

# **An exploration of an adult education programme and how it has fostered change in participants**

By

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# Abstract

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Unemployment, especially youth unemployment is one of the social problems South Africa experiences today. Amongst other factors, the legacy left by apartheid continues to impact communities which were marginalised and are still vulnerable to poverty. Increasing the challenges of youth finding employment is that employers seek staff with work experience. There are in-sufficient opportunities for youth to gain such experience.

Based in Shongweni, KwaZulu-Natal, a non-profit organisation, World Changers Academy (WCA) aims to empower young adults for work through life skills and leadership training courses. Their courses also help students find ways to gain valuable work experience. WCA focuses on students' attitudes and mindsets, while also providing knowledge and skills, by focusing on the roots of problems rather than the fruits.

This dissertation explores the changes which are reportedly taking place in students of the programme and factors which have influenced change in their lives. Using the framework of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991), the study explores the learning process and nature of change in students most impacted by the programme, to gain a qualitative insight into the change and the process of change.

From an interpretive paradigm, the study makes use of case study methodology to investigate in depth, the lives of successful candidates of the programme. Multiple data sources were used to construct the case. Data collection methods used included observation; focus groups; interviews and life histories. The data analysis included using the theoretical framework in both inductive and deductive ways to explore the research questions.

The study showed that, facilitated by their involvement on the programme, some students develop a strong sense of purpose and identity for their lives. They are challenged to think critically and experience a growth in self-confidence. Over time, changes in mindset and attitude are seen as changed lifestyles. Some aspects of the programme influencing change were emotional healing, trustful relationships and the authentic actions of role-models. Different ways of reflecting were observed and reflection was seen to be influential in individual change of students. The study concluded by theorizing about the catalyst for change in the South African context.

# Dedication

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I dedicate this study to the three incredible parents I have been privileged to have:

My first Dad, the late Denis Cox who I did not have the opportunity to know, but who chose my name for me.

My second Dad, the late Professor Emeritus, George Quicke. As a result of undertaking my Masters studies I was able to visit him and my mom more frequently in 2010, when coming to Pietermaritzburg for lectures. It was also the reason I was with him in his last moments on this earth, when I was in Pietermaritzburg for registration on 13 January 2011. I am forever grateful to him for ‘adopting’ me when I was seven and ‘raising me up to stand on mountains’.

Finally, my mom, Margaret Quicke, who gave me not just one, but two incredible dads, has loved, supported and encouraged me in my studies over the last three years and has always believed in me.

# Acknowledgements

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Although a project of this nature is an individual effort, I do not believe it would be possible without the support of others. I would like to acknowledge and thank the following people for the roles they have played in helping me accomplish this goal.

Vaughn John, my supervisor, for his guidance and insight on the academic aspects of the project, encouragement at each stage of the process and for his patience with me to see the project through to completion.

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My family and friends, who have supported me throughout my studies.

I would also like to thank World Changers Academy for allowing me to do this study on the organisation and Varsity College for assisting me with tuition fees.

# Declaration

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I, Amanda Jane Cox declare that

- i. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
- ii. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- iii. This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
- iv. This dissertation does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
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Signed:

Amanda Jane Cox

11 February 2013

As the candidate's Supervisor I agree to the submission of this dissertation.

Signed:

Dr Vaughn John

11 February 2013

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# List of Abbreviations

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ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ANC	African National Congress
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
EFA	Education for All
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution programme
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
KZN	Kwazulu-Natal
MDG	Millenium Development Goals
NP	National Party
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SETA	Sector Education Training Authorities
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WCA	World Changers Academy

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# Chapter 1 – Introduction

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## Introduction

In a post-apartheid South Africa, nineteen years into democracy, despite legislation to tip the scales in favour of previously disadvantaged citizens, many still remain impoverished, marginalised and unemployed. Unemployment in South Africa is a large scale and complex problem. An accurate figure is difficult to determine, and is dependent on who has done the study and how it has been conducted. However, it is easy to get caught up in the debate about accuracy and miss the crux of the issue, which is that unemployment figures are high and that many South Africans live in extreme poverty and economic difficulty. As Steyn (2005) says, it is important not to get so caught up in the numbers that solutions for the problems are not sought.

Jones (2011) reports that statistics from the South African Institute of Race Relations indicate the national unemployment rate to be around 25%. However, Jones' article highlights the even more alarming statistics of unemployed youth in South Africa, which is as much as twice the national unemployment rate. Further to this, young women have higher rates of unemployment than young men, and the figures across races are different, with African youth experiencing the highest rates of unemployment of all races (Jones, 2011).

In February 2011 the National Treasury released, with the annual budget, a discussion paper on policy options for addressing the acute youth unemployment problem (National Treasury, 2011). The document includes statistics showing the severity of the problems as well as proposed policies on how to address the issues. The fact that government is publishing such a document in this forum indicates that the problem of youth unemployment is significant.

One of the hurdles which young unemployed individuals face in their quest to find employment is their lack of experience in the workplace. Of course this is a chicken-and-egg situation, where one needs to work to get experience, but can't get work, because one doesn't have experience.

Another labour problem experienced in South Africa is a skills crisis, attributed partly to what is often called the 'brain drain' - large numbers of skilled people choosing to emigrate to nations such as Australia, New Zealand, England and the United States. There

are a number of other factors contributing to the South African skills crisis, some of a global nature and some of a local nature. Wöcke and Klein (2002) say that global labour market trends show an increased demand for highly skilled labour and decreased demand for lesser-skilled labour. This is not good news for a country which already has an over-supply of lesser-skilled labour. This trend is also what attracts skilled South Africans to leave the country, to seek better prospects elsewhere. Another factor exacerbating the problem is the influx of unskilled 'economic refugees' from other African countries, further increasing the pool of unskilled or semi-skilled labour (ibid).

Unfortunately, the solutions to these problems are not simple. The need for skilled labour cannot be met by the large pool of the unemployed population in South Africa, at least in the short term, because of their lack of skills and experience. While there is a great source of potential amongst the unemployed youth to develop in order to be able to fill skilled positions, they need the tools, education, opportunities and time to be able to develop those skills.

The need for skills development and empowerment initiatives for South Africans is immense, and it is evident that the African National Congress (ANC) recognized this after taking power in 1994, as they implemented laws to regulate training and skills development. Many young, previously disadvantaged people are benefiting from the training which is taking place as a result of this, but these initiatives do not reach all the citizens. Most especially, it does not reach those in very rural areas, those who do not have the resources or networks to be able access these opportunities. Furthermore, other social problems are associated with lifestyles of poverty, such as alcoholism or drug abuse, crime and vandalism. Furthermore, the people coming from this type of community are not the likely beneficiaries of business training initiatives.

There is therefore a great need amongst the poorest of the poor, the most marginalized and vulnerable, to be empowered with the skills and confidence to escape poverty and destructive habits and seek employment or start their own businesses. One non-profit organisation which is addressing this issue amongst such marginalised citizens is World Changers Academy (WCA), based in Shongweni, Kwazulu-Natal.

## Background and Rationale for Study

I first came into contact with WCA through my vocation as a skills specialist, when I was asked to assist them with aspects of their adult learning programme. My interest was piqued when I started to hear more about what they did and the success stories of people who had been through their programme. Many of these students come from lives of gangsterism, crime and substance abuse, but after going through the WCA courses they have experienced significant and lasting change in their lives. The changes reported are in the areas of lifestyle, financial status and employment. It is significant that WCA's influence is focused on communities who are historically marginalised and generally fall outside of the sphere of influence or pool of candidates chosen for government and business training initiatives.

WCA's vision is to raise leaders of high integrity in communities, who will positively impact those communities, imparting skills and attributes which they have learnt and implemented in their own lives.

WCA's vision, as published on their website, is:

*To empower people for success through values-based life skills training and to raise up emerging leaders to greatly impact their communities, nations, and the world (WCA, 2009).*

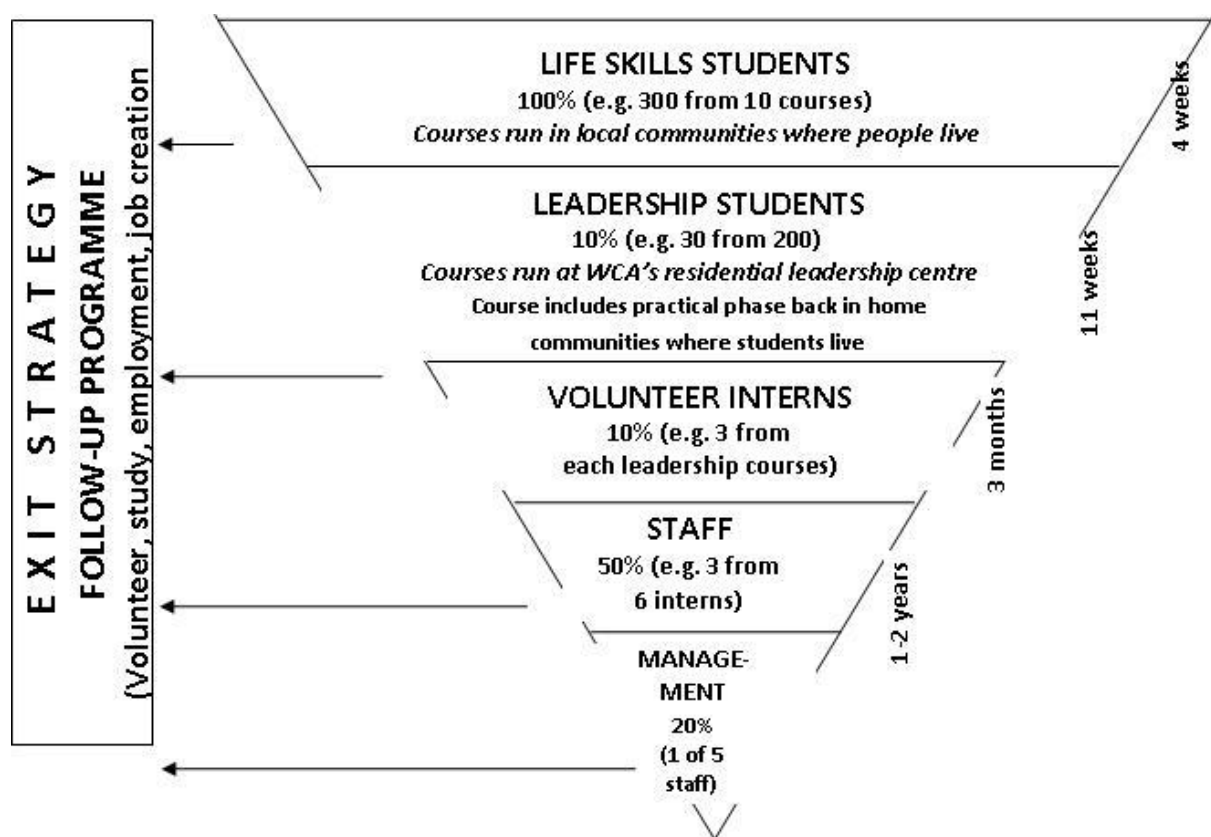
WCA was founded in August 2002 by two individuals who shared the same vision, although coming from two very diverse backgrounds. Sizwe Mthembu is a South African from a very poor, rural community and Joe White is an American raised in a well-off family, who had been living for five years in a semi-rural Zulu community near Durban prior to founding the organisation. Although they came from such diverse upbringing, their life journeys brought them together as equals, with a common vision to “*empower people from disadvantaged communities*” (WCA, 2009).

Figure 1 is a model of the WCA Programme. The model was first sourced from the WCA website (WCA, 2009). However, figure 1 is an updated version provided by Joe White. In summary, ‘Life Skills’ courses for unemployed youth are run in up to ten different locations at a time and these mass trainings normally take place seven times each year. WCA works in all disadvantaged communities in its target areas, particularly Ethekwini Metro, Ugu District municipality and Ilembe District municipality, targeting any unemployed youth who are interested in the programme. The Life Skills course has a

follow-up programme of up to twelve weeks, with regular sessions after each course. Students are encouraged to be productive in their communities and, depending on their needs and interests, are channelled into various jobs, study or entrepreneurial opportunities.

About 10% of the students from Life Skills courses go on to do the 'Leadership' courses which are run at the Leadership Centre in Shongweni. Courses are eleven weeks long and divided into three phases: lecture phase; community volunteer phase and then feedback phase, with about six courses being run per year.

FIGURE 1: WCA MODEL



A volunteer staff phase follows the Leadership course and was introduced in 2009. About 10% of the Leadership students are selected for this intensive three-month, residential programme. Before 2009, a volunteer phase took place but in an informal way.

WCA is primarily staffed by those who have been through the learning process outlined above, who started as unemployed youth. At all phases, students and staff are able to volunteer, study and be exposed to opportunities which will increase their skills give them experience, and ultimately help them find or create jobs. WCA recognises that it cannot

offer jobs to all their students, but that they can assist them with opportunities to get work experience, learn transferable skills for the workplace and set them on a path towards finding meaningful and gainful employment.

WCA has established relationships with businesses such as Mr Price, who offer work experience to students who complete courses. Mr Price may then choose to recruit students for staff positions. While this might not translate into a job, it gives students exposure to a real workplace through which they can develop some transferable skills as well as making them more marketable to other companies. WCA's strategic partnerships and networking with other organisations and businesses are therefore as much a part of the model as the more formally defined courses.

For the purpose of this study, some definitions need to be established.

The two WCA courses mentioned already will be referred to as Life Skills and Leadership when they are mentioned separately. However, although they are two separate courses, the one leads into the other, in terms of content as well as participants. The Life Skills Course takes place in community halls or communal areas of disadvantaged communities, and focuses on "*changing the world within*" (WCA, 2009). Topics covered on Life Skills include *Vision and Goal Setting*; *Worldview*, *African Renaissance* and *Job Preparation Skills*.

The Leadership Course takes place on the WCA premises in Shongweni, and is made up of students who have first been through the Life Skills Course. The focus of the Leadership Course is "*changing the world around us*" (WCA, 2009) and builds on the topics covered in Life Skills, focusing on raising future leaders for communities. Because these two courses are so closely linked and this study intends to investigate change in participants who have been through both of the courses, it is frequently necessary to refer to a combination of the two courses. The term used to describe this combination will be the *WCA Programme*.

The values of the WCA Programme include volunteerism and community involvement. These are addressed during Life Skills as part of the curriculum, and during Leadership as a major phase of the programme, when during a six-week period, students are required to go back to their community to do volunteer work. The purpose of this volunteer work is two-fold: firstly it is a way of giving back to the community and teaching the value of community participation and involvement, and secondly, it is a way of gaining valuable work experience. As was mentioned earlier, one of the barriers unemployed people face

in looking for work, is their lack of work experience. By requiring students to do community work and gain some insight and experience in real workplaces, WCA helps to empower the participants to find employment.

The type of skills which are being imparted to the participants are values-based and involve students' attitudes to life. Such skills are not always easy to define or assess in the way that a practical skill like sewing or welding would be. Coetzee and Esterhuizen (2010), in the following case, describe these skills as a 'resource' and they are also sometimes known as 'soft skills'. In a South African-based study, Coetzee and Esterhuizen (2010) investigated the psychological career and coping 'resources' needed by unemployed African graduates to make the transition from study to work. Coetzee and Esterhuizen refer to the construct of 'psychological career resources', which Coetzee defined as:

*The set of career-related preferences, values, attitudes, abilities and attributes that lead to self-empowering, proactive career behavior that promotes general employability* (Coetzee, as cited by Coetzee and Esterhuizen, 2010, p. 869).

Coetzee and Esterhuizen's study shows that some of the skills needed for employability are linked to strength of mind and an ability to cope psychologically with various changes and challenges in the transition to the workplace. The study supports the need for career guidance or work readiness programmes, which are aimed at giving educated but unemployed young people this type of skill or resource.

While the WCA Programme is not called a career guidance or work readiness programme, it has similar objectives to those discussed by Coetzee and Esterhuizen (2010). The WCA Programme is about self-leadership and about helping people find a vision and focus to their lives. It involves participants considering and establishing what their worldview is, embracing their African roots, facing the past and seeking healing of past hurts, making positive choices about their finances and relationships, and taking responsibility for the direction in which their lives are heading. It is more about developing the right attitude and mindset for success than about acquiring knowledge and skills, as a theoretical or practical college course would do.

The previous two paragraphs have illustrated some aspects of the WCA Programme which make it relevant and effective in empowering unemployed youth for the workplace. First was the value and implementation of volunteerism to assist people to obtain valuable work experience, second was the developing of psychological resources needed to cope



with study-to-work transitions. In addition, the focus on values and attitudes, leadership of self and others, are likely to be contributing factors in the success stories of students.

Many of the reportedly successful stories coming from WCA, have involved radical changes in people and resonate strongly with the type of change explained by Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. This is a theory about how adults learn through making meaning of their experiences and situations, and through changing their perspectives in order to create meaning, which is often precipitated by hardship or difficulty in life (Mezirow, 1991). Although WCA have not consciously used Mezirow's theory as a model to inform their pedagogy, there appear to be numerous aspects of the programme which resonate with the theory, including the difficult circumstances from which the participants come and the changed lifestyles or circumstances which many of them experience through the WCA Programme. These factors influenced the decision to use this theory as the theoretical framework for the study. The body of knowledge on Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory is fairly extensive, but not fully exhaustive, particularly in the African context. The proposed study could potentially add to literature on transformative learning in an African context.

South Africa has seen the birth of democracy, lived through the early years of promise and hope, but still struggles with the legacy of apartheid, along with ongoing social and political problems. It is a country which has seen much change, and has many significant challenges ahead. One such challenge is the plight of the poor and those who want to improve their lives, but don't have the means or the skills to do so. The need to find effective ways to empower young unemployed South African school leavers for the workplace is immense. In light of this, the way in which WCA seems to be making a lasting change in their student's lives, is worth investigating further. I believe there is much to be learned by taking a much closer and in-depth look at what is really going in these 'reportedly successful' programmes at WCA (WCA, 2009). If we can understand what WCA does and what happens to transform or empower individuals through this programme, we could learn some valuable lessons about how to foster success in other similar contexts in South Africa, or the African continent. The deeper level of insight into the programme might also assist WCA in improving and increasing the influence of their programme.

## Objectives and Key Research Questions

The objectives of the study are to explore and understand the changes that are taking place in students of the *WCA Programme* and investigate what influences those changes. Thus the study starts with an assumption that change is taking place. Two previous studies (Momo, 2009 and Hazell, 2010) on WCA have shown that this is a fair assumption to make. Likewise, the name of the organisation, World Changers Academy, holds within it the assumption that change is a key element or expectation of the organisation. Basing the study on this assumption and fore-grounding the change in participants does not deny or ignore that for some people, change may not take place. Inevitably, this assumption influences the choice of participants, who have been purposively chosen as students who have been considered exemplary cases on the programme. As a qualitative study, it does not claim to be able to generalise about the findings to include all the students at WCA, but rather to illustrate the change that is possible through the programme and to better understand the learning process leading to that change in exemplary cases.

The key research questions of the study are:

- 1. What changes have participants experienced as a result of the WCA Programme?**
- 2. What aspects of the WCA Programme have been influential in bringing about change in participants?**
- 3. What personal and contextual factors have influenced change in participants?**

An overview of the design and methodology of the study follows.

## Design and Methodology

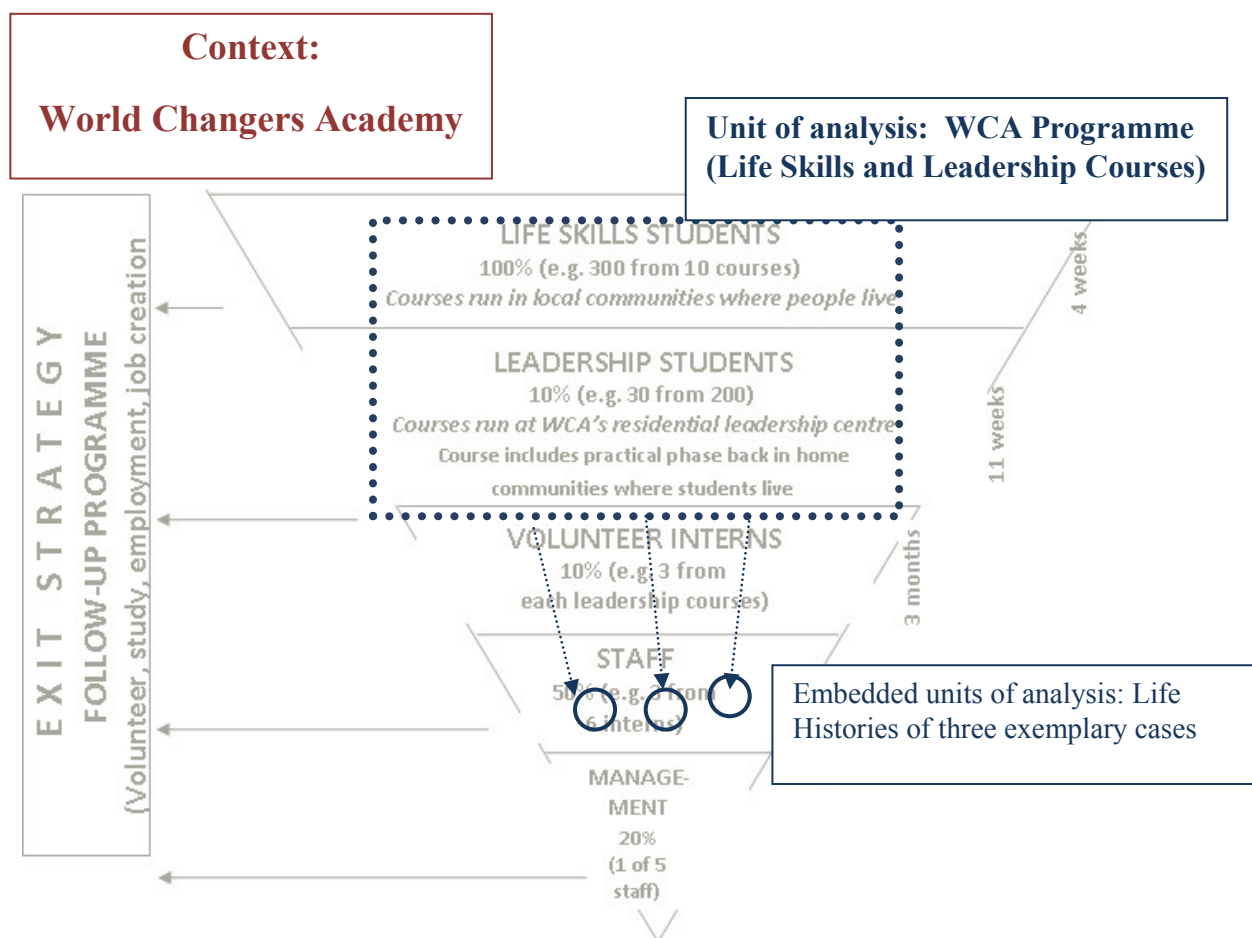
An overview of the design and methodology are given here while Chapter 3 of the dissertation details the methodology further. The study is qualitative and interpretive in nature, allowing for a flexible and in-depth study. The methodology is that of Case Study, using Life Histories as the primary construct. The theoretical framework used for the study is Transformative Learning Theory, as posited by Mezirow (1991). The case involves an investigation of the WCA Programme, gathering data from a range of

sources, namely students who have completed the programme successfully, facilitators of courses and current Leadership students. Documents from the organisation as well as researcher observations were also used in the data collection process.

The unit of analysis within the case is the WCA Programme. However, embedded units of analysis are the three life histories in the study.

Figure 2 uses the WCA model shown in Figure 1 to illustrate the bounds of this case and the units of analysis within it.

FIGURE 2: WCA MODEL SHOWING UNIT OF ANALYSIS AND EMBEDDED UNITS OF ANALYSIS



## Delimiting the Study

A case study is defined by limits and boundaries and it is important to make these boundaries clear, to delimit the study in order to identify what it is and what it is not.

Firstly, as has been emphasized already, to answer the research questions most fully, and to fit the design of the study, the chosen participants are students who could be considered by the organisation as the most successful or exemplary cases. The study highlights this

aspect of the programme, acknowledging that there is a wide range of other students who did not complete the programme, or who completed but are no longer involved in WCA. Such students would undoubtedly bring different perspectives and the study is not claiming that the findings are the experience of all students or even of the majority of them.

Secondly, similar to the WCA Programme defined above, WCA conduct Life Skills and Leadership courses in high schools. However, this study is of the adult education offering, and not the schools programme.

## Structure of Dissertation

### ***Chapter 1 – Introduction***

This chapter provides a rationale for the study; introduces WCA as an organisation and defines the WCA Programme. The objectives of the study are explained and three key research questions posed. An overview of the design and methodology of the study are also provided. Delimiting the case study, the bounds of the case are made explicit.

### ***Chapter 2 – Literature Review***

The literature review is divided into two parts. Part A starts by describing the macro, meso and micro contexts in which the study is situated. The macro-context is South Africa as a country in the global village in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The meso-context is the province of Kwazulu-Natal and its unique challenges. At the micro-context is World Changers Academy. The review includes insights from two previous studies conducted on the organisation. This part of the chapter concludes with a definition of non-formal education in the South African context, of which WCA is an example.

Part B is a review of the theoretical framework of the study, namely Transformative Learning Theory as proposed by Mezirow in 1991. It begins by contextualising Transformative Learning Theory in the landscape of other adult learning theories. Secondly, key concepts of Mezirow's theory are identified. Thirdly support and critique of Mezirow's theory during two periods of time are outlined. The chapter concludes with an overview of alternative conceptions of Transformative Learning Theory.

### ***Chapter 3 - Methodology***

In this chapter, the purpose of the study is explained and includes the three key research questions. Next the researcher's positionality is stated and the paradigmatic approach and methodology described. The methods of data collection are explained in detail including lessons learned and adjustments made as the study progressed. The method of data analysis follows. The final part of the chapter explains the issues of quality and concludes with the limitations of the study.

### ***Chapter 4 – Stories from the Study***

Chapter 4 includes four stories written in narrative style. The first story is about WCA the organisation, and more specifically about the WCA Programme which was introduced in the current chapter. The other three are the life stories of exemplary students of the WCA Programme.

### ***Chapter 5 – Analysis and Discussion***

Chapter 5 begins with a thematic analysis of the data, followed by a short discursive analysis. The next part of the chapter is a discussion about the study, using the data and concepts from Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory to understand the WCA programme better. The chapter concludes by proposing a tentative theory about the nature of catalyst for change in this context.

### ***Chapter 6 – Conclusions, Limitations, Reflections and Recommendations***

The final chapter brings the study to a conclusion, by responding to the three research questions and identifying limitations of the study. In addition, personal reflections on the learning and process of undertaking research are outlined. Finally, recommendations are made for future research and practice.

## **Summary**

This chapter introduced WCA within the current South African context, outlining the background and rationale of the study. It has been argued that South Africa faces high rates of unemployment and that many of the unemployed lack work experience. In addition, various factors have attracted many skilled South Africans to other countries, causing a lack of highly skilled employees. The government training initiatives are working towards improving the skills of the nation, but do not reach all the citizens. The

most marginalised citizens need to be reached by other means, for example, non-profit organisations like World Changers Academy.

The aims and objectives of the study were described and the key research questions posed. The basic methodological design was introduced and the structure of the dissertation was outlined. The next chapter is a review of existing literature relevant to the study.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

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This chapter is divided into two parts. Part A “The case in context” explores three levels of context in which the WCA Programme is situated. Firstly, the macro context situates South Africa within the global context of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Secondly, the meso-context situates Kwazulu-Natal as a unique province in South Africa. Finally, the micro-context situates World Changers Academy as a non-formal adult education organisation.

Transformative Learning Theory is the theoretical framework of the study. Part B explores this body of literature, firstly by identifying how this learning theory fits into the landscape of other adult learning theories. Secondly, key concepts of Transformative Learning Theory are described. A third section outlines the support, critique and development of the literature on transformative learning over two different periods, the first being from 1991 to 1998, during which some literature began to appear, followed by a period from 1999 – 2008 during which a much wider body of literature, especially of an empirical nature, was published. Lastly, the review examines the wide variety of alternative conceptions of Transformative Learning Theory up to the present.

### Part A - The Case in Context

A case is not ‘divorced’ from its context and an exploration of the wider context is not only helpful, but essential to the interpretation and findings of the case. Rule and John (2011, p. 39) say: *“In each study the case cannot be understood without reference to the wider context.”*

#### Macro-Context: South Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The first level of context to explore is how South Africa is embedded in the global context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is difficult for any country today to be independent of other countries, no matter how much they may wish to. Trade relations, worldwide pressures, shared issues like global warming, the ease and speed of communication and travel, all contribute towards an inter-relatedness which places South Africa within the global village. Global pressure was felt by South African citizens during the apartheid era, with economic, sporting and other restrictions from other countries being enforced. While these issues are no longer relevant, the current government experiences global pressures of a different nature.

To understand adult education, it is necessary to have an understanding of development, as changes in development theory have influenced and shaped adult education as we know it today. Three primary development theories have predominated since around the 1950's: modernisation theory, dependency theory and neoliberal theory.

Modernisation theory is based on an assumption that economic growth, which some countries experienced around the time of the industrial revolution, will eventually benefit everyone, filtering down from the 'developed' countries to the less developed, poorer countries. It also holds the assumption that the way that progress came about in 'developed' countries (like the United States and Britain) is the same way in which all countries should experience progress and modernisation (Youngman, 2000).

Modernisation theory was most popular and accepted in the 1960s but during the 1970s and 1980s when the practical outworking of this theory (the expected outcomes) were not observed and the gap between rich and poor increased, rather than decreased, dependency theory was beginning to gain popularity (ibid).

