

**BECOMING AND BEING:  
A CRITICAL REALIST STUDY INTO  
THE EMERGENCE OF IDENTITY IN  
EMERGENCY MEDICAL SCIENCE STUDENTS,  
AND THE CONSTRUCT OF  
GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**of**

**RHODES UNIVERSITY**

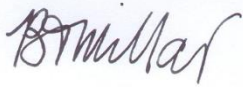
**by**

**Bernadette Theresa Millar**

**January 2014**

## **DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

I, Bernadette Theresa Millar, declare that this thesis is my own work written in my own words. Where I have drawn on the words or ideas of others, these have been acknowledged using complete references according to Rhodes University Guidelines.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "BT Millar", enclosed in a light blue rectangular box.

20 January 2014

## ABSTRACT

This critical realist thesis seeks to understand how student, graduate and professional identities emerge in Emergency Medical Science (EMS) students at a South African University of Technology (UoT) as well as in professional paramedics in the Emergency Medical Care Services (EMCS). It further considers the construct of graduate attributes (GAs) and its relationship to emergence of identity and influence on curriculum design.

The research design is that of a case study. The theoretical framework is critical realism whose depth ontology posits three domains of reality. Causal powers and generative mechanisms exist in the Real domain which cause events or phenomena to emerge in the Actual domain that are experienced in the Empirical domain. Using retrodution one may come to explore some of the causes for the event. Using Bhaskar's concepts of identity, the self, absence and emergence, ontology and four-planar social being, a Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity to explore the emergence of identity has been created. In exploring graduate attributes, a critical realist question is posed: "What must the world be like for GAs to exist" to explore the possibilities of the existence of GAs.

It was found that student identity emerges diachronically in three moments, while professional paramedic identity starts to emerge during the third year of study mainly through the structure, culture and agency of workplace-based learning. In answer to the critical realist question it was found that GAs emerge from the neoliberalist commodification of universities. In seeking an alternative to GAs, traits and attitudes were explored. It was found that these emerge from curriculum, interplay of departmental structure, culture and agency of and from students' being which makes them ontologically radically different from GAs.

This study concludes that student, graduate and professional identities emerge from a person's core constellational identity diachronically within four-planar social being and the interplay of structure, culture and agency. GAs cannot be related to the emergence of identity and curriculum design because of their ontology; however, if traits and attitudes are substituted for GAs, a close relationship does exist between emergence of identity, traits and attitudes and curriculum design.

**Key words:** critical realism, identity emergence, graduate attributes, Emergency Medical Science, traits and dispositions

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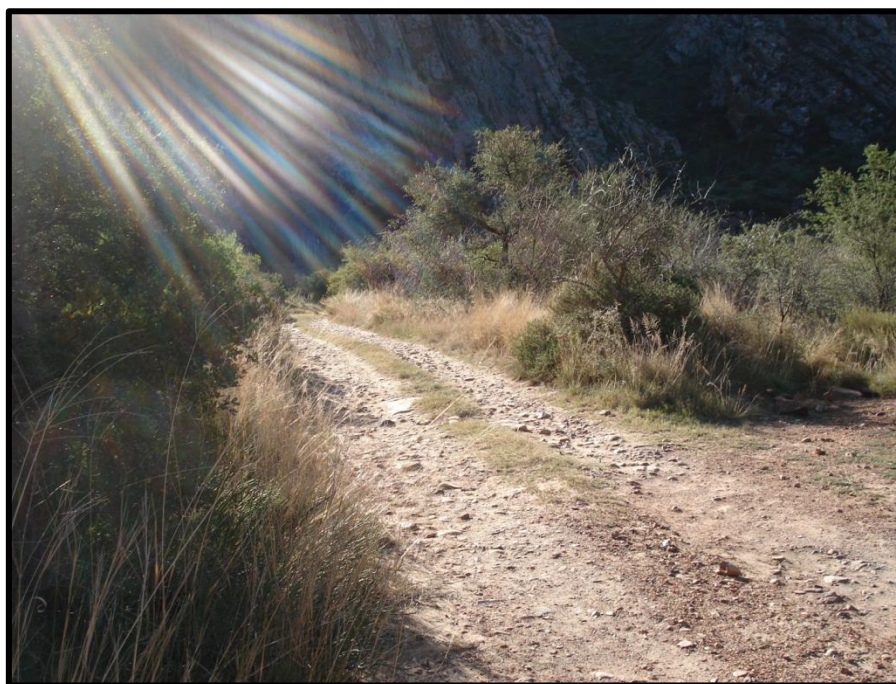
My Muses. Thank you for your inspiration and guidance.

The Divine, the Holy Spirit, the Angels and Saints. Thank you.

## FOREWORD

### Releasing my voice as writer

“Writing is not just something we do. It is also about who we are...” (Badenhorst, 2007, p.5).



Becoming and Being: the Journey is the destination...

I regard the whole doctoral process as an evolutionary journey. This thought was inspired by the above picture which I took on my first trip to Rhodes University to register as a Ph.D. scholar. However, as I have journeyed I have realised that this particular journey does not have a destination, but that the journey itself is the destination. It is in travelling through philosophical and epistemological realms that I have learned and evolved intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.

As I have come to write, I have found that I have needed to give myself permission to find and free my own writing voice. Part of freeing my voice has been owning my learning and my research – allowing (or perhaps more honestly - authorising) myself to say “This is what I think based on...”. I see this process of freeing myself reflected in the words of “Our deepest fear”, a poem by Marianne Wilson (1992):

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

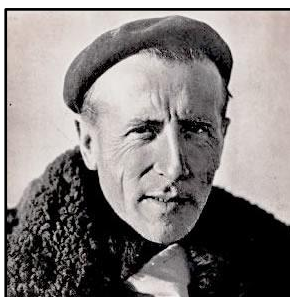
It is our light, not our darkness  
That most frightens us.  
We ask ourselves  
Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?  
Actually, who are you not to be?  
You are a child of God.

Your playing small  
Does not serve the world.  
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking  
So that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine,  
As children do.  
We were born to make manifest  
The glory of God that is within us.  
It's not just in some of us;  
It's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine,  
We unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.  
As we're liberated from our own fear,  
Our presence automatically liberates others.

So it is in giving myself permission to become who I am as a writer and therefore to be who I am, that I come to write this dissertation in a style and format that is honest, visual and clear, and yet, unmistakably *academically rigorous*. Therefore, to illustrate who I am (both becoming and being) and what I am bringing to the research and writing process, I need to introduce my influences and my Muses.



The first part of my title “Becoming and Being” is a deep bow to Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit palaeontologist and philosopher who wrote in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and whose works were

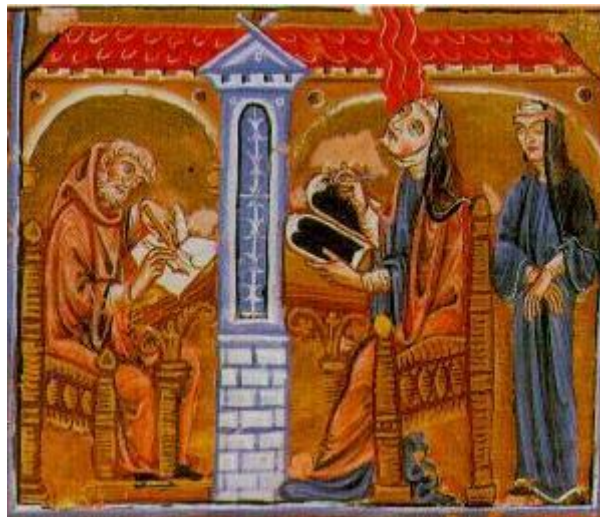
banned by the Catholic Church for 25 years. He informed my thinking and spirituality for many years, and first introduced me to the concept of ontology in 1971. As I have come to study and own critical realism, De Chardin's words resonate with me and have become part of my research process:

To understand the world  
Knowledge is not enough  
You must see it, touch it,  
Live in its presence  
And drink the vital heat of existence  
in the very heart of reality (Gallagher, 1988, p. 21)

For me, this is what answering critical realism's transcendental question is all about – exploring the very heart of reality by using retroductive reasoning.

### **My Muses**

To accompany me on my journey and inspire me to think and write clearly, I invited three Muses – Hildegard von Bingen, St Teresa of Avila and St Therese of Lisieux. Abbess Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) was a most remarkable woman for her time, a mystic, reformer and creative genius, who wrote poetry and books of her visions, went on preaching tours of Germany, composed music, painted Mandalas and “illuminations” and philosophised about the Divine.



This illumination from her “*Scrivias*” depicts her being inspired by God and dictating her visions to her scribe.



St Teresa of Avila was another remarkable woman, highly intellectual yet a mystic and reformer who lived from 1515 to 1582 in Spain and was declared a Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church in 1970. Her writings include her autobiography and “The Interior Castle”.

This portrait is a copy of an original of her painted in 1576.

“Let nothing disturb thee.  
Let nothing dismay thee.  
All things pass...”



St Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897) was deeply spiritual and suffered greatly in her short life. She was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1977. She is also known as the “Little flower”. Her most well-known work is “The Story of a Soul”. She died young and said that she intended to spend her eternity doing good on earth.

It is only after travelling with these companions for some time that I realised why I chose them: they represent three aspects of my self – the creative and visual, the intellectual and the spiritual – that I bring to my studies and that inform the way I am in the world and how I understand the world.



The PHOENIX is rising...

## ACRONYMS

<b>AEA:</b>	Ambulance Emergency Assistant
<b>ALS:</b>	Advanced Life Support
<b>BAA:</b>	Basic Ambulance Assistant
<b>BLS:</b>	Basic Life Support
<b>CCA:</b>	Critical Care Assistant
<b>CHE:</b>	Council for Higher Education
<b>CREMS:</b>	City Rescue and Emergency Services <sup>1</sup>
<b>ECP:</b>	Emergency Care Practitioner
<b>ECT:</b>	Emergency Care Technician
<b>EMC:</b>	Emergency Medical Care
<b>EMCS:</b>	Emergency Medical Care Services
<b>EMS:</b>	Emergency Medical Science
<b>GA:</b>	Graduate attribute
<b>HE:</b>	Higher Education
<b>HEI:</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>HPCSA:</b>	Health Professions Council of South Africa
<b>ILS:</b>	Intermediate Life Support
<b>NQF:</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>OECD:</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PBEC:</b>	Professional Board for Emergency Care (under the aegis of the HPCSA)
<b>SAQA:</b>	South African Qualifications Authority
<b>UoT:</b>	University of Technology

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<sup>1</sup> This is a fictitious name for the local government Emergency Medical Care Services

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Prologue

*In writing this critical realist<sup>2</sup> dissertation I have chosen to use certain features to make the reading of it easier, and hopefully enjoyable. The first is to write a prologue where necessary at the start of chapters to create a space where I may talk to the reader. The second is to provide a metacommentary about the chapter to indicate what I am doing, why and how (Thomson, 2012). The third is to write with academic rigour, but accessibly, especially when dealing with theoretical framings. The fourth is my inclusion of diagrams and photos because I am a visual person and find it easier to explain a concept or point with a diagram. Finally, the fifth feature is the considered use I make of footnotes to add an explanation or commentary to the text where necessary.*

### 1.1 Introduction

*In this chapter I first present some background about my interest in studying paramedic student, graduate and professional identity. This is followed by the field, goal and significance of the research and the research questions. In the context of the research I explore two main areas: (i) aspects of Higher Education and (ii) the South African Emergency Medical Services because this is where my research is*

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<sup>2</sup> Critical realism is the philosophy of Roy Bhaskar which is employed as under-labourer in this thesis and forms the meta-theoretical framework. Critical realism is fully discussed in Chapter Two. I take a critical realist stance in this dissertation.

*situated. The chapter concludes with a brief 'road-map' of the other chapters in this dissertation.*

“Becoming and Being” – I have chosen these two concepts to introduce the title of my research which has been a quest for understanding identity and its ontology as well as its implications for the use of graduate attributes in curriculum design. Becoming and Being are two distinct, but not separate processes because they are both dynamic, changing and have constant interplay between them; where one ends the other begins in a never-ending dance of identities. They speak to personal ontology and the emergence of personal and professional identity (Bhaskar, 1993). In the case of this research, I explore Becoming and Being within the context of the identity of Emergency Medical Science (EMS) students at a University of Technology (UoT) who graduate and then, once registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa, cross over into a professional identity in the Emergency Medical Care Services (EMCS).

There is not much literature on the emerging identity of Emergency Medical Science (EMS) students (Campeau, 2008), especially from a critical realist perspective. Lockett and Lockett (2009) have written on student identity from a social realist<sup>3</sup> perspective, but this does not address EMS student identity. As I am exploring the question of the emergence of student, graduate and professional identity, I also focus on graduate attributes and the relationship between them and graduate identity. However, I problematize generic graduate attributes which are presented in most literature as neutral, apolitical, and ahistorical (e.g. Barrie, 2005, 2006; Griesel and Parker, 2009), some exceptions are Barnett (2004, 2009a, 2009b, 2010) and Wheelahan (2003, 2009). Although much literature has been produced on graduate attributes, there is very little concerning the relationship of graduate attributes to identity (Holmes, 2001; Hinchcliffe and Jolly 2009) and even less when gazing at this relationship through a critical realist lens. Therefore, this research attempts to address these lacunae.

## **Background: My interest in this research project**

I was introduced to the world of Emergency Medical Care (EMC) when my son decided to study at a UoT to become a paramedic. Until that moment I had only associated paramedics

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<sup>3</sup> In this dissertation, social realism refers to the work of sociologist Margaret Archer.

with fast cars and wailing banshee sirens without ever considering who they were and from where they came. As a parent I journeyed with my son and his classmate friends through his three years of studies watching him and his friends change from carefree young students to responsible paramedics who literally hold someone's life in their hands on occasion. It was when my husband had a heart attack and paramedics attended to him that I actually saw how skilful and compassionate their care of him was. I thought about the students studying Emergency Medical Science at the UoT wearing their distinctive uniforms and wondered how they had managed the transition to paramedic student and thereafter to graduate and ultimately to professional paramedic; after all I had seen it happen in my son and his friends. I wondered about student identity and professional identity: what causes this change in identity, or series of changes, from student to professional? I wondered about the role that curriculum might possibly play in the emergence of student and graduate identity. These questions interested me as a lecturer at the same University of Technology and so I started this research into emergency care worker identity.

In reading through the websites of the public and private Emergency Medical Care Service (EMCS) providers, I saw that they have certain core attributes and specific workplace criteria that they require of their staff. This made me think about graduate attributes, particularly how universities have a generic list of attributes that are their particular trade-mark in branding their "products", i.e. graduates, and the corporatisation of universities. Reflecting on this led me to consider the neo-liberal agenda that has caused universities to rethink their own ontological status and change it to one of serving globalisation and the new Capitalism (Gee, Hull and Lankshear, 1996); where students become products of a process that changes them into knowledge workers for the knowledge economy (Chomsky, 2000). I wondered what the link might be between the EMS curriculum and these graduate attributes, especially in a profession where the curriculum is strongly influenced by an external, professional body who is also the gate-keeper of the profession. Do the graduate attributes promised by the UoT and expected by employers influence this curriculum?

The relatively recent Universities of Technology that have emerged within the differentiated landscape of Higher Education in South Africa have a strong career-oriented focus and strive

to produce professionals for the respective industries<sup>4</sup> that the UoTs service. The workplaces require the UoT graduates to meet not only knowledge criteria, but specific workplace criteria (seen as the aforementioned ‘graduate attributes’) that will enable them to be employable, carry out their tasks most effectively and to “be professional”. For example, a paramedic graduate entering the workplace, not only has to know the medical science and clinical skills that undergird her response in dealing with a medical emergency, but is also expected to be “professional” and act in a “professional” manner towards the patient and all others involved in the emergency situation. So, in philosophical terms one could say that both epistemological (in the sense of ‘knowledge’ from the Greek *episteme*) and ontological (in the sense of ‘being’ from the Greek *ontos*) dimensions are at play in this situation. However, the question is how do students, who arrive at a University of Technology with a range of diverse identities, develop the EMS student identity required by the academic context and the graduate identity required in the specific programmes in which they are enrolled. In addition, how do students ‘acquire’ the graduate attributes which are listed by the university and increasingly expected by the workplace?

## **1.2 Field, goals and significance of research**

### ***Field***

I have situated this research within the field of Higher Education, because it deals with student and graduate identity, graduate attributes and curriculum in an Emergency Medical Science department at a University of Technology in the Western Cape, South Africa. However, this research extends beyond higher education because it explores what happens to students once they graduate and move into the workplace and assume the professional identity of emergency care workers. Therefore, this research is also situated within the field of the Emergency Medical Care Services in South Africa.

### ***Goals***

My goal in this research is to understand emergence of identity in its different forms because identity cannot be reified as a single, generic construct that can be replicated endlessly and imposed upon people. Identity, whether it is student, graduate or professional identity, is

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<sup>4</sup> It is interesting that UoTs use an intrinsically capitalist “industry discourse” which is both generic referring to ‘industry’ as an amorphous other, e.g. “industry demands work-ready graduates” and specific, e.g. ‘the clothing industry’. EMS has adopted this industry discourse and I have observed how both students and staff refer to EMC services as ‘the industry’ or the Emergency Medical Care (EMC) “**industry**” rather than “Service”.

dynamic, complex, changing and multiple (Bhaskar, 1993; Kamler and Thomson, 2006). My goal is also to create a usable explanatory model and definition of identity that can speak to the data, because in my literature search through the many definitions of identity I have not found one that is quite appropriate to my theoretical and conceptual frameworks. My third goal is to critique graduate attributes and offer an alternative, which is based on ontological as well as epistemological principles rather than just the latter. In problematizing graduate attributes, I would like to explore their relationship to the curriculum.

### ***Significance***

The impact of structure, culture and agency on the emergence of student, graduate and professional identities in Emergency Medical Care (EMC) in South Africa has not been researched previously and, therefore, my research proposes to fill this gap. In addition, Bhaskar's notions of identity and the self have been under-researched (Mahoney, 2011); thus, by creating a critical realist explanatory framework of identity and theorising a critical realist emergence of identity, I hope to make a contribution to critical realist studies. By exploring the relationship of identity emergence to graduate attributes, I would like to contribute to a critical understanding of graduate attributes themselves, and their use in curriculum design, particularly in the context of South African Universities of Technology.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

My research questions enquire after relationships and emergence:

### **Research question:**

What is the relationship between the emergence of student, graduate and professional identities, graduate attributes and curriculum design in an Emergency Medical Science programme at a University of Technology?

