

Positioning 'the self':

Comparative case studies of first generation students' academic identities when
home meets campus in a rapidly transforming higher education context.

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Abstract

This research offers an in-depth view of the self-positioning of a sample of seven first generation students in an extended curriculum programme for Arts and Design at the Durban University of Technology. This comparative case study aims to examine how these participants took up, held or resisted positions, during the transitional process of entering a university. The students' responses were elicited in order to explore the development of student academic identity in this stage of late adolescence.

Using positioning theory as an analytical framework, a visual methodology was employed to generate data during photo-elicitation interviews. For these, participants were invited to take metaphorical and non-mimetic photographs, in response to the prompt "Take photographs that show you as a student at home and on campus". Themes that surfaced were examined using positioning theory where the storylines, speech acts and rights and duties form the apex points of the positioning triangle that acts as a framework to analyse the participants' narratives.

The study revealed the ways in which participants positioned their home communities and thereby developed their own agency. The majority of the participants used their self-positioning in relation to these home communities to build their academic identities. It was evident in the data that certain role models and peers played a significant part in such self-positioning. The rural to urban migration described by some of the participants indicated that the transition students navigated as they developed their academic identities was profound. The university was often perceived in this process as a powerful structure which offered opportunities but could simultaneously be experienced as alienating. Financial challenges added to the complexity of this experience. The development of student academic identity was evident in positioning statements of the participants and, in some cases, a professional identity was revealed. The analysis indicated that the participants were able to use their self-positioning to overcome many of their challenges through the creation of agential power and resilience. Furthermore the emergence of academic identity seemed to give rise to a positive view of 'the self' in relation to the period of transition to university.

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List of Abbreviations

CHE - Council on Higher education

DUT - Durban University of Technology

ECP - Extended Curriculum Programme

FAD - Faculty of Arts and Design

FGS - First Generation Student

HEI - Higher Education Institution

HES - Higher Education Studies

SASSE - South African Survey of Student Engagement

UoT - University of Technology

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Chapter One – Background and context

1.1 Introduction

This research explores first generation students' experiences in their transitional process into an institution of higher learning. It is concerned with the ways in which students position 'the self' and make sense of their movement between home and campus as they develop an academic identity. These positions are elicited using a visual methodology whereby the participants are invited to reflect on their 'selves' through taking photographs. In an increasingly globalised world, higher education qualifications are the means through which both individuals and nations remain competitive and relevant. The complex problems that threaten human survival and dignity, such as widespread poverty and environmental degradation, require creative, socially just and reflective solutions. It is with these understandings and the need for a more equitable distribution of wealth that some societies have sought to widen access to tertiary education (Abbott-Chapman, 2011; Morrow & Ackerman, 2012; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013; Tinto, 2006).

Despite South Africa's post-1994 political and social history, and the demographic changes in access to South African higher education¹, tertiary qualifications remain largely out of the reach of young black South Africans (Boughey, 2013; Ellery & Baxen, 2015; Kwenda, Ntuli, & Gwatidzo, 2015). This is evident in the consistently low university participation, throughput and graduation rates (Scott et al. 2007; CHE, 2013; Lewin and Mawoyo 2014).

Many of these students, especially those from working class backgrounds, would be the first in their families to have access to higher education (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014; Pascarella, 2006; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013). Students entering higher education as the first in their family are known as first generation students (FGS). The use of the term 'first generation student' can be considered problematic.

¹ These changes may be seen in the light of the expectation of the 'massification' of South African higher education by the public. The post-1994 democratic government not only views as important the provision of tertiary education to our youth but in addition increased government funding, in the form of student loans, is being made available to attempt to ensure that students from all socio-economic backgrounds have a chance of gaining entry to tertiary education. For instance, at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), the institution of the cases studies, in 2013 there were 76000 applications for 6000 first year places. This situation is echoed in many other South African higher education institutions (Bawa, 2013).

A concern arises as to whether the term masks other issues that students face as barriers to academic integration and success such as race, class and language. Some researchers suggest that the term could be used to reinforce the idea that students not fitting into the 'mainstream' have a 'deficit' (Heymann and Carolissen 2011). I have thus used this term with caution in this study but with an understanding that first generation status has a significant impact on students' experiences of higher education. Many South African researchers are currently attempting to re-envision a higher education system that provides sufficient support to reverse these low student retention trends which are considered unacceptable (CHE, 2013; Bawa, 2013; CHE 2014). As South African higher education responds to the growing understanding that if access is to relate to student academic success and not become a "revolving door" (Tinto, 2006), then it can be argued that we need to grow student engagement through acknowledging the complexity of the needs, aspirations and experiences of our students.

When studying trends in higher education it is important to include research on all sectors of the South African higher education landscape which incorporates traditional and comprehensive universities and universities of technology.² The Durban University of Technology (DUT), the institution from which this case study is drawn, is one of six Universities of Technology (UoT) in South Africa, and caters to some 26 000 students spread over seven campuses in Durban and Pietermaritzburg (Bawa, 2014). Of these DUT students, 78% are additional language English speakers and 75% are FGSs according to the South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE)(2010, pp. 14-15). The R300 million in National Student Financial Aid Scheme loans to DUT students (Bawa, 2013) and "the fact that the majority of DUT students are from the lower living standards measure categories" (Bawa, 2014, unpagged) indicate that national issues of poverty and inequality may impact on DUT students and their chance of participation and success in tertiary education (Council on Higher education, 2014). When examining the many and varied reasons for low throughput rates, connections between low income and first generation status have been acknowledged (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Tinto, 2006). While the link between economic background and student success is shown in research (Boughey, 2005; Jansen, 2009), Morrow (2007) argues that in order to have a socially just higher education system, universities need to design

² The 2015 DUT Strategic Plan states that the DUT mission should be to provide a teaching and learning environment that: "values and supports the University community; promotes excellence in learning and teaching, technology transfer and applied research and external engagement that promotes innovation and entrepreneurship through collaboration and partnership" (Durban University of Technology, 2015, p. 6).

curricula and teach in transformative and inclusive ways so that all students are afforded “epistemological access”.

I have been motivated, as an academic development practitioner currently working in a writing centre³ in a UoT, to study FGS experience through examining the self-positioning which occurs in the process of academic identity formation. Therefore, this study which involves a group of first generation extended curriculum programme (ECP) students, utilised a visual method specifically chosen to facilitate self-reflection of their home and campus experiences and related identity shifts as new students. The insights are sought in the hope of gaining a better understanding of the “process of transition” (Ellery & Baxen, 2015, p. 93) as FGSs enter the tertiary environment, in order to create the kinds of campus environments and student experiences that best facilitate teaching and learning in a supportive manner. In addition, by focusing on students in the ECP some insight was sought into how students from that particular context experience their first year transitions on a campus where they are apart from the mainstream. Furthermore, it was important to acknowledge the ways in which attending a UoT might impact on student identity. The particularities of UoTs in this national context and the particular one of this study is explored from both a historical and contemporary perspective in the following section.

Through this research I explored what the rights and duties were that constructed the positions that FGSs refer to in their experiences of home and campus. The storylines that the participants drew on to construct their experiences of home and campus were used in the analysis of their positioning. Tentative deductions could be made as to how these positions were held or resisted and subsequently contributed to the development of student academic identity at the point of transition from home to campus life. I sought such reflections to inform academic development in my context and to assist when planning for the kind of campus environment that would best suit the students and foster student success, both academic and social.

³ The writing centre at DUT, staffed by peer and professional tutors, provides feedback to any member of the university community on all kinds of writing and functions within the academic or educational development ambit of the university. Feedback may be face to face in individual or small group consultations or online. In addition writing centre practitioners provide workshops at the request of faculty to work with students in developing discipline specific writing. Globally, writing centres function on the belief that working with writers to develop good writing habits is more powerful than working to improve individual examples of writing (North, 1984).

When examining students' experience of higher education in South Africa, in addition to looking at first generation extended curriculum students' perceptions of their experiences when in transition to a university environment, it emerges as important to consider the possible impact of the changes in student enrolment profiles on students' 'in' and 'outside' classroom experiences and on their academic success (Badat, 2007) and this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. Pascarella (2006) notes that when reviewing research on the impact of university on students' lives in the USA, it would seem that there are many variables, for example, the type of college. He makes the case for further research into the specifics of the student experience taking into account the full range of types of students. Biggs (2012) suggests that educational research tends to focus on the theory of learning rather than the contexts in which learning takes place, while Haggis (2003), in a critique of the misperceptions of deep and surface approaches to learning theory, indicates that it's not the contexts in which learning takes place and which are under the 'control' of the teacher that influence learning, but rather the personal attributes and "understanding of contexts" of individual students (Haggis, 2003, p. 94). It is this thinking that brings together my interest as a researcher in the experience and context of FGSs in the UoT in which I work.

This chapter provides some background to the context of my work in academic development at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), as this provided the impetus and sense of obligation from which this research project arose. I include a consideration of the broad higher education landscape in South Africa and a closer examination of the status of UoTs, both historic and current. Against this background it then becomes important to explore how academic development, through the provision of extended curriculum programmes or foundation programmes, was and is currently positioned at the DUT.

1.2 South African Universities of Technology: A brief history

A South African University of Technology is a particular kind of higher education institution. To better understand the backdrop to the study, it is important to understand the history of UoTs drawn from studies on their formation (Cooke, Naidoo, & Sattar, 2010; du Pré, 2009, 2009a), how they are differentiated, and in what ways they fit into the broader current socio-political higher education landscape.

With the creation of Colleges of Advanced Technical Education in South Africa in 1967, the technical higher education system became one of control and regulation by the apartheid government education

system. From 1969 to 1979 curricula were centrally developed and controlled by the national Department of Education. Professional bodies had more influence on curricula than the lecturers and in the initial stages of their development the educational offerings at UoT's were largely controlled by government structures with examinations being set, marked and moderated nationally. In 1979 the Colleges of Advanced Technical Education changed to technikons and with this name change permission to set their own internal examinations was granted, while external moderation was arranged by individual institutions. Between 1980 and 2003 as South Africa moved towards democratic change, 'convener technikons' were established in an effort to make the development of curricula more efficient and to attempt to lessen any negative effects of government control of the curricula. These 'convenor technikons' were selected technikons which were seen as the curriculum leaders for specific programmes. In this system the control of the curricula was decentralized from the Department of Education into the hands of individual institutions. In 1993 the technikon sector was granted permission to award degrees and technikons became known as Universities of Technology. In 2003 with the abolishment of the 'convenor technikon' system, DUT was given UoT nomenclature in 2006 (after initially being called the Durban Institute of Technology), despite still functioning as a technikon up until the end of 2007. DUT is the product of the first South African merger of two higher education institutions (HEI), the ML Sultan Technikon (an institution that catered predominantly for the South African Indian population) and Technikon Natal (a former white institution). This merger process started in 2002 and was completed in 2007.

In March 2002, 15 South African technikons merged to form five UoTs. This new direction for former technikons has needed committed funding and investment. These developments have to some extent left UoTs grappling with their status and their visions and missions in the range of tertiary educational offerings (du Pré, 2009). A further factor impacting on the development and stabilization of UoTs is that the inherited lack of resources and current funding models continue to disadvantage UoTs and their students. UoTs came about with their broad mandate being to add diversity to the offerings of higher education institutions in South Africa in order to ensure "technology transfer and international competitiveness" (du Pré, 2009, p. 81). In addition, UoTs as former technikons have a mandate to focus on education that prepares students for the workplace and to be members of professions. This diversity is further seen to include the potential for equal status as HEIs which provide education with a different purpose, whereby the "application of research is technology-informed" (du Pré, 2009, p. 62).

In a statement about the current position of UoTs in South African higher education the current South African minister of higher education and training, Dr B.E. Nzimande, in a speech given at the seventh annual international South African Technology Network Conference in October 2014, highlighted that HEIs should develop and differentiate their educational offerings according to the needs of the economy and society. He stated that there is room for a range of HEIs catering to these different needs. He warned against UoTs losing their strengths in the area of developing technical scarce skills in their endeavours to develop their research and post graduate programmes (Ndzimande, 2014, p. 3). The reasons for this “mission” drift in the UoT sector can be understood in the light of the current funding framework which largely works against UoTs as they struggle to increase their research footprint while concurrently catering to a large undergraduate pool of students (Ndzimande, 2014, p. 2). Furthermore, the current funding formulas continue to advantage historically white HEIs. During the apartheid era these institutions benefitted financially from government support and were better able to fund research. These institutions continue to benefit financially from the resources (human, physical and financial) that they accumulated during the inequitable history of HE resource provision (Bunting, 2002). In Nzimande’s call for more carefully planned differentiation in higher education, he stated that the role of UoTs should be to: “address scarce skills especially at technician and technology levels, support and strengthen the Technical Vocational Education and Training College System, provide work integrated learning and work placements and improve governance and administration in our university system” (Nzimande, 2014, p. 3-4).

In more recent years at DUT, under the leadership of Vice Chancellor Professor Ahmed Bawa (2010-2016), DUT has embarked on an institution wide Curriculum Renewal Project whereby some academic programmes are motivating for degree offerings over diplomas. At the time of the writing of this research report, DUT was in the process of introducing 30% General Education modules into the curriculum for all first year students. This was envisaged as an opportunity to allow for a transformation in curricula and ways of teaching and learning, and possibly the very ways in which the university perceives itself. In such ways, the struggle for institutional identity continues and I suggest that this curricular transformation might impact on how faculty position the university and its institutional identity and that this changing identity might ultimately filter through to the students. While a more widely based education is valued as a way of developing a critical citizenry (General Education Task Team, 2012) there is an argument that it will need to be recognised as important by incoming students if this aim is to be achieved. These changes in institutional culture and identity may need to be addressed

by future research. Due to its relevance for this study, in the next section I focus particularly on how extended curriculum provision has been conceptualised and how this has impacted on issues of academic literacy and identity.

1.3 Extended Curriculum Provision in higher education

In this section I discuss extended curriculum provision in higher education and at DUT and how the conceptualisation of this response to academic development provision has changed over the years and impacts on understandings of academic literacy and student perceptions and attitudes to this curriculum. In addition the links between academic literacy and academic identity development are introduced and will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Two on pg.23.

There are many important reasons for the provision of extended curricula in higher education, and not least of these is a chance for entering students to have a year to acclimatise to the increased learning challenges, both in and out of the classroom, of entering a new discipline at the tertiary level (CHE, 2013). Extended curriculum programmes provide a mixture of mainstream and support subjects which together allow for a 'gentle' introduction to a first year student's field of study (Garraway, 2009). At DUT the Arts and Design ECP students are not eligible for National Student Financial Aid Scheme funding as the subjects are not considered mainstream. The foundational subjects taught are: Communication, Theory of Colour, Drawing, Arts and Design Appreciation, Two Dimensional Studies and Three Dimensional Studies. This ECP is however subsidised by the Department of Higher Education and Training. (S. Rambharos, personal communication, 25 August, 2016).

At DUT, in the Faculty of Arts and Design (FAD), the ECP programme has undergone many name changes which could be seen to reflect the changing understandings of academic literacy over the years. It is quite likely that these name changes and the long history of academic development provision of this nature within the faculty are impacting on our current conceptualisation of student academic development and student success. This Extended Curriculum Programme, as it is currently known and which now draws students from six of the FAD programmes, went from a 'bridging' to a 'foundation' to an 'augmented' course. These name changes reflect the changes in thinking around academic development in South African tertiary education. Broadly speaking Boughey (2007) identifies two ways of conceptualising the power discourse inherent in teaching and learning. The "liberal discourse" sees

what happens in an educational institution as being neutral and free from societal pushes and pulls while the 'responsibility' for learning, and student success, lies within the individual learner. The "structural discourse" however, constructs teaching and learning as social. In other words how a student learns, how a lecturer teaches and what they value are as a result of the nature of our society at large (Boughey, 2007, p. 8). Linked to these global conceptions of teaching and learning, in South African higher education, academic development has gone through changes from a belief in providing "academic support" to the student, to providing a learning environment to facilitate and integrate "academic development"; and more recently to understanding the importance of "institutional development" (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014, pp. 63-64). Currently, even though funded by the government grant for extended programme provision, the Arts and Design ECP is functioning mostly as a skills based foundational course for students who have had no exposure to art at school level. This is not without value and certainly, according to recent DUT statistics, there is an average success rate of 87% for first time entering ECP students and 86% for all ECP students (Rambharos, 2015). Although the student success rate in the DUT ECP offerings is pleasing, this model of academic development remains rooted in the academic support or "liberal discourse" (Boughey, 2007, p. 8) with the lecturers and students largely marginalised from the mainstream. As a consequence, it is apparent how the pedagogical practices of institutions of higher learning and the unspoken or hidden curriculum requirements are influenced by educational philosophy and government policy and funding models.

Important areas of learning which receive additional attention in an ECP are the requirements of academic reading and writing in tertiary study. These skills are needed for the rigorous demands of learning and teaching in higher education and the National Reading Strategy underscores reading, and its potential for economic freedom, as one of the keys to success in life. Poor readers are 'excluded from much communication in today's world' (South Africa. Department of Education, 2008, p. 4). Historical disadvantage and poor socioeconomic conditions have contributed to poor teacher competency, teaching conditions that are not conducive to learning and only 7% of South African schools having libraries (South Africa. Department of Education, 2008). This lack of access to books in homes, schools and communities hinders children's reading and literacy development. The National Reading Strategy suggests that "poor matriculation results are in part due to the low levels of students' reading skills. University students – even those enrolled for the languages and the arts – are not proficient in reading in terms of international standards" (South Africa. Department of Education, 2008, p. 5). Therefore the

ECP curriculum, where academic reading and writing are given time and attention, is a valuable way in which to ensure that students have exposure to the norms and requirements of tertiary academic study.

My teaching experience in the Faculty of Arts and Design was as a part-time lecturer in the Extended Curriculum Programme (2006-2013). It is from this class that I invited my participants for this study, partly because the students were from the domain that I had best known over the years, and partly because this was where my teaching experience lay. In the ECP class one finds students enrolling in six of the DUT arts and design programmes (Interior Design, Jewellery Design, Fine Art, Graphic Design, Fashion Design and Photography), thus the sample was drawn from a range of programmes. For a student entering the DUT Faculty of Arts and Design, to be afforded the opportunity to study in the Arts and Design ECP which is highly subsidised, is a significant opportunity. Unfortunately, because the ECP has been structured as a stand-alone one year foundation course, it is seen as mostly separate from the mainstream and this is sometimes not viewed in a positive light by students entering the institution. In my lecturing experience over seven years, when talking informally to the students about their views of the ECP, they have often told me that they feel different to the other students or excluded from the mainstream.

The ways in which FGSs position themselves in relation to their transitional experience of entering a university was elicited in order to explore the development of student academic identity in this stage of late adolescence. In the article 'What is literacy?' Gee (1989) explains how literacies must be thought of in broad terms and show how we read, write, speak, think and act. Therefore, as a first generation tertiary student, developing 'literacy' at a university means mastering the discipline specific codes that span all areas of campus life (Boughey, 2013). In plotting the changes in global thinking around communication, literacy and how this may impact on how academic development practitioners have provided for students' needs, Boughey (2013, p. 3) shows that many of our understandings, in our construction of language as a neutral resource, have led to our conceiving of students as having a 'language problem'. Any 'blame' around a lack of academic success was apportioned to the student in what came to be known as the "deficit model" of student development (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 368). In addition, Ellery and Baxen (2015, p. 94) suggest that "academic development initiatives" have been largely "predicated upon a discourse of student deficit". In this research I considered a broader and possibly more nuanced look at the student experience with a methodology which was designed to

surface all aspects of the transitional experience that the participants deemed to be of relevance and how these impacted on identity.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I provided a brief overview of trends in South African higher education, universities of technology and extended curriculum provision in order to contextualize this research historically and socio-politically. This context is necessary in this study to give greater depth to the understanding and interpretation of the self-positioning and subsequent academic identity development of first- generation students in an extended curriculum programme at the DUT.

In Chapter Two I explain the call for the kind of research that considers the depth of the student experience and also consider in particular the case of the FGS. How language, identity and academic literacy intertwine in a university environment is explored. The following chapter also explains in detail how positioning theory operates to give a nuanced view of the student experience.

Chapter Two – Literature and theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

This research explored the storylines first generation UoT extended curriculum programme Arts and Design students drew on to construct their experiences of home and campus. Positioning theory, as will be discussed in this chapter, enabled me to investigate the rights and duties that constructed the positions that these students referred to in their transitional experiences as they developed their academic identities. In this chapter I review selected published studies from the field of Higher Education Studies (HES) which relate to identity in order to understand some of the current issues faced by HE students. These trends, such as massification and the increase in the participation levels of FGSs, have influenced the sector significantly at both an institutional and individual level in the ways that it responds to the shifting student and state needs.

This chapter gives an initial overview of some of the current research in HES as it responds to the constantly changing needs of students. Therefore I take into account as broad an understanding of the student and their experience as possible. This examination of HES explored the notion of transitions to higher education, as it arguably underlies the experiences of many FGSs. In particular I look at identity as it relates to language, identity and the theoretical framework provided by positioning theory and identity and academic literacy. These themes are detailed in order to better understand the complexity of the social conditions at play when students and the university position themselves, their communities, peers and role models and each other at the time of transition into tertiary study.

2.2 Research into higher education student experience: a brief overview

A review of research literature in higher education student experience reveals that both globally and locally enrolment in higher education is increasing (Council on Higher education, 2014; Haggis, 2003; Hussey & Smith, 2010; Morrow & Ackerman) and along with this rise in numbers is evidenced an increase in the diversity of student populations⁴ (Boughey, 2013; Ellery & Baxen, 2015; Haggis, 2003;

⁴ Student diversity at DUT can be framed socio-politically, whereby a previously white, middle class English speaking student body is post-apartheid a predominantly black, IsiZulu speaking working class student body. This might differ from some global trends where perhaps diversity is seen in the age and language backgrounds of students. Another change in diversity would be

Hussey & Smith, 2010; Morrow & Ackerman, 2012; Stieha, 2010). It would seem too, that the drop-out rates⁵ globally and locally are equally troubling with close to half of first year students dropping out (Council on Higher education, 2013).

This study will use positioning theory as both a theoretical and an analytical framework and this will be discussed in further detail in 2.5. In this study participant positions will be drawn on through a photo-elicitation semi-structured interview. Dennen (2007) suggests that positioning theory has not been used in educational research which examines the written word. Stieha (2010), in her research in the USA, makes the case for doing more empirical studies on higher education which will draw on the individual lived experiences of students and suggests that in order to do this, researchers will need to work in relational ways that tease out the narratives of students as they go through an adjustment stage when entering higher education. This echoes observations by some South African research such as Bangeni and Kapp (2005, p. 3) which suggests that more longitudinal research is needed as well as research in which reflections on the “felt” or lived experiences of students are included. South African education researcher Mqgwashu (2009), gives the higher education community the benefit of his hindsight as well as his views from the inside of the higher education experience when he reflects on the narrative of his lived experiences as an IsiZulu speaking student. It must be noted at this point that although this study has limitations in that I, as a researcher, will always be an outsider to the experiences my student participants describe, this research process made an effort to facilitate the expression of the lived experiences of students in ways designed to bring out their reflections through the inclusion of narratives and the analysis of the student positions revealed. As research which looks at student academic identity through the analysis of the self-positioning evident in transcripts arising from a photo-elicitation interview (the photographs used in the photo-elicitation interview are taken by the participants), this methodology included how the process of using photographs allowed for a layering in the data generated. As suggested by Rose (2012), photographs work as a record of the real and as a

the number of FGs participating in South African higher education. The DUT SASSE 2010 showed 75%. At the time of writing the SASSE was being re-administered at DUT.

⁵ It is interesting to note that the language in which this trend is framed can be revealing, with some authors referring to student “departure”, “decisions” made around this option and the lack of “persistence and retention” (Morrow & Ackerman, 2012, p. 483).

further representation or interpretation of this 'real'. In this research the photographs added another layer where identity was seen to be performed or enacted within the photo-elicitation interview.

When looking at the student experience, one cannot rely only on quantitative data in order to understand behavioural phenomena (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; Stieha, 2010). Haggis (2003) offers a critique of higher education research conceptions of student learning and suggests that it is students' personal contexts which govern how they approach their learning in higher education. She criticizes higher education research for attempting to apply a scientific methodology to a complex, varied and changing social science field, that of student tertiary learning, and suggests that commenting on the 'context' or environment in which learning takes place is not helpful in understanding why students persist or succeed in their learning. Haggis (2003) argues that attempting to reconcile two different epistemological worldviews in the research into student behaviour and learning renders the research questionable. While the academy might consider certain learning experiences to be meaningful and important in the development of student learning, one cannot discount or ignore the many other personal experiences students bring to their learning situation which are possibly equally meaningful (Haggis, 2003). In acknowledgement of this criticism this study takes into consideration through the use of photographic metaphors, analysed using positioning theory, how the student participants might experience their transition into higher education, and consequently express their identities.

The idea of a transition to higher education is addressed by Hussey and Smith (2010, p. 156) who suggest that transitions are made up of changes in "attitudes and values as well as in knowledge, beliefs, understanding and skills" and may result in "a shift from one state of understanding, development and maturity to another" and this in turn will impact a student's self-identity and subsequently the way they live their life and approach their studies. In addition, the development of student academic identity is a site of transition as the process of becoming an active participant in a field of study requires the individual to take responsibility for the acquisition of knowledge and the impact of this in their life, both personal and social (Hussey & Smith, 2010). Vinson et al. (2010) suggest that research in higher education needs to focus more on the transitional process that students experience as they approach university study. They suggest that this process can be experienced as alienating due to large classes, the unfamiliarity of required learning methods and the remote nature of relationships between faculty and students. Thus the social and personal needs of students are considered by these authors to be of great importance, and they note the dearth of institutional programmes which address these needs at

this time of transition (Vinson et al., 2010). I acknowledge the importance of this time of transition for first year and in particular FGSs. In my lived experience I have noted how students seem to be vulnerable to high stress levels and possibly as a result the support structures available in the university are not sufficiently accessible to such a student.

This study's participants are FGSs and it has been noted by various scholars abroad (Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005) that very little is understood about the FGS and their lived experiences in tertiary level education. Bangeni and Kapp (2005, p. 3) propose that "in South Africa, research has tended to focus on the first-year students' experiences of entering into higher education institutions" and they further suggest that their research does not go further in order to "capture the felt experiences of living and studying in a radically different environment" (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005, p. 3). While extensive studies might throw light on broad trends around FGSs, the individual student experience, in order to be more fully understood, needs close and deep analysis to reveal the "highly specific" experiences that are unique to each environment and to different institutions (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011, p. 1389; Woosley & Shepler, 2011). While the lack of longitudinal studies is noted in the literature (Soria and Stebleton 2012; Pascarella et al. 2004 and Bangeni and Kapp 2005) and will not be addressed by this study, there is a call for more qualitative studies that will examine how FGSs experience tertiary education and how these experiences lead to academic success (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). This study specifically seeks to uncover the student experience of not only a particular set of FGSs, i.e. first year Arts and Design ECP UoT students, but takes into account an intersection of lived experience at a time of transition, that of the individual at home and on campus.

