UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

A CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH TO THEORY U
AS A TRANSFORMATION MODEL IN ACADEMIC
DEVELOPMENT WITHIN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER
EDUCATION

By

Riedwaan Kimmie

811811344

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Leadership Centre
Faculty of Management Studies

Supervisor: Professor Kriben Pillay

2012

DECLARATION

I, Riedwaan Kimmie, declare that

(i) The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

(ii) This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

(iii) This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

(iv) This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:

    a) their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;

    b) where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks, and referenced.

(v) This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the References sections.

Signature

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

Rampant industrialization, rapidly shifting geo-political dynamics and an increasingly complex global social context, which is punctuated by bewildering, unpredictable and unprecedented transformation, is having a profoundly debilitating impact on human society. With no precedent to draw from, the overwhelming nature of these changes has resulted in many societal ills such as feelings of alienation, helplessness and societal fragmentation.

Although the evolution trajectory shows transformation to be an intrinsic part of the human experience, paradoxically, humans generally do not cope effectively with change, especially drastic and sudden change without a conscious and constructive intervention. Hence from the perspective of this thesis, what is of major concern about pervasive transformation is its impact at the micro level of the mainly Black learners at academic development programmes in South African higher education. This must be seen within the context of the debilitating effects of apartheid, and the macro transformation pressures that were brought to bear on South Africa and which manifested in the significant socio-political shift from apartheid to a democratic system of governance.

Research based on interviews and observations with Black students studying engineering at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Durban, revealed that there were many, mainly non-academic factors that impacted on academic success; that the starting point towards overcoming academic deficiency and challenges, was to adopt an alternative ontological and epistemological perspective. These findings are supported by similar research on academic support programmes at other South African universities such as the University of the Witwatersrand (Agar, 1992:95) where surveys conducted with students have confirmed that among the problems which most influence their academic progress, non-academic problems are rated the most influential. Hence, the more an educational initiative addresses both the educational and socio-economic needs of students, the greater the impact on academic success that initiative is likely to have.

It needs to be noted that a study of academic development in South African higher education cannot be pursued independent of the complex social system of which it is part. Besides having to contend with generic social transformation as a result of globalization as well as political changes at the local level, Black learners languishing from the effects of apartheid subjugation even after the onset of democracy, still bear the significant brunt of having to transition from socio-economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue academic study, often at formerly 'White' tertiary institutions.

Unfortunately, the lack of academic preparedness, insufficient cultural capital and a myriad of non-academic ontological factors, have resulted in high failure, slow academic progression and increasing attrition rates.

In spite of the extensive prevalence of academic development programmes at many institutions of higher learning, academic problems experienced by Black learners seem to be on the rise. This has raised critical questions about the implementation and epistemological approaches of academic development. This is more so since the dominant structural adjustment implementation model coupled with the mechanistic teaching methodologies applied in academic development programmes have largely proved ineffective in addressing learning problems which are systemic in nature.

Through critically engaging the conceptual and applied strengths of the Theory U transformation model, the research proposes this model as an alternative to the mechanistic and reductionist methods which have thus far permeated the academic development discourse. This alternative approach challenges the prevailing educational orthodoxy whereby learners are perceived to be 'passive' learning beings, and replaces it with a model which approaches learning from the premise that all 'knowing' is subjective and that through a constructive 'mindful' consciousness, learners can construct their own meaning of reality.

Since education is fundamental to redressing the inequalities of the past and developing the potential for the future, there is an urgent need for an alternative approach. However in a fluid and vibrant context such as presented in South Africa, one cannot search for absolute answers, but needs to be receptive to alternative ways of thinking and to harness these with research findings as a route map for further exploration and meaning-making.

Emerging research in such diverse fields as quantum physics, consciousness and various transformation discourses (which include Post-postmodernism and Nondualism) derived mainly from contemplative Eastern philosophical traditions (such as Buddhism), point to a new realization. This realization advocates that the alternative approach does not reside in the 'grand narratives' which were reified during the eras of Enlightenment and Modernity, but that the ability to change our realities resides within each individual. This awareness posits the individual centrally within his/her reality. In other words, through conscious awareness and transformed mental models, individuals can construct a new reality.

This research thesis seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the processes of learning and adaptive intelligence, particularly as applied in rapidly transforming, complex social systems. The approach involves the engaging of the human subject in a 'mindful' process of deconstructing inhibiting thought patterns and then constructively, constructing new meaning.

The parameters of the research have been set by the researcher in accordance with the established practitioner-researcher methodology. This method provides a voice to educators and classroom practitioners to interrogate their own experiences in order to improve their praxis.

Contents

Background to Study

The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn. (Alvin Toffler, 1970)[1]

That we live in a world of tumultuous, dynamic and irreversible change is an understatement! Rapid advances in technology, spurred on by the quickening pace of knowledge production and unprecedented economic and political developments, constitute some of the factors which are responsible for the unpredictable and far reaching impact on social formations. These major social processes do not occur in isolation, but are pre-empted by a series of vital, systemic steps. What is worrying, however, is that much of the developments are taking place without a mindful awareness of their effects on human and environmental ecology. Already, our world bears grotesque testimony to the mindless actions of humans – the Chernobyl nuclear disaster; Auschwitz mass extermination camp; apartheid. Further, the rapidity of the developments deem it possible that established knowledge systems may no longer be capable of providing solutions to the rising challenges facing humanity.

This thesis, which focuses on social transformation and its effects upon learners in academic development programmes at South African higher education institutions, is located within global trends, as well as the dramatic events that unfolded after 1994, with the end of apartheid and the broad impact of the ensuing political, economic and social change.

Although the focus of the study is local, one should contextualize the change process as part of a global phenomenon, facilitated and enhanced by information technology and various forms of media. This is a process that not only impacted South Africa because of its unique socio-political conditions, but is indeed also a result of an intrinsic human quality; social transformation. The 21st century will be recorded in history as an epoch which at an international scale has been characterized by rapid, expansive and radical socio-political and economic transformation. This all-encompassing process brought profound change to all aspects pertaining to human life – modes of production, social relations, cultural norms and personal identity. Never before in human civilization has so much upheaval occurred within such a condensed period of time and with such far reaching global repercussions, not only at the macro level where major political and economic forces are at play, but more especially, at the micro level as experienced by ordinary citizens.

---

[1] http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Learning%3A+the+illiterate+of+the+21st+century+will+not+be+those+who...-a0188499054

How society manages such overwhelming change, anticipates it, makes sense of it, or harnesses it for positive outcomes, continues to pose some of the most vexing questions faced by researchers, philosophers and social theorists. Despite the fact that there is as yet no clear directive on how to deal with the outcomes and crises brought on by this phenomenon, a way forward is to acknowledge one's lack of knowing so that one can become receptive to new ways of thinking and being.

The ability to understand and manage complexity and uncertainty in a fast changing world is an imperative. Recent developments, which include the global economic recession and an increase in regional as well as international conflicts, have defied rational logic and made it apparent that conventional and possibly simplistic reasoning is no longer effective. Hence, the current proliferating challenges facing society add significant credence to the insights from influential social theorist, Alvin Toffler[2], who in the early 1970s predicted the extensive impact of overwhelming change. Toffler warned of the dangers and inadequacies of established doctrinal thinking and commented that in order to deal with rapid change and its resultant complex outcomes in the future, it is important that humans be receptive to 'learn, unlearn and relearn'. Being able to 'learn, unlearn and relearn' however, is premised on essential personal qualities, which include: a critical consciousness, an awareness of context and a keen perception of one's relationship with the context. This can best be achieved through an adoption of a 'mindful' perspective, which Langer (1997:4) aptly describes as:

> *Openness to new information and implicit awareness of more than one perspective.*

It is through the lenses of having personally experienced the overwhelming changes that occurred in South Africa after the demise of apartheid and its impact on learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds studying at a formerly 'white' university, that the process of transformation and its effects is viewed in this thesis. These effects are diverse and many. Apart from the social, political and economic ones, transformation (during the transition from apartheid to a post-apartheid society) has also evoked a heightened expectation for social improvement and as a result has become a catalyst for a number of important developments. Key among these is the massification of higher education and in parallel with this, a major attempt to improve educational outcomes through the implementation of academic development initiatives at institutions of higher learning. However,

---

[2] Since Toffler's seminal work, *Future Shock* (1972), had such a profound impact on my view of transformation, this thesis makes frequent references to it. *Future Shock* was groundbreaking in its critique of Modern education and its ability to predict a rapidly changing world for which the prevailing education system, unless radically overhauled, would not be prepared.

educational improvement is systemic; we cannot attempt to improve educational systems without locating the learner centrally in the process.

In the light of these broad educational aims, this research thesis will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How do learners successfully transition from one social context to the next?

Sufficient feedback was gleaned through various research methodologies – focus-group discussions; unstructured interviews; autobiographical essays – to show that learners from township and rural backgrounds, who experienced under-resourced and poor schooling, encounter serious academic challenges in studying engineering at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). These can be categorized into:

- Psychological-emotional: Low-self esteem and poor self-confidence are often experienced by learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is not only due to poverty and other social causes, but also poor academic performance due to inadequate educational preparation (poorly qualified teachers; lack of adequate facilities; high student numbers). As a result, the quality of teaching and learning suffers. Hence learners experience difficulty in an environment where independent and critical learning is essential. Coming from a background where rote learning is the norm, students find it difficult to make the *meta* cognitive switch from being a passive to an active learner.

- Environment adaptation: The university higher education context offers a very different learning and living environment compared to that where most (particularly Black) students originate. Besides the need for independent decision-making, learners have to adapt to a multi-cultural environment, and cope with peer pressure, feelings of alienation and 'homesickness'. In addition, they need to develop the confidence to access and manage (learning) resources – tutors; library; lecturers – in order to cope with the learning challenges.

- Practical skills: Many of the students do not have essential practical skills such as time management, interactive group learning skills, communication skills, stress management skills, conflict resolution skills and study skills.

To transition successfully from one social context to the next therefore requires a proactive and conscious effort. It is important for the subject to 'own' the locus of control and for the learner to take control of his/her total learning environment.

2. Are transformation skills context and culture bound? If so, to what extent?

By virtue of the fact that one is born into a prevailing culture, through socialization, observation, internalization and sanction, the dominant cultural traits and norms become part of one's behaviour. Hence it can be assumed that transformation skills are definitely culture bound. They form the 'memes' or 'units of cultural transmission' that Dawkins and Blackmore (in Crook, 2008:238) identified. Blackmore (in Crook, 2008) argues that 'memes' are passed from generation to generation through preferential copying. Hence cultural traits are not static. They are also mediated. Humans have demonstrated great capacity to recreate their realities and hence can respond dynamically to new circumstances. This is effectively achieved through a targeted intervention – through critical reflection, skills acquisition and practice. Individuals can acquire and present the skills which are required in a new cultural context.

3. Could successful transformation have a positive impact on learning?

An important premise is that learning does not occur in isolation, but is inextricably linked to the broader range of human behaviour patterns that shape the ontological processes. Transformation as discussed in this research project does not refer to a reductionist, technicist or reified concept. Rather, it refers to a subjective ontological awareness which arises out of deep and critical reflection, whereby dysfunctional behavioural patterns can be challenged to allow for new and more appropriate behaviour to emerge.

From empirical as well as anecdotal evidence[3], it has been observed that transformation skills can impact positively on learning. Since the introduction of critical thinking, reflection and transformation skills, teaching at UKZN's Intensive Tuition for Engineers (UNITE) Programme, significantly higher

---

[3] This refers specifically to the UNITE Programme.

numbers of Black engineering students are progressing through their engineering degrees in the requisite period of time.

4. Can these skills be taught?

There are ample research studies (Drum, 1977; Wilbur, 1999; Scharmer, 2007) which provide theoretical and empirical evidence that these skills can be taught. As mentioned earlier, humans can construct their own realities and adapt where and when required, provided they have the insights and tools to do so. The next questions arise, who takes responsibility for the teaching and how are these skills taught?

In pursuit of UKZN's Mission, which states unequivocally that it intends to increase access to the 'formerly disadvantaged', one could argue that the institution is ethically bound to explore learning and teaching strategies to address learning deficits. However there is also the stipulation by professional bodies such as the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) in Draft Document PE-60 (1997:1), for graduates to enter the professional environment with specific skills. These are expressed in the following:

- *Identify and solve problems in which responses display that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made.*
- *Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organization or community.*
- *Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written persuasion.*
- *Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognizing that problem solving contexts do not exist in isolation.*

Further, skills are not necessarily taught in a didactic manner. Much learning occurs *via* observation and reflection. Hence the powers of observation and reflection need to be activated. The acquisition of skills might not be visibly displayed within a finite period. This might occur over a period of time and the outcome might not be as intended.

However before we can address these questions in a meaningful way, we need to contextualize them within broader socio-economic and political developments. In South Africa, political liberation coupled with economic liberalization, created the environment which spurred the rapid growth of

higher education. Education, which historically always played a key political role, has always been perceived to be central to social and economic advancement and has therefore occupied an elevated status in the national government's drive for social, economic and political reform. This is because globally recognized, highly rated, vocationally relevant, accessible and cost-effective education is a key indicator of a nation's developmental status. It is this central and often reified status of education that needs to be interrogated in order to understand its impact on social reality. It therefore makes sense to address the notion of transformation from the perspective of the role that education can play. In terms of the varied challenges facing society, this role should be more than preparing learners for the world of work, but should also be one that focuses on developing a critical consciousness geared towards the challenges facing society, in order to correct the severe imbalances currently affecting the world (Crook, 2009).

From a local standpoint, the current South African government deems education vital to not only reducing the effects of the apartheid legacy, but also to providing the strategies through which to advance the new social order. State funding[4] for education has increased and a vast number of new policies (Department of Education White Papers) have been promulgated. These include addressing inequality through the equitable distribution of educational resources, improving access to education for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, aligning the new education system with the developmental growth objectives as determined by government, and (in relation to this thesis) deliberations on how to improve the practice of academic development.

However, redressing post-apartheid educational objectives has proved more complex (and more challenging) than initially anticipated. The disparate obstacles encountered involved more than the logistical efforts of collapsing numerous, diverse and separate educational departments into one and thereafter developing a common curriculum and resourcing under-resourced schools. What has been distinctly problematic and remains an ongoing, enduring challenge, are attempts to effectively manage the social transformation process. People are pivotal to the transformation endeavor; either in driving the process, or bearing the brunt of its effects. Hence managing successful social transition in a complex learning environment remains a vital test for educational practitioners.

A literature review of contemporary challenges facing higher education in South Africa (Abdi, 2001; Christie, 1990; Cloete *et al*, 2002; De Villiers, 1996) shows it to be complex, manifold, systemic and intricately linked to its context. Of key significance in this thesis are the transformational challenges to learners who originate from socio-politically and economically-disadvantaged backgrounds and who

---

[4] Education consistently receives the largest slice of the South African national budget.

access higher education *via* academic development programmes. These mainly Black learners, as a result of the effects of apartheid political, social and economic policies, have suffered seriously debilitating cognitive and intellectual deprivation and hence often do not qualify for direct entry into institutions of higher learning. The provision of teaching and learning support through academic development initiatives therefore provides these learners with the best possible opportunities for academic success[5].

Despite numerous attempts to bring about improvement in education (primary, secondary and tertiary) through such interventions as Curriculum 2005, Outcomes Based Education and 'Bridging' programmes, these efforts have not yielded the anticipated and desired outcomes. Hence increasing pressure from government and education authorities, as well as those involved in teaching in academic development, as a result of high failure and attrition rates and rapidly escalating costs of higher education, is prompting research into the praxes and prevailing discourses pertaining to teaching and learning methodologies.

Due to the varied nature of potential causal factors, there is general consensus among educationalists and social theorists that the scope and reasons for pursuing the inquiry need to be broadened. This is based on the understanding that it is not adequate to focus purely on the educational variables and that a more holistic and systemic approach needs to be adopted. This approach should locate the learner at the centre of the inquiry and explore the important notion of transformation from the perspective of how the learner interrogates his or her ontological status within the broader social field of society.

What is important to note with regards to transformation is that despite its impersonal, unpredictable and pervasive qualities, its causality is conceived, constructed and driven by human actors. This means that all transformation is as a consequence of someone's actions, which through collective synergy gains momentum. One can thus also infer that all actions emanate from how someone perceives and through their levels of conscious intentionality, constructs reality.

Based on emerging research in the integral discourses which include consciousness and transpersonal psychology (Wilbur, 1997; Scharmer, 2007; Crook, 2009), it has become more apparent that the perception of reality and its outward manifestation is intricately intertwined with one's self-awareness and one's relationship with one's social context. This view is in opposition to the widely held and

---

[5] This thesis will argue for 'success' to be defined not in terms of academic achievement only, but to embrace a broader definition which includes *meta*cognition skills. These are general awareness skills whereby a learner is fully cognizant of all the variables which impact on learning.

influential belief of the Enlightenment era[6], in which the dominant intellectual thought was one of 'duality'. The dualist paradigm propagated the separation of Self from context and the belief in an objective reality. It also advocated the notion of Man's elevated status over the rest of creation through placing a greater emphasis on scientific reasoning and empirical rationality. Furthermore, through its emphasis on the Self and personal growth, it reframed notions of identify and work relations which brought about profound changes in social life, with often catastrophic consequences. These include: disruption of traditional lifestyles, heightened stress and increased feelings of alienation as a result of humanity's feelings of powerlessness arising from the inability to predict and adequately manage change processes (Connor, 1992).

Similar social problems are encountered at the micro level of learners in academic development who are 'victims' of circumstance, such as the legacy of apartheid. How to address these problems within the learning environment has been the source of much discussion, specifically around ontological and epistemological issues. Hence this research is concerned with more than preparing learners to cope with transformation. It is about a journey of healing; of facilitating a deeper and critical ontological awareness whereby the learner through the process of self-observation and mindful reflection, is able to interrogate and deconstruct some of the inhibiting mental models imposed through tragic life experiences and socialization, and then actively construct an emerging reality within the social context in which the learner is located.

---

[6] Also referred to as the *Age of Reason*, this era which emerged in the 18th century, gave prominence to scientific knowledge, empiricist and materialist doctrines (*A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 1979).

Conceptual Framework for the Study

At the base of mindfulness research, is that individuals may always define their relation to their environment in several ways, essentially creating the reality that is out there. What is out there is shaped by how we view it. (Langer, 1998:100)

All research quests arise out of a context – a view, praxis or interest – which guides the researcher along the journey towards resolution, or meaning-making. Hence 'knowledge' is not something 'out there'; it is not independent of the researcher, but is educational content which is socially constructed (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985), driven by the researcher's personal interests and within the parameters which the researcher has decided upon.

The current research thesis is a personal venture into the highly contested, yet vibrant field of academic development within the South African higher education sector. Although academic development has been the subject of many deliberations as well as academic pursuits, particularly since the transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994, it is still an elusive concept with no standardized application model, nor a consensual understanding of its praxis. This is primarily as a result of the lack of clear, policy-driven directives of what academic development should be and how it should be applied. What is unambiguous about academic practice in South Africa, however, is that it is driven by a political transformation agenda, by individuals who believe in its outcomes and that it is shaped within socio-historical and political contexts. Hence, although transformation is acknowledged at the macro level; specifically the change from apartheid to a post-apartheid political dispensation, it is the micro level of learners at tertiary institutions grappling with the effects of drastic change that is of concern.

For many years since the demise of apartheid, South African higher education institutions have been plagued by an increasing array of academic and non-academic problems, experienced by learners from disadvantaged socio-economic and educational backgrounds. These problems include:

- Slow academic progression.
- High failure rates.
- Increasing exclusion rates.
- Social alienation.

- Difficult transition from secondary schools into institutions of higher learning, particularly by learners from disadvantaged backgrounds who enter academic development programmes.

This was commonly believed to be the consequence of sub-standard schooling. However more critical inquiry has prompted deeper exploration. It is only from *meta* critical and cognitive perspectives which involve interrogating practice, self-observation (being mindfully aware of one's actions in relation to one's environment), and which draw conceptually on the practitioner-research approach; driven by personal inquiry and reflection on personal experiences, that the possibility of alternate causality is considered. This has opened the research to new possibilities.

There is general consensus among educationalists that academic development praxis attracted more attention and resources after 1994. However, one could argue that the process started much sooner and that it was part of concerted efforts by committed educational practitioners, particularly those who subscribed to some of the principles embodied in the self-study movement (Loughran, in Pillay, 2011), to address their own practice, as well as the learning challenges experienced by the increasing numbers of Black learners entering formerly White institutions of higher learning.

The absence of a standardized model of academic development, as well as the multiplicity of causal factors – social; epistemological; ontological – have determined that academic development be shaped by diverse contextual factors at the various institutions at which it is applied. Hence there is no singular model, but rather a plurality of models which articulate the vision for academic development at the different institutions. From this perspective, the research framework deemed most appropriate, was the practitioner-researcher methodology.

Practitioner-research, which allows for a practitioner to engage in a systematic enquiry of a personal interest and which is of particular relevance to the task at hand, allows for the practitioner to implement the most appropriate action informed by theory and reflection (Hardman & Averweg, 2011:374). The *meta* theory of practitioner-research was complemented by additional critical research methodologies such as action research, constructivism and Post-postmodernism (McNiff, 1988; Robson, 2002; Kolb, 2006; Scharmer, 2007; Fox *et al*, 2010), to strengthen the approach not only conceptually, but also methodologically. These methodologies place emphasis on critical reflection in which practitioners interrogate their epistemological approaches with the aim of developing better understanding and improving practice.

As concerns the academic performance of learners in local academic development initiatives, critical interrogation using the above framework has revealed that poor schooling is only partially responsible for academic underperformance. An example is the case of the many learners from disadvantaged backgrounds studying at UKZN, who generally come from poorly resourced socio-economic educational backgrounds. These learners generally progress well academically, as compared to the vast majority who do not. Thus it is essential to adopt a critical approach to what underpins effective academic development practice, what has informed its character and whether it is applied appropriately in its current form to meet the needs of learners who have suffered seriously debilitating life experiences.

Although it is essential to note the socio-economic backgrounds of learners, it is important to guard against simplistic assumptions for their academic non-performance based solely on structural economic and educational factors, and which are assumed to be responsible for learning outcomes. There is a need for a different starting point. What is necessary to interrogate is something much deeper and less easy to empirically investigate, but which nonetheless plays a critical role in learners' lives. These are the pervasive ontological[7] and epistemological[8] factors; the inhibiting psychological and mental constructs derived from our social systems, which have become deeply embedded in mind and in practice. It is a key argument of this thesis that these have resulted in many of the learners experiencing social and academic adjustment problems, such as low self-esteem, social alienation, poor learning habits and lack of appropriate coping skills. Further, one can also argue that these are some of the causal factors which ultimately impact on academic performance.

The higher education sector's current response to learning challenges arising out of an increasingly complex social context through introducing academic development initiatives has from an epistemological perspective been inadequate, and has therefore not yielded the desired outcomes. Despite there being marginal academic success during the academic development intervention, the success was not sustained in mainstream study. One can argue that the learning challenges experienced by learners were not interrogated as deeply and 'authentically' (what Scharmer, 2008, refers to as 'open heart', 'open mind' and 'open soul') to determine the primary causes impacting learning.

---

[7] Ontology refers to the branch of metaphysics concerned with the study of existence (Flew, 1979:255). In the context of this thesis, it refers to an understanding of 'self'.

[8] Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge; the nature and derivation of knowledge, the scope of knowledge, and the reliability of claims to knowledge (Flew, 1979:109)

A critical appraisal of the policy documents shaping education published after the demise of apartheid in 1994 shows that most of the educational objectives were of a political nature, primarily to address the structural inequalities of the past. On the whole, these objectives promoted academic development initiatives that facilitated access to tertiary study, with academic support for an increased number of learners who would generally not have met the entrance criteria. Regretfully however, although the graduation rates have improved, these have been marginal *vis-a-vis* the costs of implementing academic support programmes and the number of former academic development learners dropping out of mainstream study programmes. This spawned the hypothesis that an alternative approach, which focuses on transforming the learner's mental construct through a reflective process as advocated by the Theory U transformation model, might be the solution. In pursuit of this goal, which is in opposition to the conventional mental models which shape reality, it is important to heed the following words:

> *A problem cannot be solved by the same mind that created it.*
> Albert Einstein (in Carse, 2006:9)

With education receiving strong government endorsement[9] to drive the post-apartheid transformation agenda, higher education in particular, has a vital role to fulfill. However, the development path for education is not a linear, predictable one especially within a complex, dynamically evolving social system with numerous interdependent variables. Therefore for education to make a meaningful contribution to confronting social challenges, educational research has to be viewed, planned and implemented taking into account the total range of contextual factors prevailing in the environment within which it finds itself. Simultaneously, this should also incorporate the complex ontological factors shaping the responses of the researched subjects as well as the researcher.

A review of available literature (Abdi, 2001; Cloete *et al,* 2002; De Villiers, 1996; Du Toit & Roodt, 1992; Jansen, 2000) indicates that the social problems impacting education are of a systemic nature, which cannot be addressed in isolation. These need to be viewed and addressed from the ontological perspective of the human subject who shares a symbiotically intertwined relationship with the social context within which he/she is located. This relatively recent notion of coalescence between Man and environment arises out of an emerging awareness (located mainly in the Post-postmodern and Nondual/integral philosophical discourse) which advocates that there is no external, absolute and objective reality, but that the perception of reality is determined by the level of consciousness of the human actor who lives within that reality.

---

[9] Notions of transformation through education were mainly encapsulated in the Department of Education's White Paper documents of 1997 and 1998.

The research topic *"A Constructivist Approach to Theory U as a Transformation Model in Academic Development within South African Higher Education"* aims to critically interrogate the mental models, social narratives and ontological factors which impact on academic development from the 'vantage point' of the human subjects who are affected by it, as well as propose Theory U as a viable alternative transformation model to facilitate more effective meaning-making. The research locates the study in the changing socio-political landscape after the onset of democratic governance in South Africa in 1994 and foregrounds the constructivist approach of Theory U as a transformation model to enhance academic development praxis in higher education. Through a process of deconstructing established ontological patterns, the research intends to bring into sharper focus and challenge the variables which currently handicap learning in academic development.

Theory U as a *meta* transformation model is an encompassing matrix approach which from a self-critical and reflective paradigm, guides the practitioner towards his/her innermost and authentic Self through a process of 'letting go' (suspending habitual patterns), 'Presencing' (reflection and awareness) and then 'letting come' (allowing the intuitive wisdom to emerge). This process also acknowledges the role of context, or 'social field', within which the individual is located. Drawing on the contemplative practices found in Eastern philosophies (such as Buddhism), the Nondualist philosophical paradigm, transformative learning and experiential learning, Theory U examines the intricate and symbiotic relationships between the interior state of the learner with the exterior environment and through a constructivist paradigm, advocates the active role of the individual in meaning-making.

The main focus of this thesis, drawing on the conceptual theory mentioned earlier, is to develop a deeper understanding of human behaviour when exposed to overwhelming transformation. The starting point for the research is the macro and global nature of transformation, how it cascades to a local level such as the South African educational landscape after 1994, and how its influences might be reflected through government policy to ultimately impact at the micro level of the learner through the practice of academic development. The thesis is therefore able to interrogate the research context based on the personal experiences of the human subjects in the study. The systemic relationship of practice with context cannot be denied and hence one cannot investigate the one without the other.

The emergent view that individuals are intricately connected with their reality through their levels of consciousness and that they can play a dynamic role in shaping that environment has uniquely empowered individuals to challenge and change their realities. This, however, is premised on heightened awareness, critical consciousness and a desire to change, whereby through critical self-reflection, practitioners can challenge and organize their own practice (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

If each individual is capable of shaping his/her own reality, this means that there is no uniform, standardized, objective reality. To understand this realization, we need to interrogate 'interiority', which is the interior space of each individual in which decisions are made (Hart, 2008).

To gain a deeper understanding of how our reality can unfold, it is necessary to become mindfully aware of the symbiotic relationship between thought, action and outcome. Hence we need to embark on a radical reshaping of our thinking; of how we conceive of and respond to reality. The only way to achieve this is to suspend habitual, mindless ways of responding, and to exercise our conscious will to cultivate an alternative approach; a new way of thinking and being which should be premised on a deeper awareness of these transformational processes. This can be achieved by stepping outside the framework of socializing influences such as ideology, observing the limitations objectively and then recreating a 'self-transforming mind' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986:27).

The urgent need to revise the mental models which have thus far governed social life is underscored by amongst others, recent global events such as the 'Great Recession' in 2008/9, ecological threats such as climate change which indirectly results from unbridled consumerism, social fragmentation, the rise of Islamic 'fundamentalism' and the AIDS pandemic. Many of these challenges are not only unique in terms of the pace and complexity in which they emerge and affect our lives, but are also a direct result of human action. To compound the challenges presented by the complexity of these developments, there are no prescribed or 'textbook' solutions from which to draw; the stakeholders are not clearly defined and the timelines are indeterminate.

A similar uncertainty faces numerous Black learners at institutions of higher learning who are caught up in the momentum of sudden and bewildering change with little or no preparation, no awareness and with limited expertise and resources to manage this change. There is increasing pressure on educational institutions to respond to this rapidly evolving reality. Current education praxis is often not able to respond effectively, due to the dominant positivist[10] epistemological theories which underpin it. Not only have the responses been too 'structural', but these have also been subjected to the influences of powerful financial and political forces. As educators involved in academic development, what is needed is an awareness of these changing realities and a proactive willingness to bring about radical paradigm shifts where required.

---

[10] This is a way of making sense of social phenomena through observation (empirical) and instrumental reasoning. This approach does not take into account indeterminate truth and the complexity of reality.

Since the transition from apartheid to a post-apartheid dispensation, there have been many attempts at academic remediation, albeit with limited success. Much of these efforts focused mainly on 'structural adjustment' which usually entailed hosting smaller classes, more intensive academic tuition in the academically 'challenging' courses, and English language upgrade, as well as mentoring, to enable learners to adapt and hence acquire the requisite academic fundamentals. Experience has shown that these attempts have had a marginal impact on academic success, and that the successes were not sustained in the long-term when these support mechanisms were removed. The ongoing challenge is how to bring about a fundamentally, empowering and sustainable transformation in the learner, which can shift the *locus of control* to the learner, whereby he/she realizes the potential to shape his/her own reality.

The many years of pursuing academic success, albeit limited, through various academic support, 'bridging education', foundational or extended curriculum initiatives[11], have spurred a renewed need for research in alternative teaching and learning models. In an environment in which there are limited resources and where multiple social variables are growing in complexity, critical and valid questions are being raised pertaining to institutional academic support. A literature review (Connor, 1992; Covey, 1990; Crook, 2009; Dziuban, 2006; Goode, 2007; Hart, 2008; Scharmer, 2007) has yielded compelling reasons which argue that humans do not have to be victims of circumstance, and that they can through the constructive and proactive evolution of their consciousness, shape their personal narratives, which in turn will shape their realities. The burgeoning research in constructivist theory and in social transformation models such as Theory U is providing a cogent platform from which to pursue the role of human intervention in social transformation processes. This has the potential to significantly benefit the practice of academic development.

Research by 'mindfulness' practitioners (Crook, 2009; Langer, 1998; Loy, 2003), has shown that the development of the consciousness of a practitioner will have a real impact on his/her reality. Once this perspective is internalized, this approach can facilitate a more fundamental transformative process of empowerment within the individual which will not only contribute towards more successful academic achievement, but also to more fulfilling lives.

---

[11] A broad *umbrella* definition which encapsulates academic support, bridging education and foundational learning is the provision of modules, courses or other curricula elements that are intended to equip underprepared students with academic foundations that will enable them to successfully complete a recognized higher education qualification. Foundational provision focuses particularly on basic concepts, content and learning approaches that foster advanced learning (Department of Education in Scott *et al,* 2007:43)

The research also provides a 'student voice' in the form of feedback from learners on variables impacting learning at UKZN's UNITE academic development programme. This feedback underscores the pervasive impact of context, as well as the power of reflexive learning in shaping responses towards contextual variables. Hence this primary data provides valuable insights into the socio-economic and academic challenges faced by learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the benefits that can be accrued from mindful learning. It is through acknowledging this feedback that this research, through a constructivist paradigm, will articulate the benefits of the Theory U transformation model in academic development within South African higher education.

To guide the reading of this thesis, discipline specific terminology where it appears in the thesis has been described in footnotes. For further conceptual clarity of the thesis, Chapters 1 – 5 will provide a contextual, historical and theoretical framework which outlines the research objectives and research methodology. Chapters 6 – 9 will interrogate the thesis for the Theory U transformation model in academic development within South African higher education.

Pursuant with the above guidelines, the layout adheres to the following outline:

Chapter 1: Introduction - Provides a broad contextual and systemic overview of macro and micro factors impacting the research. It commences with an exploration of one of the most pervasive characteristics of the 21st century, that is, the global reach of social transformation, its significance and its compounding impact on developments in South Africa, especially in education after the demise of apartheid. This chapter also introduces the reader to the autobiographical factors which shape the researcher's world view, the personal and professional reasons motivating the research, as well as the contribution it is hoped that this research will make to the field of academic development in South African higher education.

Chapter 2: Contextual, historical and critical review of education in South Africa post-1994- This section highlights the efforts by the African National Congress (ANC)-led government to address post-apartheid socio-economic challenges. This chapter unpacks the plethora of progressive educational policies which attempt to redress the inequities of the past through initiatives such as academic development. This will be done within the unfolding socio-political context.

Chapter 3: Epistemological Theories underpinning the Research - Presents an overview of the various epistemological theories which inform this research, ranging from constructivism, to transformative learning, to Nondualism.

Chapter 4: Research Process - Focuses on the broad research methodology. The research methodology applied in this thesis is the practitioner-researcher methodology. This chapter also explores the science *versus* social science dichotomy as applied to investigating the behaviour of human subjects.

Chapter 5: Factors impacting on Learning for Disadvantaged learners on the UNITE alternate access/ academic development programme - Unpacks the multifarious factors impacting on the learning experiences of learners from disadvantaged socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

Chapter 6: *Meta* Narratives of Social Transformation - Modernity, Postmodernity and Post-postmodernity - Provides a historical trajectory of the development of social transformation narratives, how these have shaped belief systems and ultimately, their impact on the education discourse.

Chapter 7: Consciousness and the Construction of Reality - Introduces the reader to the notion of Consciousness, its intricate relationship with reality and its role in the construction of that reality.

Chapter 8: Theory U Model of Social Transformation - Introduces the Theory U model of social transformation and attempts to consolidate the research through the synthesis of Theory U with academic development in higher education.

Chapter 9: Conclusion **-** Summarizes the thesis and points the way forward.

Chapter 1: Introduction

> *This country (South Africa) is belligerent, restless, unruly, beautiful,*
> *surprising, hopeful, difficult, challenging and different. It is a frontier*
> *society. The shape and nature of its frontiers, like any interesting*
> *country, constantly change. But the pace of change in South Africa is*
> *particularly dramatic.   Change permeates every aspect of our*
> *personal lives, our working lives and our idea of citizenship.*
> (Professor Nick Binedell, Director of the University of Pretoria's
> Gordon Institute of Business Science, *Sunday Tribune, Business*
> *Report,* May 2, 2010)

The global impact of rapid, far-reaching and unpredictable economic, political, social and environmental turmoil during the past few years, has forced many of us to rethink our perspectives on the world, how we live in it, as well as our roles and responsibilities towards one another and the environment. Since the catastrophic events of September 11 in New York, 2001, the pervasive proliferation of technology, the recent global economic meltdown and perceptible climate change, the world as we knew it has changed irrevocably.

At a local (South African) level it is no different. The extensive reach of globalization, aided by internet technological advancements, has resulted in the world becoming one interconnected system where the effects from international events are having profound impact on local contexts. In this light, Binedell's comment succinctly summarizes a view which captures the complexity of latter day South Africa's *bodypolitik*, from the encompassing influences of colonialism, to the draconian yoke of the apartheid system, the tumultuous onset of democracy, conflict between different contesting political forces, various socio-political upheavals and the sheer pervasive transformational power of globalization. Albeit that this is the perspective of one person, this view nevertheless highlights the dynamism and unpredictability of the socio-political and economic transformation trajectory[12].

When one cascades the tumultuous changes down to the level of learners within a learning environment, the effect is dramatic. Young learners, through lack of life experience, reacting on the basis of habitual and inappropriate mental models, as well as a lack of skills, are unable to process

---

[12]   A clear example here is how significantly different the current economic scenario is from the principles espoused in the guiding Freedom Charter of the ruling African National Congress. Whereas the Freedom Charter espoused a broad socialist agenda, the current economic policies are largely driven by capitalist market forces.

change effectively. This is borne out in the literature (Drum, 1977; Nelson-Jones, 1991; Pickworth, 1990) and from the academic performance results of tertiary institutions such as UKZN. For the mainly Black learners who continue to manifest the debilitating social and educational effects of the apartheid legacy, the transition from often dysfunctional domestic socio-economic and educational backgrounds, undermines their efforts when they attempt higher education without the wherewithal to cope in that environment.

The commentary from Binedell provides support for this research at two levels: it highlights the impact of change at the micro level of the learner who has been caught up in the *maelstrom* of social change and who has to cope with transformation; at the level of the researcher, it brings to mind the multiple and often discrete variables which might bear on the research.

Based on the notion of 'environmental determinism' – the impact of environmental factors on human actions (Diamond, 1998:26), one can deduce that such a fluid and dynamic context will have a profound effect on educational research due to the multifaceted, intricate and ever-changing social context within which education is located. To this already complex situation, one also needs to add the additional variable of the researcher's own ontological perspectives. This raises an important question: How does one conduct research in such a complex social context, being subjected to one's own world view, exploring a topic which is assailed by such diverse known and unknown variables? Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:29) provide a response in the following:

> *A research design is a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research.*

As a researcher, one is in a distinctive position of needing to choose and use a research methodology that best serves the research objectives. Bearing in mind the complex nature of social systems, there were no illusions about the daunting task at hand. Available literature, past research and the unpredictability of social events cannot provide an accurate forecast of educational outcomes. Therefore, trying to synthesize the many and diverse factors which impact on education can potentially be a 'messy' exercise! One should be aware that managing and responding to the challenges of social transformation in such an intricate, evolving scenario requires a unique response, one that can deal with current demands, yet simultaneously also manage the risks that may unfold.

2

Engaging in a research quest with its primary aim to improve the efficacy of academic development in South African higher education using emerging research paradigms, *is* to some degree an attempt at managing risk. This is as a result of venturing into the 'unknown' in terms of what the results might yield. In order to manage the risk, it is imperative to thoroughly understand the context (in the case of this research project this includes environmental and political factors) and then to be guided by concrete research questions and a research design (Durrheim, 1999:29). Hence this thesis is about how a 'mindful'[13] approach can enhance one's understanding of Self and manage the effects of far-reaching transformation, in order to improve academic development. It is about the need for a deep, critical awareness of the nature of transformation at an intrapersonal level, and how to engage a constructivist[14] paradigm which when harnessed with the adaptive intelligence of humans, can construct a conscious and empowering response to shape the transformation outcomes.

At the outset, we need to acknowledge the growing sense of urgency to respond to macro, rapid and far reaching transformation. This arises out of an increasing sense of despair in Postmodern and Post-postmodern literature that the scientific, economic and political orthodoxies prevailing in the world are largely responsible for the current global crises which include amongst others, increasing conflict, rapid environmental destruction and rising economic inequality. These are issues which, apart from causing great emotional distress, are also threatening the existence of life as we know it.

Much of the emotional distress and ecological threats are as a result of the unchecked rise in technological innovations and their applications. The industrial and post-industrial eras created watershed periods in humanity's quest for technological advancement, which resulted in more scientific discovery than in previous history (Dixon, 1989; Lyon, 1994). Unfortunately, with all the technological and intellectual capital at its disposal, humanity still faces many of the intractable problems mentioned above. With the social, political and economic challenges multiplying, gaining in complexity and with no improvement in sight, Humankind could be facing a future of great uncertainty!

The emphasis in our era on technological and scientific developments applied within a capitalist ideological framework has elevated Man's dominance over the natural environment and has spawned a consumerist culture which is devoid of humanist values – caring for one another and for the

---

[13] There are many definitions of 'mindfulness'. Although commonly referred to in Buddhist contemplative practices, an apt definition is that it is about awareness; *"awareness to the flow of energy and information that enters our conscious attention so that we can both appreciate its contents and also come to regulate its flow in a new way"* (Siegel, 2007:5).

[14] Constructivism is a learning approach that promotes learning and investigation within authentic contexts. It fosters the development of student responsibility, initiative, decision-making and intentional learning. It uses generative learning activities that facilitate critical thinking processes to assist students to develop comprehensive and complex knowledge (Kilfoil, 2008)

environment. This has manifested in massive industrial growth, with no concern for its impact on the environment – deforestation; plundering of ocean resources – or its effects on human populations (Tucker, 2010:19).

A similar 'positivist' mindset (where Man dominates the environment) is evident in higher education, specifically academic development. The common experience is the emphasis on a 'deficit' model of teaching and learning, whereby the deficient academic content of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds is acknowledged. These learners are then admitted to academic development programmes and then subjected to teaching methods which attempt to respond to their content deficiencies by 'topping it up' with intensive tuition, without addressing more complex ontological issues.

Following on from the earlier stated logic for the intricate relationship between consciousness and reality, the prevailing disjuncture between consciousness and reality is cause for huge concern and one can argue that it has placed humankind in a perilous state. Much of this can be attributed to the dualistic thinking which emerged during the era of Modernity that reified scientific knowledge over and above the intricate complexities of social context. Therefore an alternative orthodoxy, one that recognizes humanity's intricately intertwined and symbiotic relationship with one another and with broader reality is an absolute imperative. The following excerpt eloquently captures this view:

> *Our Modernist mindset is at the root of many of the world's current problems, yet we are all so hooked into it that we struggle to make the necessary shift. Although Modernists have been confident that they can explain and predict just about anything about the universe with the application of science and logic, they have been horribly wrong. Where modernists have gone wrong is that they have failed to appreciate complexity – that we live in an intricately interconnected and interdependent world. We now know that our mindset is fundamental to saving ourselves from unsustainability.* (Monica Graaf, *Sunday Times Review*, June 7, 2009)

The notion that our lives are impacted by our actions, our actions driven by our thoughts and our thoughts influenced by our level of consciousness, is an emerging discourse which is in opposition to the orthodoxy of Modernism. Not only has the Modernist mindset, characterized by the scientific rationality of domination and control, failed to appreciate complexity; it has also resulted in a polarized

relationship between Man and Man, and of Man with the rest of creation. This failure to realize the impact that human action has on broader reality, has contributed much of industrial society's dominant emphasis on productivity and financial gain, resulting in the erosion of communal values, with individuals becoming more fragmented and alienated from one another.

The perception that the world is experiencing so many crises as a result of mindless actions is testimony to the pervasiveness of the Modernist orthodoxy, and attempts at cultivating an alternative mindset to the predominant Modernist type will not be easy. This is because conventional modes of thinking and being are not only deeply embedded in our collective social and cultural psyches, but are also reinforced by dominant social institutions. In pursuit of an alternative, the challenges that we are currently facing defy clear definition; guidelines are non-existent and the outcomes are unpredictable. Yet one cannot overemphasize the glaring awareness that there is an urgent need to transform our social, economic and political models so that we can effect social justice, pursue economic equality and promote a lifestyle that will enable us to realize our fuller potential, as well as address the additional ills facing society. A possible way out of this dilemma is to garner the courage and venture boldly into uncertainty. Management theorist, Peter Drucker[15] captures this view in the following:

> *The best way to predict the future is to create it.*

Being able to 'shape the future as it emerges' is a central theme of the Theory U transformational model. This constructivist approach entails becoming more proactive, exercising our conscious will and through critical and deep inner reflection, enables us to cultivate an alternative approach; a new way of thinking and being.

Emerging research in neuroscience, transpersonal psychology, Post-postmodernism and constructivist transformation models such as Theory U, have provided a route map for such an alternative approach; an approach which at its heart, emphasizes the logic and power of mindful action. It is this power of mindful action enacted through the heightened awareness of individuals that this thesis attempts to foreground; whereby human subjects through an appropriate reflective process, can direct their destinies. 'Logotherapy' (the therapy of creating 'meaning' and 'seeing' beyond misery, developed by Dr Victor Frankl[16]), which was applied effectively to concentration camp internees during World War

---

[15] http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/p/peter_f_drucker.html

[16] Dr Frankl was a prominent psychiatrist who developed 'Logotherapy' or his 'therapy of meaning' whilst incarcerated in a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. He was able to apply this therapy to his fellow inmates.

II, bears testimony to the power of human consciousness. This is emphasized in Nondual and quantum physics perspectives, where there is no separation between an individual and his/her social context. Therefore we can deduce that each individual has the ability to provide the *locus* for meaning, change and action. This however is predicated on the ability to introspect, consciously reflect and challenge existing paradigms with the intention of effecting meaningful change.

The challenge that this perspective presents is how to integrate this approach into current educational praxis; how to convert instrumental reasoning and scientific rationalism, particularly as applied to academic development. Improving the effectiveness of academic development, particularly in the South African context, remains the enduring reason why the current educational discourse and praxis requires critical interrogation, because there is wide agreement that education is the lifeblood of a nation's development and contributes vastly to its sustainability.

The stark potential reality of a failing education project sounds a clarion call for an urgent intervention. Professor Salim Badat (*Sunday Times, Business Times,* April 26, 2009), Vice-Chancellor at Rhodes University, cautions that:

> *The orthodoxies of the past two decades have been especially harmful*
> *to how we think about the value, purposes and goals of universities,*
> *and about education and knowledge. They have also sought to reduce*
> *universities simply to training schools and instruments of the economy*
> *and businesses.*

> *The new logic must revalue knowledge and education as cornerstones*
> *of human development and restore to universities their important and*
> *varied social purposes.*

> *Above all, the new logic requires champions in their millions so there*
> *can be an effective prising open of minds and hearts that have been*
> *closed to all needs other than their own.*

The role of education is far too important to be subjected to the orthodoxies criticized above by Badat and Graaf. The commodification of knowledge, driven by market forces in the 21st century, has resulted in teaching and learning becoming transactional activities serving the marketplace, rather than an

activity geared towards human development. Hence the search for a meaningful way forward has created space for an alternative orthodoxy to be explored; a space which does not have to promise absolute answers, which recognizes the futility and limits of our current knowledge and which provokes a search for alternatives. It should be the core responsibility of civil society to ensure that the foundation of a socially relevant education is laid, upon which a sustainable society can be constructed.