### **Sub-questions:**

How do student, graduate and professional identities emerge in Emergency Medical Science (EMS) students at a University of Technology?

What are the implications of the interplay of Structure, Culture and Agency for the emergence of these identities?

What are the implications of this emergence for the construct of graduate attributes?

What are the implications for the use of graduate attributes in curriculum design?

What relationship exists between identity and graduate attributes?

## **1.4 Context of the Research: Section A: Higher Education**

### **Higher Education**

The two decades from 1993 to 2013 have seen change in every sphere accelerate rapidly to keep up with the developments in technology and the explosion of information easily accessible to anyone with access to the Internet and the media. Barnett (2000) has linked this rapid change to complexity and uncertainty showing how this has eroded the often-comfortable social and educational paradigms. Western society has changed from a manufacturing economy to a market economy to a knowledge economy under the forces of neo-liberalism, the new capitalism and globalisation (Gee, 1996). Higher Education (HE), being socially and historically situated, driven by these same forces has also undergone huge changes starting in mid-20th Century and accelerating over the past twenty years.

To create a broad picture of higher education by focussing on how it has changed, I will use sweeping brushstrokes rather than minutely detailed ones. This brief overview will be based mainly on three United Nations documents (1948a,b,c), two UNESCO documents (1998, 2009) and a UNESCO report prepared for the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education by Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009) as I feel that they succinctly sum up and illustrate the changes that have occurred in global higher education since 1948. These changes in higher education (HE) appear to lie in the following areas: access to university, types of HE institutions, globalisation and internationalisation, pedagogy, curricula, national standards and quality assurance, growing managerialism within HE, and the role played by technology.

Access to higher education was broadened after the Second World War in the United Nations' document "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (U.N., 1948a) which states in Article 26. 1:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be

equally accessible to all on the basis of merit (p. 76).

This Universal Declaration was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December, 1948, by a vote of 44 countries in favour and eight abstentions (UN, 1948c, p. 538). In a move to protect its policy of apartheid, the Union of South Africa was one of the countries abstaining because it felt that the Declaration “should refer only to those fundamental rights, the universal applicability of which was recognised all over the world. The Declaration, as it stood, went beyond those generally accepted rights” (UN, 1948b, pp. 7-8).

Thus, the South African National Party set off on its 46 year-long bulldozer course of a highly discriminatory, unjust, unfair and unequal apartheid education system, which included higher education, and which only ended formally with the inauguration of the new, democratic South Africa in 1994. However, almost twenty years after the end of apartheid there are still on-going consequences of apartheid for all sectors of education. I will return to this point when discussing the non-neutrality of graduate attributes.

In preparation for its first World Conference on Higher Education that would be held in October 1998 in Paris, UNESCO held a series of regional meetings across the globe, including Africa, from 1996-1998 (UNESCO, 1996). Out of these meetings and the conference itself a final report was created: “World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century: vision and action” together with a “Framework for priority action for change and development in Higher Education”. The participants included national policy makers, institutional leaders, the professoriate, researchers, representatives of student bodies, the economic and professional sectors, intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations as well as UN agencies and civil society groups (UNESCO, 1998).

Again, in Article 3a of the World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century: vision and action, the importance of equal access was not only highlighted, but also extended in stating that there can be no discrimination in terms of access:

In keeping with Article 26.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, admission to higher education should be based on the merit, capacity, efforts, perseverance and devotion, showed by those seeking access to it, and can take place in a lifelong scheme, at any time, with due recognition of previously acquired skills. As a

consequence, no discrimination can be accepted in granting access to higher education on grounds of race, gender, language or religion, or economic, cultural or social distinctions, or physical disabilities (UNESCO, 1998, p. 22).

From the above Article 3a it is clear that the definition of access widened to include everyone and remove all forms of discrimination. This is a leap forward from the 1948 UN statement that only mentions “merit” as a condition for access. Besides maintaining the core functions of a university, i.e. education, training, research, sustainable development and improvement of society, the final report of the 1998 conference calls for educating responsible citizens and providing “opportunities for higher learning and for learning throughout life” (UNESCO, 1998, p. 1). It holds that quality should be infused in all higher education functions and activities and that there should be close partnership among all stakeholders including the “world of work” in order “to set in train a movement for the in-depth reform and renewal of higher education” (UNESCO, 1998, p. 2). After this first world conference of higher education, the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI) was created by UNESCO, the United Nations University and the Technical University of Catalonia (Granados and Fredi, 2009).

A decade later UNESCO held the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education in July in Paris. By this time the participation rates in higher education had increased dramatically as a result of the widened access – an increase globally in post-secondary student numbers from 13 million in 1960 to 60 million in 1995 to 150.6 million in 2007 (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009, p. vi-vii). These authors prepared a detailed 247 page report for this conference: “Trends in Global higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution”. The report highlights the “significant forces shaping higher education worldwide” (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009, p. xxii) e.g. massification, globalisation, universal access. The authors point out that these trends, which are not new, are now considered more deeply and that “the discussion has moved beyond awareness to a deeper level of concern with the complexities and implications of these issues” (p. xxiv). For example, granting access to formerly excluded people is not just a question of granting access, but of “meeting their unique needs” (*ibid.*)

The trends that are highlighted in the report include the unintended consequences of massification of higher education:

- an overall lowering of academic standards,
- new patterns of funding,
- students and parents having to bear the direct (fees) and indirect costs (e.g. transport, living expenses),
- quality assurance and peer-audits of institutions and qualifications,
- competitiveness between HEIs in terms of rankings
- diversified HE systems including a sharp increase in private HEIs and mega-universities offering distance education, such as UNISA in South Africa which has 400 000 students (UNISA 2013),
- despite greater inclusion, the privileged classes have retained their advantage,
- international student and academic mobility,
- the rise of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (and the digital divide),
- the casualisation of academic staff with increases in part-time lecturing staff,
- a lessening of academic autonomy and
- the rise of managerialism and corporatisation within HE institutions (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley, 2009, pp. 2-5).

The authors of the report point out that the rise of English as the dominant language of scientific communication “is unprecedented since Latin dominated the academy in medieval Europe” (2009, p. iv), but do not problematize or critique this use of English. The report indicates that universities have generally moved from being a public good to a private good. It is interesting that the report only alludes to neoliberalist capitalism as one of the drivers of change as “a more widespread political inclination toward greater privatization of services once provided by the state” (2009, p. xii), but does not directly name it or critique it. However, the report critiques indirectly in its statement “the greater emphasis on cost recovery, higher tuition and university-workplace links distracts from the traditional role and service function of higher education that are central to contemporary society” (2009, p. xii).

Out of this conference came a communiqué “2009 World Conference on Higher Education: The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development” (UNESCO, 2009). It, too, addresses the question of access and acknowledges the wide gulf between developed and developing nations, especially the digital divide (p. 4).

While the broadened access has allowed more previously-excluded people access to institutions of higher learning, it has also brought its own host of problems in terms of teaching and learning because “equity is not simply a matter of access – the objective must be successful participation and completion while at the same time assuring student welfare” (p. 3). Massification does not seem to have made access altogether equitable because “great disparities persist constituting a major source of inequality” (*ibid.*). For example, internationalisation has allowed students to access higher education in countries of their choice, but this is only for those who can afford to do so, or who have the knowledge and social capital to win bursaries. The elite universities have maintained their status quo in two ways – by setting high fees and associated costs as a gate-keeper, and by attracting the best students. There is no equity in outcomes either. Middle-class students continue to do better than working class students in (i) accessing these prestigious universities and (ii) by staying the course and graduating (Boughey, pers. comm., 16 July 2012; Scott, Ndebele, Badsha, Figaji, Gevers, and Pityana, 2013). These global issues in higher education are also present in and affect South Africa higher education.

## **Higher Education in South Africa**

I bring a bias to my consideration of higher education in South Africa, namely that I consider all education and especially higher education to be an issue of social justice that needs to be addressed if we are to grow a valid democracy in South Africa. In this I follow Hassim (2009) who states that “Apartheid was a system of racial hierarchies in which education played a central role in ensuring that different “population groups” were systematically shepherded into different and unequal roles in society, political life, and the economy” (p. 63). Hassim adds that these racial hierarchies of apartheid “intersected with and reinforced class and gender inequalities” (*ibid.*). To a large extent these inequalities have remained in place in South Africa as a legacy of apartheid despite the move to democracy.

Although this research study will be located mainly in an Emergency Medical Science department in a South African University of Technology, it is set within the broader context of South African higher education. Not only does South African higher education have to deal with the same global issues mentioned previously, but it also has its apartheid history of separate, unequal and unjust education and its struggle for liberation and the development of

a new higher education system post-apartheid. It is also set within a context of enormous cultural, economic and social difference.

With the democratic South Africa came a new and transformative education policy set out in the White Paper on Education and Training of 1997 (DOE, 1997). It is significant that the transformation of South African higher education was to take place “within the pressures of globalisation and the local challenges of reconstruction and development” (Ensor, 2004, p. 339), which included applying the global neo-liberal, market-driven vision of a ‘knowledge economy’ to higher education institutions (Bourdieu, 1998; Giroux, 2002; Allais, 2003; Ntshoe, 2004; Baatjes, 2005; Lynch, 2006). Thus, a new discourse entered South African higher education, namely a managerial discourse with its notions of quality assurance, audits, key performance areas, personal performance management, students as clients and senior academics as line-managers. Universities were challenged to change to become production houses of knowledge workers by the powerful global discourses at play. Moreover, universities were also presented with the demands of the makers and shakers of capitalism who insisted on highly-skilled knowledge workers to meet their need for ever-expanding profit.

To a large extent, the relatively recent move in South Africa to develop generic graduate attributes at institutional level can be directly related to globalisation, neo-liberalism and the knowledge economy not only because of the demands that workplaces place on the universities, but also because, the market place and professional bodies often dictate the curriculum (Fleischmann, 2012).

### **The Types of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa**

Apartheid education policy had created inequitable, separate higher education institutions based not only on race, but also language – Black, Coloured, Indian and as well as English and Afrikaans White universities; the latter were highly privileged. Section 32 of the Extension of University Education Act of 1959 debarred “non-white” persons from registering at or attending “white” universities without the written consent of the Minister of Bantu Education (Ashby, 1960). Under this systemically immoral model of higher education, the location, funding as well as the remit of the institutions differed in terms of the courses

they offered and therefore the types of graduates they could turn out. For example, the black<sup>5</sup> universities did not offer courses in Engineering or Medicine<sup>6</sup>, although in 1976 a medical university for black South Africans was created – MEDUNSA (the Medical University of South Africa) (Haynes and Lee, 1995) and UNITRA (the acronym for University of Transkei – a ‘homeland’) medical school was established in 1985 (Kwizera, Igumbor and Mazwai, 2005). The medical schools at Witwatersrand University (1946-1966) and Natal University (1957-1978) produced only 413 African doctors (Tobias, 1980). However, nursing was offered on black campuses, but with the proviso that nurses were to be trained to work with “their own people in the bantustans<sup>7</sup>” (Wolpe, 1995). Engineering and Medicine courses were available to whites at the most prestigious white universities, for example the Afrikaans universities of Stellenbosch, Pretoria and Orange Free State as well as the English universities of Cape Town, Witwatersrand and Natal. Thus, the nationalist apartheid regime used funding and curriculum to advance and bolster its ideology. The same disparity applied to the South African technical colleges. This created huge inequity that apartheid in its demise bequeathed as a legacy to a democratic South Africa.

In 2003-2005 mergers of various higher education institutions took place to reduce the number of public tertiary education institutions into 22 universities: Traditional research-intensive Universities, Comprehensive Universities and Universities of Technology (CHE, 2009). The apartheid prestigious and historically important universities were retained, namely Rhodes, Stellenbosch, Cape Town, Pretoria, Witwatersrand, University of the Western Cape and Fort Hare, as stand-alone universities. Fort Hare incorporated the East London campus of Rhodes University in its merger. There was also the merger between historically elite and historically black universities such as University of Durban-Westville and the University of Natal which produced the University of Kwazulu-Natal. The comprehensive universities were a merger of different types of institutions such as a technikon<sup>8</sup> with a former university, e.g. the current Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth and the University of Johannesburg (Hall, Symes and Leucher, 2004). Technikons were combined to form Universities of Technology. MEDUNSA was merged into the University of Limpopo, but the Minister of Higher Education and Training announced in Parliament on 26 May 2011 that it

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<sup>5</sup> The term ‘black’ is used to refer to Black, Coloured and Indian people collectively without meaning to give offence.

<sup>6</sup> This was due in part to the apartheid policy of job reservation which closed certain occupations to black South Africans or allowed a few to work as doctors, but only to treat people from their own ethnic group (Wolpe, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Bantustans were the apartheid ‘homelands’ – areas of South Africa that were designated for particular ethnic groups.

<sup>8</sup> A ‘technikon’ is a South African term for what was formerly a technical college and which subsequently became a University of Technology (UoT).

will be de-merged to become a stand-alone medical university (Nkosi, 2011). The intention of the mergers was not only to transform the South African HE system, but to rationalise programmes and foster co-operation across institutions, to build capacity and to create new institutional identities (DoE, 2001). However, in the merged institutions, their identity still has to emerge. By 2008 all the technikons had changed their names to “Universities of Technology” (du Pré, 2010). The development of these universities of technology can be seen as part of a continuum of change in identity, function and name in response to the country’s growing need for high level skills training.

In addition, with widening access the types of higher education institutions have also changed in South Africa, especially with the rise of private higher education institutions (HEIs) (IEASA, 2009). In South Africa, various types of private higher education exist. In October 2013 there were 89 legally registered private higher education institutions (DHET, 2013). However, despite widening access the prestigious historically white universities continue to attract the cream of applicants of all races and creeds and in this way maintain their elitist status. There exists a distinct hierarchy of universities in South Africa, with the top positions held by the historically white English-speaking research universities, while the historically black campuses of the merged institutions occupy the lower rungs.

This historical aspect of South African Higher Education and particularly the ideologies of racism and sexism (Soudien, Michaels, Mthembu-Mahanyele, Nkomo, Nyanda, Nyoka, Seepe, Shisana and Villa-Vicencio, 2008) that seeded themselves and drove HE for many years are important because they are some of the generative mechanisms at play in the emergence of the current SA Higher Education landscape.

## **A South African University of Technology**

This University of Technology emerged in January 2005 from the merger of an historically ‘coloured’<sup>9</sup> Technikon with an historically white Technikon and a College of Education.

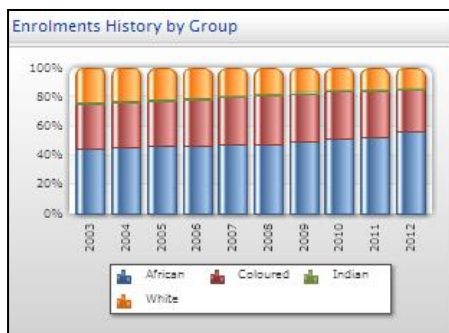
Although the end of apartheid saw the official scrapping of racially segregated universities, the apartheid legacy lives on in the sense that in merged institutions some campuses still

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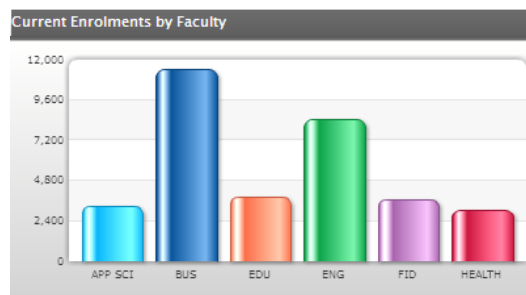
<sup>9</sup> ‘Coloured’ here refers to people of mixed racial descent who had separate HEIs to blacks, Indians and whites under apartheid.

retain their historically black student body and the perception that it is a “black” campus despite efforts by the institutions and authorities concerned to change that perception. For instance, after eight years, students at the UoT still refer to the formerly ‘coloured’ Campus by its apartheid name and consider it to be a ‘black’ campus. The logistical aspects of merger at the UoT are not yet fully complete even after nine years with the result that there are still a few departments that have not merged onto a single campus. This means that the same programme, e.g. Graphic Design, is offered on two campuses, one historically white and one historically coloured.

This UoT had 33 509 students in 2013, having grown from 28 961 students in 2005 (UoT HEMIS, 2013). It houses six faculties spread across five campuses. The former white campus has the largest student numbers with 15 849 students. The former coloured campus is the second largest with 12 251 students. Figure 1a below indicates the racial profile of the student body where white students have moved to being a minority group, while African students have majority status. Figure 1b shows the number of students enrolled in Faculties. Business is the biggest Faculty followed by Engineering. The Health and Wellness Sciences Faculty, housing the Emergency Medical Science department, is the smallest with 3047 students.



**Figure 1.1a:** UoT 2013 Student cohort  
(Source: HEMIS UoT, October 2013)



**Figure 1.1b:** 2013 Student numbers in Faculties

The Department of Emergency Medical Science is housed on the on the historically coloured Campus and has 269 students studying the following programmes: National Diploma (72 students), National Higher Certificate (80), Bachelor of Emergency Medical Care (74), Bachelor of Technology Emergency Medical Care (38) and five Master of EMS students (UoT HEMIS, 2013).

## **1.4 Context of the Research: Section B: South African Emergency Medical Care Services (EMCS)**

### **Background**

Formal, tertiary training of paramedics began in South Africa in 1986 under apartheid in historically white institutions, namely Technikon Witwatersrand and Natal Technikon<sup>10</sup>. This, despite the fact that the greatest need for emergency health care workers lay in the rural areas and townships where there was a dearth of emergency medical care. In 2013, there is still a great shortage of emergency care workers in the rural areas and an inequitable distribution of emergency medical care in the country, i.e. another facet of apartheid legacy. Kon and Lackan (2008) state that the education legacy of apartheid has left black and coloured South Africans underserved and disadvantaged in terms of health care in the new, democratic South Africa.