Dependency theory is based on socialism and a 'basic needs approach', which is about supplying the basic needs of all members of the society, including food, housing, clothing and drinking water. Contrary to the thinking of modernisation, dependency theory posits that the profits made by more 'developed' countries do not filter down to the poorer nations, but rather that the profits go from the less developed countries, also called the *periphery*, to the developed nations. Dependency theory is about how the citizens of countries rely on governments for their basic needs (Youngman, 2000). Although the theory increased in popularity, it did not influence policy or practice to a great extent (ibid).

Neoliberal theory has been strong since the 1980's and relies on the operation of free markets, with minimal intervention from governments. *Laissez-faire* capitalism, an economic system which supports private business, with minimal government interference, is at the root of neoliberal theory (Youngman, 2000). It is the neoliberal theory which seems to be most prominent in today's global context, which has implications for education, adult education and many other aspects of contemporary life.

More developed countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, operate from a neoliberal agenda and also have strong economies. Less-developed nations, like South Africa, are reliant on developed nations and so are pressured to implement neoliberal policies and decisions. For example, less developed countries rely on



international funds, such as The World Bank and The International Monetary Fund, for financing development initiatives. These funding agencies are operated by countries like the United States and the United Kingdom and their policies are dominated by neoliberal theory. Hence, loans given to less-developed countries carry with them conditions with a neoliberal agenda, including the adjustment of policies towards more privatisation (Youngman, 2000). South Africa is in the position of being reliant on other nations for finance and trade, and experiences pressure from these nations to change policies towards neoliberal thinking. This might be good for some citizens, but it does not benefit everyone and has significant implications for those already marginalised, poor and unemployed.

## **Global initiatives**

There is global recognition of the major social issues facing the world today, evidenced by the number of global initiatives tackling problems like extreme poverty, hunger and low levels of education. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) are a United Nations (UN) initiative, started in 2000 by the nations of the world to reduce extreme poverty by 2015. There are eight goals targeting issues of poverty, lack of education and disease. South Africa as part of sub-Saharan Africa falls into the area most adversely affected by these issues. The Education for All (EFA) initiative, started by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), also in 2000, has six goals with regard to education, including adult education, to be achieved by 2015. Regular reports are released to monitor progress, but as the deadline draws near, it seems less and less likely that the goals will be met.

The main theme of the 2011 EFA Global Monitoring report is the impact which violence and warfare are having on education (UNESCO, 2011). The overall message of the report is that we are not on track to meet the EFA goals by 2015 and the reasons for this include extreme hunger, finances and funding (due to the global economic crisis), violence and countries not meeting their pledges. The 2011 MDG report shows that real progress has been made in some areas and on some of the goals, with lives being changed for the better, but that it is still the poorest and most vulnerable who are not being reached (United Nations, 2011).

Despite the good intentions of these initiatives, the goals are far from being met. Even though there have been improvements in some parts of the world, in other countries the development is far short of where it needs to be by 2015.

## **South Africa – “teenage democracy”**

Within this global context, South Africa, a country nineteen years into democracy, a “teenager” in terms of freedom from oppression, still bears the legacy and scars of apartheid. In many ways, the 1994 elections, which brought an end to apartheid, were about wiping the slate clean and making a new start. However, just as children learn that decisions and actions have consequences, South Africa has had to learn that the decisions made during apartheid have had lasting consequences for our country, which cannot just be erased in a moment. Many of the issues faced today, like the poor levels of education of the majority of adults over 35 years, are a result of apartheid’s discriminatory educational policies and inadequate schooling provision.

In and immediately after 1994, South Africa became a united ‘rainbow nation’ and confounded the sceptics and critics. Many issues from apartheid were addressed through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and projects were initiated to provide basic necessities like housing, water and electricity to poor and disadvantaged citizens. However, the African National Congress (ANC) faced the challenges of the apartheid legacy, while taking governance and moving the country forward. Now we are a “teenage” democracy, facing difficulties and challenges not unlike those faced in the teenage years of human development. Some examples of the challenges South Africa faces today are: many citizens are still waiting for their basic needs to be addressed; cost-cutting and corruption has resulted in some of the housing provided being sub-standard and increasingly hazardous to live in; high crime rates; high rates of HIV/AIDS infection, and xenophobia.

One of the criticisms the ANC has faced is the shift towards a neoliberal agenda. Their interventions to address skills and training issues, in the form of Sector Education Training Authorities (SETAs), for example, could be argued to have a neoliberal agenda. Although SETA’s are government bodies, they are funded through business levies and are in place to further training and development within businesses. While companies are encouraged to take unemployed people onto learning programmes through the SETA-assisted funding models, it is often not implemented due to the onerousness of the process. While it cannot be overlooked or denied that some people are benefiting, the system does not reach the poorest of the poor because it is linked to business, and therefore more inclined to involve training and development of people who are already employed. The citizens least likely to benefit from the training and development through

the SETA system are those who are unemployed or live in rural areas and therefore do not have viable access to business centres. The participants of the WCA Programme belong to this group of citizens.

At a schooling level, education differences still exist today. While during apartheid, schooling was different for different races, the separation now is more about funding, location, and economic ability to pay for schooling. Rural schools are among the least-resourced schools, and so students living in rural areas or impoverished communities, are once again marginalised and still experience lower levels of education.

Although many previously disadvantaged citizens have experienced changes in education and have had more opportunities since 1994, it is the poorest of the poor who still lack access to the facilities and opportunities needed to bring them out of poverty. Now it is not racial oppression, but economic oppression they experience, due in part to the neoliberal decisions made by government and business. Organisations like WCA, which target the citizens of these disadvantaged groups, therefore have a crucial role to play in social upliftment.

## Meso-Context: Kwazulu-Natal

Now, we turn to the meso-context - the province of Kwazulu-Natal (KZN) and the unique issues and challenges it faces. Historically unique to this province is the political violence, in many rural or semi-rural areas, which took place in the in the 1980's and 1990's and was secretly supported by the apartheid state.

Taylor (2002) reports that according to some sources, as many as 20 000 people have died in violence in Kwazulu-Natal since 1984. There was warfare between the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), each receiving support, from the ANC and the National Party (NP) respectively (ibid). Sadly, much of the bloodshed has taken place after 1990 when the bans on the liberation movements were lifted and even after the birth of democracy in 1994. Taylor (2002) argues that the reason that the violent eruptions in Kwazulu-Natal rural areas <sup>1</sup> took place after 1994 was politically-driven violence, because the 'unofficial war' between the ANC and the IFP was not fully addressed through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor's article presents case studies of three areas of violent action: the Shobashobane massacre in 1995, the Richmond killings (1997 – 98) and the Nongoma assassinations (1999 – 2000)

While conducting a study on how HIV/AIDS affects schooling in Richmond, John and Rule (2006) made some interesting observations, resulting in an additional micro-study emerging. They noticed that there seemed to be a link between the violence that the people of Richmond experienced in 1997–98, and many of the social problems, like fractured families, alcohol abuse, commercial sex work and drugs (ibid). This indicates that the many challenges which impact the lives of these communities, most likely have been fueled by the violence.

It is into communities such as these that the WCA programme is reaching, to the children and families of those who experience multiple challenges such as those discussed. Currently, poverty, unemployment, poor education, substance abuse and alcoholism amongst others have a significant and lasting hold on many of the inhabitants of communities in KZN.

## Micro-Context: World Changers Academy

The final level of context to explore is WCA as an organisation:

*Someone once asked, “How can I change the world? I’m just an insignificant, simple nobody.” A wise man replied, “It’s not difficult to change the world. After all, to change the world, you need to start by changing your nation. To change your nation, you need to change your community. To change your community, you need to change your family. To change your family, you need to first change yourself.” This is what World Changers Academy (WCA) is all about — helping young people change their own lives for the better so that they can go out and change the world for good. (WCA, 2009)*

The above quote is taken from the World Changers Academy (WCA, 2009) webpage called “History and Background” because it describes so well the vision and heart from which the organisation was born. WCA was started in 2002 by two men from diverse backgrounds, cultures and countries, but with a common vision. Sizwe Mthembu is a South African man, from Northern KwaZulu-Natal, who is a pastor, former teacher and businessman. Joe White is an American, who prior to 2002 had been living in KwaNyuswa, a semi-rural Zulu community near Durban for five years, doing community empowerment work (WCA, 2009). Both Joe and Sizwe, had the vision to start a values-based, empowerment organisation addressing social issues in a holistic way, through a combination of spiritual, social, and economic factors (WCA, 2009).

## Values-based life skills and leadership training

The home-page of WCA ([www.wca-sa.org](http://www.wca-sa.org)) starts with a heading in bold saying: ***“World Changers Academy Welcomes you”*** and immediately below this, the words: ***“Ex-convicts, juvenile delinquents, unemployed, high school students, and many others . . .”*** (emphasis mine).

While this might seem a strange introduction, it is a poignant way of illustrating who the programme is reaching, and that young people coming from this type of background are being changed while on the programme. The WCA webpage (WCA, 2009) of “testimonials” includes the following target groups who have changed their lifestyles positively as a result of the WCA Programme: *“Criminal Offenders”*; *“Drug and Alcohol Abusers”*; *“Hopeless and Discouraged”*; *“Hopeful Yet Frustrated”*; *“Spiritually despondent”*; *“Emotionally Wounded and Unemployed”*.

WCA provides a values-based programme reaching young South African citizens who might not have other opportunities for growth and development. The first part of the programme is the Life Skills course, which focuses on the individual and self-leadership, and the second is the Leadership course, which goes to a deeper level and focuses on developing emerging community leaders.

## Previous research

Two previous research studies have been conducted at WCA, one on the Life Skills course and the other on the Leadership course. Momo (2009) studied the perceptions of students who had completed the Life Skills course, to establish how the course had affected their lives. The purpose of the study was to evaluate, through the perceptions of students of the WCA Life Skills course (Momo, 2009).

Two of the themes that emerged from the study are particularly pertinent to the current study’s research questions, firstly the ‘lifestyle/attitude before the programme’ and secondly, the ‘Effects of the programmes on the participants’. Before going on the Life Skills programme, students reported destructive lifestyle behaviours like substance abuse, criminal involvement, multiple sexual partners, and a negative attitude to life, caused by being directionless, idle and unemployed. Having completed the Life Skills course, they indicated a sense of direction and clear goals, a greater sense of their own potential and worth, spiritual growth, better communication skills and better prospects for becoming employed (Momo, 2009). Momo’s research goes some way in answering the first

research question of this study, namely “What changes have participants experienced as a result of the WCA Programme?” However, it doesn’t answer the other questions regarding factors causing the changes. Momo’s study, is therefore an interesting starting point to the current investigation, having some similarity, but also key differences. Unlike Momo’s study, the current study examines people who have been through both the Life Skills and Leadership courses. Even more pertinent, the choice of theoretical framework (Transformative Learning Theory) provides a unique lens through which to explore and question the programme and the participants. The critical nature of Transformative Learning Theory, opens the case for questions about how and why people believe what they do and if they have questioned and challenged their assumptions through engaging with the WCA programme.

A final observation is that although most of the respondents in Momo’s study indicated positive changes in their lives, this was not the case for all the participants. Particularly interesting to note was a perceived clash in cultural beliefs, which was seen by the students as a clash between African and Western values. This was primarily regarding religious beliefs – perceived as African traditional religions versus Western Christianity (Momo, 2009). This observation will be particularly interesting to examine further, especially in light of the Transformative Learning framework of the current study, with its focus on critical thinking.

Hazell’s (2010) study was an evaluation of the World Changers Academy Leadership programme. Hazell’s findings were similar to Momo’s in terms of the lifestyle and attitude changes. In this study, students reported coming from homes in which poverty, unemployment, crime, drugs and teenage pregnancy were common. As a result of going through the Leadership course, many reported that they had developed in areas like improved personal identity, being able to take a stand, exercising more self-control, accepting responsibility, communication skills and numerous other positive aspects. The study also examined the role of the facilitators, using student’s evaluations of the facilitators to assess if they were approachable and good role-models (Hazell, 2010). Hazell’s findings indicate that good relationships are established between facilitators and students on the course, and that students develop a sense of self-confidence; identity and community, through the course (ibid). These are all aspects of the programme which will be examined in greater detail in the current study, as many of these themes can be productively explored using the theoretical framework of this study.

Both of the previous studies were conducted in the discipline of development Studies, illustrating the significance of the link between adult education and development. Both studies also provide a small glimpse into the focus and purpose of the current study, and justify the assumption that some sort of change is occurring in some of the participants of the WCA Programme. However, there are some key differences, which will be able to provide a unique lens to view the programme. Firstly, this study is exploratory, rather than evaluative, as the two previous studies have been. It intends to explore what is going on in the WCA Programme, rather than evaluate the impact of the programme on participants. Secondly, this study explores the programme from an educational perspective rather than a developmental perspective, which although related, will be asking different questions. For example, a question which would be asked because of the pedagogical lens is 'How is the course being taught and is this influential in the change in students?' Thirdly, the theoretical lens of the study will inform further questioning around the style and nature of the teaching taking place. These key differences can provide unique insights which have not been observed in the studies already done.

## **Non-formal education**

Education is frequently divided into three categories: *formal education*; *non-formal education* and *informal education*, although *informal education* is sometimes called *informal learning*. A fourth category of learning (particularly in adult education or lifelong learning contexts), is *incidental learning*. The WCA Programme could be classified as non-formal education. The term *non-formal education*, used at different times in history and in different countries and contexts, covers a wide range of types of learning programmes, so a definition in the context in which it is used is necessary.

As a South African, defining non-formal education in an African context, Walters' (1998) definition is probably the most pertinent. Paraphrased, Walters says that non-formal education is educational activity which is planned but not usually certified, and is usually a short course which has been defined by the specific objective it aims to accomplish, and its relevance to the needs of the poor. Further to this, non-formal courses or programme's have a high degree of flexibility.

However, other definitions are also helpful and similarly describe the WCA Programme accurately. For example, Enache (2010, p. 86) from a Romanian and European context, says:

*Non-formal education refers to any planned program for personal or social education for youth, devised to improve some competencies outside of the formal curriculum.*

Enache advocates the role of *non-formal education* systems, and argues that the three forms of education (formal, informal and non-formal) work well together to support life-long learning. Enache (2010) says that non-formal educational settings offer a greater level of flexibility than formal settings and that an increasing scepticism about official or 'formal' education systems is opening the way for non-formal contexts.

Rogers (2005), says that non-formal education arose at a time (late 1960s and early 1970s) when globally, alternatives were being sought for formal schooling and educational systems and when predominant modernist type development theory was being challenged by the paradigm of dependency. It was therefore seen by many as a solution to formal educational failures and an answer to educational, social and economic problems. After its initial emergence as a type of education, there was much debate about what *non-formal education* really meant. While early understandings of *non-formal education* did not include schooling, after the 1980s there was a significant increase in the number of educational programmes calling themselves *non-formal*, and the definition expanded to include alternative less-formal or less-structured ways of offering schooling for children, which Rogers says is taking place in Bangladesh, the Philippines, Thailand and other countries. However, this is not the context in which it is understood for this study.

In the South African context, non-formal educational programmes usually fall outside formal government education and educational programmes in private business. Providers of non-formal education programmes are therefore most often *non-profit organisations* who rely on funding from external sources. The sources of support range from national donors to international donors, including businesses, and in some instances funding from government. Walters (1989) calls these types of organisations *community agencies* or *voluntary associations*, saying that voluntary associations tend to develop in times of social or political upheaval. It is therefore not surprising that in South Africa voluntary associations or independent community organisations proliferated in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, the decades and years leading to the end of apartheid.

In response to the apartheid government's brutal oppression of African, Indian and Coloured race groups in the 1960s, organisations which had been silenced, such as the



Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the independent black trade union movement, re-emerged in the 1970s with increased resistance and purpose. Numerous organisations, with differing key objectives, emerged in this period, many of them connected to the BCM. Although addressing different community needs, including education, health, schooling and clinics, their common underlying purpose was a response to the political and social oppression of the apartheid government. The broad and extensive network of voluntary associations was a powerful means of black consciousness-raising and self-empowerment of the country's majority, who were being oppressed by the laws of the apartheid government. The flexibility and non-formal structure of these organisations enabled them to reach out and supply diverse needs, which would not otherwise have been met at a crucial time in the political landscape of the country (Walters, 1989).

A key factor, which sustained and enabled such organisations to exist, was the funding received from the international community. As the world became increasingly aware of the political situation in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s, they sought ways to assist the oppressed. Providing funding directly to organisations within the country which were impacting the poor, marginalised and oppressed, was an effective and meaningful way they could assist.

Because the proliferation of non-profit organisations prior to 1994 was largely due to the social and political tensions and emerged out of the struggle for freedom, it was inevitable that the focus of these organisations changed after the birth of democracy. As a free country, in which the previously oppressed now governed, the expectation was for the government to provide development to the people. Financial donors who previously supported voluntary organisations directly, channeled funding through the ANC government. There were other factors contributing to the decline in voluntary organisations after 1994, but this was one of the most crucial and threatening, causing many of these organisations to close their doors (Gulati, Everatt, & Kushlick, 1996).

The new South African government did respond to the development needs of communities, initially through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and then through the Growth, Employment and Redistribution programme (GEAR). However the success of these initiatives is questioned. While some successes have been achieved, there continues to be massive problems of unemployment and poverty today, indicating that the needs of many of the people still have not been met.

From an educational perspective, legislation passed by the government in the late 1980s has had a large impact on adult education in South Africa. For example, the Skills Development Act of 1998 and the Skills Development Levies Act 1999 became the tools to establish government training bodies, called Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) for the various sectors of the economy. SETAs are responsible for identifying training, providing training, and enabling and motivating the companies within their sector to undertake training. Companies who undertake training can claim back grants through the SETAs and are therefore incentivised to plan and implement training initiatives.

Adult education in South Africa today is therefore primarily linked to vocational learning. The skills taught range from basic literacy and numeracy skills, to formal qualifications. Adult education is provided through a range of types of organisations, including government, private businesses and a few non-profit organisations which have been able to continue to operate. The result is that much of the adult education provision today has been formalised into the new education system, is vocationally driven and is linked to business.

The gap which has been left as a result of the number of non-profit organisations having had to close after 1994, is large. Although government has attempted to address these needs (and some success and progress has been made), social issues such as poverty, unemployment and education are seldom met by one source alone. There is therefore still a pressing need for non-profit organisations to address the needs of the under-privileged. Non-profit organisations are not as politically driven as they were during apartheid, when the key objective of organisations was to raise consciousness and empower the people for a struggle for freedom. Without this political agenda, non-profit organisations can be more focused on addressing the needs in poor communities. Since there is no longer an abundance of funding from international sources, organisations such as WCA, who have been able to obtain funding and remain sustainable in the post-apartheid environment over the long term, have become crucial conduits to empower unreached and often forgotten communities still living on the periphery of society.

## Concluding Comments on Context

In the global, South African and provincial contexts, opportunities for education and development are needed to reach the poorest and most vulnerable groups of people who are not being reached by government and worldwide initiatives. The WCA Programme has these individuals in mind. Within the multiple layers of context outlined, WCA is facilitating a learning programme which is making a significant difference in the lives of individuals and communities.

## Part B - Theoretical Framework:

### Transformative Learning Theory

Theories about how adults learn began to be developed around the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, as researchers in the field recognised the need for bodies of knowledge specific to the discipline (Merriam, 2004). Prior to this, scholars relied mainly on theories from psychology to understand adult learning (ibid). Three major theories have developed since the 1950s (ibid), one of those being Transformative Learning Theory which Taylor (2007, p. 173) says “*continues to be the most researched and discussed theory of adult education*”.

### Transformative Learning Theory in the Adult Learning Theory “Landscape”

Merriam (2004), reviewed adult learning theories, ‘painting’ a ‘landscape’ of adult learning theory development since the 1950s, which is summarised in Table 1.

TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF MERRIAM’S “CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF ADULT LEARNING”

<u>Time period</u>	<u>Focus of theories</u>	<u>Summary of literature</u>
1920s – 1950s	Can Adults learn?	Psychology and educational psychology the main theories used to understand how adults learn
1950s – 1990s 3 major theory building efforts	How do Adults Learn?	Transformational learning (Freire 1971; Mezirow, 1990’s)
		Self-directed Learning (Tough, 1971; Knowles, 1975 through to 1990’s)
		Androgogy – (Knowles 1968 – 1980’s)
Late 1980s - 2004 Most Recent Developments	Diverse views and interpretations of how adults learn.	Context based learning (Resnick, 1987; Lave & Wenger, 1990’s; Schön 1980’s – 1990’s)
		Critical perspectives (Merriam; Caffarella, Ellsworth, deMarrais, 1991; Sandlin, 2000; Tisdell 1990’s; Hayes and Flannery, 2000)
		Role of emotions, body and spirit in learning (Ferro, 1993; Dirxx, 2001; Pert, 1997; Clark, 2001; O’Sullivan, 1999)

Merriam proposes three main theory-building periods. The first period, (prior to the 1950s), focused on the question: “Can adults learn?” The second period, (1950s to 1990s) focused on the question “How do adults learn?” while the third period, from around the 1980s has seen an expansion of different approaches to adult learning, many arising from other disciplines (ibid).

Mezirow’s theory, developed in the second theory-building period, was first proposed in 1978, and then formally published in 1991 (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow’s theory was embedded in the literature of his time, drawing from Freire, Habermas, Knowles amongst others. Similarly, Mezirow’s theory has been a reference point for a wide variety of conceptions of adult learning theory since it was published. Merriam’s (2004) review helps to contextualise Transformative Learning Theory within the broader knowledge base of Adult Learning Theory, illustrating the pivotal role which it has played and continues to play in the field of adult education. Although developed primarily in the second theory-building period, it continues to be widely used in empirical studies, and a broad spectrum of literature has developed from it.

Much of the adult learning theory in the third theory-building period, bringing us to the present, has provided broader conceptions of Mezirow’s theory. Taylor (2008) argues that the variety of interpretations of Mezirow’s theory that have arisen, create a more diverse means to understand transformative learning and its implications for practice. Many of the newer emerging theories have had much more of a focus on the role of feelings and emotions, spirituality, context and other ways of knowing, which were not given much attention by Mezirow.

Transformative Learning Theory has remained a major learning theory, and has evolved over time to include a deeper and more diverse approach to many of the concepts introduced in the initial theory. Mezirow has continued to add to the literature, responding to critique and adding clarity of meaning to his original ideas. This dialogue within the literature has undoubtedly added value to the credibility of the theory, as well as a richer and more meaningful understanding of concepts within the theory, contributing to its development over time. It continues to be developed currently, more than three decades after its inception.

Mezirow’s theory forms the theoretical framework of this study, providing a lens through which to view and understand the WCA Programme. However it is the variety of

interpretations and conceptions of transformative learning developed later, which act as filters and serve to enrich and deepen the vision and perspective of the study. The interpretive and inductive nature of the study calls for a flexible approach to interpreting the data, which includes allowing the data ‘to speak’ and add new insights, perspectives or theorizing to transformative and adult learning literature.

The next section gives an overview of Mezirow’s original theory, and investigates what aspects of the theory have been supported, critiqued and developed over the last 30 years. The review then investigates more recent conceptions of the theory which have developed.

## Transformative Learning Theory – (Mezirow, 1991)

Transformative Learning Theory is about how adults learn. Mezirow (1991) proposes that during growth and development into adulthood, people develop or acquire frames of reference from the culture, beliefs, societies, family and other contexts in which they grow up. These frames of reference he calls ‘*meaning perspectives*’<sup>2</sup> and he says that we learn to make meaning of life and experiences, by filtering them through our *meaning perspectives* (ibid). However, sometimes an experience does not fit or cannot be understood through our meaning perspective, and through a process of critical reflection, we change our meaning perspective to make sense of the experience. Learning which takes place through such an altered *meaning perspective* is said to be *transformative learning* (ibid). At times, critical reflection does not result in changed *meaning perspectives*, but might rather affirm or add to an existing perspective. In this case, while learning is still taking place, it is not considered transformative learning. (ibid).

Cranton (1994, p. 26) describes Mezirow’s theory as follows: “*We interpret our experiences and the things we encounter in our own way; what we make of the world is a result of our perceptions of our experiences. Transformative learning, then, is a process of examining, questioning, validating and revising these perceptions*”.

Another definition, succinctly describes the theory: “*Transformative learning is about change – dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live*” (Merriam, Cafferella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 130)

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<sup>2</sup> Mezirow separates ‘frames of reference’ into two dimensions, one being ‘meaning perspectives’ and the other ‘meaning schemes’. The concept of ‘meaning schemes’ will be introduced shortly.

Transformative learning involves a process of becoming more aware of one's beliefs and the contexts from which they arose, challenging the assumptions on which those beliefs are based, embracing a new premise or perspective, and finally, acting on the new perspective in the context of one's day to day life (Mezirow, 1991).

A personal example illustrates transformative learning in the South African context. As a white woman growing up in apartheid South Africa, I had an underlying, unspoken fear of African men. The assumption was that all African men were dangerous and not to be trusted. Nine years into a democratic South Africa, in 2003, I started teaching Adult Basic Education (ABET) to all races. At one of the companies, I taught four African men on an individual, one-to-one basis, assisting them with their literacy and numeracy studies. Over a period of about three years I saw them either once or twice a week, developing close colleague-like friendships with them. I often learnt unexpected and interesting things about their cultures, experiences and day to day life challenges. They were of similar age to me, and in a democratic and fair South Africa, would have been my peers, not my students. Rather than being fearful, I was humbled and enriched by these relationships, which contributed to a changing perspective of my underlying assumptions.

On another occasion, an African colleague brought his son to me for extra maths lessons at my home. I would not have thought twice about it, except that the supervisor of the building, an elderly white lady, who had seen this African man going up to my flat, asked me later about this visit and was surprised that I was not afraid. This helped me realise that over time and through relationships, the untested underlying assumptions I had grown up with had shifted, and I was acting on those changed assumptions, even whilst being unaware of the change.

### **Key concepts from Mezirow's theory**

Some of the key concepts of Mezirow's theory will be introduced, before investigating what others have to say about Mezirow's theory. The key concepts which will be discussed are: frames of reference (including meaning schemes and meaning perspectives); critical reflection; perspective transformation and phases of transformation.

### ***Frames of Reference: Meaning Schemes and Meaning Perspectives***

*Learning may be defined as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1).*

Mezirow describes learning as making meaning through various ‘meaning structures’, called ‘frames of reference’ which he places into two categories. Firstly, a *meaning scheme*, he says, is a set of habitual expectations (Mezirow, 1990). For example, when we are thirsty, we expect a drink to quench our thirst; if we get into the car to go to work, we expect that it will get us there; if we sit on a chair we expect it to hold us up. Secondly, *meaning perspectives* consist of higher-order beliefs, ideologies, propositions and assumptions which we use to make meaning of new experiences (Mezirow, 1990). An example of a *meaning perspective* could be a stereotypical viewpoint about a different race group, or the expected way an organisation should operate. *Meaning perspectives* are usually unconsciously learnt through the society and culture in which we grow, but can also be intentionally learnt (Mezirow, 1990).

Our meaning perspectives and meaning schemes are used to filter and make sense of experience in day-to-day living, and to guide our actions and what we learn. Experiences can do a number of things: they can strengthen, extend/expand and even change the expectations we have of what will happen and how life will unfold (ibid). Meaning schemes are much easier to identify and change than meaning perspectives. A set of meaning schemes is linked to the higher order meaning perspectives. Through successive changed meaning schemes over a period of time, it is possible that a meaning perspective may be changed. Sometimes however, meaning perspectives are changed through an epochal event rather than the progressive, incremental change explained above (Mezirow, 1990).

### ***Critical Reflection***

Mezirow proposed that there are three levels or forms of reflection which he called *content reflection*, *process reflection* and *premise reflection*. Content reflection is about asking “what” questions, and involves the content of the inquiry; process reflection is about asking the “how” questions, and involves the process of the inquiry, and premise reflection is about asking the “why” questions, particularly why we believe or hold the values we do, or questioning the assumptions about our frames of reference (Mezirow,



1991 and Cranton, 1994). The following example serves to illustrate the concept, starting by posing a problem which I encounter as an educator and examining how I could engage in content, process and premise reflection to solve this problem.

**Problem:** When I am in the classroom context in front of a class of students, if they don't settle down and listen, continuing to talk to each other while I am trying to speak, I find it distressing as well as rude. I expect them to listen and pay attention.

*Content Reflection:* I need to examine the content or description of the problem. I need to ask "What is the problem?" "What am I feeling in this situation?" "What is really at the root of my distress?"

*Process Reflection:* I need to examine how I could solve the problem, examine if there are aspects to the problem I have missed, asking questions like: "How do I react in the classroom situation when this happens?"; "How do I interpret the situation when the students behave like this?"; "How could I react differently or handle the situation differently?"

*Premise Reflection:* I need to question the problem. Why do I react like this? What are the assumptions about their attitudes which I make about the students' behaviour?

Content reflection can help me to understand the problem. Process reflection can help me understand how the situation unfolds and premise reflection can help me understand why I feel this way and could lead to changing my underlying assumptions and thereby changing the way I react in similar circumstances.

An important distinction to make is between reflection and critical reflection. Reflection can be simply a matter of remembering something that has happened, while critical reflection involves reassessing and questioning what we believe, think or assume to be true. Mezirow, says that while any type of reflection implies an element of critique, critical reflection involves questioning or challenging assumptions in our meaning schemes and meaning perspectives and possibly changing them as a result (Mezirow, 1990). Reflection on my problem might involve simply remembering a specific instance, but not investigating it further, while critical reflection involves going to a deeper level, trying to answer the questions identified in the example with the intention of taking steps to evaluate those answers and be prepared to make changes.