Unfortunately, the current crises facing the planet clearly point to the fact that education praxis does not embrace the values articulated in the extracts above. This is because the dominant educational objectives, particularly of higher education, are too narrowly associated with the needs of economic and industrial development, rather than with how we can cultivate a citizenry that is responsive to one another's affective needs and also to the needs of the environment.

As a 'site' of struggle for political emancipation and social justice during the apartheid era, education played a profoundly strategic and influential role in shaping the social and political agendas of the day. Who can forget the uprising of learners against apartheid education which manifested in the Soweto schools uprisings in the 1970s/'80s and the 'Education for liberation' battle cry? What about the 'Restoring the Culture of Learning' and 'Moral Regeneration' Campaigns in the 1990s? Through the alternative curricula promoted by organizations such as the South African Council of Higher Education (SACHED) and various interests groups, there is no doubt that education has always been a vital socio-political and economic regenerative tool and hence cannot be ignored in any development programme.

The history of political and social transformation advocacy of higher education in South Africa combined with the current needs for social, economic and political advancement, has presented an exciting opportunity for an alternative orthodoxy and for the new government to reconceptualize higher education. In this regard, higher education should focus more on the development of the learner; educating and socializing them not only for professional life, but also inculcating a critical awareness so that they become responsive members of society. Consequently, government should provide the policy frameworks and requisite resources, so that institutions can function optimally and pursue their student related ambitions (Cloete *et al*, 2002).

Our challenge as educational practitioners and as a nation emerging out of the repressive apartheid legacy, is not only to acknowledge the social, economic and political developmental imperatives as a young emerging democracy, but how to pursue the redress of these within the social context of broader social objectives (Crook, 2009; Harrison, 2002). There are a number of references in the Department of

Education policy documents which point to education playing a transformative role in post-apartheid South Africa. This we can see in the following:

> *Education and training are central activities of our society. They are of vital interest to every family and to the health and prosperity of our national economy. The government's policy for education and training is therefore a matter of national importance second to none.* (Erstwhile Education Minister, Honourable Minister Bengu, in Education White Paper, 1995)

The important role of education in South Africa's emerging democratic dispensation is emphasized as a result of its potential to address the critical developmental needs the country faces. The dire shortage of skilled personnel and the overwhelming demands for a better quality of life from previously disadvantaged Black communities have deemed education, especially higher education, vital to addressing the inequalities of the past and contributing towards the nation's human resources development. Education is therefore at the forefront of the post-apartheid social restructuring programme. The 2001 National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) states that:

> *Higher education has a critical and central role to play in contributing to the development of society in South Africa both in terms of skills development and research.* (DOE 2001b: 6 in Subotsky, 2003:353)

Not only does education receive the largest slice of the national budget, but it is also regarded as central to access and equity issues and for providing the skills needed to drive macro-economic policies such as GEAR (Growth Employment and Redistribution) and the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA)[17].

This view is supported by the following policy statement:

---

[17] The GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) Strategy and ASGISA (Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa) are macro-economic strategies aim at rebuilding and restructuring the economy as set out initially in the Reconstruction and Development Programme.

The higher education system must be transformed to redress past inequalities, to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs and to respond to new realities and opportunities.
(Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, 1997)

Faced with many complex and disparate challenges and such high expectations to deliver, the key question arises: Can higher education in its current form fulfill the development mandate of post-apartheid South Africa? With such a pivotal role to play, it is therefore imperative that we critically review education's dominant epistemological underpinnings.

From recent reports (Subotsky, 2003), it is clear that South Africa's current education system has lofty ideals, but faces many challenges in its pursuit to achieve its development mandate. This is reflected in the dismal matriculation results and the high failure and drop-out rates in tertiary institutions. Simplistic and reductionist responses to high failure and drop-out rates will not do justice to the complex epistemological issues impacting education. It is instructive to note unfortunately, that despite the clear objectives articulated within the policy documents, there are no clear guidelines as to how these are to be achieved. Hence the answer must evolve out of a critical reflection on education's theoretical praxis and its methodology including a thorough analysis of the contextual factors which impact on education.

The robust debate and flurry of documents confirms the view that the new government is committed to tackling the challenge to transform education practice, yet attempts at managing the change process successfully have been confronted with numerous setbacks. The complexity of the socio-political transformation process, together with the severe lack of available resources – financial, human, skills – as a result of the apartheid legacy, have retarded the progress significantly. Thus the education system is still plagued by the following problems:

- Marked race and gender inequalities;
- Low participation, graduation and success rates;
- Uneven quality of teaching and learning;
- Insufficient alignment between programmes and changing labour market needs;
- A range of persistent institutional inequalities and disadvantages;

- Low levels of overall research output;
- Insufficient management and administrative capacity in institutions and in government.

It is necessary to interrogate why education is failing in its mandate. The existence of the above characteristics seems to point to fundamental shortcomings in the educational discourse such as: a lack of critical interrogation of educational praxis; the possible reification of education (the 'elevated' notion that education should not readily be tampered with and that it will solve all the social ills); and a commodification of knowledge (where knowledge is packaged in a revised curriculum format such as Curriculum 2005, or Outcomes Based Education) to address a perceived need. One could argue that many of the current educational problems result from these factors.

Any discussion on education in South Africa after 1994 has to take cognizance of the profound and influential impact that the apartheid system of governance had on its development trajectory, as well as post-apartheid developments, which had a similarly powerful impact on education. At the forefront of the many contextual factors impacting on education in recent years, has been the dramatic transformation which characterized and highlighted the shift from apartheid to a post-apartheid society. This unprecedented process brought with it radical socio-political change, a bewildering array of transformational demands (of which quality education is but one) from a highly politicized, restive populace and in response, an equally bewildering number of policy documents aimed at addressing and redressing the identified educational challenges. To gain a clearer understanding of these developments, it is imperative to locate the educational trajectory within a historical context, especially the social and political developments after 1994.

1.1 Social and Political Developments which shaped Post-Apartheid Education in South Africa: An Overview

All social change evolves within a social context, which is preceded by a series of events that facilitate the formulation of larger developmental processes. The context within which higher education in South Africa developed after the apartheid era is unique in terms of its complexity and the scale of the shift from the previous era. The political transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994 was a watershed period in South Africa's social, political and economic history. The repeal of apartheid legislation, release of key political leaders from prison, unbanning of political parties, reintegration into the global community of nations and the first democratic elections, were the catalysts for a groundswell of

transformation that touched all aspects of South African life. This transformation also provided the opportunity to fundamentally transform South Africa's higher education system and extend access and equality to previously excluded members of the population. The transition also highlighted the glaring deficiencies of the emerging educational system, which was expected to address the post-apartheid challenges.

Through the adoption of the new Constitution and the Bill of Rights in 1996, the South African government set itself the ambitious goal of providing inclusive education. Apart from the technical and logistical challenges presented by the merging of diverse educational departments[18], as well as the merging of curricula into a unitary system, the government also committed to access and provision of education that is aligned with the needs of all children, whatever their social origin, cultural background, economic circumstances, or abilities (Jansen & Sayed, 2001:344).

Thus apart from the rapidly transforming political, social and economic contextual conditions, education underwent the most comprehensive reconstruction in recent history. Resources had to be distributed more equitably, curricula needed to be revised, departments merged, and schools and tertiary institutions deracialized and made more accessible. These changes were in complete contrast to the situation prior to 1994 when education in South Africa was regulated through apartheid legislation. Education then was authoritarian, racialized, segregated, unequal, discriminatory, bureaucratically centralized and pursued a particular political agenda, which was the economic and political subjugation of a large sector of the population. These measures impacted significantly on the education system and more especially on the mental constructs of learners.

In all spheres of South African life, a pattern of racial inequality was effectively institutionalized under the apartheid system (Naicker, 1996:44). The Nationalist Party government (1948-1994) used two main methods to advance their interests: physical force (using the state security apparatus) and mental (mind) control (Heatly in Naicker, 1996:48). The latter entailed the distortion of Black people's understanding of themselves, of the White ruling class and of reality so that they might become willing servants (Cesaire in Naicker, 1996:48). This is based on the logic that once people are mentally enslaved they accept oppression and exploitation, and may even participate in their own oppression and exploitation (Kasene in Naicker, 1996:48). One such tool for 'mental (mind) control' used by the National Party was education.

---

[18] These were the departments which existed in the racially exclusive tri-cameral parliaments and the ethnic self-governing homelands.

11

The use of education as a political tool is highlighted by renowned author Es'kia Mphahlele (1990:36), who wrote the following about education for Black Africans in South Africa:

> *Education for Africans reflects the gross inequality linked to the policy*
> *of apartheid, which places Africans at the bottom of the social ladder.*
> *Schools for Blacks (which include all the non-White racial groups) are*
> *run on very limited funds, have limited facilities, and use a curriculum*
> *that perpetuates the racist policies of apartheid.*

The severe limitations of education for Black people under apartheid subjugation, which would have major ramifications for academic success in later years, is emphasized by De Villiers (1996:135) in the following:

> *The lack of training and low morale of the teaching corps combined*
> *with poor facilities in Black education, are some of the legacies of the*
> *apartheid system. The habit of learning and teaching has to a large*
> *extent broken down in these schools. The situation in Black education*
> *has in a certain sense created an environment where the students did*
> *not have the opportunity to develop the necessary learning and*
> *cognitive skills needed for the task demands of tertiary education.*

It is without doubt that this education system was designed to skew Black people's perception of themselves through a process of 'mind control' and to this one also needs to add the detrimental effects of economic subjugation. Economic apartheid was designed to develop a Black working class and hence provide a source of cheap labour. Through various discriminatory practices, which limited Black participation in the mainstream economy, three-quarters of the national income was concentrated in the hands of the white minority (Lemon in Naicker, 1996:44).

The combined effect of 'mind control', economic subjugation and deplorable social conditions, had a profoundly debilitating impact on the `life' and educational (particularly for tertiary education) 'readiness' of many Black South Africans, especially those studying at historically `White' universities, where the didactic styles, curriculum content and social culture is more attuned to that of `White' society. It is thus not surprising that prior to the implementation of an academic development initiative at the University of Natal (which became part of UKZN in 2004) in 1988 the graduation rates of Black

mainstream engineering students were extremely low. The following data reflect the percentage of Black graduates (from the total cohort per year), from 1985-1987:

1985 - 10%;
1986 - 31%;
1987 - 6%
(Reynolds, 1997:5)

Albeit widely varying but uniformly poor, these results reflect the interplay of a number of inhibiting causal factors: the inadequate preparation at secondary school level of Black learners for engineering study at a formerly 'White' tertiary institution such as the then University of Natal, the lack of institutional support available at the University, inappropriate mental models for tertiary education and emotional (low self-esteem; financial worries) challenges. Whatever the primary causal factors, it was imperative that these be addressed as a matter of urgency. The low graduation rates and the net outflow of skills from South Africa ('brain drain') compounded the skills shortages and had the potential to place many national capital projects in jeopardy. It was generally not disputed that this situation would have a negative effect on post-apartheid economic growth prospects.

In order to equip learners from disadvantaged backgrounds to study at former 'White' institutions in post-apartheid South Africa, there is a need for more than academic support. A revised ontological awareness based on deep inner reflection is required; a deconstruction of mental constructs or conditioned responses, as well as the acquisition of transformation skills not only to adapt to change, but also to realize academic potential. With the social, economic and political history of South Africa and its increasing complexity, the need for these skills is particularly pressing. Research on throughput rates at tertiary institutions has shown conclusively that the requirements for Black people to cope with life and learning have increased exponentially and become more glaring. This is due to the following reasons:

- Black people suffered systematic and brutal subjugation by the apartheid regime;
- The need to deal with the socio-political transition from an apartheid system based on racial inequality, to a post-apartheid society which advocates constitutional equality and equity for all sectors of the population;

- The need to provide the skills to function effectively in a developing world economy.

For more than a decade after the implementation of new and progressive educational policies, the education discourse has been characterized by discussions on academic development (also known as 'access' education, 'foundation learning' or 'bridging' programmes). There were compelling reasons for this; the effect of apartheid on learning and development was grossly underestimated. This is captured in the following statement:

> *Given the realities of South Africa's past it may even take decades before the educational backlogs of a great proportion of school-leavers will be perceptible.* (Hay and Marais, 2004:59)

Educational deficits arising from the apartheid policy of institutionalized underdevelopment (which is still suffered by mainly Black people) include slow academic throughput, high failure rates and increasing exclusions (Jansen in Abdi, 2001:231).

Implicit in this thesis are the key challenges facing South African higher education. How successfully these can be remediated, depends on how successfully higher education institutions can realign and respond to the unpredictable and evolving social realities, whilst simultaneously striving to meet the current development needs of the country. The urgency to address the educational failings and skills imperatives is noted by Pirie (2003):

> *In less than a generation, South Africa may no longer have a skilled consulting engineering base capable of maintaining the current infrastructure or of developing new infrastructure.*

Although the main causal factors for academic disadvantage are assumed to arise largely as a result of poor schooling (primary and secondary), the precarious socio-economic situation and domestic deficits which many learners (from these backgrounds) face, compounded by the drastic change experienced when they enter formerly 'White' institutions which prescribe vastly different success benchmarks, also play a vital role. This thesis will also argue for an additional factor; the lack of a constructivist transformation model.

Unless educational practitioners at higher education institutions are prepared for increasing complexity, the challenges of educating and socializing students for the world of work and for integration into civil society will prove much more daunting than had been anticipated. This is not only as a result of living in a world that is undergoing rapid transformation (as a result of globalization and the proliferation of technology), but more especially because learners are socially, culturally and academically ill-equipped to deal with the full ramifications of far-reaching change.

The transformation process which commenced in 1994 set in motion a political and social dispensation which has caused tumult in the lives of many. From an epistemological perspective, not only has it challenged many of the prevailing assumptions of how learning takes place, but it has also compelled practitioners to focus on their praxis, the causal factors which impact on learning and how best to deal with these. According to Subotsky (2003:355), the National Commission on Higher Education (1996) and the government's White Paper on Higher Education Transformation (DOE, 1997) provided the initial impetus and linked to the Human Resources Development Strategy. A number of targets were identified:

- *Ensuring that graduates are equipped with the skills and competencies required in modern society;*
- *Increasing efficiency by means of graduation rate benchmarks;*
- *Achieving equity of access;*
- *Shifting enrolments ratios by field of study.*

Despite the plethora of educational policies which were promulgated with the establishment of the new government in 1994, the educational objectives were aimed at broad economic and political transformation. The following policy documents[19] shaped the emergence of education after1994:

1994   Reconstruction & Development Programme: Focused on the transformation of education and general development;

1994   Presidential Lead Projects (22 in total; one being the Culture of Learning Programme);

---

[19] The key policy documents will be unpacked in greater detail later in this thesis.

1995   Education Department, White Paper on Education and
        Training;

1996   Education Department, White Paper on Science and
        Technology;

1997   Education Department, White Paper 3 – A Programme for the
        Transformation of Higher Education;

1998   Education Department, White Paper 4 – A Programme for the
        Transformation of Further Education & Training;

1999   Tirisano Consultative Campaign;

2000   A South African Curriculum for the 21st Century;

2001   National Plan for Higher Education.

While the above policies documents spelt out in detail the transformation imperatives of the new government, these were mainly political in nature and there was little practical guidance in terms of how the objectives were to be achieved. Hence academic development remained critically under resourced, under researched and, although integral to the educational discourse, is not effectively and uniformly applied. This resulted in the first significant criticism against the new educational dispensation, which is summed up by Jansen (2000:48):

> *The making of education policy in South Africa is best described as a struggle for the achievement of a broad political symbolism that would mark the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid society. We search in vain for a logic in policy-making connected to any serious intention to change the practice of education 'on the ground'. Every single case of education policy-making demonstrates, in different ways, the preoccupation of the state with settling policy struggles in the political domain rather than in the realm of practice.*

Given the absence of clear guidelines, it is not surprising that many higher education institutions interpreted policy directives quite liberally and in accordance with their own Vision and Mission objectives, resulting in initiatives such as academic development being applied haphazardly. However,

new centralized state funded models coupled with throughput rates, are forcing these institutions to revisit the way academic development is being implemented.

With due consideration of the contextual macro-economic, social and political factors, it is at the micro-level of the student that this research intends to make a difference. The research critically interrogates the hypothesis of non-duality between subject and environment. Through a deeper exploration of Theory U, the research will show how this reflexive learning process can transform mental paradigms, hence aiding learners in academic development. This research is relevant to South Africa for the following reasons:

- The social transformation post-1994 has undoubtedly impacted and challenged existing approaches to life and learning. For many people this has contributed to increased feelings of anxiety.

- There is expanding political and economic pressure on academic institutions to increase throughput rates of Black learners, particularly in the engineering and scientific disciplines.

- In the corporate world, issues of transformation and equity receive high priority, requiring highly adaptable, innovative and appropriately skilled personnel.

- Research shows that personal mastery, which emanates from better coping skills, will develop and enhance feelings of well-being.

1.2   Educational and Socio-Political Imperatives for the Implementation of Academic Development within the South African Higher Education Sector

As already noted, the educational imperative for the implementation of academic development is clear. There is general consensus in the literature of the need for academic development in South Africa. This is rooted in the fact that the transformation of the education system had to be a comprehensive and effectively managed process, to avert detrimental consequences. The overwhelming contextual transition (social, economic and political) especially from pre- to post-apartheid and from agrarian, or peri-urban to urban lifestyles, inevitably had serious implications for the lives of people and brought

17

about significant disadvantages[20], particularly at a social level (which inadvertently impacted on other areas of life as well). It affected *inter alia* people's economic and social lives, value orientations, leisure activities and interpersonal relationships (Olivier *et al*, 1997). Learners who already had to face the challenges of their changing life phases were now also confronted with new demands from these dynamic societal changes. The connection between society and education meant that learners would require knowledge, attitudes and skills, which would equip them to handle their life situations successfully and to lead more meaningful lives.

From the vantage point of the learners who experience the contextual complexities brought on by drastic transformation, the challenges can be overwhelming with often devastating outcomes. In Chapter 5, this thesis will 'unpack' some of the experiences faced by learners, to provide a framework context within which to locate academic development and the development path of South African higher education. These realities are by no means definitive, but provide a useful 'backdrop' against which to frame epistemological assumptions.

Based on these lived experiences it is evident that in South Africa change has manifested itself in many and often devastating ways. Apart from the uprooting of people's lives through migration from rural to urban environments, the acceleration of telecommunications which enhances the flow and influence of information, and the breakdown in the traditional structure of the family due to the socio-economic consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, it is the legacy of disempowerment as a result of the apartheid system, which seems to have had the most lasting impact on many learners' ability to cope in higher education.

Colonization and apartheid were systems of subjugation, domination and subordination which destroyed traditional lifestyles including cultural values, subsistence economies and most lamentably, self-esteem. According to Ben-Salah (1993:41), this created major obstacles to the freedom, socio-economic and cultural development of people.

Those classified `non-white', had restricted access to education, limited exposure to the cultural capital of the dominant social class and limited participation in the formal economy. The Education White Paper of 1995 captured this in the following way:

---

[20] Novick (in Zaaiman, 1998:23) defines educational disadvantage as, *the net effect of those characteristics of a student's environment that provide less than normal exposure to factors that motivate and facilitate educational growth.*

> *Millions of adult South Africans are functionally illiterate, and millions of South African children and youth are learning in school conditions which resemble those in the most impoverished states. In the large, poorly-resourced sectors for the majority of the population, a majority of students drop out prematurely or fail senior certificate, and a small minority win entrance to higher education. Access to technological and professional careers requiring a strong basis in mathematics and science is denied to all but a fraction of the age cohort, largely because of the chronic inadequacy of teaching in these subjects.*

In the same White Paper, the newly elected ANC government laid down the transformative and developmental goals of education:

> *In this situation, a priority for the national and provincial Ministries of Education is to create a transformative, democratic mission and ethos in the new departments of education which can completely supersede the separate identities of the former departments. It is now the joint responsibility of all South Africans who have a stake in the education and training system to help build a just, equitable, and high quality system for all the citizens, with a common culture of disciplined commitment to learning and teaching.*

Unfortunately with well over a decade having passed since the release of this White Paper, learning outcomes remain dismal. This is not only as a result of the structural inequalities that still prevail, but one can posit that it is also a result of the ineffective roles of the learners in dealing with their unpreparedness to receive and capitalize on the change process in whichever way it is manifested. This gives credence to the following comment by Connor (1992:22):

> *The human race is ill-equipped to deal with the burden of major changes already occurring let alone those to come.*

This inability to deal constructively and productively with change let alone predict its outcomes, has for many resulted in a distinct sense of unease and uncertainty, a feeling that social theorist, Durkheim,

referred to as *anomie*. It is the rapid proliferation of these changes and the unpreparedness of humankind to deal with them that Toffler (1972) refers to as `Future Shock'.

`Future Shock' and systematic disempowerment through apartheid underdevelopment combined with rapid social change, would precipitate the need for coping skills to facilitate individual development (Mphahlele, 1990; Mungazi in Mashile and Mellet, 1996; de Villiers, 1996).

The major advances and shifts in economics, politics and technology, as a result of the effects of globalization, brought pressure on all sectors of society to adapt, including higher education. With dramatic geo-political changes at global (and local) levels such as the rapid demise of communism, an increase in the demand for democratic rights and the rapid expanse of capitalism, higher education has become a vital component in the transformation agenda.

Under the glare of international scrutiny, the new democratic South African state embarked on a dedicated mission to redress the educational system. According to Jansen (2000:65):

> *With the adoption of the new Constitution and Bill of Rights in 1996,*
> *South Africa committed itself to a policy of inclusive education. In*
> *essence, this involves a commitment to creating access to, and*
> *provision of, a process of education that is appropriate to the needs of*
> *all children, whatever their origin, backgrounds, circumstances, or*
> *abilities.*

South Africa's re-entry into the world economy after the demise of apartheid and the need to meet economic imperatives, were some of the key catalysts for the rise of academic development. However given the urgency to redress South Africa's iniquitous political, social and economic history and despite the fact that more than a decade has passed since the onset of democracy, there remains a tremendous backlog in addressing the educational needs of the majority of South Africans who were denied adequate education during the apartheid era. Even with the official integration of education, Black and White South Africans' levels of learning, skills acquisition and achievement, are still very different. There is still a major disjuncture between the Black secondary schooling system and the higher education sector. This view is confirmed in the following:

> *Students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds have generally not been exposed to key academic approaches and experiences that are taken for granted in traditional higher education programmes. The resulting 'articulation gap' is manifested in students as a lack of sound foundations for tertiary studies, and has profound effects on students' ability to respond positively to higher educational programmes, irrespective of how talented they are.* (Scott *et al*, 2007:42)

Failing to address this challenge would seriously undermine the educational empowerment objectives of the 'new' democracy, as well as pose a threat to long-term economic growth. Academic development and its role in facilitating academic success is still a relatively recent phenomenon in the education *corpus* of South Africa[21]. The predominant objective remains to facilitate the academic development of students whose prior learning has been adversely affected by educational or social inequalities.

In terms of its conventional definition and practice, academic development does not subscribe to a homogenous discourse, but encapsulates a broad range of remedial learning activities designed to overcome educational deficits and prepare learners for higher education. The lack of a prescribed framework gave rise to the enthusiastic attempts by many institutions of higher learning to respond to the issues of 'access' and 'equity', which saw the proliferation of an assortment of bridging/access/foundation programmes.

The specific aim of academic development is to maximize the performance of disadvantaged students (Agar, 1996:94) by enhancing the academic environment of the learner through increased tuition, providing mentors and introducing various related support mechanisms. However these are largely quick-fix solutions (Nair, 1999; Hay and Marais, 2004), which advocate structural solutions to a key systemic problem (Scott *et al*, 2007:44). The 'structural response' to a 'systemic problem', is one of the primary motivators for an alternative approach to dealing with academic development. This is borne out by the following:

> *The underpreparedness associated with disadvantaged educational backgrounds often involves a complex of factors such as conceptual*

---

[21] The Engineering Bridging Unit, one of the forerunners of Academic Development, was instituted in 1988 at the former University of Natal's Howard College campus.

development, academic language proficiency and approach to learning, as well as subject knowledge. This means that 'more-of-the-same' approaches, such as providing more standard tutorials within the parameters of traditional first-year courses, are seldom effective in addressing educational disadvantage. (Scott *et al,* 2007:44)

For academic support to be effective, it is necessary to foreground the factors that precipitate its need. From earlier discussion in this thesis, it is apparent that academic support has to entail more than structural redress, but that it needs to fundamentally engage the learner directly in the support process. According to Lindhard and Dlamini (in Olivier *et al*, 1997:25), learners will be better able to handle change and the demands of life if they are adequately equipped with life coping skills. They must be empowered to exercise better control over their own lives, to be prepared for the challenges of society and to adapt to changing circumstances with greater ease. Bearing the complexity of the learning context in mind and the needs of learners to cope within this context, two core questions arise:

- What appropriate coping skills can successfully facilitate dealing with change?

- How best can these skills be inculcated?

It is too reductionist to assume that there is a core set of skills and that these skills can simply be taught. What is required is a clearer ontological and epistemological understanding of how a learner constructs learning and whether the *meta*cognitive processes of the learner are ready to receive, integrate and act upon his or her own learning. Whereas it is commonly assumed that learning is a product of our cognitive intelligence (IQ), emerging research has refuted the notion of a 'generic' intelligence and advocates the notion of 'multiple intelligences' of which 'emotional intelligence' (EQ) is an important constituent. There are widespread exceptions to the rule that IQ predicts success. In fact there are more exceptions than cases that fit the rule (Goleman, 1995:34). Goleman popularized the term EQ as a key concept in determining success in life. EQ encompasses among others: self-motivation; regulation of moods; managing stress; and the ability to empathize.

It is the primary assertion of this thesis that a major cause of the poor academic performance experienced by learners at South African higher education institutions is their inadequate ability to cope with the transition from one social system to another. This is particularly true when one is exposed to deplorable

22

socio-economic deprivation such as experienced in many township or rural environments, which has the potential to limit the development of EQ. Furthermore, environmental deprivation also undermines self-esteem and self-worth; necessary qualities required to transition to the multicultural, high-tech environment of the university. Botha (1994:5) defines environmental deprivation as:

- *Language deficiencies, which restrict communicative possibilities in the dominant culture;*
- *An inability to meet the demands of modern life due to a limited acquisition of the learning and life-content of the dominant culture;*
- *Limited intellectual stimulation; the parents having had limited or no education;*
- *'Learned helplessness' – they feel they are victims of larger systems and nothing they do will make a difference.*

This research thesis will argue that through a constructivist approach and implementing the Theory U model of social transformation, the transitional process will be managed more effectively and hence contribute towards more successful academic outcomes.

1.3   Framing the Problem

The debilitating learning challenges faced by numerous learners in the academic development sector of South African higher education and the quest to address these through effecting a transformation of consciousness, form the focus of this research. The research project is not an abstract study. It is rooted in the pain, fears, frustrations and aspirational hopes of mainly Black learners, who as a result of socio-economic and educational disadvantages, are required to commence their higher education studies *via* academic development programmes at institutions of higher learning in South Africa.

As a practitioner-researcher in the academic development sector with a key interest to bring about an improvement in my personal practice, I have experienced and closely observed the often devastating effects of transformation on learners, who have had little or non-existent skills with which to manage the process and its consequences. These learners, who originate mainly from disadvantaged socio-economic and educational backgrounds, are then subjected to the intense and overwhelming pressures of adapting to a largely unfamiliar and alienating learning environment, with little wherewithal, to achieve the academic success benchmarks in order to avoid academic exclusion.

Through a process of intense reflection, critical thinking, personal inquiry and observation, I have come to realize that neither government intention (as encapsulated in the policy documents), nor reductionist attempts at academic redress[22], that is, providing additional tutoring in subject specific content, will address the challenges besetting higher education. What is required is an *integral* approach which is not only learner-centered and which interrogates the mental models which guide the behaviour of learners, but more importantly, is an approach which locates the learning experience in a symbiotic relationship with its context.

From my practitioner-researcher perspective, to understand how an alternative learning model might be enhanced, it is necessary to review the relevant epistemological theories which can inform academic development education and based on personal reflection, assess whether these would facilitate preparedness for the transformational experiences encountered by learners from socio-economic and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. These theories include among others, constructivism, experiential learning and Theory U. Through an interrogation of these theories, but specifically a deeper exploration of Theory U, this thesis will develop the argument for implementing Theory U as a transformation model in academic development programmes in South African higher education.

The mental constructs which predominate have not served us well to cope with transformation (Connor, 1992; Gidley, 2007). This is evident in the lives of learners on academic development programmes. Based on an interpretation of key educational documents and supported by qualitative feedback from learners at UKZN, it appears that the effects of transformation on learning outcomes have been wholly underestimated and ignored within the current teaching and learning epistemological framework, particularly in academic development where it is most needed. It is clearly articulated in the literature that successful learning depends in large part on effective management of personal transformation. In the absence of this, academic development will not achieve its academic outcomes. This is particularly true in South African higher education, where numerous learners have to navigate the vast socio-economic and educational gulf between their personal and domestic circumstances and the world of higher learning with often disastrous results.

While much of the literature indicates that humans are not innately endowed with the skills to successfully manage change, there is increasing evidence from emerging research that through conscious awareness and our (human) constructivist nature, this trend can be reversed. Based on years

---

[22] The post-1994 period has seen the production of numerous educational policies and the implementation of academic support initiatives at most of the institutions of higher learning in South Africa. However, academic throughput rates and success remain largely elusive.

of feedback from learners who were attending academic development programmes and exposed to reflective and transformational teaching, I propose the hypothesis that by harnessing the social transformation model of Theory U and deep inner reflection to transform consciousness, we can change our mental models which shape our responses and hence forge a more effective way to deal with reality.

One of the core motivators for a constructivist social transformation model in academic development, stems from the qualitative feedback gleaned from unstructured interviews and focus group discussions with learners[23]from disadvantaged backgrounds attending UKZN's UNITE programme. The UNITE Programme was chosen for no specific reason other than that as a practitioner-researcher I have intimate knowledge of the programme. The feedback (in Chapter 5) will highlight the disabling effects of inhibiting environmental factors on learning, as well as the benefits to those exposed to reflective, mindful and constructivist teaching and learning methodologies. To emphasize the need for an integrated epistemological intervention, this feedback will be juxtaposed against learners from similar backgrounds who were not exposed to such teaching.

Learning as revealed through personal experience is not a linear process, but is embedded in a matrix of interconnected social and personal variables, which co-exist in a dynamic relationship between the 'outer' world of experiences in the social field and the 'inner' world of consciousness of the student. Approached from this interconnected perspective, it is not possible to understand these variables independently of one another. The interconnected perspective finds greater clarity in the term 'holon', coined by Arthur Koestler (1967). Koestler defined a 'holon' as:

> *An identifiable part of a system that has a unique identity, yet is made*
> *up of sub-ordinate parts and in turn is part of a larger whole.*
> (http://www.integralworld.net/edwards13.html)

Social theorist, Ken Wilbur (1997:1), also gives impetus to the notion of interconnectedness in the following:

---

[23] The student 'voice' in terms of pursuing this research is of crucial importance because students constitute critical stakeholders within the educational endeavour and ultimately, the aim of this research is to improve overall effectiveness with regards to student performance in academic development praxis . However sadly, it is not uncommon for this 'voice' to be completely ignored when educational planning is executed.

To understand the whole it is necessary to understand the parts. To understand the parts, it is necessary to understand the whole. Such is the circle of understanding. (Wilbur, 1997:1)

To make sense of this integral relationship of the *holonic* notions of inner (student) and outer (context) worlds with regards to academic development in South African higher education, this research will provide a detailed overview of the contextual and historical development of education, mainly in the post-apartheid era. This will focus on the educational policies, documents and debates which shaped education during the decade after 1994. It will unpack its effects on learning within academic development, as well as provide deeper insight into the transformation process and how this has impacted on the social context.

This research project is not only about making sense of these changing realities, but is also about challenging the conventional responses – the habitual reductionist and mechanistic ways we respond, uninformed by mindful or critical reflection. The same applies to academic development; where the dominant discourse has been informed by structural and mechanistic attempts at remediating educational disadvantage. A critical, mindful approach will argue for a deeper interrogation of the learner's ontological status, which, through the application of the Theory U constructivist paradigm and from the perspective of a personal and proactive intervention, can transform consciousness to bring about empowerment to construct new meaning and a new reality.

Emerging research in human behavior which draws from discoveries in neuroscience, neurolinguistics and transpersonal psychology, highlight one of the remarkable traits of Humankind, which is our innate possession of consciousness or mindfulness, and our ability to be aware of and hence to reflect on our actions and the outcomes of our actions.[24] Although it is more commonly associated with Eastern philosophical practices such as Buddhism, consciousness/mindfulness (or 'Presencing' as referred to by Scharmer, 2007) cannot be reduced to a simplistic definition; it is much more embracing than that. Peat (in Meyer-Dinkgrafe, 2006:15), defines 'consciousness' more eloquently as:

degree of alertness; increased cognitive awareness.

---

[24] The terms 'consciousness', 'awareness', 'mindfulness' 'reflection' and 'Presencing' will be used interchangeably in this thesis and regarded as being similar in meaning.

In the years after the Enlightenment era, the notion of consciousness has become much more integrated in Western philosophical discourse, especially with the rise of Post-postmodernism. In the context of this thesis, mindfulness as a practice will be understood as a psychological state with a particular bearing on learning. Langer (1998:23) defines 'mindfulness' as embracing the following states:

- *Openness to novelty;*
- *Alertness to distinction; sensitivity to different contexts;*
- *Implicit, if not explicit, awareness of multiple perspectives;*
- *Orientation in the present.*

Infusing academic development praxis with the above qualities articulated by Langer will be of significant benefit to learners, especially when exposed to novel situations. However, despite the fact that human civilization shows significant evolutionary advancement which occurred over millennia in response to changing environmental situations, according to the literature (Connor, 1992; Crook, 2009; Taleb, 2007), humans generally do not act with conscious awareness. Dominant social norms such as ideology, culture, belief systems, and the proliferating reliance on technology or brain disorders can inhibit consciousness (Connor, 1992; Kegan and Lahey, 2009). One can therefore argue that the changes in behavior in response to environmental stimuli are not necessarily 'mindful', but have been modified by trial and error over lengthy periods of time (Diamond, 1998).

As gregarious social beings, much of our responses are scripted and shaped by the socialization processes derived from our life experiences and from our environment. Hence different life experiences and environmental factors would result in very different levels of consciousness/mindfulness between individuals. The overwhelming deficit in conscious awareness is evidenced by the lack of response to global threats – environmental degradation; rapid industrialization – mentioned earlier, and the increasing complexity which has accompanied it. This inability to cope with rapid change is the primary cause of increased levels of anxiety and alienation as we can see in the following:

> *Future shock is the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce*
> *in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in a short time.*
> (Connor, 1992:20)

Receptivity to change needs to be evoked through awareness which opens the mind to alternative options. Through a constructivist approach, an approach which seeks to bring the response to change under the control of the subject, a new reality can emerge (Langer, 1998).

Through intense contemplative reflection the human subject will not only deconstruct inhibiting mental constructs to change, but also tap into intuitive wisdom and hence be able to construct a way forward. It is this ability to harness our awareness and hence construct our reality that will be explored in this research project.

1.4   Motivation for Study

As an educator within an academic development initiative, the UNITE Programme at UKZN, I am able to draw on my personal reflections and experiences. Throughout my years of involvement with this programme, I have been exposed to many often widely divergent learning observations. These include the litany of personal grievances from students who as a result of their often neglected non-academic problems have felt let down by an institution that appears insensitive to their learning needs. Paradoxically however, my classroom experiences have also highlighted the successful learning outcomes as a result of transformed mental models. This research is driven by key assumptions: Firstly, that there is a relationship between the mental models that we subscribe to and how we experience our reality. Secondly, awareness arising out of deep inner reflection has a direct bearing on success (Toffler, 1972; Drum and Knott, 1977; Pickworth, 1980; Frost, 1991; Scharmer, 2007). Thirdly, reflective skills can be acquired through constructive action or *via* a facilitated role by a teacher in a teaching/learning environment.

Higher education in South Africa is handicapped by not developing appropriate learning models and by being inadequately resourced to address the learning needs of students. Despite the plethora of policy documents (see further in this thesis) and discussion papers, the carnage of failure and academic exclusions continue unabated. Although academic development programmes have produced some successes since their inception, they still face many challenges[25].

Apart from the lack of training and resources, it is also not uncommon within many South African higher education institutions, that academic development programmes still face a crisis of legitimacy.

---

[25] The predominant means of providing academic development is via 'bridging' and support programmes. According to Strydom (in Hay *et al,* 2004:62), there are drawbacks in addressing the academic problems with bridging programmes. As 'add-on' programmes, they permit the rest of the institution, its courses and teaching methods to remain essentially unchanged, since it is somebody else's job to 'bridge the gap' or provide remediation for the students.

Many mainstream academics are still skeptical that these programmes have a legitimate place within the higher education sector. From personal experience, the following factors continue to militate against academic development initiatives:

- Faculty staff in many engineering schools who have not taken ownership of the learning problems that learners face;
- Academic staff are not equipped to manage the non-academic factors which often underpin academic non-performance;
- Resistance to change;
- Lack of funding and institutional resources.

Paradoxically, I have also seen outstanding successes by learners who with similar learning challenges, have learnt to take charge of their learning endeavours; change their mental models and hence successfully manage their transformation journeys. These successes were not only the outcome of more concertedly mindful reflection by learners, they were also outcomes from constructive action by learners who acquired additional skills, who challenged ontological assumptions about themselves and who actively participated in their meaning making.

Nelson-Jones (1993:9) writes that:

> *When people are being personally responsible they are in the process of making the choices that maximize their happiness and fulfillment. Personal responsibility is a positive concept whereby people are responsible for their well-being and making their own choices. As such, they empower rather than depower or weaken people.*

Under authoritarian apartheid rule, lives and destinies were prescribed and enforced by state subjugation. This had a severely disempowering effect for the majority of Black South Africans. However on the other hand, we cannot just assume that people will become empowered with freedom of choice. What 'personal responsibility' presupposes, is that people have the maturity or 'emotional intelligence' to decide not only on a course of action, but are also able to deal with the consequences thereof. Drum and Knott (1977:18) confirm this:

One experiences futility when immersed in a situational crisis without

the wherewithal, because of earlier developmental deficits, to convert

the challenge to a satisfactory, growth-producing outcome.

How does one acquire the 'wherewithal' to deal with personal crises? This is acquired through conscious choice. For learners who experience these developmental deficits, the choice to act (as opposed to not acting) is critical. What this means is that there are specific actions or behaviours which the learner has to execute. According to Nelson-Jones (1993:11), skills acquisition comprises of three dimensions:

- *Attitude: An appropriate attitude is that you assume personal responsibility for acquiring, maintaining, using and developing it;*

- *Knowledge: Any skill involves knowledge concerning what are the correct choices to make;*

- *Skill: The skills dimension entails the application of attitude and knowledge to practice. Basically the greater the range of skills an individual has at his or her disposal, the greater the range of alternatives there are available. Hence this allows the individual increasingly to take greater charge of his or her life.*

From the constructivist perspective, humans possess the capacity to become actively involved in the acquisition of all of the above. Psychiatrist, Victor Frankl (in Nelson-Jones, 1991:12) sees people as 'choosers' throughout their lives. Humans never escape the need to choose among possibilities. It is this capacity to make an independent choice that provided a critical catalyst to proceed with this research. Often our need to choose arises from a critical referential approach that we adopt pertaining to an area of our lives that we wish to transform. As motivational speaker, Les Brown, once quipped:

Necessity is not the mother of invention; refusing to accept things the

way they are, is the mother of invention![26]

---

[26] Dartnell Les Brown 'It's Possible' video, distributed by Learning Resources (Pty) Ltd.

Hence we have to become critical, not only of the dominant paradigms operating in broader society, but critical too of our own meaning-making processes. We need to strive to nurture a culture of critical reflection in learners, so that through critical awareness and reflection, they can take responsibility and begin to challenge the ontological discourses that might be handicapping their intellectual growth. I assert that the various crises afflicting the world today are a direct result of a lack of critical voices in a citizenry whose choices have been usurped by dominant forces of capital and ideology.

It was noted earlier that learners on academic development programmes often originate from domestic backgrounds which do not empower them to make effective choices. One can hence pose the question: How does a learner acquire the attitudinal, knowledge and skills wherewithal to cope effectively in higher education? In society generally, 'know how' would be transferred to members of that society through socialization. This is an encompassing learning process, which can include the following: informal instruction in the home; observational learning from role models; and experiential learning from rewarding or unrewarding experiences (Nelson-Jones, 1991:26). Much of the learning is also determined by the needs within society. Powerful learning shaping characteristics which exist in contemporary society, according to Horton and Raggatt (in Ryder and Campbell, 1988:41) include the following:

- *An increased demand for basic and essential skills, for example in communication, human relationships, economic management and working life;*

- *The multi-cultural composition and interests of our population;*

- *A disturbance effect due to rapid scientific and technological change;*

- *Changing patterns of employment and the emergence of structural youth unemployment.*

Rapid transition and the effects thereof, mean that socialization might not always be possible. Therefore the most appropriate channels of disseminating skills to deal with transformation will result from the educational processes at education institutions. Academic development remains an integral part of the higher education landscape because it is an imperative to address academic need and the inequalities of the past. The challenge lies in how to change the prevailing mindset within the academic

31

development discourse, how to extract value, bearing in mind limited resources, and more importantly, how to empower learners so that they can realize their full academic potential.

Practitioners at institutions of higher learning cannot absolve themselves of their responsibilities to challenge their existing assumptions and worldviews pertaining to academic development. As Landis (1996: ix) states, *'We are not born being effective; we learn how'*. Soudien and Colyn (in Abdi 2001:235) emphasize the importance of a school environment where teachers can positively and effectively respond to learners' needs. This would empower them to attain both social and academic confidence to learn, achieve and develop.

As a practitioner-researcher, the basis for approaching a research interest is primarily one's ontological outlook and is shaped by personal inquiry. As someone with varied life experiences both in the corporate and academic sectors, it is my personal desire to add value in both sectors, which has motivated me to undertake this research.

At some point along the professional journey, one reaches a stage where critical reflection on practice is necessary. This reflection can be the result of a number of factors: an external stimulus, or an inner quest, and motives can range from questions pertaining to the practitioner's epistemological practice, the changing needs of learners, or different challenges presented by a rapidly evolving social, political and economic milieu. It is important to note that the desire to pursue research is as much about the researcher; his or her professional interests, levels of critical awareness, or consciousness, as those who are the subject of the research.

For me, the motivation to undertake this research project has been a combination of both external stimuli, as well as an inner quest. At the outset, after being engaged in academic development (teaching; observing; dialogues with learners) for more than a decade, I experienced a profound shift in personal consciousness wherein I became more aware of the disjuncture between the epistemological approach commonly applied in academic development and the needs of the learners. Continued interrogation of my practice motivated for my deeper questions and reflections to be formalized and structured into the current study.

However, this study is not only about my inner yearnings to improve personal practice; it is also about making a constructive contribution to the academic development praxis in general which can ultimately impact positively on economic growth in South Africa. What is also important to acknowledge is South

Africa's integration with the global community; which is characterized by accelerating scientific and technological breakthroughs and unprecedented levels of competitiveness. Higher education needs to keep pace with these developments and as such needs to develop greater capacity for innovation, self-management and holistic learning.

In order for the research to be socially relevant it needed to be located within a local context which in this case, is the general academic problems experienced by learners from disadvantaged backgrounds as a result of poor social transformation skills. The ensuing result is high academic failure and hence the shortage of engineering skills, which is impacting negatively on South Africa's infrastructural and economic development. This can be seen in the following comment:

> *The shortage of engineers in South Africa is specifically seen as one of the worst capacity and scarce-skills crises in years, with local municipalities being hit the hardest.* (du Toit & Roodt, 2009:3)[27]

Given the huge infrastructural development demand for improved roads, housing, water and power supply (particularly after the demise of apartheid) in a rapidly developing economy such as South Africa, addressing these scarce skills needs is critical to government's political and economic objectives.

Thousands of matriculants apply for admission to study at tertiary institutions in South Africa each year, specifically in the engineering disciplines. Many of these applicants have been exposed to such deficiencies as lack of learning resources, poorly qualified teachers and impoverished social and domestic circumstances. With this legacy they enter tertiary study, often with disastrous academic consequences. Universities at which academic development is implemented have responded with a raft of mechanisms to address learning challenges. Some of these are the following (du Toit & Roodt, 2009:48):

- *Rigorous entry criteria - some of the universities that achieve the highest throughput rates are known to apply the most stringent entry criteria and procedures;*

---

[27] The National Commission Report on Higher Education (NCHE) report (in Hay *et al*, 2004:61) stresses the fact that South Africa's graduate output in the natural sciences and engineering is too low.

- *Dedicated foundation and extended degree programmes – institutions have established foundation programmes to help students deal with the challenges of higher education;*

- *Funding – many students do not have the financial means to afford training at a higher education institution. In such instances the institutions strive to assist students to obtain loans and bursaries;*

- *Monitoring and support – support is given by means of supplementary lessons, assigning a senior student as a mentor, and providing students with life-skills training;*

- *Appointing more lecturers – in some institutions the staff to student ratios were too low as a result of an increase in enrolment levels. In such cases additional staff is appointed;*

- *Upgrading the qualifications of lecturers.*

While these mechanisms have brought about improvement in throughput rates, the critical question remains: How effectively and sustainably do these responses facilitate academic success? The following table, which profiles the academic progression of mainstream as well as former academic development learners, provides some answers.