The South African EMS sector is relatively young compared to other medical services. Before the advent of democracy in 1994, the four provinces of apartheid South Africa had training colleges for white ambulance workers in keeping with the apartheid policy of job reservation (LR/6/613). It was only in the 1980s that the four provinces in South Africa set up Provincial Ambulance Training Colleges to train emergency care workers up to an Intermediate Life Support Level (Dalbock, 1996). The first Advanced Life Support paramedics were trained from 1986 in the then Natal and Transvaal, but there was no emergency medical care training in the Cape (Govender, 2010). Thus, because of apartheid policy, mainly white men were trained as paramedics (Advanced Life Support). This gave rise to an enduring perception that paramedics are white males still persisting today and that needs to be challenged according to lecturer Reddy in the Emergency Medical Science department (LR/6/6/13).

When considering the question of professional board registration during apartheid, all emergency care workers were required to register with the South African Medical and Dental Council (SAMDC) (MacFarlane, van Loggerenberg and Kloeck, 2005). This registration was an early step towards professionalising the Emergency Medical Services. In 1974 the South African Medical and Dental Council was renamed the Health Professions Council of South

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<sup>10</sup> The two institutions have undergone their own mergers and are now called the University of Johannesburg (UJ), and Durban University of Technology (DUT) respectively.

Africa in terms of the Health Professions Act 56 (HPCSA, 2013), a name it has retained up to the present. This statutory body still keeps custody and control of the registers of Emergency Care workers. In 2003 the Professional Board for Emergency Care (PBEC) was established under the aegis of the HPCSA (*ibid.*). All EMCS workers are required to register with the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

## **Two Routes to becoming Emergency Care workers**

There are presently two routes open to entering the Emergency Medical Care Services. The one way is to study for a number of years at a university of technology graduating either with a National Diploma or the newly-instituted B.EMC degree; the other is to do a series of short courses linked by stipulated hours of practice, i.e. ‘road work’ in an ambulance. These short courses are offered by private training providers as well as the Provincial Ambulance/EMCS colleges throughout South Africa. The UoT Emergency Medical Science (EMS) department, which has been accredited by the HPCSA to offer these short courses, runs the Intermediate Life Support course (AEA) on demand mainly to improve the skills of emergency care workers from very disadvantaged rural areas (LR/6/6/13).

### **Route One: The short course route to becoming an Emergency Care worker**

The short courses in emergency medical care can be studied at local government colleges of emergency care or at private institutions/training providers offering emergency medical care courses. This “short-course route” as it is known in the Emergency Medical Care Services (EMCS) entails starting off doing basic First Aid, followed by a four-week full-time course in Basic Life Support at a training provider. This four-week course leads to certification as a Basic Ambulance Assistant (BAA) and requires registration with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). The scope of practice of a BAA is limited as are the drug protocols. This means that a BAA is very limited in the kind of drugs s/he may administer to a patient, e.g. only activated charcoal, oral glucose powder/gel, medical oxygen and Entonox which is combination of nitrous oxide and oxygen (HPCSA, 2006a).

Six months after registration and having gained 1000 hours experience on the road in an ambulance, the BAA may enrol in the next level course, namely the four-month Ambulance Emergency Assistant (AEA) course. This is classified as Intermediate Life Support (ILS) and

has a specific scope of practice and drug protocols, e.g. Acetyl Salicylic Acid,  $\beta$ 2 Stimulants, Ipratropium Bromide and Dextrose 50% in addition to the BAA drugs (HPCSA, 2006b). The AEA is required to register with the HPCSA. On completion of the AEA course, the Ambulance Emergency Assistant may apply for the Critical Care Assistant course after 1000 hours of road experience as an AEA in an ambulance and is required to write an entrance exam.

This Critical Care Assistant (CCA) course lasts for nine months divided into four months in the classroom studying theory and five months on the road in an ambulance or response car doing workplace-based learning. On completion, the incumbent is deemed to have Advanced Life Support skills and is registered with the HPCSA as a paramedic. This CCA paramedic who has come up through the short courses and practical experience is on the same HPCSA register as a 3-year National Diploma graduate and therefore has the same scope of practice and drug protocols and both are called paramedics because they are both advanced life support (ALS) practitioners. The CCA paramedic has a much wider scope of practice and drug protocols than the AEA. The advanced life support drug protocols include administering morphine and a local anaesthetic Lignocaine Hydrochloride as well as benzodiazepines, corticosteroids and other drugs. As it is specified within the paramedic scope of practice, a paramedic may declare a person dead (HPCSA, 2006c). For ease of reference, these short courses are summarised in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1** Short courses to becoming Emergency Care Workers

Short Course	Acronym	Entrance Requirement to course	Duration	Level of Life Support Training	HPCSA registered
Basic Ambulance Assistant	BAA	Basic First Aid	4 weeks	Basic Life Support (BLS)	Yes
Ambulance Emergency Assistant	AEA	1000 hours' BAA ambulance work	4 months	Intermediate Life Support (ILS)	Yes
Critical Care Assistant (paramedic)	CCA	1000 hours' AEA ambulance work & 1 year as AEA & entrance exam	9 months: 4 theory 5 practical	Advanced Life Support (ALS)	Yes

## **A critique of EMC short courses**

The EMC short courses appear to be Competency Based Training (CBT). This form of training and assessment is closely related to the workplace and focusses specifically on outcomes and is mainly used in vocational training. Competency is defined as the application of specified knowledge, skill and attitudes needed to undertake a work role or task to the required standard in the workplace (Wheelahan, 2009). Thus, in the emergency medical care short courses, students learn only what they need to know in a specific context of work, e.g. a “see the bleeding, stop the bleeding” approach. Wheelahan further states that “CBT excludes students from access to disciplinary knowledge because it only provides students with access to contextually specific applications of knowledge, and not the system of meaning in which it is embedded” (2009, p. 5). Thus, if the context changes students may not be able to apply their knowledge because they do not have a system of meaning to fall back upon. Chappel, Gonczi and Hager (2000) state that the positivist interpretation of competence holds a narrow view of the workplace focussing mainly on technical aspects, while the humanist perception focuses on cognitive and social aspects and the critical views learning as formed by an exploitative set of power relations within a social, economic and political environment. Wheelahan (2007, 2009, 2011) concurs with the latter.

Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) have problematized competency based training and present five problems with CBT:

1. Units of competency are tied to the specific
2. Outcomes of learning are tied to descriptions of work as it currently exists. They focus on the present
3. CBT does not provide adequate access to underpinning knowledge
4. CBT is based on the simplistic notion that processes of learning are identical with the skills that are to be learnt
5. That even though CBT is meant to certify that particular outcomes have been achieved, there may be problems of credibility (pp. 14-16).

In addition, using Bernsteinian terms, Wheelahan (2013) states that CBT collapses the boundary between theoretical, general principled knowledge (vertical discourse) and every-

day, particularised knowledge (horizontal discourse). This means that the classroom and workplace are not seen as different sites of learning providing access to each different type of knowledge. The boundary is important because students need to be able to distinguish each type of knowledge as a basis for selecting, integrating and synthesising each (*ibid.*).

I use Wheelahan and Moodie's critique (2011) in discussing the EMS competency based short courses. These authors state that CBT atomises workplace requirements into discrete units of learning that have to be mastered and applied, i.e. in the short courses students cover only what is necessary to their functioning in a specific context as EMCS workers. Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) explain that this means that "they have access only to contextually specific elements of theory that are relevant to the particular context, so that the emphasis is on elements of content rather than the system of meaning" (p. 15). Thus, the four months of theory that the advanced life support Critical Care Assistant is taught only covers that theory which is necessary for specific contextual knowledge to be used in the workplace (LS/22/6/12). The same applies to the six weeks of theory that the intermediate life support Ambulance Emergency Assistant is taught (*ibid.*).

An example of the consequences of CBT training would be an Ambulance Emergency Assistant (AEA) who is taught to administer a particular drug in a particular context. However, if the context were to change or even to be completely unfamiliar the AEA would not know whether to administer the drug or not because she<sup>11</sup> has been trained only for a specific context, and has not been taught the wider theory and meaning around the application of the drug. The AEA has not accessed the system of meaning around the administration of drugs. In other words, the AEA has no recourse to general theoretical principles that would enable her to act appropriately in new circumstances and know why the action is appropriate. This may be perceived as a serious gap or lack in their short course training.

In addition, the CBT learning outcomes are described independently of processes of learning and knowledge and skills are conflated into one unit (Wheelahan and Moodie, 2011). Stemming from behaviourist learning theory there is also the notion in CBT that processes of learning are the same as the skills that are to be learnt (Wheelahan and Moodie, 2011, p.16). CBT learning outcomes focus on the present and are related to a specific workplace activity

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<sup>11</sup> In the interests of maintaining gender neutrality, I randomly use either 'she' or 'he', 'her' or 'his/him' when referring to paramedics or students.

which emphasises traditional ways of doing and curtail “the development of innovative knowledge and new forms of practice” (*ibid.*). In effect, these ways of doing may become habituated. An example of this would be the EMCS worker who has learnt a specific way of doing and is reluctant to embrace change. For example, doing Cardio-pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) on a patient who has gone into cardiac arrest has changed significantly from 2000 to 2005 to 2010. Formerly the algorithm was airway, breathing and then chest compressions (A-B-C), but changed to chest compressions, airway, breathing (C-A-B) (Rodseth, 2011). It might happen that a short-course EMCS worker might be reluctant to change his way of doing CPR because the ‘old’ way of doing was what he learnt and used.

A further problem regarding the short courses is that reflective practice does not form part of the practical work that is covered in these short courses (LS/22/6/12). In essence, when a short-course student comes off the practical work experience, she is not asked to write a personal reflection, e.g. how she acted as incident commander at the scene of the accident, how competent she felt about dealing with the presenting clinical picture or challenges that arose in terms of practice. Not writing a personal reflection on practice may be perceived as a lack in the learning process because it deprives the students of the opportunity to gain insight into themselves and the situation. It also deprives the students of using the reflection as a learning experience to improve themselves and their practice.

To corroborate the above, from my research I provide statements made by students who have done the short courses including the nine-month CCA short course and are in the process of completing the three-year National Diploma:

**Student Paul:** *Also there’s reflective thinking and critical thinking, you know, and it really helps you to think about this situation. Previously, as a CCA we just treated. This is asthma; this is what I think it is. But now you critically think about it and you reflect about it. When I treated a patient I never thought about it, I just switched myself off and I leave. But now when I treat a patient, it’s like, you know, I consider all these other systems. You should think critically and you reflect. And it makes a better person of you (SP<sup>12</sup>/15/8/12).*

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<sup>12</sup> SP is the coded abbreviation for Student Paul. This is to maintain confidentiality. The date of the focus group discussion is also given in brackets.

**Student Nina:** *The CCA to me, theoretical wise, it was not bad compared to here, I must be honest. Yes, here where they spend two weeks on a subject, yes, we did it in half a day, in four hours, but we needed to know what was needed to know to do the skills that goes hand in hand with it. Yes, we did have the assignments to do. Nothing changed, just the time component. There wasn't time to waste (SN/15/8/12).*

Student Paul illustrates the difference between a short-course CBT approach, and the three-year National Diploma approach. He indicates that the latter has enabled him to think critically and reflectively. He makes the point that as a CCA he never actually thought about the patient, but just diagnosed the presenting symptoms as he states: *"We just treated. This is asthma"*. However, for him this changed when doing the National Diploma, *"but now you critically think about it and you reflect about it"*. This illustrates the deeper approach of the National Diploma to knowledge. Student Nina illustrates very well the lack of theoretical input in the short-course CBT approach by comparing the four hours spent on a subject in the short course as opposed to the two weeks spent on the same subject in the national diploma. She concedes that students learnt only what was necessary; nothing more. It is interesting how she conflates knowledge and skills: *"we needed to know what was needed to know to do the skills that goes hand in hand with it"* thus illustrating the point made above.

I also interviewed a professional paramedic who had done both the short courses and then did the EMS National Diploma so that he could continue his studies onto the B.Tech level:

**Paramedic Dawid:** *With the short courses that I did and now have come through the National Diploma as a paramedic, it's true – it gives you a more in-depth theoretical knowledge to understand the whys, wherefores and hows. Whereas with the short courses they teach you the theoretical knowledge just for what you have to know. They don't go more in-depth; they don't teach you...it's the same with skills, it's exactly what you need to know – if the guy has lost blood, replace the blood by fluids. Not the whys, wherefores and hows. It's based on 'This is what I've seen; this is what I do'. Whereas you don't know the in-depth. It's not degrading the mind, but in the short course you don't have the mindset of 'I have to think further for the patient and for what I am doing. Not just for now, but also in the long-term, in the next couple of*

*hours, in the next couple of days, even months'. And that's where the big difference for me comes in (PD/15/5/12).*

Paramedic Dawid's words effectively illustrate Wheelahan and Moodie's critique above of CBT. The following excerpts from his conversation illustrate Wheelahan and Moodie's (W & M) points:

**Dawid:** *With the short courses they teach you the theoretical knowledge just for what you have to know... it's the same with skills, it's exactly what you need to know (PD/15/5/12).*

(W & M) "Units of competency are tied to the specific";

(W & M) "CBT does not provide adequate access to underpinning knowledge";

(W & M) "CBT is based on the simplistic notion that processes of learning are identical with the skills that are to be learnt" (Wheelahan and Moodie, 2011, pp. 14-16);

**Dawid:** *It's based on 'this is what I've seen, this is what I do'. Whereas you don't know the in-depth (PD/15/5/12).*

(W & M) "Outcomes of learning are tied to descriptions of work as it currently exists. They focus on the present" (Wheelahan and Moodie, 2011, pp. 14-16).

Dawid commented that the National Diploma learning experience: *gives you a more in-depth theoretical knowledge to understand the whys, wherefores and hows (PD/15/5/12).*

Having researched the EMC short courses, I agree with the critique of Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) because CBT, in training paramedics to deal only with specific incidents, is inadequate to the complex, uncertain and unpredictable workplace that paramedics face daily.

### **The move to close the register for the EMS short courses**

The short courses offered by private training providers are very expensive and very lucrative to the private companies who offer them. A 4-week BAA course is priced from R7980 (Company C, 2013) to R9500 (Company B, 2013). A 12-week AEA course is in the range of R34 000 (Company B, 2013). The 9 month CCA course is around R95 000. The CEMRS does not charge for its short courses as it offers them in-house at its Academy to its own staff.

These short courses are not aligned with the National Qualifications Framework<sup>13</sup> (NQF) nor registered with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Therefore, in order to comply with SAQA requirements, the Professional Emergency Care Board of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) was required to review the whole of the South African emergency care system of education and training, and proposed that the EMC short courses be discontinued and their registers closed to new names.

A study of the High Court of South Africa, Pretoria, (Case No: 35280/2009) (Judicial Decisions Database, 2010) documentation reveals that the HPCSA Professional Board for Emergency Care felt that these short courses' training and content were inadequate. Already in 2002, the Board had proposed a process to review and upgrade the qualifications required for BAA, AEA and CCA with the intention of ultimately closing the registers (HPCSA, 2010). Therefore, in December 2008 and January 2009 the Board sent a message to the Emergency Care Training Association (ECTA) and all training providers that the registers of these short courses would be closed – the BAA and CCA with effect from 1 December 2010 and the AEA in December 2014. However, this was not well received by the private training providers whose representative body, the Emergency Care Training Association, then took the HPCSA, the Minister of Health, and the Gauteng MEC for Health, SAQA as well as the Chairperson of the Professional Board for Emergency care to court in June, 2010, but the case was dismissed. The Minister of Health has the sole right to close courses and change the register (LR/6/6/2013); however, he has not done so. Thus, the closure of the short courses is still pending in November 2013. Most training colleges have accepted the ultimate closure of these short courses as a *fait accompli* and are focussing on the two year Emergency Care Technician course (LS/22/6/12).

The Professional Board for Emergency Care (PBEC) in consultation with the Department of Health and other stakeholders restructured the AEA course into a two-year Higher Certificate: Emergency Care Technician (ECT) programme to be offered by training providers and Universities of Technology, and the SA Military Health Services, bearing 240

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<sup>13</sup> The NQF in SA is a single 10-level national framework for learning achievements to enhance the quality of education & training. SAQA advances the objectives of the NQF and oversees its implementation. SAQA must develop and implement policy and criteria for development and registration of qualifications (SAQA 2012). The Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) is part of the 10-level NQF, spanning levels 5 to 10, i.e. tertiary education. The HEQF permits nine qualification types (ECSA 2009). In January 2013 the new Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) came into being. This new qualifications framework establishes common parameters and criteria for qualifications design and facilitates the comparability of qualifications across the system. It is a single qualifications framework for a single coordinated higher education sector (CHE, 2013).

credits on NQF level 5 (HPCSA, 2009). To regulate the Emergency Medical Care Services, the HPCSA has proposed that a new one-year Certificate course, the Emergency Care Assistant (ECA), be introduced at a basic level to replace the four-week BAA course (Reddy, 6/6/13). This will allow for the re-training of Basic Ambulance Assistants to upgrade their skills and increase their knowledge base provided that it is not done as competency based training as explained above.

## **Route Two: The UoT route to becoming an Emergency Care worker**

The second route to becoming a paramedic (ALS) has been to do the three-year National Diploma at a University of Technology. This is an academically rigorous course. The curriculum was determined by the HPCSA and the Department of Health and the departments of the various universities contextualised it to fit their particular local circumstances. For example, the UoT National Diploma course has a strong emphasis on Primary Health Care to sensitise students to the needs of the community where they can make a difference by teaching the community the basics of Primary Health Care. In addition, the UoT EMS department, runs a student service-learning project that goes into the various communities to teach them about hygiene and First Aid, particularly in disadvantaged schools (Davids 25/10/11). The National Diploma is being phased out as it will be replaced with the B.EMC degree.

In January 2012, the four-year Bachelor's degree, B.EMC, was offered in the UoT EMS department for the first time as a route to becoming a paramedic with its first intake of 36 B.EMC students. This cohort of students will graduate in December 2015. When the short course registers are closed, this will be the only route to becoming a paramedic (i.e. an Emergency Care Practitioner).

The B.Tech. EMS programme is a one-year full-time or two-year part-time post-diploma programme that results in a Bachelor's Degree. At present, completion of the National Diploma is an admission requirement. However, the B.Tech programme will be phased out as it will be replaced by the four-year B.EMC degree.