2.3 First generation students

As is suggested in the previous section, the FGS experience needs research that is responsive to the deep lived experience of these students. It is important to consider that FGSs might come from backgrounds where their families and communities possibly have a limited understanding of the experiences and expectations they are encountering in their daily lives on campus. Additionally, it is worth considering when looking at FGSs, how student engagement may facilitate or hinder student success. Researchers in the USA, Kuh, Bridges, and Hayek (2006), define engagement as the amount of purposive educational activity shown by a student and suggest that engagement is one of the prerequisites for student success. Other possible factors necessary for student success are satisfaction

with the university environment, sufficient acquisition of knowledge and 'soft' skills such as perseverance (Kuh, Bridges and Hayek, 2006). Research by Pike and Kuh (2005) suggests that poor student engagement, evidenced in FGSs, may be more attributable to the setting of lower goals for educational achievement than it is to being the first person in a family to attend university.

Further possible challenges faced by FGSs are the subconscious ways in which learning is 'approached' and the impact of this on the psyche of the individual. Mann (2001) offers in her exploration of student experiences of alienation and engagement, a look at a sociological study from the 1970s by Taylor and Cohen which suggests that alienation from the learning process becomes a "strategy for survival" (p. 16). It is suggested that some students may find a "means of escape" (Mann, 2001, p. 16) by adopting a surface approach to learning (Marton & Saljo, 1976). This would be a coping mechanism for the anxiety a student may experience when their identity becomes challenged by their perceptions of what belonging to the academy must entail (Mann, 2001). This is explained as an inner conflict between the everyday practical 'self' and the imagined 'self' which allows for the fulfilment of the human desire to experience "uniqueness" (Mann, 2001, p. 16). Mann's explanations of students' inner conflicts could be linked to South African higher education studies such as Bangeni and Kapp (2005) and Nomdo (2006) where student participants voice these conflicts and acknowledge their changes in self-perception and possible identity shifts. Not being able to overcome negative academic, financial and inter-personal challenges, a student might choose to take on counter-productive learning habits which might ultimately lead to dropping-out (Hussey & Smith, 2010).

South African research on FGSs might bring slightly different factors to light, more particular to the South African higher education context (for example the high proportion of 'English as an additional language' speakers as discussed on pg.2). These factors might be both academic and social such as those found in a study, titled "Identities in transition", which suggests that students may find it increasingly difficult to feel connected to their home identity and might develop complicated feelings including that of a loss of belonging to their home community (Bangenj & Kapp, 2005). This investigation proposes that owing to these transitions students struggled with feeling at home in their new university community. Even though this study looked at the situation from the viewpoint of the student participants, it was clear that rejection of the students' new and changing identities by their communities occurred (Bangenj and Kapp, 2005).

Thus it can be argued that to comprehend the complexities of the lived experiences of FGSs, it is essential to consider theories of identity and their development. Identity theory can be seen to have two major influences, one being the societal and its impact on the individual and the other the internal ways that the mind constructs the self (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). One of the influential notions of positioning in the social sciences was that suggested by Hollway (1984) when she talked of 'positioning oneself' and 'taking up a position' and that "discourses make available" the positions that people choose to accept or reject (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 16). This theory allows for a dynamic look at how we see and construct each other through exploring how our societal roles are constituted by the positions that we 'take up'. Positions are different to roles in that they are not static or structural. Positioning theory allows an exploration of the self which is presented to the world where social acts are located within people and the notion of "psychological time" becomes important as past and present within a person are not fixed. Within positioning theory, conversations which are made up of speech acts and storylines, become how the social realm and the self are constituted as it is within a conversation that people take up positions (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, pp. 14-15). The positioning triangle (positions consisting of 'rights' and 'duties', storylines and speech acts), explains how positioning theorists see how this occurs within conversations and is used in this study as both a theoretical and analytical framework (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Furthermore, when analysing discourse, positioning can be "first and second order, performative (also known as strategic) and accountive, moral and personal, self and other and tacit and intentional" (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 21-23). Aspects of the positioning triangle will be discussed in more detail in the methodology section 3.6.

This acknowledgement of the importance of looking at the changing nature of interactions and the impact of this on identity formation is echoed by positioning theorists Harré and van Langenhove, who suggest that "fluid positioning, not fixed roles, are used by people to cope with the situation they usually find themselves in" (1999, p. 17). Positioning takes place through discourse which affords people, through their conversations, the opportunity to come to "shared meanings" and that this meaning is not static but rather makes up what we perceive to be our social reality (Taylor, Bougie, & Caouette, 2003, p. 204). Furthermore, this movement or flux within identity is facilitated by the positioning of the self and the imposition of positions on the 'other' (Boxer, 2003, p. 251). Positioning theory provides possible understandings of the links between how student experience (the constructions of the self and other in

educational environments) impacts on student engagement in a university community (how these constructs determine the lived experiences of students in South African higher education).

In addition to the 'fluidity' enabled by positioning, the development of resilience as a student is important during the transitional journey into higher education. Furthermore, how this resiliency might link to academic identity development needs interrogation. Resiliency can be defined as the ability to grow emotionally over time and to develop ones coping mechanisms, both practical and emotional, in spite of adversity (Gordon, 1996). More detailed recent views on resilience theory include a look at "risk factors", which are the issues in an individuals' situation which impact on how they respond to adversity, as well as the "protective factors" which are a look at the positive ways in which an individual responds to risk. Included too are "vulnerability areas" which are the particular qualities of an individual, such as their gender, race and class, which might make them vulnerable and then the ways in which they might compensate for this (Morales, 2008). In the case of this study the first generational status of the participants might add to their 'vulnerability'. Research into academic resiliency in higher education notes an interesting counter-intuitive phenomenon whereby students show the ability to use the hardships they are facing as a way to create positive outcomes for themselves thereby demonstrating social and academic resiliency (Morales, 2008). An example of this phenomenon is available in research by Morales and Trotman (2004) which suggests that where students lack the social capital needed for success in a university community they actively seek out human connections as a way to build these resources. The terms social, cultural and family capital are based on the thinking of Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist, who suggests that socio-economic class might afford individuals and groups the social connections and understandings of the world and their place within it, that might result in them being well placed to succeed economically in life (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In addition Gavala and Flett (2005) suggest that respect shown to students in the relationships within university classrooms and in the wider university community goes a long way to helping a new student feel valued and that they belong. This sense of belonging in turn is essential for the development of a student's social and cultural capital which might in turn aid them in feeling part of the mainstream and thus afford them the coping skills necessary for success (Thomas, 2002). Positioning theory takes into account how an individual might show resilience in both these intuitive and counter-intuitive ways. This agential ability is important for student success as settling in to the ways of the academy, and possibly developing an academic identity as a member of a discipline, requires understanding and taking on the ways of being, thinking, reading, writing and behaving (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; Lea & Street, 2006; Mann, 2001;

McKenna, 2004; Nomdo, 2006) inherent therein, and perhaps just the will or motivation to do so is not always enough (McKenna, 2013).

As previously discussed, given the poor rate of student success in tertiary education (discussion on pg.1) and the links between academic identity and academic literacy this enquiry aims to comprehend the processes of identity formation evident through an analysis of positioning, by facilitating students' reflection on their transitional experiences of entering an institution of higher education.

As a person who has worked in student academic development at DUT (teaching academic literacy in an ECP and as a writing centre practitioner), I have found myself asking about my students, what stories do they tell their families in order to frame these new experiences? How do these FGSs in an ECP position themselves in their families and in university classrooms and design studios? Through this study I sought to gain deeper insights into the FGS experience, such as feelings of "connectedness" to home communities and to the unfamiliar university community and how "involvement" or engagement might happen in the classroom (Tinto, 2006, p. 4) and which in turn may well lead to the development of academic identity. It also interests me to consider how agency, defined by Giddens (1993) as how people choose to behave in response to life's situations in creative ways, might be the driver of how the student participants in this study position themselves. Archer (2000) views the social as important in her understanding of human agency. According to Archer (2000) the idea of primary agency takes into account the importance of an individual's family situation as the first set of circumstances in which individual and corporate agency comes into play. Archer's (2000) notion of corporate agency refers to how people, after having reflected on a problem collectively, find solutions that improve their social situations. Archer (2000), in her consideration of human agency, both individual and collective, explains how an individual who reflects on and learns from a situation in which they have been positioned by society is then able to change this positioning. Kapp et al. (2014) assert that much of South African higher education research stereotypes students as having few social resources for making their way into and through higher education, and that research needs to reflect the many ways in which students do indeed exert their agential power.

In my previous role as a lecturer in the Arts Extended Curriculum Programme and current role as a writing centre practitioner on the arts and design campus of DUT, and as a FGS myself, it is the above issues that trouble me. I value being able to empathise with and understand my students' experiences in

order to facilitate the best possible learning environment and I have wondered if what I perceive to be a lack of student engagement in reading and writing (Boughey, 2005; Boughey, 2008; South African Survey of Student Engagement, 2010) is in fact related to the identity struggles written about in studies such as the one by Bangeni and Kapp (2005). The often mysterious and hidden literacy requirements (Elton, 2010; Emig, 1977; Moje et al., 2004) or discourses (Lea & Street, 1998; McKenna, 2004) of a university may create a barrier to student academic success (Elton, 2010). These difficulties may be even more marked for a first generation tertiary student, without the particular family “cultural capital” that is valued in higher education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

The enculturation into a UoT “academic discourse community” may be further compounded by students’ “distrust of writing as a way of knowing” (Boone, 2010, p. 249). One may refer to our school leavers as “wounded writers”; students who “fret about their under-preparedness” (Boone, 2010, p. 230) whether this be their own perceptions and feelings around their reading and writing ability, the ways in which society positions them or their awareness of the challenges of being second language English speakers (Mgqwashu, 2009; Ngcobo, 2014; Soudien, 2008; South African Survey of Student Engagement, 2010). It has been noted by various scholars abroad (Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005) that very little is understood about the FGS and their lived experiences in tertiary level education. This might hold true of the South African student experience. Bangeni and Kapp (2005, p. 3) recommend that research needs to look at the experiences of students over time as this will show how they negotiate their new identities at home and on campus in order to “capture the felt experiences of living and studying in a radically different environment”. While extensive studies might throw light on broad trends around the FGS, the individual student experience, in order to be more fully understood, needs close and deep analysis to reveal the detailed experiences that are unique to each environment and to different institutions (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011; Woosley & Shepler, 2011). While the lack of longitudinal studies is noted in the literature (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2004; Soria & Stebleton, 2012) and will not be addressed by this study, there is a call for more studies using phenomenological, narrative and ethnographic methods, that will investigate in depth the lived experiences of FGSs and how they are able to achieve success in higher education (Soria and Stebleton, 2012). This study specifically seeks to examine the context of a particular set of FGSs; i.e. first year ECP Arts and Design UoT students. It seeks to take into account an intersection of lived experience, that of the individual at home and on campus.

2.4 Identity and language

The students in this study are mostly multi-lingual with the language of instruction, English, not being their mother tongue⁶ (South African Survey of Student Engagement, 2010). The impact of language on students is important to consider in any study, as a potential language barrier is of concern when examining student success (Kapp, 2004; Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014; Mgwashu, 2009; Ngcobo, 2014) and may relate to identity and experiences of student engagement in this study. As noted in studies similarly concerned with academic identity, language is considered to be “both the bearer and constituent of identity and culture” and this research suggests that for black students, learning in a “monolingual” English environment makes establishing an academic identity problematic as this kind of higher education environment may disregard their life experiences (De Kadt & Mathonsi, 2003, p. 100). It is worth considering what the effects of this are on the self and the possible shifts in identity when entering the sometimes hostile and alienating higher education environment (Mann, 2001, Nomdo, 2006).

2.5 Identity and positioning theory

Identity theory was first referred to in a presentation by Sheldon Stryker in 1966 at the American Sociological Association. It has since developed many different and nuanced conceptual and theoretical meanings in many academic fields (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Broadly speaking identity theory has two strands, one being the societal and its impact on the individual and the other the “internal (and) cognitive identity processes”. The two strands combine and give rise to observable behaviours both intra and inter-personally. Thus identity theory “generally has focussed on role identities” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 289). Roles are determined by how society structures and places the individual. Individual or personal identity is then a reaction to how society constructs and makes sense of roles (Stryker and Burke, 2000).

In my exploration of identity theory I sought not to provide an exhaustive overview of its development but rather to explore how positioning theory fits alongside understandings of identity. In this way I was able to gauge positioning theory’s usefulness and relevance to this study both as a theory of identity and

⁶ At DUT 78% of students are additional language English speakers and 75% are FGs (South African Survey of Student Engagement, 2010, pp. 14-15).

as an analytical tool. I used positioning theory as both a theory and an analytical tool in order to bring the societal and individual aspects of identity together in this study.

This study proposes looking at the positioning of the individual by the self and by others at home and at a UoT. Positioning is one of the ways in which “personal identity” formation takes place and takes into account how “our social world is not a fixed reality” (Taylor, Bougie and Caouette, 2003, p. 204). This is important as individuals often construct their identity through their interaction with issues of both power and language, this being especially evident when entering institutions of higher education (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; De Kadt & Mathonsi, 2003; Henkel, 2005; McKenna, 2004). When looking at identity formation, “the appropriate level of analysis according to a positioning framework, needs to take place at the level of discourse” (Taylor et al. 2003, p. 204). Therefore, in my interactions as a staff member of a university, I need to remain aware and conscious of the ways in which I position and am positioned by my students/research participants and how this may contribute to the power structures inherent in this university.

Several authors suggest that individual identity or the concept of the self develops against the backdrop of a person’s culture or community (Gee, 2001; Henkel, 2005; Ivanic, 1998; Taylor et al., 2003). This ‘backdrop’ or “collective identity”, “serves as a reference point”, and is a major influence in the perception of the self and thus individual identity is changing and dynamic although “remaining integrated throughout” (Taylor, Bougie and Caouette, 2003, p. 207). It is at the meeting point of the individual and the collective identity “that positioning theory offers potential insights into the process of its formation...in order to allow for a more fluid personal identity it is important to have a stable collective identity” which in the context of the FGS transitioning into higher education is shifting (Taylor, Bougie and Caouette, 2003, p. 207). In this study’s use of positioning theory it might be of interest to consider what the “reference points” for the “collective identity” might be (Taylor, Bougie and Caouette, 2003, p. 207). In the case of the FGS student participants these reference points may emerge from the discourses in the data generated from them or from their responses to the academic discourses that position them in terms of their academic identities. The data generated will enable me to analyse, from multiple perspectives, the story a student might tell him/herself about what they feel and experience in the transitions they make into a new learning environment.

Adult education places 'experience' at the centre of the educational project (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997) and through this, the formation of student identity. What positioning theory might offer to this understanding is how this experience is mediated by the self; how a student constructs and makes sense of experiences on both a conscious and subconscious level and integrates these experiences into their 'life story' that is told to the self and to others. According to Boxer (2003, p. 256)

"Positioning is a dynamic and ongoing process that is a reflection of each social encounter that takes place. These interactions arise from the ways they are organized socially and are influenced by the individuals, the "storylines" employed and the ways in which language is used (rhetorical speech acts). Each social interaction can strengthen or change memories of prior interactions".

These encounters or experiences should not be thought of as neutral "given that discourses serve the interests of particular groups" and that if viewing education critically "pedagogy becomes a political practice" (Usher and Bryant, 1997, p. 116). In addition Harré (UNU-CRIS, 2015) suggests that until recently social psychology did not acknowledge that because of the sometimes communal nature of thinking, memory can have a communal nature. This is because the negotiation and agreement between parties of their versions of the 'story' of what happened is important. The right and duties and thus power distribution of the role players within a common storyline have to be considered as each individual has their own way of remembering or (re)constructing the past.

As with positioning theory, and how it frames identity as being socially constructed through the use of storylines and language, New Literacy theorist Gee (2001) suggests that the ways in which we view and take on identities allows for a dynamic look at how we view and construct each other. This construction of identity is affected by the history and socio-politics of human existence as mediated by the individual's perceptions (Gee, 2001, p. 111). Gee asks how identities are developed and maintained by individuals and collectives (both "groups of people" and "institutions" (2001 p.111) and how the power of institutions to construct or shape identity carries across into mainstream culture so that people's understanding of what is at work shaping our views of ourselves is no longer 'visible'. Gee (2001) questions further how at an individual and personal 'moment by moment' level, different choices for identity construction are adopted, disregarded or disputed. Similarly positioning theory is thought to provide a way to look at the 'minute by minute' changing nature of social interaction and identity

formation. "Positioning refers to the fluidity of 'roles' (of) speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts" (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 17). This acknowledgement of the importance of looking at the changing nature of interactions and the impact of this on identity formation is echoed by positioning theorists Harré and van Langenhove who suggest that "fluid positioning, not fixed roles, are used by people to cope with the situation they usually find themselves in" (1999, p. 17). Positioning takes place through discourse which affords people, through their conversations, the opportunity to come to "shared meanings" and that this meaning is not static but rather makes up what we perceive to be our social reality (Taylor, Bougie and Caouette, 2003. p. 204). Boxer (2003, p.251) suggests that our "selves are discursively produced. That is, when people talk to others and engage in personal reflections, they adopt positions for themselves and impose positions on others".

2.6 Identity and academic literacy

Taking ideas around identity formation further in the setting of an academic institution of higher learning, McKenna (2004) discusses how many theorists see aspects of identity formation as happening through the acquisition of academic literacy practices and thus academic or disciplinary identities. A student becoming part of the 'foreign' culture of a university has to value it in order to take on a new identity. These identities are seen in the taking on or resisting of the literacy practices required by university disciplines and in the power struggles inherent in beliefs about the self and how a student is faring as a student in relation to other students (Foucault cited in Mann, 2001, p. 14-15). When looking at student identity formation in this study it was necessary to explore how positioning theory might offer a close examination of how this acceptance or resistance happens during everyday 'minute by minute' human interactions encoded in language (Gee, 2001, p. 111) (for explanation see pg.22).

Positioning theory with its analysis and consideration of speech acts allows the researcher access to the mental inner world that is hidden from all – participants and observers (Dennen, 2007). This is so, as a position is a "conceptual construct" and one views this construct through analysing the actions and reactions - thought of as 'rights' and 'duties' within positioning theory - to the world both past and present that are encoded by the words that make up our stories of self and that in turn construct our ever changing realities (Dennen, 2007, p. 96). Therefore "positioning has the ability to not only shape interactions within each storyline but also to form ones identity over time across storylines" (Dennen,

2007, p. 96). The storylines used by the student participants revealed the development of academic identity as newcomers transitioning to the tertiary environment.

In understanding the transitional experiences of a small sample of FGSs in the Arts and Design ECP at DUT, I sought to explore what storylines FGSs drew on to construct their experiences of home and campus. Additionally I hoped to understand what the rights and duties were that constructed the positions that FGSs referred to in their experiences of home and campus and how positions were held or resisted by the students.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter sought to provide an overview of some current research needs in higher education such as would respond to the growing diversity of needs of student populations. A further look at the FGS was provided in terms of engagement, identity development and resilience. How language impacts on identity was then explored and the links between identity and positioning and identity and academic literacy were explained. In the next chapter I detail the use of positioning theory as an analytical framework in the methodology of this research project. Additionally, consideration is given to how the use of positioning theory might lead to the kinds of educational research that some higher education researchers suggest is relevant to looking at the depth of student experience, rather than general trends across the sector.

Chapter Three – Research design and methodology

3.1 Introduction

I provide, in this chapter, the research design rationale for this study and my own position as researcher, which is pertinent given my personal context as an academic development practitioner in the UoT of this study. How the research process and methods are suited to Arts and Design students is explained. In addition I detail my approach to the analysis and discuss the ethical issues considered in this research process.

My motivation to better understand the FGS experience within the Faculty of Arts and Design ECP arose from my concerns about the students I taught and mentored in my role as an ECP lecturer and later as a writing centre practitioner. I was concerned about the socio-economic issues and challenges the students faced as they often discussed these anecdotally with me. These challenges I believed often led to the classroom behaviour I observed that I knew was counterproductive to effective learning at a tertiary level (including absenteeism, consistent tardiness, a lack of materials needed for practical projects, a seeming resistance to reading). Since my belief is that behaviour is socially constructed (Constantino, 2008), I have drawn on positioning theory as an analytical framework in order to understand the constructions of and transitions within the identity of students entering the university community. Using positioning theory in this research process takes into account the multiple perspectives on events that arise through the mix of different role players in higher education spaces.

Positioning theory explores the students' experiences of the relationships within and between their home and campus environments, including both past and present educational experiences and how both students and the university position and possibly influence each other's behaviour (see pg. 16 for detail on positioning theory). I was aware that all these factors might have played a role in student identity development and they might well act as a help or hindrance in student academic progress.

Participants for this study, who were FGSs from the Arts and Design ECP class, took photographs according to the prompt "Take photographs that show you as a student at home and on campus". The data was generated by the students' process of taking photographs and subsequent photo-elicitation interviews where the photographs were discussed. This research explored the following overarching question with regard to these first generation UoT ECP Arts and Design students:

- What storylines do FGSs draw on to construct their experiences of home and campus?

This question subsumes the following two sub-questions:

- What are the rights and duties that construct the positions that FGSs refer to in their experiences of home and campus?
- What positions are held or resisted by the students and how do they feel themselves positioned?

In searching for responses to these questions I sought to reach tentative deductions as to how these positions may or may not contribute to the development of student academic identity at the point of transition from home to campus life.

This chapter explains the methodological orientation, research design and research methods used in my investigation of student experience and self-positioning. The process used for data generation and analysis is explained. In addition, ethical considerations, including reliability, validity, power relations in research and a brief exploration of the ethics of insider research are provided.

3.2 Personal context in a UoT

I joined the DUT as a part-time lecturer, and worked in the Arts Extended Curriculum Programme (ECP) from 2006 to 2013. Additionally, I worked in the Dental Technology ECP from 2007 to 2010. In 2008, as another part-time appointment, on Teaching Development Grant funding within the Faculty of Arts and Design, I started a small writing centre in the Faculty of Arts and Design. At the time of the research, I worked full-time as a writing centre practitioner (I manage the writing centre, train tutors, offer tutoring and workshops and participate in the Faculty of Arts and Design academic development activities). In 2013 five writing centres were established at DUT, as part of the university's use of the Teaching Development Grant funds, and my post became full-time.

Extended programmes and academic development work often operates on the 'fringes' of South African higher education (Jacobs, 2007). This lack of integration was discussed in detail on pg.7. As a result, this academic development work challenges me as I frequently find myself in contradictory spaces where my pedagogical role is often contested by the different views of the academics with whom I work. I find myself, at times, being expected to work in ways that are not carefully integrated into mainstream teaching programmes, by both fellow academic development colleagues and lecturers, who hope that a

‘sticking plaster’ approach will have an impact on student success rates. On the one hand, working in an integrated manner with the academic staff in the programmes from which the ECP students are drawn was a near impossibility, not only as the lecturers did not seem to value or ‘own’ the link to the extended programme, but because the programmes are largely curriculated and taught separately (Boughey, 2013, p.9). Over time, as my theoretical understanding of how the ECP should relate to the mainstream has developed, I believe that the ECP for the Arts, to be of maximum benefit to the students could be better integrated into the mainstream curriculum, an idea supported by authors Boughey (2013) and Lewin and Mawoyo (2014).

In the ECP class my role was to facilitate the development of the ‘academic literacy’ practices necessary in the study of arts and design. Initially I was very concerned as I met resistance by the ECP students to being placed in the ECP class. They expressed their sensitivity to feelings of “stigmatization” (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013, p. 331) as being outside the mainstream and having to spend an extra year completing the ECP. However, after a few years when previous students would report how the time and learning they had had in the ECP year was benefiting their mainstream studies, I realised that the learning experiences in the ECP year, in particular reading and writing, were later valued and seen as useful. In addition, currently when working in the writing centre, I am highly motivated by experiencing how much learning and confidence a student gains in the individual tutoring sessions which are the strength of our work. This is often contradicted by how little emphasis students and lecturers seem to place on writing and reading development in the academic environment of a UoT. As Boughey (2013) explains, the literacies that students bring from their home environments are often mismatched with those required by the demands of academic study at a university and therefore I have become increasingly interested in how students construct academic identities in a UoT, and how this might impact on academic success (see previous discussion in section 2.6 on pg. 23). Therefore, in this study, I seek to understand the development of student academic identity through considering the ways in which FGSs position themselves in relation to the transitional process of entering the university in an ECP class.

3.3 Methodological rationale

This constructivist study explored the at home and campus experiences of a small sample of FGSs in the Faculty of Arts and Design. This qualitative research used methods which were both visual and oral (Bryman, 2008). Constructivist research within an interpretive paradigm attempts to provide an “understanding of human experience, as opposed to providing explanations of how people construct

their experiences” (Constantino, 2008, p. 113). The developments in philosophical thinking around research and the nature of the truth show how social science researchers moved away from positivism and post-positivist thinking to include in research documentation how the researcher is part of the social construction of the participant’s reality (Brennen, 2013, pp. 9-10). Constantino (2008), when mapping out the history of philosophical thought that gave rise to contemporary social constructivism, spoke of how Vygotsky conceived of human knowledge as developing from social constructs which are influenced by the full range of human experience such as our religious, political, language and ideological beliefs and affiliations. As Brennen (2013) suggests, in constructivist thought there are many truths and therefore this study is largely constructivist in nature as it will attempt to understand the student experience from the perspective of the student using the lens of positioning theory.

In the generation of data and in this study it was understood that although the participants took the photographs, the discussion in the subsequent photo-elicitation interviews formed part of the co-construction used in the understanding of the data (Constantino, 2008). In addition Radley (2010, p. 275) asserts that “photograph-making is a socially constructive act” and thus I suggest that this visual methodology was well suited to a constructivist methodology, as it used photograph-taking by the participants as the ‘way into’ their student experience. The participants’ construction of narratives was analysed using positioning theory and this enabled the charting of their own positioning in terms of their various rights and duties. Moreover, positioning theory facilitated an awareness of the researcher-research participant relationship, and allowed a nuanced examination of the data generated in the study.