Table 1. *Progression Potential Profile: UNITE[28] academic development learners compared to Black direct entry engineering students progressing beyond 1st year.*

	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th Year	5th Year	6th Year
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
1994 UNITE Students	30	29	25	21	18	15
Students in System	100%	97%	83%	70%	60%	50%
1995 Direct Entry	38	21	14	8	5	3
Students in System	100%	55%	37%	21%	13%	8%

---

[28] UNITE stands for University of KwaZulu-Natal Intensive Tuition for Engineers Programme. This is the academic development initiative currently attached to the Faculty of Engineering.

The table presents a comparison of drop-out (attrition) rates between UNITE (attended the academic development programme in 1994) and direct entry Black students (Reynolds, 1997).

Although there is a marked difference in the attrition rates between the former UNITE learners and their mainstream counterparts, what is of concern is the steadily declining numbers of both categories of students in the system, particularly when one considers the financial and related costs of implementing academic development initiatives.

1.5 Intended Contribution to Academic Development Praxis in South African Higher Education

> *The purpose of social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality. While the social sciences do not reveal ultimate truth, they do help us to make sense of our world. What the social sciences offer is explanation, clarification and demystification of the social forms which Man has created around himself.* (Beck in Cohen and Manion, 1995:26)

The notion of plurality in terms of perspectives on reality is clearly articulated in the above extract. This is particularly relevant to the diversity and complexity of present society. Never has the quest for meaning, understanding and foresight been more prevalent than in our current world where the socio-economic, political and educational challenges highlighted earlier defy the 'logic' of existing discourses. Current ideological, economic and social theoretical models have not addressed many of the key problems which we encounter. A radical alternative is called for; an alternative that departs from the illusions of 'knowing' and 'truth' and that is not necessarily rooted in conventional theory.

A central theme of this research is that there is no single reality, but that there are multiple realities depending on how different individuals interpret and shape that reality. As a practitioner-researcher, I wish to contribute my personal, experiential perspective to the application of academic development as applied at an institution of higher learning in South Africa. This will provide critical insights from the perspective of someone who has not only lived through the social transformation from pre- to post-apartheid, and been intimately involved with academic development, but who also wishes to be a change agent in academic development praxis.

Critical reflection on educational practice is essential to prepare for a world which is becoming increasingly more complex, multiform and fragmented. This growing complexity is not only affecting education, but is also spurring on rapid change in all sectors of society, giving rise to increased levels of social upheaval, emotional dissonance and environmental degradation on a scale which has never been seen before. Rapidly expanding levels of violence, political and economic turbulence and many other social ills, point to a need for a fundamental shift in human consciousness.

The notion that human consciousness is constantly evolving is verified in the literature (Beck & Cowan, 2006; Scharmer, 2007) and particularly in emerging research in the field of transpersonal psychology (Wilbur, 1997). The assertion that human consciousness is currently evolving in such a way that we can consciously (and constructively) participate in the process is an emergent theme in academic research (Gidley, 2007). This groundbreaking realization that humans can proactively affect their own destinies through evolving their consciousness is a paradigm shift of immense value! It unlocks opportunities for positive change for human subjects and provides the potential to become 'empowered' to challenge the hegemonic doctrines that have emasculated them. This will give them the opportunity to take control of their realities.

I wish to assert that this 'alternative' is found in the *meta* holding theory of Theory U. Theory U encourages a new way of engaging with reality through 'downloading', that is, becoming mindfully aware of our thoughts or our practices. However, it also facilitates the practice of deep, inner reflection; a practice which transcends our egoic influences, the socializing influences from the 'social field' (context) and which taps into one's authentic self – the intuitive wisdom which allows us to 'connect to the deepest source from which the field of the future begins to arise' (Scharmer, 2007:52). It is from this interior space that one can explore different realities.

This thesis intends to make a difference by confirming the hypothesis which asserts that awareness and social transformation training can impact on personal realities. It is about making a positive contribution; about adding value to the practitioner-researcher's role in academic development within higher education in South Africa. The intended contribution of this thesis is premised on the fact that academic development has potential for greater success optimization and hence this convergence of theory and praxis will significantly benefit academic development practice in South Africa's higher education sector. Groundbreaking theoretical research in Theory U and Nondual approaches to learning has provided new impetus to how social transformation can be constructed within the ambit of academic development.

Due to its pervasive role in society, it is tempting to locate the 'locus of control' for social transformation in the educational system. One needs to guard against reductionist and 'technocratic' models such as the 'structural adjustment' one mentioned earlier. As this thesis will propose, an alternative approach should be explored; one that not only acknowledges the complexities of transformation (contextual factors; philosophical paradigms), but which seeks to cultivate the 'locus of control' in the learner, through awareness and reflection, thereby developing empowering and sustainable coping skills.

The thesis will, through contextualizing the pervasive social transformation process (from an educational perspective) from pre- to post-apartheid South Africa, highlight its impact on affected learners, giving rise to the vital role played by academic development in South African higher education. Since academic development did not arise in isolation, the thesis will also provide a detailed historical overview of education immediately before and after the onset of democracy in 1994. It will draw on the researcher's own experiences, discuss the need for an alternative epistemology and finally, it will deconstruct Theory U from the perspective of the potential benefits that Theory U can bring to bear on academic development.

The primary objective of research is to provide answers to questions and to provide meaning to life. Hence we can also assume that the social world can only be meaningfully understood from the perspective of the individuals who are intrinsic to the ongoing action being investigated. The premise from which I intend to contribute to the research is to acknowledge my 'unknowing', that is, by not relying on existing epistemological discourses to provide answers to academic development issues, but to hold them up to scrutiny as I unfold my intuitive understanding and more importantly, draw on the feedback of the learners who live the social realities.

Fortunately, the social science research paradigm has spawned a variety of approaches through which to analyze society. With regards to self-driven research into personal practice, it has evolved to provide a greater voice to practitioners to research their own interests as a means of improving praxis[29]. This opportunity has deviated from the way that traditional research is implemented. Bogdan and Bilken (1982:215) write that:

---

[29] A key term often associated with Critical Pedagogy. A common understanding of 'praxis' is that it is a complex activity involving an application, evaluation, reflection and then back to theory. Social transformation is the product of praxis at the collective level.

When we think of the word 'research', we are often like horses whose master has placed blinders on our eyes to cut out the peripheral vision as we travel down the road. One blinder, in this case, is our assumption that only people with years of training, housed in universities, research corporations, or government agencies, can conduct research. The other blinder is that research must always be nonpartisan, serving no particular cause. People in the 'real world' can also conduct research – research that is practical, directed at their own concerns and, for those who wish, a tool to bring about social change.

Autobiographical research, self-study, Action Research and practitioner research have all facilitated the actions of people in the 'real world' to conduct their own inquiry. From this perspective, personal life experiences, personal problems and personal histories can all be researched (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001:14).

As a practitioner-researcher, my lived experiences, personal observations and academic practice in academic development, form the kernel of the intended contribution to the research *corpus* within the higher education sector. Ultimately however, these collective observations are to foreground and make sense of the social realities of the learners in academic development, and how to empower them to effect successful social transformation.

The starting premise is based on the notion that there is no absolute, 'determinate' truth (Usher and Edwards, 1994: 9), but that there are multiple 'truths'. Hence the legitimacy of this contribution derives from the notion that all systems of knowledge are socially constructed, historically embedded and situated in a context (Scharmer, 2007; Carr and Kemmis, 1986). This informs me that reality is not static, but that it is vibrant in nature and hence constantly evolving. Recognizing and acknowledging the dynamic contextual factors impacting on our social reality, education cannot remain static, but needs to adapt and respond accordingly. It is within this realization that my intended contribution is contextualized. This current study aims to add to the literature in the following ways:

- Critically challenge the existing, stereotypical and reductionist notions
  of academic development[30];
- Assert the integral relationship between the learner and his/her
  learning environment;
- Highlight the role of consciousness in the construction of reality;
- Articulate the potential positive role of the social transformation
  model, Theory U, in academic development.

The intended contribution of this research project is to make a case for a different approach for bringing about social transformation. This approach is based on emerging research into the active role of the human subject in the transformation of his/her consciousness. This research has highlighted that neither consciousness nor the transformation thereof originates in isolation. One needs to be mindful of the ideological, cultural and socialization processes which influences a human being's awareness. Often our responses are as a result of these factors. Even thought is not entirely independent; it is the response of memory, knowledge and prior experience. Our 'egoic' self is handicapped by its experiences and hence subjected to its 'blind spots' – the taken for granted perspectives, which are the deeply embedded belief systems which emanate from our socialized experiences and which inform practice.

Hence the starting point of Theory U is to examine and challenge these 'blind spots' from the perspective of not only what happens 'out there', but also, what happens within us as practitioners; how we process what we perceive. Taleb (2007:8) aptly writes that the human mind suffers from three ailments, which he refers to the *triplet of opacity:*

- *The illusion of understanding, or how everyone thinks he knows what
  is going on in a world that is more complicated (or random) than they
  realize;*

- *The retrospective distortion, or how we can assess matters only after
  the fact;*

- *The overvaluation of factual information.*

---

[30] This refers to the commonly held belief that 'academic development' refers to smaller classes and more intensive subject specific tuition.

What this means is that model of academic development which has proliferated at tertiary institutions needs to accommodate complexity in its structure and content and that referring to past factual information might not necessarily equip this sector for the present or future. An example is that the current model is structurally oriented, that is, the emphasis is on providing more intensive subject-specific tuition to relatively small groups of learners from socio-economically and academically disadvantaged backgrounds. The notion of 'disadvantaged' has multiple meanings and is not consistently applied.

It is necessary to approach the apartheid project from a more critical perspective in order to have a more accurate understanding of the deeper malaise of 'disadvantaged' education. The conventional understanding of 'disadvantaged' education is with regards to deficiencies in educational resources. However, the notion of 'disadvantaged' is much more serious. The apartheid system enforced total subjugation – physical; economic; social; political; and emotional. All facets of the subject's life were dictated to according to the apartheid rules and norms, which were enforced through state institutions such as education. The more sinister role education played was to transform the consciousness of Black people whereby many collaborated in oppressing themselves (Abdi, 2001:236). The vociferous rejection by Black youth of apartheid education is what sparked the 1976 social unrest.

The complexity of the emerging situation in South African higher education requires that we not draw on conventional models nor prescribe simplistic or reductionist solutions, but that we recognize our 'unknowing'. From this perspective, we can begin to explore the future as it unfolds. This approach does not address deep-rooted psycho-emotive barriers to learning. For a more effective and sustainable transformation, there needs to be a dialogic process; an intrapersonal reflection based on intentionality and awareness through which to examine and challenge existing notions of learning or ontological status. This will ultimately result in an expansion of consciousness and will hence facilitate movement towards self-actualisation and self-awareness (Preece, 2003:249).

Based on the research undertaken in this project, the literature confirms that the interior ontological state of a subject is inextricably linked to the outer world (context) as we can see in the following:

> *The separation of the researcher (subject) and the phenomena under investigation (object) is not feasible. According to constructivists, the philosophical positions held by the researchers determine their findings.* (Mir *et al*, 2000:94)

Drawing on the constructivist philosophical tradition the intended contribution is also to further the understanding that an individual's concept of reality is constructed. Constructivism as a methodology[31] is theory dependent, that is, the theoretical position of the researcher informs how a problem is understood (Mir *et al*, 2000). This approach underpins the very notion of constructive transformation through positive action. The role of human agency in the social transformation process cannot be denied. Despite the pervasiveness and power of 'change' trends, their interpretation and manifestation is determined by human actors, who construct theory and cause these to 'ripple toward the outside, into culture and society' (Preece, 2003:250).

According to Mir *et al* (2000:941), 'Constructivists challenge the notion that research is conducted by impartial and detached researchers'. They view researchers as part of a network that creates knowledge and ultimately guides practice (Mir *et al*, 2000; Preece, 2003). The fact that constructivism locates the epistemological assumption of theory building within humans does not imply that a uniform understanding of reality will prevail. Based on emergent themes in current research, one could posit that the ability of self-intervention in theory construction is dependent on one's level of consciousness (Gidley, 2007).

Beck and Cowan (2006:8) develop the theme of 'evolving consciousness' by referring to the 'spiral' and 'adaptive' nature of human intelligence. This model postulates that human intelligences or 'memes', develop in response to life circumstances. Hence, each person's unique life circumstance will premeditate a different meme for different individuals.

The 'meme' concept has also been referred to by Blackmore (1998) who, based on groundbreaking research by Richard Dawkins, describes 'memes' as 'units of cultural transmission' that are propagated through imitation and replication. Imitation and replication are important ways of learning and do not detract from the inner *locus of control* of evolving consciousness, but emphasize the socio-locatedness of learning; that learning arises in a 'field of consciousness'.

By adopting a critically referential approach with regards to academic development in South African higher education, I wish to contribute to this field by thoroughly analyzing the merits of Theory U; how through its process of sensing, presencing and realizing, an authentic attempt at regenerating can emerge. It is hoped that this research will become a platform for further dialogue and research.

---

[31] A *methodology* is distinguished from a *method* in the following way, "a method is a tool or a technique that is used in the process of inquiry. In contrast, a methodology may be regarded as an intricate set of ontological and epistemological assumptions that a researcher brings to his or her work" (Prasad in Mir *et al*, 2000:944).

From my personal experience and from having observed the experiences of others, what has become patently clear is that the increasing complexity of life's challenges makes it vitally important for one to develop new insights and hence acquire innovative 'tools' to manage these complexities and not to be subjected to the hegemonic and power influences of others. Therefore it is necessary to assert that it is possible to co-create with learners attending academic development initiatives, the 'breakthroughs' (emotional, social and academic) which can help overcome the academic and personal challenges which might be encountered.

At the academic level, it is my intention to contribute to the emerging body of research that acknowledges the potential benefits of the Theory U application. At the professional level, I feel it important to empower graduates for the professional environment. Hence, the objectives of the research are not only to better understand the learning realities of learners from 'disadvantaged' socio-economic and educational backgrounds, but to explore and co-create with these learners the cognitive and affective 'tools' that could facilitate and enhance their journeys towards academic success and personal wellbeing.

This quest, to understand the social reality and its impact on academic success, motivated me to research fundamental epistemological and ontological issues, which range from how knowledge is defined, to how knowledge is disseminated, what outcomes are anticipated and the role that levels of consciousness play in the acquisition of knowledge.

1.6   Source of the PhD Journey: An autobiographical account

> *Research is a personal venture which, quite aside from its social benefits, is worth doing for its direct contribution to one's own self-realization. It can be taken as a way of meeting life with the maximum of stops open to get out of experience its most poignant significance, its most full-throated song.* (Mooney in Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001:13)

A common existential question in the minds of many is: How do we end up where we find ourselves? There are multiple causal factors, but suffice to state that each endeavour one engages in arises from an 'encounter', which has a personal impact of sufficient persuasion to propel one to act in a particular way. This could be a flash of insight, an existential dilemma, or an environmental catalyst, that sets in motion a series of processes, which also involve reflection and action. These processes are deeply

intertwined with the life experiences of the practitioner and hence one cannot separate the actor from the action and *vice versa*. Likewise the same logic applies to the research endeavour; one cannot separate the research from the researcher. There is a fundamental interconnectedness; an intimate 'dance' of intention, action and reflection. Life histories are central to what the researcher does and how he/she goes about doing it (Bullough, and Pinnegar, 2001:13).

The focus of this chapter is partly 'self-study', as well as to provide a brief autobiographical narrative that presents a contextual background against which to frame my motives to pursue the research. It sets out to trace some of the personal life experiences which have shaped my ontological makeup and by so doing, intends to confirm the legitimacy of the impact of personal histories on research endeavours.

As alluded to above, it is often at a moment of deep inner reflection that an epiphany arises; a lucid awareness which suddenly illuminates one's mind, and so it is with my PhD.

> *An existentialist orientation leads us to focus on who we are as teacher educators, the decisions that we make and the actions we take that construct who we are, and the acceptance of our responsibility for who we are. This leads us to study ourselves, not as navel-gazing, but to understand the way we are teacher educators and to change our ways of being teacher educators.* (Feldman, 2003:26)

Embarking on such a profoundly personal journey as this PhD, has its origins in my experiences with the plights of learners battling with transformation in tertiary institutions many years ago[32]. However, the manifestation of the intent only became clear as a distinct possibility when attending an experiential learning conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in the latter 1990s. Whilst having a brief *sojourn* on the banks of the Ljublaniça River, I realized that I wished to make a contribution to the *corpus* of knowledge in the field of academic development. This arose from the core focus of the conference, which was to interrogate 'learning experiences'. At this stage, I had had many years of experience in bringing awareness to the consciousness of young people in order to prepare them for various endeavours, be it in education, or the world of work. Hence I would aver that this PhD journey started much earlier and here it is necessary to reflect on some of my personal life experiences.

---

[32] I assisted in establishing a school in the late 1980s which catered for Black ex-political detainees who after their incarceration were not able to return to township schools.

Posing the question: "Where did this all start?" forces one to be reflective and to ponder the many life experiences and causal factors and how these have come to shape one's thinking and being. Also, one might be surprised at the variance from the beginning of the reflective journey to the end. And so it is with this PhD; what one sets out to achieve is not necessarily where one will end up. This pursuit is the culmination of a long and reflective journey, a journey which, like a river, has meandered its way along interesting causeways, often not of its choosing, traversing many obstacles; some of which it could flow over; others which it had to circumvent. It has now reached the ocean where it can deposit what it has accumulated along the way, pause, and then reconvene the journey.

My current life status is an amalgam of the numerous lived experiences that touched and shaped my life over the last approximately four decades. Some of these I was personally engaged in; others I observed at a distance, but they nevertheless had a profound impact. Insight into these lived experiences and how they shaped my ontological status will provide a clearer sense of the 'why' and 'how' of approaching this PhD thesis.

Early Childhood

My life started in Kimberley, a city in the arid Northern Cape; the barren, 'big sky' and sparsely populated region of South Africa which is famous for its discovery of diamonds on the banks of the Orange River. I was the 'middle child' born to my parents – my father, a bricklayer, who frequently had to work away from home and a stay-at-home mother, who kept home and hearth together with her sewing skills. Both parents espoused solid family values of love, discipline and togetherness. Education was highly prized despite the fact that neither had completed secondary schooling. Limited financial resources meant that my leisure time was spent roaming the *kopjes* (hills) in reflective thought, listening to Springbok Radio and patronizing the local library. All three activities contributed to an active imagination, an insatiable curiosity about life and a healthy interest in world affairs.

Before the age of four years, my family was forced to move twice as a result of the Group Areas Act and we finally settled not far from the Big Hole (a disused open-cast mine). Friday afternoons were punctuated by the anguished screams from 'illegal' mineworkers followed by the squeals of tires from the 'Black Jack' police vans in hot pursuit of these workers not in possession of Pass documents. I mention this because it was my first exposure as a child to the injustices of the time which, on reflection, would be one of the catalysts in my quest for social justice in later years.

My two siblings and I attended a mixed race primary school, Olympic Primary, where peculiarly, African children from the local Galeshewe Township were forced into Afrikaans medium classes[33] and the rest (Coloured, Indian and Chinese), attended the English medium classes. All this was very confusing and thought provoking for a young and impressionable child!

Teenage years

The rapid growth phases of us three siblings and my father's infrequent employment forced the family to seek greener pastures. When I was 13, my family relocated to the Western Cape, to the bustling Cape Flats suburb of Belgravia Estate, in Athlone. What I didn't realize then, was that this was to be one of the major turning points in my life.

Besides rampant gangsterism, Athlone was also famous for the high level of political activism that so characterized life on the Cape Flats in the mid-'70s. The defining events of 1976, which saw millions of school learners in violent protest against the apartheid system, in the words of William Blake, ended my 'songs of innocence'. I experienced first-hand the brutality of the apartheid government through its systematic and brutal suppression of the protests. This shaped my consciousness, forced me to become deeply introspective and hence shaped my political activism. As a result of this growing political awareness, at the tender age of 14, I was spirited away (by my parents) to what then appeared as an 'island of tranquility', Durban, in the former Natal Province, but the die was cast. I saw myself as an 'activist', what in Action Research parlance could be referred to as a 'change agent'. Fortunately my 'activist' nature embraced a broader perspective and extended beyond the boundaries of the political ideologically charged activities as practiced by my peers. I also believed in an alternate form of resistance, based on self-directed personal development, which could counter the 'mind control' the state wished to enforce.

I continued to agitate at the schools I attended in Durban, though being so far removed from the political hotbeds of the Cape Flats, also provided the space to reflect and evaluate my role as an activist. The many years of witnessing social injustice as a child came to the fore. I started to interrogate the effects of this from not only the perspective of the victim, but also the perpetrator. I slowly began to realize that in most cases both were victims; victims of their own perspectives as a result of their life circumstances. I began to understand the effects of injustice on the psyches of people and I wanted to

---

[33] It is important to note that Afrikaans was regarded as the 'language of the oppressor' and its enforced use was one of the key catalysts of the 1976 student uprisings.

effect change. Since many friends and acquaintances who had been in the struggle were either dead, in exile or incarcerated, I started to reframe my activist role to one which I considered a more empowering one. It was this that prompted me to become an educator.

From an initial interest in medical studies, I opted for education not only to subvert the effects of the apartheid system, but also to empower the victims through the power of knowledge and self awareness.

Early Adulthood and Professional Life

I entered the field of education as a Secondary School Teacher in 1985 and held this position until 1987. During this period the education system in South Africa, especially for Black South Africans, was a contested terrain. Schools were sites of struggle against the apartheid system and hence under the tight reign of the state. After rebelling against the stifling bureaucracy (with limited success) for three years, I resigned.

In 1988, I pursued my educational endeavours by assisting in establishing a privately funded community based school named 'Phambili' ('Forward' in isiZulu) that catered mainly for Black political ex-detainees. These were learners who had suffered traumatic experiences as a result of incarceration and whose lives were under threat due to ongoing political conflict in the township environments. Much of my educational activities were focused towards counselling and teaching life coping skills. Unfortunately due to adverse circumstances – funding and understaffing – the school closed after one year.

Fortuitously, some of the Phambili learners progressed to tertiary education and one of their sponsoring companies received word of my life skills teaching. In 1989 I was recruited by De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd to co-ordinate training activities and manage an Adult Education Centre at Finsch Mine, in the mining town of Lime Acres in the Northern Cape.   This role included initiating educational enrichment projects in the employee 'feeder' areas and hence I was able to collaborate with key stakeholders, including government, traditional leaders, educational service providers and corporate officials.

The corporate world exposed me to new and exciting challenges, most importantly, the relationship between tertiary institutions and the world of work.

Based on the success of the projects in the mining environment, I decided to consolidate my life skills training with efforts to prepare learners for the corporate world. I relocated back to Durban and joined what was then referred to as the University of Natal's Intensive Tuition for Engineers (UNITE) access programme for engineering students.

Research Interests

I am currently employed on a fulltime basis teaching Communication and Management Skills to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. From experience, feedback and successes with my students, it has become clear that self advancement and the realization of academic potential depends largely on learning which is engaged from a perspective of conscious awareness and with the intention to challenge inhibiting mental models. Drawing on my own interests in the contemplative traditions of Sufism, Zen Buddhism, *hatha yoga* and *tai chi*, I have integrated some of these principles into my teaching and have personally witnessed the positive outcomes. Much of my earlier interest in the field of social and personal transformation was informed by populist writers such as Napoleon Hill, Zig Ziglar, Anthony Robbins (renowned advocate of neurolinguistic programming), Dr Leo Buscaglia and more recently by Ken Wilbur, Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer. I acknowledge that some of these writers might not have presented theories which are academically verifiable. Nonetheless they have contributed to the notion of self-transformation and personal development, which have encouraged my interest in this field.

In summary, the introductory chapter provides a broad conceptual and contextual framework for the evolution of academic development in South African higher education. Further, it highlights the complex and systemic nature of transformation – from its macro origins, to its impact on the local context, its influence on the researcher, and its effects at the micro level of the learner. What is clear is that the human response – one of helplessness – to overwhelming transformation has to change. The chapter also briefly alludes to the emerging research in consciousness and social transformation models such as Theory U. These will be more comprehensively articulated in the research.

Chapter 2: Contextual, Historical and Critical Overview of Education in South Africa post-1994

> *Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through*
> *education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that a*
> *son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of*
> *a farm worker can become the president of a great nation. It is what*
> *we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates*
> *one person from another.*
>
> Nelson Mandela[34]

In many developing nations like South Africa, education has always been a powerful vehicle for social and personal development. It unlocks dreams, provides hope and through skills development, allows nations to flourish. Hence the above quotation highlights the reason why education is held in such high esteem and articulates clearly the motivation for its massification, particularly in the tertiary sector, during the latter part of the 20th century.

Whilst the previous chapter provided a broad theoretical narrative of transformation and its impact on education from a global perspective, this chapter will locate education centrally within the contexts of political and economic transformation as experienced in South Africa after 1994. Important and critical processes – political deliberations; policy documents – will be highlighted in so far as they contributed towards the shape of South African education policy.

Indeed, one of the most remarkable occurrences after the demise of apartheid and the onset of democracy was the robust engagements amongst educationists, politicians and development theorists, to scope the development agenda for a post-apartheid South Africa. This gave rise to a raft of white papers, green papers, policies and discussion documents. While many of these did not materialize into government policy, they nonetheless informed the development debate. Within the context of this thesis it is important to be aware of the above developments particularly from the perspective of how they influenced the education discourse.

---

[34]Internet source: http://thinkexist.com/quotation/education_is_the_great_engine_of_personal/152278.html

Since there is a prevailing perception of a direct correlation of a nation's higher education status and its economic development, education, specifically higher education, plays a powerful and pervasive role in shaping destinies, especially in emerging economies (like South Africa) where so much of a person's destiny is dependent on educational qualifications.

However, education has always been a contested terrain in South Africa (Angelis and Robinson, in Criticos, 1989:23) albeit that this was mainly between the state authorities and civil society. It is precisely because of this influential role of education that we need to be more vigilant regarding its intent and practice. Although it can prepare learners for the world of work and to become productive members of civil society, one can also argue that education has the potential to be used 'subversively', that is, to drive the government's political agenda.

When the Nationalist government assumed power in 1948, schooling was under the sole hegemony of the state and used as a major vehicle for the propagation of its ideology. Hence education was a primary target during the anti-government protests. Currently, with the focus on redress and reconstruction, it is to the schooling system that the new government has turned (Jansen and Sayed, 2001:341). There can be no doubt that governance and social cohesion are pursued through education. Hence it is important to acknowledge that education is not simply an activity that goes on in schools, but is an essential part of *governmentality* (Usher & Edwards, 1994).

In South Africa and indeed many parts of the world, it is evident that education policies are not implemented as the 'great engine of personal development', but as a tool to promote particular interests or ideologies (Toffler, 1970; Harrison, 2002). Usher and Edwards (1994: 8) highlight this in the following:

> *Modern forms of governance and social discipline are secured through education; in an important sense, they work through educating. In modernity, education replaces premodern coercion and subjugation.*[35]

---

[35] Michel Foucault, French philosopher, was very critical of the oppressive discourse of Modern education. Although he did not focus specifically on schools, he acknowledged the centrality of education in the construction of Modernity.

A contextual, historical and critical overview of the historical processes since 1994 provides a sequential trajectory as to how education is evolving in South Africa *vis-a-vis* national government's mandate on social and economic development. Implicit in this discussion will also be responses to the following important questions bearing on this thesis:

- What are we educating for?
- What is the role of academic development in higher education?
- How do we make education responsive to the total needs of the learner?
- What is the role of higher education in the development agenda?

Within the evolution of social transformation in South Africa and from a historical perspective, the education narrative has always been central to social, economic and political development. The fact that education is regarded as the panacea of the country's social and economic ills since the demise of apartheid cannot be underestimated. Education is held as one of the more strategic imperatives in post-apartheid development. It receives the major share of the fiscal budget, yet it remains one of the most contested of the government's development imperatives.

This chapter will provide a detailed and critical overview of the development of South African education policy in the 1990s, specifically from 1994 to 2000. It attempts to do so from an overarching perspective of the main policy documents, reports and legislation, as well as political idealism, which influenced education. Academic development will also be located within this educational *corpus*. Finally, this chapter will propose a coherent social transformation model to assist with social, personal and academic transformation.

To map the development of education policy, it is necessary to contextualise the momentous events that arose at the end of the 1980s and which set the scene for the dramatic changes which occurred in the 1990s.

The political deliberations between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Nationalist government in the late 1980s culminated in the most significant landmark in South Africa's social and political history in 1990. It was then that the State President, F W De Klerk, made the historic announcement in Parliament, to unban liberation organizations, including the ANC and to release its leaders from prison. This act set in motion a chain of events that altered the course of South Africa's

history and reached its crescendo with the first democratic elections and landslide win by the ANC in 1994.

In later years, with a new constitution firmly entrenched and a Bill of Rights in place, the focus has moved away from the political posturing of political parties. What is held up to scrutiny is the ANC government's ability to deliver on not only election promises, but to redress the wrongs of the past. The apartheid legacy was not only characterized by racial oppression, but also by a systematic process of underdevelopment.[36]

The process of development envisaged for South Africa was an integrated one, especially when cognizance is taken of the initiatives contained in the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)[37]. The cornerstone that underpinned much of the development initiatives was education. According to the then Minister of Education, Professor Bengu (Department of Education, White Paper, 1995):

> *Education and training are central activities of our society. They*
> *are of vital interest to every family and to the health and prosperity*
> *of our national economy. The government's policy for education*
> *and training is therefore a matter of national importance second to*
> *none.*

This key statement of intent laid the foundation for all subsequent educational policies and legislation.

Brief Overview of Historical Background (1990-1994)

The period ushering in the onset of democracy fits into definable eras. Jansen (1999) refers to the period 1990-1994 as a period of `policy positioning' in which different groups started to stake out broad policy positions in anticipation of democratic, non-racial elections and a change of government. Such groups included the ANC, the apartheid government, the private sector, the labour movements, and student organizations.[38] During this period, any semblance of education policy formulation was at best

---

[36] Virtually all facets of development – housing; education; health – were neglected for Black people under apartheid rule.

[37] The Reconstruction and Development Programme sets out a comprehensive and integrated post-apartheid development rationale.

[38] Jansen outlines the most notable documents as the ANC's `Yellow Book' outlining A Policy Framework for Education and Training; the apartheid government's A Curriculum Model for South Africa and the Education Renewal Strategy; the series of

tumultuous. This can be ascribed to a number of reasons: firstly, after the unbanning of the liberation movements and the pending `death' of apartheid, an enormous task lay ahead, namely, preparations for the first democratic elections.

A second reason was the impossible task of trying to anticipate the form of state that would emerge from the negotiated settlement between the liberation movements and the Nationalist Party. Even after the announcement of the historic political changes by State President FW de Klerk on 2 February 1990, the crisis in Black education (student boycotts and stayaways) which had been evident since the 1976 Soweto uprisings continued unabated (Christie, 1990:2).

A third reason was the pressure on the new government to `do the right thing'. There were high expectations from the local populace and keen scrutiny from the international community.

A fourth reason (and probably the most important one) was the key feature of ANC politics – that of popular consultation. The RDP policy framework, which was released in 1994, is a notable example of this. This document was the result of many months of consultation within the ANC, its alliance partners and wider society. In 1994 after the election victory ANC leader Nelson Mandela stated:

> *We are about to assume the responsibilities of government and must*
> *go beyond the Charter to an actual programme of government. This*
> *RDP document is a vital step in that process. It represents a*
> *framework that is coherent, viable and has widespread support.[39]*

The key role players who participated in the education policy debates from 1990-1994 were the following: the ANC, the apartheid government, the private sector, organized labour and student organizations. Although the mass-based organizations including the ANC had a history of consultation within similar structures, this could not be assumed to be the case for the Nationalist government and the private sector. The latter stakeholders were accountable to themselves during the apartheid years. Nevertheless, significant contributions were made. These included the National Education Crisis Committee (a broad alliance of civic organizations, student, teacher and labour movements) National

---

publications by the Private Sector Education Council calling for increasing vocationalization of the curriculum; the labour movement's National Training Strategy Initiative, produced with business and industry; and the National Education and Policy Investigation (NEPI) publications of the National Education Co-ordinating Committee, consisting of allied organizations of students, teachers, workers and parents.

[39] Mentioned in the *Preface* to the RDP document.

Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) publications, the apartheid government's Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) I and II, a series of publications by the private sector on vocationalization of the curriculum and the labour movement's National Training Strategy Initiative.

In essence, these contributions advanced the education debate in the following ways: The NEPI publications established a values framework within which a post-apartheid education policy could be conceived. The following principles (NEPI Curriculum Report, 1992:3) underpinned the report: non-racism (entails moving away from the racially-based curriculum and curriculum development practices of apartheid); non-sexism (considering gender implications); a unitary system (advocated establishing a single curriculum instead of the racially divided policies of apartheid); and redress (this would include redressing the historical imbalances in curriculum resources).

The ERS (I and II) according to Jansen (2000) emphasized vocational education rather than academic education and similarly, the business community's recommendations also leaned towards a curriculum which advocated technical and vocational education in line 'with the needs of a modernizing economy' (Jansen, 2000:12).

Short descriptive chronology of main policy documents, reports and legislation which influenced education since 1994

After the landslide election victory (27 April 1994) and the establishment of the Government of National Unity, the ANC could dedicate itself seriously to education policy generation. This process followed the following pattern: the Department of Education would prepare a policy document on which they would brief the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee. This document would appear as a Green Paper, a discussion paper open to public input, which could then develop into a White Paper (formal government policy).

After 1994 many reports and research papers were produced. Not all of these became green papers or white papers, but still had a profound influence on subsequent policy development. One also needs to heed the impact of global developments on South Africa post 1994. For the first time since 1948 South Africa was able to shake off the pariah status enforced since apartheid and take its rightful place on the international stage.   This made South Africa susceptible to influences of global agencies such as the

International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the powerful economic policies of the 'First World'.

1994: The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)

While it is less acknowledged in current policy formulations, the RDP was and probably still is the main ground laying policy document which pointed the way forward for education and general development in South Africa after 1994. The RDP document steered close to the ANC Freedom Charter and laid a comprehensive ground plan for a range of development issues facing the 'new' South Africa. A key focus (amongst others) of the RDP is the development of human resources through education. The RDP states the following:

> *The RDP is a people-centred programme – our people must be involved in the decision-making process, in implementation, in new job opportunities requiring new skills, and in managing and governing our society. This will empower our people but an education and training programme is crucial. We must develop an integrated system of education and training that provides equal opportunities to all irrespective of race, colour, sex, class, language, age, religion, geographical location, political or other opinion. It must address the development of knowledge and skills that can be used to produce high-quality goods and services in such a way as to enable us to develop our cultures, our society and our economy.*
> (RDP, 1994:8)

The RDP went further to advise on the governance of education through a single ministry, the decentralization of decision-making through empowering provincial departments to plan and manage all aspects of education and training, as well as recommending a statutory South African Qualifications Authority with responsibility for accreditation, certification and the maintenance of national standards.

As can be seen, the RDP was a groundbreaking document. It provided a very clear, albeit generic focus for education. Much of its recommendations were embodied in subsequent White Papers.

Coupled with the RDP were 22 Presidential Lead Projects to spearhead development. One of these, launched in May 1994, was the Culture of Learning (COL) Programme. The purpose and influence of this was the following (Jansen, 2000:43):

> *To restore a culture of learning in education institutions. The programme also caters for physical improvement of school buildings as well as quality of learning by targeting improvement of school guidance.*

The significance of the Culture of Learning Programme must also be seen in the context of 'normalizing' schooling particularly in the townships, where schools were the 'cultivating grounds' for anti-apartheid activism.

1995: White Paper on Education and Training

The Education White Paper of 1995 was probably one of the most important to be produced by the Government of National Unity. From a government which was celebrating its first year in office, it was a 'clarion call' to make an indelible mark on governance, by sculpting the landscape at least in values, if not in detail, for subsequent policy documents. As the erstwhile education minister Bengu, (1995) explained:

> *South Africa has never had a truly national system of education and training and it does not have one yet. This policy document describes the process of **transformation**[40] in education and training which will bring into being a system serving all our people, our new democracy, and our Reconstruction and Development Programme.*
>
> *Our message is that education and training must change. It cannot be business as usual in our schools, colleges, technikons and universities. The national project of reconstruction and development compels everyone in education and training to accept the challenge of creating a system which cultivates and liberates the talents of all our people without exception. This policy document*

---

[40] My highlight, to emphasize the transformative aspect of education as perceived by the government.

describes the process of transformation in education and training which will bring into being a system serving all our people, our new democracy, and our Reconstruction and Development Programme.

Although the White Paper of 1995 provided guidelines on a comprehensive range of educational issues from budgets to governance, the essence of the document can be condensed primarily to one key concept, namely, *transformation* (including equity and redress). The strength of the document was that it set in motion the mammoth task of transforming South African education in totality. Its key weakness, though, was that it was short on detail on how to plan and implement in order to achieve its objectives.

The notion of 'transformation', which is the key theme in the White Paper of 1995, requires critical analysis in order to establish whether it is validated in subsequent policy documents. This is due to the fact that for the first time in South Africa's history, a government had the mandate to plan the development of an education and training system which could benefit all the people of the country. This mission if successful would fulfil the vision of the Freedom Charter to "open the doors of learning and culture to all"[41].

The White Paper of 1995 provides a clear development path (including anomalies) of the education project – mapping its historical legacy, as well as its future mission. This White Paper according to Jansen (2000:18) was the most important to emerge during the first year of the new government and provided the basic policy framework within which all subsequent education was to be understood. As noted in the White Paper of 1995:

This document is a `white paper' which describes the first steps in policy formation by the Ministry of Education in the Government of National Unity. It locates education and training within the national Reconstruction and Development Programme, and outlines the new priorities, values and principles for the education and training system.

---

[41] Reminiscent of the ANC's Freedom Charter.

Besides being a very comprehensive document which attempted to prescribe policy for all the important facets of education such as budgets, governance, etc, probably one of its enduring achievements is the fact that the ostensibly polarized members of the opposing political parties in parliament reached consensus about its contents. Of all the subsequent white papers, the White Paper on Education and Training was the most encompassing in scope.

1996: White Paper on Science and Technology

After the release of the first white paper, subsequent policy documents appeared in quick succession. One of these was the White Paper on Science and Technology.

Science and technology are internationally considered to be central to improving the quality of life and economic stimulation. The core vision of this white paper was the following:

> *The conceptualization of a national system of innovation which seeks to harness the diverse aspects of science and technology through the various institutions where they are developed practised or utilized. The policy thrusts of this White Paper are in harmony with the White Paper on Education and Training in its identification of investment in mathematics, science and technology as a fundamental goal.*

The year 1996 also saw the South African Schools Act passed. This Act made education compulsory for all school going aged children.

1997: Education White Paper 3 – A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education

The release of the White Paper 3 of 1997 saw a significant shift from the generic, values-based writings of the previous White Paper. White Paper 3 focused specifically on the political transformation of higher education:

In South Africa today, the challenge is to redress past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities (White Paper 3: 1.1).

An important observation in White Paper 3 is that like the RDP, the transformation of education is contextualized within the broader political, economic and social transition. This includes the pursuit of political democracy, social justice and more equitable economic restructuring. However, albeit that these ideals were clearly articulated, the White Paper was short on practical implementation. What we do need to acknowledge though is the clarification of the context within which higher education was to function. Whereas previous policy documents focused on redressing the legacy of apartheid, this document also acknowledges the influences emanating from globalization and global economic integration.

Due to the vital role (skills generation; employment creation) expected of higher education, the government was keenly involved in its transformation. At the launch of the National Plan for Higher Education (2001), erstwhile president, Thabo Mbeki noted:

Our universities and technikons are expected to play a leading role in contributing to the development of an information society in South Africa and the region, both in terms of skills development and research. Higher education is expected to contribute to the creation of a learning society that draws on people of all ages and from all walks of life and gives them the opportunity to advance and develop themselves, both intellectually and materially. Importantly, all our universities and technikons must be the powerhouses for the development of a critical mass of black intellectuals and researchers.

It is important to note that transformation of higher education is ongoing. Apart from increased government subsidies to promote science, engineering and technology research, various tertiary institutions have also commenced with their own transformative initiatives, for example, the University of KwaZulu-Natal has an active employment equity programme to attract academics from the previously disadvantaged sectors of the population and of course the implementation of academic

support programmes. The transformation of higher education was bolstered by the Higher Education Act of 1997.

1998: Education White Paper 4 – A Programme for the Transformation of Further Education and Training

The year 1998 was a significant year for education policy. It saw the release of Education White Paper 4 – A Programme for the Transformation of Further Education and Training; the enactment of the Further Education and Training Act, the pronouncement of Curriculum 2005 (incorporating Outcomes Based Education) and the appointment of Professor Kader Asmal as the Minister of Education.

In an attempt to enhance job entry and skills development, the White Paper 4 provides a vision and policy framework for a nationally co-ordinated system of Further Education and Training.   The policy is designed to promote the integration of education and training and enhance learner mobility, in line with the requirements of the National Qualifications Framework.

The focus on tangible skills outcomes seemed to be the motivation for Curriculum 2005 and Outcome Based Education. It was a bold attempt by Minister Bengu to revitalize education by making it more 'skills based'. Jansen (2000:24) describes it as follows:

> *It offered a new approach to education in which learning assumed prominence over teaching; in which statements of well-defined outcomes replaced a curriculum obsessed with content coverage and completion rather than performance-based achievement; and in which pedagogy was characterised by greater interaction and open-endedness rather than the authority-driven, fact-based education inherited from apartheid. Learning materials replaced textbooks; continuous assessment replaced one-off, high stakes examinations; learner-centredness replaced teacher-centredness; small-group learning replaced large group tuition; and success-based instruction replaced an assessment system focused on failure.*

Minister Asmal commenced his term of office with what can be regarded as a national audit combined with extensive consultations with stakeholders in the educational field. This effort culminated in the *Tirisano* (working together) campaign which heralded a significant attempt at national level, to mobilize all stakeholders involved in education and training.

From *Tirisano*'s consultative process, nine priority areas were identified. These incorporated co-operative government; literacy training; community involvement in the education process; improving physical infrastructure; developing the quality of teaching corps; ensuring the success of learning through outcomes based education; developing an education system compatible with the social and economic needs of the 21st century; developing a higher education system which will equip learners for the intellectual demands of the 21st century; and dealing with the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

A second major step by Minister Asmal, was to establish a committee to critically review Curriculum 2005. The outcome of this was 'A South African Curriculum for The Twenty First Century – Report of The Review Committee On Curriculum 2005' under the headship of Professor Linda Chisholm. This document was released on 31 May 2000 and provided a comprehensive critique of Curriculum 2005 with recommendations.

2000: A South African Curriculum for the Twenty First Century – Report of the Review Committee on Curriculum 2005

Many of the preceding education policies focused on specific technical aspects of education. The report by the Review Committee on Curriculum 2005 essentially re-orientated education policy to the values embodied in the RDP. It states the following:

> *The Report is based on the view that curriculum should be steered by principles that promote personal and social development and transformation for the 21st century. The social goals of social justice, equity and development are pursued by confronting a dual challenge: The challenge of the past and moving beyond the legacy of apartheid; the challenge of the future and developing a curriculum that will provide a platform for the knowledge, skills and values for innovation and growth, and cultural creativity and tolerance for an African Renaissance. (2000:2)*

Apart from the re-orientation, the primary focus of the Review Committee was to evaluate and make recommendations on the controversial Curriculum 2005 and Outcomes Based Education.

The above short descriptive chronological outline merely points to the key policy documents and legislation that shaped education policy after 1994. It is important to note that this chronology is by no means an absolute record. The debates around education were vigorous and there were many less high profile but no less significant education position papers, which informed education policy thinking.

By the year 2000, South Africa educational policy had matured significantly – from the early days of vague educational rhetoric to more defined recommendations. The *Tirisano* campaign was a bold move by the new Minister of Education, the results of which will be felt for years to come.

Shortcomings Underpinning Educational Policy

The raft of policy documents within a relatively short period of time is indicative of the political, economic and social uncertainties of the time, compounded by the expectations from the international community as a new democratic system of governance took root. Thus, since education policy cannot be separated from the social, economic and political contexts within which it is located, what has been particularly prominent in the formulation process, has been its dynamism – its responsiveness to the emerging social context. The policy promulgations after 1994 could not, however, accommodate the unpredictable changes of subsequent years. Tensions emanating from the unrealized expectations were therefore inevitable. Jansen (2000:51) captures this succinctly in the following:

> *South Africa's fascination with new policy statements, rather than*
> *their implementation, may continue to constitute the dominant mode*
> *of policy engagement in education. Dramatic policy announcements*
> *and sophisticated policy documents continue to make no or little*
> *reference to the modalities of implementation.*

As Jansen points out, most of the policy documents were heavy on political symbolism, but light on detail; there was scant information or structural guidelines for implementation. This could be one of the overriding reasons for the poor record of service delivery pertaining to education.

With so much emphasis on transformation and redress, the policies were too retrospective in that they focused too much on the legacy of the past, rather than on developing an educational system for the

future. None of the policy documents allude to the fact that we are living in a world of emerging complexity; and that the socio-economic, political and ecological challenges are becoming increasingly multifaceted and hence require an alternative approach. Toffler (1972:354) captures this aptly in the following statement:

> *Our schools are facing backward toward a dying system, rather than*
> *forward to the emerging new society.*

Education and knowledge should be tools to expand humanity's adaptive capacities and hence should be proactive and innovative, rather than stagnant and reactive.

The post-apartheid policy framework still laboured under a Modernist mindset, which apart from the transformation imperative, served the needs of an emerging industrial society. The Modernist educational agenda remained – to prepare workers to sustain the prevailing economic system.