The UoT and the local government CREMS Academy in Cape Town both offer the two-year National Higher Certificate Emergency Care Technician (ECT) programme as well. This ECT is set at a level above Intermediate Life Support (ILS) and below Advanced Life

Support (ALS). This is considered to be a mid-level EMCS worker. The ECT will change from a two-year Certificate to a two-year Diploma. This is shown in Table 1.2 which illustrates the proposed *new* structure that will *replace* the current short courses as well as the National Diploma, B.Tech. Degree and ECT Higher Certificate.

**Table 1.2:** The HPCSA proposed **new** structure for emergency medical care workers

<b>New Level</b>	<b>Course</b>	<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Level of life support</b>	<b>Qualification</b>
Basic Life Support	Emergency Care Assistant	ECA	1 year	A level above basic life support and below Intermediate life support	Certificate
Intermediate Life Support	Emergency Care Technician	ECT	2 years	a level above Intermediate Life Support and below Advanced Life Support i.e. Mid-level EMC worker	2-year Diploma
Advanced Life Support	Emergency Care Practitioner	ECP	4 years	At level of current National Diploma plus 1-year B.Tech. B.EMC degree = Advanced Life Support Advanced paramedic	Bachelor's Degree B.EMC

### Statistics on Registered Emergency Care Health workers

Table 1.3 summarises the number of emergency care workers in South Africa as at the end of March 2013 (HPCSA, 2013b). This table shows that there are a disproportionately high number of Basic Ambulance Assistants (BAAs) compared to the other categories. This may be due to the course only being four weeks in length and relatively cheaper than the other EMC short courses. Because of this over-supply, many of these are unemployed, particularly in the urban areas.

**Table 1.3** Statistics on Registered Emergency Care Health workers March 2013

<b>Level</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Number registered with HPCSA</b>
Basic Life Support	Basic Ambulance Assistant	BAA	52 638
Intermediate Life Support	Ambulance Emergency Assistant	AEA	8 233
Mid-level Life Support	Emergency Care Technician	ECT	706

Advanced Life Support	Paramedic (National Diploma) Paramedic (CCA Short Course)	Paramedic	1 522
Advanced Life Support (Degree)	Emergency Care Practitioner B.Tech or B.EMC degree	ECP	250

(Source: HPCSA, 2013b)

The 2009 Emergency Care newsletter reported that 17 000 BAA registrations had been erased from the BAA register due to non-payment of registration fees. This was assumed to be because of the high rate of unemployment among BAAs. The HPCSA reported exploitation of the BAAs by disreputable private ambulance service providers who do not offer them permanent or contract employment, but expect them to stand in for a 48 hour shift and only pay them if they are called out. Some BAAs “work” more than 350 hours per month in contravention of labour laws and come away with poor wages (Emergency Care News, 2011).

The relatively small number of Emergency Care Technicians (ECTs) in Table 1.3 may be explained by the fact that this course has only been implemented since 2006. Registered paramedics number only 1,522 and the advanced Emergency Care Practitioners only 250. Moreover, many of this number of paramedics are no longer in South Africa, but working outside the country either in other African countries or abroad where they are able to earn much higher salaries (LS/20/6/2012). It is of critical concern that in a country of 50 million people there are so few pre-hospital Advanced Life Support Paramedics, especially where international norms put the paramedic to patient ratio at 1:10,000 (Govender, 2010). This situation is not set to change in the near future because the number of EMS students is very low. EMS students are also required to register with the HPCSA. In 2013 there were 511 Emergency Care Practitioner/Paramedic students and 769 Emergency Care Technician (ECT) students in South Africa (HPCSA, 2013). The HPCSA regulates the number of students per class (Davids, 25/10/11). Thus, in 2013 there were 40 ECT students and 36 B.EMC students in first year at the UoT. Every year the EMS department is inundated with applications for admission. In 2012 there were 1700 applications and over 1900 in 2013 for these few places. Lack of staff and facilities constrain the department from running more classes (LR/6/6/13).

## **The service providers of pre-hospital emergency medical care**

In Cape Town there is the public (i.e. provincial government funded) City Rescue and Emergency Medical Services<sup>14</sup> (CREMS) as well as private providers of pre-hospital emergency medical care, such as Company A and Company B discussed below. These are two major private emergency medical services in Cape Town in addition to smaller localised operations such as Cape Paramedic Services.

### **City Rescue and Emergency Medical Services (CREMS)**

CREMS Emergency Medical Services is a Directorate of the Western Cape Provincial Department of Health which makes it the only public rescue and emergency medical care provider to 5.3 million people in the Western Cape. CREMS has a staff complement of 1730 members (not all are paramedics) and operates 251 ambulances in the Western Cape (Western Cape Government Directory, 2013).

CREMS trains its own emergency medical care employees at the Provincial Government CREMS College of Emergency Care. Here it offers short courses in the three levels of care – Basic Life Support, Intermediate Life Support as well as Advanced Life Support as well as the two-year Higher Certificate in Emergency Care Technician studies (LS/20/6/12). Thus, its students come up through the ranks by means of doing the short courses after gaining experience doing road shifts in CREMS ambulances.

### **SA Red Cross Air Mercy Service (AMS)**

The SA Red Cross Air Mercy Service is based at Cape Town International Airport with a helicopter and fixed wing aircraft. It has established a partnership with the Western Cape Department of Health. They have a have a working relationship with the UoT and play a role in the development of the UoT student paramedics in the area of aviation EMS which forms part of the National Diploma and B.EMC courses (AMS, 2013).

### **Company A**

Company A is a national private emergency medical services provider with bases in all major South African Cities. It was registered in 2000 and is privately owned. Supporting all hospitals throughout South Africa both private and public, Company A's emergency services cover South Africa extensively. In addition, Company A has branches in

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<sup>14</sup> City Rescue and Emergency Medical Services (CREMS) is a fictitious name for the local government EMCS service.

all major metropolitan areas and towns around the country as well as contracts with well-established ambulance service providers in the outlying areas (Company A, 2013). The Education, Training and Development department of Company A was founded in 2007.

## **Company B**

Company B was founded in 1998 and is a wholly-owned private entity. It is a pre-hospital risk management and emergency assistance subsidiary of a Group which operates and manages the largest hospital, private ambulance service and doctor network in the world (Company B website, 2013). It has fixed wing aircraft as well as helicopter rescue emergency medical services. In addition, it has a training section, the School of Emergency and Critical Care.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has served to introduce my research, the research questions and some of its context, *viz.* higher education and the pre-hospital emergency medical care services in South Africa.

It has shown that higher education has become massified over the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The Universal Declaration of Human Right in 1948 was the impetus to opening the doors of higher learning in that it declared that higher education should be available to all people of merit. At the First World Conference on Higher Education in 1998, the definition of access widened to include everyone and eradicate all forms of discrimination. The final report of the conference called for close co-operation between all stakeholders in higher education including the world of work and upheld the principle of quality in all spheres of higher education. It also posited lifelong learning and the recognition of prior learning. The aim of all these proposals was to renew higher education. In 2009 the Second World Conference on Higher Education was held. The same trends that were discussed in 1998 were still present, but the focus deepened to consider all the complexities and socio-economic implications of these issues.

I have provided an insight into EMCS in the Western Cape because that is where this research is based. It is evident that although EMCS in the Western Cape is so young, it is dynamic and growing fast. I discussed the different routes to becoming a paramedic, namely

the short course route and UOT. The EMC short courses are CBT which trains students to deal with specific incidents in the workplace, but does not give them a system of meaning. I agree with the closure of the short courses because competency-based training is inadequate for the complex and uncertain workplace of paramedics and emergency care workers. The intended closure of the short courses will streamline EMCS nationally, because new structures have been proposed, i.e. the Emergency Care Assistant, Emergency Care Technician and the Emergency Care Practitioner.

## **1.6 Roadmap of the dissertation – the journey continues**

### **Chapter Two: To be and not to be: Critical Realism, Dialectical Critical Realism and Meta-Reality**

This chapter will introduce the philosophy of Roy Bhaskar's critical realism which forms the meta-theoretical framework of this research. I think that the work of Roy Bhaskar is highly significant; thus, I would like to make it accessible to others. To this end, I have written Chapter Two in an academically rigorous manner, but have tried to keep the language simple, understandable and accessible because the original text is so densely written. In doing so, I have used many examples to shed light on difficult concepts. Using critical realism as a meta-theoretical framework for this research places it firmly within critical realist notions of ontology and epistemology. As critical realism will be a constant under-labourer at work in the dissertation, I have decided to introduce it immediately as the second chapter.

### **Chapter Three: Identity – the Trickster Concept**

I regard identity as a trickster concept because it is so elusive. Here the reader will meet the trickster wearing the various theories of identity, including those of Archer and Bhaskar. In this chapter I think I might have grasped the trickster and will introduce a Bhaskarian explanatory framework and theory of identity that I will employ when analysing the data.

### **Chapter Four: Of Graduate Attributes and Ontology**

This chapter will problematize generic graduate attributes to show that they are not the neutral, apolitical, ahistorical acultural attributes that they are made out to be in the academic literature. I look at Sayer's (1992) notion of fallacy of composition that indicates an error in thinking whereby the assumption arises that what is possible for one must be possible for everyone in all cases at the same time.

### **Chapter Five: Methodology**

In this chapter I take a reflective stance when describing the methodological process used in this qualitative research. I explain my positioning as a researcher which is that of a ‘vicarious insider’ and ponder the question where this places me in a research relationship (Lewis, 1973) to the research and the researched. I also reflect on the actual process of gathering data and the challenges it offered.

### **Chapter Six: The emergence of student, graduate and professional identity**

This chapter will present and explore the findings of the research in terms of identity. This chapter uses a Bhaskarian explanatory framework and theory of identity to address the first two research sub-questions pertaining to identity and structure, culture and agency.

- How do student, graduate and professional identities emerge in Emergency Medical Care (EMS) students at a University of Technology?
- What are the implications of the interplay of Structure, Culture and Agency for the emergence of these identities?

### **Chapter Seven: Graduate attributes – to be or not to be?**

Based on the critique of generic graduate attributes in Chapter Four, this chapter will present and explore the findings of the research with regard to graduate attributes. It will address the last three sub-questions.

- What are the implications of this emergence for the construct of graduate attributes?
- What are the implications for the use of graduate attributes in curriculum design?
- What relationship exists between identity and graduate attributes?

### **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

The journey pauses here to review reflectively what has been said and to discuss the findings. This particular journey does not end because as questions are answered so new questions arise and point the way to future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### TO BE AND NOT TO BE: CRITICAL REALISM, DIALECTICAL CRITICAL REALISM AND META-REALITY

*I met Critical Realism in the first year of my Ph.D. journey. I set out to understand this rather complicated, complex philosophy by reading and re-reading Roy Bhaskar (1978, 1993, 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c) and Margaret Archer (1995, 1996, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2010) as well as Sayer (1992, 2000), Collier (1994), and van Danemark, Ekström, Jokobsen and Karlsson (1997) and Mervyn Hartwig's very useful Dictionary of Critical Realism (2007). I set up Critical Realist and Social Realist glossaries for myself so that I could quickly return to a particularly troublesome concept that I just could not understand. Thus, I came to have a very book-bound understanding of Critical Realism and Social Realism – book-bound in the sense that my understanding of this philosophy was bound to the books that contained it. I could not free myself of this book-boundedness to the point where I could make a comparison, or translate the troublesome concepts into ideas that I could grasp and recontextualise into an understandable example. It was only in attending the first ever Critical Realism Conference in Africa at Rhodes University in July 2012 that Critical Realism became alive for me. Listening to Bhaskar, Norrie and Hartwig speak their Critical Realism, and Margaret Archer speak to Social Realism was like the rain of understanding falling on my theoretical desert. At last, the seeds of Critical Realism and Social Realism I had planted through my comprehensive reading finally started to sprout.*

## 2.1 Introduction

*I start this chapter with an explanation of the philosophy of Critical Realism. In doing so, I explore concepts of basic Critical Realism followed by those of Dialectical Critical Realism. I end with a very brief explanation of Meta-Reality, because Bhaskar (2012) explained how the latter two develop and extend basic Critical Realism.*

The experience of coming to understand and own critical realism because it makes sense to me made me feel that I would like to make it accessible to others. Hence, the aim of this chapter is to describe and discuss critical realism in terms as simple as possible, yet maintaining academic rigour, using examples that are simple to follow and come from some of the research focus areas of my study, for example Emergency Medical Care and Higher Education.



**Figure 2.1:** Alan Norrie      Margaret Archer      Roy Bhaskar      Mervyn Hartwig  
(Source: Own photography at IACR Conference, 2012)

## 2.2 Critical Realism

A movement in philosophy, social theory and cognate practices that seeks to underlabour for science and other ways of knowing in order to promote the cause of TRUTH and FREEDOM, hence the transformation of social structures and other

constraints that impede that cause and their replacement with wanted and needed ones, or emancipation (Hartwig, 2007, p. 96) (original emphasis).



**Figure 2.2:** Roy Bhaskar (2012)

From the fore-going quotation it is clear that critical realism is a philosophy that aspires to act as an “underlabourer” for the natural and social sciences in the sense of clearing a philosophical path, laying down a stratified and depth ontology and viewing the world as an open<sup>15</sup> system on which to overlay substantive theory (Bhaskar, 2012). This aspect of critical realism as an underlabourer is very useful because it allows a researcher to use a theoretical framework that speaks to the questions of “what is reality?”, “what is knowledge?” and “what is truth?” Having a clear, theoretical understanding of reality, knowledge and truth will inform a researcher’s choice of substantive theory, methodology and hermeneutic process (the way the data is interpreted). The next section will introduce the founder of critical realism, Roy Bhaskar and the development of critical realism.

As a young philosopher, Roy Bhaskar published his first book, “*A Realist Theory of Science*” in 1975 as a philosophical counter to the positivism rife in science and Humean and Kantian philosophy that denied an explicit ontology<sup>16</sup>. Although empiricists denied an explicit ontology, they practised an implicit ontology in their research in the sense that they were implicitly exploring the “being” of events and situations in a closed system (Bhaskar, 2012).

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<sup>15</sup> Bhaskar (2007) says he distinguishes two systems – a closed and an open system. A closed system is a system “where a constant conjunction of events occur” (Bhaskar, 1978, p. 14) A constant conjunction would be a regular sequence of events like ‘cause and effect’. An open system is a system where “no constant conjunction or regular sequence of events is forthcoming” (Bhaskar, 1978, p. 33). Closed systems must be experimentally established (*ibid.*) because “in nature constant conjunctions are the rare exception” (p. 103).

<sup>16</sup> An explicit ontology means a philosophical statement about the nature of reality apart from ourselves, i.e. that reality exists outside of ourselves in an open system whether we know about it or not.

As Go (2012) states, in contrast to the Empiricists<sup>17</sup> who tried to reduce reality only to the observable, and post-modernists who regarded reality as the product of our social constructions, Bhaskar proposed a stratified depth-ontology of the world, i.e. of reality. (The word ‘ontology’ comes from the Greek ‘*ontos*’ that means ‘*being*’, and ‘*logos*’ is the Greek ‘*study*’.)

Bhaskar (2012) states that in the 1970s he was particularly concerned with the way scientists were collapsing actual events into the real; in other words, the scientists were saying what they actually saw or experienced in their experiments was the only reality that there was. Bhaskar (1978) makes the point that “the world [i.e. reality] consists of generative mechanisms and not events” (p. 47). This statement was in reaction to the positivist scientists who reduced actual events to the real, i.e. they stated that actual events were all the reality that there was or could be (Actualism).

Therefore, he proposed that the Actual<sup>18</sup> domain of events was separate from the domain of the Real which had generative mechanisms and causal powers and tendencies which existed whether they were known and exercised or not. Furthermore, he stated that we experience reality in the domain of the Empirical (i.e. the level of experience) (1978, p. 13). In this way, he developed the philosophy of critical realism which posits a stratified, depth ontology which comprises three domains – the Real from which emerges the Actual and the Empirical where we experience reality. He was thus positing an explicit ontology. Bhaskar (2012) also makes the point quite strongly that the world, nature, reality are open<sup>19</sup> systems and, therefore, are susceptible to change.

Bhaskar’s critical realism has developed significantly since its first appearance in 1975 moving through several different stages. The term ‘critical realism’ was not invented by Bhaskar himself, but is derived from combining his terms transcendental realism and critical naturalism (Hartwig, 2007). At the 2012 International Association of Critical Realism (IACR) Conference at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Bhaskar emphasized three aspects of this development of critical realism. I will follow him in this and explore only these three dimensions as they extend critical realism quite considerably. The three are: (1) **Basic**

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<sup>17</sup> Empiricism embraces the view that knowledge derives from experience of the world.

<sup>18</sup> Throughout this thesis I shall use capital letters for the Real, the Actual and the Empirical domains.

<sup>19</sup> An open system is “continually in dynamic interaction with its environment” (Hartwig, 2007, p. 451).

**Critical Realism** (BCR) which lays down the foundations, e.g. the stratified, depth ontology, emergence and the world as an open system, (2) **Dialectical Critical Realism** (DCR) which extends basic critical realism in the sense that it adds the dimension of negativity and thus develops the dialectical tradition and (3) **Meta-Reality** (MR) which expands the ontology of critical realism by adding a further domain of being that encompasses all ontology as a Ground State, which is the spiritual domain.

### 2.3 Basic Critical Realism: Of a new stratified, depth ontology

As discussed in the previous section, Bhaskar proposes that reality consists of three strata/domains/levels, namely the Real, the Actual and the Empirical. It must be noted that these three words – strata, domain and level – are used interchangeably in critical realism.