The current study will explore critical reflection and in particular, premise reflection, in order to see if there is evidence of these types of reflection in the case. Some questions which will need to be answered as the data is collected and analysed are: “Is reflection taking place?”; “What types of reflection are evident?”; “Is premise reflection taking place?”; “What are the results or outcomes of premise reflection?”; “What factors about the programme are influencing or encouraging premise reflection?”; “Does the pedagogy of WCA programme foster premise reflection?” and “What factors hinder premise reflection?”

### ***Perspective Transformation:***

When critical reflection takes place and we become aware that our meaning perspectives have been distorted or are no longer valid, and we consequently change those perspectives and act on those choices, the process is called a perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991).

*Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and , finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings.*  
(Mezirow, 1991, p. 167)

Perspective transformation then is the process of change which involves using critical reflection to make meaning of life experiences through meaning schemes and meaning perspectives.

An important concept in this definition, which needs further explanation, is the word *process*. Change doesn’t happen at a single instant, but involves a period of time and a number of stages or phases.

### ***Phases of Transformation / Process of Change:***

Mezirow’s early publications about the phases of transformation outlined a ten-phase process, which starts with a disorienting dilemma and concludes with re-integration into life based on the new or changed perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). A disorienting dilemma can be any event or experience, such as the death of a loved one, loss of a job or illness, which starts a process of questioning assumptions in order to make sense of that loss.

Some of the other phases are self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame; critical reflection of assumptions; realising that others share the same discomforts or have been through similar experiences; exploring and trying on of new roles and relationships (ibid).

While there is some support for these phases, Mezirow's theory has been critiqued for focusing too much on the cognitive aspects of transformation. This ten-phase model promotes a very cognitive approach, but while more recent studies have shifted away from this model, many of the key concepts addressed in the phases resonate with newer models of transformative learning.

Reviewing different models of the transformation process, Cranton (1994) says that although the terminologies and the number of phases are different, they show a common pattern. Drawing on the different models, Cranton suggested the following phases in the transformation process: curiosity, confusion, testing, withdrawal, exploration and reflection, turning to others, renewed interest and excitement, reorientation, equilibrium and advocacy. Furthermore, she suggests that learners don't always go through the phases in the same order, or may skip some phases (Cranton, 1994).

In support of the process which Mezirow's ten-phase model represents, other authors have proposed processes with less phases, but identifying common elements from Mezirow's ten steps. For example, much more recently, Merriam, Cafferella and Baumgartner (2007) suggest that there are four main components to the transformative learning process, which are experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse and action. They proposed these components as a review of various authors' proposed stages or phases, providing a synthesis of different perspectives over time. This characterisation is helpful for a number of reasons. Firstly it simplifies the ten-step process, while not ignoring critical elements of the learning process. Secondly, naming them components rather than phases helps, from a conceptual point of view, to identify them as characteristics or parts of the learning process, which are not necessarily experienced in a linear way as a 'phases' model might imply.

Cranton (1994) warns that the danger of looking for stages in a learning process is that there is then an attempt to 'prescribe' or define every person's learning in every context. However, not all learners go through all the stages at the same time, or take the same amount of time to go through each stage. They may not complete one stage before moving to another in a linear way. Any description of stages therefore should be a guide

for the researcher and not a hard and fast expectation. This warning is well noted in terms of the current study, and will be considered in the analysis and interpretation phases.

The review will now turn towards the support, critique and developments which have emerged in the literature over the lifespan of the theory.

## Early Support and Critique of Transformative Learning Theory (1991 – 1998)

Taylor (2007), reflecting back on his 1998 review of transformative learning, identified five ways in which the ‘early days’ of the literature on transformative learning showed support for Mezirow’s ideas, namely:

- Its effectiveness at understanding how adults make meaning of experiences
- The way learning takes place through perspective transformation
- How essential critical reflection is to transformative learning
- A disorienting dilemma as a catalyst for change
- Affirmation of many of the ten phases of the transformative process

However, a number of critiques were identified, including the role which context plays in the transformative process; the varying nature of catalysts causing change; the role of different ways of knowing and the importance of relationships (Taylor, 2007).

Although much of the literature to this point was found in unpublished dissertations, due to a lack of peer-reviewed articles and empirical studies (Taylor, 1998 as cited in Taylor, 2007), many of the studies in the following period, 1999 – 2005 addressed the same issues. This illustrates that the issues were pertinent and insightful, and that gaps and weaknesses in the theory paved the way for a more scholarly body of research and literature in the following period.

## Developments in Transformative Learning Literature (1999 – 2008)

Taylor (2007), reviewing 41 peer-reviewed journal articles between 1999 and 2005, concludes that the growing body of knowledge on Transformative Learning Theory shows a good deal of support for some aspects of Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory, as well as critiques of other aspects, and that a considerable amount of the

research addresses some of the weaknesses of the theory, which will be interrogated further below.

Another finding of Taylor's was that the number of studies conducted outside the USA (Taylor, 2007) increased significantly, building a body of knowledge with different cultural contexts. This is an encouraging development, enriching the literature, because among the critiques of Mezirow's theory is its Western bias and its lack of attention to cultural context.

There was also a significant amount of literature (19 out of 41 studies) which addressed attempts to foster transformative learning in a wide variety of contexts (Taylor, 2007). What is valuable about this observation is that the literature has moved from being primarily conceptual, towards being empirical, making the link between theory and practice. This has a two-fold benefit. Firstly, it provides practical ways in which educators can apply and use the concepts in the classroom and secondly, it gives further support to the theoretical concepts, showing that they can be useful for day-to-day education, rather than being just philosophical concepts spoken about amongst academics.

## **Support and critique**

The support for Mezirow's theory emerged in the following ways. Firstly, the theory has been very stable over an extensive time period, speaking for its value and validity in the field of adult education. Secondly, the literature affirms the transformative learning process of the expanding self and of adult self-empowerment and independent, informed decision-making. Thirdly, research in this period has affirmed the role that Transformative Learning Theory has on classroom practice (Taylor, 2007), further validating the theory and showing that it is not just a 'pie in the sky' idea, but has helped inform and is applicable to practice.

On the other hand, some of the criticism was about Mezirow's failure to give attention to issues like context, relationships, action and power, and his over-emphasis on critical reflection. The literature which developed in this period addressed these issues. Taylor (2007) does point out, however, that there is very little in the way of critical evaluation of the theory. This could lead to the danger of building more and more studies which say the same thing, entrenching the theory even more, making it less likely to be questioned and probed, as well as contributing research which has been done before, rather than new

insights and challenges. Taylor thus encourages further research which will address this (ibid).

This study is not intended as a critique, but its design, with the inductive nature of the analysis phase, opens a 'space' to enable the 'data to speak', with the hope that it will shed light on new and previously unobserved factors of the transformative learning process, rather than simply affirming earlier observations. The review now focuses on the specific areas of critique of this period.

### ***Context and culture***

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory of 1991 has been said to focus too much on cognitive processes associated with meaning-making, with not enough consideration of contextual factors (Merriam, 2004). Taylor (2007) agrees that not enough attention was being given to other aspects of the learning process, such as the context, culture and the nature of catalysts for change. In reviewing the literature, however, he has identified that transformative learning studies from 1999 to 2005 have shifted towards considering the role of these factors and how they can be used to implement and nurture transformative learning in practical learning contexts. The diversity of contexts and purposes of these studies is encouraging to see, in that they provide a wide spectrum of views from which to understand transformative learning, and offer insights into the influences which context may have.

One study which addresses this gap, done after the time-frame of Taylor's (2007) review, is the study by Merriam and Ntseane (2008) in the Southern African nation of Botswana. This study seeks to understand the role of culture in transformational learning. Merriam and Ntseane (2008) argue that Mezirow's theory has a strong Western bias towards learners becoming self-empowered, independent and critically reflective. The theory was developed in a context where rational thinking and independence are highly valued attributes, which may not be the case for other cultures. The cultural context of any study using Transformative Learning Theory, must therefore be considered and understood, in order for a fuller and richer understanding.

Merriam and Ntseane's (2008) study, rather than supporting the Western models of transformative learning, supported views more specific to an African perspective. For example, the study identified a strong link between culture and spirituality, and affirmed

conclusions made in 2004 by Preece that transformational learning involves both the individual and their context, which they describe as follows:

*“Our study has affirmed that it (transformational learning) is an individual experience, contextualized by the individual’s interpretation and meaning making of the environment and culture.” (Merriam and Ntseane, 2008, p. 195)*

More recently, Ntseane (2011) has added to this literature, positing that Transformative Learning Theory could be applied to African contexts in more culturally sensitive ways. Ntseane (2011) demonstrates through key cultural proverbs from her native Botswana, that African cultural values embrace collective rather than individual identity, and argues that Transformative Learning Theory can be developed to be culturally sensitive, dependent on the culture being studied. In an African context, this could mean the use of an Afrocentric or African feminist paradigm to frame the study (ibid).

Ntseane (2011) also argues that the African people generally have had a history of social change and traumatic experiences, which have caused them to change their perspectives, even though they are not necessarily familiar with the concept of perspective transformation. This argument supports the need to be able to apply Transformative Learning Theory appropriately to other contexts, and more specifically, in the current study, to an African context. A question which arises about the current study, in light of Ntseane’s argument would be: “Is the pedagogy of the WCA Programme culturally sensitive to the African context?”

### ***Cognitive processes and ‘other’ ways of knowing***

Mezirow’s theory has been criticised for being too focused on cognitive processes to bring about a perspective transformation. While there is literature to affirm the essential role of cognitive development in transformative learning, other studies have begun to emerge which indicate that deep cognitive thought is not always necessary for transformative learning to take place and that there are other ways of knowing, which influence the transformative learning process.

A study which seems to affirm the role of critical reflection and a cognitive process of learning is that of Cranton and Carussetta (2004), which shows how critical reflection potentially leads to greater authenticity as a teacher.

On the other hand, the study discussed earlier (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008), about the role of context and culture, is an example of support for ‘other ways of knowing’, in which

cultural context influences the transformation process. Their study concurred that there was a cognitive element to the process, as most participants went through a psychological process of questioning the way they thought about the world. However, there were also cultural dimensions shaping their process of change, such as the role of the metaphysical world.

A neurobiological perspective on transformative learning (Taylor, 2001) shows support for the role of emotions in the reasoning process, not just that they can play a role in the reasoning process, but that they might be essential for rational (cognitive) processing to take place.

As has been mentioned already, Mezirow continues to contribute to the development of the transformative learning model and, in a response to Merriam, Mezirow (2004) acknowledges that the role of critical reflection and the cognitive dimension of knowing might be more relevant for Western culture than for other cultures, and that the role of other ways of knowing in different cultures should be explored.

### ***Relationships***

Although relationships are an inevitable aspect of Mezirow's theory, the concept is implicit rather than explicit. Some of the steps in Mezirow's (1991) ten-step process implicitly include an aspect of relationship. For example, step five of the process is: *"Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions"*, while step nine is: *"Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships"* (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168). These examples illustrate that relationships cannot be excluded from Mezirow's thinking; however, he has been criticised for his lack of attention to the role of relationships in learning.

Research in the 1991 – 1998 period established that relationships were an essential component of transformative learning (Taylor 1998, as cited in Taylor, 2007), but the more recent studies have taken that to another level of understanding, investigating essential qualities, different types and complexity of relationships and their role in transformative learning (Taylor, 2007). Ntseane (2011) argues for the essential and central role of relationships when applying transformative learning to an African context.

Key factors of transformative relationships are that they are trustful and allow for questioning of assumptions, sharing of information through dialogue and the ability to



come to mutual and consensual understandings on the issues being discussed (Taylor, 2007).

The role of relationships in the WCA Programme will be interesting to investigate. The Leadership course is conducted on the WCA premises and the students and the facilitators live on the premises during the week, for five weeks. Their time on-site during the course is intense. It involves living in close proximity to each other, and includes classes, activities, movies and discussions during the day as well as in the evenings, with some time off in the afternoons. The learning process is therefore not experienced as an isolated individual, but as a member of a group; relationships are integral to its structure and bound to have a significant influence on the learning that takes place. This is not to say that there is not a unique and individual component to the experience, but that relationships are integral to the programme.

The questions which will need to be asked in my study to establish if the relationships influence transformational learning include: “Do the facilitators develop or foster trustful relationships with students?” “Are students able to form trustful relationships with facilitators and amongst themselves?” “What are the factors in the relationships which promote or hinder transformational learning in individuals?”

### ***Role of power and social change***

One of Mezirow’s critics, Bruce Pietrykowski, raises an issue about the role of power in transformative learning, to which Mezirow responded, creating a dialogue in the literature. Pietrykowski (1996, 1998) argues from a postmodern paradigm that Mezirow does not acknowledge the role of power or power relations in his theory, saying that assumptions of individuals moving towards an improved or better state, through the process and phases of perspective transformation, is a modernist assumption and does not address the role of power. Pietrykowski argues that to address this, a post-modern paradigm is necessary. Although Mezirow (1998a) responded, he did not adequately answer Pietrykowski’s critique of the modernist assumptions on which the theory is based.

Mezirow’s theory was critiqued for its focus on individual change to the exclusion of social change. On this issue, a book by Mike Newman in 1994 and an article by Tom Inglis in 1997 drew responses from Mezirow, who made attempts to clarify his position on the link between individual and social change (Mezirow 1997a; Mezirow 1998b).

Mezirow (1997a) asserts that Newman quoted him out of context, and tries to clarify and highlight where and how he has shown that learning is a social process, and that he has not excluded it. Mezirow says “*Learning is a social process, but it takes place within the individual learner.*” (Mezirow, 1997a, p. 62)

Mezirow also proposes that while social action might be an outcome of some transformative learning, it is not always the case, and his theory does not rule out the aspect of social transformation taking place. However, he does say that adult educators, who would be his primary audience, have not all been trained in fostering collective social action. He suggests that the fostering of social action in education should be left to social action educationists such as Mike Newman, and not expected from all adult educators (Mezirow, 1997a).

## Alternative Conceptions of Transformative Learning Theory

In 2001, Baumgartner proposed that four different lenses of transformational learning theory had been conceptualised since the inception of Transformative Learning Theory in 1978. The first was that of emancipatory education as drawn from Freire’s work. The second was the cognitive-rational approach of Mezirow’s, with the two theories having points of synergy as well as points of departure. The third approach was the developmental approach, most prominently from the writings of Daloz, and lastly, an approach linking spirituality and learning developed by Dirkx and Healy. (Baumgartner, 2001).

Taylor (2008, p. 7), says of Transformative Learning Theory:

*Since the early 1980s, this learning theory has spawned a number of alternative conceptions and a treasure chest of research about the basic assumptions of transformative learning and the fostering of transformative learning in the classroom.*

In addition to Mezirow’s conception of Transformative Learning Theory, Taylor (2008) argues that there are currently another seven different conceptions of Transformative Learning Theory. Taylor said that up to 2001, there were at least three alternative perspectives in contrast to Mezirow’s *psycho-critical view*, namely *psycho-analytical*, *psycho-developmental* and *social-emancipatory* (Taylor, 2008). While Taylor discussed a

*psychoanalytical conception* which Baumgartner had not identified, the latter identified theory with a focus on *spirituality* which Taylor only acknowledged after 2001. Taylor's review of the literature after 2001, identified additional views of transformative learning, namely the *neurobiological*, *cultural-spiritual*, *race-centric* and *planetary* (Taylor, 2008).

Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) commented further on the seven different 'lenses' of transformative learning which Taylor had communicated in 2005, and again in the 2008 article cited above. The only difference was that the neurobiological view was not included as a 'lens' of transformative learning summarised by Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007). The articles of Baumgartner (2001) and Taylor (2008), as well as the chapter by Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007), have been used to create a synthesis and summary of the eight alternative conceptions of transformative learning as set out in Table 2 (over the page). The different views of transformative learning have been separated into two categories, firstly those which have more of a focus on change of the individual (psycho critical, psycho-developmental, psycho-analytical and neurobiological), followed by those with cultural, group or social change as the focus (social-emancipatory, planetary, spiritual/cultural and race-centric) which have been characterized as a *sociocultural* focus.

Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) point out that while there are different foci to these diverse views of transformative learning, there are a number of things which are common, namely the crucial role of dialogue and critical reflection. They also say that most of the theorists discuss social change as a result of transformational learning, and that all of the perspectives have underlying constructivist assumptions (ibid).

TABLE 2: ALTERNATIVE LENSES OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THEORY

Focus	Lens	Theorists	Basis of theory/ Key Concepts & Pedagogy
<b>Individual change</b>	<b>Psycho-critical</b>	Mezirow, 1991	Fully developed theory with cognitive/rational focus. Perspective transformation involves experience, critical reflection, dialogue and action and results in more inclusive, open perspectives. Reflection can be on content, process or premise.
	<b>Psycho-developmental</b>	Daloz, 1986 Kegan, 1994	Lifelong personal development: Continuous, incremental & progressive. Epistemological & behavioural change. Focus on intuitive nature of learning and the importance of individuals' stories in the process. Appreciation of role of relationships, personal contextual influences and holistic ways of knowing.
	<b>Psycho-analytic</b>	Boyd/ Meyers 1988; Dirxx, 2000	Process of individuation: Understand self through reflection on psychic structures. Discover new talents; sense of empowerment, self-confidence; deeper understanding of inner self; greater sense of self-responsibility and identity. Role of inner dialogue.
	<b>Neuro-biological</b>	Janik, 2005	“Brain-based” theory: Brain structure changes during the process of recovery from psychological trauma. Physically based pathway to learning: learning a conscious choice; curiosity-based; discovery-driven and mentor-assisted. Mostly involves high cognitive levels.
<b>Socio-cultural change - Change at a social level, not just about individual change</b>	<b>Social Emancipatory</b>	Freire 1984/95 Macedo, 1995	Social transformation: Reflecting and acting to transform world to be a more equitable place to live. Critical reflection; raising critical consciousness; horizontal student-teacher relationship; emancipation of marginalised in context of a social action agenda.
	<b>Planetary</b>	O'Sullivan, 1999	Reorganisation of systems: Explores how humans relate to the physical world, the planet and the universe. Addresses fundamental issues of changing of systems (social, political, economic and educational). Recognises individual from an ecological and planetary perspective.
	<b>Cultural-Spiritual</b>	Dirkx 1997,98 Healy/ Brooks 2000 Tisdell, 2003	Spiritual dimension to transformational learning. Process is extra-rational and integrates various aspects of self. Pedagogy is culturally relevant and spiritually grounded. Cross-cultural relationships encouraged; development of spiritual awareness; relational emphasis on teacher.
	<b>Race-centric</b>	Williams, 2003 Bailey & Alfred, 2006	African placed at centre of analysis. Cultural traditions (rituals & rites of passage) transformative in nature, connecting self with community and universe. Pedagogy promotes inclusion, empowerment/ learning to negotiate cross-culturally. Role of dialogue crucial.

The current study is embedded in a community context, while having a focus on the change and stories of individuals, so a diversity of views with different foci provide a rich and varied 'landscape' for the study to emerge. These alternative conceptions of transformative learning provide a more integrated and holistic landscape of change in different contexts and cultures, and enhances a study such as this in terms of its relevance to the time, country and culture under scrutiny.

Some key questions which arise from the literature, which need further exploration as the data is analysed are: Are the changes taking place in participants due to perspective transformation? What does the theoretical lens reveal about the programme, which might not have been observed through an alternative lens? What does the study say about transformational learning in an African context? What roles have relational, spiritual and social factors played in the learning process? What has been the role of critical thinking for individual learning?

## Summary

The first part of the chapter was devoted to situating the case in levels of context, starting with the macro-global context of South Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, followed by the meso-context, which identified the unique aspects of the province of Kwazulu-Natal, and finally at the micro-context of the organisation, investigating research which has already been done on WCA, as well as the role of non-formal education in South African adult education.

The second part of the chapter was devoted to understanding Transformative Learning Theory as the theoretical framework of the study, examining the key concepts of the theory as well as critique, support and new conceptions of the theory. The chapter concluded by identifying some key questions which arose from the literature.

# **Chapter 3- Design and Methodology**

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## **Introduction**

This chapter outlines the design and methodology of the study, by first explaining the purpose of the study and posing three key research questions. Secondly, the positionality of the researcher is declared, followed thirdly by the choices of paradigmatic approach and methodology. Fourthly and fifthly, the methods of collecting and analysing the data are described in detail. These sections include reflections and changes made during the data collection process. Finally, issues and choices about ensuring the quality of the study are described, including ethics and the limitations of the study.

## **Purpose of the Study**

This study explores WCA and the WCA Programme, in particular investigating the changes that take place in successful participants of the WCA Programme, and what has contributed to those changes, including aspects of the programme itself, as well as personal or contextual factors. The key research questions are:

- 1. What changes have participants experienced as a result of the WCA Programme?**
- 2. What aspects of the WCA Programme have been influential in bringing about change in participants?**
- 3. What personal and contextual factors have influenced change in participants?**

Through these key research questions the study explored the lives of successful students, and how they are different now from before they went through the WCA Programme. The study also explored what factors have influenced the processes of change. The theoretical framework was used to interpret and theorise the findings. The study looked specifically at participants who have been most ‘successful’ in the programme, constructing a picture from a subset of the population, exemplifying their experience. Many students participate in the WCA courses and this study does not claim to speak for all candidates; that could be the subject of another study.

## Positionality

As a white South African, born in 1968, the South Africa I grew up in is very different to the one we live in today. I experienced the privileged upbringing of a minority group, while fellow citizens were oppressed and marginalised during the apartheid years. So, while entering the study as an insider (a South African, studying a South African context) I am also an outsider (my understanding of the realities of the key participants of the study). While I might bring to the study skills, education, privilege and wealth of opportunities, I also bring a dearth of knowledge, experience and insight into the lives of the respondents and their parents who are from poor communities remaining from the legacy of apartheid. My position enables me to learn from the participants, rather than come to the study with my own expectations of what I will find. I do however need to be cognizant of my position in my interpretation of the data.

A further position I hold is that of my faith or worldview. WCA teaches Life Skills students about different worldviews, making students aware that all people hold a worldview. As an organisation, WCA holds a biblical worldview, which is a position I hold also. It was important for me to be aware of my potential bias in this case. Hence, I was particularly cautious of the need to interrogate the issues relating to worldview which arose during the study and to get honest and critical feedback from my supervisor on my analysis and findings.

## Approach and Methodology

The study is a qualitative inquiry in the interpretivist paradigm, since the intention is about gaining rich, deep insights into the organisation, the programme and the participants. Henning (2004) says that the purpose of a qualitative study is to examine a phenomenon and understand what it is about. Henning (2004) distinguishes between qualitative and quantitative enquiry by their depth and orientation, saying that qualitative studies aim for depth of understanding rather than studying quantities. While a quantitative study would focus on control of variables to get representative data generalised over the wider population, a qualitative study, would rather be about understanding and capturing the complexity of the case (ibid).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 21) say, “*the central endeavour in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience.*”

Characteristics of an interpretive study include small-scale studies, subjectivity and personal involvement of the researcher and attempts to understand meanings and actions rather than the causes (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Such characteristics resonate with the purposes of this study.

The main methodological approach will be a case study constructed from life histories. Bassey (1999, p. 47) says that: “*Case study is study of a singularity conducted in depth in natural settings.*”

Yin (2003, p. 13) defines case study as:

*... an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.*

Some of the strengths of case study are that they are accessible to a wide audience, because the style of writing is usually in everyday language; they can be small-scale and done by an individual; they are strong on reality and able to catch unique features of the situation which might be lost in a large scale survey (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

Further support for applying case study to this research comes from Yin (2003, p. 2) who says that: “*Case studies arise out of a desire to understand complex social phenomenon.*” The WCA programme, its impact on individuals and communities, its reach in KZN and its relevance to the South African context represent a complex social system.

Further to this, a characteristic and strength of case studies is the use of multiple sources. Yin (2003, p. 13) says: “*Case study relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion*”. WCA and the WCA programme provide ample opportunity for multiple data sources, which will strengthen the study.

Life History is a methodology used to tell the stories of people’s lives and is used across multiple disciplines in the social sciences. Marshall and Rossman (2011, p. 151) say:

*“Life histories emphasize the experience of the individual – how the person copes with society rather than how society copes with the stream of individuals”*

Previous studies in adult education, Mshengu (2005) and Singh (2009), used life history as a primary methodology. The primary purpose of these studies was an exploration of individuals’ lives to understand their experiences and perceptions of a learning context.



A life history approach could therefore capture the depth of the lives of participants in the WCA Programme. However, this study aimed to go beyond the personal stories, and investigate the complex inter-relatedness of WCA as an organisation, which includes the dynamics of the programme in relation to the lives of individuals. Life history methodology alone did not create the space for examining the programme and organisation in depth, while case study methodology did. Hence the decision was made to combine life histories as part of a case study.

### ***Case Study using Life History***

One of the strengths of case-study methodology is its flexibility to be used with other approaches, such as using life histories to construct the study. Bassey (1999) discusses three case studies, two of which he calls “story-telling” case studies. Although not life-histories, they support the use of story-telling in case studies, as the life histories of this study do.

Using life histories within the broader case emerged as a better option than either of the methods on their own, to provide a much richer insight into the organisation as well as the lives of individuals, and the relationships between them. In support of such a mixed approach, Rule and John (2011, p. 11) say “*The individual life histories of participants can illuminate the case under study by showing how the organisation influenced them or vice versa.*”

### ***Weaknesses and criticisms of Case Study and Life History***

Life history and case study methodology are both criticised for a tendency to be biased. The bias may come from the participant, the researcher or the situation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). One way to minimize bias is for the participants to review the researcher’s account of their story, with the opportunity to correct inaccurate information, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the story. The use of multiple sources can also assist in reducing bias, through cross-checking of different sources for coherence. For example, if one of the sources were to say that the teaching method of the WCA Programme is very interactive and participative, while another source claimed that it was not, the lack of coherence would prompt me to investigate the situation further, through direct observation for instance. These measures were included in the design to minimize weaknesses and are addressed in the following section on quality at the end of the chapter.

## Data Collection

A qualitative design using non-probability sampling methods were used in the study, as the intention was not to make generalisations about the wider population (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The data collection plan is summarised in Table 3 and described in detail thereafter.

TABLE 3: DATA COLLECTION SOURCES, SAMPLING AND METHODS

#	Data Sources	Sampling Method	Sample size	Data Collection Methods
1	Leadership students	Convenience	2 groups	Observations
				Focus Group
2	Facilitators	Convenience	2 people	Semi-structured interviews
3	Documents and Artifacts	As and when documents and artifacts were observed, requests were made to keep copies of them. At times photos were taken of posters in the classroom to record content of lessons. The organisation's website was used to gather further documentation for use in the study.		
4	Successful past students (Life Histories)	Purposive	3 people	Creative methods: Story-telling and In-depth interview on life history

### *Sampling*

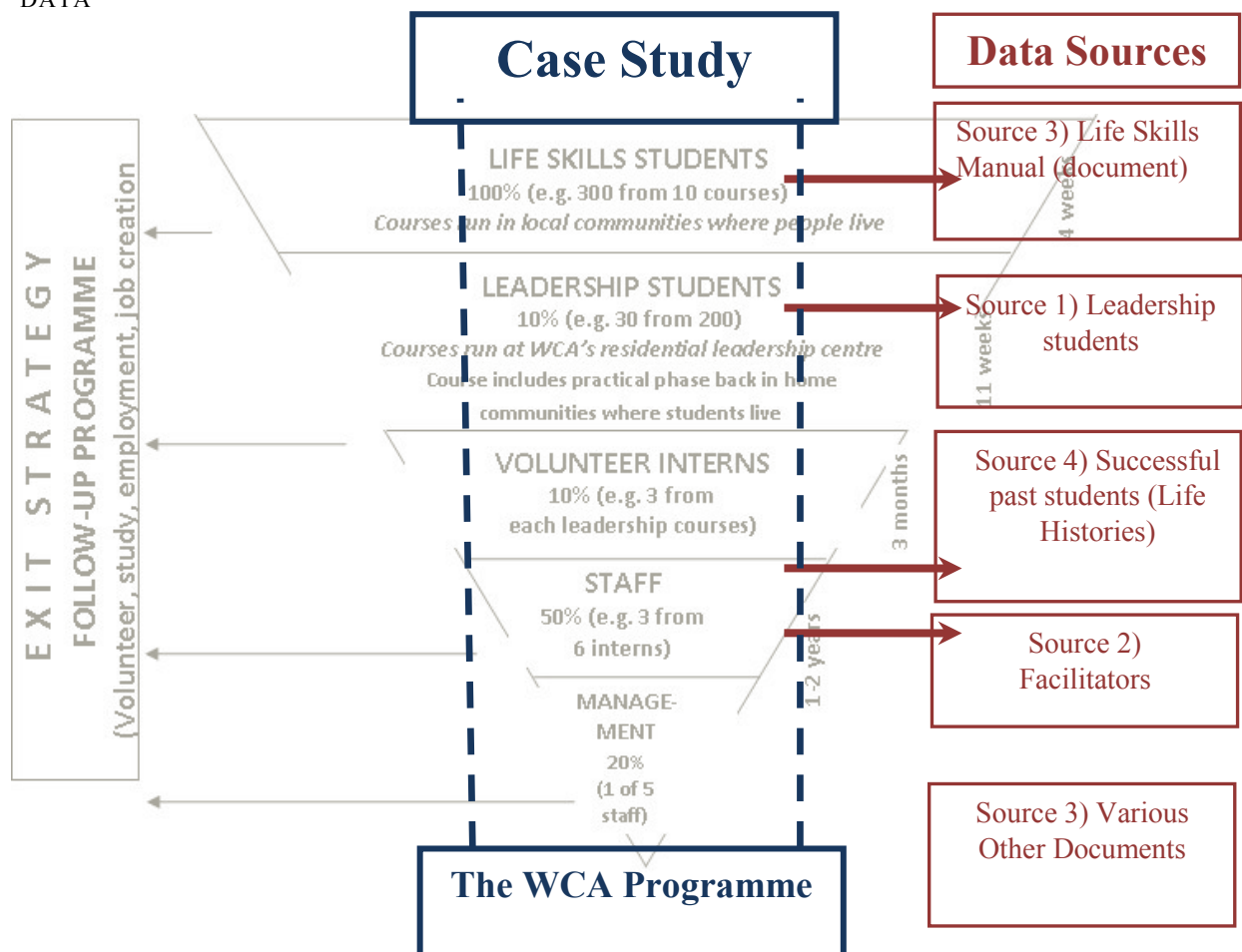
Two sampling methods, convenience sampling and purposive sampling were used. Convenience involves choosing participants according to ease of access (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The study was conducted at the WCA Leadership Centre in Shongweni when a Leadership course was in progress. This meant that there was access at the research site to a particular group of students (Data source 1) and to course facilitators (Data source 2). These two samples were therefore chosen through convenience sampling.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) describe purposive sampling as handpicking participants according to the specific characteristics that are needed for the research

problem. The people selected for the life history aspect of the case study (successful past students), were purposively chosen to be people who had been through the whole WCA programme and had been particularly successful on the programme (Data source 4).