Years after the pronouncements of the White Paper policy documents, there remains a perception that education is still in the doldrums.   This is based on the consistent dismal annual matriculation results; the teacher shortage crisis; dysfunctional schools; the closure of teacher training colleges; and the AIDS pandemic. Fedderke (1999:1) puts this into context:

> *Every year December and January bring with them predictable*
> *refrains in South Africa: the schooling system again is forced to*
> *report poor performance in its showpiece output statistic.*
> *Matriculation pass rates plumb yet more abysmal depths in some*
> *provinces. In yet others improvements in the matriculation pass*
> *rates are of an order that lacks all credibility – at least sufficiently*
> *so to lead to their being overturned six months later at considerable*
> *cost to pupils, teachers and tertiary institutions.*

This begs the question: What has happened since the White Paper of 1995? A number of probable answers emerge:

- The obvious one is the total underestimation of the enormity of the transformative process;

- No specifics were issued as to how the transformation process was to be implemented;

- No proper audit was carried out to cost in financial (or other) terms, the process of educational transformation;

- There was insufficient human capacity in terms of skills to undertake the task;

- The government was handicapped in so far as how much it could spend.

The macro-economic framework also had a major impact. Through a closer working relationship with the IMF and the World Bank, the South African government had to adhere to fiscal discipline. One of the main macro-economic policies which impacted on government investing in education was the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. According to Jansen (2000:59):

> *The adoption of GEAR [42] in June 1996 as macro-economic policy effectively put a cap on government spending. The reduction in state expenditure was one of the recurring themes of state departments, led by the Finance Portfolio, in an effort to ensure fiscal discipline. Despite the claims that GEAR was also about equity and redistribution, in practice the goal of macro-economic policy after apartheid was principally to ensure that the fundamentals are in place. In the case of education, this meant that no significant new funding would be allocated to this portfolio.*

There are many references in the various policy documents to redress and equity. However, the criticisms are valid; besides the political posturing, not much detail is provided on how equity and redress is to be achieved and in particular, how academic development is to be implemented.

What also becomes apparent is that the first White Paper was a 'political' document with a leaning towards ideals or 'political symbolism' rather than practical implementation. In the words of Jansen (2000:48),

---

[42] The GEAR macro-economic strategy recommended that state enterprises, traditional havens of employment, be privatized.

The making of education policy in South Africa is best described as a struggle for the achievement of a broad political symbolism that would mark the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid society. We search in vain for a logic in policy-making connected to any serious intention to change the practice of education 'on the ground'. Every single case of education policy-making demonstrates, in different ways, the preoccupation of the state with settling policy struggles in the political domain rather than in the realm of practice.

One can understand the need for political posturing.   The post-apartheid government had to embark on a concerted campaign to convince the world that it was committed to democratic governance and transformation which is in keeping with international civil norms.[43]

However, it is disconcerting to note the seeming inability to implement 'on the ground'. The review of Curriculum 2005 and OBE are distinct examples[44].   According to the Review Committee, implementation was confounded by amongst others:

- *Inadequate orientation, training and development of teachers;*
- *Shortages of personnel and resources to implement and support Curriculum 2005;*
- *A skewed curriculum structure and design.*

The perception of inability to deliver on the ground represents the first tension between the White Paper of 1995 and subsequent education policy documents. The White Paper of 1995 was essentially a 'positioning' paper – representing a coup for the Government of National Unity (GNU).   The GNU was still in a 'honeymoon' phase and could afford to project an ideal.   The subsequent policies were much more specific in intent – to transform higher education; and advance further education and training. The 'tension' arises from the inability of subsequent education policy to meet the ideals of the first white paper.

---

[43] An example here is our constitution, purported to be one of the most 'progressive' internationally.

[44] See also Jansen's critique on OBE entitled `Why OBE will fail'.

Financial considerations were also one of the biggest obstacles to the implementation of effective transformation. The legacy of apartheid left in its wake not only much administrative duplication through the ethnically-based education departments and educational institutions, but also an economy which through years of mismanagement and international sanctions, was in dire straits.

As mentioned earlier, the White Paper of 1995 was not explicit on details, especially on how to fund transformation. It provided certain guidelines, but these were not necessarily congruent with reality. As a document which accentuates the values of the RDP, the focus was on redressing the legacy of apartheid. Subsequent policy documents did however indicate a shift.

'New African' Values Impacting on Education in South Africa

In an address to the Afrikanerbond (1999), Thabo Mbeki stated:

> *The establishment of a democracy in our country through our first elections in 1994 and the recent re-affirmation and consolidation of our democratic ideals through our second successful elections has meant the liberation of the entire South African society from the mindset of the apartheid past, its laws, its insidious impositions on the mind, the body and the soul.*
>
> *More so than ever before we are liberated from the limitations it placed on all our lives. For the first time we are free to contemplate what it means to be South African, what it means to be African at the dawn of a new century, what it means to be living in a changing global reality and be able to meet the new demands of these times as they unfold before our very eyes and in our lives.*

The attainment of democracy in South Africa did not signify the end of the liberation struggle. Within the ANC, there was a realization that for peace and prosperity to exist in South Africa, there needs to be peace and prosperity in the rest of Africa as well.

The values embedded and promoted in South African education policy, centre mainly on redress, transformation and nation-building. An example to highlight the nation-building component is the Report on Moral Regeneration (July 2000). This report articulates the role of education as follows:

> *A democracy such as ours, which has emerged from the apartheid*
> *ashes, should be founded on sound moral values that will inculcate*
> *in each of us a sense of national pride, oneness and commitment to*
> *the common good. Moral education is already included in the*
> *school curriculum. This has to be highlighted and implemented as a*
> *long term investment.*

There seems to be a realization that nation building cannot be generated in isolation, but is intrinsically linked to usurping the legacy of colonization, which systematically distorted the historical achievement of Black people, resulting in negative self-image and low self-esteem. Africanist mathematician, Sipho Seepe (2000:3) stated:

> *Engaging the inevitable globalization of the 21st century requires a*
> *confidence in not only Africa's economic potential, but also in its*
> *capacity to participate as a scientific, technological, and cultural*
> *equal in this enterprise.*

This makes a profound assertion about Africa's potential from an 'alternative' perspective; not as a Fourth World continent labouring under the 'digital divide', but from the perspective of a continent whose rich cultural capital and history has become distorted and usurped by a legacy of colonization.

South Africa's unique history has presented unique challenges. Racism, colonization and systematic state oppression, has spawned multiple and dynamic educational problems. Insomuch as there is a desire to remain competitively globally, there is increasing realization that basic issues – textbook delivery, curriculum development, and staffing and management issues – need to be addressed.

The technological revolution, which is embedding itself globally is also reflected in South African education policy, but until such time as the basic needs are met, will probably not be significantly represented in the state-funded schools.

Besides the populist clichés such as 'transformation', a new term 'African Renaissance' has entered the fray. This term coined by former South African President Mbeki (1999) eludes definitive description. In essence, it alludes to restoring the dignity of Black people on the African continent. African values

such as 'ubuntu' (humanness) which are embodied in the African Renaissance can best be disseminated *via* the education curriculum and since a curriculum is produced within a social, cultural and historical context, much will have to be done in the classroom to advance Africanization. As Seepe (2000:57) states:

> *While much work has been achieved at the symbolic level, much more work is required in the area of psychological rehabilitation, cultural affirmation, economic emancipation and intellectual independence. Prominence should be given to questions dealing with the type of society envisioned, the kind of knowledge, skills and values required for cultural, societal and economic development.*

Scoping the Way for Academic Development in the Higher Education Sector

The amalgam of policy documents since 1994 captures the vibrancy of the policy shaping processes and the political and developmental intent of the incumbent government. Not only did it revitalize education in South Africa, it also provided the genesis for the establishment and implementation of academic development initiatives in the higher education sector. The origination and implementation of academic development initiatives were noble institution-driven attempts to translate broad policy statements to practical implementation plans; something which the policy documents were short on, and hence aid the government in its skills redress and equity objectives.

However, faced with complex challenges, it became clear that changing from a pre-to a post-apartheid system would be an arduous task. Undoing a prescriptive and highly bureaucratic system, which had deeply entrenched authoritarian and intolerant values, would require a significant and total overhaul of the entire educational system (Jansen and Sayed, 2001:343). Included in this overhaul was the need to assess the appropriateness of the curriculum in meeting the needs of learners not only on academic development programmes, but also in the industrial sector; for example, the need for non-academic skills training is confirmed by Mills (1996:2) of De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited in the following:

> *During the late 1980's, as greater numbers of students were showing some success in progressing through 'bridging' and through subsequent years of study, there was a growing awareness that although these students were developing academic coping skills, many*

of them were displaying inadequacies in other areas, such as interpersonal skills and self-management skills. Not only did this inhibit the development of fuller academic potential, but also impacted negatively on the bursars' ability to adapt to the conditions and the requirements of the world of work.

The need for non-academic skills in parallel with academic skills is clear. However there appears to be no attempt to approach academic development from this perspective of exploring the redress of the non-academic skills in which the transformation of consciousness would be included.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 0f 1996), states in Section 29 (1), that everyone has the right:

- *To a basic education, including adult basic education;*
- *To further education which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.*

Although enshrined in the Constitution, this ideal is difficult to implement because the education project cannot be viewed in isolation. It has to be considered in relation to the overall development strategy in South Africa, which largely depends on government priorities, macro-economic policy and available resources.

Bearing in mind the slow pace of real and effective transformation one cannot but heed the criticisms by Jansen in which he regards education policy as being focused more on 'political symbolism' rather than delivery. The issues which still seem to retard delivery appear to be mainly logistical in nature such as: lack of an implementation plan; personnel needs; poorly trained teachers; lack of infrastructure; inappropriate curricula; budgetary constraints. These challenges by no means imply that that there is lack of intent or political will to address the delivery challenges. A more plausible reason is the lack of capable human capacity. Of significance here is the fact that in 1994, 46% of African teachers, 29% of Coloured teachers, 7% of Indian teachers and 1% of white teachers were un(der)qualified (Arnott and Chabane in Jansen and Sayed, 2001:343). This has major implications for the abilities and capacities of teachers to execute the tasks required to implement the changes that were required post-1994.

The lack of human capacity and resources can to some degree be addressed through partnerships. A notable development post-1994 was the establishment of partnerships particularly between government and the corporate sector. Apart from establishing interest groups such as Prisec (Private Sector Educational Council), business has increasingly also made funding – capital projects and bursaries – available for educational purposes. Academic development programmes at many institutions of higher learning in South Africa were initially funded from the corporate sector. This includes the Engineering Bridging Unit at the former University of Natal and the Pre-University Bursary Scheme at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The South African constitutional imperative of enshrining education as an inalienable right, the political objective of bringing about transformation through increasing access and equity and the emergence of collaborative partnerships with the private sector, provided fertile ground and a rich opportunity for the establishment of academic development initiatives. Tertiary institutions responded enthusiastically and based on their unique circumstances and resources, academic development programmes, rich in diversity, were implemented; the common thread was that these subscribed to the broad objective of maximizing the academic performance of disadvantaged students (Agar, 1992).

However, the educational challenges mentioned by Fedderke (1999) remain as acute if not more so in 2009. Most tertiary institutions, such as UKZN, are still mired in problems of low throughput and high failure rates particularly with regards to Black learners from socio-economic and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. This situation points to a critical omission in all the policy documents discussed earlier – a lack of detail and guidance regarding the implementation of academic support. There was no national consensus as to how academic support was to be managed and this problem was further compounded by limited government funding. This resulted in vastly different approaches determined by each institution's unique agenda and resources. A case in point is UKZN's UNITE Programme.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal's Intensive Tuition for Engineers (UNITE) Academic Development Programme

In 1988 in anticipation of a looming engineering skills crisis[45], the Engineering Bridging Unit (a precursor to UNITE) was established as a joint initiative between the Anglo American Corporation of

---

[45] Large numbers of White technically skilled South Africans emigrating and the dearth of Black technically skilled personnel.

South Africa Ltd and then University of Natal. The specific mandate was to recruit Black learners who met the Engineering Bridging Unit's entrance criteria, but who were from socio-economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, for engineering studies. Once admitted to University, the process subjected them to an academic remediation programme which included intensive tuition in the 'critical' subjects (mathematics, physical science and English). It was believed that the sustained and effective implementation of this model would contribute towards academic success and hence address the skills shortage and the racial imbalances in the engineering industry.

Although initially presented as a 'bridging' option, in 1994, after research into student performance and wide consultation within the university community, the Engineering Bridging Unit was restructured to become UKZN's UNITE academic development programme. The initial academic curriculum of UNITE deviated significantly from the previous model in that it provided credits in Engineering Drawing and Mathematics. Later, the curriculum developed further to become a more holistic curriculum with a greater emphasis on reflective learning, collaborative learning, life skills training and the availability of mentoring. This was based on the realization that ontological awareness and non-academic skills played a vital role in academic success.

The UNITE Programme is primarily a developmental teaching and learning initiative which adheres to the broad objective of academic development which is to maximize the academic performance of socio-economically and educationally disadvantaged students (Agar, 1992). The Programme is located within the Faculty of Engineering at UKZN with accountability to the Engineering Faculty Board, the Dean of Engineering and to its funders. It is adequately resourced – it has access to a full range of teaching/learning facilities such as lecture and tutorial rooms, computer and language laboratories – and attracts generous bursary funding for its students.

The staffing component consists of full and part-time members; all contracted for specific academic duties. Included are residence mentors, who assist in academic and social problem-solving at the residences.

The UNITE Programme provides a full complement of subjects to prepare learners for engineering study. These are offered as credit bearing as well as non-credit (foundation level). Current subjects which are credit bearing are Mathematics and Engineering Drawing. The foundation subjects are: Chemistry, Physics, Mechanics, Supplementary Mathematics and Communication & Life Skills.

UNITE Programme: Brief Description and Outline of Teaching and Learning Methodology

What distinguishes the UNITE Programme as an academic development initiative from the conventional mainstream courses, is its holistic and experiential approach to teaching and learning. Not only is intensive tuition provided in science and engineering oriented subjects, but these are supplemented with intensive life skills training which includes critical thinking and reflection. Through interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogical processes, learners are encouraged to challenge their ontological and epistemological assumptions and where necessary, to reconstruct these in alignment with their academic objectives. Underpinning much of the learning activities is introspection and reflection as a method of facilitating transpersonal development.

It is important to note that the progressive changes to the UNITE epistemology were not prescribed by government education policy, but came as a result of expertise acquired experientially over years and through critical reflection on practice. In this period, academic development models such as UNITE evolved to address their own needs. Teaching and learning approaches included the importance of addressing non-academic factors impacting on learning. A further development was to engage the learner in his or her own learning praxis through a range of reflexive activities.

The Academic Impact of UNITE

Since inception, UNITE has impacted positively on the academic performance of its learners who responded well to its teaching and learning methodology. Through a systemic assessment of the needs of its learners, UNITE has evolved a teaching and learning model underpinned by epistemological theory and praxis which is relevant to its teaching and learning needs. The notion that learning can be constructed through active intervention is strongly emphasized at UNITE. Through problem-based learning, collaborative projects and regular feedback at which positive outcomes are affirmed a proactive and confident approach to learning is gradually inculcated.[46]

As an academic development programme which is aligned to the Engineering Faculty, core to the UNITE curriculum is the 'unpacking' and practical application of scientific/engineering principles through experiential activities. Learners are exposed to practical engineering projects in which to apply their learning skills. These include the following: tower building, kite design, steam car and paper jet

---

[46] It is not surprising that for many years in succession, UNITE learners received the Dean's Commendation for Academic Excellence in mathematics.

design. Learning to apply skills within a practical and collaborative framework is a valuable outcome. However commensurate with the ability to apply, is the ability to reflect on praxis. Becoming critical learners with regular reflection to improve practice is an ongoing pursuit, which often results in changes in learning habits, the acquisition of new skills and the better understanding of self.

What is interesting to note (see Table 2), is that academic performance gradually tapered off in the mainstream where conventional teaching methods were applied[47].

Table 2. Mainstream performance comparison between cohort of 1995 UNITE-'Disadvantaged Black' Students and cohort of 1996 Direct entry 'Black' Mainstream Students. Year of entry for both groups of students is 1996.
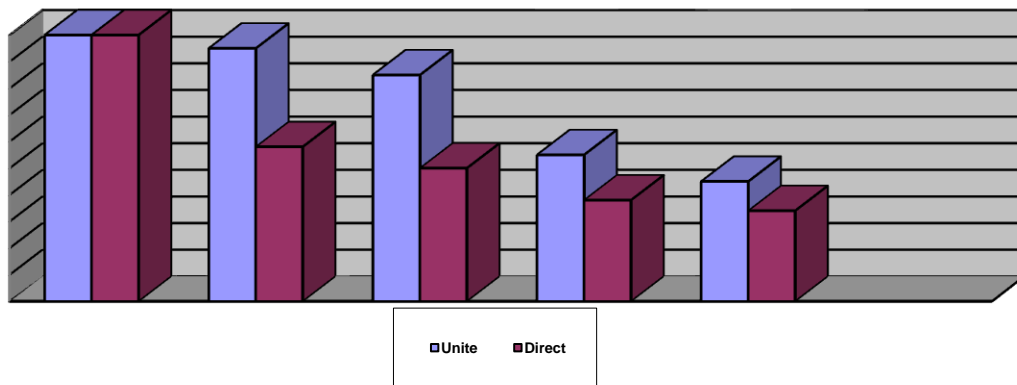
	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th Year	5th Year
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
1995 Unite Students	20	19	17	11	9
Students in System	100%	95%	85%	55%	45%
1996 Direct Entry	50	29	25	19	17
Students in System	100%	58%	50%	38%	34%

(Source: Division of Management Information, University of KwaZulu-Natal)

---

[47] See Progression Profile, page 31.

The above empirical data show improved performance and lower attrition rates of former UNITE learners in the mainstream as compared to their direct entry counterparts, despite the fact that UNITE learners enter university with significantly lower admission points and that the UNITE academic development programme is only a one-year intervention.

Although no exhaustive empirical research has been conducted to fully investigate all the causal factors for academic success, anecdotal feedback through focus-group discussions have highlighted increased awareness in learners of their learning deficits, being able to shed identified destructive patterns of thinking/ habits and the ability to harness learning resources in innovative ways to address learning challenges. Key elements of these successful learning habits are embodied and advocated by Theory U.

Critical Overview of current Academic Development Praxis

> *Today the values of a liberal education are increasingly subordinated to, if not swallowed by, the demands of the marketplace. Schooling is becoming little more than exam preparation and job training. Instead of economic development as the ultimate goal or end-in-itself, such a society would evaluate itself according to how well educated (in the broadest sense of the term) its members were and wanted to be. This understanding of education includes culture, not in the sense of entertainment, but in the root meaning of self-cultivation.* (Loy, 2003:33)

Academic development is a *meta* concept which embraces a number of learning support interventions – bridging education; alternate access; foundational learning – and thus defies a reductionist definition. Borne out of the tumultuous transition from apartheid to a post-apartheid society during the 1980s, academic development is a contentious, yet critical part of the current South African educational landscape and the primary role is to provide access to educational opportunities with academic support, to Black learners from socio-economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Since the initial establishment of academic development initiatives at institutions of higher learning, the proliferation of policies, discussion papers and various other education related documents have done much to inform the process.

73

This section of the thesis will focus on some of the critical shortcomings of the academic development praxis as currently applied, and argue for its transformation in response to emerging challenges and in line with the rapidly changing context within which it is located.

Despite the fact that over two decades have passed since the initial implementation of academic support, there is much debate regarding its success. The statistical evidence in Chapter 1 which shows the academic progression comparison of former academic development learners with their mainstream counterparts, show that academic development has impacted positively the academic performance of its learners. However we can argue that with the expertise acquired over the years and resources made available to it, these results are short of the desired outcomes.

There are many reasons why academic development has not yielded the results that were anticipated. Whilst one can argue about the merits or demerits of the epistemological approaches applied to academic development, it would be too simplistic to focus solely on these because they might only focus on pass and failure rates. What is required is a systemic approach, whereby academic development is viewed in relation to its preparation of learners who are not only academically competent, but who are also citizens, responsive to the broader social challenges of an emerging democracy, and who are able to resist the powerful hegemonic forces – globalization, political and economic influences – to which they are subjected.

With the elevated status of education in a young democracy like South Africa, it is not surprising that it is a highly contested domain and hence vulnerable to many powerful influences. These are not only government and business, but more especially the Modernist discourse with its emphasis on scientific rationality, technology and the quest for a unified truth. Modernity's pervasive influence on education and decision-making has been one of the main causes of many of the failed outcomes in solving world crises in modern times. This can be attributed to an over reliance on empirical logic, lack of critical thinking, the over emphasis or dependence on objective reasoning and the reification of science and technology. Postmodernist theorist Schuurman (1993:23) aptly stated that, 'science is not employed to emancipate humanity, but enlisted by capital and subjugated to efficiency rather than truth'.

Global trends, particularly through the information technology revolution, also impacted significantly on the educational discourse in South Africa. The reason why the rise of information technology is referred to as a 'revolution' is due to its all-encompassing influence on virtually all aspects of human life. One can go further and regard the information technology revolution as one of the most influential epochs in human history, on par with the industrial revolution because seldom have we experienced such a tidal wave of innovation and influence of such global significance.

With so much of the current world's economic enterprise dependent on technology, it is not surprising therefore that post-apartheid South African education would attempt to respond accordingly. As the technologically most developed nation in sub-Saharan Africa (Castell, 2000), the early education policy focused almost exclusively on transformation, but later education policy recognized the need to be globally competitive.[48] This influenced academic development profoundly to conform to global trends. Hence there was an increased emphasis on mathematics, physical science and technologically oriented subjects. The 1996 White Paper on Science and Technology highlighted the central role that science and technology can play in bringing about an improvement in the quality of life of citizens.

The informational technology revolution and the emphasis on science and technology constitute some of the many contesting factors which are shaping the educational discourse directly, or indirectly, and influencing policy. The conventional approach to academic development – the 'band-aid' approach[49] of attempting to address academic skills deficits through applying more stringent entrance criteria and more intensive tuition in mathematics and scientific subjects – is the result of this.

Unfortunately, the dominant Modernist discourse has handicapped the developmental potential of academic development praxis and as a result it is not addressing core variables in the learning process. The current practice of academic development has failed to approach learning from the premise that it is a socially constructed process, and that it is therefore necessary to address the ontological factors (highlighted in Chapter 5) which bear significantly on learning. What is needed in current academic development praxis is an alternative approach; an approach that is more learner-centred, that recognises the social, historical and cultural contexts of the learner, and that aims to bring about a transformation in the consciousness of the learner. This transformation process should

---

[48] See White Paper of 1997.

[49] This approach provides supplementary tuition in discipline specific subjects.

inculcate an awareness as well as an internal *locus of control,* whereby through an intrapersonal dialogical method, complete ownership is taken of the process to bring about a shift in the consciousness of the learner that can catalyze critical and reflective thinking.

Academic development, when applied from a learner-centred perspective, can facilitate consciousness transformation in a number of ways. The first is that it needs to promote in the learner an intention and a cognitive awareness. This view emphasizes the constructive potential of the individual as he or she tries to make sense of the world. Learning is seen to emerge when the learner's expectations are not met, and he or she must resolve the discrepancy between what was expected and what was encountered (Savery & Duffy, 2001:2).

The second pre-requisite is that the environment or 'social field' should be conducive and supportive of critical and reflective thinking. There should be sufficient support mechanisms to enable learning to be integrated with experience. As Harrison (2002: 25) writes:

> *Integral learning is whole in nature, complete in the absorption of*
> *what is new in the knowledge and technology of it.*

However, in a context where there is a matrix of dire social needs, education might not feature as prominently as desired. There might be additional matters which have prominence, for example, the myriad of social and economic challenges such as poverty, which affect so many learners in academic development programmes. South Africa's unique history has presented unique challenges. Racism, colonization and systematic state oppression, have spawned multiple and dynamic educational problems. Further, insomuch as there is a desire to remain competitively globally, there is also increasing realization that basic issues pertaining to education – textbook delivery, curriculum development, and staffing and management issues – need to be addressed.

Unfortunately, the current academic development model does not focus on intellectual independence or psychological rehabilitation. The current model with its emphasis on career preparation appears wholly inept to inspire a spiritual, intellectual or emotional revolution. Rather, with its emphasis on preparing learners for the marketplace, it seems to perpetuate a model what Toffler (1972:355) so aptly refers to as 'industrial bureaucracy'. This view is shared by Harrison (2002:6) who asserts that the education currently in place came out of the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society and that the educational system was a way of preparing agricultural workers for jobs in industry.

76

With so many disparate influences – government's political agenda; the global information technology revolution; vocational pressures – academic development has deviated from its essential objective, which is to develop and nurture the academic potential of its learners. Using the constructivist paradigm, we need to dispel the notion of humans who are docile and passive. It is important to bear in mind that we construct ourselves by what we choose to do. Loy (2003:7) expresses this in the following statement:

> *My sense of self is a precipitate of my habitual ways of thinking,*
> *feeling and acting.*

Since much of our decisions are based on assumptions, it is important to apply the practice of critical thinking so that we can bring about a perspective transformation. Critical thinking according to Brookfield (2006:11), involves three inter-related phases:

- *Discovering the assumptions that guide our decisions, actions and choices;*

- *Checking the accuracy of these assumptions by exploring as many different perspectives, viewpoints and sources as possible;*

- *Taking informed decisions that are based on these researched assumptions.*

With so many years of education under the Positivist notion of an absolute truth, the natural curiosity of learners to challenge and explore different perspectives has become subdued (Harrison, 2002). Learning in most educational systems is exam-focused and oriented towards an economic life. To cultivate and nurture authentic learning; learning which is geared towards transformation, we need to instil a deep and mindful awareness, such as advocated in Theory U.

This chapter captures the broad patchwork of influences – political; economic; African nationalism – which impacted on the educational discourse. What the chapter also articulates is the fluidity of the policy-making environment – from the initial political objectives to more market driven ones. These objectives arose in accordance with changing socio-political and economic needs and are manifested in the education policies evident in the white papers that were released. Apart from these contexts

shaping educational policy dynamically, they also exposed its shortcomings and hence point to the need for an alternative approach.

Chapter 3: Epistemological Theories Underpinning Research

> *Conceiving of the world as an essentially ordered totality, conducive to explanation and control, Enlightenment thought bequeathed to Modernity a faith in the capacity of human reason to objectify and scientifically describe and explain the nature of reality, both natural and social, thus providing humanity with the knowledge required to transform the world and construct a better society.* (Deacon, 2003:21)

In the same way that consciousness underpins our perceptions and the way we construct reality, so too does one's theoretical framework underpin how one undertakes research.

Man's pursuit of a meaning-making theoretical framework through which to make sense of reality, is steeped in the history of human civilization. It has its origins in various traditions, ranging from the pre-Enlightenment mythical/spiritual doctrines to the scientific, which dominated the Enlightenment era, and the subsequent *Integral* philosophical discourses which are currently emerging. The quest is ongoing. An example of the mythical/spiritual quest can be found in Sufism:

> *The way to illumination, or knowing, is the knowledge of certainty (having something described); eye of certainty (seeing something); the Truth of certainty (being consumed by the event).* (Bakhtiar, 1997:7)

Whether from a mythical/spiritual, Positivist, Postmodernist or Post-postmodernist perspective, each provides a theoretical framework, or *meta* narrative, be it religion or ideology, which governs Man's relationship with reality. This conditioning usually occurs within a social context, which reinforces the meaning-making perspective. Hence, one's ideas, beliefs and ability to interpret reality are not just as a result of the seemingly rational statements that we conjure up from our intellects, but arise from the carefully constructed social processes and lived experiences that define social life. Our identities are intimately interwoven with the values, social mores and cultural artifacts inherent in the socialization that we were subjected to. These not only inform our mental constructs or models, but also shape the 'invisible assumptions' and our responses toward ourselves, events and the world. It is also the framework around which we construct what we consider to be the 'truth'.

The pursuit of 'truth' or what constitutes the notion of 'truth', has exerted a powerful influence on pervasive doctrines such as religion, scientific theories and economic principles, which have come to dominate Western philosophical discourse and praxis. It is understandable therefore that at a time when alternative perspectives are needed, these belief systems have become constraining because they have inhibited and, in many cases, suppressed alternative ways of thinking. The concept of 'truth', when aligned with *meta* narratives such as religion and political ideology has been reified, infused with power and has often become associated with dominance and control, not only of one's own intrapersonal cognitive processes, but also in the social environment. Hence the dominant Western doctrines such as science, economics, religion and political ideology, have all been used in a destabilizing way. A clear example is the various forms of Western colonization where colonial influences have completely subverted and dominated indigenous knowledge systems at a global level.

Herein lies the conundrum. Our excessive focus on what we know and what we believe to be the 'truth' has become an impediment to dealing with unpredictable events. Our modes of thinking and cognitive models that might have worked in the past appear to be 'snapshots' of specific moments and do not offer any guarantees that they might work for us in the future. History is replete with such examples where outdated thinking have not addressed emerging challenges, ranging from global conflicts, to economic recessions, to how to transform our educational system to meet current demands. It appears as if our collective decision-making abilities seem to suffer from a serious dose of 'naïve empiricism', that is, when we attempt to make sense of what we experience by looking for instances or information that conform to our story and our vision of the world (Taleb, 2007:55).

The central problem is that we have not seriously interrogated our 'blind spots', the invisible influences inflicted by our 'social field' (Taleb, 2007:21; Scharmer, 2007:6). Thus it becomes imperative that we become aware of the 'inner spaces' from which we operate. As explained by Krishnamurti (in Pillay, 2007:26):

> *Now, when you are aware that the process of thinking at any level,*
> *however deep or shallow, is conditioned, you realize that thinking is*
> *not the liberating factor; but you must think very clearly to see the*
> *limitation of thinking. Any thought springing from the conditioned*
> *mind is still conditioned.*

Attempts to evolve understanding from a mind which is overly conditioned by embedded doctrines and outmoded ways of thinking is futile, especially when trying to generate alternative methodologies for complex and emerging social challenges. We need to become aware of what these 'blind spots' are, as well as the structure making processes, so that we can decondition ourselves of all these constraining dogmas.

> *We must not believe in a thing merely because it is said; nor traditions because they have been handed down from antiquity; nor rumours, or such; nor writing from sages, because sages wrote them; nor fancies that we may suspect to have been inspired by a deva (angel); nor inferences drawn from haphazard assumptions we may have made; nor because of authority of our teachers or masters. But we are to believe when the writing or doctrine of saying is corroborated by our own reason and consciousness. For this I taught you not to believe merely because you have heard, but when you believe of your consciousness, then act accordingly and abundantly.* Buddha (in Pe, 2006:151)

The universalizing and totalizing effect of the 'truth' doctrine in whichever form or manner needs to be challenged. The lack of critical interrogation of these totalizing truth notions is what has catalyzed major world events such as the Crusades in the Middle Ages, rapid colonization, the Cold War in the 20th century and more recently, equating of the Islamic faith with global terrorism. The current crises afflicting the world have exposed the paucity of our current 'truth' doctrines and hence provide the space to be critically referential and to come up with alternative ways of knowing. Deacon (2003: 23) critiques 'truth' as follows:

> *At the end of the 20th century, modern Western philosophy is once again bending back upon itself, critically re-examining what are said to be the now increasingly shaky foundations of our faith in the power of knowledge, in the capacity of scientific reason to illuminate, transform and improve nature and society.*

Despite the wealth of 'truth' doctrines and analytical tools at our disposal in the 21st century, they have still proved to be inadequate to predict, yet alone, effectively respond to the current crises affecting the

world. We have become psychologically blinded and complacent in our overconfidence (Taleb, 2007). The only way to counter the hegemonic influence of what is 'truth' is to become critical, deconstruct the 'truth' illusions and actively seek an alternative, more authentic perspective.

The same hegemonic logic applies to education. The processes of teaching, learning and research do not occur in a vacuum, but are influenced and shaped by the collective influences brought to bear on the practitioner-researcher by his/her environment. It is without doubt that much of the 20th and 21st centuries have been dominated by the pervasive impact of the Enlightenment (in opposition to the earlier prevalence of superstition and unsubstantiated knowledge). These influences have been far-reaching and have become embedded in practice. For this reason, the dominant education discourse in South Africa emphasizes the scientific and technical rationality which originates in Western Modernity. Added to these are the influences of powerful economic forces and the political hegemony of the ruling ANC political party. This has resulted in the commodification of knowledge; knowledge that is objectified, reified and packaged to meet the perceived needs of our developing economy, rather than knowledge that is a mediated process of development and that can facilitate critical thinking.

Since all praxis is underpinned by a theoretical framework, this chapter will present the theoretical grounding that will inform the current research project. What needs to be clarified however, is that theory is not a representation of given facts, events or even states of affairs. Instead, it is at one and the same time a condition of possibility alongside other political, economic and social conditions (Deacon, 2003: 70). In this light, the theoretical underpinnings in this thesis are not generic truths, but various perspectives, which provide the lenses through which the current praxis of education can be viewed.

Two important Foucaldian principles (in Deacon, 2003:70) are relevant here:

- *Truth does not exist in the accuracy of theory's depiction of reality,*
  but in the power of theory's production of reality;

- *Theory is not a passive representation of something else, deemed to be*
  activity or practice, but is itself a mode of action in the world.

The notions of 'truth' and 'theory' constitute commonly held claims to what is regarded as legitimate practice. In view of the constraining influences of 'truth' notions, as educational practitioners who are motivated to bring about improvement in our practice, it is of vital importance to infuse our practice

with critical consciousness. What we teach and how we teach are the critical epistemological issues facing practitioners in higher education and therefore, applying our 'meaning-making' theories has become much more challenging especially when faced with the rapidly transforming and increasing complexity of modern life.

In light of this increasing complexity, how best to manage the relentless transformation resulting from the rapidly changing realities currently pervading the world and mediate its impact on learners so that they can best manage their learning in a complex environment, has to remain central to the educational endeavor. As Toffler (1972:357 points out:

> *The technology of tomorrow requires not millions of lightly lettered men, ready to work in unison at endlessly repetitious jobs, it requires not men who take orders in unblinking fashion, but men who can make critical judgments, who can weave their way through novel environments, who are quick to spot new relationships in the rapidly changing reality.*

With the increasing complexity and rapidity at which transformation is taking place, it is clear that scholars would have to develop alternative means of understanding. The dominant scientific research methodology of attempting to view social phenomena empirically or in the light of physiological laws is completely inadequate.

Thus coping in a world of such increasing complexity and uncertainty requires not only a vast repertoire of skills; skills to successfully negotiate the challenges and choices which are presented to an individual, but also a different way of looking at the world. Basically, the greater the range of skills an individual has at his or her disposal, the greater the range of alternatives. Being able to select appropriately from the range of alternatives requires not only an acute awareness of what constitutes our personal notion of identity, but also how we would response to situations over which we have no control.

> *We obviously have little control over global economic trends, currency fluctuations and devaluations, natural disasters, political upheavals, social unrest, bad weather or schizophrenic stock markets. We do, however, have complete control over our own behaviour.*

(Robert Goizueta, Chairman of the Coca-cola company in Manning, 1997, 87)

So how does one acquire the repertoire of skills required? In society generally, 'know how' is taught to the members of that society through socialization or education. These are encompassing learning processes, which can also include the following: informal instruction in the home, observational learning from role models, and experiential learning from rewarding or unrewarding experiences (Nelson-Jones, 1991:26). However if one takes into account the defining characteristics of change, that is, its rampant and unpredictable nature, then neither socialization nor education might be possible as a result of the many variables impacting on the process. In this case, responding to change requires a reflective, intuitive response.

Tapping into one's consciousness and trusting the process allows the individual to take greater charge of his/her life, a process referred to by Hopson and Scally (in Pickworth, 1980:78) as 'self-empowerment'. Being able to empower oneself also presupposes that one has the emotional maturity to decide not only on a course of action, but also to deal with the consequences thereof (Drum, and Knott, 1977:18). The notion of 'choice' is important here and according to Nelson-Jones (1993:9) its application is comprised of three dimensions:

- *Attitude: An appropriate attitude to any skill is that you assume personal responsibility, for acquiring, maintaining, using and developing it. It is important to bear in mind however, that attitude is determined by socio and political factors in the community.*

- *Knowledge: Any skill involves knowledge concerning what the correct decisions are to make. Knowledge is the 'knowing how to do it' dimension of a skill.*

- *Skill: The skill dimension entails the application of attitude and knowledge practice.*

Not only is it vitally important to note that skills are processes, but also that they encompass personal reflections. They are not static, but are processes, which require effective sequences of choices. The psychiatrist, Victor Frankel (in Nelson-Jones 1991:12), sees people as choosers throughout their lives. Humans can never escape the need to choose among possibilities.

84

It is too simplistic and reductionist to regard 'skills' as just a series of task-oriented steps which can be neatly packaged, taught and if followed, result in better coping abilities. The essential ingredient is a critical consciousness, which enables learners not only to awaken their own ontological awareness, but to reflect on it in order to draw on their intuitive wisdom to bring about enactment. Since much of our responses towards life's challenges are shaped by our worldviews or theoretical paradigms, which arise out of particular contexts or socializing experiences, we need to strip away the conditioning influences of our life experiences and 'expertise' that clog up our minds. We need to critically interrogate everything that contributes to the development of 'blind spots' and attempt to source our decisions from our intuitive wisdom.

Teaching and learning are processes which do not occur outside of the human experience. They are intricately bound to the world-views and theories which inform and underpin a practitioner's praxis. Therefore to effect any transformation requires a shift in consciousness; a critical awareness of identified inadequacies in praxis and that practice needs to change.

Theory is not static and needs to grapple with the reality within which it finds itself. Core to the challenge of making sense of the transformation process from a Foucauldian perspective, is to 'problematize' it. According to Deacon (2003:76):

> Problemetization refers to the totality of historical practices,
> "discursive or non-discursive", which raise an issue, pose a question
> or introduce a hitherto unacknowledged element into the field of
> thought.

The dominant epistemological theories which underpin this research are: presencing, critical theory, constructivism, transformative learning, action learning and Nondualism. The inclusion of 'presencing' and nondualism with epistemological theories might raise the argument that they do not belong. The case for their inclusion here is solely to highlight the need for all teaching and learning praxis to be based on reflection and not to be separated from context or the social field within which is located.

Presencing

"All great discoveries come from a deep inner journey."

W. Brian Arthur

The dominant and powerful socializing influence of the social context on individual action, even in modern complex times with the emphasis on individual human rights, is well documented (Honderich, 2002; Huston, 2007; Scharmer, 2007; Crook, 2009). The often imperceptible nature of this influence which humans internalize into their own code of behavior is what Scharmer refers to as the 'blindspot' (Scharmer, 2007:6). Therefore to effect a personal transformative process, it is essential to become interrogative and to become aware of that inner space from which we operate (Scharmer, 2007:10).

We first need to become aware (mindful) of who we are, what it is we want to change, how we want to change it and then finally, what we want the outcome to be. This is not an externally imposed process, but a series of steps that can only come about as a result of a 'journey into the heart of our lives' (Siegel, 2007: xiii).

Many ancient cultures have contemplative traditions which advocate deep inner reflection. These can be found in the mystical practices of Sufism in Islam, yogic meditation in Hinduism and *tai chi* in Chinese Buddhism. They all pursue the same goal: the disassociation from an externally imposed reality in order to receive the benefits resulting from deep inner reflection and mindful awareness. There are a great many studies into the benefits of mindful practice (Siegel, 2007), although with the complexity of mind function, one can argue that this is still an emerging field.

Based on emerging understanding of the Theory U model of transformation, 'presencing' (which in practice is similar to mindfulness, or deep inner reflection) is regarded as a vital step in the process of cultivating our self-awareness and hence allowing our authentic or intuitive wisdom to emerge. What 'presencing' attempts to do, is akin to the reflective tradition practiced by the ancient Greeks whereby through *hêsychia*, or 'stillness' (Kingsley, 2008), one can subdue the 'egoic self' and overcome what Scharmer (2007:41) refers to as the three 'enemies' of decision-making: voice of judgment; voice of cynicism; and voice of fear.

However, 'presencing' is neither abstract nor esoteric. It is grounded in the practice of consciously interrogating *praxis*; of activating awareness to the multiple influences which we download as participants in the social field. 'Presencing' combines the notions of 'sensing' and 'presence' (Scharmer, 2007:135) and of seeking insight through deep inner reflection. Through this active process of introspecting, we become aware of habitual patterns of actions and thoughts. This awareness enables us to redirect attention, shift perceptions and as the contemplative traditions advocate, allow for a higher consciousness to emerge. This collaborative process with the self is also regarded as a form of

'participative consciousness' between the individual and the 'generative field of potential' (Sterling in Pillay, 2007:15).

The blending of 'sensing' and 'presence' is what makes 'presencing' so relevant to this thesis. Through deep reflection within a social context, 'presencing' emphasizes the connection to the social field within which the individual is located. Simultaneously, by being 'present' in that 'field' and exercising conscious awareness it also foregrounds the socially imposed norms and behavioural paradigms and hence facilitates the process of 'letting go' (of habitual responses). The main role of 'presencing' besides awareness, is 'letting go' of preconditioned responses and then 'letting come' as we cultivate our intuitive wisdom.

Our main challenge as we grapple with increasing complexity and unparalleled social transformation, is to transcend the futile conditioned mental models of the past and learn how to evolve an intuitive response. Douglas Harding in his "Science of the 1st Person" (in Pillay, 2007:40) distinguishes the shift from 'thinking' (conditioned response) to 'seeing' (awareness). For Harding, 'seeing' does not employ memory or imagination; 'seeing' cannot be theorized about, but only perceived. Through Harding's "Science of the 1st Person", all thought constructs are suspended and true observation takes place without the separation that thought creates (Pillay, 2007). This requires that we become aware of and change the inner place from which we operate (Scharmer, 2007:10).

'Presencing' is critical to a transformation process whereby the outcome is not accidental, but is guided by the active and conscious participation of the human subject. All notions of time collapse, the illusions of past experiences and future expectations dissipate, the connection of Self with the 'social field' is accentuated and the full possibility of potential is engaged. 'Presencing', due to its advancement of self-observation whilst being connected to the 'social field', is integral to the transformation process. One can conclude therefore that the synthesis of the 'observer' becoming the 'observed' results in the mindfulness that facilitates the development of a clearer vision and self-awareness, as well as emotional intelligence.

Critical Theory

> *To criticize is simultaneously to re-interpret and to re-fashion; it is to transform both that which is being criticized and that which is criticizing. To criticize something is to practically engage and enter a*

relationship with that thing, to the extent that both terms of the
relationship will be different as a result. (Deacon, 2003: 62)

One of the dominant themes in this thesis is social change and the powerful effect it has on global trends and individual actions. Another important theme in the thesis is that change can be managed through heightened awareness and constructive action. However, key to any attempt to instigate or manage transformation, be it personal or societal, is the cultivation and application of a critical mindset; a mindset that at the outset is prepared to challenge or 'problemetize' an existing practice based on the desire to effect change. In this regard therefore, a critical perspective, or theory, is the product of a process of critique. Such an approach in many, or even most instances, arises out of intense reflection and will be the result of a process of engagement by an individual or a group, with the explicit aim of exposing perceived contradictions in the rationality or the merits of social actions.

It is important to note that a critical perspective is not absolute, nor universal, but forms part of an ongoing process of reflectivity. In most cases, critical theories will be interpretations of social life created by individuals or groups concerned to reveal these contradictions. To this end, critical theories are subject to critical evaluation in the same way as any other interpretative theories (Carr and Kemmis, 1986:144). Therefore we must approach theoretical criticism from more than just a practice. A critical perspective does more than merely express a disagreement, but does so in a way to effectively alter the perception and practice of reality.

When we embrace a critical approach we basically begin to challenge our concept of self. Implicit in this process of how we revisit our habitual patterns of thought and behaviour, is Krishnamurti's notion of 'deconstructionism' (in Pillay, 2007:4). 'Deconstruction' as a philosophical construct emerges out of postmodernism and maintains that all meaning is context-dependent; that there is no 'genuine meaning anywhere, only nested perceptions' (Wilbur, 1997:98). Pillay (2007:4) explains that Krishnamurti through his process of 'deconstruction' challenges the 'solidity of the conceptual self which can only operate within the time structures of past and future because, essentially, it is a predictive, measuring tool'.

Positioned as the first step towards challenging oppressive political regimes, critical theory and critical pedagogy form part of the 'liberatory education' which is rooted in the philosophical discourse of what was known as the Frankfurt School. Popularized by Paolo Freire, critical pedagogy focuses on the development of critical consciousness, which enables learners to recognize power relations in society.

With regards to the development of critical consciousness, 'conscientizing'[50] is the first step necessary to 'praxis' (ongoing reflective cycle of theory making). A key benefit of critical pedagogy is that it challenges the traditional modes of teaching and learning which are so prevalent in modern society.

In the formal academic sense, one can locate critical theory in the Western European Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt School. According to this philosophical outlook:

> *A 'critical theory' may be distinguished from a 'traditional theory'*
> *according to a specific practical purpose: a theory is critical to the*
> *extent that it seeks human emancipation, to liberate human beings*
> *from the circumstances that enslave them.* (Horkheimer, 1982:1)

Horkheimer (1982) further asserts that critical theory must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it and then provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical outcomes for social transformation. Based on this view, critical theory as a discourse can be applied descriptively and normatively in social inquiry aimed at bringing about change in any given context.

Constructivism

Since this research aims to validate the hypothesis that humans are able to act and impact their realities, the key philosophical approach which underpins this research project is 'constructivism'. 'Constructivism' is a broad philosophical view that emphasizes the constructive nature and activities of individuals as they strive to make sense of the world. Since the researcher is central to this approach, there are two fundamental principles located within the constructivist tradition which state that all theory is constructed and that there are multiple realities.

From an educational perspective, the learner takes ownership of his or her learning activity through acting on a cognitive stimulus, or puzzlement, interacting with the environment and then socially mediating the knowledge through individual understanding. One can see this as a philosophy that views learning as an active process in which learners engage their own understanding and knowledge of the world through action and reflection. Three important concepts emerge from this definition:

---

[50] '*Learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions – developing a critical awareness – so that individuals can take action against the oppressive elements of reality*' (Paolo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, in http://mingo.info-science.uiowa.edu/~stevens/critped/terms.htm#dialogical

- The notion that knowledge is socially constructed and hence is not something that exists outside of language and the social subjects who use it. Learning, which incorporates the acquisition of knowledge and making sense of it, is thus a social process rather than the work of the isolated individual mind; it cannot be divorced from the learner's social context.