In the *Realist Theory of Science* (1978, p. 13) Bhaskar depicts his stratified depth ontology as shown in Figure 2.3 below:

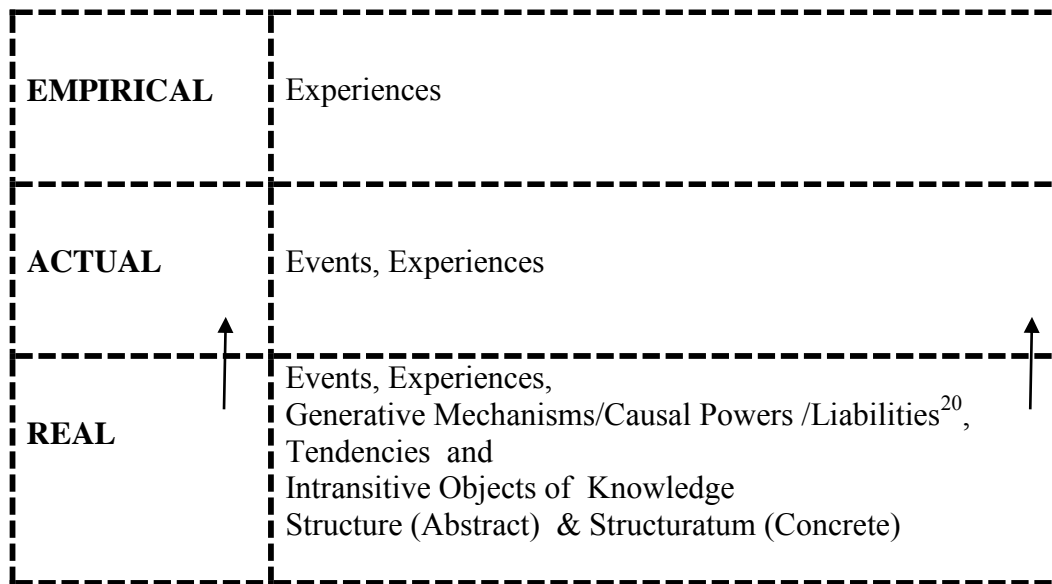
	<b>Domain of Real</b>	<b>Domain of Actual</b>	<b>Domain of Empirical</b>
<b>Mechanisms</b>	√		
<b>Events</b>	√	√	
<b>Experiences</b>	√	√	√

**Figure 2.3:** Bhaskar’s depiction of his ontology (1978, p. 13)

Figure 2.3 shows that the domain of the Real comprises (generative) mechanisms, events and experiences, and the domain of the Actual comprises events and experiences, while the domain of the Empirical comprises only experiences. Of the three strata of reality, the domain of the Real is the greatest and encompasses both the domain of the Actual and the Empirical. The events/experiences in the domain of the Actual emerge from the domain of the Real through the causal powers and generative mechanisms at play in the domain of the Real. This emergence is a very important concept in critical realism as will be explained later in this chapter.

When Elder-Vass (2007) investigates the “basis of stratification [of ontology] and its implications for the three domains of the Empirical, the Actual and the Real” (p. 16), he

makes the point that each domain is a sub-set of the other. This means that there are relational ties between the three domains, i.e. they are not separate entities. Together they represent one moment, not three separate moments i.e. the Real, Actual and the Empirical domains all exist at exactly the same time, and the one does not precede the other. This means that as I experience the actual event on the empirical level (I experience what actually happened), it also exists on the real level from which it emerged (what really happened).



**Figure 2.4:** The stratified depth-ontology of Bhaskar as one moment

I have reconstructed Bhaskar’s original diagram (cf. Figure 2.3) of his ontology because I wanted to populate the domain of the Real with concepts that are drawn from his writings and which he has indicated exist in the domain of the Real (Bhaskar, 1978; 1993). When viewing Figure 2.4 it is important to realise that this figure depicts **one** moment, not three separate moments, i.e. the Real, Actual and the Empirical domains all exist at exactly the same time, i.e. they are synchronic. It is extremely difficult to render a depth concept with a two-dimensional view. I have used dotted lines in Figure 2.4 to try to show that the Real, Actual and Empirical are not in separate boxes, but exist as one moment.

In the domain of the Real, structure exists in the sense that all being (all that exists) is structured, e.g. a human being is structured biologically and molecularly while society is structured, for example, around class, race and gender (Norrie, 2012). Bhaskar (2012) also

<sup>20</sup> Critical realism’s causality with its causal powers and generative mechanisms will be explained in the next section below.

posits that structure and agency operate in the domain of the Real whether they are known and exercised or not. The domain of the Real is where intransitive (i.e. unchanging) objects of knowledge reside whether we know about them or not. An example of an unchanging object of knowledge is gravity. Hartwig (2007) explains that in the social sciences intransitivity is mostly existential and “refers to the objects in the domain of the Real of any human inquiry theoretical or practical” (p. 264). This means that if, for example, I am investigating something in the social sciences, and discover that it emerges from the domain of the real, then what is in the domain of the Real exists intransitively. For example, if I am trying to find out why a particular student is consistently doing badly although she is bright and hard-working, by retroduction<sup>21</sup>, I discover that extreme poverty is the reason for her failing. That extreme poverty would be the intransitive dimension in the domain of the Real.

Elder-Vass (2007, p. 16) states that the domain of the Actual’s events and entities are multi-levelled and downwardly inclusive of the entity-types and causal mechanisms of the domain of the Real (See Figure 2.5). A “downwardly inclusive view” considers the existence and the effects of the parts of the whole i.e. the “whole” refers to all three domains of Real, Actual and Empirical (the whole pyramid) (Latsis, Lawson and Martins, 2007). Elder-Vass illustrates this by using a pyramid as seen in Figure 2.5 below.

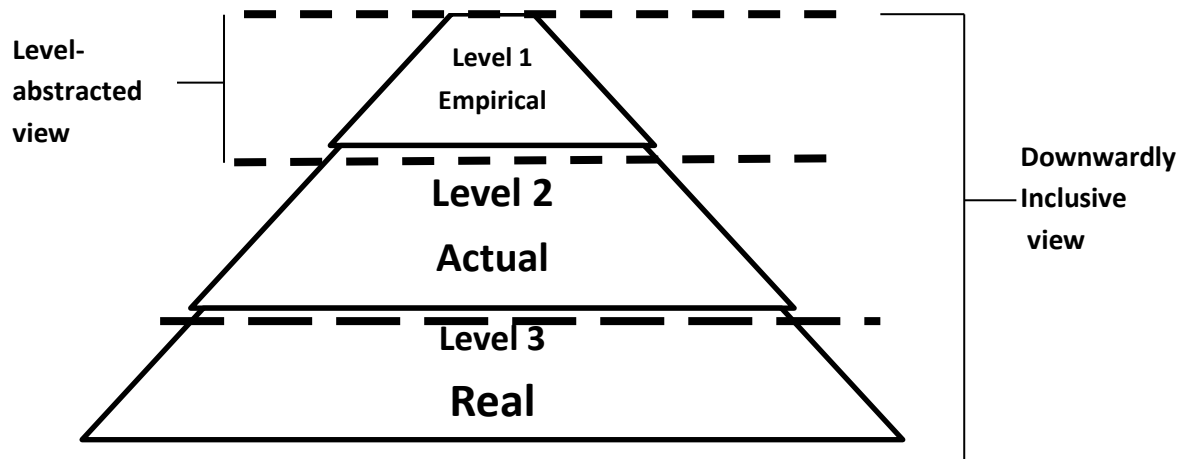
Elder-Vass (2007) also uses the term “level-abstracted view” in stratification (of ontology) (p. 163). The term “level-abstracted” means looking at only one level (entity) of a whole, e.g. looking at only Level One of the whole pyramid, i.e. the Empirical Domain in Figure 2.5. In practice, this means that one artificially “removes” (abstracts) a level/stratum of the whole at one time to explore it and understand it. This links directly to Bhaskar’s (1978) point that “when a stratum of reality has been adequately described, the next step consists in the discovery of the mechanisms responsible for behaviour at that level” (p. 169) where one might apply retroductive thinking which is employed in critical realism.

In my research I use retroductive thinking as well as both the level abstracted view and the downwardly inclusive view when trying to answer critical realist questions about identity, curriculum and graduate attributes. I regard taking this downwardly inclusive view as part of the process of retroduction. In other words, when I think retroductively, I am working from

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<sup>21</sup> Retroduction or retroductive thinking is “a mode of inference in which events are explained by postulating and identifying mechanisms which are capable of producing them” (Sayer, 1992, p. 107).

Level 1, the Empirical at the “top” of the pyramid down through Level 2, the Actual, to Level 3, the domain of the Real where there are generative mechanisms, causal powers and tendencies.



**Figure 2.5:** Internal stratification after Elder-Vass

**Source:** Elder-Vass (2007, p. 164)

The notion that the domain of the Real has generative mechanisms, causal powers and tendencies as explained above leads us to a discussion of a very important aspect of critical realism, namely causality.

### **Causality: Causal Powers, Generative Mechanisms and Tendencies**

One of the greatest changes that critical realism introduced was in the concept of causality. Prior to critical realism, empiricism regarded causality as the relationship between cause and effect as intrinsically linked events where the latter depends on the former (called constant conjunctions) (Flew, 1979, p. 58). An example of a constant conjunction would be opening a tap and water flowing out of it – the latter action depends on the former. Bhaskar (2012) rejected empirical causality as the constant conjunction of events happening within a closed system. Instead, he presented a new concept of causality within an open system where reasons when acted upon can be causes; where structures have generative mechanisms, causal powers/liabilities (the powers and liabilities are like the two sides of a coin) and tendencies operating in the domain of the Real, which may be exercised or not, manifested or not (Hartwig, 2007, p. 57). This new view of causality implies that when one tries to understand

phenomena, one has to take into account that there may be “unmanifest activities of things” i.e. generative mechanisms and tendencies (*ibid.*). As we shall see under the discussion of absence/negation, “to cause is to change is to negate is to absent a pre-existing state of affairs” (Hartwig, 2007, p. 58).

However, in critical realism these generative mechanisms in the domain of the Real exist whether they are known and exercised or not. The “generative mechanisms of nature exist as the causal power of things” (Bhaskar, 1978, p. 50). The causal powers in the Real domain are potentialities that may or may not be exercised and are greater than tendencies. Bhaskar (1978) makes the point that “a generative mechanism is nothing other than the way of acting of a thing and under appropriate circumstances is exercised” (p. 51). The tendencies may be “regarded as powers or liabilities of a thing which may be exercised without being manifest in any particular outcome” (1978, p. 14). This means that a tendency has causal powers that we do not necessarily see and these powers can work (or not) without us necessarily seeing an outcome.

So, for example, if we take a natural structure like a pool of water on a mountain, the water has a tendency to evaporate under the right conditions. The generative mechanisms for evaporation of water would be “the right conditions” in the domain of the Real and the tendency would be the “powers-to-evaporate”. Hence, the water in the pool would evaporate and over time the level of the water in the pool would drop, in which case we could say that we are seeing the outcome of the tendency for water to evaporate under the right conditions. If the conditions are not right to generate evaporation (e.g. on a grey, cold rainy day), the “tendency-to-evaporate” in a pool of water would still exist even if it were not being exercised or observed.

Taking an example from the social sciences<sup>22</sup>, we could look at a curriculum as a structure in the domain of the Real. We could say that the curriculum has generative mechanisms/causal powers as well as tendencies. The generative mechanisms/causal powers in a curriculum, for example, could be the learning outcomes specified by the curriculum. So, for instance, if a

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<sup>22</sup> I have thought about this very carefully and researched Bhaskar to find out if a curriculum could possibly be considered as a “structure” on the level of the Real, rather than an event on the Actual level. The answer is “yes”; a curriculum meets the criteria he posits in Possibility of Naturalism (p. 170-171) where he discusses the two types of structure: “the abstract form or type and the particular concrete instantiation of structure... the *structuratum*... “. Hence, I will use the curriculum in the sense of a concrete *structuratum* on the Real level.

learning outcome states that the “student will be able to work effectively in a team”, this learning outcome would have to generate an actual event (in the domain of the Actual) e.g. a classroom event/activity where students work in teams. The students would *experience* learning by working in teams (in the domain of the Empirical). A tendency in the curriculum, for example, could be the power-to-enable-learning which exists even if not exercised. If the curriculum did indeed generate the actual event of students working in teams, the tendency i.e. the power-to-enable-learning would exist in the event of the students working in a team whether they exercise it or not. If they were to exercise it, the student team would work effectively together and learning would take place.

If we apply Bhaskar’s stratified ontology to our example of the curriculum, it might appear as Figure 2.6 below:

<b>EMPIRICAL DOMAIN</b>	<b>EXPERIENCES</b> – experience of learning as enabled by students working in teams
<b>ACTUAL DOMAIN</b>	<b>EVENT</b> = Learning activity that gets teams of students working together as a team (= “the parts” cf. below) emerges from the generative mechanism (learning outcome) of the structure (curriculum) and its tendency (to enable learning)
<b>REAL DOMAIN</b>	<p style="text-align: center;">↑</p> <b>GENERATIVE MECHANISM</b> - Learning Outcome <b>Tendency</b> = Power-to-Enable-Learning <b>STRUCTURATUM</b> = CURRICULUM <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p>

**Figure 2.6:** Example of applying Bhaskar’s ontology to Curriculum as structure

Bhaskar (1998a) explains that in emergence<sup>23</sup> “something new (entities, structures, totalities, concepts) emerges/is generated out of *pre-existing material* from which they could have been neither induced nor deduced” (*my italics*) (p. 599). To illustrate this, we could return to the example of the curriculum situated in the domain of the Real, from which emerge learning activities/events that enable students to learn to work as a team. In this example (Figure 2.6) the curriculum (in terms of Bhaskar’s quote above) would be “*the pre-existing material*” in the domain of the Real out of which emerges the team-work learning activities which

<sup>23</sup> Emergence will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. A very simple example of emergence is to say the Actual event or phenomenon emerges from the domain of the Real whose causal powers and generative mechanisms cause the emergence of the event or phenomenon.

actualise in the domain of the Actual. We are unable to induce or deduce this team-work learning activity from the curriculum *per se* in the domain of the Real, because the only way we can experience the emergent team-work learning activities of the Actual domain is in the domain of Empirical. However, by a process of retroduction we may work backwards from what we have experienced on the level of the Empirical in an attempt to discover the generative mechanisms in the domain of the Real.

**Retroduction** may be described as a thinking process (i.e. inference) whereby a person starts at the level of the empirical (sense and experience) and engages with both the Empirical and the Actual levels to work back to the Real Level to explore the generative mechanisms at work there to understand what is going on at the level of the Real. Easton (2010) describes retroduction as a metaprocess whose outcome is the identification of causal mechanisms that explain why certain events occurred (p. 124). Perhaps the most interesting and creative explanation of retroduction is that of Bhaskar (2002b) himself who describes retroductive thinking as *analogical* and *metaphoric* because it requires one to use one's imagination and visualisation to creatively imagine an analogy, metaphor or model that can be used to explore mechanisms at work in the domain of the Real (p. 119, my emphasis).

### **Reasons can be causes**

The notion that reasons can be causes is another unusual aspect of critical realist causality. Bhaskar (1998b, p. 80) argues that intentional human behaviour is always caused by reasons “and that it is only because it is caused by reasons that it is properly characterised as intentional” although the person/agent may not be aware of the reasons that cause his/her intentional behaviour. He justifies this position by seeing agents as “defined in terms of their tendencies and powers, among which, in the case of human agents, are their reasons for acting” (1998b, p. 93). Thus, Bhaskar regards human agents as having causal personal powers (which Archer refers to as PEPs – personal emergent powers) including reasons. An example of this would be a student who was offered a bursary to study for two years in another country, but chose to turn down the bursary. When asked why she had turned down the offer of the bursary, the **reason** the student gave **as the cause** for her decision was that her relationship with her boyfriend would not survive a two-year separation.

Having considered the different aspects of critical realism's causality, I will now turn to the concept of emergence which goes hand-in-hand with Bhaskar's stratified ontology. I will discuss this concept of emergence in detail because I employ it in my research when trying to understand how identity emerges in paramedic students and in professional paramedics.

## **The Concept of Emergence in Critical Realism**

In critical realist ontology the Actual emerges from the Real while the Empirical domain is where we experience the events, experiences or phenomena of the Actual domain. Each emergence implies some loss, some change (Norrie, 2012). This can be seen in Figure 2.4: The domain of the Actual emerges from the Real and in so doing "loses" the generative mechanisms and causal powers, and is the domain of Actual events; the Empirical is the domain of experience. The thing that emerges is not reducible back to the thing from which it emerged, i.e. one cannot reduce the Actual to the Real from which the Actual emerges (Bhaskar, 2012). In other words, one cannot say that the emergent Actual is the Real. This is seen in Bhaskar's definition below.

Bhaskar (1993) provides a definition of emergence as:

a relationship between two terms such that the one term diachronically [over time] or perhaps synchronically [at one moment] arises out of the other, but is capable of reacting back on the first and is in any event causally and taxonomically irreducible to it (*my brackets added*) (p. 397).

To understand this definition, we can once again use the example of the curriculum (in the domain of the Real) out of which arises/emerges the team-work learning activity which is the Actual Event. There is a relationship between the curriculum and the learning activity, but we cannot say that the team-work learning activity *is* the curriculum, in other words the emerged event cannot be conflated with or reduced to the structure from which it emerged. However, Bhaskar's definition does make the point that the former (the team-work learning activity) does react on the latter (the curriculum). By adding the element of time (temporality) Bhaskar creates space for the possibility of emergence to occur either at once (synchronically) or over time (diachronically).

Elder-Vass's exploration of the concept of emergence is really useful. Elder-Vass (2005, p. 316) follows Bhaskar in distinguishing between synchronic (happening at a single instant) and diachronic (over time) emergence. He defines emergence as follows: "Put at its simplest, emergence is operating when a whole has properties or powers that are not possessed by its parts". This is a succinct summary of Bhaskar's definition of emergence above and my explanation of it. In other words, the structure (the curriculum) at the level of the Real is the "whole" possessing generative mechanisms and tendencies, while the emergent event (i.e. the team-work learning activity) on the level of the Actual is its "parts" but these parts do not possess these generative mechanisms and tendencies (as shown in Figure 2.6 above).

This means that the emergence of the event (the parts) in the domain of the Actual happens at a single instant, but that all three layers (Real, Actual and Empirical) of the reality of the thing experienced have a causal effect over time. This effect over time would be what Archer (1995) calls "morphogenesis", if change happens, and "morphostasis", if there is no change over time. What is important to remember here about critical realist ontology is that the three domains of Reality are mutually interdependent and relationally active and taken together as a whole have causality as Elder-Vass has pointed out above.

Having covered some of the most important aspects of basic critical realism, I now explore Dialectical critical realism which is the next stage of the development of critical realism.

## 2.4 The Development of Dialectical Critical Realism

The development of Dialectical Critical Realism (DCR) is summarised in Bhaskar's MELD Schema (Hartwig, 2007, p. 295). This MELD schema (cf. Figure 2.7) also illustrates the development of critical realist ontology (Being) to incorporate the concepts of non-identity, absence, totality and transformative agency and praxis. Norrie (2012) states that the MELD schema also depicts human *Being* in the world.