Figure 3 illustrates the bounds of the case study and from where the multiple data sources for the study were chosen, making use of the WCA model used in Chapter 1. (WCA, 2009)

FIGURE 3: WCA MODEL SHOWING THE BOUNDS OF THE CASE STUDY AND THE SOURCES OF DATA



### Data Source 1: Leadership students

Data source 1 was a group of students on a Leadership course. I decided to start with this source to help give me a sense of the experience of the programme first hand and to get my own ‘snapshot’ of how the programme is conducted. I wanted to get a sense of the classroom experience through observing classes in action. Two data collection methods were used, namely observation and focus group.

The sample was made up of two Leadership groups. Although not part of the original design, there was opportunity to do a pilot group first and a second group later. The pilot group helped improve the quality of the data collection for the second group, as some key lessons were learned. Data was collected from the pilot group on one day, during which I met the students, explained the project, gained informed consent; observed one of their classes and then conducted a focus group. It was a lot to cover in one day, but it assisted in developing a better strategy for collecting data from the second Leadership group.

Gaining informed consent took a lot longer than anticipated, with the estimated ten minutes, taking closer to half an hour. Ethical issues about gaining informed consent surfaced. In a group context, it is possible (and likely) that some people are too reserved to ask questions or to speak up and say they don't want to participate. It is one thing to get a form signed, but this might just be a technical 'acceptance' without the respondents really understanding the research or their rights to participate or not participate. Since the data was being collected on the same day, it didn't allow them time to discuss it with others or to build up trust of me as the facilitator. There could very easily have been reservations from some of the students, who may have felt pressure to sign it so that the proceedings could continue.

David, Edwards and Alldred, (2001, p. 363) say "*Informed consent, and the processes by which it is ascertained, is a complex issue.*" Their study, as well as other literature, suggests that careful attention needs to be given regarding language barriers, when low levels of literacy are involved, or in cross-cultural situations where different languages are spoken. In addition, sufficient time should be given to allow the participants to read through the form with family or friends, to fully understand the implications of what they are signing (Cortes, Drainoni, Henault, & Paasche-Orlow, 2010) and (Ezeome & Marshall, 2009).

As a result of the process and reflections above, the modified method of data collection from the second group of Leadership students was to ensure a more ethical approach, thereby paying attention to the quality of the study. The data collection method is described in Table 4.

The revised method of gaining informed consent allowed the participants enough time during the week to read through the form and ask questions, either with facilitators or other participants. This was a more ethical way of doing this and one which satisfied me that quality measures had been implemented.

The decision to make weekly visits for four weeks, gave participants a chance to get to know me a little, build up a level of trust and be more comfortable with my research. I had been concerned about my positionality in the study, and possible influence as a researcher and outsider. I didn't know how I would influence or inhibit our interactions. However, by visiting the site each week, the students became familiar with me and I was also able to observe how the Leadership course is conducted. I was able to conclude through this that the students are used to having observers present, and facilitators from different ethnic groups conduct their classes, so my observation of the classes was not unusual for them.

TABLE 4: METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION FROM LEADERSHIP STUDENTS

Visit the WCA centre once a week over the four week duration of the Leadership course, conducting aspects of the data collection each week as follows.	
Week 1	Meet group, discuss the project and the need for informed consent. Encourage them to talk to facilitators or others in the group to discuss concerns about participating. Give them copies of the informed consent form to read and discuss during the week.
	Observe a class in progress. (Note: Conducting an observation would be ethically acceptable, as consent for being on the premises had already been gained. The source of data gathering was an observation of the classroom interactions and facilitator's teaching style and not individual learners.)
Week 2	Collect the informed consent forms from each learner.
	Observe a class in progress.
Week 3	Observe a class in progress
Week 4	Conduct the focus group discussion.
Week 11	Observation/Feedback from group after volunteer course

## ***Observation***

The observations of the Leadership students took place once a week for three weeks, enabling me to 'be present' as the course progressed and therefore to get a more longitudinal view of the Leadership course rather than a cross-sectional view. Notes were taken during the observations and although an attempt was made to make an audio recording of some of the sessions, the background noise and the size of the classroom, meant that the quality of the recording was not particularly useful. The main points of observation were the pedagogical style of the classes and the interactions between facilitators and participants. The approach used was unstructured, whereby reflective notes were made about the class activities and the student and facilitator interactions.

## ***Focus group***

Learning from my experience of conducting the focus group with the pilot group, I realised how crucial it was to have a research assistant for this type of data collection, as it is not possible to take notes and facilitate the conversation at the same time. The person who assisted me was also able to interpret the language, thereby fulfilling an essential role. She took notes while the group progressed, translated communication on a few occasions and was able to give me feedback on how she perceived the session to have gone. Since she is a Masters student in the discipline of Development Studies, her feedback was valuable and her role crucial to making the session successful.

The focus group was conducted as follows:

- Pieces of flipchart paper were placed on the walls with discussion questions written on them. The questions were:
  - "Has World Changers Academy lived up to its name by 'changing your world'? In what ways?"
  - "What aspects of your World Changers Academy experience have been the most challenging or empowering?"
- The students were given coloured crayons to write their responses on the pages. This served as a way of recording their thoughts, creating a document which could be used later as well. It also served to start them thinking about the questions which would be discussed.
- Finally, the group sat in a circle and their responses were used as the starting point for discussion

Although some valuable data was collected and the focus group considered successful, some limitations were noted and could be improved if the study was conducted again. Firstly, the group was a bit too large, at around 20 people. The size of the focus group for the pilot study was 14 people and had worked well. The second Leadership class was much bigger and made facilitating a discussion much more challenging. It would have been better to have selected 10 students from the group to be part of the focus group, or to have conducted it as two separate groups.

Secondly, the questions were quite personal and tended towards a question/ response type of dialogue, rather than an open debate. In hindsight, a focus group conducted at the end of the study and posing a controversial question which would have opened more room for debate, dialogue and discussion, would have helped to interrogate issues raised during the study. As a novice researcher, I probably erred on the side of caution in terms of raising controversial issues.

## **Data Source 2: Facilitators**

The second data source was two facilitators of the programme. The facilitators were interviewed using semi-structured interviews, in order to understand the programme from a leadership perspective. WCA trains and empowers their Leadership students to become facilitators, which means that they have had firsthand experience of the programme as students. For the purpose of this interview, they were asked to answer questions from their perspective as facilitators.

Interviews were done on the premises in a relaxed and conversational manner. In each case, informed consent was first gained and the rights of the respondents understood. The interviews were taped, and later transcribed verbatim. For the second interview, the facilitator was not always confident with her English, and the research assistant was used to translate questions when necessary. This happened only once or twice during the interview, for the participant to fully understand the question asked, to which she then responded in English.

## **Data Source 3: Documents and artifacts**

The third data source was documents and artifacts. Yin (2003), gives a number of reasons why documents are useful in case studies, the most important being to validate or provide a cross-check about information gained from other sources. Documents can take many

forms, including websites, programme schedules, course manuals or material. Yin (2003) says that documents are relevant to most case studies. As the data collection progressed, documents and artifacts were collected. The documents and artifacts used in the study consist of:

- The Life Skills Manual
- Material handed to the Leadership students during the observation sessions
- Pamphlets and brochures of the organisation
- Some artwork done by one of the Leadership students, to depict her life

#### **Data Source 4: Successful past students (Life Histories)**

The final data source was that of successful past students of the programme to tell their life stories. This source was intentionally collected last, as I wanted to have a sense of what the programme was like, before listening to their stories. The life history aspect of the case study is the source of data from which I expected to be able to answer the research questions most fully, and it was therefore deemed most suitable to interview this source last, as my own understanding of the programme would be richer. Three participants were chosen and the data collected as follows.

The interviews took place on one day. A two-phase approach to in-depth interviewing took place, after informed consent was given. In the first phase, the three students were presented with flip-chart paper, old magazines, crayons and pens and asked to create a collage about their lives, in particular reflecting on three phases:

1. What their life was like before the WCA Programme (early life)
2. What the WCA Programme was like
3. What their life is like now

This phase took about 3 hours, while I sat in the room observing the process and listening to their conversation as they worked on their individual collages. The respondents worked together in the same room and while they did their own collages, talked and engaged with each other. It helped them think about their lives and if they saw pictures that related to one of the others they would pass them on. They talked mostly in Zulu, although they used a mixture of English and Zulu and I picked up some of the conversation. I considered taping the conversation or asking them to speak in English, so that I could have engaged more with what they were saying. However, I didn't want to interfere in the



process, preferring them to be comfortable and at ease while creating their own stories through the pictures, so I chose just to observe the process.

In the second phase, each student was interviewed individually, to tell me about their stories, using the collage as the starting point. The style of the interviews was conversational. The research instrument was used to prompt specific lines of inquiry, informed by Transformative Learning Theory. Each individual interview lasted about one hour and the conversations were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. I chose to do these transcriptions myself, in order to remain as 'close' to the data as possible.

The idea for starting the interview with the students making the collages of their life stories was initiated through learning about creative and participatory methods of data collection. Creative methods of data collection such as this are being used in qualitative research because they often get to the heart of the issues in a way in which asking a simple question could not. Participatory methods involve the participants of the study more actively in the data generation process and are helpful in situations in which language could be a potential barrier (Rule & John, 2011).

To help me to evaluate the effectiveness of the method, at the end of each of the individual interviews, I asked the students about their experiences with the collage making. None of them had done this before and all found it helpful and relaxing for the purpose at hand. There was value in the methodology in that they engaged with each other, reminiscing and remembering specific things about their stories, so it was valuable to do this session as a group activity, especially as two of the students were on the same Leadership course and could help one another remember certain aspects of their respective journeys.

One respondent at first sat quietly on his own making a greeting card. He said that he didn't really know where to start in terms of the task I'd assigned and he was thinking about his story while making the card. That process got him thinking more creatively and reminded him that art had become something he really valued. This would not have been something he would necessarily have identified through a verbal question posed in an interview.

The collage-making session also served an unintended purpose. The participants were all facilitators, so it gave them an idea of a tool they could use in their own teaching practice. Some magazines and writing material were left behind for them to use in their classes.

## Data Interpretation and Analysis

Data analysis is described by Henning (2004, p. 101) as “ ... *a process that requires analytical craftsmanship and the ability to capture understanding of the data in writing.*” Bassey (1999, p. 84) describes this process as “ ... *an intellectual struggle with an enormous amount of raw data in order to produce a meaningful and trustworthy conclusion ...* ”

In essence, analysis is the stage where meaning needs to be made from the data in a way which meets quality requirements in order to give the findings value and credibility.

Although Henning (2004); Bassey (1999) and Yin (2002) were used to guide the interpretation and analysis, it was the more recent publication of Rule and John (2011), which guided this phase most strongly. Not only was it a more current publication than the previous three, it added exceptional value as a practical guideline to case study research. Furthermore, Rule and John (2011) drew on the other three sources (Yin, Bassey and Henning) in their own writing. Using the above four sources, the plan and process for data interpretation and analysis is summarised below in Table 5.

TABLE 5: OVERVIEW OF DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

1	Organising and preparing data for analysis	Developing a system to organise the data. Transcribing interviews verbatim
2	Thick descriptions (Chapter 4)	Using all sources of data collected to write descriptive stories about the organisation and the life histories
3	Content /Thematic analysis (Chapter 5)	Coding data Use of coding to generate themes
4	Discourse analysis (Chapter 5)	Examining the data and findings for symbolic use of language, metaphors or imagery to explore meaning at another level
5	Discussion of theoretical framework (Chapter 5)	Bringing theory to the findings as a level of interpretation and analysis of what theory says about the data and what the data say about theory

6	Theorising (Chapter 5)	Using the previous levels of interpretation and analysis, to theorise the data
7	Discussion of key research questions (Chapter 6)	Using the thick descriptions and themes to discuss and interpret answers to the key research questions

### ***Preparing and organising the data***

After the interviews were conducted, the recordings were saved and later transcribed verbatim. The observation and focus group notes were typed into electronic form. All the data was stored in an organised system, clearly labelled and dated for ease of access. Care was taken throughout the study to back up data.

### ***Thick descriptions***

All data sources were used to create the thick descriptions of the organisation and the programme in Chapter 4. The life history interviews were used to write the three stories of these participants respectively. Once all the stories were written, they were sent to the participants to cross-check them for accuracy and to correct interpretations. Corrections were made based on this feedback. The WCA story was sent to Joe White, one of the co-founders of WCA to check for accuracy and to provide clarity of some the details of the story, including providing the updated WCA model used in Figures 1 – 3.

### ***Content/Thematic analysis***

Coding of transcripts took place through a partly deductive and partly inductive analysis. The theoretical framework and key research questions brought some expected codes to the analysis, while leaving room for the data to add to and bring new codes to the analysis, a process proposed by Rule and John (2011). This analysis forms the first part of Chapter 5.

### ***Discussions on theoretical framework and key research questions***

The theoretical framework was used as the lens to discuss the findings, in both inductive and deductive ways, also presented in Chapter 5. The findings were also used to answer the key research questions, in Chapter 6.

### ***Discourse analysis and theorising***

Discourse analysis was another tool used to find meaning from the data. The process was similar to the content analysis method of looking for themes in the data, but added the dimension of meaning sought through metaphors and symbolic use of language (Henning, 2004). A final level of abstraction involved making meaning from the findings by theorising, using concepts emerging from the study. These two aspects of analysis are in the final part of Chapter 5.

## **Quality in the Study**

If quality is only evaluated at the end of a study, it will either ‘pass’ or ‘fail’ the standard required or expected. Therefore, to produce a case study of quality, it is necessary to consider and make decisions right from the design phase of the study, through to the final report. In this way, measures to improve quality can be integrated through all steps in the research process. This is more likely to produce a study which is recognised to be of an acceptable standard. A holistic approach to quality, such as this, is supported by Henning (2004).

Rule and John (2011, p. 103) say that “*Quality in case study research involves both criteria for judging quality and strategies for ensuring it*” (emphasis mine). This means that not only should the end product have some criteria to be measured against, but that the process of executing the research should include steps which will validate and affirm the quality of the findings which are presented. The reader should have confidence that the methods used for conducting the research have been carefully considered and then followed through, to ensure the quality of the final product.

### **Criteria for judging and strategies for ensuring quality**

Although traditional criteria for judging quantitative studies (generalisability; validity and reliability) are well known and accepted, within the positivist research paradigm, there has been much debate in the literature to establish agreed criteria for judging qualitative studies. Rule and John (2011) say that this debate has been going on for three decades and they promote the use of the concept of *trustworthiness*, which was offered by Guba in 1981. Bassey (1999) supports the concept of trustworthiness in case study research.

### ***Trustworthiness***

Trustworthiness is about gaining the trust of other researchers through the applying of values of rigour, transparency and professional ethics in a research project (Rule & John, 2011). The concept of trustworthiness is used as a measure of the current study. Rule and John (2011) discuss four techniques which can be used to ensure the trustworthiness of the case as follows:

- Crafting thick descriptions: Rich, detailed accounts of incidents, experiences or stories within the analysis and presentation of the case
- Verifying accounts with respondents: Written accounts of the organisation, programme and respondent stories checked by respondents to confirm the details being reported and corrected for accuracy
- Creating an audit trail: Ensuring that key findings and propositions made can be traced back to the original data sources
- Using critical peer checks: Getting other colleagues or researchers to check interpretations, bringing an outside perspective which is more objective and critical

Each of these techniques has been used in some way in the current case study as has been described in each type of data collection presented earlier.

Since my study involved participants who were not first language English speakers, the potential need for an interpreter for the data collection was considered. Plans were made to have an interpreter available, to ensure that the participants and researcher fully understood one another and in order to ensure that rich and meaningful data was collected. As it turned out, there was not a great need for interpretation, although an interviewer was used on a few occasions, acting as a research assistant and as an interpreter. The person was a first-language Zulu-speaking person.

### ***Triangulation***

Triangulation is a term used in qualitative research to refer to the process of using multiple sources or methods to confirm the trustworthiness of findings. The principle of triangulation is that multiple sources of evidence are useful and important in case study research, as they provide alternative lenses, which either give the findings coherence, or reveal insights not made by previous sources, helping bring clarity as well as depth to the findings. Yin (2003) advocates triangulation as a means to improve the quality of case

studies. The use of multiple sources and methods of data collection in this study were measures taken, so that triangulation could be applied during the data analysis, to improve the quality of the study.

When the data was analysed using the various data sources, it was found to be coherent across the multiple sources in that there were no glaring contradictions between them. This coherence assured me, as researcher, that there was a reasonable degree of trustworthiness in the study.

## **Ethics**

Quality includes ensuring that the purpose, planning, process, findings and reporting of the study are ethical and are carried out in an ethical way. Rule and John (2011) advocate that ethical practices and relationships in research improve the quality and trustworthiness of the study and apply three common principles to ensure the ethicality of research, namely:

- **Non-maleficence:** Ensuring that no harm comes to the researcher, participants or communities as a result of the research. This entails being aware of sensitive information during interviewing and ensuring that the respondents know they have the right to opt out of the research at any time if they wished to.
- **Beneficence:** The research should benefit the public. Rule and John (2011) say that although this is not always possible, issues like feedback to the organisation or follow-up on issues raised, contribute toward beneficence.
- **Autonomy:** This is about ensuring that people's rights are respected. People have a right to choose to participate or not in a research study, or to withdraw from the study. It also requires gaining permission to do the study.

The current study involved four ethical considerations: Firstly, obtaining permission from the organisation (WCA) to conduct the study; secondly, obtaining the ethical clearance certificate from the University of Kwazulu-Natal (UKZN) to proceed with the study, and thirdly, gaining informed consent from the various participants of the study before any data collection proceeded. A fourth and final ethical consideration was being cognizant of my responsibility throughout the study to conduct it in an ethical manner, as unanticipated issues could have arisen at any time during the study. As the study unfolded, there were a few times I needed clarity about actions to be taken to ensure ethical practice, and my supervisor guided me in order to uphold the ethics of the study.

## Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by resources of time and finances. As a Master's dissertation, these constraints set limits on the amount of data which could be collected and the practical issues around choosing samples to participate. The respondents were therefore limited to students and staff at the WCA premises. This is a limitation in that it excludes those who have now moved on to other work or organisations, and therefore does not consider those who have experienced change, but are no longer with the organisation. Future studies could benefit from including such candidates.

A limitation based on time, was that only a Leadership course was observed, but not the Life Skills course. The study is on the whole WCA Programme, not just the Leadership course, so it made the most sense to study a Leadership group, although an investigation of a Life Skills course in action would have also been valuable.

Finally, pertinent issues around the findings could have been interrogated in more depth in a study with a broader scope.

## Summary

The chapter started by describing the purpose of the study, the paradigm and choice of methodology. It then explained issues of quality in the study, including a discussion on ethics and positionality. The data collection methods for the different sources were detailed next, followed by the data analysis methods. Finally, limitations of the study were considered.

The next chapter discusses the findings of the study through thick descriptions of WCA and the life stories of three successful students.

## Chapter 4 – Stories from the study

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### Introduction

This chapter tells four stories. The first story is about the organisation World Changers Academy and the WCA Programme which has been defined in the introduction. The second, third and fourth stories are those of three candidates who have successfully completed the WCA Programme and experienced significant change in their lives since their first encounters with WCA. These three stories are the Life History part of the case study and are different in form and structure to the WCA story.

### World Changers Academy and the WCA Programme

A range of sources of data were used to construct this story. Firstly, the interviews with leaders and secondly, documents gathered during the data collection phase. Documents include information posted on the organisation's website, [www.wca-sa.org](http://www.wca-sa.org). Finally, the latter parts of the story (on the Leadership aspect of the programme) were constructed from the observation and focus group data collected during the study of the Leadership course. The purpose of the story is to create a 'lived experience' of the WCA programme for the reader, as it contextualises the Life Stories which follow, and helps gain a better understanding of the process, and the experience of students who have participated in the programme.

As has been introduced earlier, WCA was founded because of a vision shared by two men from diverse cultures and backgrounds. From the pioneering spirit of like-minded visionaries with a heart for communities in need, WCA has become an effective organisation, meeting real needs and helping empower people. From its humble beginnings in August 2002 when the first Life Skills course was run for 100 unemployed adults, it has developed into an organisation which has a growing reach and influence in Kwazulu-Natal and beyond, with the purpose: *"To change and develop the minds, hearts and spirits of people for life success."* (WCA, 2009)

WCA's approach is to focus on the roots of social problems, rather than the fruits, by helping students to change their inner world first - their hearts, minds and spirits (Life Skills Course). The Leadership course follows on from the Life Skills course, where the focus shifts to 'changing the world around you'. The approach is holistic, considering



emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual issues of life. The approach is also very focused on building quality relationships and of networking with other organisations, businesses and individuals, both to find communities in which to run the programme and also to help link students to work or work experience opportunities.

## **Life Skills Course – “Changing the world within”**

Impoverished communities with high youth unemployment rates are identified for Life Skills courses. The courses are run in central places in the community, such as the library or a community hall. Courses run five mornings a week for four weeks, taking place six to seven times a year. Each course can take place in up to ten different communities concurrently. In recent times, it has typically been run in 4-6 communities concurrently, primarily in and around the greater Durban, KZN South Coast and KZN North Coast regions. The reach of the Life Skills course is therefore very broad.

While the primary focus of the course is on helping people change their attitude to life, students also acquire skills and knowledge. Some of the topics in the course will be explored now. They are not necessarily discussed in the order in which they are covered in the course.

The first topic introduced on the Life Skills course is that of Vision and Goal Setting. This is about getting a clear vision for one's life and setting realistic goals to achieve that. It therefore looks forward to the future.

Two topics of the course which look at the big picture of life and aspects of identity and belonging are:

- Worldview
- African Renaissance

The concept of Worldview is introduced by explaining that we all have a worldview, that each of our worldviews is unique, it develops as we grow up, and it can and does change. A range of common worldviews or philosophies are discussed including '*Post-Modernism*'; *Existentialism*; and the '*Me first*' worldview. This topic addresses the concept of frames of reference used by Mezirow in Transformative Learning Theory.

The subject on African Renaissance is about what it means to be African. Students are encouraged to acknowledge the differences in all people of African descent and embrace the values of being African. Examples of these values are: inter-dependency; generosity;

hospitality; pursuit of wisdom and a strong work ethic. The topic encourages a sense of identity in being African, while also offering a view of being African which stretches beyond the individual to embrace and accept others and their differences.

On a much more personal level, a number of topics aim to help students deal with past hurts, and provide knowledge about ways of building a more positive life. These topics are:

- Healing of the Past
- Conflict Resolution
- Motivation/ Self-esteem
- Relationships

Healing of the Past deals with what forgiveness is (and what it is not) and how to recognise it, and how to forgive others and ourselves in order to move forward to reach life goals. Conflict resolution is about understanding that conflict is a part of life and being empowered with ways to resolve conflict in positive ways. Motivation and Self-esteem teaches that all are different but all have worth, and explores what motivates people. Different types of relationships are discussed, as well as, myths about relationships and how to build healthy relationships.

Some topics deal with issues around work, including ways to find work, alternative ways of thinking about work and ways to gain valuable work experience, for example:

- Job Preparation Skills
- Volunteerism / Community involvement

Job Preparation Skills is about what employers are looking for in employees, how to find a job including preparing a CV and going for interviews, and entrepreneurship and volunteerism as a means of gaining valuable work experience.

Volunteerism is one of the values of WCA and integral to the WCA model. Students are introduced to this concept by being given the reason one would choose to do work for no pay in certain circumstances, and the advantages of doing so. For example, it is a means to getting the work experience that employers value, while also helping people to find what they enjoy doing (building on the topic of “*Vision*”). Further to this is that volunteering keeps a person productive and provides networks towards potential work opportunities. Finally, it also gives back to the community and is not just about the individual, further reinforcing the African Renaissance.

There are also topics which address communication skills, personal health, HIV/AIDS, leadership and personal development.

The Life Skills course thus introduces unemployed youth to a range of topics which are not only empowering but also challenging. With a focus on changing people's attitudes and mindsets, the course is very challenging at an emotional level. Many participants in the study used the words anger, forgiveness, confusion in describing some of the change and process of change they went through. The topic on "Healing of the Past" surfaced numerous times in most of the data collection sessions and seems to be one of the most influential aspects of the Life Skills Course.

### **Leadership Course – "Changing the world around you"**

To participate in the Leadership course, students would first have been on the Life Skills course. The topics covered there are taken to a deeper level in the Leadership course. The Leadership course does not follow a formal manual as the Life Skills course does. The basic topics covered are Worldview, Vision of a Leader, Strategic Planning, African Renaissance, Team Building, Relationships, Leadership Style, Character Building, Human Nature, Healing of the Past, Forgiveness, Pressing Beyond, Spiritual Development and Self Leadership.

While the Life Skills course does not place a strong emphasis on the spiritual aspect of life, the Leadership course is different. As an organisation, WCA has a Christian value system and teaches a biblical worldview. The Bible is used as a reference point for topics discussed and is referred to as the 'Manual of Life'. Characters from the Bible are used to discuss the nature of leadership, to learn about leadership strengths and weaknesses and to make it practical to living.

The Leadership Course is 11 weeks long and divided into three phases. The structure of the course is illustrated by Figure 4 below, followed by an explanation of the phases.

FIGURE 4: STRUCTURE OF LEADERSHIP COURSE



### ***Lecture Phase:***

The first phase is four weeks long and students live on the premises from Monday to Friday. Students sleep in dormitories, making it a very intense community experience. During the morning they have classes, a tea break and lunch break, and then one session after lunch. For the rest of the afternoon they have free time and then there are activities in the evening. Evening activities include movies, talent shows, and once a week separate girls and boys meetings with the female and male facilitators respectively. The separate meetings provide a forum for students to talk about gender issues in a safe environment. In these forums, students have been known to reveal their HIV status or other personal issues, which the facilitators find very encouraging as it shows that deep levels of trust have developed in such groups.

### ***Community Service Phase***

The next phase of the Leadership course involves students going back to their communities to volunteer at various organisations for a period of 6 weeks. Volunteerism is included as part of the Leadership course for multiple reasons. It offers students the opportunity of giving back to their communities, building African values such as interdependence and generosity. Although this requires an attitude of looking out for others, it is not only an act of self-sacrifice. Doing volunteer work provides students with valuable work experience, it keeps them productive and out of the negative behaviour often linked with idleness, and it can create networks and opportunities for paid work. The community service phase of the course is therefore considered as important as the lecture phase.

### ***Feedback Phase***

After spending six weeks back in their communities doing volunteer work, students come back to the centre for a ‘feedback week’, during which classes are held again and the students get to discuss their experiences of the volunteer phase. On the final night of the feedback week a graduation is held and students are given freedom to organize this how they want to. They consider it an important milestone and go to great efforts to make sure it is a special evening.

### ***Objectives of the Leadership course***

One of the objectives of the WCA Leadership course is to build leaders with sound character. By going to the roots of problems, and challenging people’s mindsets, attitudes and thinking at grassroots level, WCA seeks to model and teach a values-based lifestyle which is focused on sound character.

Another objective of the Leadership course is to develop a culture of reading. Although this is also encouraged in the Life Skills course, it is most effectively applied through the Leadership course because of the residential component of the lecture phase. One of the requirements of the course is that, over the first four weeks, students write a review/report on three books on leadership, much like submitting an assignment on a more ‘formal’ course. To assist students with finding suitable leadership books, they are encouraged to join their community libraries. The hope is that by the end of the course, students would have discovered the value of reading. Ultimately, WCA hopes that students will embrace and continue a lifestyle and habit of reading.

### ***WCA House Rules***

While on the WCA campus, students are expected to abide by some basic rules of conduct and to fulfil cleaning and washing duties. Meals are cooked for them, but students have to wash the dishes. They also have to keep their rooms (dormitories) and toilets tidy. This encourages teamwork and teaches them about taking responsibility and doing their part in an organisational context, thus instilling values of productivity and responsibility.