- Learning is an active and experiential process. Students learn by doing rather than by passively absorbing information.

- Knowledge is constructed and derived from experience. Hence prior knowledge plays a powerful influence in new knowledge construction. Upon encountering something new learners must first reconcile it in some way with existing ideas and experiences. This may mean changing what they believe, expanding their understanding, or disregarding the new information as irrelevant.

These principles are core to this research because by asserting that all theory is constructed, they not only place the researcher (and researched) centrally in the research process, but also allows for closer scrutiny of the 'inner state' of the researcher. Savery and Duffy (2001:1) characterize constructivism in terms of three propositions:

- *Understanding is in our interactions with the environment: what we understand is a function of the content, the context, the activity of the learner, and, perhaps most importantly, the goals of the learner.*

- *Cognitive conflict is the stimulus for learning and determines the organisation and nature of what is learned. There is some stimulus or goal such as the 'problematic' that stimulates learning.*

- *Knowledge evolves through social negotiation and through the evaluation of the viability of individual understandings. The social environment is critical to the development of our individual understanding as well as to the development of the body of propositions we call knowledge.*

The role of human agency in the social transformation process cannot be denied. Despite the pervasiveness and power of change trends, their interpretation and manifestation is determined by human actors who construct theory. However, the fact that constructivism locates the epistemological assumption of theory building with humans does not imply that a uniform understanding will prevail. Based on emergent themes in current research, one could posit that the ability of self-intervention in theory construction is dependent on one's level of consciousness (Gidley, 2007). Hence each person's unique life circumstances will premeditate a different degree of awareness for different individuals.

Transformative Learning

One can argue that the ultimate objective of all learning is transformation; the acquisition of skills/knowledge to effect change in knowing, behaviour and hence reality. To effect this change, there needs to be an awareness; a reflection and a realization of the need for change. This is premised on autonomous and critical thinking. Unfortunately this is often offset or restricted by the multiple factors – social, political, ideological and cultural – which shape our collective thinking and hence will impact on education. It has been noted that education as a vehicle for transformation shapes the environment in which it is located. Given its powerful role, education will always be subjected to different interest groups competing for control. Hence the role of higher education is a constellation of interests voiced by diverse and organized groups strategically to further their particular interests. In South Africa, this includes the state, civil society and the corporate sector.

Based mainly on the work done by Jack Mezirow (2000), 'transformative learning' provides the link between development and learning. He defines transformative learning as 'the social process of constructing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experiences as a guide to action' (in Taylor, 1997:1). This definition, like Theory U, locates learning in a 'social field' or context, where meaning is mediated through personal experience and interaction within the field. Yet, there is also the assertion that the individual's own critical reflection plays an important role in meaning making.

> *Transformative learning is a complex process that happens at the intellectual and subliminal level. It is an individual experience, contextualised by that individual's interpretation and meaning-making of his or her environment and culture. (Preece, 2003: 250)*

One also finds this explicit in Mezirow's theory of transformational learning in which he states that one of the goals in transformational learning is independent thinking, "achieving greater autonomy in thinking is a product of transformational learning" (in Merriam, 2004:60).

Two components integral to Mezirow's theory of transformational learning are critical reflection and rational /reflective discourse. Criticos (in Merriam, 2004:62) writes that effective learning does not follow from a positive experience, but from effective reflection. Mezirow (2000: 62) differentiates between three types of reflection:

- *Content reflection – thinking about the actual experience;*
- *Process reflection – how to handle the experience;*
- *Premise reflection – involves examining long-held, constructed assumptions about the experience.*

In transformational learning it is essential to note the personal, historical and socio-cultural contexts of the learner, since these can play an influential role in the process. Personal factors, the role of experience and prior, stressful life events, could facilitate a predisposition for a transformative experience (Turner in Taylor, 1997:2).

Transformation is a complex process, which involves much more than change. It pursues an enhancement of personal reality, as well as the conversion of that reality (Preece, 2003). There therefore needs to be an interactive relationship within the individual between the personal and the practical transformative processes.

Action learning

There are multiple ways in which knowledge is acquired. Some of the major criticisms of apartheid education were the stifling bureaucracy, control over curricula and repressive epistemological practices, which not only inhibited a teacher's practice, but also fostered passive rote learning. 'Learning is more effective when it is an active rather than a passive process' (Johnson 1982, in Criticos, 1989:23). Learning is more effective when it is acquired through experience because the learner is able to integrate thought and action by linking concepts to behaviour.

Action learning, as its term indicates, focuses on the dynamic active experiences of the learner and gives value to the actions and experiences (and the learning) which is engaged in everyday life. One can approach this either from the perspective of bringing experience to the learning environment, or, 'experiencing' learning in a practical sense through the curriculum.

Through action learning, the learning content/experience is not a pre-given, but is constantly constructed and reconstructed. The value of this approach is that it involves or legitimates the learner's input into the learning process. According to Usher and Edwards (1994:200):

> *By helping people focus on their experience, to help them give voice to their personal histories and aspirations, (*action learning) *assists people to operate more effectively within the confusion.*

Action learning identifies four distinct learning styles based on a four-stage learning cycle in which concrete experiences (stage 1) provide a basis for 'observations and reflections' (stage 2). These observations and reflections are assimilated in 'abstract concepts' (stage 3), producing the results for action, which can be 'actively tested' (stage 4). Learning is therefore a continuous cycle of experience and reflection culminating in a new learning experience. Learning is thus dynamic and ongoing.

Historically, education is a contested terrain in South Africa (Angelis and Robinson in Criticos, 1989:4). Educational practitioners who often battle against stifling bureaucracy, control of curricula and repressive epistemological practices which inhibit a teacher's practice, are part of that contestation because of their direct involvement in contributing to a future education system.

Nondualism

> *Nondualism is an experience, or a metaphysical view of reality. As an experience, it is a nonobjective sense of presence, or borderlessness, and lack of separation. As a metaphysical view, nondualism holds that reality is not composed of a multiplicity of things.*
> (Goode, 2007: 1)

As a critical theory and an experiential perspective more closely associated with the contemplative practice found in Eastern spiritual traditions, Nondualism is increasingly finding more relevance in philosophical discourse in the West.   This is as a result of the increasing disillusionment with modernity and scientific rationalism.

In defining Nondualism, we need to critique 'dualistic thinking' that is, the polarity of opposites – being and nonbeing; success and failure; life and death (Pillay, 2007:12). The problem of dualism is that we view reality in terms of these polarities, forcing us to choose between one and the other. According to Pillay (2007:12):

> *The world is treated as the 'other' by a subjective self that regards itself as an autonomous 'me' that can only survive by subjugating the other, through various acts of control, both obvious and subtle. So, the individual's sense of isolation in a conceived hostile world becomes the seed of all kinds of divisions within this dualistic conception; good/bad, love/hate.*

The growth of industrialization and the prominence of Newtonian physics contributed to the flourishing of dualistic thinking and to shaping views on reality in the West. Ironically these are also responsible for Man's increasing sense of helplessness and distress, which Durkheim refers to as *anomie*, which is a sense of helplessness as a result of a 'lack of regulation or breakdown of norms' (Giddens, 1972:173). It is human nature to desire stability, but today, the world is in constant motion.   The world is characterized more by disorder than order (Daft, 1999:9). According to Durkheim (Giddens, 1972: 173):

> *Modern industrial societies separate people and weaken social bonds as a result of increased complexity and the division of labor. This is especially evident in modern society, where we are further separated and divided by computer technology, the internet, increasing bureaucracy, and specialization in the workplace. Perhaps more than ever before, members of Western society are exposed to the risk of 'anomie'.*

94

One can even argue that the capitalist ideology, based on the system of class domination and control, found synergy in Newtonian physics in which prediction and control is emphasized through reducing wholes into discrete parts and carefully regulating the forces that act on these parts (Wheatley, 1999). Modern science was all about gaining understanding through an empirical approach and exerting control over the natural environment. The emphasis on control and manipulation indirectly forced Man to disassociate himself not only from fellow Man, but also from the natural environment. The exploitation of natural resources and the resultant ecological destruction is testimony to this.

The stark reality of a world under threat of ecological destruction, has through an evolving consciousness and based on emerging research, evoked a paradigmatic shift; a shift which albeit in its infancy, is gaining momentum. This is the shift towards Nondualism.

Nondualism as a distinct oppositional philosophical perspective to dualism, asserts the interconnectivity of everything; that nothing exists except in relationship to everything else (Wheatley, 1999). This view emphasizes the relationships between things; that even the empty space between things is filled with fields; invisible material that connects everything together. The Buddhist Law of Co-dependent Arising (Crook, 2007:80) argues that nothing can be grasped as an object independent from context; that phenomena are dependent on conditions and that causes lead to consequences under the influence of context.

The influence of Nondualism in thinking, action and ontology, has been to place humans at the centre of the social context/field within which they find themselves, not as passive observers, but as active participants in social action.

In summary, this chapter captures the fundamental relationships between critical ontology, critical epistemology and social change. It foregrounds how our mental constructs perceive and engage with reality. Further, it interrogates and delegitimizes conventional notions of 'truth' and argues for a critical theoretical approach which through presencing, transformative learning, action learning and Nondualism, can evoke a mindful awareness. This, within an integral relationship with the social field, can become a force for positive action. Ultimately, transformation in whichever manifestation cannot arise without fundamental constructs, such as critical thinking, awareness and a Nondual perspective being in place.

Chapter 4: Research Outline and Methodology

Research is a personal venture which, quite aside from its social benefits, is worth doing for its direct contribution to one's own self-realization. (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001)

Introduction and General Overview

At the heart of all research, lies a quest; a desire to know, or make sense of something. The nature of the study, or concept that we wish to understand, is what will determine the methodological approach. Our 'knowing' can be revealed through the pursuit of new knowledge, or the interrogation of existing knowledge. Research is therefore a systematic attempt to provide answers to questions (Tuckman, 1978:1). This process follows a research design, which is a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research (Durrheim, 1999:29). It is this designed and planned nature of observation that distinguishes research from other forms of observation (Durrheim, 1999).

This chapter will at the outset deliberate on some of the broader theoretical issues impacting research and thereafter, expound on the research approach to address the interests of this thesis.

In everyday life, we are exposed to situations that provoke inquiry. To make sense of these inquiries, we often engage in a cyclical process of observation, question and action. Thereafter we reflect on the outcomes of the action and the process starts afresh. The acts of observing and reflecting on our own practices can be an enlightening experience, which enable us to see ourselves and situations more clearly. This deeper understanding will also allow us to formulate ways of working that are more effective (Stringer, 1999). These practices are then discussed or reported through various media. Hence, structured research differs from commonplace observation in the sense that it is a planned activity, which is guided by concrete questions and systematic research methodology.

It is important to 'demystify' the process of research and to recognize that the concept and process are not unique to the modern era. It has been one of the more defining characteristics of the human species because since time immemorial, Man has been involved in a quest to make sense of reality. This can be

deduced from evidence contained in the practice of primeval rituals and traditions which often point to this need for a deeper understanding of the meaning of life.

With the increasing complexity of the challenges facing humanity, never have the need to provide answers to questions and the quest for meaning been more prevalent than at present. Industrial societies all over the world are becoming more complex and fragmented (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) and the current century has seen more information discovery and diverse factors impacting on society than in the pre-Industrial era. Attempting to understand these changes has given rise to a plethora of research methods, which one can trace historically along a developmental continuum. This extends from a theological stage where attempts were made to explain events in terms of spiritual or supernatural entities, to the positive stage where one seeks understanding through observation and reason, and currently to the Post-postmodern stage, where meaning is regarded as a social construct co-created between Man with the environment. However, one can argue that the dominant view that still prevails is the scientific approach (Cohen and Manion, 1995:9).

The Science and Social Science Dichotomy

The reification of scientific knowledge and methodology has had significant implications for research. This is as a result of the empirical nature and testability of scientific claims, which were generally believed to be more objective and hence more valid. Underpinned by observation, rational thinking, irrefutable laws and the three vital characteristics of reductionism, repeatability and refutation (Checkland, 1991:50), the scientific method stands in stark contrast to social science, which tries to make sense of human behaviour, which is unpredictable and complex. Importantly and critically, it is the belief that scientific testimonies are generalizable, reliable and valid that is problematic, particularly when researching human subjects who, by nature, are creative and unpredictable.

Although certain results might be obtainable in a laboratory under controlled conditions, scientific forms of inquiry are not always appropriate to investigate human behaviour. This is mainly due to the complexity and unpredictability of social events. Thus social science practitioners have often grappled with the problem of where to locate it; as a physical science, or within the humanities. Many of the 'hard science' practitioners are skeptical of social science as a science and often view it as a 'parascience' or even, 'pseudoscience' (Dixon, 1989:107). The skepticism seems to stem from the belief that the study of (unpredictable) human behaviour is inherently beyond true scientific investigation. This

perspective of social science follows the view of Beck (in Cohen and Manion, 1995:26) that social science does not provide 'ultimate truth', but helps us to understand the world as different people see it.

Social science has thus spawned a variety of approaches through which to analyze society. Much of it is dependent on which perspective or research doctrine one subscribes to. Whichever view is adhered to, what is significant is how valid, reliable and objective the findings are. Since there is no universal consensus about what is meant by 'research', and the fact that the process is so intertwined with the human experience, what is therefore important to note, is that research is subject to the worldviews (values and interpretative paradigms) of researchers. This means that research is never purely an objective process, but is always influenced by the mental models from which the researcher views the world. Acknowledging the worldviews of researchers had profound influence on research processes and methodologies. Increasingly research objectives have shifted from 'wanting to know', towards 'wanting to change'. This is driven by research approaches such as Action Research and practitioner-research, which posits the researcher as a 'change agent'.

Researching social phenomena presents interesting challenges to researchers. Those who see the social world in the same way as the physical world might regard social knowledge as objective and measureable in a precise and quantitative manner. The aim of such an approach is to extract generic laws of human behaviour. However, the emerging view on the social world has evoked a different research response to the above. This view sees the social world as very different from the physical world and recognizes that there is no uniform social reality, but that there are various interpretations and meanings based on the diverse social contexts and experiences from which the social actors originate.

With the pervasive influence of Modernity, it is not surprising that the scientific forms of inquiry have dominated research, but with the increase in efforts to research human behaviour, there is much debate about the applicability of scientific forms of inquiry. The polarity between social and scientific researchers has also resulted in the different uses of qualitative *versus* quantitative research methodologies. Increasingly, social researchers are opting for more qualitative methods in acknowledgment of the differences between the social and the physical worlds (Stringer, 1999:191) and the fact that the scientific form of inquiry (unlike the social world) is applied more effectively within a predictable and stable environment.

There are many methods and instruments a researcher can draw on depending on the worldview of the researcher and the resources available. At its most elementary level therefore, doing research is a

simple and dynamic process involving a cycle of action, reflection, raising questions, planning fieldwork to review actions, drawing conclusions and planning new and transformed actions. Depending on the nature of the research and the researcher's dominant research paradigm these results can be presented in either a quantitative or qualitative form.

The quantitative method of research sees the social world in the same way as the physical world, in that social reality can be studied and researched in the same way that physics and chemistry study material phenomena. It sees social knowledge as objective and measureable in a precise, quantitative manner. It is therefore concerned with issues surrounding the most accurate way to use numbers and statistics in describing and analyzing the social world. The aim of such research, as in the physical sciences, is to produce generalizable laws of human behaviour.

The qualitative method on the other hand sees the social world as essentially different from the physical world in that there is no one social reality, only the varying subjective interpretations of social reality held by individuals and groups. Different people draw different meanings from different social contexts and experiences and research helps us to understand and to gain insight into participants' meanings and interpretations.

Research Objectives

The increasing social problems affecting the world have been the primary catalysts for changing trends within social science research, which have seen it evolve to more than just a method for social inquiry. Increasingly, social research has shifted from the social inquiry role towards critical intervention and transformation. The researcher, instead of being an investigator, also becomes a 'change agent'. This role draws on a number of research traditions – critical pedagogy, action research, practitioner research and constructivism.

With specific regard to the education environment, the reasons why educators engage in research vary. Although the basic motive is that of wanting to know, some do so to reflect on their educational practices, to justify them, or explore their limitations. Others do research because they have arrived at the conclusion that research into practice is not only to improve and advance the level of understanding in that area, but more importantly, to fundamentally transform practice.

As a practitioner-researcher in an academic development programme, my central claim is that academic development is currently constrained by a 'positivist' paradigm. This view means that social phenomena are viewed scientifically, following physiological laws of 'cause and effect' and investigated empirically (Dixon, 1989:107). This approach has important implications for the study of learning within academic development because the integral, complex and symbiotic relationships between learner and social context are not taken into account; neither are the ontological factors which impact learning interrogated. It is the intention of my research to pursue four general objectives:

1) To provide a broad, general overview of the macro social context and its impact on educational policy and higher education;

2) To outline the dominant theories of transformation and their influence on social development;

3) To present and expand on the *meta* theory of the integral/nondual and its impact on social transformation;

4) To critically 'unpack' the Theory U transformation model and show how it can be integrated into academic development and the benefits it can yield.

In society generally, life know-how is passed on to members of society through socialization. As mentioned earlier, due to rapid changes in society and the breakdown of family and community structures, this socialization process is often impeded. Hence Wood (in Pickworth, 1980:82) advocates the deliberate teaching of skills, with the proviso, however, that these skills be generalized so that they can be applied in a wide variety of applications. However, transferability is also contingent upon the subject's ability to learn the necessary skills. Thirdly, for any change to occur there needs to be 'awareness'.

There cannot be change without awareness of what needs to be changed (Henen, 2007). Associated with this awareness must exist the desire to change. This raises a pertinent question: How does this awareness come about? This can be externally induced through, for example, poor academic results, which prompt an academic institution or a learner to respond. The alternative to this externally induced

stimuli for change either arises from an evolving consciousness (Beck, 2006), or is a facilitated ontological or epistemological response which is mindful in nature, whereby change evolves out of deep reflection on a set of considered options (Langer, 1997). Complementary to both models is the dynamic 'learning model' proposed by Senge (1990). Unlike Beck's naturally evolving model, Senge highlights the natural inclination on the part of humans to learn. Hence when this attribute is nurtured, it will not only facilitate personal growth, but also have broader impact through contributing towards a 'learning' organization.[51] Thus humans evolve their consciousness because of an innate desire to learn.

In pursuit of the need to challenge existing educational praxis and to fulfill the change agent role, the research methodology in this research project explores an alternative (to the traditional scientific model) research methodology. It moves away from what Reason (1988) refers to as the 'distance and separateness of objectivity' to a more 'humanist' approach which honours *experiential inquiry*[52] and thus emphasizes the fundamental importance of personal experience. This approach emerges out of the refutation of the 'positivist' world view that saw the world in 'cause and effect' mechanistic terms, to one that embraces wholeness, dynamism and awareness. It is this approach that recognizes the complexity of social forces that impact on human inquiry.

Researching human behaviour especially within the complex context of academic development, presents unique challenges. Core to these is the fact that some of the fundamental criteria of humanity are its creativity and unpredictability (McNiff, 1988:4). Taking cognisance of these human qualities, a research method, which was qualitative, rather than quantitative, was considered to be more appropriate. I wish to aver however, that even when researching humans using a qualitative methodology, the research process is still required to be systematic, methodical and evidence based.

What is of particular importance to the research process in this project, are the motives that underpin the research. These are the concerns that the researcher intends to address, which in this particular project, are to better understand the personal learning perspectives of the mainly Black African students in academic development programmes and their transformational and learning challenges. The primary source from which the research draws its feedback and data, is the University of KwaZulu-Natal's academic development initiative, the UNITE Programme.

---

[51] This inclination to learn does not necessarily imply a willingness to change. Indeed many learners learn without applying their learning. This will be expounded upon in 'Theories of Transformation'.

[52] A key objective of this thesis is for the researcher to reflect on his personal experiences in the teaching/learning environment and strive towards improvement in the academic development environment.

Approaching this research project from the 'practitioner-researcher' methodological approach, albeit that I drew extensively on my personal experience, much of the 'theorizing' was underpinned by deep reflection. This entailed posing questions to myself based on classroom observations. These thoughts were interrogated, reflected upon, discussed with learners and considered in light of the total learning experience of the learner (including being cognizant of their socio-domestic and economic backgrounds).

Schematically, the research cycle may be reflected as follows:

Simple Research Process
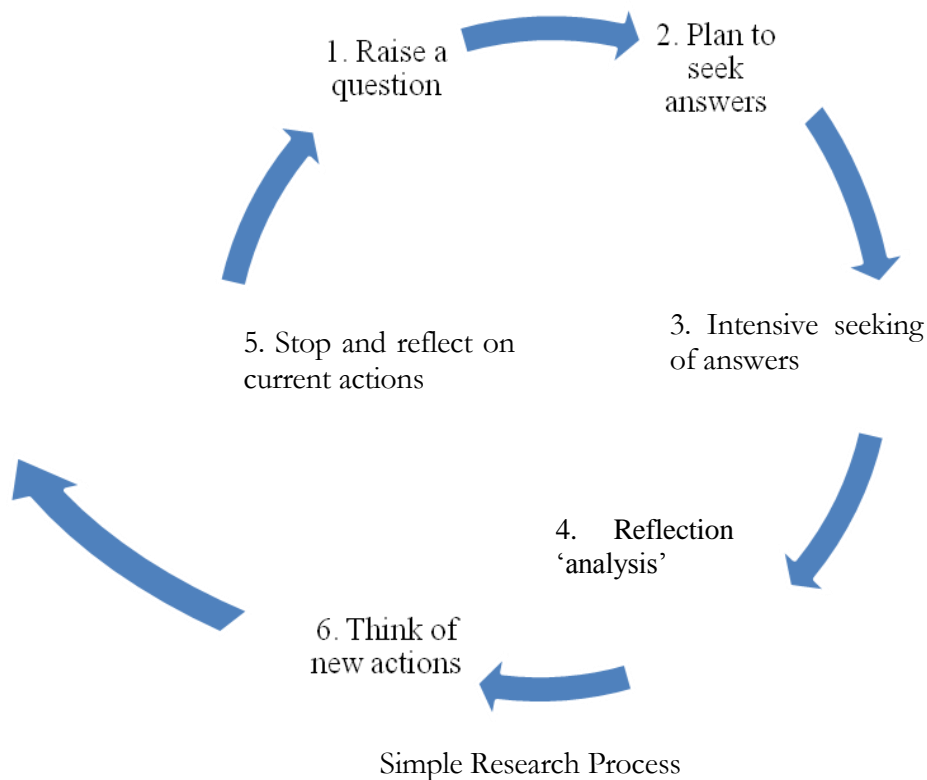
(Wadsworth, 1998)

The above schema succinctly shows the cyclical nature of research where analysis and reflection might address the initial question. However, as step 6 illustrates, it might also be a catalyst for a new and novel research quest. Since research is inspired by the pursuit to know and to make sense of one's reality, some practitioners regard research as a 'frame of mind' – a perspective people take towards objects and activities (Bogdan and Bilken, 1982:215). From a practitioner-researcher perspective, this is what research means to me; to observe the world/life experiences with a sense of wonder, curiosity and a need to understand.

In this regard, the research was approached from two perspectives: the educational practitioner with a personal interest to develop a deeper understanding of practice; as 'change agent' intending to bring about an improvement in practice. The research approach deemed most appropriate is the practitioner research approach. As will be discussed in this chapter, the practitioner-researcher perspective enables practitioners to research matters of personal concern and in this regard, to select the methodology most appropriate to address their concerns. A key feature of the practitioner-researcher methodology is the notion of 'reflexivity'. 'Reflexivity', as opposed to 'reflection', refers to the impact of the researcher's position on the outcome of the research. In other words, the emotional and behavioural constructs of the researcher can affect the world they research, but likewise, the world they research will in turn affect their thoughts and beliefs (Fox *et al*, 2010:186).

The overall research objective of this thesis is to critically unpack the multiple and complex variables which impact the learning effectiveness of learners in academic development within South Africa's higher education sector. From a qualitative, interpretative perspective, the research will seek to validate the hypothesis that the inclusion of a transformation model such as Theory U will make a positive impact on academic development. Although this theoretical research will reference the life experiences of learners in an academic development initiative, UKZN's UNITE programme, the feedback is reflected purely to substantiate the theoretical claims of this thesis.

Rationale for Research into Academic Development and Theory U

> *My thoughts do not just pop into my head out of nowhere; they pop into my head out of a cultural background, and however much I might move beyond this background, I can never simply escape it altogether, and I could never have developed thoughts in the first place without it.* (Wilbur, 1997:11)

As social beings who are located in social contexts and who are subject to the dominant socializing influences from the social field, we can never be totally objective. This growing awareness of the pervasive role of context in social inquiry, as well as the increasing trend of individuals becoming involved in researching their own practice, is undeniably shaping the research process. This undoubtedly impacts on concerns pertaining to objectivity. However, the trend which sees individuals using such research methods as practitioner research and action research has indicated a profound shift away from Modernism and its assumptions about what constitutes 'legitimate' knowledge. Self-study and

practitioner research recognizes the central role of the researcher and the fact that in any research endeavour, one cannot escape the influences of personal bias as well as the socializing influences of social context.

The context which the research for this thesis is focused on, is academic development in South Africa's rapidly transforming higher education sector. Like a 'holon', the higher education sector is reflective of the emerging and turbulent social context of broader post-apartheid society. The reason for choosing academic development in the higher education sector is as a result of its rapid expansion and it being part of the strategic drive to bring about equity and educational redress in South Africa, as well as the need to interrogate academic praxis with the aim of improving learning efficiencies. Through its curricula and epistemology, it has great potential for empowering individuals and hence contributing towards the transformation of learners as well as society.

Much emphasis in this thesis has been placed on outlining the historical and contextual framework within which education has evolved (Chapter 1). The reason for this is that South African higher education cannot be researched independent of the broader socio-political developments, which are so fundamentally shaping its policies and impacting on its adherents. Indeed, the current national political agenda is directly linked to education, especially higher education, and the development of post-apartheid social and political policies are playing a vital role in determining the national higher education project.

The research data which is reflected in the student experiences in Chapter 5 – high failure rates of students; domestic issues; insufficient resources – emphasizes the situational challenges afflicting higher education and confirms that higher education, following its current positivist trends does not have the skills nor infrastructural capacity to effectively manage the situation. Further, the current mechanistic teaching and learning methodologies are 'mindless' responses and at best only making marginal academic impact. It is not surprising therefore that many learners in the higher education sector are experiencing learning crises (Naicker, 1996). A new epistemological approach is needed; an approach which seeks to see beyond limitations, which identifies behavioural deficits through reflection and which can facilitate the acquisition of appropriate skills to empower learners to identify inhibiting mental models and to address these appropriately.

Following on from the earlier discussion (Chapter 2) on the social context in South Africa after the demise of apartheid and the massive social challenges the country faces, in order for education to play a

meaningful developmental role, it is true that the educational system needs to change, but 'How does it change?' 'What does it change to?' and 'How does one measure the change?' are some of the key epistemological questions to be addressed. As mentioned earlier, the complexity posed by rapidly changing social systems and the failure of conventional educational models to respond accordingly, calls for an alternative approach.

The fundamental shift from an institutional driven[53] towards a learner-centered approach[54], that is, working at a deep reflective level with learners and locating the *locus of control* for academic success within the learner, has resulted in a profound breakthrough to learning success in academic development for the researcher. This breakthrough is premised on the belief that people have adaptive intelligence and when this is engaged, it can change their responses to new learning challenges. This new conditioning must be uniquely appropriate in its type, timing and strength to override already established conditioning (Crowley, 2006). The desire to legitimize this experience and find synergy with Theory U, is the primary rationale for this research. Hence this thesis will 'unpack' the context within which academic development emerged, explore Theory U and propose how it can benefit academic development in South African higher education.

The rationale for embarking on this research thesis as mentioned earlier, involves a combination of roles: that of being a 'practitioner-researcher', as well as the desire to be a 'change agent'. Based on reflection on current teaching practice and the learning experiences of learners in an academic support programme, the research is driven by the hypothesis that learners in academic development programmes will show an improvement in academic success when exposed to a more holistic, reflective and empowering curriculum underpinned by the principles embodied in Theory U. What will also be argued in this research is that it is not solely the curriculum that is responsible for the positive academic outcome, but also the adherent's level of conscious awareness (Crook, 2009; Loy, 2003). This will provide the ability to integrate and apply the principles of Theory U that will become the catalyst to construct a new mental model to transform the adherent's perspective towards reality. Hence self-development in any meaningful sense must begin with and within the individual. Unless motivation comes from self-awareness, efforts to promote change will not be sustainable (Burkey, 1993).

---

[53] A model such as the 'structural adjustment' one where the institution provides all the necessary support.

[54] A model advocated in this thesis where the learner, through cultivating awareness skills, takes responsibility for his/her academic success.

Acknowledging that learners, through their awareness and interpretation of the curriculum, can impact on their academic success narrows the polarity between theory and practice. How this unfolds, that is, how we go about evolving consciousness through the Theory U transformation process, is what this research will endeavour to reveal.

Notions of Validity, Reliability and Objectivity in the Research Process

It is understandable that working within the personal parameters of practitioner research will raise concerns of 'validity', 'reliability' and 'objectivity', particularly within the academic realm. It needs to be borne in mind that academic research, which traditionally followed a positivist paradigm, has always been considered to be a scientific, quantitative pursuit, in the interests of 'objectivity' and 'validity' (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). Although the terms 'validity' and 'reliability' are often used interchangeably, they have distinctly different meanings. Bailey (1982:68) defines them in the following way:

> *Validity has two parts: that the measuring instrument is actually measuring the concept in question, and not some other concept; that the concept is being measured accurately. Reliability on the other hand, refers to the consistency of the measurement.*

However, the central role played by humans within the research process, the emerging understanding that humans are not objective but operate from mental models, and the increasing trend by individuals to research areas of personal interest, has challenged[55] existing scientific claims to 'validity' and 'objectivity'. Hence it is imperative to revisit the traditional notions of 'validity' and 'objectivity', but from the perspective that these terms are socially constructed and hence can be 'delegitimized'. What has aided educational research, specifically research into personal classroom experiences, is the notion of 'practitioner research' (Cockley, 2008), which allows the practitioner to research a particular (and unique) experience. Notions of 'validity' and 'objectivity' are integral to this research methodology, but these have to subscribe to the premise of a 'situational truth', that is, the context within which the research is carried out. The dynamic nature of humans and the changing nature of social contexts do not guarantee that when executing the same research, the results would be predictable.

---

[55] This is specifically due to the notion of 'unpredictability' of human behaviour.

'Validity' and 'objectivity' have been core to the research undertaken in this thesis, but from the situational perspective of learning at the academic development initiative, the UNITE Programme. The question of 'validity' with regard to the current thesis is bolstered by the fact that practitioner research is grounded in real life situations. Hence the questions this thesis seeks to answer; answers pertaining to the researcher's own quest for a better understanding of how learners can construct their own learning realities and the methodology employed to answer the questions, has deemed the process as valid (Cockley, 2008). Also, this research (through this thesis) will be in the public domain, which exposes it to critical interrogation and hence can test its claims to validity. With regards to 'objectivity', having the dual roles of researcher and practitioner, I needed to be careful not to influence the learner feedback in any way. Bogden and Bilken (1982:217) define 'objectivity' as giving equal weight to all the information one gathers. Since the feedback from the learners was viewed systemically, utmost care was taken not to prejudice specific information/data at the expense of another. Further, where I as practitioner-researcher drew on established research methodologies such as action research, I have endeavoured to follow the methodology with care. This also ensures validity (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

Research Process

Research is a planned activity that links the research questions with the means to provide answers to those questions. Hence a research endeavour arises out of a researcher's compelling need to better understand a situation or to provide the necessary data to improve practice (Cockley, 2008). This pursuit according to Beard (2008)[56] can be through 'experiential knowing' (face to face knowing an entity), 'propositional knowing' (claims or assertions) or 'practical knowing' (proficiency skill). The researcher is the central actor and establishes the parameters to guide the process. The research process is as much about the researcher and the context within which the research will be implemented, as it is about the research. Hence it is important that the researcher not remain too doggedly committed to a particular methodology (particularly in a social context which could be characterized by its dynamism), but should instead remain true to the original reasons for the research, whilst keeping track of his or her own feelings as well as those of the participants during the course of the research process.

A qualitative process (which this research project follows) adheres to the view that qualitative researchers propose designs that are more open, fluid and changeable, and are not defined in purely technical terms. This is particularly so when one researches human subjects. The researcher needs to

---

56 Experiential Learning Conference, ICEL, Sydney, 2008.

consider the practical and ethical implications of the research. Research is therefore an *iterative* process that requires a flexible, non-sequential approach (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999:31). Hence the outcome of the research is as much about the transformation of the researcher's outlook on his/her practice, as the achievement of the research objectives. However, the researcher also needs to consider (and manage) multiple and complex variables such as: personal bias, research objectives, methodology, and research paradigm and context, which can impact on the process and its outcomes. Managing the research process does not follow a predictable, linear path. Hence the researcher needs to be alert to the often 'messy' and 'organic' nature of the process.

As with all research, the genesis of the process is usually a *problematized* action or practice. In this case it was the learning challenges of learners in the UNITE Programme. Poor academic results which could be indicative of difficulties in adapting to higher education, social alienation, as well as deeper ontological issues which could include low self-esteem; misdirected anger, indicated that learners were experiencing problems. Apart from personal observations and reflections, student feedback was gleaned from the following methods: focus group sessions; unstructured interviews; and autobiographical essays. In the focus group sessions, the participants usually adhered to a specific theme which related to their personal lives, or learning experiences. The unstructured interviews were mainly requested by learners to discuss matters of concern, or requested by the researcher. The autobiographical essays also adhered to a specific theme which the students had to respond to.

The feedback sessions were primarily small group (approximately five learners per group), informal sessions where learners were encouraged to talk about topics relevant to academic performance.

Participation in the interview sessions was voluntary, but there was a call for participants whose opinions and ideas would be particularly relevant to the investigation. In practice, more than one group session was conducted to ensure adequate coverage. This was sometimes necessary as the increased contact with the respondents allowed for the development of trust. Baker (1988:79) emphasizes the principle of `trust', so that those involved in the research process understand that their rights are protected and that their participation in the study could be beneficial.

The discussion forums provided the basis from which much information was obtained. They were conducted as an 'open' conversation (between all participants), in which each participant commented, asked questions, or responded to comments by others, including the moderator. Interaction among the respondents encouraged in-depth discussions of various topics.

The discussions followed a semi-structured procedure in the sense that there were set questions to be answered. These questions explored the following issues: managing the transition from a rural area or township to the university environment; learning and study abilities; social skills; and coping ability pre- and post- transformation skills intervention. The respondents were also at liberty to direct the discussion when they wished to disclose additional information.

With regards to the validity of the methodology, Gorden (in Bailey, 1969:68) argues that the unstructured interview can sometimes be more valid than the highly structured interview, even though the latter is more commonly used and probably thought to be more valid. It must be understood that the social world can only be meaningfully understood from the perspective of the individuals who are part of (and affected) by the ongoing action being investigated.

The superiority of the unstructured interview, according to Gorden (in Bailey, 1969:68), occurs in situations where communication would be impeded by the use of a rigid, highly-structured interview schedule with all questions specified in advance. The validity (of the unstructured interview) will be substantiated by the extent to which it meets the findings in the literature. The 'systematic enquiry made public is what distinguishes the activity as research' (Gorden in Bailey, 1969:6).

What was investigated was whether exposure to mindful learning as well as transformation skills to facilitate the transition from rural or township life to the university had a positive impact on academic achievement and whether it enhanced overall student coping ability at UKZN.

The small group sessions were intended to explore generic social experiences of student life and where greater detail was required, in-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted. The outcomes of the small group sessions were further supplemented with written feedback in the form of autobiographical essays.

The feedback interpretation was done qualitatively rather than quantitatively. The reason for choosing a qualitative rather than a quantitative system of analysis was that quantitative analysis gives indications of the frequency that people do things, rather than why they do them. 'What is important in the focus-group discussion is not to statistically quantify group norms, traits and characteristics, but to expose their underlying attitudes and opinions. The `quality' of the response is important and the purpose is to detect directions of behaviour rather than magnitude' (Folch-Lyon and Trost, 1981: 445).

In order to categorize the responses in terms of their relevance to the objectives of the research, various themes were identified. It should be borne in mind that these themes, although conceptually distinct, are in many ways overlapping and interconnected.

The themes extrapolated from the students' responses, gave an indication of:

- Skills deficiencies; the causes and the consequences thereof;
- Whether there was an improvement in academic performance, or personal happiness after being made aware of mindful learning.

Hence in the current research, the focus was not on the frequency with which a statement was made or corroborated, but on the reasons why statements were made, their contexts and their consequences. Indicators of life skills effectiveness were:

- Students' adaptation to university life as measured by reported happiness and integration;
- Students' perception of academic success; and
- Students' ability to participate in campus social life.

Research Methodologies

Since the research was underpinned by two key objectives – to be a change agent and to interrogate academic development praxis – the research methodology was determined by the motives of the research. The research drew mainly on the practitioner research and action research traditions. Both these traditions legitimize the researcher's own pursuits by recognizing the context dependent nature of the study and the 'change-agent' role of the researcher. Lomax (in McNiff, 1998:62) addresses the validity issue as follows:

> *As Action Researchers we do not claim to find the answer to a question, but we do claim to improve (or change) educational practice through the educational development of practitioners. The validity of what we claim would seem to be the degree to which it was useful (relevant) in guiding practice for particularly teachers and its power to inform and precipitate debate about improving practice in the wider community.*

110

Although the research is primarily theoretical, Robson (in Case and Fraser, 1997:19) uses a metaphor of 'detective work' to describe the process of 'real world inquiry'. In these terms, the options for investigations are:

- *To watch people and try to work out what is going on;*
- *To ask them about it;*
- *To look for 'fingerprints'.*

In research language, 'watching' is observing, 'asking' is interviewing and 'fingerprints' can be found in documentary and other evidence. In this research project, all the above three steps were adhered to, including a fourth step, that of being critical.

Action Research Methodology

As the name denotes, 'Action Research' involves action; a pursuit which starts from the place of 'wanting to know' and follows the process of how to 'find out'. The term is usually applied to describe professionals studying their own practice in order to improve it and ultimately bring about social change (Bogdan and Bilken, 1982:215). Important points in Action Research, according to McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996)[57], include the following:

- I am the central person in my research.
- I am asking a real question about a real issue and I am hoping to move
  towards a possible solution.
- I am starting from where I am.
- I am trying to bring about some improvement.

The focus on the individual wanting to pursue his/her own research endeavour, is what makes the Action Research paradigm so appropriate to this current project. The premise of 'teacher as researcher', has opened up many opportunities for people in the 'real' world to conduct research that is practical, determined by the individual's own concerns and for those who wish to, provides a tool to effect social change. It is an empowering methodology as stated by Wright Mills (in Adelman, 1993:8):

---

[57]This quotation is from the following internet source: http://educ.queensu.ca/projects/action_research/guide.html

Action Research gives credence to the development of powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action by ordinary people participating in collective research on 'private troubles' that they have in common.

What this means is that as practitioners adhering to the Action Research approach, we are more conscious of our critical stance and the reasons that inform it. Further, we are also more receptive to explore our intuitive understanding in the pursuit of a deeper understanding. We are engaged in constructive action, reflection and more action (Wadsworth, 1998).

What this means, is that the researcher adhering to this method is not an impartial observer of the research process, but an active participant as well as a 'change agent' to achieve the objectives for which the research is conducted. Hence Action Research, unlike traditional research where the emphasis is on 'objective' knowledge, provides the following unique features:

- Its emphasis on being a change agent process;
- Its participative nature;
- The opportunity it provides the researcher to empower participants.

The 'change agent' and 'participative nature' foci of Action Research, being pivotal to the research methodology, raise important credibility and ethical issues which the researcher must be mindful of. Action Researchers always assume that the research will reflect their values. Therefore, it is important that the research reports accurately and honestly on the research findings. The researcher also needs to be aware of the inevitable intervention in the social context within which the research operates and the potential consequences of the 'change' he/she wishes to introduce.

Albeit that the researcher is the central person in the research process, by being constantly aware of the impact of his or her actions the credibility of the research process is retained. The research question is important to the researcher and there is an impetus towards improvement of an existing situation. Action Research therefore, unlike traditional research where the emphasis is on 'objective' knowledge, provides unique features: its emphasis on being a 'change agent' process; its participative nature; the opportunity it provides the researcher to search for answers to his/her own questions, all facilitate the gathering of data to advance the pursuit of the researcher's cause.

It must be noted that this process will not follow a linear trajectory, but could be cyclical, starting with reflection on practice and proceeding towards new practice, which provides grounds for further research.

Practitioner-Researcher Approach

The journey of inquiry is often motivated by very personal motives – to gain deeper understanding of a particular interest; to improve practice; to bring about change. These are all characteristics which were endemic to the self-study movement which gave rise to practitioner-research (Pillay, 2011). However, teaching and learning are multifaceted and highly contested activities. They are context dependent and often subjected to diverse interpretations by their practitioners. Further, numerous variables impact on them and hence the outcomes can never accurately be predicted. This is more so in the South African context where so many more determinants – social, political, economic, cultural and personal – are brought to bear on the teaching and learning processes. This makes the research task all the more challenging because no singular research methodology might suffice.

As a practitioner engaged in academic development and a researcher with an interest to optimize learning experiences of learners from academically and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, my embracing of the practitioner-researcher approach was motivated by the following:

- Personal interest in working with disadvantaged students in academic development (particularly the UNITE Programme);

- Realization based on experience through Action Research and focus group discussions that 'structural adjustment' is insufficient to address learning challenges faced by 'disadvantaged' learners;

- My growing awareness that a learning approach as advocated by Theory U can have a significant benefit to learning challenges in academic development.

My experiences in academic development have revealed that learning is multifaceted and complex, and that academic development deals not only with what happens in the social environment, but more importantly, with what happens in the internal (consciousness) environment of the learner. Hence at the

113

primary level, I am motivated by my interest to deconstruct various theories and government policies which have shaped education and learning and ultimately, based on my research, to advance the thesis that a transformation model such as Theory U can make a meaningful contribution to learning in academic development.

What is clear from my experience as an academic development practitioner is that valid and compelling questions must be asked in order to understand how learners interpret, cope and hence respond to their social realities. Embarking on this research was one of the main motivations for providing the answers, since the primary aim of practitioner-research is to improve practice through better understanding (Cockley, 2008:3).

Having worked with learners in various academic development contexts for approximately 15 years, my practitioner research perspective is valid because it is grounded in real life situations. As an educator I have engaged with learners in 'mindful' teaching and learning activities, which included reflection, critical interrogation (of self and context) and dialogue. As will be presented later in this thesis, positive ontological (self-image) and academic breakthroughs have been achieved. This prompted the need for deeper inquiry and research into the evolution of consciousness and its role in the construction of reality.

The awareness that reality could be 'constructed' took into cognizance the notion that Man's ability to understand or interpret reality means that reality is not absolute, but forms part of multiple realities, depending on how each individual defines it. This view also implies that reality can change according to one's cognitive abilities and the development of one's consciousness. Therefore, the perception of what constitutes reality is not uniform for everyone. It depends on the degree of participation from each individual. Human subjects have the power to shape their actions and hence shape their destinies.

Colin Beard (2008) endorses the call to action when he aptly deciphers the Chinese proverb, 'I hear, I forget; I see, I remember; I do, I understand' as:

> *To hear something is better than not hear it;*
> *To say something is better than just to hear it;*
> *To know something is better than just to say it;*
> *To practice something is better than just to know it.*

Engaging 'mindful' practice can allow for a better understanding of reality. This objective is further posited in the hypothesis that if learners in academic development can be actively and consciously engaged in their learning, it will allow for better self-awareness to develop, bring about an enhancement in their ability to tap into intuitive wisdom and, if they can shift their consciousness, this will have a positive influence on their actions.

Becoming aware, reflecting, and then proactively acting from that state of awareness, presents the most significant challenge that learners in academic development seem to face, where generally, passive and submissive behavioural patterns are the norm. Based on personal observations, as well as teaching methodology drawn from 'mindful' epistemology such as experiential learning, feedback (as indicated in Chapter 5) has shown that an alternative (to the 'structural adjustment' model mentioned earlier) epistemological approach has not only accelerated academic success, but also contributed to better adaptation to the higher education learning environment.

Encouraging anecdotal as well as empirical feedback from learners of the UNITE Programme obtained through the application of practitioner research, underscores the primary hypothesis of this research which asserts that an alternative epistemology that emphasizes inner reflection, self-awareness and a constructive action which involves learners taking ownership of their learning destinies, will have a positive effect on learners' potential for success.

The role of the practitioner-researcher was that of facilitating the process of enhancing the learners' inner reflections; to explore their own understanding of their learning 'terrain'. Becoming aware of learning obstacles and reflecting on these would allow for intuitive wisdom to emerge which could then be engaged to create possible solutions.

The approach taken at the UNITE Programme of engaging learners in 'mindful' learning, is by no means a novel one. The value of this 'awareness' creation (taking ownership of one's destiny) has been recognized for a long time particularly within corporate environments. This was borne out *via* direct experience on the Business Preparedness Programme run at Anglo and De Beers' operations in the early '90s (Gatherer:1993).

---

[58] Colin Beard was the keynote speaker at the International Consortium for Experiential Learning in 2008, Sydney, Australia.

Motivational theorist, Abraham Maslow (quoted in Clarke, 1995:34), writes that to achieve success in 'higher order' needs such as education (according to his hierarchy of needs), one has to satisfy the 'lower order' needs of: physiology, security, social status and self-esteem. Feedback from small group sessions of Black students studying engineering at UKZN not only reveals the existence of these needs, but also the lack of skills to satisfy them. The absence of particular skills was posing obstacles to the realization of academic potential.