It can be argued that because the prompt used (“Take photos that show you as a student at home and on campus”) required the participants to reflect through taking photographs on their student experiences, that this surfaced through the use of visual metaphors, aspects of sub-conscious student identity formation. Positioning theory attempts to account for the changing nature of human experience in the ‘minute by minute’ and often fleeting interactions between individuals, communities and societal structures and therefore provides a useful way of analysing what transpired in the photo-elicitation interviews. In this development of identity one positions and repositions the ‘self’ in order to define the personal self (Taylor et al., 2003). It is these positions that this study attempted to reveal in its exploration of student identity development within the contexts of home and campus.

3.3.1 Visual research methods

Visual research has gained popularity in recent years although it was noted as a sociological method as early as 1890 when Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine used photographs to highlight the living conditions in the slums of New York (Emmison & Smith, 2000, p. 23). As is proposed by Harper (2002) (1980's onwards) photographs "portray, describe or analyse social phenomena". Furthermore, Olsen (2012, p. 113) notes how the "layering of data" in modern visual research methods allows ever richer and more complex ways of recording observations of behaviour and people's unique ways of experiencing our world. Mitchell (2008) contends that visual methodologies have a great role to play in educational research in South Africa and can in many instances shift societal patterns if researchers work with participants in transformative and inclusive ways. How this research might be seen to have had a transformative impact will be discussed in section 3.7.7 on pg. 47.

The author or "image maker", and their "intentionality" when taking a photograph is an important yet often glossed over aspect of using the visual in social science research (Rose, 2012, p. 26). The reasons proposed for why the author's intentionality may be ignored are that the image's broader context and its audience and their personal meaning-making are thought to be more important (Rose, 2012, p. 26). Belluigi (2015a, p. 62) suggests that in the interests of self-criticality and transparency in research that the researcher openly acknowledges the complexity of the researcher-researched relationship to ensure the author's intentionality is "irreducible to one perspective". For the purposes of this research I took the participants' intentionality into account through using their thoughts and reflections about the content and process of taking their photos as the basis for discussion in the photo-elicitation interviews. I intended through this to facilitate the surfacing of the participants' thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards their photographs and the student experiences and developing academic identities expressed therein.

3.3.1.1 Data collection process

This enquiry aimed to uncover students' reflections on the abstract and complex concept of identity. For this reason using visual methods to probe a person's construction of self was a valuable tool (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 255). In asking for photographs to be taken by the research participants I intended for reflection to take place not only on the photographic end product but during the process of taking photographs. There are many advantages afforded by visual methods which are not found in more traditional

qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups (Gauntlett, 2008). In this study asking participants to “make something”, to create a visual output (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 255), allowed them time to reflect on and consider their response to the prompt. This facilitated a sense of agency and collaboration in the research which shifted the power relations in a positive way (Banks, 2007, p. 65).

When using digital photography, there is little if no delay in access to a newly taken photograph, with viewing and sharing possible in a range of circumstances not bounded by place or time. With the proliferation of photographs, personal image archives become very large and often difficult to manage, and thus are seen to be at risk, transient or fragile (Van House, 2011, p. 128). For the purposes of my research I imposed a limit on the amount of photographs required in response to the prompt. I attempted to counter-act the modern trends of personal photography and to help ensure that careful thought was given to the images the participants chose to take. Some of the participants were able to adhere to these requirements whereas others took many photographs that were not relevant to the interview and in the interview we agreed to skip the surplus or duplicate photographs. I think that this was a clear indication that the participants took ownership of the task and had enjoyed the opportunity to reflect on themselves and to interact with the subjects of their photographs (e.g. on an outing or in a social setting).

3.3.1.2 Representation

Banks (2007, p. 15) explains visual representation as how visual subject matter, in this study photographs, in many instances might be simply the vehicle for the message chosen to be communicated by the image maker, whether this message is conscious or not. As such, representations are “resources for communicating” the lived experiences of individuals and these function so that what is spoken of, merely suggested and pointedly omitted will possibly be of equal interest (Radley, 2010, p. 268). It remained my responsibility as the researcher when working with oral representations, to discern when to probe and when to accept silence and to note this shutting down of verbal communication as significant and possibly as part of the ‘representation’ itself, used by the respondent whether conscious or not. As a researcher, this broad understanding of the importance of the many layers of representation, both visual and oral, and subsequent positions taken on or rejected by both the interviewer and interviewee was important in order to not impose or create discomfort in the interview situation. I did not notice any instances during the interviews in which the participants shut down their communication.

There are many advantages afforded by visual methods which are not found in more traditional qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups (Harper, 2002). Using visual methods allows a variety of responses to be gathered together which express abstract thoughts and feelings in real ways (Gauntlett, 2008). This response required probing and questioning in the discussion of the students' photographs in order to surface both the cognitive and affective aspects of the shifting student identity revealed in these visual representations. However, as identity develops in relation to the 'other' (Day Sclater, 2003), Pink (2011) in her work with the sharing practices inherent in amateur photography, suggests an expanded view where representations become more than individual expressions but rather expressions of individual identities within a collective. Thus it is possible that my students' identities are representations of a collective identity constituted against or by the identity of a university of technology and its values and practices and the home identity of the student.

Positioning theory allows the researcher to work with and within the narrative and it acknowledges that the self is presented through stories (Day Sclater, 2003) that are accepted, rejected and changed constantly and retrospectively. An important element of any narrative is that it shows how identities are formed and maintained over time and "the self is always more than any one narrative can hold" (Day Sclater, 2003, p. 321). This study, looking at a point of transition in the lived experiences of students, needed to embrace both the shifting and negotiation of positions and the layers and levels within the narrative expression of the self.

3.3.2 The role of photographs

Photographs, when used in visual research, are both a "trace of the real" and "culturally encoded image(s)" (Rose, 2012, p. 313). In addition, and most importantly for this study of student identity and experience, it is suggested that in photo-elicitation interviews, social identities are played out through the process of engaging with photographs taken by the participant (Rose, 2012, p. 313). The participants' process of engaging with the photographs in my presence as the interviewer was an opportunity to voice an emerging academic and professional identity.

These issues of power in research are complex, and in this study examples might be, who decides what image to use and whether the subjects of an image know the intentions of the researcher? Historically,

the use of the visual can be shown to have controlled and exposed people and justified the domination of certain societies (Banks, 2007, p. 42). In this study although I guided the photograph-taking by a prompt, I think this left the participants largely in control of how they responded to the task. I intended in this study to use images conceived of and constructed by the participants and facilitated and recorded their explanations and interpretations of the images before any analysis was attempted.

With the rapid growth and change of social media, Van House (2011, p. 131) argues that photographs have gone beyond mere self-representation to the enactment of the self and this now “sociotechnical system” of personal photography is involved in establishing and maintaining social norms. It might be argued that people use social media intentionally to create profiles that express their worldviews. In the interviews I noticed how the participants were able to represent themselves, beyond their daily online personas, in response to the prompt in a creative and expressive way. How the use of photographs fitted with and enhanced the use of positioning theory as an analytical framework in this study became clear when thinking of the photograph as an “act of picturing” (Radley, 2010, p. 279). In addition, Radley (2010, p. 279) talks of photographs as “mediators of stories” – showing simultaneously how the world is, was and how it should or could be, they are able to both anticipate and reconstruct events. In this research process the photographs and the storylines elicited in their explanations or narrations allowed for changing and multiple perspectives on the student participants’ experiences.

3.3.2.1 Photovoice

This study’s use of a prompt was adapted from Photovoice, which uses participatory action research methods in visual research (Findholt, Michael, & Davis, 2011). Photovoice is a “process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). The possibility this method brought to this research was its inclusiveness. As the process of taking photographs according to a prompt is not dependent on reading and writing it allowed the expression of difficult emotional issues in ways that were not directly confrontational (Mitchell, 2011, p. 28). Although reading and writing are valued as integral to university life and study, they can create stress for first year students (Pym & Kapp, 2011). In my experience students seem to resist engaging with writing and may therefore have found a photographic medium preferable and less effortful (Olsen, 2012).

The visual aspect of this research used “metaphors to express abstract thoughts and feelings in a concrete way” (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 255). The visual research process, as mediated by and through the physical bodies or senses of interviewer and interviewee, engages more than just the intellect of the viewer and through this deeply embodied reaction allows a holistic and almost real experience of what has been depicted (Weber, 2008). In research by Belluigi and Mestre (2010, p. 165) involving “visual metaphor storytelling”, the researchers explain how the use of photographs (in this instance provided by the researcher to the participants) surfaces student experiences in ways that are sensitive to nuance. Belluigi and Mestre (2010, p. 164) noted that the Fine Art students participating in their study were comfortable using this visual method as it allowed for the expression of “playful” metaphors that were not reliant on words. Similarly, I chose a visual method for this study, which is comparable in nature given that metaphors were encouraged, as I felt it suited Arts and Design students as it created a comfortable ‘visual space’ outside of written language, within which to participate in the study. I found that the participants responded in an engaged way to this research project. In one instance one of the participants spoke to me informally in my office a while after the interviews were completed and reminisced about how he had enjoyed the opportunity to use the digital camera as he saw the importance of this skill for him as a design student.

3.3.2.2 Validity in visual research

In a social science study of this nature, it was important to consider issues of validity and whether triangulation was possible. It would seem that social science researchers vary on their views of triangulation (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005), preferring instead to suggest that a researcher should endeavour first to be rigorous and thorough in the research process and not presume that simply varying and mixing together methods would increase validity (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). It is suggested that when social events are viewed in ways that cater for the multiplicity inherent in human experience, then validity is increased. When conceptualising the issue of how to increase validity in social science qualitative research, Richardson and St. Pierre (2005, p. 963) use the metaphor of a crystal, with multiple facets refracting light, and point out how this allows the researcher to consider or hold in view these multiple perspectives. I posit that the use of positioning theory as an analytical framework will enhance the validity of this study through recognising multiple and changing perspectives on the experiences, thoughts and feelings of the student participants. Positioning theory takes into account the rights and duties, storylines and speech acts used by people as they construct their realities based on the positions they assume (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). These elements

spoken of in positioning theory could in turn be thought of as the facets mentioned in the crystallisation metaphor used by Richardson and St. Pierre (2005, p. 963). Thus the research outcomes validate the choice of theoretical framework and method in this study.

Additionally, when considering the importance of validity in social science research, Ng'ambi and Brown (2004) remind us that “teaching and learning are multicausal” and thus no occurrence has a single cause and each occurrence has multiple outcomes. The idea of “multicausality” (Ng'ambi and Brown, 2004, p. 1) may underpin our attempts at collecting “rich data” in order to analyse happenings in higher education spaces. This acknowledgement of the ever-changing nature of being human on classroom interactions is important for education practitioners striving to teach and research in a reflective and responsive manner. This study attempted to provide an in-depth look at student experience through using a visual methodology that facilitated self-reflection (Banks, 2007; Mitchell, 2011) to access the “mental” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 43), feelings, attitudes and beliefs of the participants through conversation about events, actual and metaphorical. It layered the research process followed by the student participants to provide a richness of detail as well as multiple access points to the area of interest.

3.3.3 Narrative interviews

According to Maxwell, (2012), the ways in which realist qualitative researchers can work towards making their causal claims more valid include using longitudinal and exhaustive methods within a research project as this is more likely to allow for the gathering of data which is rich in nature. Although this was not a realist study or a long-term project, the use of visual data and the ‘layers’ within this design, provided a richness in the data. The uses of “narrative or ‘connecting’ approaches to analysis” are considered to be valuable as they tend to “preserve connections within the data” (Maxwell, 2012, pp. 43-44). The use of positioning theory as an analytical framework and its consideration of ‘story lines’ allowed me to introduce the element of “narrative analysis” when working with the data (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Thus the “rich data” provided by this study was facilitated by the layering in the act of taking the photograph, the photograph itself and the verbal reflection facilitated in the photo-elicitation interviews.

It can be argued that because a photo-elicitation interview is semi-structural in nature and starts broadly with an open ended prompt, such as “tell me about your photographs”, that it holds much in common with a narrative interview. Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) suggest that a narrative interview is far more

likely to not pre-structure an interview than any other method and that this is achieved by not explicitly imposing definitive questions and answers on the interactions, and by rather allowing the participants' narration of the story to be received by the researcher's listening. This method was congruent with the intentions of this study which was an attempt to examine the positions of its student participants through the storylines and speech acts that were employed while discussing their photographs. In this study, as I prompted the participants in a broad sense to take photographs that showed them as students at home and on campus, I did not presuppose that the photographs formed "a narrative 'whole' with a plot and a chronological sequence of events" (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, pp. 58-59). The photographs the participants chose to take might instead each have drawn on a different story and the depth to which each story was narrated I left as the choice of the interviewee

Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000, p. 65) describe how one of the "uncontrollable expectations of the interview" might result in the interviewee giving information they believe the interviewer wants to hear. This is thought to happen in their attempt to please the interviewer as they assume that the interviewer is already informed about the topic at hand. This was of concern in this study as the participants knew my role in the university as a writing centre practitioner. I attempted to avoid this in this research through the use of photo-elicitation, where the individuals' photographs become the focus and I had no prior knowledge (assumed or not) of what the research participants photographed and their intentions (metaphorical or not).

3.3.3.1 Photo-elicitation

Photo-elicitation, a method first named by John Collier in 1957, is the use of photos as the stimulus for an interview process in the generation of data (Harper, 2002). According to Banks (2007, p. 59) photo-elicitation rather than being thought of as "a standalone form of research" is a method that a researcher can use to extend or deepen their contact and interaction with participants when interviewing and the photos used are taken by the researcher or the participant(s) or sourced from archives. In this research I intended using photo-elicitation in order to lessen the 'power' differential between me as an older 'lecturer' figure when interacting with first year students. Therefore, in the individual photo-elicitation semi-structured interviews, the use of photographs as a stimulus drew the focus of the interviewer and interviewee away from each other through the lessening of eye contact while the discussion focused on the photos, and this in turn helped to set a more relaxed mood for the research interview (Banks, 2007, p. 65-66).

This study involved me as the researcher, to have a conversation facilitated by photo-elicitation during an individual session with the student participants about issues that were not observable and may possibly only have surfaced into consciousness through this reflective process of taking photographs (Banks, 2007). The narrated lived experiences of story-tellers are not copies of their experiences but rather “representations or interpretations of the world” and as they remain embedded in their broader contexts, cannot be proved or judged (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000, p. 72). That the stories of individuals are always embedded in the “socio-political and socio-historical happenings of a society” (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000, p. 67) is an aspect of the research participants’ lived experience that I considered through the inclusion of both the ‘home’ and ‘campus’ environments in the initial prompt given to the participants.

Rose (2012) gives further suggestions for the advantages of the use of photographs in photo-elicitation interviews. Topics that would not usually be thought of as important tend to be included as a photograph-led interview opens up subject areas not possible with “talk only interviews” (Rose, 2012, p. 305). Having an active role in the research process gives agency and empowerment to the research participant and thus the relationship between the researcher and the ‘researched’ is a collaborative one (Rose, 2012, p. 306). This ability of photo-elicitation is known as “breaking the frame”, how every day and “taken-for-granted” experiences when photographed allow participants to “deconstruct their own phenomenological assumptions” (Harper, 2002, p. 21).

3.4 Research method

3.4.1 Sampling rationale

The students invited to participate were from the Arts and Design ECP. The ECP is a yearlong course into which the Photography, Interior Design, Fashion Design, Graphic Design, Photography, Jewellery and Fine Art programmes place approximately eight to ten students each year. For the purposes of this study the participants were all FGSs (definition provided on pg.1). It must be noted that in the literature reviewed (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011; Pascarella, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004; Woosley & Shepler, 2011) it would seem that the references to family structure and who one’s ‘parent’ might be, refer to predominantly western family structure encoded in English. It should be acknowledged, particularly in

the post-colonial and post-apartheid context of this case study, that there might be differences in the kinship terminology amongst different ethnic groups and how the family systems of the research participants in this study were viewed by the participants themselves (Mafela, 2007). In order to allow for “the changing nature of family structures” (Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998, p. 407) and kinship terminology variation across language groups (Mafela, 2007), the research participants were asked to make their own interpretation of who they considered their parents to be and this determined whether they considered themselves to be a FGS or not.

It is significant to note that there were other students (South African Indian and Black) in the ECP class who were very interested in participating but who did not fit the study’s requirements as they were not FGSs. This might have meant that they were by nature the types of people showing resilience already, in their transition to their new surroundings. I think that this study’s methodology was well suited to Arts and Design students and the interest shown by the ECP students was evidence of this.

3.4.2 Data generation methods

With the consent of the Arts Extended Curriculum Programme Head of Department and lecturers I explained the purpose of the research to the Arts and Design ECP class and requested volunteers. My explanation included defining a FGS as a student whose parents had not received any form of tertiary education. For pragmatic reasons I requested ten volunteers as it was anticipated that each individual discussion would take up to an hour and it was anticipated that ten participants would generate sufficient data and variation. From these initial ten volunteers, seven interviews were conducted⁷. I initially asked the students to use their cell phones to take photographs but once it emerged that not all had access to a cell phone camera of good quality, I organized temporary use of digital cameras that I purchased for this purpose. The four cameras were shared between the seven participants and the interviews were conducted over a month in the late second quarter of the academic year.

As part of the initial briefing of the volunteer participants I facilitated a discussion of ethical behaviour when taking photographs involving people, informed by texts by Rose (2012) and Mitchell (2011). I explained how the photo-elicitation sessions were to be conducted. Once the research method had

⁷ Two participants dropped out of the course before the scheduled interviews, and one student left university temporarily as he could no longer live in the men’s hostel where he was staying, because of violent faction fighting.

been explained and the volunteers had time to ask questions for any clarification needed they were asked to sign informed consent agreements which had been translated into IsiZulu⁸ (see Appendices B and C) as all of the participants had IsiZulu as their home language. The students were informed that they had the right to withdraw at any point with no negative consequences. In addition the participants were provided with an information sheet giving them my contact details and reminding them about the requirements of the photograph-taking as discussed in the initial briefing (see Appendix A). In order to ensure the participants' anonymity I assigned the participants pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Research interviewing, a major methodological tool used in qualitative research was employed. This method of data generation allowed for ambiguity as interviewees' statements, which in addition to having many interpretations, could be contradictory (Kvale, 2007, p. 13). This was in keeping with the nature of this constructivist research and it was therefore the responsibility of the qualitative researcher to explore, and attempt to understand these complexities as part of the process of uncovering and gaining access to the interviewee's lived experiences. The researcher decided if the contradictions were related to unclear interviewing techniques or if they were a reflection of the "inconsistencies, ambivalence and contradictions" of the world as we experience it (Kvale, 2007, p. 13). This study attempted to explore student experience through the use of 'how' and 'what' questions or probes based on the visual data generated by the photographs taken by the research participants. These probes enabled a deeper exploration of what the participants thought, felt and believed (van der Mescht, 2013), in relation to their transitional experiences of being students, at home and on campus.

3.4.3 Data generation

The student participants were given up to two weeks to take photographs so as not to place them under unnecessary time pressure. I requested that the students took between 15 and 20 photographs in order that they explored the prompt given in enough detail. The chosen 'prompt' ("Take photos that show you as a student at home and on campus") both guided and constrained the participants when taking photos and was necessary to ensure that all the participants focused on the same area of interest for the study. (Parthasarathy & Pies, 2008). The participants' photographs were downloaded by the researcher keeping the order in which they were taken by the student. All of the seven research participants took part in

⁸ IsiZulu is one of South Africa's 11 official languages and according to the 2011 census, the most widely spoken language in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2012).

taking photographs. In the case of one of the participants, Andile, the actual photographs were not part of the interview, but rather references to them were made from memory. Her camera had unfortunately been stolen from her bag on campus after she had been through the process of taking the photos she wanted to use in the interview..

3.4.3.1 Photo-elicitation interviews

Broadly, a photo-elicitation interview allows a person's identity to be 'performed' as part of the process of viewing the photographic images they have chosen to make. This takes the notion of representation a step further whereby photographs as depictions and versions of reality become a new enacted reality within the photo-elicitation interview. It can be argued that these representations were facilitated by the participants' self-positioning, as if strategic, they then accounted for an element of performativity in the expression of the self in the photo-elicitation interview.

The individual and private photo-elicitation interviews were semi-structured in nature as much of the structure was provided by requiring the participants to clarify for the interviewer the meaning encoded in their photographs (Belluigi, 2015b). As the photographs were viewed on a computer screen they were viewed one by one in the order in which they were presented to the researcher. The interview prompt was broad (e.g. "Tell me about your photographs") to allow the participant to explore any aspect of the photograph or any topic that arose. The use of metaphor was encouraged as well as reflection on the process of taking photographs as it was anticipated that this would have been an interesting learning experience in itself (Rose, 2012, p. 311). I found that this method allowed for a relaxed entry into the interview conversation and the participants seemed proud of their photographs. Some had gone to a lot of effort in conceptualizing the metaphors used.

These interviews were held in a quiet room on campus and were scheduled outside of class times when convenient to the participants. The interviews were audio-recorded with the student participants' permission. The student was free to reflect on, discuss and 'surface' any issue they chose from the visual metaphors (intended or not) captured by the photographs, the actual images captured as well as the photograph-taking process. I probed in the interview around issues of identity and positioning using experiences of the two contexts or communities (home and on campus). After the audio-recording the interviews were transcribed by a trusted professional transcriber as well as myself in order to ensure that the accuracy, detail and quality of the transcriptions were maintained. This was necessary as the

transcription can be considered to be the first stage of the analysis (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000, p. 69).

The interview transcripts were analysed using the analytical framework of positioning theory. One views the construct of a position through analysing the actions and reactions (known as 'rights' and 'duties' within positioning theory) to the world, both past and present, that are encoded by the words that make up our stories of self, and that in turn construct our ever-changing realities (Dennen, 2007, p. 96). I believe that using this layered methodology gave adequate time and opportunity for the complexities of human identity and its representations to be acknowledged in the research setting. There is always a connection, when using interviews in research, between what is real and what is portrayed (Olsen, 2012). I think that using positioning theory as an analytical tool acknowledged this "circularity" (Olsen, 2012, p. 73) and brought the shifting points of view from the interviewer and respondent into the research, and acknowledged how the social nature of language influenced the interpretations of representations (Olsen, 2012).

3.5 Analysis

Social psychology puts forward positioning theory as a way out of the cause and effect thinking that underpins modern psychology (Moghaddam, Hanley & Harré, 2003). Positioning theory allows the investigator to uncover the current and retrospective dynamic positions that a research participant may hold within their perceived roles. Furthermore, the use of positioning theory as both a theory and as an analytical framework employs both inductive and deductive reasoning in relation to the data. This attempt at looking at human behaviour from the perspective of the 'actor', where motivations or explanations for behaviour are not 'static', is bounded by the delimitations of "loose set(s) of rights and duties that limit the possibility of action" (Moghaddam et al. 2003, p. 5).

The positioning triangle was used as an analytical framework as it provided three aspects of data analysis which together allowed the researcher to identify the positions that construct identity. The positions (made up by rights, obligations and duties), storylines and speech acts (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999) were analysed within the transcribed conversations recorded in the individual interviews. In the case of this research the context was the ways in which the students construct identities within their experiences of home and campus.

This research employed “the systematic comparison of two or more data points (“cases”) obtained through the use of the case study method” (Kaarbo and Beasley, 1999, p. 372). The comparative case study approach was realized through examining seven individual participants’ storylines. The case study method, for the purposes of this study, is defined as “an empirical examination of a real-world phenomenon within its naturally occurring context without directly manipulating either the phenomenon or the context” (Kaarbo and Beasley, 1999, p. 372). In this study, the participants in the individual cases were similar in that they were all first generation Arts and Design students from an ECP class at one higher education institution, and thus the context was “bounded” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 25). I investigated seven such cases “in order to understand [this] common condition” (Beaudry and Miller, 2016, p. 77) and the nuances and differences between the individual experiences of positioning.

Positioning theory in its use of language (speech acts) and storylines allowed my investigation to work with and within the narrative elements of the research interviews. Positioning theory might explain the ways in which the ‘self’ is storied (the identity constructed by narrative) and how that very identity can be contested or resisted, concealed or revealed by the self or other (Day Sclater, 2003). This is in line with other research using positioning theory as although positioning is not often used in educational research it is useful to illuminate individual spoken interactions (Dennen, 2007).

When using positioning theory as an analytical framework, certain steps were necessary; firstly, the “tracing of the storyline” (Aberdeen, 2003, p. 193) and secondly an analysis of the positions assumed by the speakers which included noting the rights, duties and obligations inherent within their positions (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999). In the adoption of positions, a right (see pg.23) justifies a “demand or request for action by someone else” whereas a duty is an “expression of a demand for action by oneself” (Harré & Slocum, 2003, p. 125). In addition the first and second order positioning used was analysed. First order positioning is the position in which a speaker places him/herself or is placed by another participant in the conversation. Second order positioning occurs when other participants in the conversational exchange do not accept the first order positioning and they attempt to reframe or change the positions within a conversation (Aberdeen, 2003). Thirdly, the speech acts used in relation to the storyline were noted as this gave a full picture of the three elements of the positioning triangle (Aberdeen, 2003). Speech acts may be locutionary (“the act of saying something that makes sense in a language”), illocutionary (“an act performed through the medium of language e.g. wishing”) and

perlocutionary (“the effect the locutionary act has on the listener”) (Finch, 2005, p. 171). The social force expressed in a position was considered as significant as this, based on the idea of “illocutionary force” as expressed by Austin (1962), shows how words uttered bring into being action, depending on how and when they are used (Moghaddam, Hanley, & Harré, 2003). When looking at the language used, the speakers’ intentionality was considered as this showed if the position was used as a performance, which might exert influence, or as an accounting to others’ beliefs about the self (Dennen, 2007).

Viewing the photographs of the participants was the initial stage of data collection and analysis. It was important to hold in mind, that what can be inferred from photographs is often culturally determined and that one cannot assume that interpretations of the visual imagery captured in photographs can be standard across cultures and social contexts in any way (Loizos, 2000, p. 96). In this study I left what was discussed in the interviews to the choice of the participants as far as possible, in order to allow the photographs to act as a method for self-reflection and to allow self-positioning to emerge in the discussions.

3.6 Ethical considerations

3.6.2 Reliability

In general terms, seeking reliability in social research is an attempt to achieve quality by ensuring that similar research results are achieved by different researchers at different times (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000, p. 363). Thus the role of the ‘reader’ of the research needs to be taken into account in order to design research that provides “a thick description, of the research situations and methods”. In this way, when effecting transferability, the “findings of a particular qualitative study on either an individual or a group of individuals can be transferred to the context of the reader” (Wagner, Kawulich, & Garner, 2012, p. 94).