Students are not allowed to drink alcohol or smoke on the premises. This includes smoking cigarettes. The hope is that this will help students who have addictive habits, to stop them during this time, since they live on the premises during the week. Students are

mentored and guided during the Leadership course and supported through the process of giving up addictive habits. At the same time they are being taught about making choices and how those choices affect their future.

The facilitators are very strict about time-keeping for classes. In an environment in which students are being empowered for the workplace, where time-keeping is important, this helps them to learn the value and importance of being on time, especially in a work context.

Having outlined the structure of the Life Skills and then the Leadership courses, the story now shifts to a richer description of the experience, as I ‘invite’ the reader into the classroom experience. Firstly, a vignette based on observations and impressions gained during the data collection phase of the study is presented, and secondly, the students’ views about the volunteer experience are summarised.

## **Inside the Leadership classroom**

On a warm, Kwazulu-Natal winter’s day, I arrived at the WCA Leadership centre in Shongweni, to meet a group of students. It was the last week of their course before they were to leave for the volunteer phase. I arrived during morning tea break and was met by the course facilitator, Kosan<sup>3</sup>. He was very hospitable, friendly and interested in learning more about my research. As we got talking before the classes started again, I found myself asking him a lot of questions informally. It sounded as if I was interviewing him already, interrogating him with all sorts of questions, simply out of my own curiosity and eagerness to hear more about the organisation. I made a note of some of the interesting information I was learning, so that I could follow up on these issues when I formally interviewed him later on.

Kosan started the session doing an activity with a message and purpose, which was interactive and involved all the students; making them think but also bringing some fun and laughter to the room. He then asked students to write down four strong points about themselves, four good habits they had and four positive things people had said to them in their lives, giving them time to think about each one. Kosan was preparing the students for re-entry into their communities for the community service phase, after having spent

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<sup>3</sup> In keeping with the ethics of the study, anonymity of individuals needs to be maintained and so pseudonyms for the participants have been used. Kosan is introduced here but his life story is the next story of this chapter.

four weeks of intensive living and learning at the Leadership centre. He followed this activity by talking about how it is so much easier to make a list of negative things about ourselves and remember only the negative things people say about us. He encouraged them to focus on the positive. He also spoke about the negative messages that people in the community might give them when the students are on the community service phase.

During the lunch break, students sat in small groups talking and relaxing in the warm winter sun, while others fulfilled their cleaning and washing duties. There was a positive, productive but relaxed atmosphere. It had been a very positive first impression of the classroom experience, but I knew there would be a lot more to see and learn as I observed other classes. This first encounter had whet my appetite to see a range of classes held over the next Leadership course.

When I returned to WCA to start observations of the second group, with my revised methods of data collection, the atmosphere on the premises was much as I had noticed before: relaxed, productive and peaceful. Through the visits over the next few weeks, I was able to gain a much broader sense of the variety of teaching styles, activities and topics covered. For example, different facilitators were used for different sessions, each facilitator bringing their own unique style. It was evident that the style of facilitating was very flexible and varied from day to day. One characteristic of all the sessions, however, was that the facilitators asked the students numerous questions, making them think about issues they may not have thought about before.

I was able to conclude from the multiple classes I observed that there was a high level of student participation and engagement. Students were required to stand up and present during class time, work together with other students in groups and learn to ask questions. Frequent occurrences of both seriousness and laughter were observed during the class times. Facilitators addressed relevant and difficult issues, making students think about these issues, but at the same time including activities which brought in a lighter side of life.

## **Volunteer experience**

When the Leadership students who participated in the study returned to the centre for their final feedback week, I had the opportunity to visit them one last time and get a

deeper insight into the experiences, feelings and attitudes of the volunteer phase of the course.

I asked them to tell me where they had volunteered, what they had learnt and what they thought about volunteerism now that they had been through the experience. I have summarized key aspects of their responses in order to get an overview of the general experience for students.

Students had volunteered at a wide range of types of organisations, including a library, a medical clinic, different levels of schools, an adult education class, and other service organisations in the community.

There were common themes in what they felt they had learnt from the community service work, as summarized here:

- Soft skills: communication; conflict resolution; learning to work with people
- Work ethic: discipline; time keeping
- Learning about self: what they are good at
- Practical skills associated with the respective places of work

Although some mentioned that they had not been very positive about the idea of volunteerism before doing it, they had seen the value of it and named a range of benefits:

- Productivity: keeping occupied in productive ways, and out of negative habits
- Stimulation for the mind
- Creating opportunities
- The value of gaining work experience and getting better at something which you would like to do as a career

## **Concluding comments**

In concluding the WCA story, I offer some initial comment on what I observed and heard as researcher. Although there was some reticence and uncertainty about the value of the volunteer phase among the students, many indicated that through doing the volunteer work they had learnt the value that could be gained from it. Many found it a helpful way to learn about what they were good at and enjoyed doing in a work environment. No matter what practical work context students were involved in, there seemed to be a



common acquisition of soft skills like good communication, working with others and resolving conflicts. Reflecting back to the primary objective of the Life Skills course - to change people's attitudes towards life, while also acquiring skills and knowledge - there seems to be some coherence between what students are learning and what the programme is setting out to achieve.

The intention of this story was to contextualise the experiences of the Life History stories which are to follow and to provide triangulation of sources for quality purposes, thus adding a richness and depth to the Life Stories, bringing the cases to life and giving the reader a sense of being there.

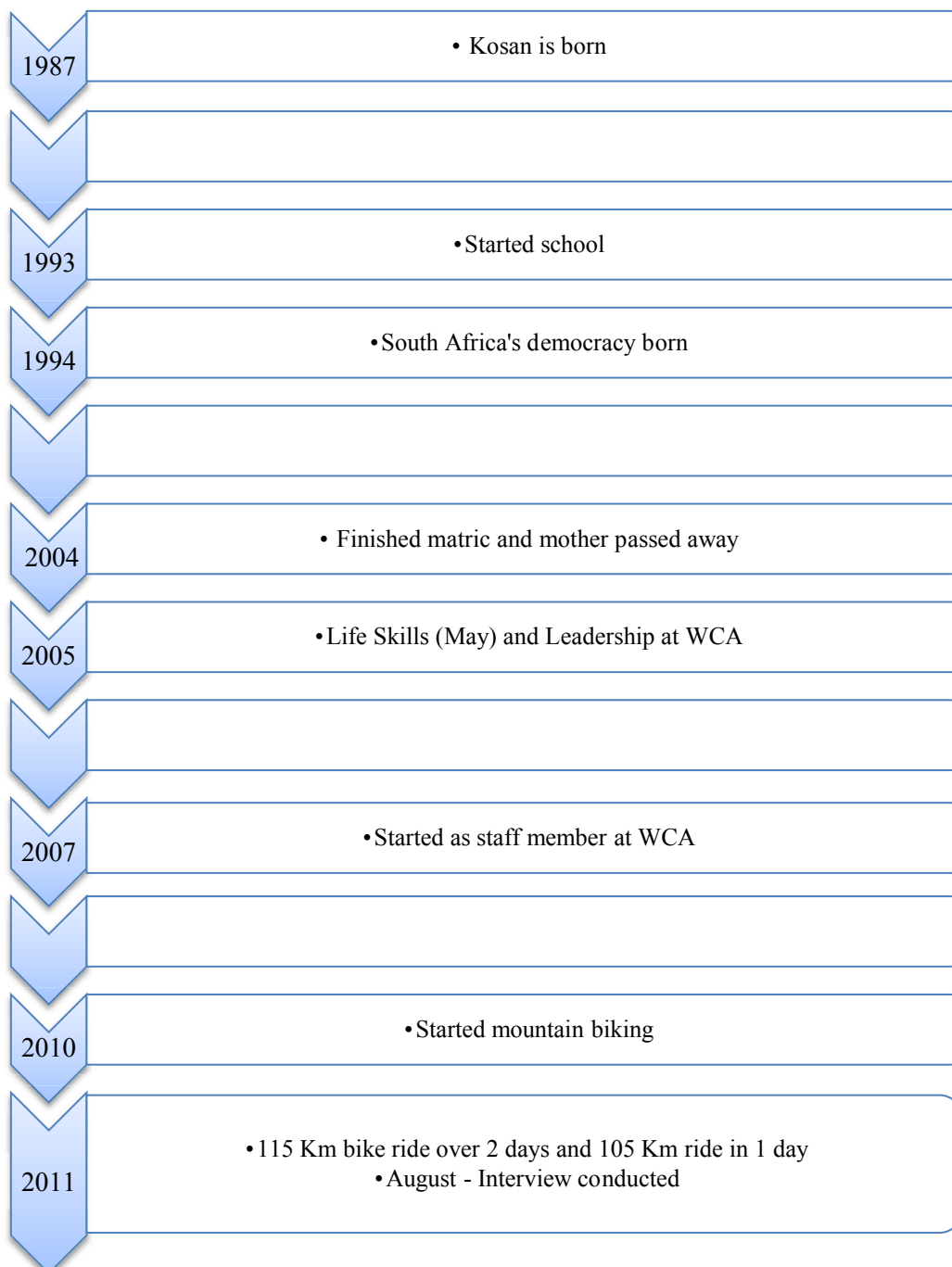
Three Life Stories follow, starting with Kosan, who was introduced as the course facilitator in the WCA story. Each story starts with the researcher's first impression, followed by a chronology of 'Early life', their participation in the 'WCA Programme' and 'Since the WCA Programme'. Each story ends with a 'Summing Up' section, including a table which has been used to summarise changes and the processes of change which were observed as the stories were told. The way the story has been told - as 'before', 'during' and 'since' the WCA Programme - is not intended to illustrate a causal or linear relationship, but rather to capture a glimpse of each participant's lived experience. Likewise, the table summing up the story is not intended to illustrate a learning or development process which is strictly linear. Rather, they are a helpful way to capture the essence of change which has been described in each story.

# Life Story 1: Kosan - Mr “Leader of Leaders”

## Initial impressions

I first met Kosan as the co-ordinator of the Leadership course and he facilitated the first session I observed. Easy-going and interesting to talk to, he was enthusiastic and confident about his role as leader. Figure 5 is a timeline of critical incidents and events in Kosan’s life, followed by his story.

FIGURE 5: KOSAN’S TIMELINE



## **Early life – growing up**

Kosan grew up in a rural area, where he says it is tough because the education in these areas is not good. He describes his family as being not poor or rich, but ‘in between’. He grew up in a home in which he was the only male, with his granny, mother and other female relatives. His mother was often absent from the home because she worked as a domestic worker. He doesn’t know who his father is and will never know, because his mother never told him. In his matric year his mother died, taking with her the knowledge of who his father was. Both the loss of his mother at such an early age, and not knowing who his father was, were very painful for him. Kosan was shy, introverted and had low self-esteem. He liked to spend a lot of time alone. His shyness and lack of self-confidence are illustrated well when he said:

*Even at school it is hard for me to raise up the hand when the teacher is teaching, because I was shy.*

Zulu people believe that their ancestors have power over their lives, and they practice cultural rituals and ceremonies based on these beliefs. This belief system was the taken-for-granted frame of reference which Kosan grew up with and adopted.

After finishing school in 2004, in January 2005 Kosan came to stay with an uncle in the greater Durban area. Although he would have liked to study further, he couldn’t go to university because of the lack of finances. He was supposed to be looking for a job, but was not motivated, so much of the time he was doing nothing. He was just waiting, hoping that perhaps someone would come and offer him a job. After spending January to April of 2005 ‘doing nothing’ but waiting and hoping for ‘something’, in May 2005 he heard about the Life Skills course being run in the community in which he was living and decided to go along. In fact, he mistakenly thought that it was an employment opportunity, so he went along to find out about it.

## **The WCA Programme**

Kosan describes the first day of the Life Skills course as follows:

*There were two guys who were WCA co-ordinators and one lady and they speak about real issues, because the first day they were talking about vision, they were talking about positioning your heart and your focus to the future. It was 2004 - I was sitting in the class in 2004, seeing my life in 2020, because they shift my focus from the present, to the things that is yet to come.*

On the second day of the Life Skills course, the topics were about goal-setting and about worldview. These first two days were enough for Kosan to realise his need to continue with the course, and he attended every day for 20 days without missing, even obtaining an award for his attendance at the end of the course. The talks about vision on the first day helped him project his mind into the future, which was followed the next day by goal-setting, helping him see the steps he needed to take to reach his vision.

One of the highlights for Kosan was about developing a deeper sense of personal identity. He says:

*I learnt so much about identity ... who am I? Where am I from? Where am I going? It's something I've learnt so much about, because I didn't have direction that time, I didn't even know where to ... but the way they give me the sense of identity through the programme on the Life Skills, opened my mind ... Define my vision, develop my mind ...*

Kosan's words here describe a process of self-learning and discovery which involved a finding of identity, both in terms of where he had come from but also in terms of a new identity and direction for the future.

The sessions on 'Healing of the Past' helped him to deal with the issue of not knowing who his dad was and of losing his mother so young. This part of the Life Skills course helped him face these realities and accept that these things had happened to him, even though he had not planned them. He also faced and embraced the fact that he was alive and in good health, and came to the point of accepting that these things may have happened for a reason, as part of God's plan for him. His belief in God gives him a higher purpose and motivates him to live life purposefully.

Kosan was challenged to break out of old ways of thinking and acting, stretching him beyond his comfort zone in a number of different ways. Firstly, the active nature of the programme, requiring students to stand up and present to the rest of the group, was not something he had been comfortable with at school.

Secondly, Kosan's way of thinking about the world of work was challenged. At WCA he was introduced to the idea of creating opportunities for work or starting a business, something he had never considered before.

Kosan said:

*...particularly in our culture, our parents don't teach us **about creating opportunities**, but they (WCA) teach us about seek opportunities. So if you grow up they (parents) say, please study, so that you can be employed, they don't say, please go and study so you can be an **employer** (emphasis mine).*

He had, grown up with the assumption that what he needed to do was get a job – be an employee. However, his mindset changed from looking for a job, to thinking about being an entrepreneur and creating his own business.

Thirdly, Kosan's cultural beliefs were challenged when presented with a Biblical belief system through the Leadership course. This caused him to start a process of questioning of both his family's beliefs and the new beliefs that he was being presented with. The frames of reference regarding his beliefs were being put under scrutiny, beginning a process of reflection, questioning and dialogue with leaders both in his family and at WCA.

## **Since the WCA Programme**

Kosan says that now his life is purpose driven. When asked to explain what he means he describes it as follows:

*I'm the kind of person who live life purposefully, not just live life because the sun has risen, but the person, when he wakes up in the morning, knows why he wakes up in the morning and knows that there is a task that he has to finish in that day. I don't do things just haphazardly; I do it for a certain reason. What is that reason? It is to help people. I like helping people, because I know what does it mean to be in need, so I wish everybody can have something that they can require in life, so I think that is my purpose, to help people, in different ways... I can't be specific in what way, but helping people – seeing development in the person, is what makes me feel good, so this person doesn't know anything about life, but if I interact with that person, that person start to see the light, that person start to develop, I like that. That is my purpose.*

Today, as a leader of leaders, Kosan is able to stand in front of large groups of people with confidence. He does take time out for himself when he needs space, but it is no longer a negative isolation from people, as it was when he was younger. He has

developed his people skills to the extent that he prefers it when there are groups of students at the centre. He finds it boring and too quiet when students are not there. He has become a people person.

Kosan investigated and enquired into issues of belief and faith. He did lots of reading for himself to decide what belief system he wanted to follow. His search for answers about transcendent powers brought him to a point where he could no longer find value in ancestral worship and came to embrace a Biblical worldview.

Kosan enjoys new challenges and learning to master new things. In 2010 he started mountain biking. He used to see white people cycling around but not black people, and wanted to start doing it too. He approached the club where these cyclists rode and they helped him get started. He started entering mountain bike races and recently did a 115 km mountain bike race over 2 days and then a while later a 105 km race in 1 day. He has also led the way for others by encouraging others from WCA to get involved in cycling.

Another passion of Kosan's is art in different forms, such as poetry, painting and writing. He was not exposed to this in his early years, but through the writing and presenting of poems in the WCA Programme he realised that this was something he liked to do. He also enjoys drawing and painting. The collage session used at the beginning of the interview was enjoyable and creative for him and helped him to reflect on his journey.

Two of Kosan's ambitions are to learn to play the guitar and to venture into business. He has set his mind on doing these things and is confident that in time he will achieve these goals and master the new skills required.

Although Kosan's expectations were not met when he first went on the Life Skills course, thinking it was to offer him a job, he says he has learnt more about life and his focus has shifted from looking for a job to knowing life skills. In the end he has received more than he was expecting. The three things which he feels have changed the most in his life are: firstly having a relationship with God, secondly, spending time with people and thirdly, living a life of purity. What stands out for him as having been most influential in making these changes seeing a lifestyle which was modeled and lived out by those who taught him. Their authenticity, of practicing the things they preached was a powerful teacher. He also attributes the changes to the fact that he encountered the programme at the very time when, as a young person, he was struggling to find the way forward for his life.

The name Kosan was chosen as a pseudonym because it means “Leader” and likewise, Kosan has been called “Mr Leader of Leaders”. His story demonstrates how he has become a person who takes initiative, is a pioneer and likes to master new challenges. As the co-ordinator of the Leadership course, he has developed into a leader, guiding others and teaching them how to lead.

## Summing up

Kosan’s process of learning was multi-faceted. It included reading books, being honest with himself about where he was at, and also spending time talking with other people who challenged his assumptions. A critical moment in the programme seemed to be the initial topics of Vision and Goal Setting, which helped him think about and establish a picture of what his life could look like in 20 years’ time. This seemed to be a motivating factor for him. Table 6 is a summary and illustration of the key changes which seem evident in Kosan’s life from his story. The table includes some of the processes of change identified from his story.

TABLE 6: OVERVIEW OF KOSAN’S STORY OF CHANGE

<u>Changes in Kosan’s Life</u>	<u>Early Life</u>	<u>WCA</u>	<u>Life now</u>
Purpose/ Direction	Lack of direction and motivation	Identity defined Becoming future focused	Direction and focus Purpose driven life Cycling and Leading
Communication	Shy, afraid to speak in public Spent a lot of time alone	Developed people skills and leadership skills	Comfortable speaking to large crowds
Emotions	Pain from past Low self-esteem	Emotional and spiritual healing	Wholeness and confidence
Challenged assumptions	Looking for a job (not sure what job)	Assumptions about work challenged	Plans to ‘create’ a job
	Cultural/Family beliefs	Dialogue with WCA leaders as well as family about beliefs	Clarified own worldview/beliefs

A discussion of these findings from Kosan’s life story will be explored in Chapter 5, along with the other life stories, as content analysis draws out the main themes which emerged from the study.

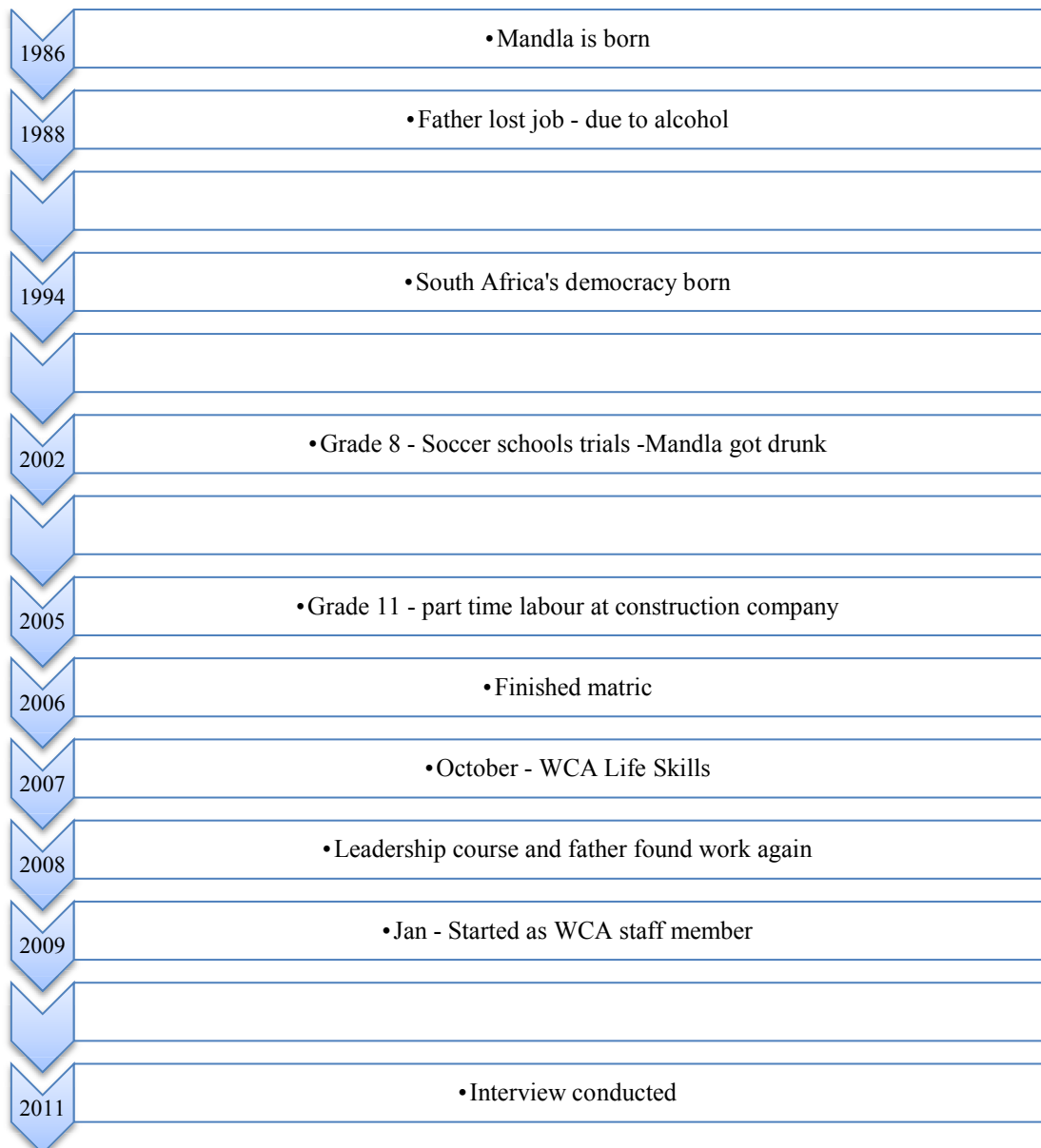
## Life Story 2: Mandla – Mr “Motivational Speaker”

### Initial impressions

When I met Mandla, he appeared reserved and a bit shy. I discussed the purpose of the research and the need for informed consent. When I invited questions from the three participants, he was the only one who responded. I welcomed and answered his questions, seeing his questioning as an indication of someone who gave thought to what he had heard and was not afraid to ask questions to gain understanding and clarity.

Figure 6 is timeline of Mandla’s story, identifying critical incidents and key moments in his life.

FIGURE 6: MANDLA’S TIMELINE





## Early life – growing up

Mandla grew up in a very poor family. Both his parents were unemployed and uneducated. At the time of Mandla's birth his father was employed, but not long after that he was given warnings for being drunk at work and was eventually dismissed. Mandla was the third of five children. In addition to his parents and siblings, an uncle also lived with the family and other relatives visited from time to time. This meant that there were eight or more people in the home at any one time. With both parents unemployed, there was very little food in the house, and porridge was their staple diet most of the time.

Mandla describes this situation as follows:

*We used to eat porridge in the morning, porridge in the evening, porridge afternoon, porridge even night, only to find that you eat porridge for the whole week because you have no choice, so I eat it up to the position when my throat said 'No more!'.*

Now, if he tries to eat porridge, after three or four spoonfuls, Mandla brings it up again. He simply can't stomach it any longer.

Tough as life was, Mandla discovered early on what he was passionate about – soccer. He loved other sport such as long-distance running, but it was soccer that was his life. The running helped him to train for soccer. He became very good at soccer, even playing in age groups older than his. He was told by some people that he was destined to be a professional soccer player. In 2002 Mandla was the youngest student at his school to go to soccer trials in Johannesburg. He says about soccer at this time in his life: *"I only knew that soccer it is the only thing that I can live with..."*

Unfortunately, Mandla also used to drink too much. He can't even remember at what age he started drinking, but knows that by Grade 9 he was already drinking too much.

Ultimately this habit destroyed Mandla's soccer talent. At the schools trials in 2002, despite being the youngest student, Mandla was also the only one who got drunk.

Although his goal was to become a professional soccer player, and he had the talent to develop his potential, it was his drinking habit which got in the way of this goal. Mandla would train hard for soccer, but then would get drunk on a Friday night and have to play a game the next morning. Mandla says about his drinking: *"so that is how I killed my talent... I destroyed my talent"*

By the time he was in Grade 11, Mandla did part time work in a construction company as a manual labourer. This was during exam time, so if he wrote exams in the morning, he would go to work in the afternoon. Although he continued to drink too much, Mandla used some of the money earned from the work to help his family, whom he loved and respected. He says *“my mind was starting to be open up, because any income I was get there, I was giving to my mother”*. His mother really appreciated Mandla’s contribution and saw the potential in her son. Although he feels that at this time (2005 - 2006) he was *“coming to his senses”*, he still did not have a ‘vision’ for his life.

In March 2007, the year after finishing matric, Mandla got a job as a petrol attendant at a garage, but he was there for only three weeks. A petrol cap went missing from a car he had been serving and he was unable to find it. It seemed to his bosses that he was lying and he was dismissed from the job. Although he doesn’t really understand what happened, he is not bitter about it. His attitude was *‘maybe that job is not for me’*.

Mandla used the money he had earned there to get a forklift driving certificate, and continued looking for a job.

## **The WCA Programme**

At this time of his life Mandla said he was *hunting* for something, but he didn’t know what he was *hunting* for. Although he was looking for a job, he spent a lot of his time sleeping in the morning, sometimes only getting up at about 1 or 2pm. However, one morning at around 9am in October 2007, Mandla’s mother woke him and said he must go to the community hall because people were getting employment there. He dressed and walked the 25 minutes to the hall to see what was happening. There he found that a WCA Life Skills course had been under way for a short while, and Mandla was invited to join one of the groups. They were talking about “Worldview”. Mandla sat and listened to what was being said, and found that it made sense to him.

Like many others in the community, Mandla’s mother had read the pamphlet asking “Do you have a matric?” and “Are you unemployed?” and had assumed that this meant that jobs were being offered. However, the pamphlet had been advertising the Life Skills Course, targeting unemployed youth who had completed school. Many young people came, realised that it was not an employment opportunity, and left immediately, without waiting to find out more, but Mandla stayed.

A short while after he arrived, the group had to present to everyone what they had discussed. Because he had arrived late, his group nominated Mandela to present the feedback for their group. Although he was reluctant at first, he did it. When he finished the short presentation, for the first time in his life, he heard people clapping for him. This affirming gesture triggered a thought through his mind: *“Oh ... that means I can do something positive”*. This event was a catalyst for his decision to commit to the Life Skills course. It was also the start of a new passion – public speaking.

At the end of the Life Skills course, Mandela had some choices to make about his future. There was an opportunity to get a bursary to study Information Technology (IT), but the college offering it was located very far from his home. He didn't even know the name of the place or how to get there. There was also the opportunity to continue on to the WCA Leadership course. The problem was that the WCA interview was scheduled for the same day he needed to be at the college in order to get the IT bursary. The obstacles and the confusion of having to decide between the two, were too overwhelming for Mandela and so he didn't go to either of them. However, later the same week the facilitator of the Life Skills course contacted him and he was given a second chance to join the Leadership course.

Mandela felt that the way in which he was enabled to do the Life Skills course (when he was looking for a job) and then the Leadership course (when he had missed the opportunity and been given a second chance) were a sign of God revealing himself to him. As he had said before, he was *hunting* for something, but didn't know what it was. He believed that God had brought to him the things that he really needed and he had been 'hunting' for life skills.

What Mandela found tough about the Life Skills course, was the way he was challenged to think in different ways about some of the life issues he had grown up taking for granted. The frames of reference which he had developed through childhood and into his early adult life were being challenged by alternative ways of thinking. Some examples of this were about the role of women in the home; how to conduct healthy relationships and what it means to be an African. On a very personal and emotional level, the topic “Healing of the Past” presented a big challenge for Mandela, as he was taught about facing the past and forgiving others in order to move forward positively with his life.

The Leadership course provided another challenge for Mandela, because during the voluntary community outreach phase, he had to return to his community to give back. He

went to the school from which he had matriculated only 2 years before, so there were many people there who knew him and his previous drunken lifestyle. Here was a young man who had been a gangster, coming to motivate them with the life skills he had learnt. He knew there were some people there who still feared him, but said to himself: *“If I can succeed here to one week, I can succeed in my community”*. Mandla managed so well the first two days, that by the third day he was invited to another school to do motivational talks. Word about his inspiring message had spread quickly.

## **Since the WCA Programme**

Once he had completed the Leadership course, Mandla, of his own accord, went back to help voluntarily in his community, leading further Life Skills courses as well as visiting different schools and teaching young people there. He did motivational talks, focusing on the life skills he had learnt through the WCA Programme. Mandla was developing a new talent and passion – being a motivational speaker. His strengths in public speaking were affirmed and encouraged by WCA leaders, teachers at the schools he worked in and other students. He was giving back to the community, but also developing and practising his new skills. Mandla was active in his community through most of 2008, and WCA heard about what he was doing.

At the end of 2008, WCA approached Mandla about coming to train as a member of staff, after which he was invited to apply for a job with them. After an interview process, he was accepted and started as a full-time staff member at the beginning of 2009. He now works on the schools Life Skills programme at WCA, helping to co-ordinate the programme and moving between the different courses running in different communities.