The influence of non-academic factors provided convincing reasons for the UNITE Programme to re-examine both its ways of teaching and the structure of the curriculum. One of the innovations subsequently introduced, was the implementation of structured life skills training, which included mindful reflection. Mindful reflection within the context of the UNITE teaching and learning environment involved small group sessions facilitated by a tutor, wherein students were encouraged to interrogate or reflect on their social conditions and/or ontological constructs impacting on their lives. These structured sessions attempted to provide a learning environment, which according to Kilfoil (1996:205), is one which fuses the cognitive and affective areas of students' lives and integrates the socio-political context within which their learning takes place. The need for reflective thinking skills which can also enhance creative problem solving is not unique to the UNITE Programme. The need to do so has been hastened by the realization that educational remediation as well as preparation for professional life could not be achieved through intensive tuition alone. There had to be a more fundamental intervention that would empower 'disadvantaged' students to cope, not only with the demands of university study, but with professional life as well (Mills, 1996:2).

As mentioned earlier, skills acquisition does not occur in isolation, but is intrinsically linked to a particular context, which leads to the need for particular skills. The type of life experience to which someone is exposed, will determine the type of skills required. It can be argued therefore, that socio-environmental factors and skills needs are intrinsically linked. To understand the skills needs holistically, one has to understand the social forces prevalent in society.

The practitioner-researcher approach blends well with the 'change agent' focus of Action Research and the introspection and mindfulness implicit in Theory U. It provides the framework for educational practitioners to focus their critical gaze on their own praxis and to research issues of their own concern. The primary aim of this approach is to improve practice through better understanding of the situation the practitioner is involved in. Being directly involved in the situation that the practitioner-researcher wishes to investigate, s/he is best placed to execute a detailed investigation. Whilst not necessarily

producing a solution, the practitioner-researcher acquires a deeper understanding of the context as well as his/her practice (Cockley, 2008:2).

Hence a comprehensive research framework and methodology will guide the investigation into the theoretical model for the implementation of Theory U leadership within the context of academic skills development in South African higher education. Although the starting point will be a theoretical analysis, the focus will be on real life application. Ultimately research is of limited value unless it has real life applications, and this is especially so in this thesis, which aims to improve the learning experiences of learners in academic programmes.

By 'theoretical' is meant that the research will interrogate the conceptual building blocks of the Theory U model of transformation, what constitutes the Theory U, how the variables are connected and then assess how it can be applied to the South African higher education context.

In putting forward Theory U, it is important to state explicitly the limitations and contextual factors that could have a specific influence on the findings and their potential to be generalized. Fundamental to all research inquiry is the paradigm from which the researcher approaches the subject matter. Paradigms are powerful because they create the lens through which we see the world (Covey, 1990). Increasingly, researchers acknowledge human subjectivity in the research process. This is particularly true of research undertaken on human subjects in social environments, prompting the belief that research is not neutral (Reason and Rowan, 1981).

The paradigm that will frame this research is Nondualism. The Nondual paradigm will be addressed in more detail later in the thesis, but in brief, it is a critical theory which arose in response to the increasing complexity and fragmentation of advanced industrial societies, rapidly changing global relations and disillusionment with technology's ability to solve the world's problems. This resulted in a major reconceptualization of reality – a reconceptualization which emphasized the interconnectivity of all the entities in the world. This paradigm is referred to as the 'integral' or 'Nondual' approach.

In brief, 'Theory U' is a complex matrix of behavioural processes. Central to the theory is its emphasis on deep inner reflection and locating the *locus of control* within the individual. Life challenges are addressed through 'presencing' which includes suspension of judgment, redirecting of effort, letting go of stereotypical notions and then letting 'authentic truth' emerge, to be enacted, prototyped and then performed.

In the research, social transformation is not viewed in isolation, but is related at the macro level to its social context, and then at the micro level to the student within the academic environment. The study will also explore the following assumptions:

- The realization that in a rapidly changing world, readiness and ability to respond successfully depend on awareness and understanding. These skills need to be enhanced for the achievement of professional and personal goals.

- With the socio-economic challenges facing South Africa currently, there exists a national imperative to bring about a transformation in learners' abilities to cope and excel in higher education;

- The researcher's personal experience in recognizing the need for such awareness in the academic skills development sector in South African higher education;

Through a rigorous interrogation of 'Theory U', this research will formulate a theoretical model to be implemented in academic development within South African higher education to address the above assumptions.

Potential Problems Associated with the Research

With any research project, particularly one that researches human nature, there are potential problems which the researcher needs to anticipate and be mindful of. These could either be inherent to the approach, or as a result of the nature of the inquiry. This concern applies specifically to the practitioner-researcher approach where there could be a perception that the approach is less rigorous than the scientific method. In addition, besides the potential problems associated with the complexity of the current research, more especially when it deals with concepts as elusive as 'consciousness', 'learning' and 'transformation', what requires keener attention, are the dual roles of being a practitioner as well as researcher. Although the practitioner-researcher methodology has provided a valuable space for practitioners to investigate areas of personal interest, there is a greater need for vigilance to observe the requisite research protocols.

Researching human subjects qualitatively always has the potential to present problems pertaining to objectivity and validity since the variables cannot always be controlled. These notions of 'objectivity' and 'validity' are being challenged and seen in a new light with the emerging view that these are social constructs. Not even 'pure' science is objective because scientific facts are embedded in cultural practices (Wilbur, 1997:24). As for 'validity', as mentioned earlier, a study is valid if it is grounded in real life situations (Cockley, 2008).

Additional problems could also arise from the epistemological definitions of the concepts 'social transformation' and 'academic development'. These are often contested and fraught with multiple meanings; much of these are dependent on the particular contexts they are encountered in. Thus there are probably no standardized definitions which are universally acceptable. A *meta* perspective provides opportunity for a more critical dialogue on these concepts (Wheatley, 1999) and hence a deeper understanding of the emotional and ontological underpinnings of these concepts will be interrogated. It might also be necessary to evaluate cultural and contextual perspectives for their impact on the initial research.

Although the acknowledgement of non-academic skills and its impact on learning is a relatively new phenomenon within academic institutions, it is becoming increasingly more prominent. This stems from the belief that non-academic factors play an influential role in the academic performance and career readiness of learners. Current research methodologies provide clear and effective guidelines. Specifically with regards to consciousness, Francisco Varela (in Crook, 2009:222) distinguishes between four approaches to explaining consciousness:

- *Reductionism – the study of brain and cognitive mechanisms;*
- *Functionalism – what consciousness does, or can do;*
- *Phenomenology – focuses on the accounts people give of their experiences (subjective empiricism);*
- *'Mysterianism' – the whole thing is a mystery.*

Through understanding how theories have been transformed and the concomitant impact on reality, we will develop a deeper insight into the symbiotic relationship between human actors and theory in meaning making.

The research objective in this thesis is not about providing absolute answers to the problems encountered by students in academic development programmes. It is about a practitioner-researcher asking probing questions to make sense of the learning experiences of learners who experience learning challenges as a result of drastic transformation. It is also about the learners focusing their gaze on themselves, interrogating their interiority to develop a more effective meaning-making process.

In summary, this chapter articulates the challenges and complexity associated with researching human subjects. It also demonstrates that despite the eclectic nature of such research methodologies as practitioner research, it is possible to adhere to research protocols such as validity and objectivity and hence conduct credible research.

Chapter 5: Factors impacting on learning for Disadvantaged Students: Learner Feedback

> *All people, from adolescence onwards are heirs to the potential for logico-mathematical thought. However, given the differences in the ideological and material conditions of existence, people from different backgrounds or eco-cultural niches will develop different competencies and skills: competencies and skills which are more or less suitable for the culturally autogenous demands of the tasks/problem solving situations encountered in praxis.*
>
> (Craig, 1988:7)

Critical pedagogists such as Paolo Freire (1921 -1997) laid great emphasis on the influence of social conditions in learning. However, for a practitioner-researcher interested in the relationship between context and academic performance, it is necessary to interrogate how the context manifests from the perspective of the learners' experiences. Hence learner feedback provides authentic, first person and deeper insights into the learning challenges faced by learners within a particular environment, which can then better inform the remediation process. In this regard, the main aim of this chapter is to outline, in broad terms, the challenges faced by learners in an academic development programme, the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Intensive Tuition for Engineers (UNITE) Programme. The feedback provides substance to the oft referred to impact of the apartheid legacy on the ontological and educational lives of Black learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Although it can be argued that Bantu Education, which was a vital extension of the apartheid ideology, was largely responsible for the serious deficits in the academic preparation of Black students for tertiary study, we should not underestimate the role of ontological factors. This is because the role definition of Black people under the apartheid system of government was such that it required different competencies. The behavioural deficits which often arose from these deprived socio-economic backgrounds included: low self-esteem, poor communication skills and academic underachievement. These challenges were exacerbated by substandard schooling mainly in the mathematical and physical sciences as a result of limited resources (financial and infrastructural) and poorly qualified teachers (De Villiers, 1996; Hay & Marais, 2004; Mphahlele, 1990). To this one should also add the denial of access to the acquisition of 'cultural capital', which could have been acquired from greater exposure to technology and western culture, and which could have provided suitable socialization for study at a historically 'White', Eurocentric university.

Although the introduction of academic development was an important step towards educational redress, it was not the panacea for all the ills. Academic development raised unrealistic expectations and through its methodological limitations, paradoxically, undermined the very objectives it was trying to achieve. An example is the lack of infrastructural support within many institutions, which undermined the learning aspirations of learners. However, it was nonetheless a cogent effort at attempting a redress of the inequities of the apartheid legacy.

The need for transformation skills has to be viewed within the context of the lived experiences of learners. Over successive years at UKZN's UNITE Programme, feedback was gleaned from students to ascertain their socio-economic and intellectual challenges as they transitioned from secondary school and from their domestic environments to the university.

These students at UNITE received regular theoretical as well as practical input on transformation skills at the time of participating in the research. To determine whether this exposure was having any impact on their coping abilities at university, it was necessary to develop an understanding of the socio-economic backgrounds from which they came and thereafter assess their coping skills as they progressed.

These students were therefore asked to write autobiographical essays soon after their arrival at the university. This was to capture their socio-economic home experiences whilst these were still 'fresh' in their minds. The intention was that the researcher and the students could identify skills deficiencies, as well as instill self-awareness in the students, which would enable them to become proactive in terms of acquiring skills and monitoring their own development. From the essays, a context emerged in which the following environmental factors prevailed:

Socio-Economic Problems

Prior to arriving at university, the majority of the respondents experienced varying degrees of socio-economic problems. These ranged from inadequate living conditions which affected self-esteem and studying: *'We live in a shack settlement. It is so difficult to study in the evenings as we did not have electricity or running water'*, to lack of financial resources: *'I did not have enough money for school fees or to buy textbooks'* and *'I could not study at school as both my parents were unemployed and I had to find a part-time job to earn some money'*.

A further consequence of the economic problems was the disintegration of the family unit. Many respondents did not share sustained contact with their parents, either in their roles as parents, or as role models: *'I lived with my grandmother for my entire childhood, while my parents were working away from home'*. According to some respondents the lack of familial support could have resulted in not being able to forge closer emotional ties at tertiary level: *'Not seeing my parents when I was younger made me feel as if they did not love me. I sometimes find it difficult to trust people'*.

Another major socio-economic problem was that of violence, domestic or other, which occurred in many of the areas where the respondents resided: *'There was too much violence in our township. We were sometimes too scared to go to school',* but it can be argued that it also had a psychological effect on the respondents: *'Some of my best friends were killed which really affected my behaviour.'* The effects of violence were also felt economically: *'Violence in the townships forced us to move regularly. Both my parents lost their jobs because of this and life became very hard'*.

The social conditions under which Black students were socialized, did not prepare them for the rigours of tertiary education, or for participation in civil society. Political, social and economic conditions, it must be borne in mind, have a profound effect on the development of education (Mungazi in Mashile and Mellet, 1996:223). Not only was the culture of learning eroded, but in many cases it also brought with it alienation from learning.

Poor Schooling

The responses from respondents indicated that the schooling which did occur within the township and rural environments, as indicated above, did not provide adequate preparation for tertiary study nor for employment. One of the most common problems related to resources. Most of the schools in the Black townships were under-resourced: *'We did not have laboratories or libraries and many of the classrooms did not even have sufficient furniture'* and *'We did not have enough textbooks which was a problem as many of the classes were overcrowded'*. Teaching standards were in doubt: *'Our schools did not prepare us for university as many of our teachers were not qualified'*, *'There was no subject like career guidance and all our subjects were taught in Zulu, even English. That's why I'm battling with English'* and *'We were not taught to learn independently'*.

The lack of resources and 'poor' teaching skills were compounded by school management problems: *'Many things went wrong in our school. There were too many staff meetings, lack of resources, timetable clashes and often changes in the timetable. This severely disrupted our learning'.*

The existence of so many institutional problems in Black education was bound to have a severe retardation effect on the learning by the respondents. In research conducted by Mashile and Mellet (1996:225), respondents cited the following reasons for poor performance and attitude problems: lack of extrinsic motivation, pedagogical deprivation, political socialization and poor school administration. To these one also needs to add the dire domestic, impoverished socio-economic conditions impacting on these learners. They form an inclusive whole. Thus whatever happened in the one sector, significantly affected the other. Thus the socio-economic context of the disadvantaged Black learner extended to more than language deficiencies, limited mental stimulation and limited exposure to the dominant culture (Botha, 1994:5). One can argue that in the South African context, the disadvantaged learner is also subjected to an environment which steadily undermines a learner's academic abilities.

Together with poor schooling, economic deprivation denied many students the opportunity to engage with the technology, or to be exposed to a technological *meta* curriculum – cultural capital of time management and teamwork skills which often defines the way knowledge is organized and structured (Starfield, 1996:159). The context which the respondents sketched through their autobiographical essays formed the background against which the focus interviews were held.

Dealing with Change

For most Black learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, qualifying for university entry is a major achievement which is accompanied by concomitant stresses and demands. This is largely as a result of the differences in cultural, social and technological differences between the two diverse environments.

Much of the anxiety which students experienced on arrival at university, related to stereotypes about the institution as well as ignorance: *'Life in the township is very different to that of university. In the township you don't follow time management and all that stuff. The main priority is to get money, to get food'. 'I did not know what to expect when I came to university. I felt nervous and unsure of how to cope'.* However, this fear dissipated through the mentoring system and participation in the structured UNITE Orientation Programme. Mentors in particular, played important roles in assisting with transformation and in assuaging new student fears about university: *'Having a mentoring system is a*

good idea. I feel safe knowing that I can ask for help when I need it.' The mentors, who were current university students and ex-UNITE students, could draw on previous experience in solving learning obstacles in order to provide motivational support.

The dissemination of information during the UNITE Orientation Week encompassing all aspects of student life – pass/fail criteria, academic support, recreation, AIDS awareness and financial management – did much to 'demystify' the university and reduced the feelings of alienation and fear.

Lack of Career Orientation

Many of the students who enrolled for engineering, did not know much about their career options, but made their choices due to financial reasons: *'I saw a poster of Anglo-American offering bursaries for engineering study. I did not know what engineers did, but I applied. It was the only way I could get to university'.* There were no role models or 'significant other' persons to emulate or to approach for advice. Since many came from schools where career / guidance counseling was virtually non-existent, they did not know much about studying at university either: *'I had mixed feelings when I arrived at university. I was scared because I did not know what to expect. Our teachers did not give us any information about coping at university. I just asked my friends and hoped for the best'.* Thus many found themselves in an environment which they knew little about, were subjected to various pressures from peer groups and yet felt alienated from the mainstream university community.

Propensity towards loneliness and alienation in Social Life

As mentioned earlier, an interactive and enriching social life is regarded highly on the UNITE programme. Students who were content with their social lives generally, had a much more positive attitude towards learning and life at university in general. This provided a sound basis for pursuing academic excellence. Social life, however, did not exist in isolation. A productive social life was intrinsically tied into a productive academic life. This is evident in the following feedback and supporting comments from direct entry respondents:

- Restricted social life: This was due to various factors. One of the main ones was the excessive and complex workload they were subjected to: *' I don't have a social life - I'm too pressurised by my work. I have to work every day just to keep up with my daily workload'.*

- Interpersonal problems: Many students expressed the feeling that they were shy which inhibited their chances of making friends. They lacked the confidence to strike up conversations with strangers, especially members of the opposite sex: *'I find it difficult to make friends in class as I'm not used to meeting other race groups. I feel that we won't understand each other'* and '*I'm naturally shy and don't communicate well with strangers. What has made the situation worse is that I'm not from Durban. The university is a lonely place for me'*.

Loneliness and cultural alienation were thus common problems. Words often used in the feedback sessions were, 'shy'; 'embarrassed'; 'scared'; and 'lonely'. Students who had an emotional deficiency such as shyness, experienced loneliness and depression: *'I'm a naturally shy person and don't communicate well with strangers. I'm not from Durban and the university is a lonely place for me. I don't speak English well and cannot speak Zulu'*.

Some of the students had inadequate social skills and could not establish significant relationships with members of their peer groups: *'I find it difficult to make new friends, especially those of different race groups. I feel that we won't understand each other'*. Also, the engineering work load did not allow for much social time and hence the cycle of loneliness was perpetuated. Lack of assertive skills also posed problems when problem-solving was required because students were often embarrassed to approach lecturers or tutors for help. This impacted negatively on their academic performance and perpetuated feelings of inadequacy.

Many students, who originated from homogenous cultural backgrounds, did not assimilate easily into the multicultural environment of residence. Various perceptions of cultural discrimination exist. Some students went as far to describe conflict in residence of being of a tribal nature: *'There is tribalism in residence. As a non-Zulu speaking person, I often feel isolated'*.

This sense of cultural alienation extends to the classroom as well. Most of the students could not relate socially to their 'non-Black' counterparts. Many of the students felt the cultural alienation acutely because it had potential impact on their careers. In the latter years of their engineering study, much of their professional training occurs at the sites of their sponsoring companies. At these occasions students are evaluated by their prospective employers not only in terms of their technical expertise, but also their

ability to integrate into the professional environment.   Not being able to relate to the culture of their peers thus places them at a distinct disadvantage.

Acquiring Study/Academic Skills

The lack of study/ academic skills as a result of poor schooling caused the most apprehension for the UNITE students as a result of their 'disadvantaged' education.   This was compounded by the expectations of sponsors and parents alike.

What characterized the responses with regards to academic progression was an overwhelming sense of helplessness.   Many students felt that their schools did not prepare them sufficiently to study at university: *'I couldn't cope. I blamed my teachers for not teaching me correctly; for not preparing me adequately. I couldn't learn independently, did not have the proper study skills and battled with self-discipline and time management'.*

Due to the lack of resources in terms of textbooks, laboratories and underqualified teachers, the foundation for study at university was not established: *'We did not [have a] functioning laboratory or a library at school and therefore I felt inadequate to use these facilities at university'.*   From the passive manner most of the respondents ascribed to their learning style, one could assume that the dominant didactic methods they were exposed to were 'transmission' style teaching with limited opportunity for critical engagement with the subject matter.   Through its practice of rote learning and uncritical approaches to learning, this has encouraged students to follow a surface processing approach to learning as opposed to a deep processing of learning material (Entwhistle and Ramsden in de Villiers, 1996:135). This passive approach to learning is wholly inadequate in the field of engineering, which is dependent on pursuits of enquiry and therefore this presented a major obstacle to effective learning at university.

The majority of students claimed not to follow a consistent study programme. Study was often a rote learning exercise, rather than a holistic process of synthesizing understanding and application.   Due to a lack of time management techniques, structured work planning and relaxation time were regularly neglected. Thus studying was often haphazard, with no structured timetable.   Hence students often misallocated their time with often disastrous results.

Poor motivation and the lack of self-discipline also affected students' ability to perform. It is important for this not to be relegated to a 'typical student problem'. Many of the students were subjected to

'dysfunctional' domestic circumstances – such as strife in the household, dire economic circumstances and various other social problems, which did not foster the development of self-discipline or self-motivation.   Most had no substantive understanding about what engineering entailed, nor had they encountered a `real life' engineer, *'I have never met or seen a real engineer, so I'm not really sure what they do'*.   Thus there were no reference points for the students to relate to and hence motivate themselves. When they experienced academic problems they did not have the problem-analytical skills, nor the stress management skills: *'The work is too difficult; I don't even know how to approach the work, or how to go about organising my study programme'*. Anxiety and panic from an inability to cope thus compounded the problem.

Lack of communication skills also played a debilitating role. Students expressed an inability to approach tutors, lecturers or friends for help.   This was also compounded by self-esteem problems – some students refrained from requesting assistance because 'they felt stupid' or 'inferior to classmates'.

Being able to acquire the following skills emerged as having contributed significantly to students' academic success:

- Time management: The development and application of a structured timetable was attributed as a major cause of academic success by the students: *'I never followed a study timetable at school. At first I was a kind of person who left my work until the last minute, but time management skills helped me structure my life'*. For students who largely felt alienated on arrival at the university, being able to take control of their learning environment and structure their lives is an important step in the process of self-empowerment. Students felt that they were taking control of their learning processes by developing and being able to adhere to a study timetable.

- Teamwork skills: During the UNITE year, the learning programme emphasizes teamwork. However, a team only functions effectively once students have acquired an understanding of 'group dynamics' such as: democratic participation; tolerance for diversity; and empathy. Being able to take decisions and be tolerant of group members was therefore an important learning event for students

because it assisted the effective function of study groups: *'Learning group work skills helped me to understand the behaviour of others and how to co-operate with them'.* The teams usually provided more than just academic assistance. They also played a valuable role as a social and emotional support system.

- Effective communication and interpersonal skills: As a result of low self-confidence and a culture of rote learning at many township and rural schools, many African students tend to adopt a passive approach to learning. This seems to be reinforced by certain cultural norms within the African culture, such as deference to adults or authoritative figures and expresses itself in the learning environment through not asking questions or challenging teachers. A similar pattern was prevalent in the UNITE programme whereby students would display passive behaviour by not asking questions or challenging their lecturers/tutors, nor engaging critically with their learning. The reasons for this were not restricted to the cultural and socialization factors mentioned above, but also a lack of competency in English and a lack of interpersonal skills. The teaching of assertive communication skills not only facilitated interpersonal relations between students which encouraged a supportive environment, but also gave students the confidence to take charge of the learning process by being able to ask for help when required. Some of the comments which reinforced this were the following: *'The teaching of coping skills helped me to overcome my nervousness. I developed some skills such as social skills and interpersonal skills which helped me a lot to adapt to my new environment';* 'Doing presentations improved my confidence very much. I now feel much more confident in front of people';* and 'Learning what it means to be assertive is helping me a lot to ask for help from the mentors and the tutors'.*

- Stress Management: One of the major causes of academic 'burnout' and failure is the inability of students to deal effectively with stress. Stress frequently manifests itself in students – to such a degree that it is

evident on a physical and emotional level, affecting their academic achievement as well as their social lives (du Toit, 1996:175). There were many causes of stress. Chief among these were the fear of failure and the high expectations set by parents and sponsors. Many UNITE students complained about their high stress levels and their initial inability to deal with it: *'I was so worried about failing, I couldn't sleep at night';* and *'My biggest problem is my fear of failing. The work is too much, too difficult and I don't know how to cope. It's causing so much worry'*. The teaching of stress management techniques was thus a vital part of the UNITE curriculum. This had a significant impact on the exam performance of students.

Integration into the Social Environment

Generally, students expressed a high degree of 'student happiness', especially with regard to their social life at university. This they attributed to improved communication skills: *'Learning to communicate more confidently helped me to meet other students especially in residence';* and *'Learning communication skills made me more aware of myself, but also of the feelings of other students'*. Students felt that their improved communication abilities assisted them in establishing and sustaining friendships. Being part of a support / study group helped to developed confidence and facilitated the development of interpersonal skills. They felt more confident to participate in student life such as sports and various student programmes in residence.

Sustainability of Transformation Skills: Transition from UNITE to Mainstream Studies

Moving from the secure environment of UNITE to the mainstream often caused anxiety for students due to the increased complexity of their workload and the decrease in institutional support. To develop a clearer sense of long-term student integration and perceived happiness, it was important to determine whether the confidence acquired during the UNITE year extended further into their university career. The following themes provide credence to the sustainability of transformation skills training:

Better Adaptation to Campus Life

The adaptation to mainstream study including social life, according to most students, went smoothly: *'What helped me to adapt to the university, was meeting other students and learning how to communicate with them through the communication skills courses'.* Being able to forge relationships and establish informal support networks through friends and peers seemed to enhance the adaptation process.

The interpersonal support which had been established during the UNITE year, combined with increased understanding of the workings of the university, made for very confident and proactive students. Although students experienced increased workload demands, this was overcome through better administrative abilities such as time management, better note-taking and listening skills, and through effective study groups: *'Having received transformation life skills learning helped me to understand more about the university and how to cope with being here (time management; study skills) and made me feel more relaxed about my ability to cope'.* Transformation skills training that encompassed group problem-solving skills and consensus decision-making activities, played an important role in helping these student to adapt: *'I'm not from here and being able to participate in group activity helped me a lot to get to know people and to develop confidence in communicating with them'.*

Improved Study Skills

In general, students who had progressed into mainstream engineering study *via* the UNITE programme, experienced fewer academic problems than their counterparts and showed higher potential for academic success. Although much of these could be ascribed to intensive tuition within the science and engineering curriculum, what had shown significant improvement, was the general management of the learning process: *'Apart from the extra support in subjects like maths and physics during the UNITE year, what also helped me cope academically, were the courses in work planning, objective setting and time management. This helped me plan my life more effectively'.*

Far from the passive attitudes which often prevail among Black students, many ex-UNITE students also felt much more confident and were far more able to take the initiative to utilize the resources at their disposal, such as tutors and study groups, which they could use for academic support: *'Transformation skills provided me with the tools to ask for help. It gave me the confidence to ask questions from those who could help me. In residence I meet regularly with other students to discuss problems'.*

131

Participant Responses and their Relevance to Social Transformation

The feedback from respondents in the UNITE Programme provides valuable first person personal perspectives and insights into the causal factors affecting learners emanating from disadvantaged socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Two prominent observations emerge: firstly, the debilitating impact of socio-economic and educational disadvantage on academic achievement in higher education; and secondly, the need for an effective intervention.

The ability to overcome the effects of poor schooling was a prominent theme arising from the focus group interviews. The effects of poor schooling on 'disadvantaged' students at tertiary institutions are emphasized by de Villiers (1996), Gatherer (1993) and Mphahlele (1990). de Villiers (1996:135) notes that:

> *A number of students in South Africa fail their first year at tertiary institutions. The failure rate is even higher among students who are disadvantaged in terms of their schooling and socio-economic backgrounds and are not prepared for the learning demands at tertiary education institutions.*

The effects of poor schooling are not the sole reason for study difficulties at tertiary institutions. Bourdieu (in Starfield, 1996:159) also makes reference to `cultural capital' – the socialization process which gives middle class children an advantage in understanding both the nature of knowledge (through their exposure to various leisure and hobby activities) and the cultural norms of middle class society (whose value system is most often reflected in tertiary institutions). Denied access to cultural capital, learning at tertiary institutions thus becomes particularly challenging for learners from 'disadvantaged' socio-economic backgrounds.

Another major theme which emerged from the interviews was the inability of students to deal effectively with change. Although the concept of 'change' has been discussed extensively with particular reference to Toffler (1972) and Connor (1992), a further aspect of change which was experienced at the micro realm of the student, was that of cultural alienation – students originating from different cultural backgrounds and hence, experiencing difficulty with regards to social integration at university. This cultural alienation occurred not only at economic class and technological awareness levels, but also at

132

ethnic and race levels. Whereas it is easier (and less 'sensitive') to develop technological awareness, developing cross-cultural awareness is more challenging.

Nevertheless, the need for cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity was seen as an imperative. According to Starfield (1996:159):

> *Much of the literature on multicultural education calls for increasing the amount of curriculum content which looks at ethnic groups' cultures. An appropriate pedagogy for the multicultural classroom is seen to be instruction which is sensitive to differences in learning and cultural styles.*

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 5, the teaching of critical and reflective thinking skills enabled students to challenge their own established notions of learning and being. Hence they were able to evaluate their responses to the learning challenges they faced. In so doing, they became more empowered and able to construct more appropriate responses. This is one of the great redeeming qualities about these skills – they can be learnt (van Niekerk, 1992; Nelson-Richard Jones, 1991; Bond, 1988; Fontana, 1990; du Toit, 1996).

Judging from responses at the focus group interview sessions, transformational learning promoted higher self-esteem, and led to better integration into university social life and better academic performance. All this was achieved despite being admitted on lower university entrance academic criteria.

Self-awareness was the most prominent in terms of observable behaviour. Students who had been exposed to reflective and transformation skills training appeared much more confident, communicated their responses much more articulately and were able to reflect more critically on their own development than their counterparts who were not taught these skills.

At an academic level the benefits of transformation skills training were also present in academic achievement. Former UNITE students regularly outperformed their counterparts, were better adjusted socially and, with improved through-put rates, displayed better graduation potential. Hence a clear picture has emerged from the research: students from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds, when exposed to structured and encompassing transformation skills training with the necessary ancillary support (such as mentors), have enhanced potential to achieve academic success. Such a curriculum which is integrated

133

with the mainstream curriculum could therefore be considered as essential. Social, economic, political and educational challenges arising out of the above student feedback are too vast and varied to be addressed in this thesis. However, they do raise fundamental questions pertaining to education, particularly the role of education in empowering learners with relevant skills.

The need for critical reflection in educational practice gains a sense of urgency especially in a world becoming increasingly more complex, fragmented and multiform. This growing complexity is not only affecting education, but is also spurring on rapid change trends in all sectors of society, giving rise to increased levels of social upheaval, emotional dissonance and environmental degradation on a scale never seen before. Increasing levels of violence, political and economic turbulence and many other social ills, points to the need for a fundamental shift in human consciousness.

The notion that human consciousness is constantly evolving is a largely undisputed claim. This is verified by significant emerging research particularly driven by the field of quantum mechanics. However, the belief that human consciousness is currently evolving in such a way that we can consciously participate in the process is an emergent theme in academic research (Gidley, 2007). This groundbreaking belief that humans can proactively affect their own destinies through evolving their consciousness is a paradigm shift of immense value! It unlocks opportunities for positive change and provides the potential to the 'disempowered' to challenge the hegemonic doctrines which have emasculated them and thereby creates the potential to take control of their realities. This thesis is about making a positive contribution; about adding value to the practitioner- as- researcher's role in Academic Development within higher education in South Africa.

It is tempting to locate the 'locus of control' for social transformation in the educational system due to its pervasive role in society. One needs to guard against reductionist and 'technicist' models such as the 'structural adjustment' one mentioned earlier. As advocated in this thesis, an alternative approach should be explored; one that not only acknowledges the complexities of transformation (contextual factors; philosophical paradigms), but which seeks to cultivate the 'locus of control' in the learner through awareness and reflection and thereby develop empowering and sustainable coping skills.

Groundbreaking theoretical research, such as Theory U and Nondual approaches to learning have provided new impetus to how social transformation can be constructed within the ambit of academic development.

Highlighting the 'student voice' identifies the social and academic variables which impact learning. Further it stresses the fact that an academic development intervention needs to extend much further than the structural adjustment model which is so prevalent in tertiary institutions and that there is an urgent need to intervene at social, behavioural and ontological levels. What is also instructive is the fact that when learners were engaged in a process of interrogating their own learning praxes, they became aware of their 'blind spots' and could critically observe their personal shortcomings. Even engaging at this elementary level had a positive outcome in the lives of many students.

Chapter 6: Meta Narratives of Social Transformation: Modernity, Postmodernity, Post-postmodernity

> *The future will inevitably, be very different from the past, simply because the predominant trends that have shaped global industrial development cannot continue.* (Scharmer, 2007)

One should consider Scharmer's statement in the light of the rapidly evolving social realities afflicting the world. What makes his statement so poignant, is the fact that this 'future' has arrived already!

This chapter will explore the *meta* transformational narratives which defined the various historical epochs, ranging from Modernism to Post-postmodernism and its influences on thinking and education.

Transformation is one of the indelible qualities that characterizes social life as we know it. The same quality applies to human life. Throughout its developmental phases, the human body and its consciousness undergoes changes – shaped by its natural genetic processes, as well as by the environmental factors to which it is exposed. A commensurate quality with the propensity to transform is the ability to adapt to changing circumstances:

> *The plasticity of the human brain enables it to develop through learning, which in turn means that individuals can benefit from experience. In humans, the majority of complex skills have to be acquired through a protracted period of development in the environment in which we live.* (Greenfield, 1999:24)

Although social transformation is such a major discernible characteristic which has defined human civilization since its earliest history, it is only during the last two centuries that its evidence has become discernible; mainly with the advent of technology and the onset of the industrial revolution. The post-World War II social, economic and political environments have been influenced by a *maelstrom* of changes which were not only powerful and unpredictable processes, but also radically transformed societies globally (Toffler, 1972; Sunter, 1987; Connor, 1992; Gatherer, 1993; Preece, 2003). These changes, which are a result of shifting socio-economic and political dynamics, continue unrelentingly, resulting in major lifestyle shifts such as global urbanization, the decline of political ideologies and among others, the disruption of traditional values and lifestyles.

136

Much of these changes are fuelled and driven by rapidly expanding globalization and with the rise of technology, this has been given a further boost. In the words of Castells (2000:367):

> *A new world is taking shape at this turn of the millennium. The information technology revolution induced the emergence of informationalizm, as the material foundation of a new society.*

Information technology has become an indispensable tool for the effective implementation of socio-economic restructuring, resulting in far reaching effects on societal norms which include the establishment of virtual social networks and access to real time world events (Castells, 2000:367).

Although driven often discretely by technology, transformation is not an impersonal process which happens simply as a result of technological and economic events. We have to acknowledge, whether at a macro or micro level, the role of human agency as catalysts in the change processes and also the impact this has on human destiny. Besides the macro forces mentioned earlier, transformation comes about mainly as a result of the interactions and actions of people. This raises a longstanding debate within philosophy; that of *free will* versus *determinism*. Hondereich (2002:2) defines 'free will' and 'determinism' as meaning the following:

- *Free will: each of us has the personal power to originate choices, decisions and thus actions.*

- *Determinism: human actions and choices are limited or determined by our human nature and thus are not free.*

The controversy which has raged around this debate has given rise to a third perspective; what is commonly referred to as 'Compatabilist'. This basically posits a compromise between the two – that our *free will* is free, but that it is exercised within certain parameters such as genetic make-up, neurological structure and the social environment in which we live (Greenfield, 1999:25).

It is not the aim of this chapter to engage in the debate on free will *versus* determinism. However in keeping with the constructivist tradition, this research aligns with the 'Compatabilist' perspective because although one's thinking and actions may be determined by genetic make-up or neurological

structure; people can and do change with new conditioning. This change is appropriate to the type and strength of the training to override the already established conditioning (Crowley, 2006:93).

Although some theorists accept change as intrinsic to a perpetual cycle of the advancement of human consciousness (Beck: 2002; Crowley: 2007), we should not take change as a 'given'. Strong resistance to change also prevails, based on fear, cultural restrictions and a lack of skills to manage change. The complexity of change processes and the speed with which it has happened, aided by informational technology has made it both daunting and overwhelming and hence evoke what Kegan and Lahey, (2009) refer to as an 'immunity to change'. According to these authors:

> *The change challenges today's leaders and their subordinates face are*
> *not, for the most part, a problem of will. The problem is the inability to*
> *close the gap between what we genuinely, even passionately, want and*
> *what we are actually able to do. Closing this gap is a central learning*
> *problem of the twenty-first century.* (2009:2).

It has been mentioned earlier that 'change' is an intrinsic part of human life. In fact, the ancient Chinese treatise, the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes* (Wilhelm, 1972:281) makes a distinction between three kinds of change:

- *Nonchange: The background or reference point against which change is made;*
- *Cyclic change: The rotation of phenomena, each succeeding the other until the starting point is reached again.*
- *Sequent change: The progressive (non-recurrent) change of phenomena produced by causality.*

However, the success of the change process depends on the human psyche's receptivity to change as well as its ability to cope with the complexity of change acquired through constructive action.

The fact that we live in a world where change arises out of evolving consciousness, opens up exciting possibilities for advancement. The ongoing quest for social transformation is undoubtedly having a major impact on society and a deeper and comprehensive understanding of this process will provide a

clearer perspective for learners in academic development programmes on how to manage and benefit from this process.

The intention to relate the research to academic development in higher education in South Africa, is not only because of its potentially positive impact on learners' success in the learning environment, but also that its goal is compatible with the 'Compatabalist' perspective which asserts that learners are able to exercise free will facilitated by a constructivist transformation model. The transformation themes that will be explored in this chapter will include the following:

- How does change or transformation manifest in society?
- How does it impact on the individual?
- How can an individual/ learner be empowered to manage the change process?

These are fundamental questions which challenge the very nature of epistemological and ontological processes. Hence this section will also provide insights into the proliferating discourses – modernism; postmodernism; post-postmodernism/integral – that have impacted the social transformation trajectory.

There is no doubt that the unprecedented change in current society is having a major impact on human and organizational norms. Never before has Mankind experienced so much cultural transformation, technological proliferation and economic upheaval; the pace of which people are unable to absorb or make sense of. Toffler, in his seminal work *Future Shock* (1972:3), sums this up succinctly:

> *Change overturns institutions, shifts our values and shrivels our roots.*
> *Change is the process by which the future invades our lives, and it is*
> *important to look at it closely, not merely from the grand perspective of*
> *history, but also from the vantage point of the living, breathing*
> *individuals who experience it.*

When we view the change processes from the 'vantage point of the living, breathing individuals who experience it', we begin to realize the full impact of 'Future Shock'. Rapid and overwhelming social change affects *inter alia*, people's states of well being, value orientations and interpersonal relationships (Olivier *et al*, 1997:24).

These change processes – political, social, economic and educational – have had profound effects on the prevailing societal paradigms. This is aptly reflected in the following table by Daft (1999):

Old Paradigm	New Paradigm
Industrial Age	Information Age
Stability	Change
Control	Empowerment
Competition	Collaboration
Things	People and Relationships
Uniformity	Diversity

The above paradigm shifts are reflective of dynamic social processes, which significantly impact all social activities. The process is driven by the prevailing mindsets of the participating social actors. Various researchers propose that engaging with social transformation through awareness and constructive action will greatly enhance coping in a turbulent environment. This view is supported by various management theorists (Heifetz, 1994; Wheatley, 1999; Leithwood *et al*, 2004).

In order to locate the discussion in the present, this thesis will trace the social evolution from Modernity to Postmodernity and on to Post-postmodernity. It will explore the rise of each epoch not only as a reaction to the previous ones, but also in its attempts to chart a way forward and most importantly, its impact on education.

This section will focus at the outset on two of the most defining epochs of human history, Modernity, and Postmodernity. It will explore how through education, it sustained the drive for industrialization and served the needs of industrial capitalism. The research will explore the hegemonic influence which Modernity exercised over social systems and in the process, manipulated education to its own ends. It will then show the development trajectory towards Nondualism/Integral and then Theory U.

Modernism, Postmodernism & Post-postmodernism (Integral)

> *There are periods in human and cultural evolution when humanity*
> *passes through such fundamental transformations that our reality*

140

*shifts and new patterns of thoughts are required to make sense of the
unfolding human drama.* (Gidley, 2007)

The chronological shifts in discourse from Modernity to Post-postmodernity represent significant periods of human and cultural evolution and the understanding of this trajectory provides insights into the dynamism of social theory and the evolution of consciousness.

Modernism

Lyon (1994) asserts that the years from 1789-1989 became the symbolic two centuries span of Modernity, which is expressed politically as the quest for a rationalized world. This era spanned the French Revolution to the fall of bureaucratic state socialism'. From an economic perspective this period also saw the rise of industrial capitalism, which had a major impact on work patterns and social relations and it fostered the development of Western philosophical traditions that placed Man at the centre of the universe. The natural environment was there to conquer, exploit and develop for Man's sole benefit (Burkey, 1993:32). This era represents a watershed period in humanity's quest for a technologically driven civilization because the Modern epoch probably saw more scientific discovery than in previous history.

When we reflect on this era, the discoveries cannot always be deemed beneficial because this era also encapsulated the discovery of mass destruction in the form of the atomic bomb, government corruption in the form of the Watergate Scandal and various other atrocities against humankind – Nazism and apartheid. It is not surprising that hand in hand with the scientific and technological advancement there was also an increase in Humankind's search for truth because whilst scientific reasoning brought progress and emancipation from superstition and mythology, it also brought destruction and confusion.

Essentially, Modernity, which was characterized by its forward looking thrust and dependence on technology, made a distinct break from the theological and superstitious belief systems of the pre-Modern era, thus marginalizing tradition. Its belief in progress and the power of rationalism to produce emancipation from ignorance and poverty probably had the greatest impact on social evolution. One could argue that due to spectacular scientific discoveries during the era of Modernity, a greater faith was developed in the power of 'instrumental reason' to discover the 'truth' – and that this 'truth' was universally valid. It is this 'instrumental reason' based on scientific discourse, which has shaped both

Modernity and Modern education – understood as the process through which to socialize the young into society and professional life.

One can trace the notion of 'instrumental reasoning' to the positivist doctrine, depicted by Auguste Comte in his *Law of the Three Stages*. Here Comte traces the progression of the human mind, from a theological stage, through a metaphysical stage, to a positive stage (Cohen and Manion, 1995:6). According to this doctrine, at the theological stage, the most primitive attempts are made to explain behaviour in terms of spiritual entities. The metaphysical is only a modified version of the earlier stage and sets out to explain behaviour in terms of abstractions. The final, positive stage dispenses with theological and metaphysical concepts and turns to observation and reason as a means to understand behaviour.

More simply, explanation now proceeds by way of scientific description. The 'scientific description', as Oldroyd (in Dixon, 1989:107) explains, meant that social phenomena could not be viewed objectively, but were to be viewed in the light of physiological laws or theories and investigated empirically'. This break from the theological and metaphysical traditions in favour of scientific reason was referred to as the dawning of the 'Age of Enlightenment'. Enlightenment, with its emphasis on empirical investigation, elevated the notions of science, technology and related disciplines, which resulted in a 'rephrasing' of authority, identity and work relations.

In contrast to the apparent stability of antiquity and the pre-Modern, the era of Modernity unleashed convulsions of changes in traditional social life. These changes resulted in the following: significant shifts in socio-economic practices were brought about as agricultural workers were uprooted from farmlands and transformed into industrial urbanites; and large-scale industrialization was established, resulting in 'production line' mass manufacturing (Fordism) and also facilitating the rapid advance of industrial capitalism. Alongside these developments have come cultural changes such as secularization, the emphasis on self and personal growth and the growing importance of electronic media and information technology.

At a more personal level, the social and economic changes also transformed institutions such as the family. Fragmentation and role alteration set in as a result of relocations (rural to urban) and related job practices (shift work).   The acceleration of telecommunications which enhanced the flow of communication was also able to shape people's understanding of reality. Sociologists, Durkheim and Weber, noticed a profound sense of unease and uncertainty (*anomie*). Weber feared that rationalization,

resulting from the increased bureaucracy, would eventually 'crush the human spirit'. In short, Modernity had the potential to dehumanize human society. Jane Jacobs (in Lyon, 1994:33) wrote that 'while urban space was clean and orderly, it was socially and spiritually dead, except where life was sustained, paradoxically, by noise, congestion and chaos'.

Modernity's Impact on Education

One might ask the question, "How did instrumental rationality acquire such a monopoly over social development during the Modern era?" The answer points to education!

> *Modern forms of governance and social discipline are secured through education; in an important sense, they work through educating. In Modernity, education replaces pre-modern coercion and subjugation. In this respect, education is not simply that which goes on in schools but is an essential part of govern mentality, a crucial aspect of the regulatory practices of a range of modern institutions.* (Usher and Edwards, 1994)

Education theory and praxis is founded on the discourse of Modernity; the discourse of rationality and scientific empiricism (Usher and Edwards, 1994). This discourse expounded education as the vehicle through which the 'grand narratives' of the Enlightenment such as the ideals of critical reason, individual emancipation (from superstitious beliefs, ignorance and poverty), progress and benevolent change could be realized. The modern project of education is to do with the cultivation of reason and autonomy as the condition of and for an economic and social progress built upon the cumulative growth of scientific understanding of the world and its associated technical rationality (Usher and Edwards, 1994).

The notion of 'scientism' is an important defining characteristic of Modern education due to the belief during the Modern era that the world could not be mastered without scientific method. This perspective resulted in one of the core characteristics of education in Modernity, being its claim to a 'determinate', universal truth – a truth based on rationality and science, with its promise of inevitable progress in the task of human betterment (Usher and Edwards, 1994).

The impact of Modern thought on education was as perverse as it was pervasive. In addressing the needs of industrial society, Modern schooling sought to reduce humans to units of production. The economic

system which Modernism served most effectively was that of industrial capitalism and the curriculum was manipulated to provide functional knowledge to sectors of the population in order to make them economically active.

In South Africa, Modernity manifested through the apartheid system of racial governance. Systematic political and economic subjugation reduced Black people mainly to units of production – with social freedom and land rights usurped and coerced to serve the interests of monopoly capitalism.

Toffler (1972:95) succinctly captures the essence of the Modern schooling system:

> *The whole idea of assembling masses of students (raw material) to be processed by teachers (workers) in a centrally located school (factory) was a stroke of industrial genius. The whole administrative hierarchy of education, as it grew up, followed the model of industrial bureaucracy.*

Modern education and conventional science could not stem the proliferation of social and economic problems globally. Wide-scale poverty, ecological destruction, climate change, social fragmentation and global economic turmoil were largely blamed on the application of Modernist thinking. This initiated a catalyst for a new way of thinking and being in what was perceived to be an increasingly turbulent and complex world. This search gave rise to a critical approach which problemetized and critiqued prevailing discourses. This approach was commonly referred to as 'Postmodernism'.