The research interview becomes a more reliable method when viewed with the understanding that the presentations of self in an interview, as in all life situations, are not fixed or static. These presentations of the self are bound to change depending on circumstances, which include the relationships between interviewer and interviewees (Kvale, 2007, p. 113). These changing presentations are recognised by positioning theory and thus the interview as a method, when used with this analytical framework,

becomes a valid research method as it allows for the particularity of the student experience to be revealed (see more detail on narrative interviews on pg.34).

3.6.3 Validity

Within interpretative research, validation is sought in an attempt to truthfully and accurately document what has transpired in the research. To this end a researcher employs methods such as triangulation in order to avoid making mistakes and to ensure the data generated is in as much depth as possible (Gibbs, 2007). Bauer and Gaskell suggest that validity is achieved when the research measures what it is intended to measure (2000, p. 367) and this would imply that a researcher needs to plan carefully in their choice of research design. The pursuit of validity in this study was furthered as I provided the research participants with adequate information on the research methods and intention, accurate transcription of the discussion, open and full opportunity for the participants to cross check the transcriptions and careful thematic analysis. An ethical approach to the research will entail the collection of sufficient background information about the participants in order to fully understand their life experience (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Furthermore, validity, as suggested by Olsen (2012) was understood to only exist within the view that understandings and interpretations of the data were multi-faceted and thus contestable (for discussion of validity see pg. 33).

It was evident to me that the visual methodology along with the photo-elicitation interviews created a reflective space and relationship that was relational. Relational research occurs when the researcher and the participants are brought into relation to each other through the research and ideally draws on a small sample of participants in order that the research remains manageable (Stieha, 2010). The value of research that is relational in nature is that it looks with depth at a situation as opposed to attempting to provide a breadth of understanding of many situations. In this way relational research provides validity to a certain context and participants' experience. Furthermore this study facilitated the participants' own explorations and understandings of the self at a moment in time during their transition from home to university.

3.6.4 Power relations in research

Boxer (2003, pp. 2-3) describes how as positioning plays out between different 'actors' in "discursive acts" a "social field of power or underlying mood is created" and the effects of this are long lasting such

that they impact on what he calls the “underlying conscious or culture”. In the consideration of the power dynamics within researcher roles, “positioning looks at a speaker’s position relative to another speaker” (Dennen, 2007, p. 96), the self and the other, and thus when using positioning theory one must constantly consider the relationship between the researcher and the participant and these effects on researcher bias. If language is one of the ways we construct our reality, then positioning is useful in making visible how this construction takes place, and as explained by Davies and Harré (1990), positioning theory provides a way to understand discourse.

It was with the issues of power in research interviewing in mind that I attempted to maintain a high level of self-awareness throughout the interview process. I did my best to self-monitor throughout the interviews in order to take into account what (Kvale, 2007, p. 14) terms the inherent “power asymmetry”, which exists mostly without the intention of the interviewer in the research interview process. I was mindful of how the participants may have reacted to the interview either consciously or subconsciously as suggested by Kvale (2007) and kept an informal and friendly tone in my interactions in the interviews. I think this was achievable as the participants had freedom to lead the interaction as I asked only for them to “Tell me about the photographs”. I was able to keep the ‘conversation’ about the photographs moving without direct questioning which might, according to Kvale (2007), have been construed as powerful or dominant behaviour by the interviewee. In addition I think that the interviewees were able to retain their control or agency as they had made the choices of what to present (the photographs they had taken) and how to interpret them (the meaning they gave to the photographs in the photo-elicitation interviews).

3.6.5 Participant ethics

Before the start of the data collection I obtained ethical approval from DUT at institutional and departmental level. An important ethical consideration was the issue of confidentiality, and linked to it anonymity, of not only the participants but any other person pictured in their photographs (Rose, 2012). The research participants were advised to take non-mimetic portraits in order to not reveal the identity of any people included in the images. Photographs being used in the dissertation where faces were shown had the faces blurred using Photoshop. In addition, when the student participants took photographs in their home and campus environments they were requested to conduct themselves in an ethical manner. This was discussed with the participants as any ‘harm’ that may have arisen if the

photographs distracted or disrupted the subjects' activities or possibly provoked reactions from people not willing to have photographs taken of them and their activities (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012, p. 67). To avoid this, as much as possible, I asked the participants to take photographs that expressed their responses to the prompt metaphorically.

3.6.6 Insider research and ethics

When critiquing 'insider research' it is necessary to acknowledge that the research interview, often approached as merely a description of how research is being done (a methodological choice), has an often unacknowledged impact, a "pedagogical reflexivity" (Clegg & Stevenson, 2013, p. 13), on the research participants. Kvale counters this by acknowledging how research interviews are neither therapeutic nor philosophical in nature as a researcher is not attempting change through "emotional personal interaction" (as in therapy) nor change through "logical argumentation" (as in philosophical debate) but rather the research interview tries to gain insight into the experiences of the interviewee, using the least possible amount of influence in a relationship characterised by partnership (2007, p. 16). In the case of my study, although I may have been seen to be an 'insider' to the research environment as I am a staff member, and this could have been advantageous in that I am familiar to the students, I must acknowledge how I differ from the research participants in for example home language, age, gender and socio-political past experiences. I had to acknowledge through this research process that it might have been difficult to maintain objectivity or impartiality if aspects of my colleagues' teaching were brought under discussion by the participants and if my beliefs about the importance of higher education and the role of the university in society were challenged. As I am a FGS myself, albeit a white, middle class one, I find that my views are often conflicted as I see how my close family members who have no higher education have at times succeeded and at times struggled to make their living. I therefore feel that perhaps I have an understanding of the inner conflicts of current students who no longer feel they can relate to their families as they increasingly become a part of the university community.

Although I might have had "common sense insider knowledge" (Clegg and Stevenson, 2013, p. 7) I needed to 'step away' from these understandings in order to obtain the distance necessary to examine my assumptions and the data in a trustworthy manner. I acknowledge tentatively that "in field research the researcher's presence is always an intervention in some way" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 46).

3.6.7 Reflections on the research process

This research process had outcomes beyond the data I expected to be generated in the photo-elicitation interviews, in particular, in the ways in which the participants exercised their agency in their relationship with me as a writing centre practitioner. This agency led to two examples of pedagogical reflexivity (see pg.45 for explanation). In the first example, after the photo-elicitation interviews, Sibusiso and Keith asked me if I had any way to help them improve their English as they felt that this was part of how to succeed as a student. It is interesting to note that the issue of language was only raised after the photo-elicitation interview was concluded. I think that this was when the participants returned to seeing me as a member of staff who had a 'teaching' role in their environment and thus I was called on to make a response. Perhaps this request for assistance was a conscious response to a more subconscious shift in identity, indicative of the participants' transitional process in taking on the literacy practices of being a university student (How identity and academic literacy might interact was discussed in detail on pg.9). Moreover, as a writing centre practitioner on campus, students and staff sometimes assume that it is the role of the writing centre to get involved with English language development. Although teaching English is not the role of a writing centre, in the case of the participants, I decided that I should respond to their request as this was something that they felt was necessary for them. I suggested that they could visit the writing centre as often as they could manage to spend time sharing readings they suggested and discussing them in English with the tutors.

What grew from this exchange was the informal arrangement of an early morning group of students (four of them were participants of this research project and another two were their classmates from the ECP) who came in to work on their reading and speaking of English, with facilitation by an IsiZulu speaking writing centre tutor and myself. What this initiative suggested was that the students having reflected on their situation, being mother tongue IsiZulu speakers in an English language of instruction tertiary institution, had taken collective action in order to work towards changing their situation and to improve their chances of academic success. This approach to learning has been reported in research by Mgqwashu (2009). He comments on how peer tutoring worked to extend and support students wanting to improve their English skills. Magqwashu (2009. p. 298) suggests that the poor teaching many youths receive in South African schools has for the majority, without access to the advantages of middle class educational facilities, remained unchanged and continues to disadvantage students. I think that although in such a short time the students' English skills might only have marginally improved, what did

seem to be happening was that they were growing in confidence in discussing their thoughts on the readings. In addition, they got to know each other, a writing centre tutor and myself a little more and that would have possibly made them feel more at home on campus. This establishment of relationships with faculty and peers is noted in higher education literature as an important factor in the success of first year students. This not only helps students feel connected in their new environment but helps to develop relationships with role models in their disciplines (see pp. 13; 115).

The second example occurred during the third quarter of the academic year in which the photo-elicitation interviews were conducted. Six of the student participants approached me for advice about setting up a business. The claiming of agential power in their collective action was clearly evident. They explained that they had an entrepreneurial idea and were researching how to plan and set up a small business. Some HES researchers suggest that research can be transformational if it considers the resilience and agency that students possess, and how these skills are learnt, prior to entering higher education (Ellery & Baxen, 2015; Fataar, 2010; Gofen, 2009).

It became clear that the leader of this group was Sibusiso, the participant who had shown in his interview (as I discuss in more detail in 4.2.2.1) that he was very aware of the role of business in society and in his social mobility. The creative and determined response of this group to the financial situations in which they found themselves at the start of their university studies was a very clear example of what Archer (2000) refers to as corporate agency as previously discussed on pg. 18. As Case explains in her social realist study of student learning and agency in a South African higher education institution, “students exercise corporate agency through their engagement with peers, in order to facilitate their achievement of academic success” (2015, p. 847). Case’s study takes into account how life circumstances can constrain or enable this agency. Archer (2007) suggests that internal self-talk becomes useful in a reflective process if it is shared with an ‘external’ listener. In the case of the interactions facilitated in this research process I became the external listener and fulfilled this role both during informal ‘pop-in chats’ and a more formal interaction when the students ‘pitched’ their business idea to me. In support of Archer’s understandings of the importance of collective or corporate agency, a South African study of a university mentorship programme suggests that FGSs would benefit from the relationships and help afforded by personal mentors in a structured student mentorship programme, as this would allow for opportunities for corporate agency (Luckett & Luckett, 2009). I was pleased to see how the students were using the time they had during their academic programme, and their corporate

agential power, to explore the possibility of starting a business or at least to learn what the process might entail. I think that even though they seemed to be following the leadership or role modelling of one of the group, the process they went through was transformational as the participants were in a position to imagine themselves as 'business partners' and what that might entail. By extension, I realised through this experience, that research may be considered transformational if it includes opportunities for pedagogical reflexivity (pg. 23) within the research design. In support of this, my experience of this research was that the process was as powerful for me as it was for the student participants as the self-reflection created opportunities for the participants to give voice to their aspirations. The use of photographs as metaphors for how one constructs one's life experiences was seen as valuable by the participants as is shown in this comment by Stanley.

It's helping us a lot, this photo-taking thing. I have just realised this in the last few days. I learned that a picture is not a picture...Each picture has a different story and a meaning behind it. I've been thinking about them all together and it's like looking at many different stories at once. Stanley then links the value of the reflective exercise to the self ("photography has made my mind clear") and he reflects on the medium, skill and role of photography in his life as a student of art and design.

My lecturer... told me a picture...is an imagination of what you see. That is what I want to have in future, and that opportunity started from when you gave us the camera to take the photos. As indicated through section 4.2, positioning theory in this study allows for the up close and 'minute by minute' positions (see pg. 22 for discussion) in the participant storyline transcripts to be revealed, however it might be useful to be able to step back from this fine-grain analysis to see how the self relates to societal issues that might impact on education and academic identity in South Africa (see pg. 14).

As a writing centre practitioner in higher education, I consider it important to help in creating an environment in which the power structures of society can be challenged. My pedagogical practices need to be constantly 'disrupted' by new experiences in order for me to remain healthily aware of how power plays out in society, the university and ultimately impacts on individuals. This research experience has provided an opportunity for me to find this disruption in my assumptions about the student experience and to work outside of my usual 'space' or experience. As Salazar (2013, p. 125), following the ideas of Paulo Freire suggests, our educational environments will become "more fully human" when all students in all their diversity are respected and taken into consideration by educators. Moreover, Fránquiz and Salazar (2004) value, as part of a 'humanizing pedagogy', an educator's role in researching both the large

and small scale events that contribute to social justice in students' lives. A humanizing pedagogy is a liberating pedagogy whose aim is transformational and fosters freedom and social justice in educational environments (McLaren, 1997). The notion of a humanizing pedagogy implies that educators and students alike should position and reposition themselves with power and agency in relation to the educational project. This positioning was evidence of how the photograph-taking task served a reflective role in the student experience and furthermore, how a university environment could become more humanising, through the use of reflection, was considered.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I provided my context within a UoT in order to show the relevance of the research design to my work and the students I serve. The overall methodological approach and the research design were explained as fitting to the needs of both Arts and Design students and the chosen theoretical and analytical frameworks. The use of photography in educational research and how I constructed this study's methodology was outlined and the reactions of the participants to the methodology, was discussed.

Chapter Four – Data analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide a summary of my analysis of the participants' personal storylines that emerged during the individual photo-elicitation interviews. The analysis first explains in brief how positioning theory was used (for more detail see pg.51). Thereafter the data is analysed using positioning theory as a framework which provides a fine-grain analysis of the participants' storylines and their positioning. This analysis seeks to make tentative deductions as to how these positions contribute to the development of student academic identity at the point of transition from home to campus life. Positioning theory has allowed me to consider the changing nature of identity and possibly how the student participants saw themselves and constructed their (academic) identity 'in the moment' at a point in time during their transition from home to university. These shifts in identity took place against the backgrounds of family, peers and community role models, spiritual beliefs and rural-urban contexts. Positioning theory accounts for how a participant can use the flexibility of self-positioning to construct or give expression to identity when faced with new situations. In the second subsection (4.3), I provided a discussion of the key themes that arose in the participants' storylines and integrated this discussion with some key theories and themes in HES as discussed in Chapter Two.

The analysis process began with clustering the personal storylines that emerged from the transcribed interviews under broad categories. These broad categories emerged from the data generated by eliciting the participants' explanations of what the photographs signified to them. The topics that the participants commonly brought forward in these personal storyline categories were clustered as:

- Role models – the ways in which the participants felt that relationships with home community, family and peers provided role models in both positive and negative ways.
- New roles and identity – the participants expressed thoughts around how universities and power interact and their development of both academic and professional identity.
- New lifestyle – how participants experienced the physical transition from their home/rural environment to being on campus or in an urban setting.
- Challenges – participants spoke of the difficulties they faced with regards to their academic, family and financial lives.

- Belief systems – participants’ spirituality and how they viewed the world were grouped in this topic.

As a way to consider how student identity formation might occur the ‘lens’ of positioning theory provides a view of fleeting “social encounter(s)” (Boxer, 2003, p. 256). An assumption of this theory, which I found important to keep to the forefront of my own mind while analyzing the generated data, is how the positions taken up or rejected can change an individual’s construction of or memories of reality (Boxer, 2003). From the narration of these storylines, I sought to explore how the participants’ *rights* (pg. 41) and *duties* (pg.41) and positions (pg.41) were revealed.

4.2 Participant stories – Analysis using positioning theory

I present the data generated in the photo-elicitation interviews arranged as per all seven participants. This arrangement allows for an illustration of all the common topics or trends in actions, beliefs and experiences brought forward by this sample of FSGs. Although many of the participants related common themes in their photo-elicitation interviews, the excerpts of the transcribed interviews chosen to be represented in this research report are intended to indicate the range of student experiences and challenges that arose in this study. This particular choice on my part has validity because, although contrary to studies which explore commonality and statistical significance, a central purpose of this study was to understand the range and depth of transitional positioning experiences of students in this context (pg.19). Personal storylines represented here speak of the seven participants’ perceptions of themselves and the challenges they faced during the transitions they made when entering a university, becoming a student and developing an academic identity. Thus, I felt it important not to present them in a fashion which may privilege one storyline over the other, but rather they are presented in no particular order, as each individual’s story is equally important to be ‘heard’. Thus, to help the reader have a sense of each participant as a person, I chose to preface each participant story by a brief profile of them holistically.

These storylines are intended to show how they view their rights and duties as explored in response to the prompt “take photos that show you as a student at home and on campus”. Initially the data was analysed by looking at the rights and duties the participants accept, reject and contest which in turn revealed the positions they held. How the participants might have been positioned by a societal

structure such as a university was explored. Agency will be discussed further in 4.3.2. In subsection 4.3, the analysis links the student participant experiences with relevant and current trends and themes in HES. This was in order to explore whether what I was observing in the data generated in this study began to align with other HES in South Africa and globally.

4.2.1 Andile

At the time of the interview, Andile was a 19 year old female student enrolled in the ECP as a Fashion Design student. As with all the participants in this study (pg. 36), she was the first in her family to be studying at a higher education level. She reported living with her mother and three aunts in a large township⁹ in the south of Durban. In her earlier childhood she had lived in a rural town 200km north of Durban, close to a national park.

In my discussion of Andile's storyline of transition, it emerges that Andile positioned herself both in relation to those she characterized as negative, including within these her home community and peers, and those she saw as positive, in particular her mother's colleagues. In narrating her storyline, a sense of her new roles and identity; and her new lifestyle as a student when at home/rural and on campus/urban; and the various challenges she faced in her transition to student life, emerged. Underlying these themes was a spiritual belief system which strongly underpinned how she saw the world and her place therein.

4.2.1.1 Negative role models - home community

In the recounting of Andile's¹⁰ experiences of home communities she shared stories of how different role models had impacted on her life. As in this indicative excerpt from our interview below, Andile most often described her home community in negative terms.

It is very much a corrupted place...I don't think they have life because they don't have something to live for ...They drink alcohol so bad it is what they do on a daily basis.

⁹ A township is defined as a "suburb or city of predominantly black occupation, formerly officially designated for black occupation by apartheid legislation" (Van Niekerk & Wolvaardt, 2006, p. 1257).

¹⁰ Andile is a pseudonym. Andile took photographs for the study but the camera she used was stolen. In the interview, she described to me the images she had used to think through the prompt. The imagery she described were: clouds in the sky at night, clouds in the daytime, clouds in front of the sun, and a motor highway.

Included in Andile's description of her home community, in the following transcript excerpt, are some of the ways in which Andile perceived the societal norms she experienced in her community. Andile used the pronoun 'they' repeatedly which gave a strong sense of how she distanced herself from the community and how she perceived their lifestyle as counter-productive. By not using the inclusive 'we', she seemed to be distancing herself from the community norms and role models she perceived as negatives, even though she recognised herself as belonging to this community. As the reader will notice in many of the interview transcript excerpts in this section, Andile's use of the pronoun 'they' was indicative of the way she positioned herself as distant from her community and this seemed to be an attempt to reject the kinds of behaviour she considered self-defeating.

I don't think *they* have life because *they* don't have something to live for. *They* are corrupt... and it is sad because *they* seem to have lost to know who *they* are [emphasis added].

Taylor et al. (2003) suggest that positioning can take place "intergroup", where an individual may position a group to which they belong and themselves in relation to that group. In the case of Andile this was her home community. In this interview excerpt, Andile seemed to be able to distance herself from what she characterised as ways of thinking that were self-limiting. The people she described, she seemed to feel, had lost their direction.

They don't believe in themselves, they don't see themselves in the future...It just is more like people from that place, this cloud covering their eyes, they don't see what is happening, they don't think of producing themselves.

Andile indicated her awareness of the importance of not allowing the sense of belonging she experienced in her community to weaken her resolve to live her life differently.

It is a place where you just, you sometimes your sense of belonging, you just know where you belong, what is the right thing to do, you just get lost like you are standing in the middle of nowhere and you don't know what you do. That is the place I come from.

Andile articulated the contradictions and social troubles she saw in her community and rejected how she might be positioned as a member of that community. These attempts to position herself as different or apart from her community could be interpreted as her way of attempting to prevent these social ills from becoming an obligation and impacting negatively on her life plans. This she did by positioning the people in her community in order to reposition herself as different to them (see explanation on pg.28). This repositioning could possibly be strategic as "positioning ones opponents in various disadvantageous ways [could] reduce the scope of their actions markedly" (Harré & Slocum, 2003). In this instance strategic positioning enabled Andile to 'separate' from her community or determine who she believed

she was. In describing the cell phone¹¹ photograph she took of a highway, Andile again positioned herself as knowing the best direction for her life in relation to her surroundings or community.

Recalling my background, I think I have a long way to go. As Andile, I just want to be everything. I know it is crazy. I want to be everything I want in a profession, because I believe in learning. I have to learn each and every second. So if there is a second, a minute, that I didn't learn anything, that is just time wasted. So I got the highway. When I looked at the road, I thought of my life, where I come from.

Andile's belief system was another way in which she was able to position herself in her world and indeed served as a way for her to ensure she lived her life in the way she saw fit despite the pull of the negative influences around her. Andile seemed to identify deeply with her spiritual beliefs which according to Taylor et al. (2003) are the only other collective identity as pervasive as a collective cultural identity.

I believe the world belongs to God. God must decide what we should do. We are all created by God.

4.2.1.2 Positive role models - home community

In the following instance of how community may impact on educational choices, I suggest that a broad conception of community might be important to consider. In other words, that a community is not necessarily limited to the people amongst whom one lives, but could rather be all the groups of people that might have an impact on one's life. In the case of Andile, this would include her mother's colleagues. This is illustrated in how Andile reported her journey to making an application to study at university as having been influenced by her mother's colleagues. Andile retrospectively positioned her mother's colleagues as having been responsible for prepositioning her as a fashion designer. Her mother's colleagues' prepositioning is evident in the following transcript through the comments they gave her about her sketches when she was still at school.

...and that is where they said you are a fashion designer, and that is where it came about.

This example of prepositioning, whereby her mother's colleagues expressed certain beliefs about and expectations of Andile, possibly indicated how she started to imagine a future for herself in the field of design as it might have been their comments that built her self confidence in her artistic ability.

Whether this prepositioning was strategic or not is arguable, but of most importance for a study of this

¹¹ South African term for a mobile telephone.

nature that considers how individuals resist/accept positioning, is that it certainly helped Andile think about her rights and duties in terms of matching her abilities with a possible career path.

4.2.1.3 Role models – Peers

During the interview, Andile described her inner conflicts and the challenges of peer pressure as a student. She was able to express with strong social force her conscious decisions as to how she would lead her student life in accordance with her spiritual belief system. Thus she showed how within her transition to higher education she was aware of not losing her direction to peer pressure and how that could jeopardise her future which, in excerpts such as the one below, she clearly indicated are predetermined.

It is one thing that will pull me away...from where I want to be, and choose friends that just don't ...respect the things that I believe in...I find it hard sometimes to stay away from them...it keeps coming in my mind to do whatever I like because I am still young...but those things sometimes make me forget who I am, but the decision I made about my life...do everything that God says I must do...The influence of friends, the pressure around them, it is one thing topple away from my goals.

4.2.1.4 New lifestyle - rurality

As indicated in the excerpt below Andile, in an act of “reflexive positioning” (Moghaddam, 1999), positioned herself as belonging to the rural area where she grew up.

As I live here in Durban; I am from Mtubatuba and the place is a village. So there is less industrialisation...and in Mtubatuba, it is just a quiet place.

This intrapersonal position showed her strong identification with her rural roots which she felt allowed her the right to be her ‘true’ self.

It lets you be who you are, and to be able to produce yourself, to be whatever you want to be. She positioned city life in the following extract as being threatening to her core identity and values, giving a sense of how vulnerable she felt while she was experiencing the transitional process of becoming a student.

Because when you are around here in Durban, it's an urban area and you get a lot of things from the side of politics and the social issues that we get into and that we encounter every day. Right here in these urban areas, you find it hard to express who you are.

4.2.1.5 University and power

Andile spoke of the pain of initially not being accepted into higher education and having to spend a post-matric year at home before being placed in the ECP, enrolled through the Fashion Design programme.

I matriculated 2013. And last year I couldn't study. I applied for fashion. For all the things I wanted to do but it couldn't happen...It is painful not to study. Not to do anything. I wanted to study.

Andile's storyline positioned her as having been rejected by the higher education institution and she sought comfort and made sense of the situation through prayer and her Christian faith. In her storyline she revealed how she positioned God as having authority in her life.

I believe in God. I believe he guides us and tells us what to do, the right things we must do at the right time, and when I did that, I just asked God.

Although the illocutionary force with which Andile framed the events of her university application process was strong ("I was rejected"), she was however able to reject this first order position from the institution and take up a second order position through contesting how the events played out.

I knew I qualified for them. I couldn't understand why I got rejected.

Later Andile was offered a place in the ECP and she showed how pleased she was to be accepted into the university.

There was a call from DUT fashion department. It went well and I passed.

4.2.1.6 Challenges - financial

The following excerpt showed the day-to-day practical challenges Andile faced in her transition to student life. Adapting to and coping with the workload created pressure and added to this were her concerns about her perceived duty to provide the materials necessary for projects. Here Andile voiced her concerns about resources and how the university had a duty to provide assistance, even if just to help students manage stress with counselling.

Yes, and like here at school I sometimes find it hard to cope...I find it hard to get it done on time, because sometimes I wouldn't have the proper stationery...I wouldn't have all that I need for the assignment we have been given and tools. I am glad that such schools as DUT have student counselling. There is a food problem because I am quite poor...they advise me of ways to get out of the situation and to move on. So it is not that hard because there are people who are supportive around.

Andile acknowledged through her storyline the financial challenges she faced and how when overwhelmed she contemplated dropping out. She did however take on duties inherent in the position that she occupied. Her right to the identity of a tertiary student meant that she had a simultaneous duty to her family as the future breadwinner. This was a transition that might well have placed an inordinate amount of pressure on a young adult and quite possibly have led to feelings of isolation (Hussey & Smith, 2010).

I find it hard to cope with things. My Mum works late. She is actually a domestic worker. It's one thing that challenges me where I sometimes think of dropping out of school because there are things we need at home...I know that when I get my profession and get out there and show how poor I am, that dark cloud will get out of my way.

4.2.1.7 New role and identity

The next excerpt shows Andile's reflections on her student academic identity. The following transcript showed her realisation of what was her duty in being an effective student.

Who am I firstly and, what makes me a student? ...One thing I realise is that I am always willing to learn not only from the lecturer, or a student, or anyone standing in front of me, but to everything surrounding me, my environment, and the nature.

Andile positioned herself within her role as a student as being the kind of student that actively sought ways in which to engage with the world and any opportunity to learn which presented itself. She showed her understanding of how valuable learning could take place in many environments and that being open to this was her duty as a student. It is possible that this set the scene for a reasonably seamless transition into tertiary study, one in which she saw herself as having a duty to be an active, open and engaged student and who could subsequently claim her right to a tertiary education.