Mandla still plays soccer for fun and enjoyment, as he is now too old to consider it for professional purposes. Family has always been important to him, both before and after the WCA Programme. He has a vision of what he wants to do with his life and how he wants to live it. He wants to be a business man, financial advisor and motivational speaker. One of his role models is a professional Brazilian soccer player, Kaka (Ricardo Izecson dos Santos Leite). He says that the reasons he looks up to Kaka are threefold: his love for soccer, his family commitment and his belief in God. These are the characteristics that Mandla aspires to.

## Summing up

The things that Mandla values about life now, can be summed up in the key words he used when making his collage: Health; Sport; Quality time alone; Chilling with friends; Family and Business. These values represent a balanced and holistic approach to life which includes work, health and interests beyond work.

Mandla had started to make wiser life choices before coming to WCA, like using money earned from working as a petrol attendant to further his studies, but the Life Skills and Leadership courses seem to have influenced him further in this direction. The programme helped him develop his skills, knowledge and attitudes in a way that is positively impacting his life. The opportunity to go on the WCA Programme came at a time in his life when he wanted to find work, but perhaps more than that, needed to find direction and purpose. The programme challenged him in many ways and also guided him through a process of evaluating what his life was like and making decisions about what he wants his life to look like in the future. Could he have got to this point without the course?

Perhaps yes, perhaps no – we can't know that, but what we do know is that the programme came about at a critical time in his life and seems to have been a catalyst in a process of change towards making positive and healthy choices early in his life. The affirmation he received on the first day after he had finished his presentation also seems to have been a critical moment for him in encouraging him to follow through with the course. Table 7 outlines some of the changes and processes of change from Mandla's story.

TABLE 7: OVERVIEW OF MANDLA'S STORY OF CHANGE

Changes in Mandla's life	<u>Early Life</u>	<u>WCA</u>	<u>Life now</u>
Purpose/ Direction	Soccer and sport	Discovering new gift/talent of public speaking	Goal to become motivational speaker and a financial advisor
Relationships	Valued family, but involved in negative relationships (gangs)	Facing people from the past during volunteer phase. Emotional learning	Values relationship of community (WCA) and of family. Giving back to community
Challenged assumptions	Abuse of alcohol (self) and family (father)	Seeing that different life choices can be made and bad habits changed	Made choice to stop drinking

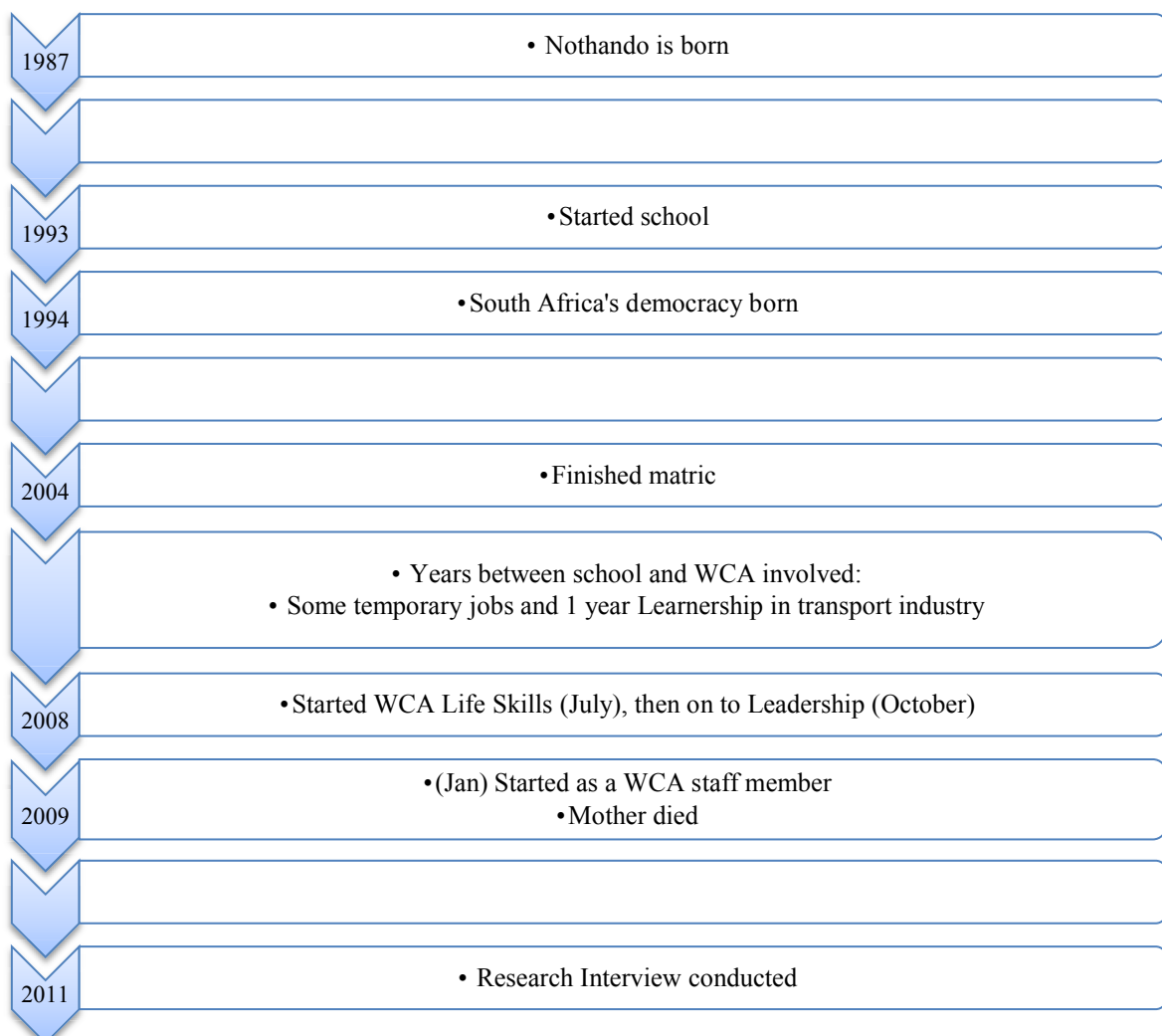
The name Mandla was chosen as a pseudonym as it means strength or power, and his story has revealed strength of character to make difficult changes and choices about his life. Mandla has also been called “Mr Motivational Speaker” because he has realised that motivating others is one of his strengths, and he has a clear purpose and vision to use that skill.

# Life Story 3: Nothando – Miss “Heart of Compassion”

## Initial impressions

I was at the WCA centre conducting research, when a bubbly and outgoing young woman entered the room. With a warm and friendly disposition, she was equally open to me, a total stranger, as she was to those she knew. My first impressions were of the kind of person who attracts other people to her. After being introduced, it was as if we were long-standing friends. Nothando was one of the facilitators of the Life Skills Programme in schools, and having been through the WCA Programme herself, was a possible participant in the Life History part of the study. Because of my strong, positive first impressions and the intention to purposely choose successful candidates of the programme, I was intrigued to know more about her life story and how her journey had begun. Figure 7 is a timeline of significant events in her life and her story follows:

FIGURE 7: NOTHANDO’S TIMELINE



## Early life – growing up

Nothando's mother and father were never married and she was their only child. For the first years of her life she lived with her mother in the home of her grandmother and the extended family. When she was still quite young, her mother married, moved out of the home and left Nothando with her grandmother. She spent some time at her father and step-mother's home as well. This time of her life was very confusing for her and she had many questions, such as why her parents didn't marry. She felt as if she was "*caught in the middle*". Her mother was absent and within the extended family at home there was conflict. Nothando says:

*... you know when the family is extended, everyone can shout at you, everything can happen there, your mother is not there, your dad is not there ...*

It was obviously very painful and confusing for her not to be living with either of her parents. Of visits to her father's home, she says

*Sometimes I ask (for something) from my dad and I will get some nasty answers and even for my step-mother ... 'No, we don't have money'.*

These quotes illustrate that in both Nothando's homes she faced considerable conflict. Not surprisingly, she lacked confidence. Exacerbating the situation, she had an acne problem, making her self-conscious. She was not a people's person and her self-esteem was extremely low. She was short-tempered, aloof and would just cut people off and isolate herself to deal with conflict and her own emotions.

Nothando's family was not extremely poor, but they were also not rich. When she had money, she spent it on things she liked, like nice clothes and having her hair done. She didn't know anything about saving money. Nothando had dreams of becoming independent and being able to look after herself financially. She wanted to get ahead, get a job and her own car, become independent and look after herself. She was very self-absorbed. From observing various family relationships, Nothando had come to the point where she hated men and said that she would never get married. Her mentality was: "*All men are dogs - I don't want to get married*".

Nothando completed her matric in 2004. She spent the next few years doing sporadic temporary jobs when the opportunities arose and spent a year gaining a qualification through a learnership in the transport industry. In 2008, at the time she saw the Life Skills



course advertised in her community, she wasn't doing anything and decided to go and see what it was about.

## **The WCA Programme**

On the first day of Life Skills, the topic covered was 'Planning'. The talk motivated Nothando to return the following day, especially the way the speaker had thanked them for coming, told them not to despise small beginnings and to finish whatever they had started.

The topic of the second day was 'Vision and Goal-setting'. Nothando was challenged about the need to have goals and a vision for her life. She realised that if she wanted to follow her ambitions of being financially independent and having the good things in life, she needed to live her life right. Seeing the value of the course and how it could help her to make the adjustments she needed, she committed herself to doing it.

The topics of 'Healing of the past' and 'Relationships', required Nothando to look at her past and face the issues there, so that after dealing with family and social relationships, and her attitude towards men and marriage, she could move on with her life.

After completing the Life Skills course, Nothando proceeded to the Leadership course, which presented different challenges. One challenge came during the community outreach phase. After four weeks of the course at the Leadership centre, being introduced to different mindsets and ways of thinking, Nothando went back into her community to do volunteer work. The concept of doing work for nothing, introduced to her by WCA, was a new one, and to her family and community it seemed senseless. Doing something differently from how others think you should, was the challenge which she faced.

The thinking and teaching about volunteerism was just one of the mindset changes which Nothando was challenged about as she went through the WCA Programme. Other issues about which she started to think differently included finances, relationships and beliefs.

Doing class presentations during the WCA Programme was something Nothando was not comfortable with at all. At first, when she had to get up to present, she was so fearful that she ended in tears. The fact that she is now able to talk in front of a crowd with confidence is a testament to the growth and learning which she has undergone.

Nothando grew up in a culture which practices ancestor worship. These traditions and cultural practices were normal for her. She believed that the ancestors had the power to

influence your life – that they were powerful beyond God. Although she used to go to church, it was without understanding of the teachings of the Bible. At WCA she was introduced to a different worldview, based on Biblical values and beliefs. This challenged her to look at life from a different perspective, and she went through a process of evaluating both the beliefs she had grown up with and the new beliefs which were being discussed, in order to make sense of it all and decide what she believed was right.

## **Since the WCA Programme**

After completing the Leadership course, Nothando did training to become a staff member and began working for WCA in early 2009. She lives on the premises during the week and goes home on weekends, as all the staff do. Nothando is also studying part time towards a degree in teaching.

In 2009, while Nothando was at WCA, her mother died. This was an understandably difficult experience for her, but she feels she was able to apply what she had learnt through the WCA Programme about grieving, to help her through this.

At WCA, Nothando's work is on the high-school programme. She understands that the children she works with are the future leaders of society. She wants to build positively into their lives as a good role model. Although she would like to be earning better, she is content to work at something she loves, getting valuable experience in teaching and working with school children.

With a clear vision of what she wants to do with her life, she is able to manage her finances better, while still being generous to others in need. She has chosen to work at WCA, even though the pay is minimal, because it is an environment in which she is growing and learning. She has a heart of compassion for those who are abused and mistreated and wants to help them to find their voice.

Nothando no longer feels defined by her past and the difficulties she grew up with. She has a sense of purpose and leadership, with an outward focus on others, whereas before she desired only to be independent and self-sufficient.

Nothando has learned not only how to love other people, but how to love herself. She is now making choices which enhance her health holistically - emotionally, physically, spiritually and intellectually. She has a new perspective on relationships and is open to marriage now. She controls her acne problem through the use of skin products and by watching her diet, which includes eating lots of fruit and drinking water. She likes hiking

and has recently been introduced to cycling by Kosan. She has discovered a sense of spiritual purpose which also keeps her grounded. She is applying her mind through studying, in order to build a career based on her strengths that will fulfill her sense of purpose.

## Summing up

There is a stark contrast between the story Nothando told about her life before she was involved in WCA and what her life is like now. The strong, positive first impressions I had of her are coherent with her life now. It is hard to reconcile with the way she describes her early life: introverted, aloof and self-focused.

What seemed to capture Nothando's attention about the Life Skills course were the facilitator's words at the start - to 'not despise small beginnings but to work with what you have'. Throughout the telling of her story, there were indications of her awareness that the nature of change and learning is a process. Although she has big dreams and goals for her life, she is aware of the step by step process it takes to get there. Table 8 is an overview of the key changes and processes in Nothando's story.

TABLE 8: OVERVIEW OF NOTHANDO'S STORY OF CHANGE

<u>Changes in Nothando's Life</u>	<u>Early Life</u>	<u>WCA</u>	<u>Life now</u>
Purpose/ Direction	To have the good things in life - but no vision how to get there	Challenged to have a goal and vision for her life	Studying towards teaching degree (helping people).
Communication	Aloofness to deal with conflict.	Learning about healthy communication & conflict resolution	Able to deal with conflict in healthy ways
Emotions & Self image	Self-absorbed, holding onto past, low self-esteem, conflict, confusion, pain	Healing of past/ moving forward, emotional healing	Confident, positive, & hopeful. Able to live and work with others
Challenged assumptions	Ancestors have the ultimate power over our daily lives	Personal dialogue Mentors as role models	God has the ultimate power over our daily lives
	Negative attitude to men and marriage	Challenged about relationships	Open to getting married

The name Nothando was chosen as a pseudonym because it means “Mother of Love” and her story demonstrates someone who has a caring and mothering heart to reach out to others in need. Nothando has also been called “Miss Heart of Compassion” for the same reasons. The names chosen illustrate the purpose and vision which she has for her life now.

## Summary

This chapter described WCA and the programme, then proceeded to tell stories of three young people who have been successful participants in the programme, and who more than a year later are still involved in the organisation as staff members. The stories began with the researcher’s initial impressions of the participant, and then told of their early lives, their WCA experience and what their lives are like now. The last part of the stories moved to a first level of analysis, where the researcher made observations about the learning experiences of the participants. Included in this analysis were key areas in which the participants experienced change and were influenced to change.

The next chapter takes the analysis to another level, using these stories and other data sources, to do content and discourse analysis and engaging with the emerging themes through Transformative Learning Theory. The last part of the chapter goes to another level of abstraction, involving interpreting and theorising the data.

# Chapter 5 – Analysis and Discussion

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## Introduction

The previous chapter described WCA and the WCA Programme, outlining timeframes, structure, process and content of each part of the programme. It then proceeded to tell the life stories of three students who have been successful on the programme. The rich descriptions from chapter four are the starting point for the analysis which follows in this chapter.

Chapter five is structured in four parts, starting with a thematic analysis of the data, followed by a short discursive analysis which explores some symbolic language used by individuals and the organisation. The third part of the chapter is a discussion of the findings, specifically in relation to Transformative Learning Theory, and includes aspects of Mezirow's original proposition as well as newer conceptions of the theory. The final part of the chapter proposes a tentative theory about the nature of the catalyst for change in a South African context.

## Thematic Analysis

Seven themes emerged from the data, contributing to answering the research questions and to discussion about Transformative Learning Theory. Within each theme, I signal links to concepts from Transformative Learning Theory, which I will return to in the discussion part of the chapter.

### 1. Identity and purpose

The most obvious theme emerging from the study was that students established identity and purpose through the WCA Programme. Two aspects of identity were seen, firstly that of personal identity, and secondly, of African identity (cultural identity). Each will be explored in more detail as two sub-sections of this theme.

#### *Personal identity*

When the Leadership students (first data source) were asked what the WCA Programme had done in their lives, many used the words identity and purpose in their responses. For example, one student said it had helped him “*to find my true identity*”.

Other responses included references to a spiritual identity as the following two quotes illustrate:

*It has empowered my life in terms of identity and about who God is*

*I now found my identity in God.*

Similar comments were found on the WCA website (WCA, 2009) from past students about what the programme had done for them (data source three). Three examples follow:

*I now know my purpose in life. I won't sit at home any longer*

*I didn't have a vision before, but I now know what I want.*

*I have learned about my true identity and that I was not a mistake. I'm now positive towards my future and believe in myself*

Furthermore, the two earlier studies of WCA, Momo (2009) on the Life Skills course and Hazell (2010) on the Leadership course, also found that students developed a sense of identity, direction and purpose for their lives. The present study confirms these findings.

The stories of Kosan, Mandla and Nothando (data source 4) add weight to the theme of identity and purpose. Each of them developed a sense of purpose for their lives, a sense of what they were good at and what they wanted to do with their lives, which has been illustrated through the pseudonyms chosen for them and recapped below.

Kosan, *Mr Leader of Leaders* started out with a lack of identity, particularly from not knowing his father. He lacked male role-models in his life, was unsure of himself and was a loner. However, he emerged as a leader and pioneer, whose activities included mastering cycling and bringing the sport to the African community. The WCA Programme seems to have helped him to find that identity and now he lives his life very purposefully.

Mandla, *Mr Motivational Speaker* began the WCA Programme with an identity as a good soccer player, but knowing that he had destroyed his chances of becoming a professional player. Through the WCA Programme he discovered a new identity and strengths he didn't know he possessed. He started recognising his skill at public speaking, which was affirmed by WCA leaders, and he proceeded to develop that skill. My impression of the way he confidently and engagingly told me his story, was that his vision was based on accurate knowledge of his strengths and not just an unrealistic idea or dream.

Nothando, *Miss Heart of Compassion*, was a self-conscious young woman who was afraid of standing up in front of people. She had a poor sense of self and of her place in this world. Now she has a heart for others and knows that she wants to be in a profession helping empower people. The WCA Programme has facilitated her process of establishing a healthy identity of self.

These three life stories indicate that these participants have found a sense of identity and purpose, but also that they seemed to find identity *in* their purpose - that finding a purpose was a key aspect of knowing their identity. I see the sense of identity and purpose in these students as what Mezirow (1991) calls 'frames of reference' which are used to make meaning of their lives.

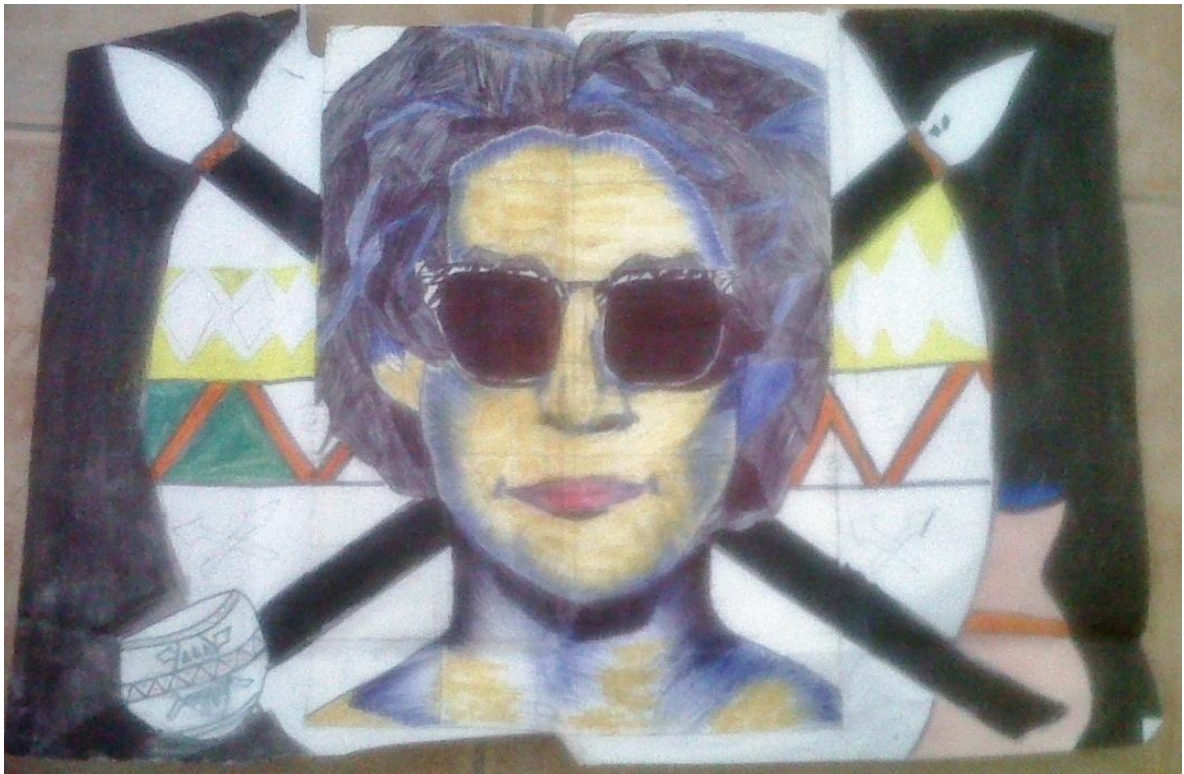
### ***African identity***

A second aspect of identity was that of African identity. The topic of 'African Renaissance' on the Life Skills course encourages students to think about their African heritage, where the understanding of being African stretches beyond the borders of South Africa and involves embracing people from *all* African countries. Mandela's assumptions were challenged by this. He says he was proud of being African, but explained how he and others used to use the derogatory word 'makwerekwere' referring to foreigners from other parts of Africa. Then, when confronted with the teaching during 'African Renaissance' his mindset was challenged about what it means to be African, to have an African identity and who else should be included in that identity.

The importance of African identity to the students was highlighted by one of the Leadership students, Nobuhle, which means "Mother of beauty". I chose this name because of her love of art and creativity. After I had conducted the focus group session with the Leadership students, Nobuhle came and asked me if I would give her the crayons I had used to facilitate the session. She loves drawing, but didn't have any crayons of her own at the time. I was happy to help her with this, but also interested in her creative passion and her personal story. I asked her to draw me a picture about her life and bring it to the last data collection session six weeks later. When I saw her again, Nobuhle had drawn not just one but three pictures, which she was willing to discuss with me for the purpose of the study.

Artifact 1 was a representation of herself. In the background are two spears and a shield, weapons and symbols of her Zulu heritage and culture. The pot in the bottom left corner

is like the one African women drink from, while the pot in the bottom right corner is like the one African men drink from.



ARTIFACT 1

Nobuhle said that no matter what she becomes, she must not forget where she has come from. While she didn't indicate what direction she wanted to take in her life, she identified that where she has come from (her identity) is and must remain an integral part of where she is going to (her purpose). There is the sense of identity as a Zulu woman in that her heritage and roots are an integral part of who she is. However, there was also the sense of moving forward purposefully into new identities, while not forgetting past identities.

Like the life history participants, I see Nobuhle's identity as an African woman to be what Mezirow (1991) calls a 'frame of reference' for her life, from which she can make meaning. Her drawing and explanation seem to indicate that she is willing to make changes in her life, but that certain parts of her identity and existence are not negotiable and must be retained. The sub-theme of African identity is also an aspect of culture and context in transformative learning, which forms part of the discussion about Western and non-Western worldviews outlined by Merriam and Kim (2008).



## 2. Growing self-confidence:

My first impressions of Kosan and Nothando, were of people with a high level of self-confidence. However, when they started at WCA, they described themselves as shy and lacking confidence. The difference between their early descriptions of themselves and my first impressions illustrate that the level of confidence each of them has gained has been significant. Their confidence grew as they progressed through the programme.

Mandla seemed to come to the WCA Programme showing more self-confidence than Kosan and Nothando, even speaking well in public on the first day. However, his journey was still one of self-discovery in which he grew in confidence and competence in new skills and knowledge of himself. Right from the start of the WCA Programme he realised his strength in public speaking, but it was through participating in the programme and getting affirmation and positive feedback from others, that he developed and furthered this skill, growing in self-confidence.

Furthermore, the Leadership students (data source 1), just after completing their community service phase, seemed to have gained self-confidence from the experience. When asked what they had learnt through the volunteer experience, many highlighted that they had learnt about themselves and about what they are good at doing. The following are four quotes of what they said they had learned during the volunteer phase:

*I discovered that I am good at teaching.*

*Learnt about myself – that I can be patient with kids*

*Discovered that I am able to teach so that they (others) can understand and enjoy the sessions*

*Learnt that others believe in me, that I am a leader*

These findings affirm Hazell's (2010) study in which she reported that an increased sense of self-confidence was seen in the WCA Leadership students.

I see the growing of self-confidence in this context as part of the process of learning or in Mezirow's terms, one of the phases of transformative learning. Mezirow's (1991) ninth phase of transformative learning is *building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships*. As the students progressed through the programme, the step by step process of trying on new roles (like doing a small presentation in class) could be seen

as an incremental step in the process of learning – a learning which saw self-conscious individuals being changed into self-confident young leaders.

### 3. Emotional healing: emergence of hope

Emotions seemed to play a significant role in the learning process of WCA students. From as early on as the first data collection sessions, I noticed emotive words such as anger and pain being expressed by participants. Although initially taking me by surprise, when I later reflected on the history of hardship which most of these students and their families have come from, it made sense that issues of pain and anger were so real to them. Words often used were: conflict, fear, anger and confusion.

However, I also noticed that along with these expressions of negative emotions, were also descriptions of positive emotions, like healing, hope, fun and joy. The topic ‘Healing of the Past’ seemed instrumental in helping students deal with painful past issues, with a sense of hope emerging as a result.

When Leadership students were asked: ‘What changes have you experienced in your life since being involved in WCA?’ some responses were:

*I was very **angry**, holding **grudges**. I know now that I can’t live like that, that it is not a life.*

*Facing the issue of **forgiveness** ... now I’m empowered to **forgive**.*

These two students showed they had learnt about the negative impact of holding grudges and have learnt the power of forgiveness.

Another two responses were:

***Healing**, relationships and behavior to other people – I take decisions in a **positive** way now.*

*Helped me to be **positive** in life - I always had **fear**.*

The above two quotes show that positive change had resulted from the programme, while the two following, express hope.

*Bringing hope back, understand myself better and clear future.*

*It helped me find my identity and brings my **hope** back.*

One student's response illustrated that healing was still taking place, that it is a process and that it was not yet complete. When responding to the question, 'What was challenging about the course?' he said:

*Anger – it's not easy to forgive but the more we learn about forgiveness, the more challenged we are to forgive. **I'm not there yet, but I'm trying.*** (emphasis mine)

Another student responded:

*The most challenging part (of the course was) dealing with anger management and forgiveness.*

These final two examples demonstrate that the process of healing and forgiveness is not easy, and that it is a process which takes time and continual effort.

A vivid and creative depiction of emotional hurt (and then healing and hope) came from Nobuhle, who was introduced earlier. In Artifact 1 she is wearing dark glasses which she said is because people see through the eyes into your soul and that the dark glasses are to hide behind, so they can't see you. This already seems to signal some sort of pain, but it was her second drawing (Artifact 2 below) and explanation which suggested more strongly that deep emotional pain had been part of her journey.



ARTIFACT 2

Nobuhle said that this is a picture of a heart, which is red in some places, but should be all red. There is a spear through the heart and it has been bleeding, which has made it go pink. The black in the background is fear. To the right of the heart is another picture, which is the devil. Around the devil is blue, which is peace, but the devil comes into places of peace and destroys them. Around the blue is a range of colours, which are different emotions. Nobuhle's description is a vivid depiction of a range of conflicting emotions, ranging from pain and fear, to an element of hope, because peace is also present.

Her final drawing, Artifact 3 below, suggests that hope and peace are possible. This is a picture of a tall tree, with grass and flowers on the bank and a peaceful stream running next to it. When Nobuhle wants to get to a place of peace, she looks at this picture.



ARTIFACT 3

Returning to the life history students, emotional healing formed a significant part of the journeys of Kosan and Nothando, who each referred to ‘Healing of the Past’ as a factor in the programme which facilitated healing from their respective hurts.

Although students displayed high levels of pain, using words like anger and fear about their past, there was also hope emerging in the descriptions of change. Healing of the past, to face the pain and hurt, and to learn to forgive, seemed to be a significant step in helping them move forward in their life journeys.

Learning through emotional and spiritual healing are aspects of the newer conceptions of Transformative Learning Theory which will be discussed more fully later in the chapter. The discussion section of this chapter will explore contributions to the literature by Dirkx (2008), Taylor (2001) and Tolliver and Tisdell (2006).

#### **4. Roles of community: giving and receiving**

Community was seen to be an influential factor in student learning. Two communities in particular were a significant part of each student’s life. Firstly there is the community in which the student lives (their home) and secondly there is the WCA community.

The former is a community representing a sense of familiarity, home and belonging before they encountered WCA through the Life Skills course. Then, the WCA Programme introduced a new aspect of relationship to this community. When students returned to their communities during the community service phase of the Leadership course, they were required to volunteer in this community for a six week period. The focus of the volunteer phase is about ‘giving back’ to this community although there are also personal benefits such as gaining work experience. While the ‘giving back’ to the community might simply be a part of the course and something never considered again once the programme is over, the findings seem to indicate otherwise. Some students like Mandla do return to volunteer situations of their own accord after the programme. When he completed the programme, he returned to doing volunteer work to keep himself productive and out of the lifestyle of drinking. A number of the Leadership students indicated their intentions to do volunteer work after the course. Whether or not they followed through with this plan is unknown, but the volunteer experience seems to have opened up their eyes to the value of doing volunteer work and gaining work experience while giving back to their communities.