**MELD** stands for:

- the first *Moment* (**M**) which refers to Basic Critical Realism (BCR),
- the second *Edge* (**E**) which refers to the transition from BCR to DCR,
- the third *Level* (**L**) and
- the fourth *Dimension* (**D**).

<b>M</b>	<b>1M First Moment Level of ontology</b>	<b>First Moment</b> refers to <b>NON-IDENTITY (i.e. DIFFERENCE) RELATIONS; BEING AS STRUCTURED</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>2E Second Edge Absence</b>	<b>Second Edge</b> refers to the <b>POINT</b> of transition or becoming; pertains to <b>ABSENCE/ NEGATIVITY; BEING AS PROCESSUAL (BEING-IN-PROCESS)</b>
<b>L</b>	<b>3L Third Level Totality</b>	<b>Third Level</b> is an emergent <b>WHOLE</b> , capable of reacting back on the materials from which it emerged, process-in-product <b>TOTALITY; BEING AS EMERGENT WHOLE</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>4D 4<sup>th</sup> Dimension Transformative Agency &amp; Praxis</b>	<b>Fourth Dimension: BEING AS INCORPORATING TRANSFORMATIVE AGENCY OR PRAXIS</b> ; product-in-process; reflexivity

**Figure 2.7:** The MELD schema

(Source: Adapted from Norrie (in Hartwig, 2007, p. 197) and Bhaskar (1993, p. 392)

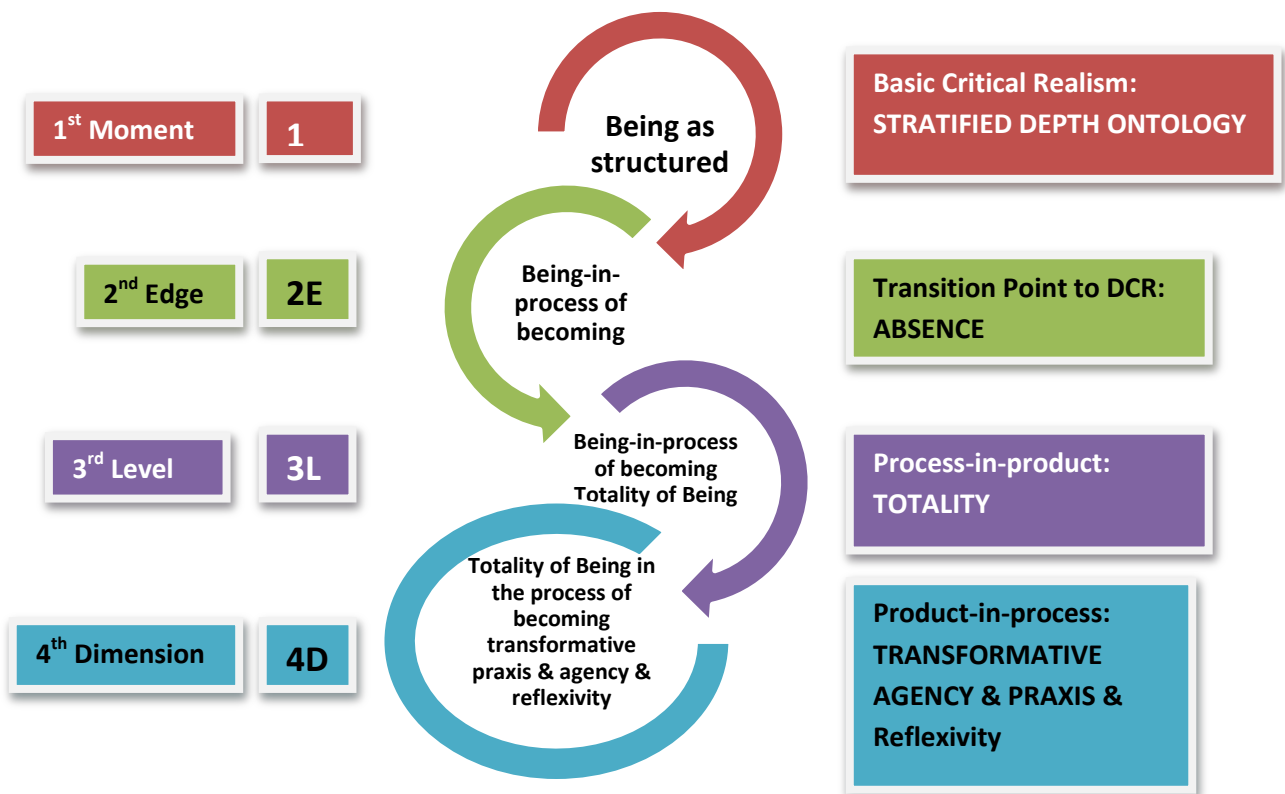
The MELD schema in Figure 2.7 illustrates the different levels of ontology (*Being*); how the concept of *Being* develops in critical realism as structure (*Being-as-such*) and then changes to *Becoming* in dialectical critical realism (Norrie, 2012) in the sense that *Being* now becomes process (becoming)-in-product (being), then becomes a product (being)-in-process (becoming). (This might become easier to understand when viewing Figure 2.8 below.) Here, “product” means that we are all in some way a product having been produced through processes – of our parents, of our education, of our religion and so forth. Again, it is impossible to render the dynamism of this process of being and becoming that the MELD diagram represents two-dimensionally and statically.

**1M:** In Basic critical realism, i.e. the *First Moment (1M)* refers to the introduction of an explicit ontology in which non-identity means difference and Being is seen as structure. To explain non-identity as difference, Bhaskar (2012) uses the example of two people whose weight differs; they are both people, but they are non-identical in so far as one weighs 78kg and the other weighs 95kg.

**2E:** In Dialectical critical realism, *the Second Edge (2E)* is the point/edge of becoming where Being is processual, which means that it is in a process of becoming and “bestaying” (maintaining its *status quo* and not changing) and “begoing” (i.e. changing and moving on/emerging) (Hartwig, 2007, p. 387). Here negation/absence is introduced where non-being has ontological priority over being (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 39).

**3L:** In the *Third Level* (3L), Being is regarded as becoming an emergent whole. This totality is the most important aspect of Level Three (3L) because as Bhaskar (2012) states, “Being is internally related, as together, as a whole” i.e. all is an inter-related one. We are all co-dependent. Being is becoming an emergent Totality.

**4D:** On the fourth level, *the Fourth Dimension* (4D), Being incorporates transformative agency, praxis and reflexivity which points to the emancipatory dimension of critical realism. Here the important word is “transformative” in the sense that the things that agents do need to bring about transformation which is emancipatory because change liberates. So, Totality-of-Being is in the process of becoming transformative praxis and agency, i.e. the whole person, the embodied self practises transformatively and uses transformative agency. See Figure 2.8 for an illustration of the MELD schema in which this dynamic process of becoming being is depicted.



**Figure 2.8:** The MELD Schema showing 4 levels of development of ontology (Being)

Dialectical critical realism deepens and extends “critical realism’s concerns with ontology, existence and causality, science, social science and emancipation, reference and truth, spatio-

temporality, tense and process, the logic of dialectical universability and on to the plane of ethics” (Bhaskar, 1993, p. xiii). One way in which DCR extends basic critical realism (BCR) is that it adds a new dimension by bringing into ontology the concept of negativity/absence/non-being and by according it primacy over positivity.

Negativity/absence/non-being also extends BCR’s causality by regarding cause as change in prevailing circumstances which are then altered by absencing something – “to cause is to change is to negate is to absent” (Hartwig, 2007, p. 58). Furthermore, DCR sees structure and agency as constellationally linked which means that the one is embedded in the other without losing its own significance, or becoming conflated (Norrie, 2012), but together they make up a constellation<sup>24</sup>.

Of these DCR concepts that have been introduced in the MELD schema above, the one that interests me the most is Absence. In my research and data collection I discovered that absences can be powerful and I will speak to these later in the dissertation when analysing the data around identity. Therefore, I have spent some time on understanding the critical realist concept of absence and its value. (It is important to note that Bhaskar uses the following terms interchangeably for the same concept: absence/negativity/non-being/negation.)

### **Absence: Countering ontological monovalence with negativity/absence**

We know that matter is largely constituted by empty space at whatever level we look. We know that this room, whatever way we look at it, is punctuated by absence. Actually there is no way you could have purely positive being. There is no way in which positive being, unmarked by absence or space, could exist. But the contrary is not the case. You could have nothing; there is no logical impossibility in having no positive being at all. So actually absence and negativity is in every way prior to presence and positivity (Bhaskar, 2002a, p. 130).

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<sup>24</sup> The important aspect of Bhaskar’s notion of a constellation is that a constellation comprises two or more things/entities that are closely interrelated, but they are not conflated or embedded in one another, e.g. a constellation of stars like the Southern Cross consists of five stars which are all necessary to make up the constellation, but each one is important on its own as well.

Ontological monovalence (from *mono* meaning ‘one’ and *valence* meaning ‘value’, i.e. having only one value) refers to the empiricist monovalent notion of positivity as the only value when viewing reality without the concept of negativity, i.e. ontological monovalence is a purely positive account of reality without taking negativity (absence/non-being) into account. There has been a long philosophical history of positive ontological monovalence going as far back as Parmenides in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE. In his work entitled “*On Nature*” Parmenides states that “being is and non-being is not”. However, Bhaskar (2012) counters Parmenides’ positive ontological monovalence by introducing bivalence (positive and negative) into Dialectical Critical Realism by means of the concept of negativity/negation/non-being/absence. This means that Dialectical Critical Realism takes the position that “being is and non-being is” (i.e. a bivalent ontology having two values). Moreover, Bhaskar (1993) considers negativity/absence to have ontological primacy over positivity, which means that negativity/absence comes first in philosophical terms.

Like Parmenides, I had been accustomed to think that “non-being is not” and considered absence/non-being a lack (something that is not there), a void, something negative or as having negative connotations, but in critical realism I encountered a different understanding of absence/ non-being as something that exists ontologically, that is real – “absence<sup>25</sup> is”.

## Understanding Absence

Negating what is given is transforming it; transforming it is absenting something which is already there and making something present which was not there (Bhaskar, 2002a, p. 71).

In terms of Dialectical Critical Realism (DCR), Bhaskar (1993) states that “dialectic is, in its essence, the process of absenting absence” (p. 43), i.e. where absence exists, it is removed (absented). Bhaskar (*ibid.*) mentions “absenting of absence manifests in the satisfaction of desire”, i.e. if one desires something, that desire is in itself an absence because it implies the lack of the thing desired, and satisfying the desire absents (removes) that absence/desire. Bhaskar (*ibid.*) holds that “dialectic is at the heart of every learning process”. In other words, learning absents an absence, e.g. If I do not know about critical realism, this is an absence.

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<sup>25</sup> From here on I will use the term absence on its own with the understanding that Bhaskar does use absence, negativity, negation and non-being interchangeably.

When I do learn about critical realism, my learning absents the absence (lack of knowledge) I had about critical realism. Bhaskar (in Hartwig, 2007) comments that in order to understand critical realism's concept of absence, one should "see the negative in the positive, and the periphery in the centre" (p. 13).

Absence may be considered in terms of Dialectical Critical Realism's MELD Schema (reviewed above) as: "1M: Absence exists, 2E: Changes are absentings, 3L: Ills can be seen as absences which act as constraints, and 4D: Empowered praxis is absenting agency which can remove remediable ill" (Hartwig, 2007, p. 13). To explain the above in other words: absence exists, change brings about an absence, absence can constrain because ill (negative things) are seen as absence and by transforming our praxis (changing the way we do things); we use our agency to absent an ill that can be changed.

The above may be illustrated by means of the following example. Change and absence are closely inter-related in the sense that if a change happens, then an "absenting" happens as the example will show. Absences may also be seen as constraints. For example, an illness (e.g. a very bad bronchial infection) is an absence of health. It could be said that this absence of health is a constraint on my ability to work because I feel too ill to work and have to stay in bed. Bhaskar (1993, p. 207) goes further and says that a person can act (i.e. use their agency) to change the ill/bad situation (he calls this action by the person "empowered praxis"). So, I go to the doctor to ask for medicine to make me better (this is my empowered praxis). The doctor does so, I take the medicine, have bed-rest and I get better. The process of my getting better removes (absents) the constraint (my bronchial infection) and I can once again work. I have acted, I have exercised agency to absent the constraint (my infection) that was constraining me by preventing me from going to work – this is called the "absenting agency". So then Bhaskar (*ibid.*) puts it together and says "empowering praxis is absenting agency which can remove remediable ill" (notice the adjective 'remediable' - the constraint has to be of such a kind that it can be changed for the better).

Bhaskar (1993, p. 38) explores the concept of negativity/absence/non-being/negation which in Dialectical Critical Realism (DCR) has the following elements:

**Real negation (non-being)** is the presence of an absence at some specific level or context of being (1993, p. 38). This includes non-existence. For example, if someone dies, what remains to the living is the presence of the absence of that person.

**Transformative negation** refers to the transformation of a thing, property or state of affairs, i.e. change. An example of this would be if a woman goes on diet and loses 20kg, she changes her weight and in the process of changing her weight the absencing of those 20kg happens. So, she now has a transformative absence of 20kg in her life.

**Radical negation** refers to self-transformation or overcoming of a being or condition. Radical transformation has four aspects: (i) Self-undermining; (ii) Self-transformation; (iii) Self-realisation and (iv) Self-overcoming (Bhaskar, 1993, pp. 25-28). An example of this would be someone who suffers from depression (self-undermining), but decides to help herself by consulting a psychiatrist (self-transformation). Then through medication and therapy realises that she is capable of changing her life (self-realisation) and manages to control her depression and improve her life; however, it is difficult and she has to overcome her constraints, e.g. recurring bouts of depression by absencing the constraint/absence, i.e. the depression (self-overcoming).

As mentioned above in the discussion of critical realism's view of causality, there is a direct connection between causality and absence (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 44). With reference to transformative negation above, Bhaskar (*ibid.*) states that "all causal determination, and hence change, is transformative negation or absencing. All causes are in space-time and effects are negations". This points to the close relationship between cause, change and absence as in the above example of the woman losing weight. Bhaskar (1993) goes on to state that although change and difference both presuppose absence, "change cannot be analysed in terms of difference because change presupposes a continuing thing in a tensed process" (p. 45). This means that when something changes, it cannot be measured in terms of how different it has become because the change in something implies that the something that has been changed still continues to exist over time (a "tensed process"). For example, if I have very long hair and decide to change my hairstyle by cutting my hair short, the "continuing thing" is still my hair even though I have changed it; I have transformatively absented my long hair. However, I cannot analyse the change in my hair in terms of the difference in length of hair because my hair still continues to exist even though it has changed. Thus, I cannot say that I have 'different hair' because my hair is still the same, only the length has changed.

Bhaskar (1993) also says that “difference cannot be analysed in terms of change because it includes the idea of two or more non-identical tokens which cannot necessarily be reduced to a unitary origin” (p. 45). In other words difference implies two or more non-identical things. For example, I can say that a dog is different to a cat because they are two non-identical things. It is impossible for me to speak of change in terms of the dog and cat because I cannot say that the dog is different because it has changed from being a cat.

Having looked at the ontology and development of Critical Realism into Dialectical Critical Realism, I now turn to how epistemology (the theory of knowledge) is viewed within Critical Realism. I will first explore Critical Realism’s epistemology/theory of knowledge and then consider the epistemic fallacy, epistemic relativism and judgemental rationality.

### **Epistemology and Critical Realism**

Positivism is the achieved subject-object identity knowledge theory against which contemporary philosophy reacts. Critical Realism is a fallibly and dynamically critical non-identity theory. Following a phenomenological method, it starts from actually generated kinds of knowledge and asks what the conditions of their possibility are (Bhaskar 1998a, p. 232).

Critical realism (CR) does indeed react against positivism by rejecting it because of its inherent epistemic and ontic fallacies<sup>26</sup> (Bhaskar, 1998a, p. 111). Positivism posits a subject-object theory of knowledge in which the researcher would be the subject and the researched the object. However, critical realism rejects this subject-object identity and operates in terms of “non-identity”. CR also brings a principle of fallibility into its theory of knowledge, i.e. there is no absolute knowledge. Bhaskar explains in the above quotation that critical realism deals with knowledge that has been generated in and emerged from the domain of the Real into the Actual and is experienced in the Empirical domain. To interrogate this kind of generated, emergent knowledge, Bhaskar asks what he calls the transcendental question, i.e. a critical realist question: “If this exists, what are the conditions of it being possible?”

Bhaskar (1998, pp. 16-17) holds that knowledge has two aspects: it is both transitive (changing) and intransitive (unchanging and enduring). He concedes that transitive objects of

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<sup>26</sup> These two fallacies are discussed below. ‘Epistemic’ refers to knowledge and ‘ontic’ to being.

knowledge are produced by people in their social activities and are thus a social product and fallible (*ibid.*). Bhaskar (1978) offers gravity as an example of an intransitive (unchanging) object of knowledge because it is not a social product produced by social activity and human agency. These intransitive objects of knowledge are unchanging and enduring (Bhaskar, 1998b, p. 16).

Working within my focus area of Emergency Medical Care, an example of a transitive (changing) object of knowledge would be knowing how to do cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) on a patient who has gone into cardiac arrest. The transitive/changing nature of CPR is illustrated in the quotation below, as is the principle of fallibility in the sense that what was once thought to be accurate knowledge is discovered to be flawed and therefore changes.

According to Rodseth (2011):

CPR has undergone significant changes; from four compressions with one breath and three stacked shocks in 2000, to 30 compressions with two breaths and a single shock in 2005, and now to the 2010 changes... which require 100 chest compressions followed by airway and breathing (C-A-B) which is an important change from the former airway, breathing and then compressions (A-B-C) (p. 143).

This CPR example shows that there have been three changes to this particular object of knowledge, thus showing its transitive (changing) nature. This particular example using CPR shows that knowledge is a social activity and product. In this case, the object knowledge was produced by those who inform the practice and passed on to the practitioners. Bhaskar (cited in Groff, 2004) states that knowledge claims are socio-historical artefacts which are produced rather than discovered, and they change over time. This is adequately illustrated by the CPR example above. Furthermore, Bhaskar (1978, p. 25) states that knowledge is structured, differentiated (transitive and intransitive) and changing as we have seen above.