4.2.1.8 Conclusion

Thus Andile's storyline considered many aspects of her journey into higher education. Perhaps the most important thread might be her academic identity development as how she experienced her transition into higher education culminated in her realisations about herself and her role in the process, including the meaning of her rural roots and the peace and well-being she felt this environment gave her. This important personal development was linked by theorists to how students start to feel at home in their adopted disciplines, feel comfortable in their new life as a student and subsequently use this shift in identity to influence how they engage with their studies (see pp.14; 23 for discussion). Thus how

Andile's positioning contributed to the development of her student academic identity at the point of transition from home to campus life was shown. She noted how she saw the importance of learning from everything in her life, not only school but her environment (nature) too. Andile showed how her strong spiritual beliefs allowed her to overcome the pull of negative role models in her community and subsequently the despair she felt when she had to take an ECP placement. She acknowledged too positive role models in her community and the importance of rejecting negative role models amongst her university peers. Additionally, Andile recognised the underlying financial strain she lived with as a student.

4.2.2 Sibusiso

Sibusiso, at the time of the interview, was a 23 year old male student registered as an Interior Design student in the ECP. He lived in a DUT student residence and came from the rural area around a small inland town in KwaZulu-Natal where he lived with his grandmother and uncle. Sibusiso was a confident and relaxed participant with a keen sense of humour. He had taken a lot of photographs showing happy memories from his childhood and detailing the post-school time he had spent working as an intern in a government sports development programme. Sibusiso enquired at the end of his interview about opportunities for classes to improve his English skills while on campus.

In Sibusiso's interview he positioned himself in relation to other youths and his views on their lifestyle, his rural and city environments and he showed a strong sense of an emerging student and professional identity. Throughout he showed his awareness of the importance of money and his attitude towards it was one of wanting to learn how to be a good businessman. This he explored in his views on entrepreneurship and business practice.

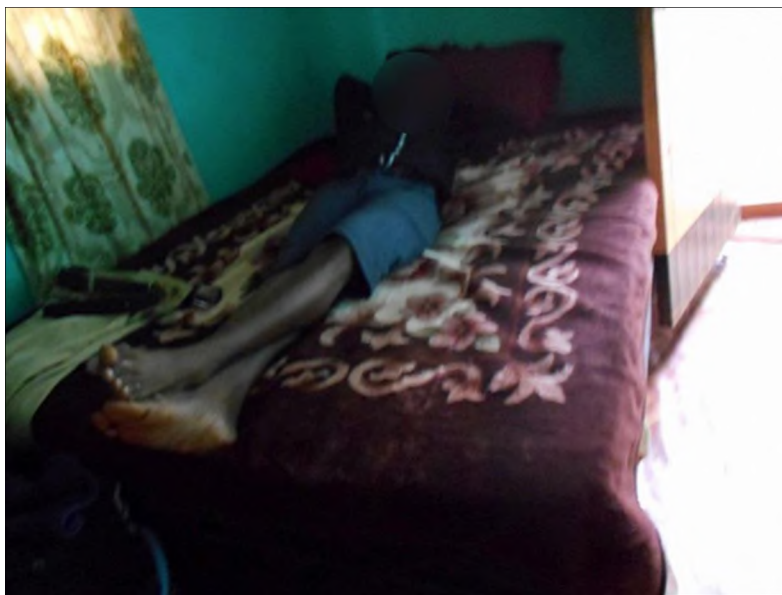
4.2.2.1 Negative and positive role models - home community

In the following transcript from the photo-elicitation interview, Sibusiso took up what he saw as his duty to live healthily and to spend money on what he felt were important things. Similar to the strategic positioning that Andile's storyline suggested (pg.53), this position influenced his counter or strategic positioning of some of the youths in his community as engaging in what he saw as unproductive behaviour. He rejected their behaviour through this reflexive positioning which occurred in what Moghaddam (1999) refers to as the intrapersonal domain. He could be seen to create for himself a concomitant right to 'get ahead' in life in a positive manner which he envisaged as 'being responsible'

through the accumulation of material possessions. This was most poignantly indicated in his verbal discussion of

Photograph 1: Sibusiso "I have got a double bed in my room, I just bought it"

You can see I have got a double bed in my room, I just bought it, and if I compare to other youth, all they think about...is wasting money, like buying alcohol and drugs. They are abusing their systems and bodies, it is not healthy, but they are still going for it...instead of buying serious and important things.



Photograph 1: Sibusiso "I have got a double bed in my room, I just bought it" [Image altered]

In the following transcript excerpt showing Sibusiso's views of his role models, he spoke with admiration of an entrepreneur in his home community. He noted how the exercising of one's agency could influence economic power and ultimately effect change in a community. He positioned this role model as a person who took up his duty to act with agency and that the outcome for him was the right to the economic power and freedom of self-employment.

This guy is too much of a business man. This was the building which was built in a short space of time that is a big building, so it has created much sense to my mind. If you have power you can do anything you want to do at any time. This person who built this building...He was on contract. Then he left his job to do his businesses.



Photograph 2: Sibusiso "This guy is too much of a businessman."

4.2.2.2 New lifestyle - rurality

Sibusiso made observations about the differences he noticed between his home life in a rural context, and his student life in an urban context.

If I am here in the city I don't always see these...sometimes I see dogs for policeman not the dogs like we have at home. And chickens, all I see in the city is the braai packs¹².

Although he used humour, what the transcript shows is how he positioned city life as different to his home life through his observations of the somewhat negative roles of domestic animals in the city environment. These differences were marked for him and contributed to the newness or strangeness of his student life.

¹² A 'braai pack' refers to a punnet or serving of meat suitable for cooking on a braai or barbeque.



Photograph 3: Sibusiso "All I see in the city is the braai packs."

Sibusiso talked of how he was enjoying having lots of people around him in the student residence and how this was a marked difference to his rural upbringing.

...communication is now more active in my life. Because sometimes if you have far neighbours, this is how you would find yourselves, talking with your family only, but if you have close neighbours this is whereby you would have communication and hear some things you didn't know about.

He positioned his new found access to technology as enabling a fundamental change in his lifestyle and he spoke with social force of the rights this gave him to freedom of expression and how this extended his life experiences past just those of his immediate family.

Later in the interview Sibusiso's storyline changed to show how he may have had conflicted feelings about living in the city. Although he was able to embrace the positive transitions that it brought to his life, such as better access to communication, a chance to connect with people and to further his studies, he observed that it brought negative influences. He thus positioned his community as peace loving and having a system of discipline. In opposition to this he felt that Durban could be a harsh and unwelcoming place to live.

I think it is the environment that I am living in...there is not that much cruel...They have peace inside. If someone is being difficult to committee members they would discipline that person so

they don't want to do that thing again. Durban is worse...right now there is xenophobia, this...has just showed me some people are stupid, like because they are doing unnecessary things, chasing people out of the country...And there is too much of robbery here in town...there are many Whoonga stars...a lot of things are corrupted here. But it doesn't affect me much because all I know is to go where I have to go, at school...I had to stick to my studies.

I see how, in the case of Sibusiso, given the suggestion by positioning theorists that positions are not static, like roles may be (see pg.16), they allow him the freedom to move out of the reality of the negative happenings around him in the city such as xenophobia and crime. This possibility is written about by Mann (2001) who proposes differing perspectives on alienation in the student experience. Mann (2001) suggests that a person's identity is in constant tension with what is experienced in the 'real' world and so seeks ways to escape this reality. In the case of Sibusiso this works in a positive manner as he articulates how he seems to use his positioning of himself as a student designer almost as a barrier against a reality that he sees as limiting or frightening in its potential to throw him off a productive way of living. Sibusiso's ability to 'stick' to his studies through partitioning himself from the reality of the city is an effective strategy for self-preservation as it provides him with a strong focus for his life.

In contrast to Sibusiso's guardedness in relation to the city, Sibusiso expressed the openness he felt in relation to how he saw his rural home environment. Sibusiso's storyline showed his connection to and value for the natural world around him and a sense that when he was away he longed for the sounds of his home and the usual things he saw around him. In the following excerpt he positioned his rural environment as one which afforded him happiness and peace.

...yes I enjoy the beauty. Because nature combined. And the freedom. I heard birds singing different songs with their whistles in my yard. It brings me that joy. It makes me happy. When I am in the city, I remember that noise I heard sitting in my yard.



Photograph 4: Sibusiso “It brings me that joy.”

Sibusiso’s storyline shows how he positioned nature as being dependable and he expressed his gratefulness and appreciation for the abundance that has sustained him and his family.

Since I was growing up they are here and still now surviving and they still produce what they have to produce. So I think these trees are so great...there were times, whereby like curry is finished, so we have to take avocado and use it as a curry, so I appreciate those trees.



Photograph 5: Sibusiso “Since I was growing up they are here.”

Sibusiso attributed nature with a sense of reliability, permanence and abundance, perhaps even a sense of food security, which most likely he felt was missing after his transition to a new life in the city, where it might have been necessary to protect oneself from risks. Davies (2003) suggests that “we are...multilingual and multidiscursive” and that “we have more than one way of speaking ourselves into being and thus more than one way of inscribing our embodied selves”. Therefore I ask, what subtle impact on a person’s sense of place and identity and personal security and safety might moving to a city bring? This is especially so when the new life is lived within a busy urban student residence in a concrete environment, far from other support structures such as family members and community, whilst struggling to make sense of often puzzling and inefficient university systems such as funding and housing.

4.2.2.2 New role and identity

In the following excerpt Sibusiso showed how he started to think of himself as a designer and to enjoy this transitional process of becoming (Gee, 1990). He acknowledged that he valued being in the ECP class as he was learning skills he could see would be useful to him as a designer.



Photograph 6: Sibusiso “I will be best designer.”

I took this picture to represent myself physically in this campus, and my class. I am enjoying my studies. I will be best designer. It was going to be difficult for me, so I think it was good to start here to develop my skills.

Sibusiso used the metaphorical photograph (Photograph 7) he took to express with great social force his vision for himself. He showed a very determined awareness of the duties (such as strength, determination and focus) he would need to fulfil in order to achieve this success. The way in which Sibusiso narrated his description of the photograph gave him distance from the subject matter and it was as if the individual in the photograph had a voice and spoke to the viewer. Day Sclater (2003) suggests that a person's narrative can construct who they are (see pg. 41) and the following transcript from Sibusiso's interview showed the agential power that this might afford an individual.

I think you can see he has a focus on something. I took it as if "I know my goal and where I am heading to". So I think the eyes are not looking to the side but are looking straight forward. So I know what I am looking for. When I look at this picture I just have that feeling, and passion and positivity of like doing things more, doing the best out of what I can with my schoolwork, so I can reach my goal.



Photograph 7: Sibusiso "I know what I am looking for."

4.2.2.3 Conclusion

Sibusiso showed a clear interest in entrepreneurship and business practice. He expressed his disapproval openly of youth who don't spend their money wisely. Although Sibusiso expressed strong connections to his rural background and valued greatly the peace and joy he found in nature, at the same time he saw the importance of what city life brought him in his links to technology and his access to improved communication. Sibusiso showed strong academic identity development through his understanding of his new role as a student and showed a willingness to take on a professional identity as a designer. He seemed to be able to use his new found student and professional identity as a designer to deflect any possible negative city influences.

4.2.3 Hlumela

Hlumela, when interviewed, was a Fashion Design student registered in the ECP class. She came from a rural area around a small coastal town an hour south of Durban, and lived there with her mother and sisters. She lived as a student in a DUT residence in the Durban city centre. Hlumela seemed reluctant to attend the interview as her classmate and fellow participant Andile had to remind her to keep her appointment for the interview. Hlumela was softly spoken and gave very succinct responses in the interview.

In Hlumela's interview she showed an awareness of her new role and identity as a student. Her new student lifestyle brought with it many choices and responsibilities. She positioned the university positively as providing opportunity for these lifestyle choices and despite her past and present financial challenges a possible improved financial situation for her family.

4.2.3.1 New lifestyle

Hlumela gave voice in her interview to how she felt about the freedom and responsibility in the choices she now had as a student living away from home. Her awareness of the challenges she had to take on if she was to live up to her duties as a student was apparent.

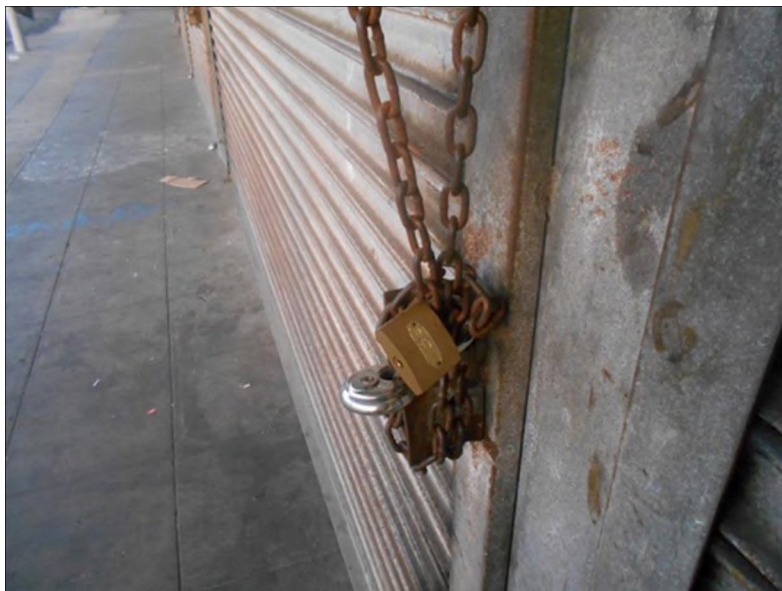
In life, if you chose a bad way and then the good one. Taking this picture I was thinking about two ways. Which way I want to go, is it either that way or another way?



Photograph 8: Hlumela “Which way I want to go, is it either that way or another way?”

Hlumela talked in the photo-elicitation interview of the lack of opportunity that her poverty visited on her life. She positioned herself as having had no choices and the metaphor of a lock and chain expressed her accompanying feelings of powerlessness.

Sometimes when I grew up I used to think like everything was locked up. We didn’t have a way, we were so poor, we were the only one who was poor at the time.



Photograph 9: Hlumela “I used to think like everything was locked up.”

In the transition to becoming a student Hlumela embraced the duties she saw as inherent to her success and the choices she had to good nutrition and a physical environment conducive to study. She staked her claim to certain rights as a student.

I can now study in a place with electricity, table, chairs there, space... I said we were like, we were eating like food that we could find in the dustbins. Now I can eat food that I like. I can buy something that I want.



Photograph 10: Hlumela “Now I can eat food that I like.”

4.2.3.2 Challenges - financial

Hlumela spoke of her family’s financial challenges and explained that it was her ‘duty’ in life to continue the financial struggles.

I took this picture because I am still walking, my life I still have to do, and there is still a journey I have to go through. I do have sisters working, but not in very good jobs, but we were able to survive from that, because my Mum...is a pensioner, so from all of that, we have survived some more.



Photograph 11: Hlumela "I am still walking, my life I still have to do."

Hlumela positioned herself retrospectively within her storyline giving voice to her expectations about her family's financial situation having shifted. Now that she was a student she and her family were able to claim the possibility of, or right to, a higher economic status in their community.

I took this picture because there are so many doors open for me, so I can see. This picture means light in my life.



Photograph 12: Hlumela "This picture means light in my life."

4.2.3.3 New role and identity

It is evident from the way Hlumela spoke when interviewed about being in university that she positioned the institution as symbolising financial opportunity and as holding the potential for a change in living standards. The university was positioned as a provider of opportunity and in turn Hlumela, as the student, had the right and duty to access this financial improvement for her family. The illocutionary force with which this belief was expressed was evident in her comment.

Yes, I can't wait to be something else, make a change in our home.

Hlumela's storyline narrates how she felt she and her family was before she became a student. She suggested that being a student somehow changed her fundamentally ("now we are" and "we are now") and her utterances seemed to be positioning the university as having the power to accept or reject a person into its midst. Her position was constructed both by her perceived duty to "upgrade" her family and by her right to now be accepted into 'the university'. Considering that she gave this interview only a few months into the university year indicated that she had strong expectations of what being a student could or should signify in her and her family's lives.

Ja, now we are quite civilised. We have grown up from home. I don't know - I think I upgraded our family to where we are now. I am now at University.



Photograph 13: Hlumela "I upgraded our family."

Hlumela, having been placed in the ECP for Arts and Design, expressed her initial confusion about and ambivalence towards the course. She then indicated through her retrospective reflective positioning that she had seen value in her realisation that she had lots to learn. Through this realisation the transitions in the growth of her academic identity became evident as she developed a stronger sense of what was required of her as a student.

There are so many in my class, you meet different people, different minds, different perspectives, ja you learn a lot. I took this picture of them because it will remind me even in future that I studied in the Foundation. I think at first I was thinking...why we are having the Foundation like others were not in Foundation, who went for their first year. But now I can see that...I have learnt a lot, this programme is for me, it is the best, you mustn't stop this. Because we think that we know, but we don't know.



Photograph 14: Hlumela “This programme is for me, it is the best.” [Image altered]

By contrast, Hlumela expressed her wonder at her new situation in the city, as she had seen the benefits that this would afford her in her new student lifestyle. She acknowledged how different her duties and rights were now and her self-positioning suggested her acceptance of an academic identity through valuing her independence as a student living on her own in a residence. She saw this new way of being in the world in a positive light.

We are going to school at night, so I decided to take this picture because it was interesting, since I grew up in a very, very, very rural area, so this thing is new to me. Even at night you can study.



Photograph 15: Hlumela “This thing is new to me. Even at night you can study.”

Hlumela was able through her positioning, to frame her situation along with her shifting identity as a new student, both retrospectively and forward looking, in a positive manner. How she overcame her initial negative feelings to the ECP and to her family’s poverty was apparent. Her storyline signaled her resilience in dealing with the challenges in her life, especially at this point of transition. She expressed a real sense of hope.

4.2.3.4. Conclusion

Hlumela’s storyline showed shifts in identity strongly underpinned by the lifestyle changes she experienced, as her student life gave her more choices, more economic and personal freedom. She acknowledged the differences between her previous rural life and how this differed to her new student urban life. Her comments implied how she valued the contribution of her ECP year as it brought many unexpected learning opportunities. She was aware too of her responsibilities, and seemed to see this positively as she realised she had a new role to play in her family, with the potential to improve their economic situation.

4.2.4 Mcedisi

At the time of the interview, Mcedisi was a 21 year old male Fine Art student registered through the ECP. He came from a township close to the Pietermaritzburg city centre and lived there with his grandparents, brothers and sisters.

Mcedisi had gone to a lot of effort in taking his photographs and many of them were deeply metaphorical. Although he seemed shy, he was very eager to share his experiences and thoughts through his photographs. Mcedisi's interview allowed him to express his pride in his family heritage, in particular their values and literacy practices. His student life afforded him peer group support and he proudly claimed a new student identity, at home and on campus.

4.2.4.1 Positive role models - home community

Mcedisi, in the following interview excerpt, discussed how his heritage was important to him and he made mention of the kinds of beliefs and values in his family with which he identified. The importance of his role models as being his 'roots' and giving him life was expressed using strong illocutionary force.

I have never forgotten my roots. I still think I share the reason why I am living today, this is why I took this photo and I selected it to bring here today...the remote is broken but he (my grandfather) didn't want to throw it away, he wanted to fix it. He doesn't throw everything away...that is why it is here just to show what kind of man he is.



Photograph 16: Mcedisi "It is here just to show what kind of man he is." [Image altered]

Mcedisi continued to speak about his heritage and way of life in terms of his family's literacy practices and the value that he placed on reading. He noted how things had changed over the years with the advent of technology. He positioned his family as having a love of reading and the illocutionary force with which he noted this underlined how he saw this as part of his heritage.

Sometimes I read the paper...I was at my grandmother's place...this is what people used to do in the olden days because TV was not then. So we didn't have TV. So that is why I took this picture because the picture shows that I haven't forgotten my roots. Just that, I don't have books, I had a cell phone, but cell phone is not that good because you can shorten the words and use those words, but I love to read, that is why I am getting better in this, because at home they don't buy books, they only use newspapers.



Photograph 17: Mcedisi "I love to read." [Image altered]

In Mcedisi's storyline, when describing his transitional process to university, "intergroup positioning" (Taylor et al., 2003, p. 205) was evident when he showed that he thought of his brothers as being the members of his family who were most influential in encouraging him to study. This way of viewing the self in relation to the other, takes into account how we often function as group or team members. This construction of identity in African culture could be seen as flexible and inclusive in that the extended family is taken as one's immediate family. Thus, although the 'brothers' to whom Mcedisi referred may

have been cousins, they provided a strong influence and offered important emotional support in his life (see explanation on pg.37).

The reason I took it because they were the ones who encouraged me to do art...they have been a good support. They showed me a lot ... they are studying now at PC College.

4.2.4.2 New lifestyle

Mcedisi's storyline took the importance of peer group support further as he spoke of the importance to him of the support of his classmates. His choice of the word 'comrade' positioned his classmates as 'fighting the same battles' as him.

Sometimes I feel like a flat tyre, like everything ran aground. But when I pick myself up, I make sure that the tyre is full...When you are down, maybe you are facing some challenge or something, then your comrades come around and be behind your back, no matter what you get and if you talk to them, they will help. Ja, I would say I have comrades in class.



Photograph 18: Mcedisi "Sometimes I feel like a flat tyre."

4.2.4.3 New role and identity

In Mcedisi's storyline, a strong academic identity starts to form in his home environment and how this gave pleasure to him was apparent. This identity was something that defined him and 'protected' him at home and allowed him the social space to resist the peer influences he saw around him that might have had a negative impact on him and his future.

I was painting my first picture...Everyone was seeing my work and they were happy...in my holidays...I did this project we were given, but then I was happy because then I improved as an artist. I am an artist. That is why I am really happy that I have art, because it is keeping me busy, and it keeps me away from these kind of things. Drinking, smoking.

4.2.4.4. Conclusion

Mcedisi showed the development of academic identity as well as professional identity as an artist, through how he positioned himself. Mcedisi spoke of his academic identity development in his home environment and how this seemed to set him apart in his family and gave him a special or new role in his household. He showed particular pride in what he valued about his family heritage in both the older (his grandfather) and the younger generation (his brothers).

4.2.5 Keith

When interviewed, Keith was a 22 year old male Fine Art student registered through the ECP. His home was with his mother and stepfather outside a coastal KwaZulu-Natal town two hours north of Durban, where he had been to school. At the time of the interview he lived in a men's hostel in a northern Durban township.

Keith enjoyed having a digital camera on loan and in addition to the photographs he chose to take in response to the prompt, took photographs of his artwork. Keith was very serious about his studies and spent time making art for sale. He was concerned about his English skills and asked at the end of the interview about what he could do to improve. Keith spoke of his growing academic identity and he showed a strong awareness of how being a participative member of a university community would facilitate this growth. Keith showed a high level of self-awareness which he used to overcome the emotional challenges his material situation imposed on him. Keith's level of perseverance in spite of all

he faced, and the meaning he made from the situation through giving support and care to his peers, was striking.

4.2.5.1 Role models - peers

In the following interview extract Keith discussed how he was coping with his new student lifestyle and developed a way to escape the possible negative influences of peers. He felt he had a duty to not make his peers feel bad about their choices but at the same time claimed the right to remain in control of how he spent his spare time and to maintain friendly relationships with them.

I have a way to make them maybe to not see that I am really criticizing. No I don't want to do this. I say "no maybe next time because have a lot of work to do". Not like saying no, because I don't want to have a relationship with them.

Keith's speech acts showed "social force" (pg. 42) both in his expression of his rights and duties and in his use of powerful idiom (Moghaddam et al., 2003). In this example it is important to note what Harré (UNU-CRIS, 2015) described as other important 'nodes' when using the positioning triangle. Thus Harré suggested that: who the speaker was and the contexts of the utterances became important. Keith commented using great "illocutionary force" (Austin, 1962) that he believed his duty was to help other students become better students and that he had to respond to the challenges in student life with the strength and heat of a fire.

I go to them one by one and say, look at this, as you are here we have to forget about what is happening out there, and what you like or you don't. You have to stick on what you are here for...Maybe He created me to be here to fix those things, so that is how I became Keith – I respond to fire, everything I am doing I am on fire

4.2.5.2 Challenges – financial, academic, personal

Keith's financial challenges started before he reached campus as he searched for accommodation. He was offered cheap accommodation in a men's hostel which was not a place conducive to study.

...and I said to him, next year I am going to DUT for doing Fine Arts, and I don't know where I can stay. And he says to me you can stay in the hostel, there is my brother there, you can go and stay there.



Photograph 19: Keith “He says to me

you can stay in the hostel.”

Keith spoke further of the academic challenges he faced and he described the difficulty of painting a self-portrait. He positioned himself as a person who accepted challenges as his duty.

...the challenge that I have to face while I am here

He explained that he was able to find meaning in these challenges and strength through his spiritual beliefs which he expressed using great illocutionary force.

Always when times changes to difficult I commit myself by praying...and get strength for what I am doing. This is how things becomes better. On what I believe, it is...why we are made a human being, we are not alone as we are walking everywhere, and there are some spirit that is guiding us, so to give yourself the power to say that you living His word.

Keith along with his spiritual belief system knew that recreational activity and communing with nature was important for success in his life and this he illustrated with a metaphorical photograph of birds ‘playing’. He expressed this as a duty to himself:

I like to play...and that way I am able to handle my emotions when I don’t feel good, by playing; that is where I have to manage my emotions. Yes they are communicating to each other. That is why I communicate with nature.



Photograph 20: Keith “I am able to handle my emotions when I don’t feel good, by playing.”

4.2.5.3 Belief system

Keith positioned himself as a helper in order to show his belief in the importance of going the extra mile for his friends and in doing so took on a “supererogatory duty”. A supererogatory duty is one which an individual might believe to be important and they take it on even though this is not required or expected of them (Harré & Slocum, 2003, p. 125). He further showed how his spiritual beliefs positioned him as predestined to fulfil this duty for his peers.

Everything has a reason maybe I am here because God put it on that reason, and how I can help you. That is why you always have someone that guide you and help you.

Keith saw it as his duty to mediate between what the lecturers required and what the students were facing in their transition to tertiary life. He claimed this position for himself which may in turn have afforded him feelings of agential power. This agential power could be seen to come from the strength or ability that Keith was able to claim through his self-positioning.

Because lecturers may not know what things or challenges that you are facing whilst you are doing your work, or why you are not at class.

Keith seemed at peace with the duties and subsequent self-positioning aligned to his spiritual beliefs, and for him there was no contestation or inner conflict and so it was possible that he saw it as his duty to help as he felt he was ready and able to do so. Keith positioned himself as having a moral duty both

to listen to his elders and to use his chosen field, that of Fine Art, to effect some change in the world. In this way he seemed to be able to reconcile his collective cultural (pg.21) and his emerging academic identity. In addition he took on supererogatory duties in his interpretation of his moral duties to society. Positioning himself in this way gave him a greater purpose in society which was possibly a way in which he found the strength to keep persevering to overcome his practical challenges. His self-positioning seemed to link his current actions and self-belief with past teachings from his elders.