Postmodernism

> *It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity; it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness; it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going the other way…"(*from A Tale of Two Cities – Charles Dickens)

Although written in the 18th century, the Dickensian quote, above, elegantly captures a reality that is anchorless, uncertain and ambiguous; all features which also came to be associated with the Postmodern.

As stated earlier, the era of Modernity and Enlightenment heralded major upheavals in social, economic and cultural life, under the guise of progress and emancipation. Yet, when one takes a critical look at contemporary society internationally, there is a strong realization that 'progress' (developments in science and technology) occurred at a great human cost. This resulted in an increase in social fragmentation (traditional structures disintegrating) as well as *anomie*[59]. Many of the ideals of the Enlightenment were being cast into doubt, or rendered incredible, through the continuation of want, disease, famine, destruction and devastating ecological costs. Much of the progress which science, technology and instrumental reason promised to all had not materialized!

Postmodernism as a critical discourse, in opposition to Modernism, did not emerge in a vacuum, but was a critical response to the 'bankruptcy' of the era of Enlightenment. Although not easily definable, some of the definitive qualities of Postmodernism were its critical posture towards convention, its tolerance of ambiguity and diversity, the acceptance of innovation and the emphasis on the constructedness of reality.

Emancipation (from ignorance and poverty), which was a key ideal of Enlightenment, was elusive to most people, as evident in the Marxist analysis of labour exploitation. Not only were people enslaved to the production line in mammoth corporations, but disciplines which became prominent during the Enlightenment – the human sciences such as psychology (psychoanalysis), which were supposed to contribute to humanity's personal growth and emancipation – were branded 'discourses of power' by Foucault (Lyon, 1994:15). An example is the discipline of educational psychology, which attempted to 'normalize', that is, change, the behaviour of children and adults, in order to fit into the Modernist educational paradigm.

One of the core Postmodernist critiques of Modernism concerns determinate and universal truth, based on science and rationality. Scientific empiricism to provide a universally valid understanding about the world comes under intense scrutiny through the Postmodernist perspective.

---

[59] An absence of laws, rules or norms. The term is used to describe the condition of individuals who are unable to internalize social constraints, or the condition of societies with conflicting or disintegrating norms (Roberts & Edwards, 1991:4).

The Modernist search for an underlying and unified truth which could render reality, experiences and events coherent and meaningful, based on a scientific, objective and value-neutral knowledge, is rejected within Postmodernism. Postmodernist theorists place a heightened awareness on the significance of language, discourse and socio-locatedness in constructing and understanding reality. Postmodernism takes into cognizance the diversity and plurality of social, economic and cultural life, thus rejecting the notion of a determinate truth and rather proposes the thesis of multiple truths.

Lyotard (in Usher and Edwards, 1994:156), through the analysis and philosophy of language, challenged the 'transcendental' nature of scientific empiricism which characterized Modern education and through which Modern education claimed universal validity.

Despite the Postmodern delegitimizing of Modernity there has been much debate about what is actually meant by Postmodernism. I wish to posit that to attempt to define it or to locate it in a specific moment could be regarded as oversimplification and reductionist. Rather it finds its definition more succinctly in its critical approach and the acceptance of increasing complexity and the fragmentation of advanced industrial societies, rapidly changing (hegemonic) global relations and disillusionment with technology's ability to solve the world's problems. This major reconceptualization of reality has fundamentally questioned the precepts of the Enlightenment, which gave rise to Postmodernism's critical approach. According to Beck (1993:2):

> *Postmodernism has helped us see that reality is more complex than we*
> *had imagined. It does not exist objectively, "out there," simply to be*
> *mirrored by our thoughts. Rather, it is in part a human creation. We*
> *mould reality in accordance with our needs, interests, prejudices, and*
> *cultural traditions.*

Although it originated as a response to Modernity, Postmodernism should not be seen as a panacea for the 'ills' of modernity. Essentially, its message is the need to challenge or problematize conventional ways of perceiving reality and attempting to systematically explain that reality (Usher and Edwards, 1994:1). It is these characteristics of being able to 'problematize'[60], and to critically question that allowed Postmodernist theorists to analyze so penetratingly the discourses of Modernity.

---

[60] 'Problematization' is very much a Postmodern notion of rendering concepts or theory to critical interrogation.

The term 'debate about reality' is a key defining characteristic of Postmodernism, which in essence does not posit itself as an determinate truth about reality, but entertains differing interpretations about it. Nietzsche coined the term 'Nihilism', which corresponds most closely to this fluid and anchorless sense of reality (in Lyon, 1994:8).

Furthermore, it presents itself as a critical way of thinking about progress, especially after the epoch of Modernity. It must be borne in mind that Postmodernism does not reject progress, but questions the notion that progress was in fact an inevitable outcome of scientific rationality, especially when one takes into consideration consequences such as ecological destruction, diseases, war and poverty.

A Postmodernist perspective would be applied to an interpretation of reality through challenging established discourses, through developing a critical, self-referential posture and style which consists of a set of critical methods and techniques, as well as 'problematizing', that is, asking critical questions, challenging attempts at rationally and objectively trying to analyze reality. A second defining characteristic of Postmodernity is its questioning of established doctrines as the following demonstrates:

> *It is complex and multiform and resists reductive and simplistic explanation and explication. The message is the need to problematize systems of thought and organisation and to question the very notion of systematic explanation.* (Usher and Edwards, 1994:1)

Postmodernism allows one to debate reality, however it does not posit itself as a determinate truth about reality, but entertains differing interpretations about it. Nietzche (in Lyon: 1994) coined the term *'nihilism'*, which corresponds most closely to this fluid and anchorless sense of reality.

Postmodernism's Impact on Education

The main contribution of Postmodernism to this research is to provide the platform from which to problematize and challenge the fundamental educational discourse pertaining to social transformation in academic development. At an epistemological level it places a greater emphasis on individual agency in the construction of knowledge, where knowledge results from the interaction between an individual's ideas about the world and the experiences of the world (Beck, 1993:2).

Regarding how we approach our inquiry from a Postmodern perspective, Beck (1993:4) elucidates:

No longer should we see ourselves as seeking to uncover a pre-existing reality; rather, we are involved in an interactive process of knowledge creation. We are developing a "working understanding" of reality and life, one which suits our purposes. And because purposes and context vary from individual to individual and from group to group, what we arrive at is in part autobiographical; it reflects our "personal narrative," our particular "site" in the world.

According to Postmodernist theorists, the reason why knowledge cannot be objectified is because all discourses are socially constructed. This construction of knowledge has to be located in social, economic and cultural circumstances; the multiplicity of perspectives which perhaps most characterizes a Postmodern perspective. Hence in opposition to a search for absolute truth, the Postmodernist celebrates diversity and plurality of truths (Usher and Edwards, 1994:25). What this means is that universal validity of truth is rejected. Sociological differences and related experiential differences, which emanate from these, are recognized.

One of the key benefits of Postmodernism was to usher in a critical dimension to the evolution of social theory. It questioned the very nature of one's understanding of reality by challenging and presenting multiple realities. Through this, it brought about a greater acceptance of the inevitability of change and recognized it as a potential source of renewal.

Postmodernist theorists place a heightened awareness on the significance of language, discourse and socio-locatedness in constructing and understanding reality. The Postmodern critique of science is thus centred on science's refusal to accept that it is itself a human, social practice rather than a transcendental activity 'beyond history, culture, values, subjectivity and power' (Heenan in Usher and Edwards, 1994:33).

By critically challenging the subjugation wrought by the era of Modernity, Postmodernism was able to emancipate thinking and education from restrictive discourses. Education and social theory were hence susceptible to change and from this perspective, the pivotal role of education as a Postmodern 'project' is significant.

The challenge is to make sense of the social transformation process. This can be done by identifying the relationship between knowledge and theory. According to Handsfield and Melnyk (in Morrison, 2003:4):

> *Knowledge develops through a systematic progression of theory building. Knowledge is as a result of three courses of action: the creation of new theories; the expansion of existing theories; and the disconfirmation of old theories that do not survive empirical scrutiny.*

Having the intentionality to critically interrogate habitual/'old' theories and then construct new theory is the synthesis between Postmodernism and constructivism. Knowledge results from the purposeful and systematic processes aimed at bringing new understanding through the development and testing of new theories (Morrison, 2003).

As mentioned earlier, in the constructivist tradition, the researcher's interpretation is central to the research, meaning that the researcher constructs his or her own reality. This gives credence to the comment by Socrates, who taught his students that knowledge was mere perception (Murphy and Rhaume, in Morrison, 2003). The creation of knowledge is manifestly determined by the relationship of the observer towards the observed. This non-positivist approach asserts that the separation of the researcher (subject) from the phenomena (object) being researched is not feasible. According to constructivists, the philosophical positions held by researchers determine their findings.

Since Postmodernism is not a determinate truth, the question might arise: How might one reconceptualize education within the Postmodern theoretical approach? At a fundamental epistemological level, a Postmodernist approach provides theoretical 'space' to challenge educational systems. This would include emancipating education from its Modernist 'bondage' and seeing it in a perspective where it is receptive to change. Due to the differences in social, economic and cultural circumstances, including the concomitant influences on education, the possibility of a multiplicity of perspectives is recognized. The sociological and related experiential differences, which emanate from these is acknowledged. What this plurality contributes to education is the notion of 'mediation'– content and process is not prescribed to educational participants.

One of the examples of a learning approach which has been associated with Postmodernism, is that of 'experiential learning'. Experiential learning as its term indicates, focuses on the experience of the

learner – in giving value to the experiential and the learning engaged in as part of everyday life (Titmus *et al* in Criticos, 1989:17). One can approach this either from the perspective of bringing experience to the learning environment, or, 'experiencing' learning in a practical sense through the curriculum. Either way, through experiential learning, the learning content is not pre-given, but is constantly constructed and reconstructed. The value of this approach is that the learner's input is involved or legitimated into the learning process. Education therefore becomes a process which is not bound by convention, but is allowed to be shaped by the participants, based on their location within the social formation.

Despite the criticism of the 'nihilistic' dimension that Postmodernism brought to social critique, one has to acknowledge that it nevertheless played a pivotal role in the evolving trajectory of social theory – from its refutation of the 'instrumental' reasoning of the Modernist era to the emphasis on critical reasoning and the acceptance of the notion of 'multiple truths'. I would assert that Postmodernism's main contribution to education is to 'problematize' and challenge all the discourses pertaining to Modernity. It does not proclaim a uniform or unified Postmodern discourse on education, but underlines that we construct our world through discourse and practice.

At an epistemological level, this approach rejected the universal and transcendental foundations of knowledge and thought and affirmed the socio-locatedness of the individual in knowledge construction. What is relevant in this development trajectory of transformation theory from Modernism to Postmodernism is the shift in discourse and consciousness away from the reductionist rationality of cause and effect, towards a stronger focus on the role of human agency in the construction of reality.

Post-postmodernism/Nondualism

> *How can it be that the most intelligent and creative of sentient beings are so stupid when it comes to their own ultimate welfare? It is not difficult to perceive that much of this non-enabling reluctance is embedded in the institutional structure of the western world through which consumer capitalism operates. The neglect and failure to meet these challenges poses the paradoxical dilemma of our times because, after some two hundred years of unremitting technological advance bringing immense benefits to humanity, it appears that the entire paradigm of thought underpinning Western civilisation needs a radical overhaul if not total replacement.* (Crook, 2009:7)

150

The above quotation eloquently captures the two key dissonant notions of Modernity, which are 'disconnectedness' and 'dominance' not only in human society, but more especially towards the environment. Hence, the dynamic trajectory from the Modern to the Postmodern and onward to the Post-postmodern, is not only as a result of a response from Humankind to a world that is in crisis, but is also reminiscent of the 'meme' theory which identifies the different stages of human development as presented in *Spiral Dynamics* (Beck, 2006) (See Appendix 1).

Beck in his Spiral Dynamics model of the evolution of human consciousness, proposes that human development undergoes a transformation process of eight stages. For clarity and categorization these are colour coded and linked to themes. The first stage is Beige (started 100 000 years ago), where the basic theme is 'survivalist'. This spirals through the various stages until it reaches Turquoise (30 years ago) where the basic theme is 'experiencing the wholeness of existence through mind and spirit'.

The Spiral Dynamics model, which is similar to the psychologist Abraham Maslow's motivational model, the Hierarchy of Human Needs (where we progress through various stages until we reach self actualization), epitomizes the dynamic and proactive potential of human nature. Through our awareness and ability to respond to the crises we experience, we can identify the stage we wish to aspire to.

Once could therefore argue that it was the gradual awareness of the dangers inherent in Modernist thinking and the 'anchorless' narrative of the Postmodern that inspired the progression from the Modern, to the Postmodern and onward to the Post-postmodern. This provided the catalyst for a new search for a deeper, more expansive understanding of reality.

Spurred on by globalization and informational technology, new understandings of order, disorder and change emerged. This was bolstered by emerging research in quantum mechanics (which examines the behaviour of subatomic particles), ecological studies and systems thinking. New philosophical paradigms emerged; paradigms which departed significantly from the traditional Western Positivist, subject-matter, dualistic way of viewing the world, towards an integral Nondual approach where subject and matter were considered intricately intertwined.

It is relevant to note that with the emergence of the Nondual paradigm came a renewed interest in Eastern philosophy and a deeper awareness of spirituality. In the Eastern philosophical traditions, Nondualism was well established (Loy, 2003; Pillay, 2007). Loy (2003:5) writes:

For Buddhism there are no self-existing things, since everything, including you and me, interpenetrates (interpermeates) everything else, arising and passing away according to causes and conditions. This interconnectedness – not just an intellectual insight but an experience – was an essential aspect to the Buddha's awakening, and it is congruent with the essential postmodern realisation.

The awareness and indeed inclusion of a spiritual dimension was not a return to the metaphysical state of the pre-Enlightenment era, albeit that it was one of the most profound and defining characteristics of the Post-postmodern. Spirituality in this sense however, is not the reductionist concept that is commonly found in conventional religions. Rather it refers to a deeper connection with reality; an intricate and interdependent connection with all of life. Archbishop Rowan (in Crook, 2009:9) refers to it as a 'reflective inner life'. Loy (2003) regards 'spirituality' as a *metanarrative* which creates a 'sacred canopy' that provides psychic and social stability. Beyond Eastern philosophy, it is poignant to observe that at a scientific level Nondualism also found legitimacy, mainly through improved understanding of physics and quantum mechanics. Wheatley (1999:32) notes;

In science, the beginning of the twentieth century heralded the end of the hegemony of Newtonian thinking. Discoveries of a strange word at the subatomic level could not be explained by Newton's laws, and the path was open for new ways of comprehending the universe. Newtonian mechanics still contribute greatly to scientific advances, but a new and different science is required now to explain many phenomena. Quantum mechanics does not describe a clock-like universe.

This view is in opposition to the social theory based on Newtonian physics, which regards every atom as an individual entity that moves in a unique, predictable way. Hence, prediction and control are achieved by reducing wholes into discrete parts and controlling these parts.

With the emergence of Nondualism and aided by the constructivist tradition in Postmodernism, the emphasis moved towards an interconnectedness in knowledge construction where the polarity between the 'subjective Self' and the 'objective other' was negated. The 'subjective Self' thus did not act on a

separate, hostile world, but saw itself as part of that world. The observer became the observed and *vice versa.*

Of key importance in this approach, was the renewed focus on the Self, not only in terms of its role in constructing reality, but in terms of its 'ontological status' that is, the nature of its true being (Wilbur: 1997) and its relationship with the 'field' or the living system within which it is located. Wilbur (1997:1) emphasizes this relationship:

> *To understand the whole, it is necessary to understand the parts. To understand the parts, it is necessary to understand the whole. Such is the circle of understanding.*

The web of interconnectedness is further highlighted by Wheatley (in Daft, 1999:12):

> *Nothing exists except in relationship to everything else. It is not things, but the relationships among them that are the key determinants of a well-ordered system we perceive. Order emerges through a web of relationships that make up the whole, not as a result of controls or individual parts.*

The notion of the Self as a 'holon' and in relationship to everything else means that we cannot see it apart from its finely calibrated relationship with the context within which it finds itself. This view however, has not been without controversy. The symbiotic interplay between Self and context has fuelled the nature-nurture debate of determinism *versus* free will. Crick (in Crowley, 2007:9) sums this up:

> *Genes appear to lay down broad structure of the nervous system, but that experience is needed to tune up and refine the many details of its structure; this is often a continuing process throughout life.*

Based on the fact of our genetic predisposition, certain theorists refute the notion of conscious will and regard it as an 'illusion'. Although neurological capacity might be genetically determined, we cannot rule out the powerful influence of contextual experience and interpreting and acting upon that experience. However with new conditioning and socialization, human neurology can and does

153

ultimately change (Crowley, 2007). It is this assertion that human consciousness can change that forms the crux of this research. The multiple realities that were alluded to earlier are based upon individuals' abilities, albeit from differing levels of consciousness, to shape these multiple realities.

The profound impact of the Nondual perspective has far reaching consequences on how we exist in reality. Fundamentally it shifts the gaze away from the object (observed) towards the subject (observer) and hence emphasizes the 'interiority' that is, the inner state/disposition from which the subject acts.

Whereas Postmodernism's fundamental contribution to the social transformation trajectory was to break Modernism's restrictive bondage of 'instrumental reasoning'; to create a space for alternative ways of perceiving and exploring reality, Post-postmodernism came with a message of the 'whole being more than the sum of its parts'; that the world is a complex, dynamic system where reality exists not in discrete parts, but in relationships among them (Daft, 1999).

Potential Contribution of Nondual/ Integral thinking to Education

The Nondual/integral philosophical paradigm is an emerging discourse that has already contributed much towards a renewed interest in consciousness and its role in the construction of reality. One can argue that its philosophical doctrines are not new, but are reminiscent of an integral way of life, which preceded the rise of the Modern philosophical doctrine.

We must see the shift towards the Nondual/Integral from two perspectives:

- The disillusionment with the established doctrines (Modernism; Postmodernism) in dealing with the current crises facing humanity globally. These include: climate change; ecological destruction; rampant consumerism; social fragmentation; and unprecedented levels of conflict;

- The alternatives that Nondual thinking offers as compared to the above established doctrines.

Modernity's focus on instrumental reasoning, rationality and its reification of science and Postmodernism's notion of a fluid reality provided useful insights into the thinking patterns and

challenges experienced in the contexts within which they were located. Unfortunately both doctrines do not meet the challenges facing contemporary society.

Connor (1992:02) writes that:

> *Today more than ever, people feel the loss of that 'centre' and the sense of stability it once provided. Many of the frames of reference that once offered some degree of predictability and order are disappearing. The world is changing so rapidly that confusion and dysfunction have become more the rule than the exception.*

Ironically, the challenges facing contemporary society do not arise only due to a lack of resources; more importantly, they arise out of the negation of human values. The prominence of materialism and crass consumerism has generated a lack of respect for human dignity and a lack of compassion. Closed minds have been evident in the economic and social policies that have sustained human suffering and limited the emergence of intuitive wisdom.

The challenges facing contemporary society seem to need an alternative, more innovative response. With the increasing complexity of social life, people are not going to stop creating new problems. Paradoxically, although change is part of the human development cycle, it is evident from the literature that humans are not able to absorb or cope with the change. To prepare and instil coping mechanisms I assert that the most effective vehicle towards managing social transformation is education.

> *Ever increasing change is inevitable and will be the hallmark of our lives. The ability to successfully manage change has become one of the most important skills needed for personal happiness, the prosperity of organizations and the health of the planet*. (Connor, 1992:2)

The major contribution that the Nondual/ Integral approach brings to social understanding and education is its distinct departure from the conventional Western philosophical tradition of the Positivist, subject-matter and cause-effect dualism. It must be emphasized that this dualism is one of the major causes of the current social and environmental problems facing the planet, because it has reified the notions of Self and expert knowledge as having the power to act upon the world.

One can trace the dualistic thinking back to the rise of the Abrahamic religious systems such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In these faiths, the theological construct of Man is also that of an elevated Being, superior to the rest of natural world. One could argue that it is as a result of this worldview that we have witnessed the indiscriminate plundering of the earth's natural resources.

Nondualism focuses on the intricately connectedness of the Self with Reality. It collapses the 'spectator' perspective (Goode, 2007:8) of the observer observing the observed and places the Self at the core of the construction of reality. Hence there is no independent reality; each reality (for each human subject) is constructed differently based on the level of individual consciousness. There is thus a symbiotic relationship between the Self and the environment within which it exists. In Nondualism the observer and the observed are one.

The trajectory of how we make sense of life from a theological state to a Post-postmodern state reflects the evolution of consciousness. The theological state emphasized the reign of a divine deity, but as Man acquired more knowledge of the physical laws applying to the world, the knowledge paradigm shifted to science and rationality. However, faced with increasing complexity to which there were no rational, scientific solutions, Postmodernism arose, which critiqued everything. Finally, drawing on emerging research in Post-postmodernism which taps into intuitive wisdom through a process of deep reflection and awareness, human consciousness, as in the ancient contemplative traditions, is realizing its role once again as integral to the process of meaning-making and shaping reality.

Chapter 7: Consciousness and the Construction of Reality

> *Reality is what we take to be true. What we take to be true is what we believe. What we believe is based upon our perceptions. What we perceive depends on what we look for. What we look for depends on what we think. What we think depends on what we perceive. What we perceive determines what we believe. What we believe determines what we take to be true. What we take to be true is our reality.*
>
> (Bohm in Parrish, 2006:42)

The increasing complexity and rapidity of social change have been the key drivers of pursuits to understanding reality, as evident in Chapter 6. Interestingly, most of the emerging social discourses are now preceded by 'post' for example, Postmodernism; Post-postmodernism; in order to show the onward march and changing nature of theoretical discourse.

Within the evolving trajectory of theoretical analyses, the recognition of consciousness and its construction of reality and hence in meaning-making, represents a profound shift away from the 'rationality' of the Modern era and the critical, but 'anchorless' discourse of Postmodernism. Chapter 7 therefore serves to articulate the critical ontological significance of the merging of consciousness with reality, and its role in shaping that reality.

It is generally accepted that as humans, we engage with life through our consciousness. Hence Bohm's extract eloquently captures the essence of the inseparable relationship between the Self and its perception of what constitutes reality. This notion that reality and Self are symbiotically intertwined is an established tradition in many spiritual paths, but an emerging one in social research discourse. It challenges conventional beliefs of an objective reality and evokes the need to expand our understanding of the relationship of Self and reality; with reality perceived not as an objective phenomenon 'out there', but as an integrally related part of who we are and essential to our meaning-making process.

This chapter intends to deconstruct the notion that consciousness is merely an innate (passive) human characteristic. It seeks to present an alternative understanding of consciousness not only as a latent human characteristic, but as a creative, constructive endeavour, which can be engaged to dynamically mediate our relationship with broader reality through the *meta*cognitive process of mindful self-awareness, which is an ontological state (Pillay, 2011).

However, cognition does not end with self-awareness. It should be integrated with our attempts to make sense of this vastly complex, chaotic and dynamic world, and enable us to cultivate our critical, self-reflective faculties, to question more intensely, enter into deeper generative dialogue and develop new ways of cognition in order to find a way forward.

> *In spite of our understanding so much about the universe and its functioning, we've barely begun to scratch the surface of understanding who we are, what our life is, and what our relationship is with the 'ten thousand things' that comprise phenomenal existence. The need to reverse our gaze to examine what lies within becomes obvious.* Crook (2009:26)

In general, various doctrines and socializing practices determine how we think and interpret our life experiences. There is limited personal involvement. The script for how we live our lives, how we interpret what we perceive, is determined by strong social and environmental forces. These find their origins in such diverse sources as spirituality, psychology, culture, education, parental influences and scientific disciplines, which all provide diverse entry points through which to attempt an understanding of our existence and our relationship with reality.

How we construct reality, how we make sense of it and how to transform it are some of the baffling epistemological and ontological questions posing renewed challenges, especially as we grapple with rapid transformation in an increasingly unpredictable and unstable world. What is certain is that the *meta* narratives on which we have become so dependant for meaning – science, religion, ideology, and economic theories, are no longer able to provide the explanations to the problems we are facing and hence take us out of the current morass of uncertainty and ensuing chaos. With all our technology and modern education, the social challenges facing humanity are accelerating and point to an urgent need for an alternative perspective on living in the world (Gidley, 2007:1).

A prime starting point is to determine how we know what we know. Besides the historicity of our knowledge acquisition, we rely much on our senses and our ability to reason. All of these have been conditioned by the context within which we find ourselves. 'Truth' is culturally relative and so is science (Wilbur, 1997:130). Hence these knowledge systems which might be restricted by their historical locatedness, might not be adequate to make sense of reality. Therefore, we need to become less dependent on what we know; leading from the past (Scharmer, 2007) and place greater emphasis

on what we don't know (Taleb, 2009). To become aware of what we don't know we have to interrogate what we know and strip it of its conventional wisdom.

The constant reference in this thesis to the transformational conundrum facing education emphasizes the fact that despite the advances in technology and in scientific and financial knowledge, challenges of poverty and disease remain prevalent. It appears that the established theories, models and various knowledge systems have become obsolete in the face of rising complexity. Kingsley (2008:306) states:

> *We have plenty of theories, endless discussions of problems about problems. But the simple fact is that through our minds we have not managed to understand one single thing. And the time for thinking and for reasoning is over now. They have served their purpose. They have kept us busy, allowed our minds to grow, carried us a little way further on the route towards greater individuality and self-consciousness. The problem is that we know nothing.*

The current social, political, economic and ecological challenges besetting the world are an indictment on the collective levels of consciousness. How is it possible that with the intellectual resources and sophisticated predictive instruments at our disposal, we contribute to problems of such immense magnitude that they threaten our very existence? It does appear that we are not as conscious of reality and as connected to the consequences of our course of actions as we should be. We have become oblivious to our 'blind spots' and totally dependent on our ability to reason. Like in the Enlightenment era, it seems that our ability to reason and the empirical-rational approach to knowledge inculcated a degree of arrogance, as seen in the following:

> *Arrogant and self-confident, 'les philosophes' of the Enlightenment emphasized the necessity, universality, unity, certainty, homogeneity, self-presence and unconditioned status of human reason. Universal human rationality coupled with empirical scientific analysis promised to banish the darkness of civil war, lawlessness, religious intolerance, dogmatism, superstition, ignorance, immaturity, disease and perversion.* (Deacon, 2003, 22)

A literature review and attempts to clarify what is meant by the notion of 'reality', reveals that there is no fixed definition, but that the understanding of 'reality' is based on a shifting discourse, subject to our experiences which we perceive through our senses, or from the philosophical traditions from which it is perceived. We can deduce from this that the concept of reality is in fact a social construct and that there is no independent, uniform reality. Each perspective of reality is constructed differently based on the practitioner's level of consciousness. Hence each Self's unique life circumstance will premeditate a different perception and construction of reality. Theory construction is therefore dependent on our level of consciousness (Gidley, 2007).

There is much evidence which testifies to the dynamic nature of transforming consciousness (Beck, WIE: 106).[61]Based on emerging research, particularly the Theory U model of transformation (Scharmer, 2007), one way of transforming consciousness is 'Presencing'. 'Presencing' places emphasis on seeking insight through deep inner reflection, interrogating one's mental models and thereby evolving one's consciousness. 'Presencing' is part of a transformative process that directs the suspension of habitual patterns of behaviour and perception, and aims to enhance the development of a clearer vision, and self-awareness as well as emotional intelligence. 'Presencing' restores the power of the individual by enabling the practitioner to become aware of the inner place from which he/she operates, examine the 'blind spots' (emotional barriers) and then facilitates the necessary shift in consciousness (in other words, becoming 'mindful').

The central argument in this chapter is recognizing that the integral relationship between consciousness and reality will significantly empower learners to shape their reality in the classroom environment through evolving their consciousness through constructive action. By advancing through the research the notion that perception of reality is not independent of human consciousness and that it is indeed a construct of consciousness, one can argue that humans can change their reality through transforming their consciousness. This hypothesis is particularly pertinent to learners in academic development programmes who will be greatly empowered to enhance their learning potential.

Notions of 'reality' and 'consciousness' are subject to multiple interpretations, which are primarily grounded in the world views held by the researcher. It is generally accepted that 'reality' is what we experience through our senses or 'consciousness'. These experiences are apprehended through direct encounters with stimuli and then processed by consciousness. Since our perceptions are dynamic, the perception of reality is therefore not static. How does this awareness come about? Beck (2002:106)

---

[61] Article which includes an interview with Don Beck in *What Is Enlightenment* magazine (Fall/Winter issue).

posits that awareness is linked to the evolution of human consciousness. His Spiral Dynamics Theory maps the complexity of human development as a spiral; '*A dynamic expression of a natural and cosmic force.*' (Beck, 2002:106)

With regards to 'consciousness', there is much debate as to its definition. Some scientists view consciousness as an illusion, or an 'epiphenomenon' (Greenfield, 1999:42). This view stems from the age of scientific materialism where it is assumed that everything, including our thoughts and feelings, can be reduced to simple physical causes and effects, that is, outcomes of chemical reactions in the individual's brain, or the products of our genetic inheritance. This reductionist view of consciousness has been refuted by emerging research and discoveries in the field of quantum physics. Quantum physics has made the incredible finding in certain experiments involving protons, that the consciousness or mind-set of the observer can determine outcome and reality. This raises the question: Can we choose our reality through our level of awareness?

Although elusive to simplistic explanations, quantum physics stresses the interconnectedness of everything in the universe. Consciousness is therefore not restricted to activities in the human brain, but has located the human subject centrally in the 'dance' of life – our consciousness is a 'holon' of the whole and the whole is a 'holon' (Wilbur, 1997) of us.

The *Webster Dictionary* (in Parrish, 2006:82) defines 'consciousness' as:

- *Awareness, especially of something within the self; also the state or fact of being consciousness of an external object;*
- *The state of being characterized by sensation, emotion, volition, and thought;*
- *The totality of conscious states of an individual;*
- *The upper level of mental life as contrasted with unconscious processes;*
- *Perceiving, apprehending, or noticing with a degree of controlled thought or observation;*
- *Capable of or marked by thought, with design or perception;*
- *Having one's mental faculties undulled – by sleep, faint, or stupor.*

At a *meta* level, according to Dziuban (2006), even the striving to understand consciousness, is in itself an act of consciousness; nothing exists outside of consciousness. Dziuban (2006:2) elaborates further:

> *Consciousness isn't a word. It is actively and alive right here, now,*
> *and always includes all there is.*

The assertion that consciousness can be transformed to impact on a vastly complex, chaotic and dynamic reality has not only been contested, but has also contributed to numerous theories and models of transformation which have also provided diverse entry points to make sense of this reality. This has given rise to the debate between the 'determinists' and those who believe in 'free will'. 'Determinism' is the doctrine which stipulates that we are not free and responsible, but that we have a certain nature that determines our actions (Hondereich, 2002:2). The emergent view as mentioned earlier, is that humans have the ability for independent action – that we can choose our level of consciousness and that we can choose either a positive or a negative collection of beliefs (Parrish, 2006:3) which can then determine reality.

The exercise of 'free will' is premised on awareness. There cannot be change without awareness of what needs to be changed (Henen, 2007) and then the effort to construct that change. This leads to the question: how does this awareness come about? Senge (1990) highlights the natural inclination on the part of humans to learn. When this attribute is nurtured, it can contribute towards a 'learning' organization. Thus humans evolve their consciousness because of an innate desire to learn. This learning, however, does not occur in a vacuum; it occurs as a result of a 'shift in mind'; a concept Senge calls "metanoia" (Senge, 1990:13). Senge further expands this model through linking learning to 'systems thinking' and the pursuit of Personal Mastery; all in all showing individuals' and organizations' ability to learn and reinvent themselves.

Although the recognition of consciousness as a determinant of reality has its roots in the contemplative practices of Eastern belief systems, it is strongly supported by existential psychology. Existentialism, unlike the psychoanalytic approach advocated by Freud (which looked at hidden motives), placed independent choice squarely within individual experience:

> *It stressed the universal role of becoming conscious and responsible*
> *for discovering and developing the meaning of our individual*

existence. It advocated personal choice, personal responsibility and personal freedom. (Parrish, 2006:18)

The realization that we can actively intervene in the process of meaning-making capacity and from there change our realities has far reaching consequences. It challenges the notion that science provides the only valid way of understanding human behaviour or reality and opens the door to new ways of thinking and being.

The process of knowing follows multiple paths. Contemporary education with its emphasis on instrumental reasoning has been responsible for shaping much of our logical and rational perspectives on knowledge production. However, these approaches, which emphasize objectivity and detachment, have often blinded us to our actions and their effects on the world. There is therefore a compelling argument for a deeper interrogation of the relationship between heightened consciousness and its impact on reality.

In summarizing this chapter, the realization that reality is not something 'out there', but is intrinsically tied to our level of consciousness brings an empowering dimension to the notion of meaning-making. It awakens us to the fact that much of the discord in the world and indeed in personal lives, results from a lack of awareness. This applies specifically to learners in academic development programmes who might not have interrogated the causal factors for their learning problems.

The refutation of a dualistic reality also challenges the domination of scientific discourse as the only valid way of understanding society and reality, and prepares us for new ways of thinking, being and doing.

Chapter 8: Theory U Model of Social Transformation

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
(T.S. Eliot)

Human life as we know it has been defined by transformation. It has been subjected to many historical epochs; all characterized by unique belief systems, technological innovations and political ideologies, which have shaped and left a lasting impact on its social evolution. The Spiral Dynamics model (Appendix 1) provides a clear example of this progression from the earliest dawn of human civilization, to the present. However, on critical reflection, it seems that despite all our life experiences and the technology at our disposal, we've been duped! Technology has failed us; science has failed us; education has failed us; religion has failed us!

History is replete with examples of how the 'grand narratives' of science, philosophy, education, religion and technology have 'mindlessly' responded to social challenges and hence not provided solutions to some of the intractable problems facing Humankind. As an example, science and technology have instead compounded our crises through additional problems such as being the primary causes of ecological destruction and climate change. Conventional religion has failed us in that it is unable to embed the values which can curb interfaith wrangling and reduce the rise in religious conflict. Education has yet to provide the intellectual tools that can empower us to address the myriad of social problems facing us. So all in all, it seems that the conventional wisdom of established knowledge systems have not kept pace with the increasing complexity and needs of human society, and have not been forthcoming with the answers essential in order for us to cope in our rapidly changing world.

Therefore the T.S. Eliot verse elegantly captures the unceasing and cyclical nature of the meaning-making quest that Mankind is locked into. Yet, it matters not that Man had to traverse the various social narratives which defined different epochs of human history and which have been highlighted in this thesis. These all played important and meaningful roles within the contexts which gave rise to them, but as with Beck's Spiral Dynamics model, new narratives will emerge with the evolution of society and as our quest for new meaning continues. What is important to us as social researchers and educational practitioners, is to accept our 'unknowing' and allow, with a keener receptivity, for these new narratives to emerge.

164

Right from the outset of this thesis, I have expounded on the causes and effects of the global transformation trends and their impact from a macro perspective on the social, political and economic terrains, and ultimately at the micro level of the learner. In a world which is so profoundly characterized by increasing and rapid complexity, the learning enterprise is no longer a simplistic exercise which takes place in the classroom where 'empty vessels' are topped up with knowledge by 'expert' teachers, but there is increasing emphasis whereupon the process of learning is mediated through personal experience within the 'social field' or context. The lasting effect of the socializing influences of the context on the learner is what has become increasingly important, resulting in the shift of the *locus* of control (of the learning process) from the social field/context, to the learner. However, as mentioned earlier in the thesis (Chapters 1, 2, 5 & 6) social transformation does not occur in a vacuum. It arises as a result of numerous push and pull factors, but essentially finds its genesis and momentum in the actions of human subjects.

In Chapter Eight, I continue my research journey into the process and effects of social transformation by focusing on the Theory U Model (Scharmer, 2007) and its potential benefit to academic development. In this chapter I intend to locate it in a socio-historical context, conceptually 'unpack' Theory U, as well as explore its potential in academic development praxis in South African higher education.

The socio-political and economic contexts which shaped higher education in South Africa and which gave rise to academic development were strongly influenced by narrow political and economic goals (see the white paper documents in Chapter 2). The education project after 1994, was buffeted by many contesting social forces and evolved primarily as a vehicle geared towards attaining specific objectives as determined by the broad political and economic agendas of the African National Congress-led government, in association with its various and related stakeholders (evident in the RDP document). The outcomes of these deliberations are not only evident in the policy documents which emanated during this period, but also impacted the shape of many academic initiatives such as academic development, resulting in the structural adjustment model, as well as curricula designed merely to 'top up' the deficient academic content emanating from the legacy of Bantu education.

The consistently high failure and attrition rates of access learners in higher education despite their exposure to academic development initiatives meant that these have not comprehensively addressed the totality of learning challenges faced by learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is this epistemological gap that is the prime motivator for an alternative approach to academic development.

Hence, Chapter 7, with its focus on consciousness, argues strongly for an ontological and epistemological revision from the perspective that what is perceived as 'reality' is intricately intertwined and hence determined by our levels of awareness. This argument is supported by the student feedback in Chapter 5, where learners on the UNITE Programme who had been exposed to teaching in mindfulness activities, registered more successful academic progress, as well as more positive ontological perspectives.

It is not surprising therefore that this disillusionment with the prevailing positivist ethos which still dominates the education discourse, would give rise to a catalyst for a deeper, more introspective, empowering approach; an approach which having exhausted the 'grand narratives', would bring us back to the Self, and compel us to re-examine our role in meaning-making. This renewed focus on the Self is nothing new and shares a longstanding tradition with some of the major spiritual paths in their quests for the meaning of life and spiritual purpose. Much of the ancient Greek, Buddhist and Islamic texts anchored their philosophical insights on the role of the Self in perceiving and shaping reality. Through self-observation, adherents of these spiritual paths could reflect upon their life experiences, interrogate their roles and beliefs, and deconstruct their 'egoic' selves as they pursued their spiritual goals.

The return to the Self is fundamental to this research, since it affirms the hypothesis that the role of the Self through reflection and awareness is instrumental to consciousness transformation, and hence can bring about the transformation of reality.

It is important to note too, that the notion of Self in the discourse of Post-postmodernism, is more than a philosophical abstraction. It is a heightened state of Being; a state of awareness into which is collapsed much of the contemplative traditions such as Kingsley's (2008) *metis* (awareness), Buddhism's 'mindfulness' and Harding's *seeing* (in Pillay, 2011). However, this is not a passive state. The conscious Self is mindful and shares an integral relationship with its context. It acknowledges the pervasive influence of social experience; is aware of the shortcomings in personal practice and is driven to harness through its adaptive intelligence, all its capacities in order to bring about the required transformation. This is summed up by Preece (2003:250) in the following:

> *Transformative learning is a complex process that happens at the*
> *intellectual and subliminal level. It is an individual experience,*
> *contextualised by that individual's interpretation and meaning-*

making of his or her environment and culture. (O'Sullivan in Preece, 2003:250)

Paradoxically however, preceding the ability to transform or construct the Self, is also the need to 'deconstruct' the Self because through this complex process of self-observation and critical reflection, we challenge our established discourses – identities; mental constructs; habitual patterns, and allow for new ones to emerge. The challenge to learners in academic development programmes who suffered from the debilitating effects of apartheid and of overwhelming change, is about how to 'surface' (download) these experiences, deconstruct the effects of their socializing influences and through a process of reflection, how to reconstruct themselves in order to cope with new realities. In essence, the critical question is: How do we manage such a complex process of transformation?

With so much of our faith undermined in what we had entrusted it in and that we end up at the same place from where we started, the Self is a poignant truism in our quest for meaning. The same sentiment applies to academic development. Since its inception, there has been much expectation and anticipation regarding what it will contribute towards academic excellence, albeit that there were scant directives on its implementation and that the structural adjustment model which is so pervasive at various tertiary institutions has not yielded the desired success. Therefore as academic development practitioners who are approaching this matter from a critical perspective, it is becoming increasingly evident and necessary to bring learning under the control of the learner and it is at the level of Self that the focus to improve performance in academic development should commence. What is important though is to locate this process within the contexts as captured in the earlier chapters (2, 5 and 7) of this thesis.

It is through seeking a confluence of mindful practice with grounded theory, that is, drawing from people's actual experience (Fox, *et al*, 2010: 14), that I wish to posit the Theory U model of social transformation as a potentially viable process to facilitate transformation not only at a personal level, but also at the institutional level of academic development in higher education. Theory U is a *meta* holding theory which encapsulates 'downloading', 'presencing' and 'prototyping'. The theory expresses itself through a symbolic 'U' shape, which succinctly harnesses constructivism, transformative learning and integral/Nondual philosophical traditions, to facilitate the adherents' progress towards personal breakthroughs and then self-realization.

What determines Theory U to be relevant to our current context of academic development in South African higher education is that it provides a link between learning and context, with the Self centrally

located within the process. Further, it actively engages the Self in the transformation process through elevating two key notions, 'authenticity' and 'presencing' (Scharmer, 2007). 'Authenticity' facilitates the awareness and receptivity for change. It allows the adherent to deconstruct the illusion of the 'egoic' self; the self which is shaped by experiences within the 'social field' and to shift it from the egocentric state (I-in-me), to a oppositional phase, which recognizes the social field (I-in-It), to a empathy phase (I-inYou) and finally, to a contemplative phase (I-in-Now). This development is captured in the following illustration:
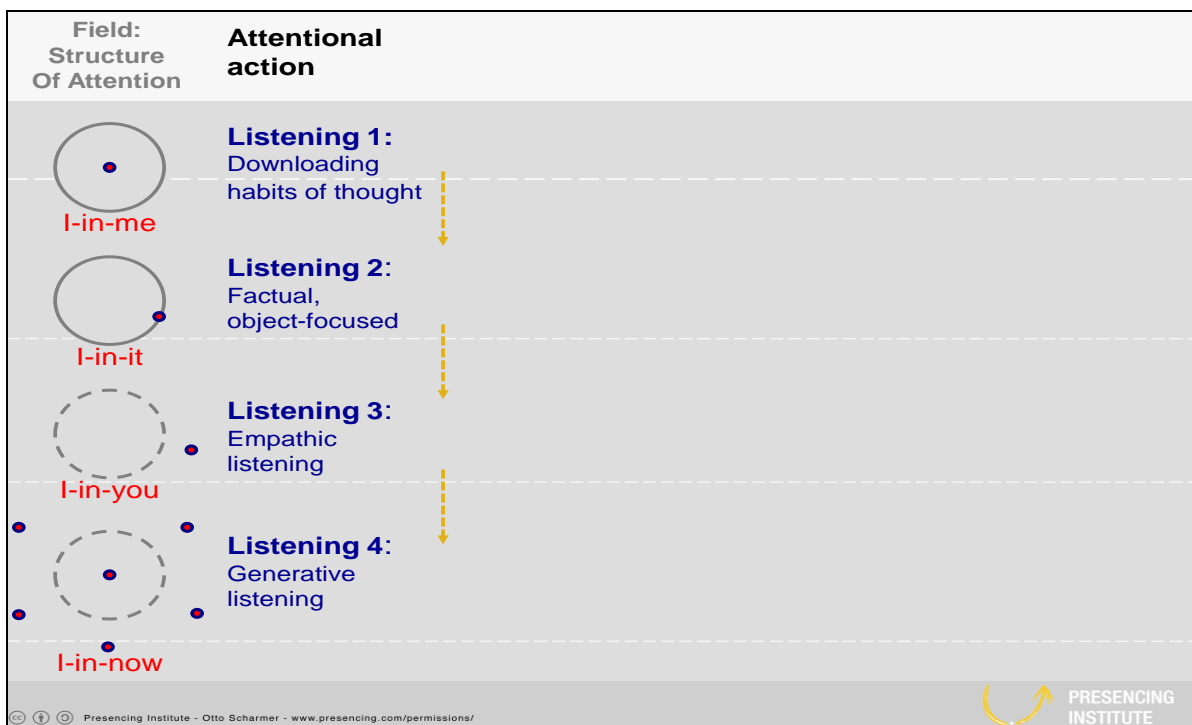
(Source: www.presencing.com)

Conceptually, Theory U is based on four key principles (Scharmer, 2007):

1. We are not powerless to alter the dominant trends of the industrial age. Much of our 'power' depends on how we interpret reality.

2. Mindful intentionality.

3. Individuals operate from within a 'field' – a complex living system which influences the behaviour of the individual.

4. Our ability to respond is based on our awareness and changing our
    'inner' place from where we operate.

These four key principles form the kernel of the Theory U social transformation model and are critical to its effectiveness because it provides the broad framework which guides the process from downloading towards prototyping. It also posits the responsibility to challenge existing conditions and embark on change squarely on the individual. This is especially important in order to subvert the totalizing effects of subjugation and subservience from the apartheid legacy, and which resulted in a passive approach to learning in most learners who suffered under this regime.

The starting point in Theory U is awareness; awareness which shapes our interpretation of reality, as well as enhances our realization that it is possible to transform that reality. Mindful intentionality, either in response to a crisis or the desire to progress to a higher stage/'meme', is necessary for transformation to occur. Scharmer (2007) refers to the necessity of three vital connections to aid this process; open heart (emotional intelligence), open mind (access intellect) and open will (authentic Self). Accessing these through an intrapersonal dialogical process, the practitioner can transcend the 'habitual self' and challenge what Scharmer (2007) calls the 'enemies' of the Self, namely, the 'voice of judgment', the 'voice of cynicism' and the 'voice of fear'. Through this dialogical process, whereby the learner confronts his or her sense of Self and the socializing forces which impact that Self, the processes of 'letting go' and 'letting come' can commence.

Theory U also actively engages the individual within the 'social field', the complex living system (Scharmer, 2007:8) which he/she is part of. The social field in which the learner is located could be the classroom or society. Recognizing and acknowledging the social context, the multiple variables at play within that context and the symbiotic relationship the learner shares with that context are vital to gaining insight into the learner's ontological status (relation to self and society). We need to understand our context and how it impacts our lives. Through our socialization, much of our habitual thinking and patterns of behaviour which constitute our 'blind spots', emanate from within the social field.

