the university so as to make their transition easier. This can be achieved by hosting open days or orientation programmes at the beginning of the year. Such a programme has to target not only international students but also the local student body to create an atmosphere of mutual acceptance and tolerance.

The issue of accommodation also needs to be addressed. Postgraduate students should be separated from undergraduates to afford them the peace and tranquillity that their postgraduate work demands and also to liaise with other postgraduate students within the postgraduate learning community. The UKZN Strategic Plan resolves to “acknowledge the value of the individual by promoting the intellectual, social and personal well-being of staff and students through tolerance and respect for multilingualism, diverse cultures, religions and social values, and by fostering the realisation of each person’s full potential” (UKZN Strategic Plan 2007-2016, p. 6). UKZN needs to cater for diverse linguistic and cultural groups that study on campus by creating forums, debates and workshops that will address the language issue.

Suggestions for further research

My study focused on the learning experiences of international postgraduate students from within African states. It would be interesting to explore the educational journeys of international students from other countries outside of the African continent. My research study is based on the narratives of only two African international students at UKZN, Edgewood Campus. It would be interesting to know if the findings would be different if more than two students narrated their life history. This study is limited to UKZN, Edgewood Campus only and the findings cannot be generalised to other faculties and university campuses in South Africa. Similar studies could be conducted at other universities within South Africa.

Reflection

Studying the educational journeys of African international postgraduate students as a critical part of my Masters programme was an important learning moment for me. As an intentional part of my learning journey, it allowed me the opportunity to reflect on my own life, learning and development. I had to come face to face with my own biases. By excluding myself unintentionally from the larger body of students and ‘clinging’ to people I could identify with I realised that I had almost missed the opportunity to grow as a person. Yes, apartheid had kept us in our ‘safe’ little cocoons, but I had a choice to mix and mingle with other people of different race groups. I am blessed to have been afforded this opportunity. It was difficult to confront my biases, but by doing so I have made new friends and formed alliances that will dictate my future life and learning experiences. I have come to realise how complex the meanings of being a postgraduate student, mother, wife and educator are, and the creative ways I need to find to negotiate my learning and development. I also credit my achievement to the support I received within the postgraduate community of learning. The learning journey for me as a South African citizen who has the support of family and friends helped to make my study a reality. Thus the bridge that Arthur talks about is also about my own crossing over which has brought in new meanings of me as a wife, mother, educator and now as a proud researcher.

I came to the knowledge that although this journey was fulfilling, it was also one filled with hurdles and stress. I therefore stand in awe of the two students who afforded me the time and their story in the face of the numerous obstacles they face as foreign students within a foreign campus. Due credit needs to be given to the two students who navigate their journey in a foreign

land and emerge as triumphant despite the many adversities they face. As foreigners they were able to establish a relationship within the postgraduate community. I conclude with Arthur's words etched in my mind: *I have been redefined at UKZN, not on the outside but on the inside. On the outside I may have gained weight but more importantly on the inside I have gained an education at UKZN.*

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Dear Student

REQUEST FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), and this research forms part of my Master of Education (M. Ed) study.

The title of my study is, “Educational journeys of international postgraduate students studying at University of KwaZulu-Natal: A biographical Approach.”

The purpose of my study is to explore the learning experiences of international postgraduate students from African States studying at UKZN through the context of internationalisation.

This study is supervised by Dr Daisy Pillay who is a senior lecturer at the School of Education and Development, UKZN. Dr Pillay can be contacted telephonically at 031- 2607598.

In this study, I will use the following methods to gather information from participants: Life history interviews, collage and photo voice. The oral narrative descriptions will be audio recorded.

I hereby request permission from you to use collages and oral narrative descriptions as data for my research.

If I receive your consent, I will use this data in a way that respects your dignity and privacy. Copies of your contributions will be securely stored and disposed of if no longer required for

research purposes. Your name or any information that might identify you will not be used in any presentation or publication that may arise from the study.

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study. However, I hope that this study will make a significant contribution to postgraduate research on international students studying at higher institutes of learning.

I also wish to inform you that you have no binding commitment to the study and may withdraw your consent at any time if you feel the need to. If you withdraw your consent, you will not be prejudiced in any way.

If you have any questions relating to the rights of research participants, you can contact Ms Phume Ximba in the University of KwaZulu-Natal Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Office on 031-260 3587.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Roseann Rajpal



INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

TITLE OF STUDY: Educational journeys of international postgraduate students studying at UKZN (University of KwaZulu-Natal). A narrative inquiry.

I,

(full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this study, and do consent to participate in the study .

I understand that I am free to leave/withdraw from the study at any time if I want to without any negative or undesirable consequences to myself.

I consent to the following data collection activities (please tick)

	YES	NO
Audio recorded oral narrative descriptions.		
Memory collages		
Photo voice		

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE



FACULTY OF EDUCATION
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

This one to one interview is directed to the international postgraduate students in the Faculty of Education at UKZN and who represent the different countries within Africa.

Dear Postgraduate Student

The purpose of this interview is to gather information that will shed light on international students learning experiences through postgraduate educational research at University of Kwa Zulu Natal (UKZN). The information you give here is strictly confidential and will be used for the purpose mentioned above.

Thank you

Roseann Rajpal

The following questions need to be addressed

- Who are the international students engaging in postgraduate studies at the University of KwaZulu Natal.
- What are the international student's learning experiences through postgraduate studies at UKZN.

PART ONE:

- Biographical /oral narratives of International student's representation of the different faculties, countries and genders
- Long Interviews (Life history) will be conducted with the students to understand the complexities, challenges and highlights of studying in a foreign country.

The main themes that will inform these life history interviews will include:

- Early life (family life, community relationships, experiences as a learner in school, and the choice for engaging in higher education in a foreign country.)
- University life and related facets of one's' personal life
- Teaching experiences – contextual challenges, institutional culture, community relations, relationships with local students and lecturers

PART TWO:

Stimulus Recall/ critical conversations using photovoice and collage produced by the students of critical incidents and moments of their lives as international students. The collage and photovoice will be used to produce a deeper and nuanced understanding of the international student's challenges, possibilities, views and experiences.



Life History Release Form

I, _____, have read the life history story recorded and written by Roseann Rajpal. I have also read, understand and agree to the following.

- I have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter and delete information from the life story as I see appropriate.
- I acknowledge that the life story accurately reflects the content of my personal interview with Roseann.
- I authorise the release of the life story to Roseann to be published.

Date

Participant

Date

Researcher

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1 August 2011

Ms R Rajpal (931306623)
School of Education & Development
Faculty of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Rajpal

PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0662/011M
PROJECT TITLE: Educational Journeys of international postgraduate students studying at UKZN (University of KwaZulu-Natal): A Narrative Inquiry

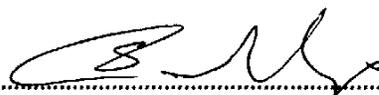
In response to your application dated 26 July 2011, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



Professor Steven Collings (Chair)
HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

cc. Supervisor: Dr D Pillay
cc. Ms T Mnisi, Faculty Research Office, Faculty of Education, Edgewood Campus