We listen to the elders; that is where on my side I did understand that now in the world you must just not look at what is happening and just say “no it is okay, and what about it? What am I going to do with it?” So that is why I chose to being an artist because...some of the things you can’t understand why is this happening and how can I handle it...I am from the mother who has a talent that is why.

4.2.5.4 University and power

As Keith narrated his story of coming to Durban as a student, he expressed what he saw as his duties

...now it is like I see where I am going, and what things I should leave, what things I should take, in order to succeed in what I am looking for.

...and his subsequent related rights.

...It is different now from where I am from, because your mind can change because of where you are. So as I am here all the things that I was thinking whilst I was at home is different...

The importance of these subtle experiences on Keith and his ability to deal with the transitional experiences in an evaluatory and reflexive manner was evident in the way in which he expressed his observations

I have to control myself...maybe I will manage to make it better.

Keith thus, through his expression of his duties and rights, positioned himself as a newcomer to the situation of being in a university. His story talked of being far from his role models, his parents (“I am far from parents who are guiding me with things”), having a new lifestyle (“experiencing a new life”) and a new role (“I am a new resident here”) as a university student.

In addition Keith’s utterances showed excitement, determination and resolve. The social force with which he positioned himself evidenced the emerging of his student identity.

This is like it is the beginning of a journey, where there are all the things that I was dreaming about...It is now the time to study...and here in Durban I see everything helps us learn and finish.

I think I am going to finish when I am here.

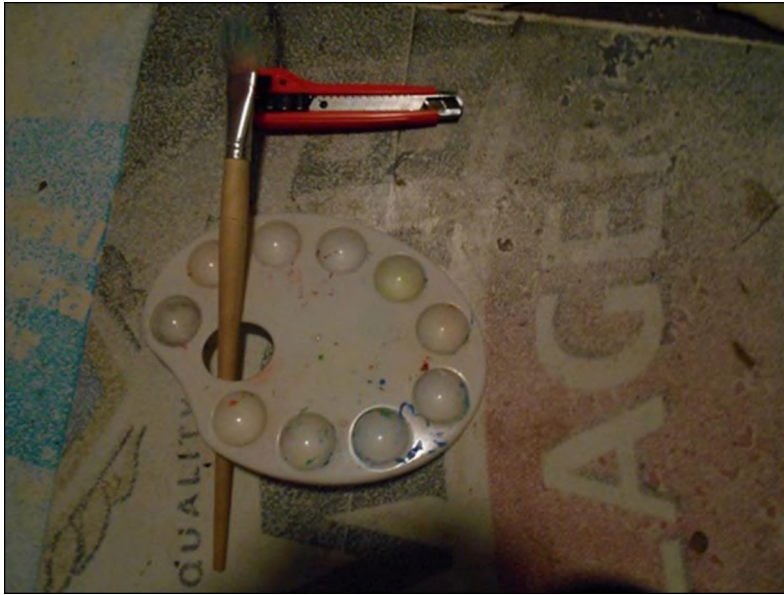
Although Keith positioned members of the discipline of Fine Art, as having the right to hold the 'key' to his success he accepted the impact of this on him in a positive way and used it to keep focused on his duty as a student to keep up the hard work. In this way positioning the other was used to reposition the self in a positive manner

What gives me energy is to commit myself with people who have a lot of knowledge...That is why it is like magical...I get energy to see someone who holds the door to what I want to do one day...here in DUT as we have lecturers...those who did art before...we have to stick on them to get that information that we need.

4.2.5.5 New role and identity

Keith expressed with a strong sense of self his thoughts on his growing academic identity as an art student. This sense of self could be seen to have been derived from his strong awareness of his duty to behave in ways that accorded with this new identity amongst the members of his new, academic, community.

So everything that I am doing I must show myself that I am an artist because in each and everything that you are doing, you have to show to people the way you commit yourself with people. The way you behave in a community, the way you communicate with the people, have a concept that you are an artist, so by using these tools I am sure that this feeling of being an artist I will be expressed to lots of people.



Photograph 21: Keith “So everything that I am doing I must show myself that I am an artist.”

His self-positioning seemed to reveal that he saw himself as a member of a community that did not possess enough of the knowledge he felt was needed to navigate in the world. He understood that in order to get ahead one had to know where to find the required information. Through intergroup positioning (Taylor et al., 2003) he was able to become aware of and reflect on the type of behaviour that would be necessary to be a successful student.

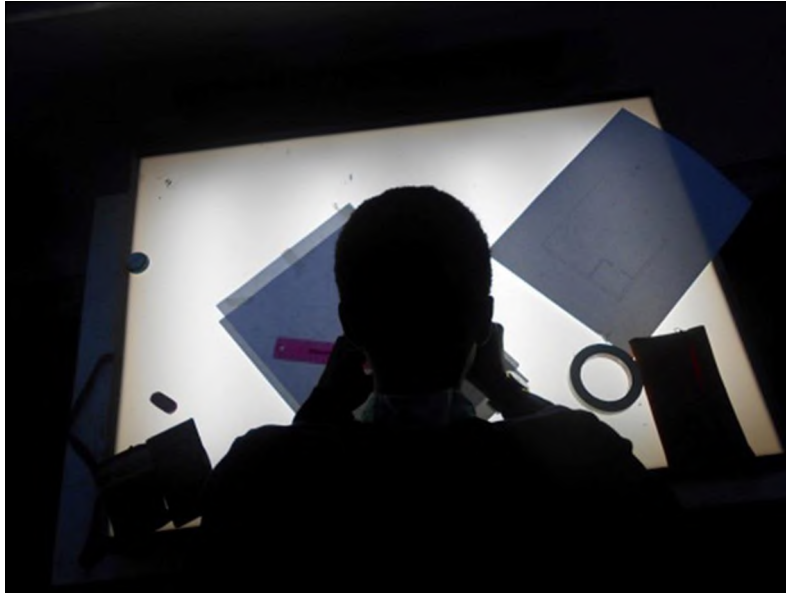
Always forecast who has more information about that thing you would like to have. So that's why chickens, they are following a man, because they know that this man is having food that we need.



Photograph 22: Keith “They know that this man is having food that we need.” [Image altered]

Keith showed how he had a meta-cognitive awareness of the value in how his life had changed since becoming a student and being able to access the knowledge he felt he needed and therefore to feel connected to his new environment as a student. In this way his changed life circumstances in the university community were repositioning him and he had access to a new storyline. As a student he now had the ‘right’ to information and felt that things had changed and he was part of the ‘mainstream’.

As I am here in DUT, there is a lot of information that is here, from different sources, yeah we are having lectures, we are having library, while I was from school, all of that, and now we are able to use computers, information we get from there. And is how life changed.



Photograph 23: Keith “There is a lot of information that is here.”

4.2.5.6. Conclusion

In Keith’s realisation of the importance of relationships as part of his role as a university student, he was able to use positioning to develop and maintain positive and productive relationships with his peers, lecturers and home community. He acknowledged the differences in his home and student lifestyle and saw this difference as bringing him an important connection to technology and information. Keith’s positioning showed how he developed an academic identity as a Fine Art student. This new academic identity was expressed in relation to the academic community of the university and in relation to his home community. Keith was able to position himself as a source of strength in being a role model to his peers and in turn this role gave him purpose and strength to stay focused and to claim a new academic identity. Keith was able to make sense of the challenges his student lifestyle brought through recreation, prayer, communicating with nature and staying in a relationship with his community elders. He demonstrated perseverance through this transitional stage of his life.

4.2.6 Stanley

Stanley, when interviewed was a 22 year old male Jewellery Design student registered in the ECP programme. He came from a rural area near a coastal town south of Durban where he lived with his

mother and sisters. As a student he lived in a southern Durban township. Stanley spoke to me informally at the writing centre about how he had enjoyed and valued the photograph-taking process. Stanley was a confident participant and took great pride and enjoyment in telling me about additional photographs he took when he had the digital camera on loan and accompanied his brother, a television cameraman, to work at a rugby match at the main stadium in Durban.

What stood out in Stanley's interview was the importance he placed on the older male role models in his life. He discussed how in spite of the pressure it placed on him that he had taken on the duty of potential breadwinner for the family. He spoke too of how his home community had inspired him through their attitudes to education and how he had a new professional and academic identity as a design student.

4.2.6.1 Positive male role models.

Stanley spoke in this extract of the way he positioned the men in his life who were positive role models and who gave him the strength to make it through his transitional time as a first year student.

...he is my brother's friend...they have sort of given me good advice, so I go talk to them, what do you think about this guys, or they will say "eish it is not good". They are making sure that they support their families...that is what I love about them, they got their matrices, but no chance to study...I have someone I can cry to when I have a problem.



Photograph 24: Stanley “What do you think about this, guys?” [Image altered]

He positioned them as strong and acknowledged their role in his emotional life. His positioning of them as having made sacrifices showed that he valued the duties that he saw them fulfilling towards their families and towards him.

4.2.6.2 Challenges - financial

Stanley spoke about how the family financial problems played out in his relationship with his mother and it was clear that in his transition to higher education, he was being positioned as the potential breadwinner in the family, with a strong duty or obligation to his family.

A lot of pressure, because I am the first one to attend a university...and they are reminding me of the purpose of me doing this. My mother always reminds me, to be on this campus, because we usually check and call each other.

Stanley was able to take up these duties as he was “physically and temperamentally” able to do so (Harré & Slocum, 2003). Thus according to positioning theory a person’s behaviour demonstrates an inter-relationship between what they “say and do; what they may say and do and what they can say and do” (Harré & Slocum, 2003). In Stanley’s situation he had the right to study but the “correlative duty” then existed whereby he would undertake this to ensure a better financial future for his family (Harré & Slocum, 2003). Stanley responded by accepting the duties inherent in this first order position (for explanation see pg.41).

I have told myself I won't forget why I am here. That question she asks every day, why are you here?

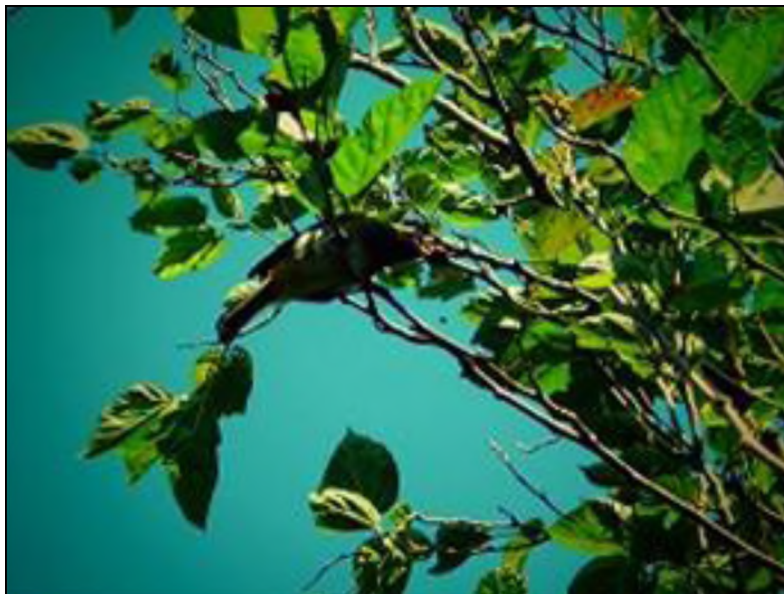
Positioning theorist Rom Harré suggests that duties are taken up when one party has a vulnerability and the other party has the power to resolve it and this he refers to as the “pre-positioning” that happens before a moral attribution is possible within a position (UNU-CRIS, 2015). Stanley knew the financial vulnerability of his family and he took up the duty or obligation to succeed in his studies with the goal of earning a living and finding a way out of poverty.

I feel quite uncomfortable actually, because if you do something wrong that would backfire. I don't like to see my mother being hurt, because if I don't do something right, she will feel bad for me.

4.2.6.3 New role and identity

In Stanley's storyline his development of student academic identity through his acknowledgement of his duty to take on new practices was apparent.

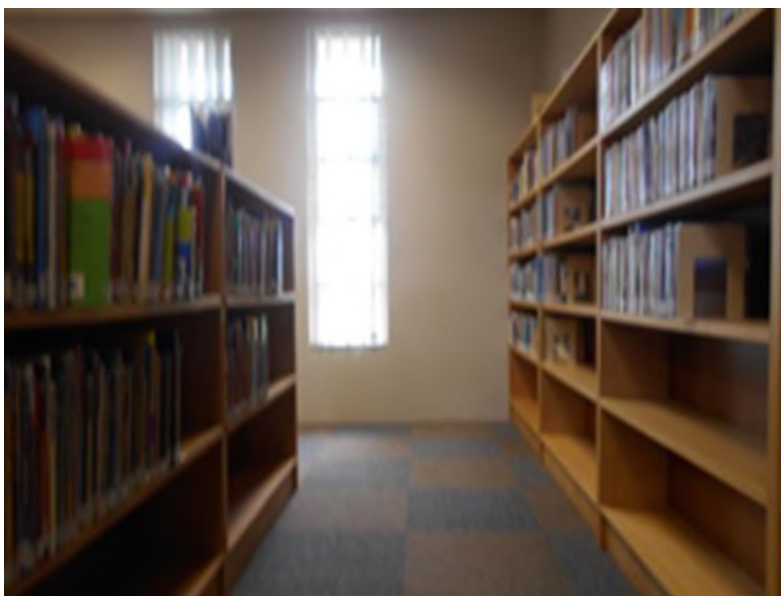
It is actually fun to take all these pictures because photographs are not my field, but I am interested to learn about photographs...Changing the whole picture, it made me feel like a real artist.



Photograph 25: Stanley “Changing the whole picture, it made me feel like a real artist.”

Here Stanley showed and reflected on the awareness of his new found academic identity as an artist and how this allowed him to take on new literacy practices that were congruent with what was expected at tertiary level. Stanley uses reflexive self-positioning to show his determination. This positioning came about from his reflections on his chosen metaphor of library shelves.

What I like about this picture, it is leading me into seeing my future, and as I have just said, in order to be successful, I need to study books, and this is the proof of what I am doing in my public library area. And I make use of it when at home.



Photograph 26: Stanley “In order to be successful, I need to study books.”

Stanley talked explicitly about feeling that he had changed in his approach to learning. He appeared to have reflexively repositioned himself as an active and engaged learner. He realised that in higher education he had to make a constant effort to make his own sense of the study material and decide what he thought about the ideas presented in class.

That is what I surely have changed to do, each and every time we introduce something new, I need to take my own part and dig deep into what we talked about in class and find my own ways about the topic we are introduced to.

His storyline reflected a growing sense of agency and academic identity as he made the realisation through accepting the positioning of the university that this student behaviour was largely up to him. His duty was to facilitate his own learning. Stanley continued his reflection by retrospectively positioning

members of his community as people who used their agency to pursue their goals and fulfill the duties they had taken up in relation to their education. Stanley expressed his admiration for these people and showed that he identified with how they had dealt with life.

You can't always depend on Government...Not just wait for someone to come to help us. That is what my inspiration comes from. There are some people who are doing a great job in their families...they are putting education first....Poverty is the worst problem that we have. True education can beat that...So this is a very important photograph...my focal point was the book.



Photograph 27: Stanley "They are putting education first."

Stanley talked of how these observations had influenced him and that he had a duty through the position that he accepted to keep pursuing his education. It appeared that the pressure he felt was possibly helping to keep him motivated.

I thought to study and get a diploma or degree in my name; that is what has been ringing in my mind...To read all the time, and the pressure I get at home about education and study. That is what has kept me going.

4.2.6.4. Conclusion

Stanley showed a strong connection to his older male role models. They were his strength through the sounding board they provided to him as he faced the challenges of student life. These role models and

the support they provided to Stanley were even more important as Stanley's positioning revealed that he had taken on the duty of potential breadwinner and he acknowledged that this placed a lot of pressure on him. His growing sense of academic identity was apparent in the way he reflected on the resources he had had, his love for taking photographs (and feeling like an artist in the process) and how his community had inspired him to value education.

4.2.7 Khulekani

Khulekani, at the time of the interview, was a male Interior Design ECP student of 21 years old. He came from a small inland rural KZN town. His mother had remarried and he had been brought up by his grandparents. He lived in a DUT student residence at the time of the interview. In our interactions for this research project, Khulekani displayed a keen sense of humour and was able to laugh at himself. Perhaps choosing to keep the interaction away from emotional displays, he discussed instances of deep sadness in a matter-of-fact manner, such as when talking to me about his father's and his grandmother's suicides, which had occurred when he was a high school pupil.

Khulekani chose to speak about his role models while he was in high school despite feeling that he could not trust friends his own age. He related his financial challenges as a result of his family structure. He also spoke of himself in relation to the university and his new student identity. Underlying his transcripts was a strong sense of the emotions he experienced in relation to all his life experiences leading up to his entry to university.

4.2.7.1 Role models – peers, school.

Khulekani, like the other participants, acknowledged and valued the role that peers played in his academic life. In the following extract he mentioned an old friend and the fun they had had studying together in the last years of high school (pg. 91). This retrospective positioning showed that he clearly valued the support this relationship brought.

We used to study in that house together, for grade 11 and matric. We used to fight a lot. The result was that this house was good for us.



Photograph 28: Khulekani “That is my friend’s house. I was disappointed he wasn’t home for the holidays. He is studying in TUT.”

Khulekani however, spoke of how he felt he did not have friends he felt he could trust even though he seemed to position himself as a sociable person.

Life is not easy for me here...My Mum I can share some feelings with, but...I don’t have friends. My friend is my inner self. I always talk to myself. I am not that person, I don’t get angry or too emotional, I love to laugh, and I know it is good for me. But I don’t have friends. When it comes to talking to myself, I do get a good feeling...I don’t trust anybody.

Khulekani appeared to see it as his duty to accept life’s hardships in order to claim the possibility of success.

Everywhere we go in order to reach success we all have our hard tasks to face... life is not about perfect things.

As with many of the other participants Khulekani drew on his understanding of God to make sense of the world and in this case how he related to his peers. Through his spiritual beliefs he generated the resources that enabled him to see the situation in a positive way. This he did by making it his duty to ‘be’ towards others as he felt God was teaching him.

I won’t say to people I won’t walk with you because you had this and this and this, you are the same towards God. So I want to be like a simple person towards people. I talk to each and every person in class. I know everyone in my class. It took me a while to speak to every person, everyone in class, but I

like the way that I am. The way I am towards socializing with people, talking to people, I think that is what keeps me happy.

4.2.7.2 Challenges – financial

Khulekani talked of his financial challenges as a result of his family structure, which he explained as being culturally determined, and resulted in him having little financial support for his studies. The rights he might have enjoyed to financial support whilst studying had been disrupted by the remarriage of his mother.

Life is not easy for me here, but I am trying to cope, trying so hard to cope, because my Mum is married, her husband won't support my sister.

This storyline positions him as being the one in his family that had been left to manage on his own.

So I am the only one left here hanging around. Because our culture doesn't allow if your Mum is married to another man that you have to remain at your Mum's home.

Khulekani recounted the story of his relationship with his biological father.

He doesn't support me...In 2006 he started showing up, buying me some clothes, everything, I didn't want to fight him, I wasn't raised like that. I am just a kind person. I respect people. In 2007, I started learning chess and I went to the tournament and won more games. He started supporting me

It was possible to see in this narrative the vulnerability of the child who needed love, recognition and financial support and stability from his father whilst growing up. Khulekani spoke with acceptance of how he was treated by his absent father. He was able to retrospectively position himself as a peace lover with a duty to respect others. He was clear about how his grandparents took on the role of parents.

I don't talk to my Mum, when I talk to her it is about fees for my school...My grandmother was everything to me. Because I took her as my Mum.

Khulekani spoke of how the subsequent suicide of his father gave rise to many of his difficulties in life.

I ask God, 'why did you have to give me this difficult past?'

As a result he expressed strong feelings about the duties he felt young South Africans had to take up in order to take responsibility for their lives and how they could achieve the right to success through exercising an agency born from suffering.

...because I lost my Dad, I went to work and I saved money to study. I paid my own fees...I don't like to see someone my age complaining about life. I am doing my life. There is no need for you if you have lost your parents, to say I lost my father and this is my job...Because many people... if they lost their parents, they will say when there is something wrong, because I lost my Mum I wish things would be easy for me to do...I swear you won't go anywhere and besides ...we have to learn how to live without our parents...because I think losing our parents is the huge problem. There are many things you can do in order to make your life easy for you...there are some people who are like poor, poor, poor, poor, even in South Africa, there are too many jobs in South Africa, you can do anything to any level, and beneficial things.

4.2.7.3 University and power

Khulekani positioned himself as an 'outsider' needing acceptance and affirmation by 'they' or 'the university'; not having the self-assurance that it was his right to choose to study, or at least to apply to study at the university. Khulekani's next comment indicated how unsure he felt of his position in relation to the university.

I did come, I managed to go through it and then they called me for an interview.

His next utterance indicated his contestation or rejection of the university's positioning and he claimed a second order position for himself as he said "I did manage to pass my interview". Khulekani's next utterance "Now I am here in the city" showed his self-positioning through his storyline as having 'arrived' at an important place.

The facelessness that could be experienced by a student was seen by the use of 'they' in a comment by Khulekani, although in this instance he was accepted into the university 'inner circle'.

They accepted me to the interview for interior design.



Photograph 29: Khulekani "They accepted me."

4.2.7.4 New role and identity

Khulekani's following statements expressed, as do the other participants that he was starting to interpret his environment using his newfound academic identity as a designer. He was able, through his new awareness of design, to position himself as being part of the discipline.

That is a nice mirror and toilet. The interior of it I love it, because I am an interior designer.



Photograph 30: Khulekani "The interior of it I love it, because I am an interior designer."

4.2.7.5 Conclusion

Khulekani expressed how he valued people and fostering good relationships which was rooted in his belief in the importance of treating all people equally and without judgement. This approach to relationships allowed him to be aware of and proud of his strong sense of self-reliance. Khulekani positioned himself as having a spiritual belief system which allowed him to use his hardships to not feel self-pity and to spur himself into a proactive approach to life. A distinctive feature of this participant's storyline was that Khulekani used his past hardships to find strength and meaning in the current challenges he was experiencing. Positioning himself as more mature, he expressed impatience with 'the youth', who he seemed to think might feel victimised by life's challenges and hardships. As with the previous participants, Khulekani's emerging identity as a member of his design profession was evidenced.

4.3 Participant stories – Findings

The data I chose to present in 4.2 was what I considered to be representative of the whole range of themes addressed by all the participants in the photo-elicitation interviews. Therefore, I presented and subsequently analysed as many of the different themes that arose as possible. This was done in order to be inclusive of the fullest range of their student experiences that emerged during the interview process and the significance of this for their academic identity development.

In this subsection, the key themes that arose in the participants' storylines discussed above in 4.2, are grouped to consider holistically the participants' experiences of transitioning to higher education in this context. How the participants showed the development of their academic identity through their positioning statements became evident as well as the development of agency and resilience through strong spiritual belief systems. In 4.3, a broad look at the challenges of the student experience is further explored through links to other HES literature and theory. The storylines that FGSs draw on to construct their experiences of home and campus and the rights and duties that give rise to their positions, held or resisted, are explored in terms of their impact on the students' transitional experiences as the development of their academic identity emerged. These storylines gave rise to the following themes:

- Agency and community – an exploration of the participants' relationships to and positioning of their home communities and how this enabled the development of agency.
- Role models – participants discussed a range of positive and negative influences in their lives.
- Peer influences – avoiding negative influences and acknowledging the positive aspects of peer relationships.
- Financial challenges – how students were positioned with regards to financial responsibility and the impact of cumulative financial pressure and stress on students was discussed.
- Universities and power - how universities are perceived at the societal and individual levels and the resilience displayed by the participants was explored.
- Rural-urban divide – an exploration of the participants' rural to urban migration as an underlying factor in the student experience.

4.3.2 Agency and community- “They don’t think of producing themselves”

In this section I discuss how agency was developed as a theme in the participants’ narratives through their responses to their home communities. The participants expressed pride in being different to the situations in which they found themselves and seemed to use this self-knowledge to set themselves apart from their home communities and peers. In addition, how social capital and cultural heterogeneity might have worked out in the participants’ agency was discussed.

All of the participants indicated clearly their agency through choosing to reflect in an evaluatory manner on the behaviour observed in their home communities. The participants were then able to use this evaluatory knowledge meta-cognitively, in the decisions made during their transition to university. As indicated in the analysis on p.52, an example of this is seen in Andile’s claim that “Because it [my community] is a place where everyone just does whatever they like”. A further example of such acknowledgement and then rejection of behaviour ‘in the community’ is evident on pg. 59, where Sibusiso does this when talking about the youth in his rural community.

Participants, Andile, Sibusiso, Hlumela, Keith and Khulekani, were able, through their beliefs about duties to the ‘self’ and their spiritual beliefs, to remain flexible in their responses to life. Aspects of a South African case study of secondary school students in a township high school by Kapp et al. (2014, p. 58) echoes this agential phenomenon. In that study it was found that scholars in township secondary schools turned to “source(s) outside of schooling”, such as religion and community organisations, which helped them to view life in a positive way and enabled them to “take control and direct their own futures”, in other words to claim the strength of their agency whilst applying to and enrolling for tertiary study.

All the participants, through their self-representations in the photo-elicitation interviews, were able to use their storylines to position themselves as different, possibly better than, the situations from which they came. A sense of growing agency, enabled by the self-affirming notions of pride and self-worth emerged in Andile’s (“they don’t think of producing themselves”), Sibusiso’s (“if I compare to other youth, all they think about...is wasting money”) and Hlumela’s (“now we are quite civilised”. “We have grown up from home”) positioning as different to their home community and family. Mcedisi exhibited a similar sense of pride in his new identity as the artist in his home (“I was painting my first

picture...Everyone was seeing my work and they were happy"). Keith revealed his pride in his ability to help others ("Maybe He created me to be here to fix those things") and remain connected to family ("We listen to the elders" and "I am from the mother who has a talent that is why"). Stanley demonstrated the sense of self-worth he gained from realising the importance of education to his community and himself ("in order to be successful, I need to study books"). In addition, he now played an important part in his family as a potential breadwinner ("I am the first one to attend a university...and they are reminding me of the purpose of me doing this"). Khulekani saw himself as different to other South African youths he observed and stated how he did not like to hear them complain as despite his suffering he has been able to overcome his "deep past" ("I don't like to see someone my age complaining about life").