Although the application of the symbolic U is an organic matrix, rather than a sequential journey, for conceptual understanding it makes sense to perceive the process sequentially. Hence the journey of intent 'down the U' symbolizes an important prerequisite for intuitive wisdom to emerge. This is the vital step of 'letting go' whereby habitual patterns of action and behavior can be critically examined or seen through 'fresh eyes'. This course of action includes shedding our stereotypes and our fears, but
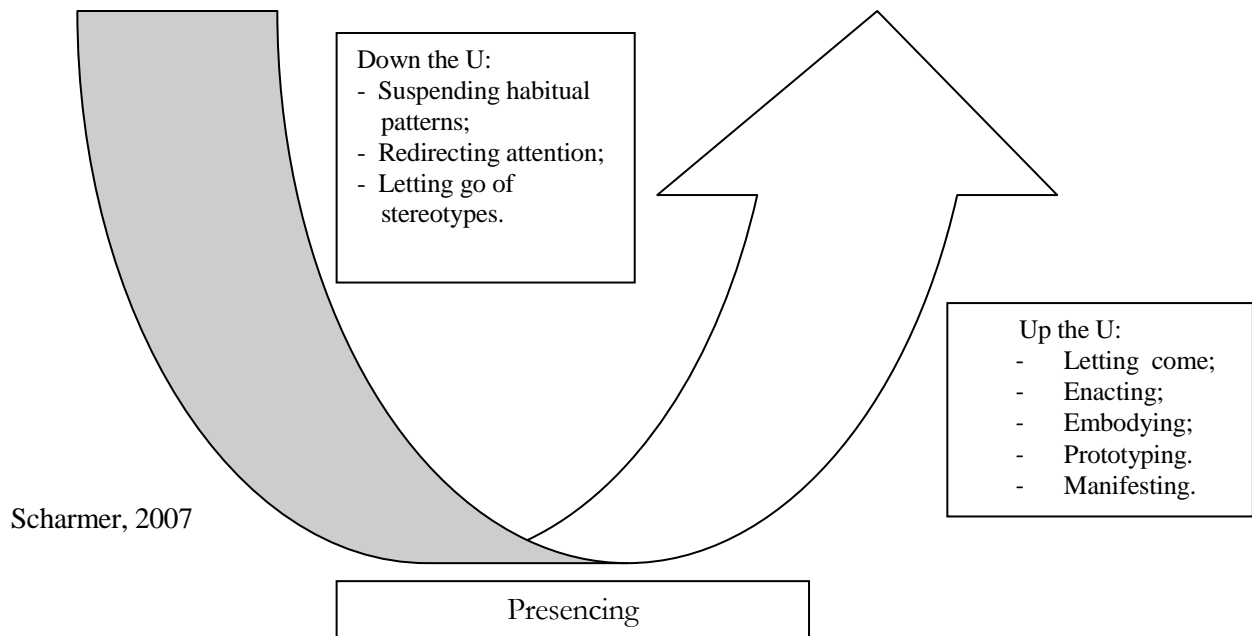
most importantly, it makes us aware of our 'blind spots' – that is our habitual sources from which our actions or intentions originate.

Essential to the process of the 'letting go', is one's 'ontological status', that is, how one views oneself relative to the social field. This entails suspending the paradigms through which one views oneself and the world. Scharmer (2007: 135) highlights two essential acts to facilitate ontological awareness – seeing and sensing. 'Seeing' requires the practitioner to suspend judgment; to open him/herself to 'wonder'. 'Sensing' is a process of total immersion; of accessing and engaging deeper levels of emotional perception.

The connection between the 'letting go' and 'letting come' phases is the 'Presencing' (combination of 'presence' and 'sense') phase. 'Presencing' provides the 'stillness' and 'awareness' that we find in Zen or Buddhist practices and can be understood as a state of Being which through self-awareness integrates the mind, body and spirit (Pienaar in Meyer-Dinkgrafe, 2007:38). 'Presencing', is a state of deep reflection and awareness (Scharmer, 2007; Huston, 2007). Scharmer (2007:52) refers to it as being '*aware of and experiencing the present moment*'. Presencing through its enhancement of awareness facilitates the development of a clearer vision, self-awareness and evolves consciousness. It allows one to subdue the 'chatter' of daily life and to tap into one's authentic nature. Huston (2007:34) comments on the need for deep inner reflection in the following statement:

> *To remove ourselves from the noise of external embodiments of the*
> *current situation; to open our field of vision and allow new ways of*
> *seeing; fresh perspectives from the heart.*

The 'upward' trajectory of the U symbolizes 'letting come'. This process signifies our connectedness to the source of our highest, future possibility, whilst simultaneously shifting our focus from the internal to the external where our actions will manifest. It also includes prototyping and enacting our understanding. Theory U can be illustrated in the following way:

Down the U:
- Suspending habitual patterns;
- Redirecting attention;
- Letting go of stereotypes.

Up the U:
- Letting come;
- Enacting;
- Embodying;
- Prototyping.
- Manifesting.

Scharmer, 2007

Presencing

It must be noted that although Theory U might be depicted as linear, it is in fact more 'organic', which means that it does not adhere to a strict sequential process.

From a *meta* perspective, what Theory U provides is a practical process which any practitioner can apply to his/her life. It concedes to the socio-locatedness of the individual and acknowledges that our harried lives, the incessant chatter in our minds and our 'blind spots', are all factors that preclude us from finding or creating the space for mindful reflection. It recognizes that we generally tend to react out of our memories/habitual patterns, rather than our authentic nature.

There is compelling argument that a deeper awareness of the Self leads to a better understanding and contributes to what Peter Senge (1990) refers to as 'Personal Mastery'. It is this Personal Mastery, which Theory U can instill and nurture, which must be brought to bear on learners in academic development programmes in South African higher education.

Theory U and its Potential Contribution to Academic Development in South African Higher Education

> *Learning strategies can, in other words, be brought under the control of the student, which in practical terms is much more viable than adjusting teaching styles to meet the needs of different individuals in a class group.* (Van Aardt and Van Wyk, 1996:173)

Empowering learners to take charge of their own learning is one of the core focus areas of this research thesis. This is an imperative, especially in the light of the increasingly complex and rapidly changing social fields within which learners are located. From my vantage point as a practitioner-researcher who has been intimately involved in academic development praxis, institutions of higher learning are not able to respond expeditiously to the emerging social scenarios. With so many social needs impacting on the South African government, unfortunately, the core epistemological needs of academic development are not being addressed.

The argument for the implementation of the Theory U social transformation model is based on the conceptual and practical lucidity of the model in abetting social and personal transformation. I will also assert that it can bring about profound benefit to the teaching and learning transaction through providing a clear framework for the advancement of critical interrogation, mindfulness and intuitive wisdom. However for this to be possible, it must be emphasized that the Theory U process is not intended to be a prescriptive linear sequence, but is more of an organic matrix, or even an ontological state, where self-knowing and learning are collapsed into one movement of Being-Knowing (Pillay, 2011:9).

The assertion of the potential benefits of the application of Theory U, stems from empirical evidence drawn from learners in the UNITE Programme who were exposed to mindful activities which included reflection and the critical intrapersonal interrogation of thoughts, habits and beliefs. Although not as structured as the Theory U model these didactic activities facilitated a definitive positive shift, ontologically as well as epistemologically. Hence the 'student voice' (Chapter 5) highlights the positive feedback as a result of mindful learning and underpins the need to engage students in the interrogation of their own learning praxes; something which the current models of academic development do not do. I would aver that the benefits which learners registered from being exposed to mindful learning resulted more from the process of being critically engaged in their learning praxis, rather than any external learning stimulus. Providing students with the opportunities to 'download', that is, to interrogate their 'blind spots' (habitual patterns of decision making which often originate from socialization) from which they approach learning, elevates their conscious awareness and improves the potential to facilitate their own remedial processes. Learners can only successfully interrogate their learning 'blind spots' through identifying the link between learning, culture and experience. One of the major benefits of Theory U is that it locates the learner within his/her social 'field', which could be the classroom or society. This facilitates awareness of what constitutes the causal factors of the 'blind spots'. In the South African

172

context, locating the awareness of learners in their social context can focus attention on the situational factors which inhibit learning or transformation.

It is without doubt that learners who have suffered the apartheid legacy have internalized much emotional anguish, which undoubtedly will influence decisions and responses later in life. Through engaging with their social contexts, 'downloading' their repressed emotional states that influence responses and through the process of inner reflection, learners are able to explore their 'blind spots' and through coming to terms with it, are able to set themselves free. Hassan (2006:3) writes that:

> *'Letting go' means to leave the shores of our certainty. We need to let*
> *go of something for something new to be born.*

It is at this level that Theory U with its emphasis on Self transformation can make a major contribution. Hart (2008:244) emphasizes the following:

> *Self-observation and reflection help to expose and deconstruct*
> *positions of role, belief, culture, and so forth to see more deeply or*
> *from multiple perspectives. This allows students the conceptual*
> *flexibility to see beyond the information given and beyond their own*
> *presuppositions.*

Processes like Theory U which challenge personal paradigms and which provoke self-interrogation and transformation, are not without challenge. Operating from within the social field are two potentially powerful inhibiting hurdles: resistance to change (Kegan & Lahey, 2009) and fear of the unknown (Huston (2007). Despite transformation being intrinsic to the human experience, resistance to change and fear of the unknown have similarly been part of the human experience. These two debilitating hurdles can impede the application of Theory U in academic development praxis. Also from an applied perspective, as a practitioner-researcher, I am under no illusion as to the challenges which might inhibit the application of Theory U. These include the lack of capacity in staff suitable to facilitate the Theory U process, the dominant positivist epistemological paradigm and the complexity of the ontological problems.

However as stated above, Theory U is not a prescriptive methodological process. What Theory U provides, is an ontological framework which facilitates the individual's journey and mindful

participation in an 'authenticity' process which embodies the vital connections of 'open heart', 'open mind' and 'open will' (Scharmer, 2007). Through this process, learners can engage in conscious intent and through an intrapersonal dialogic, facilitate the 'letting go', that is, the suspension of what could be the obstructive habits, learning patterns or belief systems. Through 'letting go', a powerful cathartic experience is created. 'Letting go' is an essential precursor to 'letting come' and only when learners are able to engage in and dispense of dysfunctional behavioural patterns, can they connect with their higher purpose and tap into their intuitive wisdom to create, enact, prototype and manifest their innovative solutions.

The upward trajectory of the symbolic 'U' model is 'letting come'. This signifies the regeneration phase, which includes: enacting, embodying/prototyping and manifesting. Learners in academic development programmes have clear goals/ objectives and timelines within which to achieve these. Hence the 'letting come' phase is crucial towards the achievement of these objectives. 'Letting come' is also the difficult phase of the Theory U because it represents the shift from reflection to action. This action in any meaningful sense must begin with and within the individual. Unless the 'locus of control' comes from within, efforts to bring about change will not be sustainable. 'Letting come' arises out of a process of gradual change in which learners through 'letting go' and 'presencing', become aware of their own capabilities and can use this to analyze their needs, and decide on solutions and mobilize their resources – efforts and skills – in the pursuit of their objectives.

It is interesting to note that there is a strong similarity particularly in the reflection aspect of learning between Theory U, Kurt Lewin's Action Research and David Kolb's Experiential Learning model. Some of the Action Research characteristics in Lewin's model (in Adelman, 1993:8) are outlined in the following:

- *Reflecting on the current situation.*
- *Planning a change to improve the situation.*
- *Acting and observing the process and consequences of the change.*
- *Reflection and re-planning the same, or another process of change.*

Like Theory U, reflection and intentionality, are core to Action Research. Underpinning the process is the 'participative consciousness' (Pillay, 2007:15) of 'presencing', which is a *meta* cognition that allows the learner to witness (and intervene if necessary) the transformational process as it unfolds. Wilbur (1998:10) articulates this in the following:

174

That which observes or witnesses the self, the person, is precisely to that degree free of the self, the person, and through that opening comes pouring the light and power of a Self, a Soul.

It is important to note that transformation of the Self is much more than change in personal habits; it is an enhancement of one's personal reality, as well as the conversion of that reality through intentional action. How this can be manifested through education is that teaching becomes a social practice for the transformation and empowerment of learners. In addition, the educational methodology should focus on issues of transformation whilst challenging the learners through the curriculum, to interrogate their own learning praxis.

For this to occur, it is essential that the teaching epistemology is not static, but is a dynamic and fluid process, which acknowledges all the variables within its context. In this regard, the appropriate emotional environment is essential for learners to interrogate their contextual factors. Hence, the UNITE Programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal has for many years and with great success, employed a 'mindful' epistemological approach in its teaching, supported by empathic staff as well as student mentors. Learners are actively encouraged to participate in 'critical conversations' on matters which impact their individual learning. As the learners become aware of the sources of their learning challenges, they are then able to devise appropriate strategies. At UKZN, students who employed this process performed significantly better than their counterparts in the mainstream.

Unfortunately, the general conundrum of poor academic achievement facing generic academic development initiatives in South African higher education, underpins the paucity in research and lack of student-centered analysis of the challenges facing learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. It also exposed the disjuncture between the ideals of current political policy and the lived experiences of learners within their 'social fields'.

This chapter concludes on the note that the learning impact from a learner's ontological make-up and socializing influences from the social field on the learner, has to be factored into academic development praxis for it to have meaningful and sustainable learning outcomes. Bringing learning under the control of the learner is exactly what Theory U intends to do.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

A conclusion usually presupposes that one can reach a closing; a finality on a particular issue. Although this is tempting, for a number of reasons, this is not always the case. The reality about research is that it raises more questions; highlights more issues, particularly within the social sciences where we deal with the complexities of human behavior.

Hence with regard to this current research thesis, the research process was a journey; a journey towards meaning-making; a personal Theory U in practice. Working from the practitioner-researcher perspective, this research approach allowed me to download and interrogate my personal observations and experiences as an academic development practitioner. My 'presencing' moment was when I deliberated upon reflective/mindful teaching and learning, and my upward trajectory was the commencement with this thesis to qualitatively interrogate my assumptions and critically explore the possibility of using the Theory U model of transformation within academic development praxis.

Another reason why a conclusion is difficult is that from a Postmodernist perspective, totalizing explanations should be refuted; it is well nigh impossible to conclude on abstract and dynamic notions such as consciousness and awareness. These are not tangible things; not easily measured and not testable, and fall largely within the realm of the metaphysical (Crook, 2009: 218). So one has to resort to what has become known as 'phenomenological assumptions' that which is based on direct experience which, in the case of this thesis, are my personal observations and reflections as a researcher, as well as the feedback from the learners in the UNITE Programme and the observations from the researcher in the classroom environment.

The student feedback has yielded deep insights into the nature of being, of learning and in particular, learning challenges. The philosophical traditions of Post-postmodernism and Nondualism have contributed extensively to this endeavour. Besides the fact that they advocate the strong relationship between Self and context, they also examine the nature of experience, the depths of consciousness, and the nature of self-identity and from these, construct values in a way that breaks free from dualisms (Crook, 2009: 28). Similarly, Theory U has 'grounded' what could easily be perceived as esoteric principles in a more practical and applied methodology. Through the Theory U model of 'letting go', 'presencing' and 'letting come', it has provided a model which can readily be integrated into academic development curricula.

Through highlighting the social transformational stages from Modernism to Post-postmodernism, this thesis shows the evolution of human consciousness and also foregrounds the effects this has had on social life. More importantly, the transformational stages also show the weaknesses in human reasoning particular to the stages. Hence through critical reflection and awareness of these stages, Mankind can become alerted to dysfunctional thinking and decision-making and how these might impact the environment. Using the example of a 'holon', the disturbance effect of transformation at a macro global level, is also perceived at a local level, and then at the micro level of the student.

In the South African scenario, besides the symbolic statements in the plethora of policies which were produced after 1994, little real transformation has been implemented. The changes that have been introduced have merely served to sustain the current legacy. These include attempts to 'corporatize' institutions of higher learning, as well as making curricula more 'market' related.[62]

Despite the fact that much of the emphasis in this project has been to focus on the interiority of the learner, the same inward gaze should be directed towards the educators and a similar critical reflection regarding epistemological methods needs to be embarked upon. The 'practitioner-researcher' and 'teacher as change agent' should become the change he/she wishes to see. As Tinbergen (in Crook, 2009: 5) asserts:

> *What will be needed is a "new type of citizen". Only a thoroughly*
> *renewed outlook on life and its problems can make a difference.*

Living with awareness, reflecting on that awareness and evolving one's consciousness in response to that awareness, is a starting point towards becoming that new type of citizen.

What this research narrative has attempted to do is to provide a compelling argument (substantiated with student feedback) for a revised academic development model which is responsive to the diverse backgrounds of learners and which can provide generic transformation skills training in parallel to the academic emphasis on scientific and mathematical knowledge. This need has also been recognized by the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), the professional body responsible for engineering accreditation in South Africa. In Draft document PE-60 (1997:1) the ECSA defined some of the broad outcomes and knowledge of engineering graduates to include general abilities of problem-solving,

---

[62] A popular trend in South African higher education institutions is to transform themselves into corporations. This is evident from the introduction of new performance appraisal systems and the emphasis on courses such as 'Entrepreneurship', which are more 'market related'.

communication, analysis and teamwork. These outcomes are expressed in the South African Qualifications Association recommendations for learners to:

- *Identify and solve problems in which responses display that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made.*

- *Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, community.*

- *Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written persuasion.*

- *Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem solving contexts do not exist in isolation.*

In terms of the research, what the above indicates is that there has been a shift from the traditional perspective, which believed that engineering is a purely scientific and technological discourse, to one which is more context driven.

The need for transformation skills training, however, does not end with being able to cope at university. Ideally it should extend its objectives to making the graduate engineer a more professional and effective practitioner, especially in a rapidly changing environment. What is required at the curriculum level is not only a greater integration of the physical and social sciences, but also emphasis on self awareness and critical thinking.

Although the research shows that Black students from disadvantaged backgrounds require transformation skills in order to excel academically and manage their learning challenges, this does not absolve tertiary institutions of their responsibilities in providing an environment conducive to teaching and learning to develop the 'new citizen' that Tindbergen referred to. In fulfillment of this objective, there is a critical need for the skilling of academics to teach Black students more effectively, implementing curriculum reform and transforming the structures of governance.

The research also intended to highlight the fact that the academic process at university should not diminish the importance of the socio-economic and political context from which the student originates. This context plays a powerful role in shaping students' abilities to cope with later academic, social and professional life. Through understanding this context, more effective and relevant curriculum reform can be instituted.

In dealing with research material which is emotionally sensitive (to the respondents) and possibly controversial (to the university authorities), the feedback discussions as defined by Action Research proved invaluable. They provided a balance of structure and freedom through which to explore perceptions and responses. The emphasis thus moved away from a technicist perspective towards an enhanced meaning of the content.

At a personal level, the research, especially conducting the focus group discussions, was an emotionally rewarding experience. Being able to explore sensitive issues in a meaningful way through the direct experience of the learner, guided the empathic relationship between interviewer and interviewee.

At a professional level the researcher benefited in a number of ways. From an epistemological perspective, the research has highlighted the holistic nature of the learning process – that learning cannot be practiced in isolation but needs to be considered in the context within which it takes place.

Secondly, through reflection and the interactive medium of the focus group discussions, the researcher developed a deeper insight into the needs of Black 'disadvantaged' learners. This insight will be particularly useful in informing curriculum reform. It should be noted that the participants also benefitted from an enhanced self-awareness of their own academic strengths and weaknesses.

Thirdly, the practitioner-researcher approach provided a useful opportunity for the writer to commence research in an area of personal interest. Not only did this research process develop additional skills in academic research, but the outcomes of the research were of personal and professional value.

Finally, this research does not intend to provide conclusive answers to the reasons for low academic performance by Black students within the Engineering Faculty of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, or to (unrealistically) extol the virtues of transformation skills as a panacea to all academic ills. What the research advocates, is that tertiary institutions need to take ownership of the learning problems of their students and to proactively and actively develop interventions, of which structured transformation skills

179

training is but one constituent. Only once this is implemented will disadvantaged students be able to realize their true academic potential.

In reflecting on my own objectives for the research project, that is, to better understand learning in the context of academic development and to investigate how a constructivist paradigm using the Theory U model of social transformation can benefit learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, the research strongly supports the intervention of Theory U.

At a personal level, one cannot research transformation without being transformed oneself. In investigating with a heightened sense of awareness the multifaceted variables impacting on learning in academic development, I had to forego my own 'egoic' mind and recognize my unknowing. It was only at the level of the unknowing that I could attempt to reconstruct a new path to understanding social transformation and hopefully make a meaningful impact in my understanding and academic development praxis.

<p style="text-align:center">The Window Through Which We Look</p>

<p style="text-align:center">A young couple moves into a new neighbourhood.
The next morning while they are eating breakfast,</p>

<p style="text-align:center">the young woman sees her neighbour hanging the washing outside.
"That laundry is not very clean", she said.
"She doesn't know how to wash correctly.
Perhaps she needs better laundry soap."
Her husband looked on, but remained silent.</p>

<p style="text-align:center">Every time her neighbour would hang her washing to dry,
the young woman would make the same comments.</p>

<p style="text-align:center">About one month later, the woman was surprised to see a
nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband:</p>

<p style="text-align:center">"Look, she has learned how to wash correctly.
I wonder who taught her this."</p>

The husband said, "I got up early this morning and
cleaned our windows."

Anonymous[63]

[63] http://funstorybook.blogspot.com/2011/11/window-through-which-we-look.html

Bibliography

Abdi, A. A. 2001 'Integrated Education and Black Development in Post-Apartheid South Africa: critical analyses' *Compare (vol.31. No. 2)*

Adelman, C. 1993 *Kurt Lewin and the Origins of Action Research* Educational Action Research (1.1)

African National Congress 1994 *The Reconstruction and Development Programme – A Policy Framework* Umanyano Publications (Johannesburg)

Agar, D. 1996 'Evaluating Academic Support Programmes - What have we learnt in the last six years?' *South African Journal of Higher Education (vol 10.1.)*

Alberts, E.M. and Hugo, E.A.K. 1996 'The Social Responsibility of the Vaal Triangle Technikon with special reference to Student Involvement' *South African Journal of Higher Education (vol 10.1.)*

Alston, J. and Thaxton, L. 2003 *Stuff Happens and then You Fix It* John Wiley & Sons Inc (New Jersey)

Asmal, K. 1999 'Call to Action: Mobilising Citizens to build a South African Education and Training System for the 21st Century' (Tirisano)', 27 July
http://education.pwv/gov.za/Tirisano_Folder/Tirisano_Index.htm

Baker, T.L. 1988 *Doing Social Research* Mcgraw Hill (New York)

Bailey, K.D. 1982 *Methods of Social Research* The Free Press (New York)

Baynes, C. F. 1973 *I Ching or Book of Changes* Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd (London)

Beck, C. 1993 'Postmodernism, Pedagogy and Philosophy of Education'
http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-Yearbook/93_docs/BECK.HTM

Beck, D. And Cowan, C. 2006 *Spiral Dynamics – Mastering Values, Leadership, and Change* Blackwell Publishing (USA)

Beard, C. 2008 Experiential Research: Forging New identities for Experience: Keynote Address, International Conference on Experiential Learning, Sydney, Australia

Ben-Salah, A. 1993 *The South and the North: Neither Dictatorship Nor Interference* South Centre (London)

Blackledge, D & Hunt, B. 1985 *Sociological Interpretations of Education* Croom Helm (London)

Bogden, R. and Bilken, S. 1982 *Qualitative Research for Education* Allyn & Bacon (Boston)

Bond, T. 1988 *Games for Social and Life Skills* Hutchinson (London)

Botha, C. 1994 *The Life Skills Needs of Children with Learning Problems* (Masters Thesis - UNISA)

Bullough, R. V. Jnr and Pinnegar, S. 2001. 'Guidelines for Quality in Autobiographical Forms of Self-Study Research' *Educational Researcher, Vol. 30. No.3*

Burkey, S. 1993 *People First: A Guide to Self-Reliant, Participatory Rural Development* Zed (London)

Carnoy, M. 1999 'Globalization and Educational Restructuring', a seminar paper, University of Natal, 1 September

Carnoy, M. & Castells, M. 1999 `Globalization, the Knowledge Society, and the Network State: Poulantzas at the Millenium', Centre for Higher Education Transformation
http://www.chet.org.za/CastellsPapers.html

Carr, W & Kemmis, S.1986 *Becoming Critical* The Falmer Press (London)

Carse, D. 2006 *Perfect Brilliant Stillness – Beyond the Individual* Self Non-Duality Press (UK)

Case, J. and Fraser, D. 1997 `Action Research in an Engineering Context' - Conference Paper (National Seminar on Engineering Education in South Africa - UCT)

Castells, M. 1996/2000 The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture vol. 1: The Rise of the Network Society (Oxford, Blakewell,) `Prologue: The Net and the Self' and `Conclusions: The Network Society'

Castells, M. 1996/2000 The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture vol. 3: End of Millennium (Oxford, Blakewell) `Conclusions: Making Sense of our World'

Checkland, P. 1991 *Systems Thinking, Systems Practice* John Wylie & Sons (New York)

Christie P. 1990 "Black Education: The Role of the State and Business" *Conference Paper*, October

Clarke, A.G. 1995 *From Ideas to Action* Human & Rousseau (Cape Town)

Cloete, N; Fehnel, R; Maasen, P; Moja, T; Perrold, H; Gibbon, T. 2002 *Transformation in Higher Education* Juta & Company (Pty) Ltd (Cape Town)

Cockley, S. 2008 *Guide to Practitioner Research* The Virginia Adult Educators Research Network (US)

Cohen, L. and Manion, A. 1995 *Research Methods in Education* Routledge (London)

Connor, D. 1992 `Future Shock is Upon Us' *Human Resources Management (vol.8.8.)*

Covey, S. 1990 *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* Simon & Schuster (New York)

Craig, A.P. 1988 'Excellence In and Through Education' *South African Journal of Higher Education (vol.2.1.)*

Crook, J.H. 2009 *World Crisis and Buddhist Humanism – End games: Collapse or Renewal of Civilisation* New Age Books (Delhi)

Crowley, G. 2006 *From Here to Here* GL Design (Colorado)

Daft, R.L. 1999 *Leadership: Theory & Practice* The Dryden Press (US)

Darder, A, Baltodano, M & Torres, R. eds *The Critical Pedagogy Reader* Routledge (New York)

Deacon, R.A. 2003 *Fabricating Foucault* Marquette University Press (Milwaukee)

Department of Education, Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation, December 1996
http://www.info.gov.za/greenpapers/1996/highereduc.htm#_Toc374340695

Department of Education, White Paper on Education and Training 1995 (Education White Paper 1), 15 March
http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/white_papers/

Department of Education, White Paper 2 1996 "The Organisation, Governance and Funding of Schools", February
http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/educup2feb.html

Department of Education, White Paper 1996 "Science and Technology", October
http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/white_papers/science.html

Department of Education, White Paper on Education (Education White Paper 3) 1997 "A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education", 24 July
http://www.polity.org./za/govdocs/white_papers/highed.html

Department of Education, White Paper on Transformation (Education White Paper 4) 1998 "A Programme for the Transformation of Further Education and Training, 25 September
http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/white_papers/educup4.html

De Villiers, A.B. 1996 ' ``Disadvantaged Students: Analysing the Zone of Proximal Development' *South African Journal of Higher Education (vol 10.1.)*

Diamond, J. 1998 *Guns, Germs and Steel – A short history of everybody for the last 13000 years* Vintage Books (UK)

Dixon, B. 1989 *The Science of Science* Cassell (London)

Drum, D.J. and Knott, E.J. 1977 *Structured Groups for Facilitating Development: Acquiring Life Skills* Human Sciences Press (New York)

Du Toit, B.H. 1992 `The Development of a Short-Term Stress Management Programme for Students' *South African Journal of Higher Education (vol.10.1.)*

Du Toit, R and Roodt J. 2009 *Engineers in a Developing Country* HSRC Press (Cape Town)

Dziuban P.F. 2006 *Consciousness Is All* Blue Dolphin Publishing (Nevada)

ECSA 1997   *Background to Standards for University Bachelor Degrees Document: PE-60 Draft* 1.1 (Pretoria)

Edwards, M (undated) 'A Brief History of Holons'
www.integralworld.net/edwards13.html

Erickson, F. 1986 'Qualitative methods in research on teaching' in M.C. Wittrock, ed, *Handbook on research in teaching* 3rd edition, Mcmillan (New York)

Fedderke, J. 1999 `From Uneducating to Educating South Africa: some thoughts on new policy imperatives in education'*, Kenton conference paper*, Salt Rock, October

Flew, Antony 1979 *A Dictionary of Philosophy* Pan Books (London)

Feldman, A 2003 'Validity and Quality in Self-Study' *Educational Reviewer, Vol. 32, No 3*

Folch-Lyon, E. and Trost, J.F. 1981 `Conducting Focus-Group Sessions' *Studies in Family Planning (vol 12.12.)*

Fontana, D. 1990 *Social Skills At Work* Routledge (London)

Fox, M; Martin, P; Green, G. 2010 *Doing Practitioner Research* Sage (London)

Frost, D. 1991 *Skills for Life* Intermediate Technology Publications (London)

Gatherer, J. 1993 'Development of Life Skills Training in De Beers' *South African Mining: Coal, Gold and Base Minerals* (July Edition)

Gazzaniga, M.S. 2000 *The Mind's Past* University of California Press (Berkley)

Giddens, A. 1972 *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings* Cambridge University Press (London)

Gidley, J. 2007 'The Evolution of Consciousness as a Planetary Imperative: An integration of integral views' *Integral Review, 5 (US)*

Gladwell, M. 2000 *The Tipping Point* Abacus (UK)

Gladwell, M. 2008 *Outliers* Penguin Books (UK)

Goleman, D. 1995 *Emotional Intelligence* Bloomsbury (London)

Goode, G. 2007 *Nondualism in Western Philosophy* (e-book)

Greenfield, S. 1999 *Brain Power – Working out the Human Mind* Element Books Limited (Dorset)

Hardman, S & Averweg, U.R. 2011 'Practitioner Research from a Critical Systems Perspective' Alternation 18.1

Harrison, S. 2002 *The Happy Child* Sentient Publications LLC (US)

Harrison, S. 2005 *Post-Spirituality and the Creative Life – What's New After Now?* Sentient Publications LLC (US)

Hart, T. 2008 'Interiority and Education – Exploring the Neurophenomenology of Contemplation and its Potential Role in Learning' Journal of Transformative Education vol 6, No 4

Hassen, Z. 2006 *'Connecting to Source: The U-Process'* Systems Thinker, Vol 12, No 7

Hall, M. 2000 'Realizing the Virtual Hamburger: Education and the Margins of the Network Society', Centre for Higher Education Transformation, debates, http://www.chet.org.za/debates/MartinHall.html

Hay, H.R. & Marais, F. 2004 'Bridging Programmes: gain, pain or all in vain' *South African Journal of Higher Education (vol.18.2)*

Henen, C. 2007 'Mindfulness' Odyssey: Body, Mind and Soul (Cape Town)

Honderich, T. 2002 *How Free Are You – The Determinism Problem* Oxford University Press (UK)

Horkheimer, M. 1982 (in 'Critical Theory' March, 2005) http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-theory

Huston, T 2007 *Inside Out* Society for Organisational Learning (Cambridge, MA)

Implementation Plan for Tirisano: January 2000 – December 2004 http://education.pwv.gov.za/Tirisano_Folder/Tirisano_Index.htm

Jansen, J. D. (undated) 'Can Research inform Education Policy in Developing Countries? A South African Experience' University of Pretoria (lecture notes)

Jansen, J. D. 1997 'Why OBE Will Fail', University of Durban-Westville (Lecture notes)

Jansen, J. D. 2000 'Educating beyond Apartheid: Intersections of Politics and Polity in the South African Transition, 1990-2000', University of Durban-Westville (Lecture notes)

Jansen, J.D. & Sayed, Y. (eds) 2001 *Implementing education policies: the South African experience* University of Cape Town Press (Cape Town)

Kegan, R & Lahey, L.L. 2009 *Immunity to Change – how to overcome it and unlock the potential in yourself and your organization* Harvard Business Press (Mass)

Kimmie, R 1998 *An Analysis of the Need for a Life Skills course for Black Engineering Students from Socio-economic and Academically Disadvantaged Backgrounds, Studying at the University of Natal, Durban* (Masters Thesis, University of Natal)

Kilfoil, W. 1996 'Academic Support Articles: A Review Article' *South African Journal of Higher Education (vol 10.1.)*

Kingsley, P. 2008 *Reality* The Golden Sufi Centre (California)

King III Report on Corporate Governance 2009 (Institute of Directors in South Africa) http://african.ipapercms.dk/IOD/KINGIII/kingiiireport/

Kolb, D 2006 'Kolb Learning Styles' http://www.businessballs.com/kolblearningstyles.htm

Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. 1985 *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* Verso (London)

Landis, R. B. 1995 *Studying Engineering – A Road Map to a Rewarding Career* Discovery Press (California)

Langer, E.J. 1998 *The Power of Mindful Learning* Perseus Books (Massachusetts)

Loy, D.R. 2003 *The Great Awakening – A Buddhist Social Theory* Wisdom Publications (Boston)

Lyon, D. 1994 *Postmodernity* Open University Press (Buckingham)

Manning, T. 1997 *Radical Strategy* Struik Book Distributors (South Africa)

Mashile, E.O. and Mellet, S.M. 1996 'Political and Social Factors Related to Secondary School Pupils' Attitude Towards School' *South African Journal of Education (vol 16.4)*

Matlou, D. 2009 'Access for Success: Alternative Admission for Selected, Talented Science Degree Students at the University of the Witwatersrand' Success Stories in Foundation/Extended Programmes (Higher Education Learning & Teaching Association of South Africa)

Maxwell, J.C. 2007 *Talent is Never Enough* Thomas Nelson (Nashville)

Mbeki, T 1999 "Together we must commit ourselves to making the next century an African century" Woza online, 28 July   http://www.woza.co.za/

McNiff, J. 1988 *Action Research* Macmillan Education (Hampshire)

Merriam, S.B. 2004 'The Role of Cognitive Development in Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory' *Adult Education Quarterly*, Sage http://www.aeq.sagepub.com

Meyer-Dinkgrafe, D (ed) 2006 *Consciousness, Theatre, Literature and the Arts* Cambridge Scholars Press (UK)

Meyer-Dinkgrafe, D (ed) 2007 *Consciousness, Theatre, Literature and the Arts* Cambridge Scholars Press (UK)

Mills, M. 1996 `The Development of Life Skills Training Within De Beers - A Synopsis of Its History, Aims and Content' (Conference Paper - unpublished)

Mir, R & Watson, A 2000 "Strategic Management and the Philosophy of Science: The Case for a Constructivist Methodology" *Strategic Management Journal, Vol. 21 No. 9*

Morrison, J.M. 2003 'A Contribution to Scientific Knowledge' (A working paper) University of Stellenbosch Business School

Mphahlele, E. 1990 `Alternative Institutions of Education for Africans in South Africa: An Exploration of Rationale, Goals and Directions' *Harvard Educational Review (vol.60.1.)*

Mulemfo Dr M.M. 2000 *Thabo Mbeki and the African Renaissance* (Actua Press, Johannesburg,)

Muller, J. 1994 "Development, Reconstruction and Education: A Review for the Urban Foundation", mimeo

Naicker, I. 1996 *Imbalances and Inequities in South African Education: A Historical-Educational Survey and Appraisal* (Masters Thesis - UNISA)

190

Nair, P.A.P. 1999 *A theoretical framework for an access programme encompassing further education training: remedy for educational wastage?* South African Journal of Higher Education, (vol 16.2)

Nelson-Jones, R. 1991 *Life Skills: A Handbook* Cassell (London)

Nelson-Jones, R. 1993a *Life Skills Helping* Brooks/Cole (California)

Nelson-Jones, R. 1993b *You Can Help* Cassell (London)

Olivier, M.A.J. Greyling, S. and Venter, D.J.L. 1997 `Life Skills in a Changing Society, with Specific Reference to the Adolescent' *South African Journal of Education (vol. 17.1.)*

Ostrander, S. & Schroeder, L. 1996 *Superlearning 2000* Souvenir Press (UK)

Parikh, J. 1992 *Managing yourself* Blackwell Publishers (Oxford)

Parrish, D. 2006 *Nothing I see Means Anything* Sentient Publications (USA)

Pe, D. 2006 *Eight Types of Leaders* MDP Global Resources (USA)

Pickworth, G. 1990 'Life Skills Training: Educating Youth for Life' *Pedagogic Journal (vol.2.1.)*

Pillay, K. 2007 *Nondualism & Educational Drama and Theatre* The Noumenon Press (Wandsbeck)

Pillay, K. 2007 'The Wisdom of the Whole System: Constructing an Alternative view of Leadership. Large Scale Systemic Change: Theories, Modeling and Practices' *(In Preparation)*

Pillay, K. 2009 'From Self-Study to Self-Inquiry: Fictional History and the Field of Discovery, Making Connections: Self-Study and Social Action', edited by Kathleen Pithouse, Claudia Mitchell & Relebohile Moletsane. New York: Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 223–234

Pillay, K. 2011 'LED Postgraduate Education and Mindful Research: Deepening the Practitioner Research Paradigm' *Alternation, 18.2* (in press)

Pirie, G, 2003 *SSACI News,* No 10, December 2003

http://www.ssaci.org.za/news/news_0010

Pratt, D.D. (Undated) *Good teaching: one size fits all? An Up-date on Teaching Theory, Jovita Ross-Gordon (Ed)*, Jossey-Bass Publishers (San Francisco)

Preece, J. 2003 'Education for Transformative Leadership in Southern Africa' *Journal of Transformative Education (vol 1:3)*

Raaheim, K. Wankowski, J. and Radford, J. 1991 *Helping Students to Learn* Open University Press (Buckingham)

Reason, R. 1988 *Human Inquiry in Action – Developments in New Paradigm Research* Sage Publications Ltd (California)

Report of the NEPI Curriculum Research Group 1999 *Curriculum* (Oxford University Press / NECC)

Report 1999: *"Status Report for the Minister of Education – June",*

http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/reports/education/statusreport.html

Report 2000: *"A South African Curriculum for the 21st Century",* 31 May
http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/reports/education/curric2005/curric.htm

Report 2000: *"A Report on Moral Regeneration",* July,
http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/reports/morals.html

Reynolds, R. 1996 `Educational Development In Engineering At The University of Natal'
(Africon Conference Paper: Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers - Stellenbosch)

Reynolds, R. 1997 'Building Strong Foundations - Experiences at Natal University with Engineering Students' (Conference Paper - unpublished)

Roberts, G. & Edwards, A. 1991 *A New Dictionary of Political Analysis* Routledge (New York)

Robson, C. 2000 *Real World Research. A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers* Blackwell (Oxford)

Roemischer, J.2002 (Fall/Winter Issue) 'The Never-Ending Upward Quest: An interview with Dr. Don Beck' *What is Enlightenment Magazine* EnlightenNext Media (USA)

Ryder, J. and Campbell, L. 1988 *Balancing Acts in Personal, Social and Health Education* Routledge (London)

Savery, J.R. & Duffy, T.M. 2001 'Problem-based learning: An instructional model and its constructivist framework'
CRLT Technical Report No 16-01, Center for Research on Learning and Technology (Indiana University)

Scott, I. Hendry, J & Yeld, N 2007 'A Case for Improving Teaching and Learning in South African Higher Education' *Higher Education Monitor No. 6*

Scharmer, O. 2007 *Theory U – Leading from the Future as it Emerges* Society for Organisational Learning (USA)

Seepe, S. 2000 'Higher Education and Africanisation' *Perspectives in Education, 18,3*

Senge, P.M. 1990 *The Fifth Discipline* Doubleday (New York)

Sestabi, A 2003 'Leading the Way from Poverty to Prosperity in Lesotho: The Case of Kali Charles Thaanye' The Synergos Institute

Shouler, K. 2008 *The Everything Guide to Understanding Philosophy* Media Adams (USA)

Siegel, D.J. 2007 *The Mindful Brain – Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-being* W.W. Norton & Company (New York)

Starfield, S. 1996 'The Challenge of Diversity: Staff, Student and Curriculum Development' *South African Journal of Higher Education vol 10 (1) 1996 (UNISA)*

Stones, L. 2000 `Education should focus on sciences' *Business Day* 12 April

Stringer, E.T. 1999 *Action Research* Sage Publications (California)

Subotsky, G. 2003 *African Higher Education: An International Reference Handbook* Indiana University Press (USA)

Subotsky, G. 2003 'HRD Review' http://hrdreview.hsrc.ac.za

Sunter, C. 1988 *The World and South Africa in the 1990's* Human & Rousseau Tafelberg (Cape Town)

Taleb, N.N. 2007 *The Black Swan* Penguin Books (London)

Taylor, E.W. 1997 'Building upon the Theoretical Debate: A Critical Review of the Empirical Studies of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory' *Adult Education Quarterly Vol. 48, Issue 1*

Terre Blanche, M & Durrheim, K. 1999 *Research in Practice: Applied Methods for the Social Science* University of Cape Town Press (Cape Town)

Toffler, A. 1972 *Future Shock* The Stellar Press Ltd (London)

Tucker, M.E. 2010 'The Fountain: A Magazine of Scientific and Spiritual Thought' Issue 47, The Light Inc. (US)

Usher, R. & Edwards, R. 1994 *Postmodernism and Education* Routledge (London)

Van Aardt, A.M. & Van Wyk, C.K. 'Changes in Students' Strategic Learning' *South African Journal of Higher Education vol (1) 1996 (UNISA)*

Van Niekerk, K. 1992 'Life Skills training essential for school leavers' *Human Resources Management vol 8 (2)*

Wadsworth, Y. 1998 'What is Participatory Action Research?' *Action Research International* Southern Cross University Press (US)

Ward, V.M. Bertrand, J.T. and Brown, L.F. 1991 'The Comparability of Focus-Group and Survey Results' *Evaluation Review (vol 15.2.)*

Wheatley, M.J. 1999 *Leadership and the New Science* Berrett-Khoeler Publishers (San Francisco)

Wilbur, K. 1997 *The Eye of Spirit* Shambhala Publications Inc (Boston)

Wilber, K. 1998 *The Essential Ken Wilbur* Shambhala Publications Inc (Boston)

Wilhelm, R. 1973 *I Ching – Book of Changes* Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd (London)

Zaaiman, H. 1998 *Selecting Students for Mathematics and Science – The Challenge Facing Higher Education in South Africa* Sigma Press (Pretoria)

Appendix 1

Spiral Dynamics[64]

The Eight-Stage Spiral of Development

Second Tier: "Being" value MEMES

TURQUOISE Holistic MEME—starting 30 years ago

Basic theme: *Experience the wholeness of existence through mind and spirit*

- The world is a single, dynamic organism with its own collective mind

- Self is both distinct and a blended part of a larger, compassionate whole
- Everything connects to everything else in ecological alignments
- Energy and information permeate the Earth's total environment
- Holistic, intuitive thinking and cooperative actions are to be expected

YELLOW Integrative MEME—starting 50 years ago

Basic theme: *Live fully and responsibly as what you are and learn to become*

- Life is a kaleidoscope of natural hierarchies, systems, and forms
- The magnificence of existence is valued over material possessions
- Flexibility, spontaneity, and functionality have the highest priority
- Differences can be integrated into interdependent, natural flows
- Understands that chaos and change are natural

First Tier: "Subsistence" value MEMES

GREEN Communitarian/Egalitarian MEME - starting 150 years ago

---

[64] Condensed from Beck, D. and Cowan, C. 2006 *Spiral Dynamics – Mastering Values, Leadership, and Change* Blackwell Publishing (USA).

Basic theme: *Seek peace within the inner self and explore, with others, the caring dimensions of community*

- The human spirit must be freed from greed, dogma, and divisiveness
- Feelings, sensitivity, and caring supersede cold rationality
- Spreads the Earth's resources and opportunities equally among all
- Reaches decisions through reconciliation and consensus processes
- Refreshes spirituality, brings harmony, and enriches human development

ORANGE Achievist/Strategic MEME - starting 300 years ago

Basic theme: *Act in your own self-interest by playing the game to win*

- Change and advancement are inherent within the scheme of things
- Progresses by learning nature's secrets and seeking out best solutions
- Manipulates Earth's resources to create and spread the abundant good life
- Optimistic, risk-taking, and self-reliant people deserve success
- Societies prosper through strategy, technology, and competitiveness

BLUE Purposeful/Authoritarian MEME - starting 5,000 years ago

Basic theme: *Life has meaning, direction, and purpose with predetermined outcomes*

- One sacrifices self to the transcendent Cause, Truth, or righteous Pathway
- The Order enforces a code of conduct based on eternal, absolute principles
- Righteous living produces stability now and guarantees future reward
- Impulsivity is controlled through guilt; everybody has their proper place
- Laws, regulations, and discipline build character and moral fiber

RED Impulsive/Egocentric MEME - starting 10,000 years ago

Basic theme: *Be what you are and do what you want, regardless*

- The world is a jungle full of threats and predators
- Breaks free from any domination or constraint to please self as self desires
- Stands tall, expects attention, demands respect, and calls the shots

- Enjoys self to the fullest right now without guilt or remorse
- Conquers, out-foxes, and dominates other aggressive characters

PURPLE Magical/Animistic MEME - starting 50,000 years ago

Basic theme: Keep the spirits happy and the tribe's nest warm and safe

- Obeys the desires of the spirit being and mystical signs
- Shows allegiance to chief, elders, ancestors, and the clan
- Individual subsumed in group
- Preserves sacred objects, places, events, and memories
- Observes rites of passage, seasonal cycles, and tribal customs

BEIGE Instinctive/Survivalistic MEME - starting 100,000 years ago

Basic theme: Do what you must just to stay alive

- Uses instincts and habits just to survive
- Distinct self is barely awakened or sustained
- Food, water, warmth, sex, and safety have priority
- Forms into survival bands to perpetuate life
- Lives "off the land" much as other animals