Sayer (1992) makes the point that “the admission that all knowledge is fallible does not mean all knowledge is equally fallible” (p. 68). This notion of fallibility in critical realism gives rise to “judgemental rationality” which will be discussed below. Archer (2004, p. 1) concurs that our judgements are always fallible and adds a further dimension to critical realist epistemology with her claim that all knowledge is value-laden and theory-laden. Critical realism is open to the use of substantive theory because critical realism is first and foremost a

philosophy. Therefore, substantive theory<sup>27</sup>, e.g. such as Social Science theory, or New Literacy Studies, may become necessary to explore social activities because these activities are themselves concept-dependent (Bhaskar, 1998a, p. 49).

### **The Relationship between Epistemology and Ontology in Critical Realism and the Epistemic Fallacy (Knowledge-Misconception)**

In critical realism ontology (being) is distinct from epistemology (knowledge). Critical realism makes the strong point that being and knowledge are not conflated in any manner; ontology is not absorbed by epistemology; ontology cannot be reduced to epistemology (Hartwig, 2007, p. 174), in other words “being” does not equate with “knowing”; being cannot be reduced to knowing. The conflation of ontology and epistemology is called the “epistemic fallacy” in critical realism and is a common error in most post-modernist thinking, as pointed out by Bhaskar (1978). In other words when questions about being (ontology) are answered only in terms of our knowledge of being, this is the epistemic fallacy.

However, because knowledge and the material world are different it does not mean that there can be no relationship between them (Sayer, 1992, p. 68). Because critical realism sees knowledge as a social product of social activity, so human beings have to exist prior to knowledge being constructed about “being/ontology”. From this it is clear that being (ontology) always exists prior to knowledge and is greater than epistemology.

The epistemic fallacy arises from the incorrect assumption that, because there is no objective epistemology, there can be no objective ontology. Thus, the epistemic fallacy occurs when knowing and being are conflated, i.e. when they are reduced to each other – “knowing is being”. Critical realism avoids this epistemic fallacy by insisting on *an epistemological distinction* between the transitive (changing, e.g. our beliefs or knowledge claims about the world) and intransitive (unchanging, the world apart from us, i.e. ontology) dimension (Archer, Collier and Porpora, 2004, p. 2). This *epistemological distinction* means that critical realism *knows* (has the knowledge/posits as knowledge) that the transitive (changing) is separate from the intransitive (unchanging), because the transitive belongs to the world of epistemology (knowing) and the intransitive belongs to the world of ontology (being).

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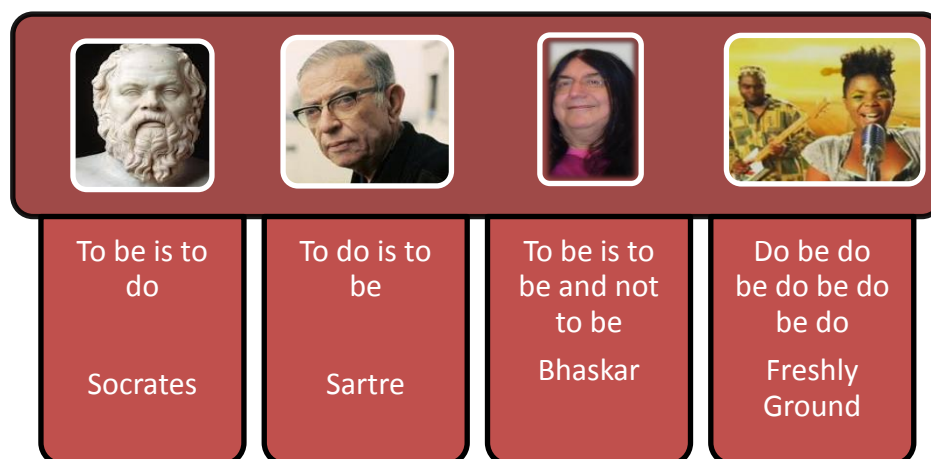
<sup>27</sup> Substantive theory deals with a particular limited domain of inquiry (Darkenwald, 2005), e.g. curriculum.

An example of the epistemic fallacy would be to say that ‘CPR is **knowing** how to do CPR’. In other words, this epistemic fallacy says that CPR does not exist apart from the knowledge of it because it has reduced being (the existence of CPR) to the knowledge of how to do it.

Indeed, the relationship between epistemology and ontology is complex because the world can only be understood in terms of available conceptual resources, but these conceptual resources do not determine what the structure of the world is (Sayer, 1992, p. 83). In other words, we can know the world because of our experiences, concepts of, knowledge and discourse about the world, but the world is more than we can experience, know or describe and therefore we can never claim that we know all that exists in the world. Furthermore, our knowledge is not infallible. Perhaps the relationship between the two can best be described as epistemology with its premises of judgemental rationality and epistemic relativism being in the service of ontology without in any way conflating to it (Bhaskar, 1978).

### **Ontic Fallacy (Being-misconception)**

The dialectic counterpart of the *epistemic fallacy which reduces being to knowing* is the *ontic fallacy which reduces knowing to being*. The epistemic and ontic fallacies are the converse of each other. For example, it would be an ontic fallacy to say that that knowledge of art constitutes art. A further example taken from the world of Emergency Medical Care would be to say that knowledge of a drug protocol *is* the drug protocol.



**Figure 2.9:** A little light ontological relief<sup>28</sup>

**Source:** Adapted from quotation at start of film *Subway* by Luc Besson, 1985

<sup>28</sup> Freshly Ground is a popular South African band, whose hit song is “Do be do”.

## **Bhaskar's Holy Trinity of Critical Realism**

Bhaskar (1998) calls three of the essential concepts of critical realism its holy trinity –

(i) the necessity of ontological depth, (ii) epistemic relativism, and (iii) judgemental rationality because taken together they show that there is no strain between critical realism, relativism and rationality. In other words, critical realism accommodates relativism and rationality as explained below.

**(i) The necessity of ontological depth:** This refers to critical realism's view of reality as being stratified and deep having the three domains of the Real, Actual and Empirical. This ontological depth has been explained above in the section on basic critical realism: "Of a new ontology", and will therefore not be discussed here.

**(ii) Epistemic relativism:** the operating principle here states that "all beliefs are socially produced, so that all knowledge is transient, and neither truth-values nor criteria of rationality exist outside historical time" (Hartwig, 2007, p. 238). Archer (2004) adds that "all our judgements are socially and historically situated and are conditioned by our circumstances, what we know at the time and by the prevailing criteria of evaluation" (p. 4). In other words, the beliefs that we hold are relative in terms of our geo-historical, social and economic conditioning and positioning. For example, if someone is born into a Catholic family in 2001, that person may follow the Catholic faith as it exists in 21st Century South Africa, which would be a different expression of Catholicism than practised in 19th Century South Africa. Thus, epistemic relativism accepts that each person may know and experience the world differently according to how, where and when they live. Potter (in Hartwig, 2007,) concurs: "Knowledge is inevitably socio-culturally, economically and historically situated. We perceive and know relative to particular perspectives" (p. 273). This is further substantiated by Sayer (2000), "the world can only be known under particular descriptions, in terms of available discourses, though it does not follow from this that no description or explanation is better than another" (p. 2). This statement leads us into the concept of judgemental rationality.

**(iii) Judgemental rationality:** This means that we make a reasoned judgement "when we choose one belief about some domain above another" (Hartwig, 2007, p. 242). Judgemental

rationality is considered to occur within epistemic relativism because it is always exercised within an historical context (*ibid*). Sayer (1992) states that judgemental rationality allows us to discuss our claims about reality to arrive at “reasoned, though provisional, judgements about what reality is objectively like, and it may be that some judgements may be objectively better than others” (p. 68). This concept of judgemental rationality indicates that we have to think about our judgements and having made a choice, we need to be clear why we chose that particular belief or claim about reality above other beliefs/claims.

I have discussed various aspects of basic critical realism and dialectical critical realism and have shown how the philosophy of critical realism has been developed and expanded by DCR. Critical realism has been criticised by several scholars. I now offer a brief overview of this criticism.

## **Critique of Critical Realism**

There has been critique of critical realism (e.g. Cruikshank, 2004 and 2011; Mearman, 2006; Steele, 2006; Jefferies, 2011; Michel, 2012; Wilber, 2013). Each author, speaking from within a specific discipline, focuses on a particular aspect of critical realism to critique as it pertains to the use or possible use of critical realism in that discipline.

In his 2004 and 2011 articles Cruikshank critiques the ontology of critical realism and Bhaskar’s notion of the epistemic fallacy by using immanent critique. While Cruikshank (2011) commends critical realism for “avoiding the pitfalls of positivism and social constructionism by focusing instead on the developing a fallibilist approach to the positive development and application of knowledge” (p. 15), he critiques this fallibilist approach itself. His point is that theories are fallible interpretations of the world and, as such, are always open to “revision and replacement” and cannot therefore be justified by appeal to a posited source of knowledge; instead the emphasis should be on locating problems in theories (*ibid.*). However, this does not happen because critical realism does not develop “such a problem-solving approach to the positive development of knowledge” (*ibid.*), but rather relies on the ontological assumptions it makes. Cruickshank (2004) regards these ontological assumptions as problematic because they are assumptions made by Bhaskar about reality, and sees critical realism as a philosophical edifice built upon these assumptions.

Cruikshank (2004) finds critical realism's separation of epistemology and ontology into transitive and intransitive domains problematic. He makes the point that critical realism cannot avoid committing the epistemic fallacy because "ontological assumptions would be located in epistemological conceptual space" (2004, p. 572). He argues that critical realism turns questions about reality into assumptions about reality "situated within our knowledge claims about reality", thus leading to the epistemic fallacy (Cruikshank, 2011, p. 16). In response to this, one could posit Bhaskar's words:

For it is only if the working scientist possesses the concept of an ontological realm, distinct from his current claims to knowledge of it, that he can philosophically think out the possibility of a rational criticism of these claims (Bhaskar, 1978, p. 43).

In other words, Bhaskar is making the point that it is only in the separation of ontology and epistemology that one can philosophise about criticism of knowledge claims. Separation of ontology and epistemology occurs which is the opposite of the conflation of the two that would be the epistemic fallacy.

Critical realism with its stratified depth ontology employs the concept of open systems (Bhaskar, 1978). In critical realism a closed system is one where there is a constant conjunction of events (event regularity) while an open system does not have such event regularities (Faulkner in Hartwig, 2007, p. 66). Bhaskar states that that in this constant conjunction of events, an event of Type A will invariably be accompanied by an event of Type B (1978, p. 70). Bhaskar holds that there is no unique relationship between variables in an open system (1978, p. 53) and that there are no constant conjunctions of events in open systems (1989, p. 16).

Mearman (2006), an economist, accepts critical realism's stratified depth ontology, but has three main criticisms that he makes about the critical realist treatment of open systems. Mearman's first critique concerns critical realism's treatment of open systems in that critical realism reflects an "underdeveloped concept of 'system' that is dominated by event-level definitions. Here, Mearman (2006, p. 55) explains that critical realism does not have a well-developed concept of 'system' because at times the term refers to "mechanisms or the "structures" wherein they reside" which seems to ignore "the fact that the mechanism is at the real level, but generates events at the empirical level" (ibid.). He adds that the levels are part of the system and, just as the system cannot be reduced to any one of the three levels, it

cannot be reduced to mechanisms. His second critique is that critical realism emphasizes negative definitions which are so called because they emphasize an absence of a regularity. Thirdly, he feels that “there is a tendency towards polarizing definitions” (2006, p. 48) between open and closed systems because there may be “differences in degree rather than in kind between them” (2006, p. 69).

Jefferies (2011) critiques critical realism’s ontology from an empirical realist stance which regards reality as constituted by experience. Jefferies regards critical realism as “a contemporary re-application of Kant’s dualist method, which divides Pure Reason from empirical reality” (p. 2), and states that it inherited many Kantian flaws while solving none of the Kantian problems. Jefferies (2011) maintains that Bhaskar “invents unreal, “theoretical”, alternate reality” (p. 6) which Jefferies sees as a contradiction in terms. As critical realism rejects deductivism, Jefferies critiques critical realism’s *a posteriori* retrodution which he regards as “metaphysical and metaphoric and therefore, essentially unscientific” (p. 2).

Michel (2012) coming from the field of International Politics and International Relations takes issue with critical realism’s conceptualisation of ontology, particularly that it appears to lack “a deeper appreciation of the ontological significance of science and language as human activities and potentialities” (p. 210). Michel adopts a phenomenological approach based on Heidegger and as such he looks for recognition of science and language as human phenomena.

Wilber, the formulator of Integral Theory, criticises critical realism’s separation of epistemology and ontology and the subsequent “grounding” of epistemology in the ontology (Wilber, 2013, p. 1). He takes this stance based on his Integral Theory which does not regard ontology and epistemology as separate, but sees them as “integrally interwoven and mutually enactive, each contributing an irreducible aspect of the whole of reality, and none can be privileged” (*ibid.*). Thus, Wilber’s premise of the relationship between epistemology and ontology is irreconcilable with Bhaskar’s premise and Wilber rejects critical realism’s ontology.

Interestingly, Bhaskar (2012, p. 40) responds to Wilber’s critique made in 2012 (Wilber in Marshall, 2012), but does not change his own position or premises. Bhaskar answers Wilber from within his own critical realist conceptual framework making no concessions to Wilber’s

concerns or his claims on the inseparability of epistemology and ontology, but simply re-states critical realism's own conceptual claims.

When reading through all the various critiques of critical realism, it becomes apparent that each critic is operating from within his own specific paradigm and discipline. Therefore, the criticisms concern basically irreconcilable differences between the different paradigms and critical realism. It seems that the only possible action is to declare for or against a particular paradigm and operate strictly within the paradigm one favours observing its conventions and claims, taking care not to contravene the internal logic of the paradigm that one has chosen.

Having briefly considered critique of critical realism, I now turn to a brief discussion of the further development in critical realism which is Meta-Reality developed by Bhaskar after he took a spiritual turn. In many aspects, there are echoes of Eastern thought and spirituality in Meta-Reality.

## **2.5 Meeting Meta-Reality**

Meta-Reality is a new philosophical position. It accepts but goes beyond critical realism, insofar as it pinpoints the reality of non-dual states and phases of being, showing how they underpin and sustain the totality of all forms of human, and indeed all life. Understanding Meta-Reality is to realise the limitations of the world of duality (Bhaskar, 2002c, p. 8).

Meta-Reality is Bhaskar's new spiritual philosophy that is not intended to replace critical realism (because it actually pre-supposes critical realism and dialectical critical realism), but rather to extend and deepen dialectical critical realism after his spiritual turn and the publication of his book *"From East to West: Odyssey of a Soul"* (Bhaskar, 2000). Critical realism is a philosophy of duality and difference, while Meta-Reality tries to be one of non-duality/unity (Bhaskar, 2012). Thus, Bhaskar (2002b, p. xv) states that Meta-Reality sustains and incorporates critical realism as the best account of the realm of duality. In other words, basic critical realism dealt with the world in which there was duality – the either-or world. In dialectical critical realism in the MELD schema, we saw that DCR introduced the notion of absence and totality to critical realism, to overcome the former duality. In Meta-Reality Bhaskar moves to deepen his critical realist philosophy by introducing the spiritual elements

of the transcendently real self, the ground state and the cosmic envelope as described below.

The opening line of the introduction to *From East to West* states, “This book describes the odyssey of a soul on its journey to enlightenment” (2000, p. 1). This immediately tells us that this is the presence of something new. However, Meta-reality is not religious, although it acknowledges the Divine (Hartwig, 2007, p. 305). Meta-Reality has to do with spirituality and particularly with re-inserting the spiritual into ontology. Indeed, there are new concepts such as the Ground State, the Cosmic Envelope, the transcendently real self, four-planar social being, non-duality, demi-reality and eudaimonia.

As I am not using a great many of the concepts of Meta-Reality in my research, I will limit myself to a very short description of some of the most important concepts in the very complex philosophy that is Meta-Reality. This is to complete the description of critical realism that has taken us from basic critical realism, through dialectical critical realism to the third stage, Meta-Reality. I will very briefly explore the following concepts in Meta-Reality: the extension of ontology as seen in the extension of the MELD schema (which now becomes MELDARZA), the self consisting of the ego, the embodied personality, transcendental self, four-planar social being and the Ground State/Cosmic Envelope.

### **Extending Ontology in Meta-Reality**

Meta-Reality deepens the basic ontology of critical realism by adding further layers of being to those expressed in the MELD schema of dialectical critical realism. Figure 2.10 below is a simplified version of the seven layers of ontology that was given by Bhaskar (2012) at his Meta-Reality post-conference workshop at Rhodes University. Bhaskar (2002c) explains that “the whole of critical realism can be understood in terms of a systematic attempt to think *being* in a systematically progressive way” (p.181, original emphasis). This progression of *being* is illustrated in Figure 2.10.

Meta-Reality's 7 layers of Ontology incorporating layers of basic CR & DCR'	
1M	Being as structure
2E	Being as process
3L	Being as totality/whole
4D	Being as incorporating transformative practice & reflexivity
5A	Being as spiritual; Being as reflexive; Being as inward
6R	Being as re-enchanting
7ZA	Being as non-duality, incorporating primacy of identity/identification over difference and unity over split. Ontology is now all-inclusive.