A consideration of social capital possibly provides a useful means to further understand how the participants exercised their agency. In Gofen's model of social capital, she suggests that some forms of capital may have the potential to become limiting. Family practices that encourage identification and a common focus amongst family members are considered to be habits of mind and ways of relating that may hold people back from achieving their full potential (Gofen, 2009). All of the participants, in contrast, exhibit their agency in their reaction to their situations. They use the self-knowledge and social capital that instead 'bridges' (Gofen, 2009) or allows the rejecting of the kinds of positions that the home communities seem to take up. Thus the participants acknowledge the importance of their reactions to their home communities in their positioning. Gallagher (2013) proposes that a person's narrative holds power in its ability to transport us out of our 'small' experiences, and in addition that these journeys may develop in us the critical ability to discern what is acceptable in differing social contexts. In the instance of the participants in this study, their narratives and positions might serve to free them from the possible effects of "bonding social capital" that Gofen (2009, p. 107) suggests is one of the ways thought to trap individuals or communities in cycles of poverty. For examples of the emergence of social capital, see pg.70 for how financial opportunity develops agency in Hlumela's storyline, and pg.81 for how academic and professional identity as an art student gives Keith a strong agential sense of purpose in his new university community.

A further look at how community may influence the agency of the individual is available in the research of Harding (2011) who examines disadvantaged neighbourhoods in an attempt to understand the behaviour of communities in relation to their educational goals. Harding's research suggests that

working class neighbourhoods in the USA exhibit a higher degree of cultural heterogeneity than middle class neighbourhoods. These middle class communities tend to reproduce their social order or control more easily the kinds of educational choices that the youth make. In a poorer neighbourhood the youth have many competing role models to follow and less access to the relevant advice about how to achieve their educational goals. These competing models have been referred to as “social noise” (Curtis 2015). Although I am in no way suggesting that the structure of South African society can be directly compared to that of the USA, there are possible ways in which Harding’s research could shed light on the participants’ positions, as in South Africa issues of race and class often converge with economic status. In South Africa, despite some shifts in the economic status of different race groups there remains an alarmingly static status quo which privileges the white middle class (Commission for Employment Equity, 2014-15; Kwenda et al., 2015). Linked to social class and economics, and in accordance with the notion of “social noise”, is the idea of cultural capital. This form of middle class advantage potentially helps to continue the privileging of middle class values that maintain the norms and values of educational goals and reproduce educational culture, and thus the educational success of the individual (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). It is likely that in impoverished neighbourhoods, such as the ones Andile and Sibusiso describe, the chances of high cultural heterogeneity to the privileged norm of white middle class are significant and thus the reproduction of the social order, if one follows the ideas of Harding (2011), could become a potential barrier to individual educational success.

As indicated by this section’s consideration of how agency developed in relation to the participants’ experiences of their home communities, the people in the participants’ home communities have an impact on the student transitional experience. For this reason, in the next section, I consider in more detail the ways in which I noticed that positive role models in particular contributed to the participants’ agential positioning.

4.3.3 Positive role models –“I just say something that is going to touch their hearts”

In this section I discuss how the participants showed clearly the importance they attributed to specific individuals in their lives. The participants not only expressed their appreciation of and admiration for those they saw to have a positive impact on them, but acknowledged the importance of they themselves being role models to other students.

When considering student experience in transition to higher education, Mcedisi, Stanley, Khulekani and Sibusiso, expressed a strong identification with the values of male role models in their lives. The participants' choice of gender in role model choice may be significant given current post-apartheid South African family structures, where many children grow up without their biological fathers as role models (Ratele, Shefer, & Clowes, 2012). For instance, Mcedisi was raised without his biological father and had a grandfather (a male role model) to whom he seemed to relate closely. His storyline indicated clearly the admiration he had for his grandfather in his acknowledgement of the values he saw his grandfather transmitting to him. Educational research in the USA looks at similar themes around the lack of fathers as role models and suggests that many young male students might thus long for male role mentors in the higher education environment as they grow up in largely female headed households (Morales, 2008, p. 209). The research participants suggested a strong sense of purpose through their choice of young male youths from their community as very positive role models as this comment from Khulekani about his teacher indicates.

I can say he is the person who I look up to...he is my inspiration too, because he has shown that we were like in the same situation with him, like the background he is coming from is not good...Now he has his own car, house, wife, and now he is doing his own career.

According to Salazar (2013), broadly speaking, current educational goals can be seen to push a narrow-minded and mechanistic agenda which could serve to disconnect students from themselves, their culture and their heritage. In short, educational success often requires conformity and assimilation and may lead to a denial of the students' humanity and a possible loss of "academic and social resiliency" (Fránquiz and Salazar, 2004). The participants who chose good role models (in this study mostly male role models) and demonstrated their belief in the value of this through their positioning of the role models, perhaps experienced a resistance to this loss of agency mentioned by Salazar (2013) as their role models perhaps served as 'mediators' for them, between the home and campus environments, as they went through the transitional process of becoming a tertiary student.

The way in which a role model could serve as a mediator between the home and the campus environments is perhaps expressed in the following excerpts. Sibusiso's transcript is indicative of how he sees himself as a role model and he explains how he fulfills this role with his peers.

I used to lecture them sometimes...I know it reaches their minds...I know they think about what I say. Because I just say something that is going to touch their hearts like that.

Keith shows how he positions himself as a mentor or role model to the students around him.

I go to them one by one and say...we have to forget about what is happening out there, and what you like or you don't. You have to stick on what you are here for.

Both the above examples are significant in that they show how not only have the two FGS participants positioned themselves as role models but that in spite of them not having a family 'blue print' to follow they have seen the importance of the kind of emotional support they can provide to their community of peers, and they take the time and trouble to act on their reflections. The excerpts tell the peers about how they have to leave behind a previous way of doing, being or thinking perhaps. This was mentioned by Hlumela as she came to terms with her new student life and its freedoms and responsibilities (pg. 66).

In addition, Keith's excerpt from his transcript provides evidence of how he makes sense of the importance of being a role model through his spiritual belief system.

Maybe I am here because God put it on that reason...That is why you always have someone that...help you, because lecturers may not know what things or challenges that you are facing whilst you are doing your work, or why you are not at class.

In this consideration of the effect of role models, I noted how the male participants showed a preference for male role models and the possible significance of this in HES and in addition, how the participants offered themselves emotionally to their peers. In the next section I explore how the role of peers in the students' experience might differ.

4.3.4 Constructive peer influence – “We always care for each other”

As indicated by the previous sections considering students' sense of agency and the significance of positive role models in their lives, when looking at the challenges new students face it is useful to consider the socio-emotional aspects of transition to university life. In this section I note the influences from their peers which the participants chose to highlight in their conversation with me. In particular, I consider how these participants negotiated internal conflicts about their rights and duties in relation to the people and behaviours around them, and how this, in turn, related to their agency.

The following examples from the participants' storylines show the complexities within and importance of peer relationships in an educational setting. Mcedisi (pg.75) and Sibusiso (pg.65) narrate in their storylines how they position their peers as having a positive influence on them. In contrast, Keith seems

to gain agency though being able to handle the potential negative pull from his peers (pg.77). Khulekani acknowledges that he enjoys socialising with his peers and this makes him happy, even though he does not have close friendships (pg.91). Andile, although noting below that she looks to her peers for inspiration, acknowledges that they place her at risk for getting distracted from her studies (pg.55)

When I am in the campus, I get to see a lot of...students around doing other courses and the way they connect themselves in their study, and actually commit.

These influences from peers are important as in order to succeed in tertiary study, a student will need a certain amount of self-belief in order to persevere, which it is argued grows through the relationships and connections a first year student is able to form and maintain within the university community (Zepke, 2013).

I did discover that to look for someone that you need him or her to help you. You have to just come and say what you need. If he or she give you or not, don't put some comment or excuses about what he or she said to you.

Keith's comment above is perhaps indicative of his realisation that he has the agency to ask peers for help and to take responsibility for what peers can bring to his learning. Thus his positioning activates his agency which allows him the resilience to make the necessary transitions more easily and to develop the resilience he is aware that he needs.

In support of this, Wilks and Spivey (2010) suggest that support from peers helps to protect against the stress felt in an academic environment. Rivera (2014), in her study of Latino students living in the USA, proposes that significant factors in behaviour, when students' make applications to higher education, suggests that peer influence is important from both an individual and a community perspective. Her review of literature of this topic found that peers have an influence on the agency of individual students as they offer psycho-emotional support which may guide new students through difficult terrain when adapting to university practices (Rivera, 2014). I think it is possible to draw broad parallels between Latino students in the USA and the participants in this study, as both groups are largely FGS and come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. In the context of this study, the following comment from Sibusiso showed the agential power he had to use the support from good peer relationships to his advantage.

I go with other students as we are here in the campus...we used to meet after school and do assignments.

In contrast, Keith is aware of the possible negative influences he has to avoid if he is to stay on track with his studies. He uses this agential power, possibly gained from his ability to position himself in a positive way, to 'protect' himself from becoming involved with negative behaviour.

So yes, a lot of them they do drinking, but I said for me, no to these things, I must not do them. In this section and those preceding it, the development of agency through the participants' socio-emotional navigation against the backdrop of their relationships with their home communities, role models and peers was discussed. In the following section I shift the focus to the intersection between the practical challenges of the funding of studies, whilst retaining a concern for the significance of this aspect on the socio-emotional experience of the participants.

4.3.5 Financial challenges –“I upgraded our family”

Financial challenges were reported by all the participants and the relationship of these financial challenges to emotional stress emerged as an important consideration. Whilst I consider the coping mechanisms employed by some of the participants in this section, included is a discussion of the possible impact of financial stress on the possibility of student drop-outs and throughput.

The act of a student leaving home to attend university may in many communities be seen as a rite of passage. Higher education research in the United Kingdom suggests that the idea of leaving home is a middle class practice that is seen as a valuable aspect of the education process in itself (Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2005). In contrast to this, in South Africa, and in particular the DUT where so many of the students are FGSSs, leaving home to study would not function as a chosen rite of passage. This migration, often rural to urban, may create a new set of economic challenges and for many students, personal hardships. Obtaining funding to pay study fees is difficult enough, and as higher education has massified, this is especially a challenge for the already economically marginalised working class South African. Consequently, the lack of money needed for living safely away from the protection of home and all that is familiar places many youths at risk of exploitation (Shefera, Clowesa, & Vergnanib, 2012). A tertiary education may be seen by many families as an economic necessity and carries with it great hope and expectation as a chance to move out of poverty. Consequently, this can become a great burden, with new debt, for the individual student and for the family.

In the examples provided by participants Hlumela (pg.68), Keith (pg. 86), Khulekani (pg. 92) and Stanley (pg. 86) the financial challenges and the subsequent emotional pressures of being a higher education student are clearly stated. What is noteworthy of the responses of such students is that, in terms of resilience theory, they position themselves as people able to move past resenting the challenges they have faced to using those challenges to create the emotional strength necessary to move out of the situation and towards better living conditions (Janse Van Rensburg & Kapp, 2014; Morales, 2008). When Hlumela stated “Yes, I can’t wait to be something else, make a change in our home”, it suggested how the resilience she had developed allowed her to move past her material circumstances in her view of her future. In the South African higher education environment how much emotional pressure is being placed on the individual is not easily quantifiable, except perhaps in the possible links to the high drop-out rates¹³ seen in South African higher education (Shay, 2015). The financial and subsequent emotional pressure on a young student and its possible impact on his/her emerging academic identity and potential for success is significant given the current high levels of student drop-out and the low levels of student success (Council on Higher education, 2014).

In attempts by SA HES researchers to understand the student experience, Mabizela (2015) suggests that it is important to consider how cumulative stress could impact on how individuals fare as students. The financial responsibilities and pressures most of the participants voiced in this study, and that are faced by many young adults during their time as students are documented by higher education research in South Africa (Janse Van Rensburg & Kapp, 2014; Machika & Johnson, 2014). In addition, it is significant to note that although frequent protests in South Africa often centre on the financial plight of tertiary students, mostly due to the government’s education funding models and policies (Kwenda et al., 2015) these protests indicate the possible broader effects of this constant and often insurmountable financial pressure on young adults’ lives. How the participants in this study withstand this amount of cumulative pressure is not evident and might have a significant impact on their ability to adjust to the academic and social demands of tertiary study. This pressure is evident in Stanley’s comment that his mother says every time she calls him that “I must not forget why I am here”. A student’s ability to remain aware of these stresses and how they might impact on their emotional lives might be what either enables them

¹³ According to the Council on Higher education (2014) of the “18% of 20 to 24 year-olds who are enrolled in higher education, which is low in comparison with other middle income countries, roughly half drop-out of higher education without obtaining a qualification.”

to cope or not. Archer (2007) suggests that human beings, the agents that act within and on societal structures, need to act in a reflexive manner if they are to fulfil their roles in a healthy social way (Archer, 2007). This reflexivity or “self-talk” is the habit of mind that helps an individual learn from events and situations as they occur and after the fact. Archer (2007) further suggests that self-talk or reflexivity is necessary for the effective functioning of any societal structure (see examples pp.8678, 86). The participants seem to show themselves to be, as Archer (2007) suggests, ‘reflexive subjects’ as their storylines demonstrate this reflexive or intrapersonal positioning (Taylor et al., 2003). This may well afford them a good chance of functioning successfully within the complex and sometimes alienating social structure of the university.

In this section I provide a view of the student experience in which responses are explored at the level of the personal. In the following section, at the level of the societal, I look at the impact of rural to urban migration within the student experience.

4.3.7 Rural - urban migration – “It is just a quiet place. It lets you be who you are”

In the following section the student participants speak of how living in a city is an indirect consequence of being a student and that this rural-urban migration brings challenges and changes in lifestyle to them.

In the photo-elicitation interviews the participants Hlumela, Sibusiso and Andile make a specific reference to being “in the city” as opposed to just being at a university. This might suggest that the move from a rural area to the city has importance for identity as a student through the possible changes in lifestyle, values and beliefs (Janse Van Rensburg & Kapp, 2014). Andile’s experiences of rural- urban migration as expressed in her comment - “Right here in these urban areas, you find it hard to express who you are” - suggests how she perceives her rural background to be peaceful, while the city is a more difficult environment to navigate. In spite of the possible challenges inherent in this rural-urban migration, participants Sibusiso, Keith, Hlumela and Khulekani noted the positive aspects of their new city student lifestyle and saw that it might well assist in them achieving their goals for social mobility or a way out of poverty and the stress inherent in being a student under those conditions.

Tinto and Goodsell-Love (1993), when writing about how students and institutional culture interact, suggest that when students develop a new academic identity they experience a disjuncture with their

home culture which might cause them difficulties integrating into the institutional culture. They suggest that some students dropping out might be related to this phenomenon. Mqgqashu (2016) proposes that in the main, South African higher educational systems exclude the needs and ways of being of rural populations. This exclusion may include how students from rural areas experience transitions to university life in urban settings as being uncomfortable. This lack of comfort he explains as deriving from how higher education constructs what is valued as being urban, and thus students and graduates may potentially develop a distaste for, or disinterest in, their rural backgrounds. In a different way Australian higher education research documents the trials of students moving from rural backgrounds to cities. This research suggests that these students are vulnerable to burglaries and muggings, struggle to feel part of the university community and worry about their student debt (Yorke, 2000).

How the participants in this study experienced moving to the city and how this change may have impacted on their feelings of self has been explored through some of their photographs and subsequent interviews. Positioning theorist Bronwen Davies suggests that in moving from a “familiar landscape” to the unfamiliar, in this case a university, could contribute to feelings of alienation. Davies (2003, p. 281) comments how “many of us (are) multilingual and multi-discursive; that is, we have more than one way of speaking ourselves into being and thus more than one way of inscribing our embodied selves”. Davies further suggests that

“bodies and landscapes might be said to live in such complex patterns of interdependence that landscape should be understood as much more than a mere context in which embodied beings live out their lives” (Davies, 2003, pp. 283-284).

Thus leaving a rural landscape, in which one has grown up, for a new life as a student in an urban environment seems to be a significant event in the lives of the participants which could challenge the individual’s sense of self and place in the world, and certainly might impact on a student’s “family resources and community ties” (Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2005). The following transcript by Sibusiso gives testament to Davies’ comments about ‘landscape’ and evidences the deep interdependence between human beings and the natural world that he chooses to foreground in his photographs (see photographs 3, 4 and 5) and subsequent storyline:

This is also the mountain or the hills that we used to play at and this is the forest that we used to find the wood...so I can say I respect it, because it brought us light in our home. And warmth. Someone can say “eish” this is an ugly forest. But I know this ugly forest has got huge respect behind this.

In this section I discussed the possible significance of leaving the rural-home environment for the urban-campus environment and how this in some cases might lead to feelings of alienation and disconnection between home and student academic identities. In the following section how the participants experienced the self in relation to the power of a tertiary institution is explored.

4.3.6 Universities and power – “They accepted me.”

In addition to the financial and emotional pressures faced by these students in transition to higher education, as I discussed in the previous sections, it is essential to acknowledge that universities can be seen as dominant societal structures given their prestige and power as producers and gatekeepers of knowledge (Morrow, 2007).

Universities are able to accept or reject, admit or refuse access to an individual, and on a more subtle level to the individual’s ideas, understandings and opinions of the world (Salazar, 2013). This is often referred to in the notion that universities seem to privilege western middle class ways and as such play a role in the continued oppression of minority, or less politically or economically dominant, groups of people (Jansen, 2009). The consequence of this societal ‘positioning’ and the ‘self- positioning’ of universities is often that the status quo of dominant power structures is maintained (Clegg, 2011) and that students who fall outside of the ‘mould’ are at risk of experiencing feelings of isolation and alienation (De Kadt & Mathonsi, 2003; McKenna, 2004; Thaver, 2010). Salazar (2013, p. 124) argues that the “language of measurement and quantification” that is dominant in the way we organise and conceive of education continues to place students in danger of losing the cultural, linguistic and community practices that afford them their resilience in the face of the newness and strangeness of a university culture. Thus, how institutions can be seen to position individuals and groups on a personal level becomes clearer.

When investigating student attrition trends in higher education, it is evident that research acknowledges the importance of feelings of connectedness and belonging amongst new students, especially as increased diversity brings an increase in FGS enrolment (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; Morrow & Ackerman, 2012; Nomdo, 2006; Thaver, 2010; Tinto, 2006; Willcoxson, Cotter, & Joy, 2011). This lack of feelings of connectedness might be compounded by issues surrounding the use of language in South African higher

education (De Kadt & Mathonsi, 2003)¹⁴. With the majority of South African higher education students having a mother tongue other than English, the language of instruction and power in higher education (Mgqwashu, 2009, 2014), it is possible that many first year students enter a learning environment where they might experience feelings of not belonging. In addition, Mgqwashu (2009) and Ngcobo (2014), state their belief that mastery of English is the most significant predictor of academic success in higher education. In this study the issue of belief about language mastery became evident through two participants' requests for assistance with English language 'tuition'. This was discussed in detail on pg.46.

At the beginning of Andile's student experience, as she applied to study at university, Andile expressed feelings of rejection and confusion ("I couldn't understand why I got rejected") and possibly in reaction seemed to be able to use her spiritual belief system and how she positioned God as having supreme power over her life and experiences as a way to cope with the power of the institution (see pg. 56). Later on in Andile's student life she expressed how she positioned her community as not being able to "produce themselves", that is she saw that they did not take up the right to think constructively and she distanced herself from this (pg. 53). In addition Keith and Sibusiso, albeit in positive ways, distanced themselves from their communities as they become part of the university, insiders to its power as they had been "accepted" (pp. 80; 61).

By contrast, the student participants, Andile, Keith and Khulekani in this study gave a sense of their rejection of any such institutional positioning, through displays of "individual resiliency" (Rivera, 2014). It would seem from their narratives that the students intended to draw on their spiritual belief systems for strength and self-validation. They did not seem to give in to fear of failure, rejection and self-doubt and this strengthened their resilience (see examples on pp.56, 79). These fears are documented in higher education research as being possible factors working against individual agency in FGSs as they develop their understanding of the higher education environment and its often hidden requirements

¹⁴ The South African research I refer to by de Kadt and Mathonsi (2003) was conducted in a traditional university whilst McKenna's (2004) was conducted at a UoT, thus suggesting that similar difficulties with language and identity are experienced by students in both types of institutions. This kind of research might be seen in a new light when one considers the issues of differentiation facing South African higher education and how the current minister of higher education has cautioned institutions against "mission drift" (Ndzimande, 2014).

(Janse Van Rensburg & Kapp, 2014). This notion of individual resiliency is important when examining how power relations play out in society, and in this case how a student may experience the transition to higher education.

In considering my own positioning by and of the 'university', a teaching and learning environment with a complex myriad of interpersonal interactions and positions which are constantly changing and contested, I acknowledge that as Moghaddam et al. (2003) suggest, the act of positioning oneself can set into motion the way others interpret one's actions. An influential party, whether an individual speaker or an institutional structure such as a university, is able to dominate through self-positioning and it becomes very difficult for the less dominant party to free themselves from the position into which they have been placed (Moghaddam et al., 2003). This might be especially true when the individual is a student experiencing the facelessness and power of an institution of higher learning. Through the use of positioning theory in this research looking at the student experience of transition to university, I acknowledge my role in my construction of the learning environment. As a member of staff at a university, I must remain aware of how I contribute to these power structures as these power struggles in universities are inherent in the discourses and ways of teaching and learning. (Bangeni & Kapp, 2007; Jury, Smeding, Court & Darnon, 2015). How I relate and react to my surroundings, and subsequently might position the students and staff with whom I work, may be directly linked to this.

Again the participants' resilience and agency is seen in their positioning reactions in relation to the power of a university and what emerges is how the participants were differently able to resist the institutional positioning they acknowledged. In the following section I continue the discussion at the level of the individual and I explore identity further, in relation to the participants' academic and professional identities.

4.3.8 Academic identity—"It made me feel like a real artist".

The participants all made positioning statements in relation to their academic and professional identities. Because of the nature of the discipline of art and design, the domain within which their academic studies was situated, in some cases the participants' academic identities were strongly intertwined with their professional identities, as is common for those who taught them (Belluigi, 2015b). The participants expressed their awareness of these identities in relation to their home and campus environments which might suggest that they were starting to actively integrate aspects of their academic identities into their

existing identities. In addition the learning that was acknowledged was seen by the participants to happen both in and out of the tertiary classroom.

Most of the participants in this study positioned themselves as members of their art or design disciplines with both an emerging student and professional identity (see pp. 57; 64; 76; 81; 87; 94). This development of individual academic identity as a higher education student in transition, involves how “personal identity” or the “experienced core of the self” develops against the “collective identity” (see detailed discussion on pg.21), within the university community. This collective identity is the necessary context against which a healthy personal identity develops (Taylor et al., 2003, p. 197). When working within the field of South African higher education it is important to ask what collective identity a student possibly uses as a foil to their individual identity and what the costs to their previously formed personal identity might be. These questions in the context of this study might have to include looking at what happens when the student is part of an environment where there are many other FGSs, and what the effect of this social collective on individual identity formation and understanding of roles when entering a UoT might be. Keith’s observations below indicate that he has read and values the discursive practices of a university.

I committed with a lot of people who are an artist, who are in different fields, like professional people, so I feel like that I am comfortable.

He recognises that he is the outsider and is in the process of developing a firm academic identity as a member of his field (Bangeni & Kapp, 2007). As Gee (1990) writes, academic identity includes ways of being, doing and valuing as well as learning and taking on the language of a chosen discipline. Hlumela expresses how she values the social richness of the academic environment in the ECP.

There are so many in my class, you meet different people, different minds, different perspectives, ja, you learn a lot. I took this picture of them because it will remind me even in future that I studied in the foundation (see pg. 23).

Furthermore, academic identity development is enhanced as a student develops a sense of professional identity and starts to feel in control of their learning and discipline knowledge (Solomonides, Reid, & Petocz, 2012). Hussey and Smith (2010) acknowledge how significant social changes occur during the transitional time whilst entering higher education and that this might alter the self-concept of a student. These changes are not always welcomed by a student as being appropriate. Hussey and Smith (2010) contend that if a student does not develop a mind-set that values autonomy as a student, then they are at risk of not taking on the academic practices of their field. McKenna (2012) supports this by suggesting

that developing the ways of being (ontology) that arise from the varying epistemologies within which students are learning to 'be', is important in the growth of a student's academic identity. Additionally, Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) argue that at the time of transition into higher education, the late adolescent students' process of developing a strong sense of personal identity is enriched by the higher education environment if they engage actively with the new environment both socially and cognitively. The choices students make from these engagements rather than staying with their previously accepted and unchallenged belief system, based on the familiarity of their home environments, helps to facilitate new personal, academic and professional identities.

A further possible source of emotional pressure in the transition to higher education might be evident when considering that the financial changes the participants so wish to see happening will require a change in their very 'being', a possible shift in identity. It is useful here to consider Archer's (2000) work on the formation of identity, as she suggests that it is only when the personal and social identities of an individual are aligned through their actions and belief systems made visible, that they are moving closer towards being able to use their agency effectively in determining their life course. Archer posits that when agency is fully realised individuals are able to contest or resist their positioning by society and societal structures (Archer, 2007). In the case of Hlumela, the shift in identity to 'university student' brings the ability to contest her position (see pg.69) in society as 'disadvantaged' and brings the promise of an improved financial situation in the future. Stieha (2010) however, warns in her writing about the FGS experience in the USA that the need to make a shift in identity to take on the practices required by a university, could possibly result in students not persisting in their studies. The impact of this phenomenon is further explored by Tierney (2000) who suggests that students are at risk of experiencing the disorientation of losing their home or cultural identities when higher education is inflexible in taking the emotional needs and cultural and personal identities of students into account.

In this study, the opportunity created for reflection through metaphorical photograph-taking (for detailed discussion of Harper's (2002) functions of photographs see pg.29) could have possibly positioned the participants in ways they hadn't considered valuable or necessary prior to the beginning of their student journeys. This is possibly what participant Stanley was attempting to verbalise in the following transcript.

The possibilities, ja. Just to realise to think more carefully about my future.

In this section I discussed issues of student identity formation at a point in time during the participants' transition to higher education looking at how the personal identity develops against the collective, taking into consideration that in this study the collective would be FGSs in an ECP class within a UoT. The emergence of a new identity possibly takes place with the cost of a loss of the old self and this might be a disorienting process. The participants made strong positioning statements concerning their identity and it would seem that in many instances they were positioning themselves as art and design students or as artists and designers both in their home and campus environments.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I provided an analysis of the responses of the student participants, as generated in individual photo-elicitation interviews, using positioning theory as an analytical framework. The student responses were based on the photographs they constructed in order to represent, explore and make personal meaning from the prompt "take photos that show you as a student at home and on campus". The analysis in subsection 4.2 (pg. 51), in line with the positioning 'triangle' (pg.16), took into account the storylines outlined by the participants and the speech acts used when doing so. I provided an analysis of the positions assumed by the participants, as suggested by the rights and duties to which they subscribed, and made some tentative deductions as to how these positions might contribute to the development of student academic identity. Thereafter, I linked the key themes from the initial data analysis to research in HES in order to highlight the specificity of the experience of the South African tertiary student. It is evident from this analysis that many of the participants experienced similar issues and challenges to each other in the transitory time of becoming a student.