Another aspect of ‘giving back’ to the community can be seen by re-looking at the purposes which Mandla, Nothando and Kosan established for their lives. Each of their purposes has an outward, community-oriented focus. Mandla knows he is good at public speaking and wants to use this skill to motivate others. Nothando is studying to become a teacher, a people focused profession and one which requires an extensive outward focus. Kosan likes to see people develop and grow the way that he has and wants to be a part of the process of helping people in that process.

The outcome or results of change in many of the students point towards the development of an outward focus and a giving back to others and to their communities. Similar observations were made in the longitudinal study by Courtenay, Merriam and Reeves (1998, 2000) on perspective transformation of HIV-positive adults in the United States of America. The study found that once participants had accepted their HIV diagnosis, they made sense of their lives by helping others in dealing with the illness.

The second community which became part of the student’s lives was the WCA community. WCA became in a way a ‘home away from home’ to some of the students. A bond and a sense of belonging developed among the staff and students on campus. This community seems to represent one from which students receive a lot in terms of support, nurturing and friendship.

Both of the leaders interviewed (data source 2), said they engage with the students after classes, most especially when there have been issues of conflict arising during class time. They intentionally work to build positive trusting relationships with the students and approach them one on one if they feel that an issue was not resolved. There seems to be significant nurturing within the programme, helping students face challenges and changes.

The value Mandla places on the relationships at WCA can be seen through one of the pictures he chose for his collage (Artifact 4) and the words he used to explain why he had chosen this picture.

He said:

*This picture, symbolises us at World Changers – we are too many from different places, but we formed one organisation and we formed a friendship – that is what is happening here... they are all wearing different clothes, but if you look at them*



*close, you see that there is a smile and I believe that there is a friendship there and there is unity.*



ARTIFACT 4

Mandla learnt and grew through the affirmation and encouragement he received from others about his public-speaking skills. In isolation, he would not have had this feedback, illustrating the crucial role of contexts and community in learning.

Kosan offers another example of the importance of community. When growing up, he used to spend hours and days in isolation. Now he enjoys the WCA campus more when there are lots of students around than when there are none. He says it is too quiet without them, showing his enjoyment of relationship and community.

Through the Leadership course where students and facilitators all live on campus, share responsibilities and abide by organisational codes of conduct, an intense community experience is created. The environment and community seem to create the space for deep levels of trust and disclosure in relationships to develop, and positively influence the changes the students go through.

The role of community seems to be bi-directional - the 'getting from' or nurturing as well as the 'giving back' to the community - and it plays an integral part in student's learning processes. The insights gained from the study will be interesting to discuss later in relation to the study by Merriam and Kim (2008), which considers the role of context and community on non-Western perspectives of knowing.

## 5. Reflection

My personal reflective style is through writing and journaling, so I had preconceived notions of what reflection would 'look like'. It therefore took me some time to recognise the multitude of forms and styles in which reflection took place for the WCA students.

Kosan reflects in a very active way while he is teaching Leadership classes. Whatever message he is teaching, he evaluates whether his actions are matching what he is saying. Reflection takes place while he is *in* action. On the other hand, there are other instances when he takes time to be alone to reflect, and this is rather reflection *on* action.

Other students indicated the need for time alone in quiet, for internal dialogue and critical reflection. Nothando made the most reference to these times, although Kosan and Mandla also identified quality time alone as being important to them. Nothando found these times particularly helpful as a way to work through some of the conflicting opinions and viewpoints she was confronted with to decide what was right for her.

The volunteerism component of the programme proved to be another way the students reflected. Many of the Leadership students talked about how the volunteer phase had helped them to learn what they were good at, and through having the experience they were able to evaluate and learn about the workplace.

Another form of action linked to reflection was observed during the collage session with Kosan, Mandla and Nothando. In the beginning, Kosan sat very quietly by himself and seemed deep in thought, whereas the other two participants chatted to each other from the start. Kosan started by making a greeting card for someone, before doing his collage. It was unrelated to the task given and was for another WCA staff member. He seemed to need time with his own thoughts and used creativity to get started and to reflect on his journey. He later identified the process of doing the collages as being helpful in recognising his appreciation for art. The earlier example of Kosan was of how he reflected while in action during teaching. In this case, he seemed to need to be busy with his hands, doing something creative and active, in order to reflect back on the process and journey he had been through on the WCA Programme.

There seemed to be times when students were reflecting on action, in other words thinking about past actions and situations, while at other times they were reflecting in action, like when Kosan reflects on his own actions when he is teaching students.



The notions of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action were first proposed by Donald Schön in 1983, the former referring to reflection which takes place during an experience and the latter to reflection taking place after an experience (Rogers, 2001). Schön's writing on reflection resonates to some degree with that of Mezirow, but is another body of knowledge in its own right and more can be learned about the concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, by referring to Schön's *The Reflective Practitioner*, as well as the body of knowledge which has developed from it.

Reflection is recognised in the phases of transformation proposed by Mezirow (1991), Cranton (1994) and then Merriam, Caferella and Baumgartner (2007). However, as has been mentioned in the literature review, not all reflection is critical reflection, and it is the latter which is integral to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). Much, but probably not all of the reflection noted within this theme is likely to be critical reflection.

## **6. Challenged perspectives**

On the WCA programme, the content of what is taught about relationships, attitudes, emotions, health, beliefs and work principles is in many cases different to what students have grown up believing or hearing. The WCA programme, therefore introduces students to different ways of thinking about life, encouraging them not to simply take things for granted. It is an environment in which critical reflection is encouraged by creating space for questioning and challenging of assumptions. This type of learning environment is fertile ground for clashes and conflict. However, within the conflict, discomfort and disagreement, a potential space for discussion and learning also arises.

Mezirow (1997b, p. 7) says that "*We do not make transformative changes to the way we learn as long as what we learn fits comfortably into our existing frame of reference.*"

While conflict and disagreement do not automatically guarantee an environment in which discussion takes place, it does create the potential for it.

When the Leadership students were asked in what ways they thought they had changed, some of the responses were:

*I've changed the way I think.*

*I didn't know that decisions I made could affect my life going forward.*

These quotes show that students gained insight into different ways of thinking. There were indications that some students were able to engage in critical reflection on issues, have their perspectives challenged and sometimes changed.

Mandla recognised that it was the choices his father had made regarding alcohol which had severely impacted his own life growing up. He realised that he didn't have to follow the same pattern and that the decisions he made about his lifestyle, would affect his own children and family in the future. These reflections were influential in Mandla deciding to stop the destructive habit of alcohol abuse. This type of reflection is akin to what Mezirow called *premise reflection*.

Nothando's perspectives were challenged in the community service phase. She faced opposition from her family and friends for doing work for no pay, because it was a mindset which was foreign to them. Although during the lecture phase of Leadership, she was introduced to the ideas and values of volunteerism, back in the home community her friends and family had not been exposed to these new ideas. Despite the opposition, Nothando had to try out the new assumptions she had adopted, to see how they worked out for her. Acting out a new assumption which is contrary to the mindset of those closest to you is perhaps one of the most challenging parts of the critical reflection process.

Kosan's mindset about the world of work, which had been reinforced by his family was challenged and later changed. Previously, he knew he needed to look for a job, but had never thought about starting a business himself. After participating in the WCA Programme, he now sees being an entrepreneur as a possibility.

The Biblical worldview held by WCA as an organisation is different from the worldview held by many of the WCA students who believe in ancestral worship. It became evident quite early on during data collection that this was a source of conflict and challenge for some students. One student said, "*Things we are taught here (are) against what we learnt at home*".

Kosan and Nothando wrestled a lot with this issue before coming to the point of changing their beliefs and practices. They were introduced to new ideas, and needed to work out for themselves what they believed and how they wanted to lead their lives. They engaged in discussion with leaders at WCA and their own families, to interrogate why certain rituals and belief systems were held. They revised some of the assumptions they had grown up with and embraced a different belief system.

When premise reflection leads to a changed mindset, Mezirow calls this a *perspective transformation* (Mezirow, 1991). In the examples given above from Mandla, Kosan and Nothando's lives, perspective transformation seems to have taken place and will be discussed more fully later.

## 7. Action

It is only at the point of action that one can really tell if someone has a changed mindset. By way of an analogy, when we have a virus which causes illness, it is the symptoms we see, not the actual virus. Likewise, it is the way people act or the decisions they make which are indicators of changed mindsets. Some of the examples of changed mindsets leading to changed action have been described already: Mandla changed his drinking habits because of his revised mindset; Kosan and Nothando changed their religious practices based on their revised beliefs.

The final phase of Mezirow's (1991) proposed ten phases is '*reintegration into one's life on the basis of one's changed perspective*'. I take this to mean action, in the sense that getting on with life involves action.

One of the reasons for using multiple data sources in the study was to improve quality by allowing triangulation of data. For the most part, there was synchronicity between the data sources, with no glaringly obvious differences between what was being said. There was, however, one finding which I thought worthy of further investigation.

At the time of the study, Mandla and Nothando had completed the programme three years earlier, and Kosan six years earlier (data source 4). They had had sufficient time to start putting into action their changed mindsets. On the other hand, the students who were on the Leadership Course at the time of the study (data source 1) were still in the process. I noticed that all the students from data source 4 made mention of business or finance as an aspect of change in their lives. However, there was a silence on the issue of business and finance from the current Leadership group.

Wanting to investigate a bit further, I decided to take a look at some of the stories of the first participants of the programme in 2002 which were available from the WCA website (WCA, 2009). I was able to draw on three of these stories for the study as a third 'group' of successful students who had completed the programme much earlier than those in my study.

When they started at WCA, two of these students were criminals and addicts, and had originally come on the programme to see if they could steal the computers at WCA. One of those men has now started another organisation, 'Light Providers', similar to WCA, while the other leads the WCA Programme on the South Coast. A third student from this

group came to the programme with no work experience but today is employed in a leadership position in a business.

Table 9 (below) is a comparison of three groups of students from the study, particularly looking at how the action of business and dealing with finances impacted them, followed by a more detailed interpretation.

TABLE 9: COMPARING CHANGED ACTION OF THREE STUDENT GROUPS OVER TIME

<b>Year on WCA Programme</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Action / Change</b>
2011	Leadership Students (Data source 1)	Changes in attitude or mindset (No mention of finance or business.)
2005/ 2008	Life History Students (Data Source 4)	Intentions/plans for business Way of handling finances
2002	1 <sup>st</sup> group of WCA students (from Data Source 3)	Leadership positions in business Started own organisations or businesses

The first group was the current Leadership students, still on the programme during the study. Although they would have learnt about finances on the programme, they didn't make mention of finance or business as a change in their lives. They would not have had time to put into action the things they had learnt about finances. The changes they did report were to do with changes in attitude, ways of thinking and emotional issues.

The second group of students (Kosan, Mandla and Nothando) had completed the programme some years before. They not only recognized that their attitudes had changed, but that their actions had changed too, and they identified dealing with finance and planning for business as aspects of change in their lives.

The third group of students, from the first programmes at WCA in 2002, have moved into positions of leadership in WCA and other organisations or businesses, having had opportunity to put their plans into action. Their stories illustrate that changed action (lifestyle) for some of the WCA students has been a long term process.

This finding demonstrates the progressive nature of transformative learning over time, and how the initial changes are to do with attitude (perspective transformation), and that action and carrying out those changes take place much further down the line.

A different aspect of action seen in the study was how the actions of leaders influenced the students' lives. As an organisation, WCA places a high value on the authenticity of their leaders, as illustrated by this statement from their website:

*One of WCA's core emphases with its training is that the message and the messenger must be 'one'. WCA is very strict with character and doesn't allow people to teach what they don't practice. (WCA, 2009)*

During the data collection and then analysis, frequent references to role-models, or leaders who 'practiced what they preached', surfaced. Kosan was influenced by the way the facilitators of his courses lived out their lives. He is also aware of his own actions and the need to be an authentic role-model to the students he teaches.

Kosan, when interviewed on his leadership role, said that one of the strengths of the model is that facilitators on the courses are people from the same communities and backgrounds as the students. This enables the facilitators to relate to the same struggles and challenges the students have been through, and to encourage and motivate them. It also means that the students are able to look to them as role-models to evaluate the authenticity of their message and to see in a practical way how that is working out. This is what Nothando did, when she was considering different belief systems. Kosan had already made changes to his beliefs and stopped practices associated with ancestor worship. Nothando looked to see how Kosan's changed actions were affecting his life. Cranton (2006) says that authentic relations between student and teacher, is one aspect of fostering transformative learning. The role of relationships, in particular authentic relationships based on trust and integrity have been seen to be influential in the lives of the students.

### **Concluding comments on thematic analysis**

The thematic analysis surfaced several important aspects of learning and change in WCA participants. In the thematic analysis, concepts from Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory were also recognised, but so were concepts from the newer conceptions of transformative learning, like the role of emotions, relationships and context. The themes have also contributed to answering the key research questions, which will be discussed in Chapter 6. The next part of the chapter is a short discursive analysis, highlighting a few metaphors which arose from the study and which contribute further to the exploration of transformative learning.

# Discursive Markers - Metaphors and Symbolism

This section explores some of the metaphors and symbolism which the participants used and how this might offer additional insight to answering the research questions. Henning (2004) says that metaphors and symbolism in language are usually pertinent indicators of meaning.

## 1. Manual of Life / Frames of reference

I noticed during the life history interviews that the Bible is referred to at WCA as *The Manual of Life*. The term *Manual of Life* reflects how WCA uses the Bible as a practical tool from which to learn life lessons during the Leadership course, as has been mentioned in Chapter 4. The Bible is used as a tool for applying leadership principles to day-to-day life. This speaks of the importance which WCA places on the Bible as a foundation for teaching values-based principles and lifestyle.

This metaphor, *Manual of Life*, is symbolic of how the Bible is seen by the organisation and the participants, namely as a guidebook, help or reference point for life. I see this as a frame of reference used to guide discussions on the programme. The students are taught how to study the Bible, so that they can continue to make practical use of it as a guidebook when they are back in their communities.

## 2. Quality time alone / Internal dialogue

Nothando in particular used symbolic language to describe internal dialogue and time spent alone to reflect, using phrases like: *Sit down with myself* or *Meet with myself* or *Quality time to meet with myself*.

When asked what she did during that time, Nothando said:

*Read the word, bring it to myself, what does it say to me? What are the things I need to work on? Just sit down with yourself, do introspection ... asking questions ... What is the next step?*

Mandla and Kosan also took time out for themselves to think on and process what they were learning on the programme, and continued to value quality time alone, identifying it as important in their personal journeys.

I see these expressions as the students' need to spend quality time alone for internal dialogue. Although time alone does not automatically imply critical reflection, the

contexts in which these phrases were used seem to indicate that time alone was useful in terms of weighing up different ways of thinking in order to determine and decide on their own convictions. The changed mindsets indicate that it is likely that some critical reflection on underlying assumptions took place.

The role of meditation, silence and contemplation which I recognised here could be seen as one aspect of holistic learning, and has been identified in the literature as an important component for healing and learning (Manicom and Walter, 2012).

### **3. Changed state of mind / Learning**

Participants made frequent references to various states of mind. Statements ranged from *my mind was blank* which Mandla used to describe his life when he was drinking a lot and not making good decisions, to phrases like *my mind was beginning to be opened up*, when he was making better life choices.

Other phrases used were: *Stretching the mind* or *just get a new mindset* or *change your mindset*. These phrases referred to times when the students were learning, growing and making positive decisions about their lives. Mandla and Kosan frequently used the phrase *opened up my mind*.

*My mind was blank* seemed to be an expression of the idleness, lack of thinking and exposure to ideas and opportunities, and referred to a time when students were making negative choices about their lives.

I saw these references to the mind as implying awareness of cognitive learning taking place. WCA's intention is to change attitude, which could be likened to a changed mindset, and so it should not be too surprising that this symbolic language was so prevalent amongst the students, and was an indicator to me that WCA's intentions to change mindsets and attitudes was indeed bearing fruit and influencing some of the students.

This does not mean that the ways of knowing were solely cognitive. As has already been seen, there were also aspects of emotional and spiritual learning taking place. What it might signal is that the students were more conscious of the cognitive aspect of their learning than the affective aspects. I say this because when I asked Kosan what role emotions had played in his process, he said they had not played a big role. However, analysis of his story seems to indicate that emotions were an integral part of the process. It is likely that it was something he had not recognised as influential in his learning.

## **Concluding comments on discursive markers**

A few of the concepts from Mezirow's (1991) proposition of Transformative Learning Theory were recognised, namely frames of reference, critical reflection and cognitive learning and dialogue. The second discourse marker also pointed to other aspects of learning, namely spiritual and meditative means. This brief analysis adds to and complements the concepts already identified through the thematic analysis, all of which will be discussed next.

## **Discussion of findings in terms of the Theoretical Framework**

The chapter thus far described aspects of learning for participants of the WCA Programme through thematic and discursive analysis of the data. The analysis at this stage was inductive in nature. Once themes and discourse markers were identified, links were made to the literature, which have been signaled throughout these sections, moving the analysis to a deductive phase. This section is a discussion on how the themes can be understood in terms of key concepts from the theoretical framework of the study.

### **Critical reflection**

The programme fostered critical reflection about previously-held assumptions about relationships, work, finances, beliefs, attitudes and emotions. In some cases it was content reflection (what people believed), in others it was process reflection (how they came to believe it), and in others premise reflection, where they asked questions about why they held particular attitudes, beliefs or viewpoints. Through critical reflection of their assumptions, dialogue with others and with self, and finally through taking action, some students seem to have had perspective transformations.

Mezirow (1997b, p. 5) says: *"We engage in discourse to validate what is being communicated. Our only other recourse is to turn to authority or a tradition to make a judgment for us."*

Nothando, having listened to WCA leaders' views on beliefs and their reasoning about them, took time alone for dialogue with self and with the Bible, to come to her own judgments about what beliefs to follow. She had grown up with beliefs taught to her by



the authorities in her family. At WCA she was being challenged with another set of beliefs, taught to her by a different ‘authority’.

Kosan changed his thinking about work, from aiming to be an employee, to aiming to be the employer. Before, Kosan’s intention would have been to look for a job, but now his intention is to create a job. Mandla changed his thinking about drinking habits and realised that he didn’t have to follow the negative habits he’d seen in his family. He realised he could make the choice to change. Mandla’s perception of what it means to be an African was challenged and expanded to include people from other African countries.

In the examples given above, the students were taught different things by different authorities in their lives, but they had to go through the process of evaluating these differing viewpoints, engaging in discussion and trying out new ideas, to come to a decision about what was right for them. Some of the WCA students were seen to embrace critical thinking and the discomfort of challenging the assumptions of their existing beliefs and ways of acting in the world. They opened themselves to engage in discourse in order to validate and come to their own best judgment, rather than being dictated to by authority or tradition.

## **Frames of reference**

Taylor (2008, p. 5) says *“Frames of reference are structures of assumptions and expectations that frame an individual’s tacit points of view and influence their thinking, belief and action.”*

‘Identity and purpose’ were identified in Chapter 4 as frames of reference, because students used their understandings of self and the direction they wanted to take, to make meaning of their lives. If identity is seen as a frame of reference, then defining a new identity could be seen as a perspective transformation. Mezirow (1997c, p. 7) says:

*“Learning occurs in four ways: by elaborating existing meaning schemes; learning new meaning schemes; transforming meaning schemes and transforming meaning perspectives. Transformations may be epochal or incremental.”*

In light of this, I understood the various participants to have experienced a range of ways of learning. Kosan and Nothando did not start with clear frames of reference in terms of their identity. They seemed to be discovering their identity for the first time, which could be seen as the establishing of a frame of reference, or learning a new meaning scheme rather than changing one. Mandla was different in that he had already established an

identity as a soccer player, but through the WCA Programme he developed a new identity as a motivational speaker, and to me this resembled a change in meaning scheme. On the other hand, Nobuhle had multiple identities. She used her identity as an artist, to depict and express her identity as a Zulu woman. However, she still wanted to embrace new identities and directions. She seems to be holding on to her existing identities, while moving toward new identities. I saw her learning as elaborating an existing meaning scheme as she has not completely changed her perception of self, but is rather exploring new aspects of her identity.

The examples given above and the changes in WCA students in general were seen as incremental changes. Such changes, along with further incremental revisions of meaning schemes could in time lead to a perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1990).

The examples given above represent individual frames of reference, but an organisational frame of reference used was the 'Manual of Life' to illustrate and teach leadership principles. As an organisational frame of reference, it wouldn't necessarily become a frame of reference to individuals. However, for some students, like Nothando, we saw how it also became an individual frame of reference.

Mezirow (1997b, p. 5) says: "*They (frames of reference) selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition and feelings. They set out 'line of action'.*"

The establishment of identity and purpose in students seemed to help to set their 'line of action', and from there, students grew in self-confidence as they developed towards those new identities and purposes. Similarly, the Bible as a frame of reference could guide the 'line of action' of the students in their life decisions.

## **Phases of transformation**

The process of change takes time. As was seen in the theme of 'Action', students who completed the programme at different times were seen to have different changes, especially with regard to action. Although some changes take place during and within the programme, other changes take longer to be played out in the action of daily living.

Mezirow's model (1991) proposes a ten-phase process. Some of the phases of transformation were recognised in the study. What Mezirow (1991) called testing could be seen in the experience students gained doing the voluntary phase of the Leadership course. The experience gave them a chance to test the volunteerism concept as well as to

test the working environment. 'Experience' was also one of the four components of transformation proposed by Merriam, Cafferella and Baumgartner (2007).

Other phases of the process were recognised through the study; for example, phase nine of the ten phases proposed by Mezirow (1991) was '*Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships*'. This was identified in the way that the three life history students established roles and identities and supportive relationships with the organisation, and grew in self-confidence.

A number of Mezirow's ten phases include aspects of action. Phase 5 is about exploring options for roles, relationships and **action** (emphasis mine) while phase 6 is planning a course of action. Other phases don't use the word action, but action is implicit in them. For example, the final phase is a reintegration into one's life based on one's new perspective.

Acting on changed assumptions was most obvious when looking at some of the earliest students of WCA whose stories were read on the organisation's website. The life history students who had been on the programme three to five years earlier, had begun to act on their changed mindsets. It was also seen that the actions of leaders in the organisation were noted by the students to see if they were 'living' as well as 'preaching' the same message. Action is an integral part of the transformation process. Merriam, Cafferella and Baumgartner (2007) actually name 'action' as one of the four components of transformative learning.

The examples discussed above show that many of the phases of transformation were seen in the study. Cranton (1994) says the phases are not likely to be experienced in a linear way and each person will experience them differently. The study concurred with this statement of Cranton's. There seemed to be frequent overlapping of phases, or coming back to phases, and the process for each individual was different.

## **Holistic Transformative Learning Theory**

Although some of the key concepts of the original theory were confirmed by this study, there was also a significant amount of data supporting the wider conceptions of Transformative Learning Theory and it is to these that the discussion will now turn. These newer conceptions of transformative learning present a more holistic process, which not only includes cognitive aspects of learning, but also considers the role of the emotions, relationships, spirituality, context and culture. Mezirow's theory has been critiqued for his

lack of attention to these aspects of learning, as was identified in the Literature Review. However, Mezirow has acknowledged the role of affective, emotional and social contexts of transformative learning in addition to the cognitive aspects as illustrated by two quotes. Firstly, Mezirow (1997b, p. 5) says that “*A frame of reference encompasses cognitive, conative and emotional components.*” Secondly, Mezirow (2004) acknowledges that there is a need for adult educators to gain a better understanding of the role of relationships, intuition, imagination and emotions in transformative learning.

### ***Context***

The importance of considering context during a case study was highlighted in Chapter 3 and more so in Chapter 2 (Literature Review), where the first part of the chapter described the multiple layers of context relevant to this study. Therefore it is important to consider how context fits into this discussion. The micro-context, which was WCA, is already deeply embedded in the study and discussion. The meso-context, of Kwazulu-Natal as one province of South Africa, could possibly have an impact on student learning because of the particularly violent history of the area. The study showed that healing of the past played a significant role in participants’ development and learning, especially when dealing with anger and forgiveness. It would be interesting to see, if a similar study were conducted in a different province of South Africa, whether the role of emotional healing would be as significant as it was in this context.

The macro-context, South Africa within the global village in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is the context which is more pertinent to discuss here as it raises a discussion around Western versus non-Western worldviews and values. Merriam and Kim (2008) illustrate how Western worldviews value independence, self-sufficiency, critical thinking, reasoning and logic, and very much follow the famous maxim of Descartes “I think, therefore I am”. On the other hand, non-Western worldviews value community, working for the common good and interdependence. The roles of emotion and intuition are also important. The overarching maxim which non-Western cultures follow could be summed up as “We are, therefore I am”, which is also found in Native American thinking (ibid).

South Africa is an interesting and complex synthesis of both Western and non-Western worldviews. Although the majority of the population is African, the country has been strongly influenced by the domination of white minority and Western worldviews. We have seen how the WCA Programme, particularly the topic of African Renaissance, was influential in reminding the students of their African heritage and African values, which

echo the non-Western values outlined above. What is interesting to notice is the need to re-teach the values of African culture to young African people. This seems to signal just how significantly Western thinking has influenced the African people of the country, and in this respect the WCA Programme is challenging students to think critically in order to re-gain the values of inter-connectedness and African-ness.

We have seen that one of the changes in students when coming through the WCA programme is the development of an outward focus. While they have become more self-confident and able to think independently, the process and learning has also led them towards belonging to a community, which incorporates aspects of both giving and receiving. The changed outward-looking nature of the students resonates strongly with non-Western value systems where community is very important.

### ***Emotions***

The role of emotional healing in individuals' lives was seen to be influential in the growth and learning process. Nothando was able to make sense of events in her life because of knowledge about and healing of her emotions. She was able to use the knowledge gained from 'healing of the past' in the process of grieving for her mother. The other vivid example of emotional awareness was Nobuhle, who used art to depict her emotions. Incidentally, the two females in the study showed more awareness of their emotional state, while the two males were not as conscious of the role of emotions in their learning, even though the data indicated that these played a role in their healing. This observed difference between genders might be significant in terms of gendered ways of learning, although it was only a preliminary observation and would need further research to verify the difference.

In Western worldviews, emotions have been seen to hinder cognitive learning. However, in the last ten to fifteen years, the adult education literature on the role of emotions in learning has grown, and emotions are now seen as integral to learning (Dirkx, 2008). Furthermore, studies on the brain from the fields of neurobiology and psychology, are showing that at a physiological level, emotions and reason have an interdependent relationship (Taylor, 2001). In other words, emotions are an essential element of cognitive learning.

## ***Spirituality***

The role of the metaphysical world and spirituality was another aspect influencing learning. Tolliver and Tisdell (2008) define spirituality to be about connecting to a higher life force and making sense of ourselves as whole people, including the heart, soul and mind. Describing what spirituality might look like in practice Tolliver and Tisdell (2008, p. 40) say:

*It involves authenticity, openness, acceptance, and honoring of the various dimensions of how people learn and construct knowledge by incorporating activities that include attention to the affective, somatic, imaginative, symbolic, cultural and communal, as well as the rational.*

Much of what is described above can be seen in the WCA Programme, like the authenticity of the leaders and the close community experience in which students are able to develop meaningful relationships. We have seen both emotional (affective) and cognitive (rational) aspects of learning. WCA have made use of symbolism in the way they refer to the Bible as *The Manual of Life*. There are hints at the inclusion of art, poetry and other forms of creativity in the programme as Kosan mentioned these in his story. Mandla talked about how God had led him to WCA to find what he was looking for. Nothando's frequent practice of time spent alone in meditation, reflection and dialogue is another example of a spiritual aspect of learning, which Manicom and Walters (2012) have identified as important to transformative learning. Tolliver and Tisdell (2006) argue that spirituality has a place in transformative learning and this does seem to have a role to play in the WCA Programme.

## ***Relationships***

The role of relationships in transformative learning emerged as a theme in the review by Taylor (2007). Cranton and Carusetta (2004) identified the relationship which teachers have with students as one of five dimensions of authenticity. The focus of the WCA Programme on developing and building authentic relationships with the students seems to have had a beneficial effect on the lives. Students are able to look at the behaviour of their teachers to see if the message they are teaching is being lived out. We have also seen the bi-directional role which community played in this context, of nurturing (receiving) but also of giving back. This is similar to what Merriam and Ntseane (2008) found in their study: that the role of community responsibilities and relationships was a cultural aspect

of transformative learning. As much as development and learning is personal, it always takes place in a context and in relationship with others. Supportive, trusting and authentic relationships contribute towards an environment where transformative learning is possible.

## Reflective learning

In bringing the discussion to a close, I return to the concept of reflection in learning which has been shown to be a crucial aspect of transformative change. During the course of my study, I came across a learning model by Castelli (2011). The model is based on reflective and transformative learning theories and their developments over time. Castelli's intended purpose of the model was to provide guidance to teachers who want to apply reflective learning in their classrooms. In other words, it is a theoretical model, developed from literature to guide practice. While reviewing this model, it struck me how closely the WCA Programme resonated with this model. Table 10 summarises the key concepts of Castelli's model with descriptions of how aspects of the WCA Programme reflect each concept.