The common and most significant experiences revealed through the positioning analysis can be grouped as: how participants used their spiritual belief systems to support, guide and make sense of their worlds; how past hardships seemed to create resolve and strength; how the participants rural homes or upbringings gave comfort, peace and strength and most importantly that all the participants positioned themselves as having an emerging academic or professional identity both in the campus and home environments. This identity in some cases was in relation to the learning that takes place not only in the academic environment but from the natural environment.

One of the challenges illuminated by the analysis of the participants' contributions was how the participants dealt with emotional pressures when facing the financial challenges brought on by being

students. These financial needs were reported to be unpredictable, for example day to day expenses for art materials and external, such as family expectations of the students' future earning potential. Dealing with negative peer pressure and feeling comfortable as a student after having moved from a rural to an urban environment were issues that students noted as challenges. It was apparent that the participants, through the ways in which they positioned themselves and the various role players in their environments, were developing a sense of agency when dealing with the stresses, both emotional and financial, of entering higher education. Both agency and resilience were displayed in the way in which the participants used their emerging academic identity to claim ownership of their student role and purpose in higher education. Furthermore, many of the participants were able to position themselves positively in relation to the power of the university and in this way demonstrated their "individual resiliency". This resiliency seemed to give momentum to the students' emerging academic identities and as is suggested in some HES literature, the very hardships one might think would be a setback for an individual, in many cases seemed to fuel their desire for personal change and achievement (see more detail on pg.17). Resilience was evident as the participants were able to pull away from negative home or community influences which they saw as obstacles to their personal goals. The participants revealed the value and self-worth they derived from their spirituality, supportive family role models and the rural landscapes and communities which they left in order to enter campus life at an urban university. It is significant to note that none of the participants chose to bring forward language as a challenge to them as they explained the meaning of their photographs during the photo-elicitation interviews. Language may well have been a factor subsumed in how some of the participants positioned the university as having a certain amount of power.

In the following chapter I conclude this report by discussing the findings and limitations of the research and recommendations for future research are made.

Chapter Five – Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This study has come at a time in South African higher education research, where it has been identified that there is too little known about how students might react emotionally within the home and educational environments when transitioning to higher education (Bray, Gooskens, Moses, Kahn, & Seekings, 2010). This knowledge would be valuable when planning institutional responses to students' transitional needs (Kapp et al., 2014). This study contributes by considering the time of transition from home to campus of FGSs in a particular context. It does so by providing an analysis of the positions assumed by the participants, as suggested by the rights and duties to which they subscribe in the narratives they constructed. This analysis, when considered against the landscape of research in the area of the student experience in higher education, then informed some tentative deductions as to how such positioning might impact on student academic identity development.

This chapter presents a summary of the main findings around issues of student academic identity development and in addition how professional identity emerged in some of the cases. How agency was shown in relation to the influences of home communities, spiritual beliefs, peers and role models was discussed. The financial challenges and rural-urban migration experienced by the participants was brought into consideration. In addition the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are discussed.

5.2 Discussion of findings

The data generated in the photo-elicitation interviews allowed me to analyse how the student participants might experience the transitional time as they enter a tertiary institution in relation to how they hold or resist positions or feel themselves positioned in relation to their home and campus environments. In particular in this study I sought to explore whether the participants showed a concomitant development of student academic identity. I found that the participants made strong identity statements in their positioning whilst discussing their photographs. In addition, the analysis using positioning theory as an analytical framework suggested that some of the participants were able to use their positioning towards claiming the agential power necessary to direct their lives away from the social ills they perceived in their communities. In several instances the participants were able to do

this through their positioning in relation to their spiritual beliefs. Some of the participants used previous hardships and challenges positively in order to strengthen their resolve to change the way they saw their lives. Morales (2008) contends that a strong spiritual belief system is one of the central reasons for successful navigation through the student experience including self-motivation, hard work, the willingness to leave home, self-control, a positive view of challenges, good relationships with faculty and willingness to seek out support structures. Resiliency born of a strong spiritual belief system was evident in many of the participants' storylines. The participants were able to distance themselves, in many instances using self-validation, from behaviours they perceived as unproductive in their home communities and amongst their peers. Role models that were positive were positioned as important in the participants' lives. In the work of Arts and Design ECP teaching and learning, I tentatively suggest that lecturers might find it helpful to use the findings from this study to facilitate classroom activities which acknowledge and affirm the strategies, techniques and ways of thinking that their students use when dealing with their challenges in positive ways. In the case of spiritual belief systems, for example, this could take the form of written work that fosters student reflection on their spirituality in relation to their art making. In addition, when planning the curriculum for the Arts and Design ECP, I propose that there is adequate opportunity for lecturers to provide explicit instruction and experience in how students could make use of all the resources of a university to ensure their success (e.g. library, writing centre, student counselling, computer laboratories).

Additionally, the agency gained by this positioning could be seen to have allowed the participants to overcome how middle class social capital exerts power on the higher education environment and how the effects of this might have impacted negatively on their successful transition to a student life. Kapp et al. (2014) argue that in South Africa, students are often constructed as not having the necessary emotional resources and home support structures to allow them to succeed in higher education. New Zealand higher education scholar Zepke (2013) agrees with the view that students often do have the support and emotional strength necessary for success in higher education as they learn this from their home environments, even though these environments might not necessarily follow middle class norms. Zepke (2013) suggests that research into the student experience needs to provide understandings that allow for tailor-made and contextualised plans to meet the needs of students. In South Africa, with the rapidly changing and volatile socio-political landscape of higher education, this becomes a matter of urgency. Kapp et al. (2014) ask how it is that students from working class backgrounds are able to rise

above the complex challenges of their home environments to achieve academic success (for more discussion of this see pg.18).

The participants in this study were able to use their experiences of overcoming the hardships of their lives as a resource whilst adapting to the demands of tertiary study. The example of Khulekani (pg. 92) is indicative of how the memory of childhood experiences may forge a positive worldview in some. Marshall and Case (2010) indicate how experiences of adversity in earlier life might lead to the development of effective social skills when coping with tertiary study. Khulekani was able to position himself in a way that he took up the duty to learn from the challenges in his life and subsequently he was able to claim the concomitant right to emotional growth and strength, or resilience. Khulekani seemed to have overcome the combined impact of poor schooling and FGS status, which so often puts university out of reach from disadvantaged students (Abbott-Chapman, 2011; Kwenda et al., 2015). Further to his emotional resistance of feelings of rejection by the academy, Khulekani was able to place himself in a position of potential power and resilience as he felt he had the resources of the university at his disposal.

Under consideration in this study was how the migration from a rural to an urban environment was experienced by the student participants. Leaving home may create the need for individual physical resources that would not be a necessity if a student was able to stay with their family. The presence or absence of the necessary resources, both material and emotional, and how the student makes sense of the new environment and way of life may bring forth a myriad of emotional responses and in particular those in relation to the development of an academic identity. Many of them articulated their love of and connectedness to their home rural environments where they seemed to feel close to nature. Although the participants expressed excitement about and seemed to value what an urban or city university setting offered, there was a sense of loss expressed. Perhaps this sense of loss was a necessary part of the process of transitioning to or making room for a new identity, in this case a student academic identity. Furthermore how one recovers from this sense of loss or how one reconciles oneself to the loss or accommodates it within the emotional self (Mann, 2001; Salazar, 2013), might well impact on the development of a healthy new identity in which the student wants to become fully part of the new (university) environment.

In a study in the USA which focused on first generation Hispanic students, the prerequisites for resilience in the higher education environment were explored and researchers Garza, Bain, and Kupczynski (2014) suggest that a resilient student is able to create relationships with faculty; dedicate more time and energy to academics and use these social skills and self-knowledge alongside their academic abilities. The student participants in this study were drawn from an ECP year which essentially functions as a foundation course. It was clear from some of the participant comments that although they were confused or perhaps upset initially by the purpose of this they used their resiliency to understand the benefits the course afforded them in its ways of teaching and the curricular content. In spite of the participants belonging to the ECP class they presented a strong developing academic identity within their respective fields with Keith, Mcedisi and Stanley identifying as (Fine) Artists, Sibusiso and Khulekani as Interior Designers and Andile as a Fashion Designer. This sense of identification brought with it a sense of belonging which in turn may have enhanced resilient behaviour. As discussed on pg.23, some higher education studies argue that the learning of the academic literacy practices of a field or discipline in turn facilitates the taking on of academic identity. It could be argued that being a student in a UoT enhances and accelerates the development of a professional identity through practice-based learning. The ECP students are required to use their theoretical learning alongside their practical tasks from early on in their studies (e.g. the ECP students learn colour theory and put this into action when doing a group mural painting community engagement project in the second term). In addition, a student pursuing the study of art might have to do this against the will of their family. In my lived experience as a staff member interacting mostly with first year Arts and Design students, I have heard many reports from students of how they went against their parents' guidance in their study choices, but that in spite of these objections they still felt compelled to live out what they feel is their destiny to be an artist. These findings might be helpful to lecturers in finding ways in which to highlight the process of identity formation. This could be done using reflective exercises which might in turn foster feelings of connectedness to the university community. Furthermore, it might be possible to explore ways in which the ECP could be better integrated into mainstream programmes within the faculty.

Many of the participant positioning statements clearly showed how the participants distanced themselves from the negative behaviour of peers. However, peers and role models were positioned by most of the participants as being essential to the new lifestyle being experienced as a member of the campus community. Many of the participants positioned themselves with a sense of pride as different

from their home communities and families. This self-validation might well have taken a large amount of self-awareness, courage and possibly emotional pain, as this distancing might have involved separation or distancing from a previous and familiar identity.

This study revealed how reflection (through the taking of metaphorical photographs based on a prompt) brought forward in the minds of the participants how they saw themselves in relation to their new student environments. This was evident in the positioning statements the participants made which included the taking on of new academic identities, their resilience in the face of challenges and the agency, or ability to choose, that they were able to exert when making the necessary transitions to student life. I suggest that the findings and observations from this study might be useful to academic development practitioners working in ECP provision in order to help deepen their understanding of their work and the students that they serve.

5.4. Limitations

This is a study at the level of a master's degree and thus has a limited scope in terms of the depth of analysis, as this was bounded by time restraints. I made pragmatic choices about the length of the interviews and the amount of photographs discussed in the photo-elicitation. The intentions of this study were realised as the necessary data was generated in the manner in which I envisioned, i.e. the participants used the photograph-taking process to reflect on their student experiences. In this regard I think that the study was valid. However, there were some limitations which I outline below.

The reliability of this study could have been strengthened by interviewing a larger sample of FGSs in order to provide a more representative sample of participants (see pg. 42 for more information about choices to do with sample size). Ways in which to compare personal insights to a sample of other FGSs from other disciplines may make future studies of this nature more reliable. In this study, I initiated interaction with students three times (once in the briefing about the study, once when arranging camera loans and discussing the ethical approaches to photographing human subjects and once in the individual interview sessions) between the end of the first term and the end of the second term of their first year of university. Repeated interviews over an extended period (e.g. first to third years of undergraduate study) would have provided valuable longitudinal data, showing in more detail and depth the process of student academic identity development over time and perhaps with clearer findings related to

ontological issues in specific disciplines (see pg. 37 for further detail on higher education research needs looking at FGSs).

Another possible limit to the scope of the study was the issue of gender as there were five male and two female participants. This led to more variety of insights into the male student experience and was perhaps the reason for male role models emerging as more dominant in participants' narrations. A future study with a similar number of both male and female participants might obtain a more balanced representation of the student gendered experience and certainly more research on FGS race and gender might be of value.

The linguistic identities of South African students are highly complex and subject to a number of factors. These might include, for example, different kinds of home backgrounds, schooling and the perceptions of the individual (Bangeni & Kapp, 2007). When taking language needs into account, it is argued that South African higher education research should remain nuanced in order to reflect the "hybrid identities" (Bangeni & Kapp, 2007, p. 266) of our students. In my research the interviews were conducted in English, the language of instruction at DUT and the language within my own expertise, but it is noteworthy that this was not the mother tongue of any of the participants. Although no strong indications of this arose in the interactions, this might well have lessened the comfort the participants experienced in the interview situation.

In addition, language use and how this affected the ways in which both metaphors and idiomatic expressions were voiced could possibly have created a situation in which the participants chose to avoid certain explanations of their photographs. If I had the necessary language skills to switch codes this would have created greater ease of communication of our ideas. Further, as I was seen as a lecturer and researcher, it is possible that issues of power relations came into play, consciously or subconsciously. This may have impacted on the participants not feeling comfortable enough to speak freely about the full range of their experiences and positioning (see pg.43 for discussion). Therefore, comparative research with a speaker of the participants' home language and who was not known to them in the campus setting might provide varying insights into their transitional positioning as my own positioning may have impacted on their constructions.

Efforts were made to include the participants in the study by the use of the photo-elicitation prompt, which although asking for reflections on student experiences, left the photograph-taking entirely over to the participants. Moreover, the participants signed an English and an IsiZulu version of the informed consent form (see appendices B and C) which gave them the right to withdraw, object or request information at any point. The participants did not do this but instead used their agency to initiate contact with me on several occasions. This informal contact was made possible as I have, as a writing centre practitioner, an 'open door' policy. During working hours I am accessible to students informally or for students to book individual appointments for writing consultations. Four of the participants came to talk to me informally and the students, whose mainstream programmes are on my campus, continue to do so up until the present. See pg. 46 for detail about the unexpected participant initiated pedagogical interventions that arose from this study.

5.5. Further research recommendations

My lived experience when teaching in the ECP class demonstrated to me the importance of connectedness in helping a new student feel comfortable and at home in their study environment (for an exploration of this in HES literature see pgs. 7 and 15). The ECP timetable structure allowed students sufficient access to their ECP lecturers, and the following year when the students entered mainstream study they had many social and friendship networks across programmes on which they could draw (see pg. 71 for student comment related to this). Other HES research suggests that while the higher education environment may value the development of independence it is the interdependence of human actors in the higher education environment that may help to facilitate learning (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, & Johnson, 2012).

Kahu, Stephens, Leach, and Zepke (2015) in a study of the role of academic emotions in how successfully students engage in higher education, propose further research into the student experience as a way to help students prepare for higher education study. Consequently further research on the impact of a general first year of study, such as is provided by the Arts and Design ECP class structure, on feelings of belonging, connectedness and engagement amongst FGSSs would be helpful in planning for the students likely to enrol at DUT. We should be asking what kind of change in structure to a first year of study could provide the kind of institutional support that leads to connectedness and engagement in students most

at risk of feeling alienated in higher education, which is arguably a largely middle class system (Stephens et al., 2012), and certainly a novel one for FGSS.

I thus think it would be valuable to conduct research on ways in which to devise curricular offerings for first year students which include opportunities for self-reflection. This activity, with its possible pedagogical reflexivity could be evaluated for its efficacy as a way to foster feelings of connectedness amongst first year students when entering the academy. This in turn might create the emotional space needed for first year students to adapt to their new tertiary environments. Perhaps too, this reflection would be a useful space in which students from all backgrounds could consider what these home experiences might mean to them and how a student lifestyle might differ, even if at a subtle socio-emotional level. Indeed, in the context of community colleges in the United States of America, there have been valuable contributions made in the establishment of learning communities for “creating learning environments that allow students to cultivate a sense of belonging and voice in the academy” (Jehangir 2009, p.48)

In some HES research the term positioning is used differently than in this study and thus does not provide any close analysis of the constantly changing positions of subjects which becomes evident when analysing participant storylines using the theory as an analytical framework. It would seem that in this sense, the idea of positioning as a psycho-social phenomenon is used to be broadly representative of the ideas of the theory as put forward by positioning theorists (for a detailed understanding of these ideas see sections 2.3, 2.5 and 2.6. on pp.16; 21; 23). In this sense I ask whether a more in-depth positioning analysis is warranted and would it perhaps serve to reveal additional research directions when looking in-depth at the student experience of transition into higher education?

I have found that working within a newly constituted University of Technology, the former technikon status may possibly influence not only the staff but student expectations and academic identity. It is not unusual to hear lecturers refer to each other as “industry experts” when human resource issues are discussed in meetings. Additionally, students often remark to me in academic writing workshops that they “come here to make art, not to write”. In addition, as my experiences have shown me, it remains a growing concern for academic heads of departments that the academic qualifications required by the UoT management when recruiting new lecturing staff are not easily found when searching for experienced industry professionals, whose work experience and connections are needed and valued. So

the “mission” that Nzimande (2014, p. 2) refers to is a complex and challenging one, if a UoT is to provide a balanced educational ‘UoT’ offering. These self-perceptions voiced by lecturers and students seem to indicate tension between professional and academic identity positioning (Belluigi, 2015b) and it would be useful to take this into account in higher education research in the field of academic development.

In view of how a student may feel they have to sacrifice the feelings of connectedness to the home environment or culture to which they belong (Salazar, 2013) and possibly in particular students leaving behind a rural background in their move to urban universities, I see too that research into the home environment, and specifically the expectations and anticipation of the family or parents of students, would shed light on how first year students experience the transitions necessitated by a successful adaptation to higher education.

Ngcobo (2014) in his research on Dual Language Instruction comments that it is largely attitude and perceptions towards the use of Black African languages in higher education that remain important and this is an area that needs more research into the link between the perceptions and actual academic performance of participants in a multilingual course. Thus I propose that positioning theory, when used to examine the constructions of identity in relation to how language is used in higher education, might provide an interesting perspective on how language and identity mesh together in educational environments. Possibly a closer examination of the importance of language in higher education could be provided using positioning theory as an analytical tool. In the following section I provide final thoughts on the significance, relevance and possible value of this research, to the students and academic development practitioners.

5.6. Conclusion

This study shed light on the experience of seven FGSs in the transitional process of entering a UoT while part of an ECP class. The students participating in the study demonstrated through their self-positioning how they started to develop a strong sense of their student academic identity. In some cases this identity was expressed in association with their home environment. Many of the participants seemed to express a sense of identity shift in terms of their transitions or migrations from the rural environments familiar to them as they made sense of their new urban student environments.

Furthermore, the present research seemed to show that the participants were able to position themselves in ways that enhanced their agency which in turn gave rise to their developing sense of academic identity. In many instances the participants were able to speak with self-pride about the ways in which they positioned themselves as different to the environments from which they originated. This sense of self-worth seemed to enable the growth of a positive academic identity amongst the participants as they integrated into the university environment.

I think it is worth considering whether the value of this study has been the opportunity created by the research process (participants' construction and interpretation of photographic metaphors about their identities in the two transitioning contexts) to facilitate reflection and that possibly this process of growth might not necessarily have occurred in this manner if left to chance without such facilitated pedagogical reflexivity (pg. 45). Informed by the process undertaken in this research, I would argue that it is unlikely that the participating students would have reflected on their positioning outside of this research process. A number of their unsolicited comments and their initiation of the tutoring sessions which had never occurred previously support this.

As an extension of the idea of leaving home for university as a 'rite of passage', it would be interesting to ask whether the act of photographic construction, as an exploration of developing student academic identity, might serve as a created "ritual of enactment" in the transitional process students undergo in order to "become students" (Pansters & van Rinsum, 2016, p. 22). Although Pansters and van Rinsum (2016) suggest that rituals of enactment happen at the level of institutional identity, I suggest that in addition, this might be a helpful concept at the level of community (i.e. groups of students belonging to a faculty or programme of study) or individual identity. Having the opportunity or energy to "imagine a future possible self is important to educational success" (Clegg, 2011, p. 94), and this is possibly more important in the beginning stages of a FGS's contact with the demands of a university, as such a student is less likely to have access to the social and family capital (Gofen, 2009) that continuing generation students are more likely to have. Perhaps positioning theory allows one to see how this reimagining might be occurring at the level of the internal conversation (Clegg, 2011), that occurs as people construct or speak their storylines.

This research sought to explore ways of understanding how the positions adopted by FGSs contribute to the development of student academic identity at the point of transition from home to campus life. I

think that these understandings might be useful when planning for a higher education environment best suited to the kinds of students studying at DUT. An environment needs to be created in which FGSs, largely dependent on government study loans (pg.2) receive the kinds of socio-emotional and financial support necessary, so that they study in an environment relatively free from the levels of stress that might make successful study difficult. That the sample of FGSs was drawn from the ECP is significant as research suggests that FGS status is often what makes students unsuccessful initially, and that if they are able to overcome their initial difficulties and access and enter university, then they are likely to continue their studies and graduate (Dumais & Ward, 2010). Therefore, tentatively, I suggest that a campus environment, in which feelings of connectedness between the student and the new university environment are facilitated in the broad teaching and learning environment is important in order for a new student to position themselves in such a way that the development of a new student, and 'urban', academic identity takes place. That this positioning might be facilitated as the students acknowledge for themselves, through reflection, how they might better use their agency and resilience to make sense of the higher education environment, I believe becomes significant.

Appendices

Appendix A – Photograph taking instructions to student participants

Dear Students

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. I hope that you will enjoy the experience and learn both about yourself and the use of photographs in research.

Please feel free to ask questions at any time about any aspect of the process. You can find me at the Writing Centre (room 124 City Campus), my work landline is 031 3732365 and my cell number is 0825616311.

What you have to do:

1. Make sure you have a cell phone or digital camera that works reliably and from which you can download and email your photographs to me (andrea@dut.ac.za). I will arrange a loan camera if your cell phone doesn't take photographs.
2. The prompt you must use to inspire your photographs is: Take photographs that show you as a student at home and on campus.
3. You are free to take as many photographs as you would like while you are thinking about the prompt. We will require 10-20 photographs for the interview.
4. Schedule an interview with me after the April holidays. This should take about one hour. The interview will only be done when you are not busy with a class (the afternoons will be best).
5. Here are a few reminders from the session we had where we discussed the use of photographs in research:
 - Please always ask permission before you take photographs. It is important not to upset anyone by disturbing them or making them feel uncomfortable.
 - Explain what you are doing before you take photographs and make sure you answer any questions to the best of your ability.
 - Take photographs that DO NOT show peoples' faces (non-mimetic portraits).

Remember, your photographs can be metaphors (pictures that are symbolic or representative) so they do not have to show peoples' identity.

Have fun thinking about the prompt and give yourself creative freedom of expression.

I look forward to talking to you about your photographs.

Best Regards, Andrea

Appendix B – Informed consent (English)

Rhodes University: Masters in Education (Higher education Studies)

RESEARCH PROJECT: *Positioning 'the self': Comparative case studies of first generation students' academic identities when home meets campus in a rapidly transforming higher education context.*

Dear Student Volunteer

Thank you for taking time to read and consider this before you agree to participate in the research project (indicated above). Please would you read and tick or delete the appropriate statements below before signing at the bottom. If at any stage you feel uncomfortable about proceeding you are free to renegotiate any of the terms below. This research depends on your time and goodwill and your concerns will be taken seriously.

Please tick or cross out the statements below as you wish them to apply to you:

I have read the research outline and understand the purpose of the research

I understand my part in this research

I agree to participate in this research

I understand that my participation is voluntary

I understand that I can renegotiate my participation at any time

I understand that I can withdraw at any time

I understand that anonymity cannot be guaranteed but that if appropriate, it will be assured as far as is possible

I am happy for the individual discussion with Andrea Alcock to be audio-recorded and transcribed

I wish to view the transcribed interviews and negotiate amendments

I wish to be involved in the interpretation phase

I wish to view the draft of the section in which my input occurs

I understand that parts of this research could be submitted to academic journals or presented at educational conferences.

Signature of participant:

Witness:

Date:

Place

[This form was adapted from an example shared at www4.gu.edu.au:8080/adt-root/uploads/approved/adt]

Appendix C – Informed consent (IsiZulu translation)

Rhodes University: Masters in Education (Higher education Studies)

RESEARCH PROJECT: *Positioning 'the self': Comparative case studies of first generation students' academic identities when home meets campus in a rapidly transforming higher education context.*

Rhodes University: Amakhosi ku Education (wezeMfundo ePhakeme Studies)

UCWANINGO: Ukuphenya isizukulwane sokuqala sohlelo lwabafundi, nokucwaninga izindaba zezemfundo ephakeme ekhaya kanye nasesikoleni.

Mfundi oyivolontiya

Siyabonga ngokuthatha isikhathi sokufunda, cabanga lokhu ngaphambi kokuvuma ukuba ingxenyeyalolucwaningo (olukhonjiswe ngenhla). Sicela ufundeokanye ufake uphawu noma ususe izitatimende ezifanele ngezansi ngaphambi kokusayina ekugcineni. Uma kunoma yisiphi isigaba uzizwa ungakhululekile mayelana nokuqhubeka ukhululekile ukuba ukushintsha noma iyiphi imigomo ngezansi. Lolucwaningo luncike esikhathini sakho ukuzwisisana kanti nokukhathazeka kwakho kuyothathelwa phezulu.

Sicela ufake uphawu kulezizitatimende ezilandelayo ngendlela okuhambiselana nawe:

Ngilifundile uhlaka locwaningo futhi ngiyayiqonda inhloso yocwaningo

Ngiyayiqonda indawo yami kulolucwaningo

Ngiyavuma ukuba ingxenye yocwaningo

Ngiyaqonda ukuthi ukuba ingxenye kwamikwenziwa ukuzithandela

Ngiyaqonda ukuthi ngiyakwazi ukushintsha ukuba ingxenye kwami noma nini

Ngiyaqonda ukuthi ngiyakwazi ukuhoxa noma nini

Ngiyaqonda ukuthi ukufihlwa kwamagama ngeke kuqinisekiswa kodwa ukuthi uma kufanelekile, kungenzeka.

Ngiyavuma ukuba ingxoxo yami no Andrea Alcock iqoshwe futhi ibhalwe

Ngiyafisa ukuyibona ingxoxo isibhaliwe nokucela ukuchibiyela

Ngiyafisa ukuba ingxenye yokuhumusha

Ngifisa ukubuka isigaba lapho umbono wami ufakwe khona

Ngiyaqonda ukuthi izingxenye zalolucwaningo zingase zibonakale ezincwadini zemfundo noma zethulwekwizingqungquthela zemfundo.

Sayina: Ufakazi:Date: Indawo

[Leli fomu lisuselwa kwisibonelo esithathwe ku [www4.gu.edu.au: 8080/adt-root/uploads/approved/adt](http://www4.gu.edu.au:8080/adt-root/uploads/approved/adt)]

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