Table 10: Comparison of the WCA Programme with Concepts of Castelli's model

<b>Castelli's Model (2011)</b>	<b>WCA Programme</b>
Openness – safe learning environment	Trustful and authentic relationships are built and emotional healing takes place within a safe, open learning environment.
Purpose – interest and relevance to subject	The programme starts with a focus on vision and purpose for life since it is a life skills course
Meaning – critical thinking and reflection	Critical thinking and reflection are seen to be factors contributing to transformative learning
Challenging beliefs – realising alternative approaches and views, and changing behaviours	Different beliefs and ways of thinking are presented, challenging the students' inherent assumptions
Dialogue and feedback throughout the process	The style of teaching of the course, being interactive and participatory with extensive use of questioning, facilitates growth and development as well as relationship-building and support

I saw such a close connection between this model (Castelli, 2001) and the practice of the WCA Programme that it seemed almost as if WCA might have used this model to develop their programme. Of course, this was not the case, as WCA started in 2002 and the model was only published in 2011. Just as this model could be used as a guide to inform practice, so practice can be a guide to inform theory, but in this case it looked to me like a ‘meeting’ of theory and practice. The two don’t seem to have been informed by each other, developing independently, yet they have much in common. The value of this is that they therefore each have the potential to increase the trustworthiness of the other.

The WCA Programme and the model proposed by Castelli (2011) resonate strongly with the currently developing holistic views of transformative learning which have been built upon Mezirow’s original conception of the theory. Future studies may want to use Castelli’s model as a theoretical framework.

## Catalyst for Change: Proposed model of transformation in the South African context

In this final section of the chapter, I propose a model of the catalyst for change in South Africa. Mezirow (1991) proposed that the first phase of transformative learning is a disorienting dilemma – an epochal event in someone’s life like the loss of a loved one, loss of a job, or something which does not fit within their frame of reference. This event acts as a catalyst for a transformative process of learning. Although this was how Mezirow first conceived of transformative learning, there have been revisions in the literature showing the varying nature of the catalysts for change (Taylor, 2007).

While analysing the data, I noticed that the WCA students did not identify an epochal event in their lives which initiated the process of change, but change happened as a result of participation in the programme. In the proposed model for transformative change (Figure 8 below), I argue that it is the WCA Programme which acts as the catalyst for change in the participants. However, while the programme itself may not necessarily precipitate change in all the participants, it is a combination of factors which have gone before that makes some students particularly receptive to this type of change. Some of these factors are as follows.

Firstly, the students come from backgrounds of hardship and personal difficulty. They have not experienced one epochal event or disorienting dilemma, but a series of unsettling



and difficult circumstances. Even though the students involved in this study were very young at the time of the birth of the South African democracy, their parents and grandparents were very much a part of the struggle against the injustices of apartheid, which involved violence, conflict and hardship. This hardship and conflict would include, but not be limited to, the violence in KZN as outlined in Chapter 2. These factors would have directly impacted the families of the students and their current life circumstances.

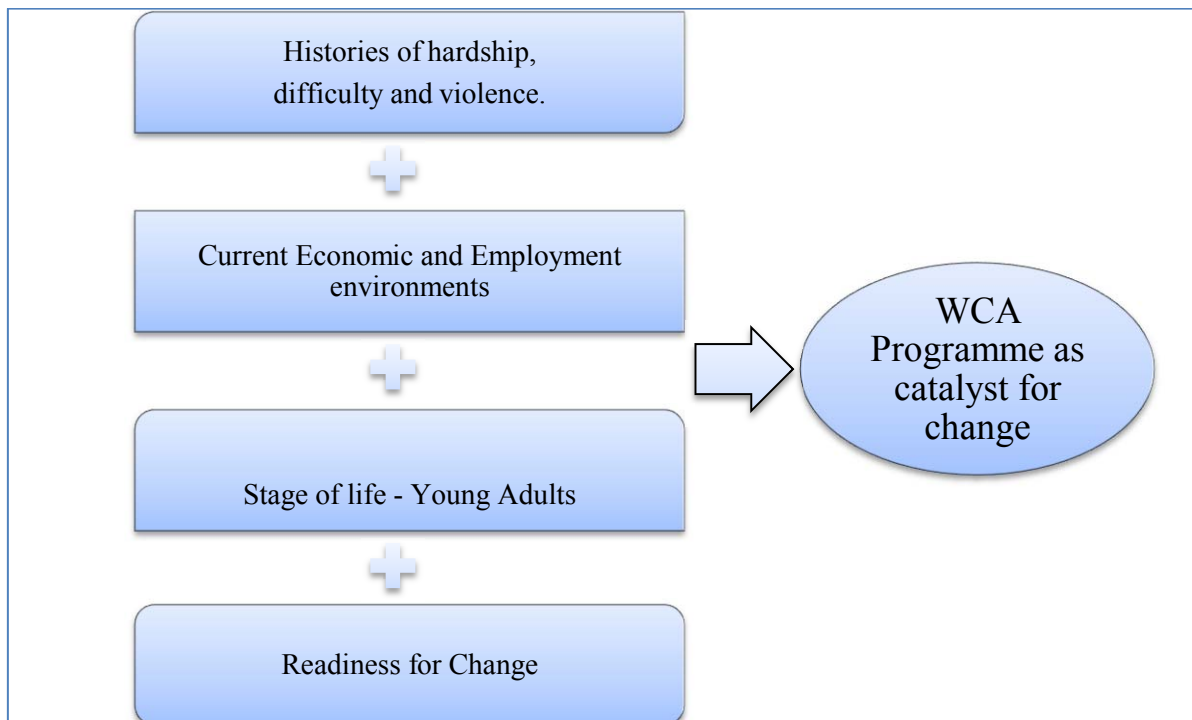
Secondly, the environment into which they will go is difficult, with job scarcity and high rates of unemployment, especially amongst their age group. At a global level, there is economic turbulence, which influences South Africa. Within South Africa, there is uncertainty about leadership and economic conditions are difficult. The prospects of work for unskilled and inexperienced youth are bleak.

Thirdly, these students are at a crucial stage of their lives, as young adults in transition between school and the workplace. They are not sure what work they want to do and they are still establishing their own identity and purpose in life. The students targeted for this programme are those who have completed a matric, but have not yet found work. It is a stage of life usually associated with the beginning of a career, or of studying further towards a career.

Fourthly, readiness for change is an individual attribute which is necessary for change to take place. Each student has a unique story, background and personality, as well as a varying degree of desire for change. It is likely that the hardship and difficult circumstances outlined already have created fertile ground for change and receptiveness to positive and helpful ways to face life decisions.

It is from this context that students encounter the WCA Programme. Here they encounter an environment which challenges them to think differently about various aspects of their lives, and which introduces practical tools and experience for the workplace and hope for the future. The WCA Programme in a way creates a disorienting dilemma or series of such dilemmas for young adults, as different ways of thinking and acting are introduced.

FIGURE 8: PROPOSED MODEL OF CATALYST FOR CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT



These theoretical propositions would benefit from further research and development.

## Summary

Chapter 5 has been a thematic analysis of the data and then a short discourse analysis. The themes and the discourse markers arose from inductive analysis of the data, and were then used to discuss and interpret the data, in relation to Transformative Learning Theory. Finally, a tentative model for the catalyst of change in a South African context was proposed.

The themes have also illuminated answers to the key research questions, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

# **Chapter 6 – Conclusions, Limitations, Reflections and Recommendations**

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## **Introduction**

This final chapter brings the dissertation to a conclusion by firstly responding to the three research questions, followed by identifying limitations of the study. The chapter then outlines some personal reflections about my learning in the research process and finally offers some recommendations for future research and for WCA.

## **Responding to the research questions**

In chapters 4 and 5, increasing levels of abstraction from the data have been proposed, starting with the rich descriptions in Chapter 4 and then followed in chapter 5 by a thematic analysis, discursive analysis and lastly discussion and theorising. Although these sections have provided answers to the research questions, this section aims to draw together key aspects from those chapters to answer the research questions more directly.

### **1. What changes have participants experienced as a result of the WCA Programme?**

Changes observed in students were in a range of areas of people's lives, including spiritual, intellectual and relational.

Perhaps the most obvious change in participants was that of coming to understand their identity and purpose. For some students this involved establishing an identity where there had been no clear understanding of identity before, while for others it was about developing a new identity or expanding existing identities. They changed from not knowing what they wanted to do with their lives, to having a strong sense of their unique strengths and the direction they would like to take. Their purposes seemed to be outward, people-focused. Many of the students developed an outward focus on life, realising the value of inter-dependence and being able to give back to others.

Secondly, there was an increase in the levels of confidence of the participants in the study, as they seem to have developed the skills to work systematically, step-by-step towards their goals, growing in competence and confidence. The participants spoke about

the future with hope and self-confidence, felt that they had made good choices and that they would be able to realise the visions and goals they had set for their lives.

Thirdly, coming from places of confusion and emotional turmoil, they experienced emotional learning through the ‘Healing of the Past’ topic, now showing signs of emotional wholeness in their lives.

Fourthly, the study showed that attitudes were challenged through the WCA Programme and in some cases this led to changed mindsets. The pedagogic style of the programme created space for the challenging of assumptions and for dialogue to take place.

Lastly, students started to act on their changed mindsets. The changes in students just completing the programme were more about changed attitudes, but students who had been through the programme a few years earlier and when the programme first started in 2002, had acted on their changed attitudes, seeing the practical and physical outworking of the choices made from these new assumptions; choices such as dealing better with their finances, going into business or starting new organisations.

This is significant change and augurs well in terms of WCA’s vision and for development in South Africa.

## **2. What aspects of the WCA Programme have been influential in bringing about change in participants?**

Community and context were factors which seemed to influence change in students. The structure of the WCA Programme, with its emphasis on volunteerism, both to give back to the community and to gain valuable work experience, is a likely factor influencing students toward a community focus. One of the co-founders of WCA is an African man and the organisation is built on a Biblical worldview. The values embraced by these cultural and religious viewpoints, have most likely influenced the outward focus of the programme and ultimately the students.

The theoretical lens of Transformative Learning introduces a critical perspective through which to view and explore the programme. As observer-researcher and also as a teacher, I was really interested in seeing how the programme was taught and how this was potentially influential in the change process of the students. It was clear that all the facilitators used critical questioning techniques in their classes, requiring students to think about their lives and the issues affecting them. This, along with other aspects of the programme seemed to foster transformative learning.

The organisation's worldview and use of the *'The Manual of Life'* as the primary reference point in the Leadership course seems to influence change in students. Depending on a person's own worldview, this could be seen in a positive or a negative light. Two of the life history students spoke to me in more depth on this issue and saw this as a positive influence. A line of questioning was taken to ascertain if the worldview was forced on students. From the responses it seemed that although a biblical worldview was introduced to students, it was not taught in a dictatorial or missionary approach, but in keeping with the style of teaching described already, of using questioning of assumptions, dialogue and discussion. However, there were 'hints' that some students see this as a negative aspect of the programme. I say this because during two of the group discussions, comments were made by students that some of the ideas taught by WCA conflicted with their beliefs but when I tried to probe further they did not want to elaborate. The study done by Momo (2009) reported a negative aspect of the programme being religious clashes in the class which arose from the differences between African beliefs in ancestor worship and the Christian belief system which WCA holds.

Emotional healing seemed to be a factor contributing to the change and restoration of students and seemed to be facilitated by the section of the Life Skills course on *'Healing of the Past'*. Furthermore, students and facilitators develop relationships of trust and disclosure, contributing to a supportive environment for healing and growth. Most of the facilitators have been students first, coming from similar communities, background and life challenges. This enables them to relate well to the students and to identify with their growth path, especially the challenges.

From the community experience, relationships of trust were developed and nurtured. In particular, the authenticity of the leaders in the organisation was an influential factor in the students' lives. It was important for them to see that what leaders taught they also lived out practically. When leaders were seen to be authentic, they became role-models for students. Students were able to look at the changes that leaders had made and evaluate how those changes were working out.

### **3. What personal and contextual factors have influenced change in participants?**

Personal histories of growing up in difficult circumstances may be fertile ground for transformative learning to take place. It is contexts of difficulty which often precipitate transformative learning and most of the students have grown up in contexts of difficulty. Such contexts require survival techniques, making the students resilient to change and

hardship, and possibly even causing them to change their frames of reference sub-consciously. This may have been particularly influential for this context because of the history of violence experienced in Kwazulu-Natal. Coming into the programme from this context could have prepared students to embrace the message of hope and direction which they encountered at WCA, and which they perhaps desperately needed in life.

The majority of the students are young adults, just out of school. This is a crucial stage of life involving choices about what to do next and what career to follow. It is a stage of life where young people need to find focus and direction for the future. In a context and environment in which opportunities and choices are limited due to high unemployment rates and lack of finances, this stage of life could be particularly overwhelming and frightening for students. This time of life could be seen as a contextual factor contributing to changes in participants.

A further factor which may have influenced some students and not others was the degree of readiness for change, and whether they were prepared to challenge their underlying assumptions or not. For example, Mandla was already shifting his mindset before he started the programme. Although the programme may have acted as a catalyst in the process, he was ready to make the changes. Aspects of the WCA Programme resonated with the direction he had started to take and possibly made him more ready to embrace other aspects of the programme.

The role of spending quality time alone in reflection, meditation and stillness was a personal factor which helped students to process the changes they were experiencing. This was seen most obviously through Nothando's story. Future research should explore the importance of such contemplative spaces for transformative learning and change.

## Limitations

As a small-scale qualitative study in the interpretivist paradigm, a limitation is that the study cannot make generalisations about all of the students going through the programme. It has been fore-grounded that the students chosen for the Life History aspect of the study were purposively chosen as candidates who had been most successful on the programme. While this serves one purpose, it limits the study in other ways. To evaluate the extent of the changes and the factors influencing change which have been observed here, a study with a different focus and sampling strategy would need to be conducted. An example of a potential bias as a result of the focus of the study being on successful students, was the

clash of belief systems. A different sample and a study from a critical paradigm would be a more suitable way to interrogate that issue.

A further limitation of the study was its resource constraints. Being an unfunded Masters study, there were limited financial and time resources available to the researcher.

Similarly, working as an individual novice researcher at the research site, could have limited the study in terms of lack of expertise. If a more experienced researcher had been involved in the fieldwork of the study, they may have been able to provide additional insights and perspectives in the field.

However, working independently provided different opportunities and insight. Some reflections on this learning process follow.

## Reflections on the Research Process

Conducting a study of this nature for the first time has its own learning curve with challenges and insights. The study gave me the opportunity to put into practice what I had learnt through the taught part of the programme. Perhaps my most difficult transition was the shift of thinking from my background in pure science research in the positivist paradigm, to this qualitative and interpretative approach in the social sciences. One challenge was to find the right balance of rigour and quality in the analysis, without being ‘too scientific’. It was only in actually doing the study, that it was really possible to start to understand the qualitative analysis process more fully.

A surprising aspect of the research process, was realising how much more difficult it is to write up your own study (primary research) than to write papers on other people’s work. While doing assignments for the module work and using secondary data sources to create an argument or support a point of view, the writing process came fairly naturally to me and much of the time was enjoyable. While it was exciting to do my own study on a subject I had chosen, it surprised me how much more difficult a process this was, perhaps partly because of the extent of data generated from a qualitative case study, and of having to analyse and make sense of this amount of data.

The study has helped me become more critically reflective. The first example of this is in my own teaching practice. Becoming aware of the concepts of Transformative Learning Theory helped me look at my own practice and to ask critical questions to improve how and why I teach the way I do. I started asking myself questions like “What am I teaching? What are the key concepts?” (content reflection); “How am I teaching it? How could I

teach it differently?” (process reflection) and “Why am I teaching it like this?” (premise reflection). This challenged me at times to look at other ways of teaching concepts, and at other times confirmed that my teaching methods were already effective.

The second example is that critical reflection helped me challenge my own perceptions of success. As a goal-driven person, I have always been good at meeting deadlines, seeing it as part of being successful at something. When due to various reasons, I struggled to meet those deadlines while doing this study, and had to shift my plans for completion numerous times, I had to re-examine my definitions of success. I had to deal with the emotional disappointments of not meeting deadlines, while asking myself critical questions about why I was struggling and how I was going to overcome the obstacles.

Although more examples could be given of learning that I am conscious of, I also know that much learning took place at another level, which is more difficult to articulate or define, more at an unconscious level of knowing. It has been a difficult but interesting learning curve, one I hope to continue to grow in and develop.

## Recommendations

WCA is open to sharing their ideas and model with others, and have a network of other organisations who have already adopted their model. As a non-profit organisation, they do not have a business agenda or a mindset to withhold their model for monetary gain. This means that many of the principles and successes of the programme could be used in other contexts and adapted in other areas. For example, many organisations doing this kind of work would not want to have the same emphasis on the Bible as the foundation of the Leadership course, but they could still apply values-based teaching of Leadership skills. The need for interventions such as this is vast, particularly in light of the challenges South Africa faces with regard to the number of youth who are not in employment, education or training.

WCA and other organisations could learn from the successful application of this programme to other contexts, particularly amongst young unemployed adults who have become disillusioned by their circumstances. The study has examined the WCA programme, thereby only including the 10% of Life Skills students who continue to the Leadership programme. WCA could draw on some of the findings about factors influencing change in those who have been successful on the full programme, in order to



revise or enhance the Life Skills course. Alternatively, they could explore ways to extend their course offerings to a wider group of Life Skills Students.

A similar study, but from a critical paradigm, would be a helpful way for the organisation to critically reflect on their programme and to challenge some of the assumptions which they hold as an organisation. Similarly, this type of study would be useful for other organisations with similar development goals, to learn from what is working at WCA, but to contextualise it for their own situations. For example, to investigate the third research question about personal factors influencing change in more depth, one could critically explore what makes some students change and others not change.

From some of the preliminary insights gained during the study, a number of other possible research studies could be undertaken to understand aspects of transformative learning in a South African context. Firstly, the nature of change over time could be studied using a longitudinal design. Secondly, gendered ways of learning in a transformative context could be investigated, and finally, future research could explore the tentative theory proposed at the end of Chapter 5 about the WCA Programme (or other similar programmes) as a catalyst for change.

## Conclusion

The findings of the study were positive and insightful, perhaps unsurprisingly due to the choice of exemplary students of the WCA Programme. The value which such an intentional choice of participants can offer is the depth of understanding of what has made their stories so positive. While such findings cannot be generalised in the sense that quantitative studies can, insights gained from success stories could be used as models for other organisations with similar goals and objectives. Other organisations wishing to implement a similar programme could incorporate factors of WCA's success into their own contexts, without trying to replicate all of it.

The study has shown the complex and holistic nature of transformative learning in a South African context. It is a context which has been very influenced by Western thinking, but now as a democratic country has embraced its non-Western roots. In this context we have seen how it is sometimes necessary to use critical thinking to help people from non-Western cultures embrace once again the value systems of their ancestors. On the other hand, critical thinking has also been used in this context to challenge African

belief systems. This demonstrates the nature of critical thinking, which is able to put anything under scrutiny.

From the study we have seen that it is possible to foster transformative learning in practice in order to achieve positive change in the lives of students, but that the nature of such learning is complex and multifaceted, including multiple layers of context, relationships, culture, spirituality, emotional learning, cognitive learning and many internal factors.

The history and needs of South Africa discussed in Chapter 1 indicate that more of what has been achieved at WCA is desperately needed in South Africa, and on a much larger scale. This case study offers some hope and direction for this important work.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Ethical Clearance



**UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL**  
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YAKWAZULU-NATALI

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28 June 2011

Ms AJ Cox (871871599)  
School of Adult Education  
Faculty of Education  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Ms Cox

**PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0402/011M**  
**PROJECT TITLE: An exploration of an adult education programme and how it has fostered change in participants**

In response to your application dated 23 June 2011, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

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

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

Yours faithfully

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

cc. Supervisor: Dr V John  
cc. Mr N Memela/Ms T Mnisi

  
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## Appendix B: Permission to Conduct Research at WCA



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PO Box 3328, Polo Pony 3624  
Tel: (031) 769-1238 Fax: (086) 530-5160  
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Email: [admin@wca-sa.org](mailto:admin@wca-sa.org) PBO #: 930018909  
Non Profit Reg No: 042-260-NPO  
Section 21 Reg. No. CK2004/024889/08

*Empowering People to Change the World!*

### Approval to Conduct Research

World Changers Academy welcomes Amanda Cox to do a research study on our organization, particularly looking at the change that occurs in participant's lives. We are very grateful to have such an opportunity, and would like to have a copy of the research report and summary of findings, if one is available, at the end of the study.

We impose no conditions on the research except the ones that she has imposed on herself in her research proposal of confidentiality of participants, especially in areas where they may discuss sensitive personal information, such as HIV/AIDS status, etc.

Regards,

Joe White  
Founder/Public Officer

Board of Directors: S Hamilton (Chairman), D Wilson (Treasurer), J Chats (Secretary)

# Appendix C: Informed Consent Forms

## Current Leadership students (Data Source 1)

*LEADERSHIP STUDENTS  
(DATA SOURCE 1)*

Informed Consent Form – Current Students

Research Project: Mini-dissertation for Masters in Adult Education

**Project Title:** An exploration of an adult education program and how it has fostered change in participants

**Project Aim:** To understand the nature of the changes that have taken place in individuals lives as a result of the WCA life skills and leadership courses.

**Researcher:** Amanda Jane Cox 031-201-0357 OR 083-337-6257  
[coxaj@telkomsa.net](mailto:coxaj@telkomsa.net)

**Supervisor:** Dr Vaughn John 033-260-5069  
[johnv@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:johnv@ukzn.ac.za)

**Participants:** Candidates of a WCA course currently running

**Conditions and rights of participation:**

- Participation is voluntary.
- One of your classes will be observed.
- A focus group will be conducted.
- The focus group will be recorded using a dicta-phone.
- You will remain anonymous throughout the project, to ensure confidentiality.
- At your discretion, you will allow me access to documents which you consider relevant to the research and which you would like to show me.
- If you need further information, please contact the researcher or the supervisor of the project (contact details above).

**Declaration:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (Full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and that I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

## Leaders/Facilitators (Data Source 2)

DATA SOURCE 2  
(FACILITATORS/LEADERS)

### Informed Consent Document – Course & Organisational Leaders

#### Research Project: Mini-dissertation for Masters in Adult Education

- Project Title:** An exploration of an adult education program and how it has fostered change in participants
- Project Aim:** To understand the nature of the changes that have taken place in individuals lives as a result of the WCA life skills and leadership courses.
- Researcher:** Amanda Jane Cox 031-201-0357 OR 083-337-6257  
[coxaj@telkomsa.net](mailto:coxaj@telkomsa.net)
- Supervisor:** Dr Vaughn John 033-260-5069  
[johnv@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:johnv@ukzn.ac.za)
- Participants:** Course and organisational leaders

#### **Conditions and rights of participation:**

- Participation is voluntary.
- You will be interviewed on one occasion for a period of about 1 hour.
- The interview will be recorded using a dicta-phone.
- After the interviews have taken place, and written into an account, you will be asked to check that your responses have been accurately represented.
- At your discretion, you will allow me access to documents which you consider relevant to the research and which you would like to show me.
- If you need further information, please contact the researcher or the supervisor of the project (contact details above).

#### **Declaration:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (Full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and that I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

## Life History – Successful past students (Data Source 4)

### Informed Consent Document – Life Histories

#### Research Project: Mini-dissertation for Masters in Adult Education

- Project Title:** An exploration of an adult education programme and how it has fostered change in participants
- Project Aim:** To understand the nature of the changes that have taken place in individuals lives as a result of the WCA life skills and leadership courses.
- Researcher:** Amanda Jane Cox 031-201-0357 OR 083-337-6257  
[coxaj@telkomsa.net](mailto:coxaj@telkomsa.net)
- Supervisor:** Dr Vaughn John 033-260-5069  
[johnv@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:johnv@ukzn.ac.za)
- Participants:** Candidates who have participated in WCA life skills AND leadership courses

#### **Conditions and rights of participation:**

- Participation is voluntary.
- You will be interviewed on two or three separate occasions for a period of about 1 hour each time.
- Due to language differences, if it is necessary, an interpreter will be used to assist with the interview.
- The interview will be recorded using a dicta-phone.
- You will remain anonymous throughout the project, to ensure confidentiality.
- After the interviews have taken place and your story has been written, you will be asked to check that it has been accurately represented.
- At your discretion, you will allow me access to documents which you consider relevant to the research and which you would like to show me.
- If you need further information, please contact the researcher or the supervisor of the project (contact details above).

#### **Declaration:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (Full name of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and that I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE



## Appendix D: Research Instruments

### Current Leadership students (Data Source 1)

#### Course Participants – Data Collection Instruments

LEADERSHIP STUDENTS  
(DATA SOURCE 1)

Purpose: For current course participants

- This instrument intends to investigate the way that the classes are taught, to gain insights into teaching style, opportunity for dialogue, critical reflection, constructivist learning

#### Observation:

*(Observe a class of the current course participants using an unstructured approach to get a sense of how the course is taught and how the participants engage. The following are guidelines of what I will be looking for, while also recording other insightful observations.)*

- Facilitation style – the way the class is conducted
- Relationship dynamics: Participants to facilitator and participants to participants
- Opportunities for dialogue
- Opportunities and freedom for critical reflection
- Level of participation or discussion from class
- Participants engagement with the material
- Power relations – and ‘giving up of power’ by facilitator
- Student self-awareness (understanding of selves)

#### Focus Group:

*(Following the observation, a focus group will take place with the aim of understanding the dynamics of classroom experience from the **participant's** perspectives. Through the group discussion, the following topics will be discussed to obtain a sense of perceptions emerging from the group.)*

Topics for the dialogue/discussion will be:

- Motivations for participating on the course (Why)
- Expectations of what the course will achieve (What)
- Experiences of the course (What)
- Limitations of the course
- What opportunities were provided for reflection
- How has the course influenced or affected you
- Would you recommend the course to friends? Why or why not?

## Leaders/Facilitators (Data Source 2)

### Organisational Leaders – Data Collection Instrument

(DATA SOURCE 2)  
(FACILITATORS/LEADERS)

Purpose: For organisational leaders to:

- Give insight into their goals and intentions for participants of the courses
- Indicate how they evaluate or assess whether their goals have been accomplished
- Identify specific changes which they have observed in participants
- Identify what factors they consider influential in participants changes

Interview questions: (Two or three leaders of the organisation or facilitators of courses – individual interviews of about 1 hour each)

- What are the goals or intentions of World Changer's Academy (WCA) in providing the Life Skills Course / Leadership Course?
- How do you gauge or assess whether these goals have been met?
- What makes a particular community a good target audience for the Life Skills Course?
- What types of change do you see in participants completing the courses?
- What factors seem to contribute towards changes in participants?
- Describe the link between the Life Skills and the leadership course in terms of any selection procedure, requirements, who can or cannot go on to the leadership course?
- What support structures are offered to students while they are going through the courses and also after the courses?
- Are the courses designed to allow participants to reflect on experiences? Describe or explain these aspects of the program.
- Are students empowered through the course? If so how?
- Does the course allow participants to
  - Challenge assumptions?
  - Question what they are being taught?
  - Dialogue and engage with facilitators in a way that is empowering to them?

If so, explain why you say so and how that takes place.

- Choose one success story and tell me about that person's journey.

## Life History – Successful past students (Data Source 4)

### Life Histories – Data Collection Instruments

DATA SOURCE 4 – SUCCESSFUL  
PAST  
STUDENTS

Purpose:- For participants who have completed both courses to tell their life stories, especially to

- Include significant times, experiences, relationships, places or people
- Reveal mind-sets, beliefs, assumptions and expectations at various times of their lives
- Identify what factors they attribute to changes they have experienced.

Interview 1: *(This part of the interview will be done as a group – with all the participants being introduced to the interview process together and doing the collages at the same time)*

This will be an informal workshop activity. I will bring along pieces of paper, magazines for cutting up, pictures, pens and other drawing materials. Participants will be asked to draw or do a collage in the form of a time-line, which show important people, places, times, seasons, experiences in their lives.

Interview 2: *(This part of the interview will be done individually – with the researcher and if necessary, an interpreter)* Collages from Interview 1 will be used to initiate and guide the discussion. Further questions and probes used to guide the interview will be:

- Significant life events and relationships - positive and negative
- Difficult experiences and what has been learnt through them
- Situations which have prompted change in your life
- Early family life/growing up: Where, with whom, interests, responsibilities, schooling
- Current life experiences and circumstances
- World Changer's Academy courses
  - Motivations/purposes for participating
  - Experiences of the courses – positive and negative
  - Results or outcomes achieved as a result of the courses
  - Limitations, disappointments or unmet expectations
- Reflections, Views & Values about life
  - Attitude to life and what was important prior to you participating in the World Changers Academy (WCA) courses. How did you see the world?
  - Attitude to life and what is important to you now.
    - How do you see the world now?
    - Do you see the world differently now? In what ways?
    - Do you see yourself differently? In what ways?
  - During times of change – what factors influenced the change? What are the things that made it possible for change in your life to take place? What was the process of change like?
  - Do you think/reflect about your life? How and in what ways this takes place?

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**Life Histories – Data Collection Instruments** (DATA SOURCE 4)  
CONTINUED

Self-Reflective Questions for me when doing the Life Histories:

1. Does the story have indicators of a disorienting dilemma?
2. Did participants undergo a reflective process which involved critical assessment of their underlying assumptions (Worldview)?
  - a. Epistemic
  - b. Psychological
  - c. Socio-cultural
3. What was the role of other people in their process of self reflection?
  - a. Relationships, community and role of OTHERS
4. Has the person been empowered?
  - a. Does the person have a stronger sense of identity, of confidence
5. Were assumptions or beliefs challenged? How did this take place?
6. Have their experienced difficult or hurtful experiences which they have used to reflect, assess and change their perspective?
7. What evidence is there that they have questioned their assumptions?

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