**Figure 2.10:** Extending the DCR MELD schema to MELDARZA in Meta-Reality

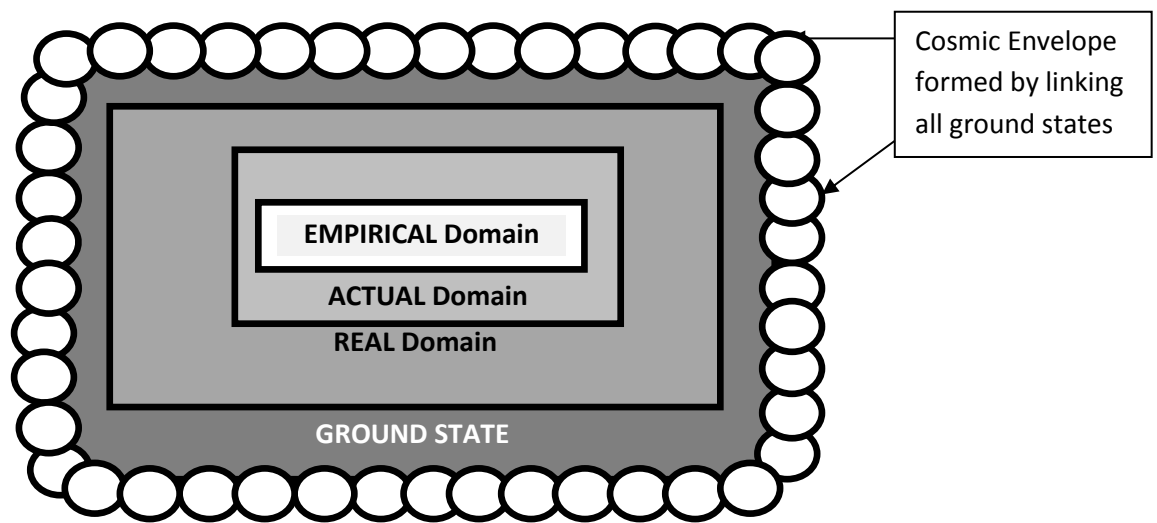
(Source: Bhaskar, 2012; 2002a pp. 26-27)

In the schema in Figure 2.10 above, three new levels have been added to the original MELD schema 5A, 6R and 7ZA. Each level presupposes the foregoing levels. In the MELDARZA Schema, Level 5A speaks to the inwardness of being where the inner world can be explored through reflexivity. The 5 **A** refers to the fifth Aspect (Bhaskar, 2002a, p.26). Level 6**R**'s being as **Re**-enchanting refers to the need for being to become re-enchanted after the disenchantment that was the dominant position in Modernity, because things have a value and meaning in themselves. Level 7**ZA** refers to being in the seventh **Z**one of **A**wakening where the world is characterised by unity over split and identity over non-identity; this is a reality of non-duality with no opposition between subject and object (*ibid.*). This 7ZA level of the zone of awakening is the utopia that Bhaskar urges humankind to seek – the new eudemonistic (Utopian) world (Bhaskar, 2012).

Looking at these new layers of ontology with their inward turn, it seems that Meta-Reality is basically a spiritual philosophy. Bhaskar (2002b, p. xxi) argues that the seventh zone of awakening and of non-duality underpins all the other six levels and also the relative world of duality, as its ground. This he calls the **Ground State** – the ground and truth of reality. The qualities of the ground state are freedom, love, creativity, and right action (2002b, 305).

Each human being has such a ground state which Bhaskar (2002c) describes as the Transcendental Higher Self. All ground states are linked together “like beads on a string, bound, strung together. Let us see them as being connected in what I call the cosmic

envelope. This is that envelope which connects the ground-states of all beings” (Bhaskar, 2002c, p. 140). Thus, the **cosmic envelope** is the unity of all the connected ground-states.



**Figure 2.11:** The expanded ontology of Meta-Reality

Figure 2.11 illustrates how the ontology of critical realism has been expanded by adding a further two ontological layers – the Ground State and the Cosmic Envelope; the latter is made up of linked ground states of humanity. Figure 2.11 also tries to illustrate Bhaskar’s point that ontology becomes all-inclusive at Level 7ZA where all-is-one and non-dual. Again, I must stress how difficult it is to render a 3-dimensional concept with a 2-dimensional graphic.

Moving on from this basic understanding of how Meta-Reality aids the development of CR and DCR, I will go into a closer consideration of the self as perceived in Meta-Reality.

### **The Self in Meta-Reality<sup>29</sup>**

You are not who you think you are (Bhaskar, 2002b, p. 97).

In Meta-Reality the self can be considered to be stratified because Bhaskar (2002c) defines human beings as having four aspects: (i) the ego, (ii) the embodied personality, (iii) the transcendently real self and (iv) the psychic being (which is the soul) (2002b). I will briefly discuss each one separately. I have tried to capture their relationship graphically in Figure 2.12.

<sup>29</sup> In Bhaskar’s description of the self, I recognise similar concepts of self in Eastern Philosophy, in the writings of Eckhart Tolle and Doreen Virtue. Bhaskar (2002b, p. 349) himself mentions 3 traditions: the Vedic tradition, the ancient Egyptian tradition and non-secular tradition that correspond roughly to Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge), Bhakti Yoga (the path of love of devotion) and Karma Yoga (the path of action or service).

### **(i) The Ego**

Bhaskar states that the ego is the “I” that regards itself as separate from other “I’s”. He says that it has no real object and therefore is an illusion, but is causally efficacious and, therefore, as an illusion it is real (2002a, p. 71), but untrue. So we could say that the ego is a *Real* illusion, but is not real in itself, because it is an illusion. He calls the ego the “little self”. However, the ego is a property of real, non-illusory embodied personalities. It is through the ego that we have a sense of being separate from the world (*ibid.*). Furthermore, as in the Eastern tradition (in which Meta-Reality seems to be firmly rooted), it is part of a human’s life-journey to try and shed this illusory ego that sees one as separate (in space) and split (in time).

### **(ii) The Embodied Personality**

Bhaskar (2002a) states that the embodied personality is a complex entity that is constituted and defined relationally. In other words, it is a complex entity in the sense that the embodied personality itself is “stratified, differentiated and changing” (Bhaskar, 2002a, p. 71). The embodied personality comes about through our relationships and is defined by them. This means, for example, that as a child is raised, its personality would be formed through its relationships in its own life-world. This personality becomes embodied as part of the child’s being in the physical world around the child. Because we are dealing with basic ontology here in the sense of talking about human “being”, this being – the embodied personality - is stratified having the three domains of all other “being”, i.e. the Real, the Actual and the Empirical. It is differentiated in the sense that it exists as one of the three different aspects – the ego, embodied personality and the transcendently real self. Finally, as with all being, the embodied self changes and therefore is dynamic; it is also constituted by mental, emotional and physical properties (*ibid.*). In sum, we could say that the embodied personality is relative and changing and incorporates one’s personality, one’s understanding of body, mind, emotions and feelings (Bhaskar, 2012).

This embodied personality is the individual “person” that the world sees and experiences. Interestingly, Bhaskar sees the embodied personality as part of what he calls the “relative reality” (*ibid.*), i.e. the reality that is relative in the sense that it changes and cannot be absolute. He explains this concept of “relative reality” as containing everything including the world of duality and the demi-reality. To overcome duality, we need to start “manifesting the

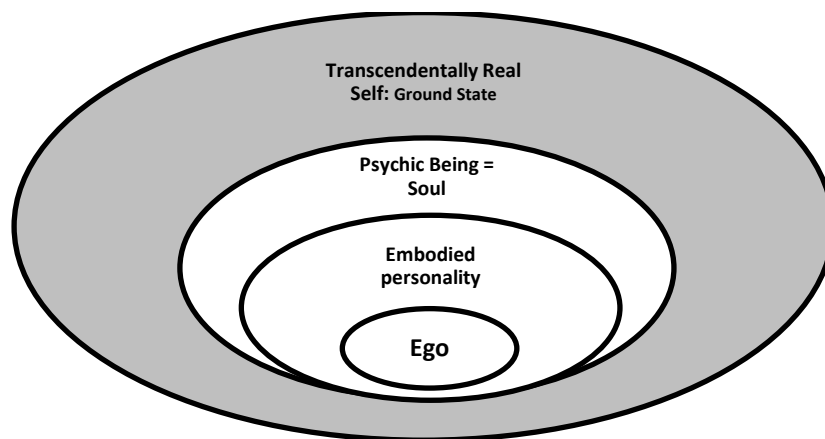
absolute within the field of relativity” (2002a, p. 66). In other words, it is only by bringing a 7ZA awakened consciousness into the world, that we will be able to overcome duality. To do this we would first have to shed our illusory self, the ego. Thereupon, the embodied personality – no longer seeing itself as separate – would expand and we would become freer and less limited as we start manifesting the absolute in our lives. Here the absolute means the transcendently real self (*ibid.*).

**(iii) Psychic being**

Bhaskar (2002b) calls the psychic being the “soul of the embodied personality” (2002c, p. 68) whose nature is autonomous and free. He describes it as mediating between the embodied personality and the transcendently real self (the Ground State).

**(iv) The Transcendently Real Self (TRS) a.k.a the Ground State**

Bhaskar (2002c, p. 71) explains that the transcendently real self (TRS) is unlimited and absolute and is underneath the embodied personality and is “the source of its causal agency and powers” (*ibid.*). The TRS is the unlimited ground of a person’s being and whatever one does depends on this TRS because a person’s agency and personal powers (PEPs) derive from this higher self. In other words this TRS is the Ground State of an individual.



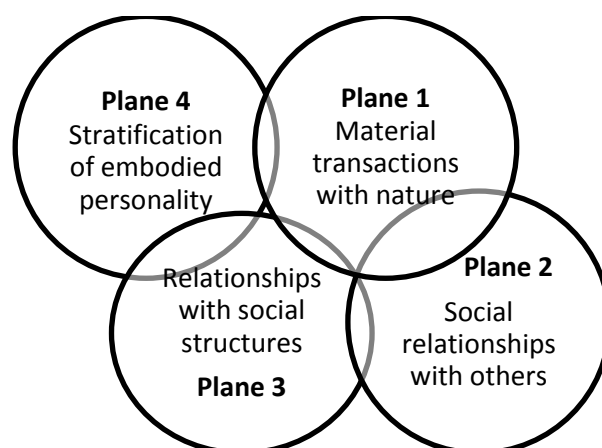
**Figure 2.12:** A representation of the stratified Self in Meta-Reality

Figure 2.12 attempts to show how the Ground state is the all-encompassing Transcendently Real Self with the Psychic Being as the intermediary between the embodied personality and the TRS. The Ego is part of embodied self, but is an illusion although it is causally efficacious, i.e. it has dynamic, causal powers that bring about a specific effect.

## Four-planar social being

Four-planar social being presupposes that every event in life has to be understood in terms of four dimensions: our material transactions with nature/environment; our social interactions with others; our relationships with the social structure (i.e. languages, economies, political forms); and the stratification of our embodied personalities (i.e. person, body, mind, emotions) (Bhaskar, 2002c, p. 305).

From this quotation it can be seen that four-planar social being points to four dimensions that have to be considered when trying to understand what happens in life. These four dimensions are the four planes: nature, society, social structures, and the embodied personality. Bhaskar calls this concept of four-planar social being a “technical concept” (*ibid.*) – technical in terms of being philosophically concept-dependent. Four-planar social being means that occurrences/events are stratified in the sense of comprising four planes on which we interact with nature<sup>30</sup>, others, social structures and ourselves simultaneously, i.e. our interactions (on the Empirical level) with events (on the Actual level) operate on all four levels at the same time. In other words, the four planes together make up one moment. Figure 2.13 below is an attempt to show that the four planes are one moment and exist simultaneously and are inter-related. An important point to make here is that Bhaskar does not see nature as separate from us, but that we are part of nature and nature is part of us. Four-planar social being and social tetrapolity<sup>31</sup> can be used interchangeably.



**Figure 2.13:** Showing Four-planar social being as one moment

<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that Bhaskar considers the social world to be part of nature/ the natural world.

<sup>31</sup> Social tetrapolity is another expression for the four planes (tetra means four) of social being

## **Bhaskar's five theorems of human action**

1. *“There is no action which is not intentional; otherwise it is not an action but a mere piece of behaviour, e.g. slipping on a banana peel or catching a cold. Intentionality is irreducible”* (2002c, p. 98; 2002a, p. 225). This means that action is the transformative praxis of an agentive (i.e. intentionally acting) agent, because when we act we change something. “Changing is absencing something that is there and making present what was not there”, as Bhaskar says (2002a, p. 71). For example, when a paramedic applies CPR to a patient whose heart has stopped beating, he absents the absence of a heartbeat by making the heartbeat present through CPR.
2. *“There is no way that we can't not act. Agency itself is irreducible, i.e. we have no choice but to act (2002c, p. 98). In addition, the more well-versed you are in a form of behaviour, in the practice, the more capable you are of acting spontaneously”* (2002a, p. 225). For example, if a paramedic is presented with a patient with a broken arm, she acts to splint the arm. If a paramedic finds a person dead as a result of a car accident, she acts by declaring the person dead. In addition, over their three years of training, certain psycho-motor skills are well developed in the EMS students through practice, e.g. doing CPR on a patient or placing an intra-venous line in a patient. Thus the students are so well-versed in CPR that they act spontaneously when resuscitating a patient.
3. *“All social action, everything we do, has to be captured in terms of all four planes of our social being: (i) in its material aspect, (ii) its relational aspect, (iii) its social systemic social structural aspect and (iv) in its subjective aspect in terms of the stratification of our personalities”* (2002a, p. 225). This is four-planar social being which has been explained previously.
4. *“Whatever we do, at some point, at some level we must just do it spontaneously. We could not do anything in the world unless there was a level of basic spontaneous action, things we just did”* (2002a, p. 225). In other words, every action has a point of spontaneous action, e.g. when I am typing this thesis, I spontaneously move the mouse to place the cursor where I want it, i.e. I do not have to think consciously about moving my hand to the mouse and then moving the mouse – it is a spontaneous action. Bhaskar states:

This is profoundly important because it means that ultimately all change in the social world proceeds from self-change. Because if everything we do depends upon our spontaneous activity, then to change at any level of practice in our world, means that we have to in some way change ourselves, our ways of doing things. So this points to the primacy of self-change (2002a, p. 226).

In other words, as I change myself, so I change the social world either by reproducing it or by transforming it. This is reminiscent of Ghandi's famous quotation: "Be the change you wish to see in the world".

5. Bhaskar comments on four-planar social being:

Anything we do will immediately affect all planes of social being... whatever I do, necessarily myself, I am affecting other being, other human beings, i.e. the natural environment and in a relationship with social structure, I am reproducing it or more or less transforming it. So we have the phenomenon of the simultaneity of action, necessarily action by an agent, and therefore self-action and social action, and a dialectic of self-change and social change. The only way that we can change society is ultimately by our actions... There is a natural dialectic between the two (Bhaskar, 2002a, pp. 225-226; 2002c, p. 98).

Any action we take immediately affects all four planes of four-planar social being at the same time. Here Bhaskar is pointing to the dialectic existing between society and human action because we can either transform or re-produce society and social structures by our actions. This ultimately means that 'no-one is an island', but that we are all connected through four-planar social being not only to other humans and non-human animals but also to nature and the material and social world around us. In the philosophy of Meta-Reality Bhaskar posits that this inter-connectedness is a result of the ground-states of all people being connected in the cosmic envelope (2002c, p. 140).

From this brief discussion of the self in Meta-Reality, I move onto exploring reflexivity and inward being that appear as Level 5A of the MELDARZA schema.

### **Reflexivity and inward being**

In the MELD schema reflexivity already appears under Dialectical Critical Realism at 4D (see Figure 2.10) because reflexivity is necessary for transformative practice; one cannot

transform one's practice unless one has reflected upon it and discovered through reflection where change needs to occur. At Level 4D reflexivity and transformative practice are seen as "the unity of theory and practice" (Bhaskar, 2002a, p. 180). However, it is in Level 5A of Meta-Reality's MELDARZA schema where reflexivity comes into its own as part of "Being as inward". In the embodied personality reflexivity is: "The prime personal emergent power (PEP) to self-consciously monitor our activities and deliberate internally upon the always already natural, practical and social context in which they occur" (Hartwig, 2007, p. 408).

This means that the embodied personality has the personal power and capacity to reflect upon, account for and monitor what it does, thinks and says in the different contexts of nature, practice and society which always pre-exist any activity of the embodied personality. Bhaskar says that this is true of institutions too (1993, p. 273). Therefore, when looking at the research findings that throw up reflexivity, I shall consider it in this meta-realistic light.

## **Demi-Reality**

The concept of Demi-Reality is important in Meta-Reality because it is the relative, dualistic world of alienation from the Higher Self and split on all four planes of social being, i.e. four-planar social being is no longer one moment but has split into four separate moments. The ego is part of the demi-reality, as is Capitalism which is the very antithesis of the eudemonistic (i.e. Utopian) society that Bhaskar proposes in Meta-Reality (Bhaskar, 2012).

## **The background to Meta-Reality**

I have kept the background to Meta-Reality to the end of this Meta-reality section because I am of the opinion that a reader may understand the reaction explained below better having read through my explanations of Meta-Reality.

When Bhaskar published his book on his spiritual turn, it created a split in the world of critical realism and evoked strong criticism from some quarters. This criticism was expressed on the Bhaskar web list at the time, in 2000. Gary MacLennan's review (2000) entitled "From East to West – a book too far?" explains the critical reaction of the loyal critical realist followers. Although angry about Bhaskar's book, MacLennan seems to maintain some kind of balance by also considering a defence of the book and its philosophy on both aesthetic and religious grounds (MacLennan, 2000). He concludes his review with a call for openness.

The anger and the break-away may be explained by the fact that by 2000, the Critical Realism movement had reached a point of consolidation of the four major moments in Bhaskar's Critical Realist work, i.e. *A Realist Theory of Science, The Possibility of Naturalism, Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom and Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (*ibid.*). This body of work had consolidated the philosophical thought behind critical realism: the stratified depth ontology; the epistemology of fallible, value- and theory-laden transitive and intransitive knowledge; the introduction of absence and bivalence into ontology; the concept of totality; transformative praxis and reflexivity. These correspond to the MELD schema explored earlier in this chapter. The critical realist movement was proud of and confident in its philosophy (*ibid.*).

Then the leader did the unthinkable. He found God. Worst of all, it was a very down-market god, nothing more than your common or garden New Age variety, the type readily available at any incense saturated shop frequented by a Shirley MacLaine or Nancy Reagan (MacLennan, 2000).

The snideness of this comment may reveal some of the anger felt by MacLennan.

Mervyn Hartwig (2000) responded critically to MacLennan's review pointing out that there had been three reviews only one of which had been unfavourable. The consequence of Bhaskar's spiritual turn was that some followers of critical realism decided to agree to disagree with him about his spiritual turn and Meta-Reality, notably Margaret Archer, Andrew Collier and Douglas Porpora who wrote their own work on God called "*Transcendence: Critical Realism and God*" (2004) written from their Christian perspectives.

Since 2000 and his spiritual turn, Bhaskar has incorporated Meta-Reality into critical realism using the MELDARZA schema to represent the development of basic critical realism into Dialectical Critical Realism and then Meta-Reality.

I am of the opinion that there are certain elements of Meta-Reality that are very useful and really add philosophical value to CR and DCR, e.g. reflexivity and inward being, and the notion of four-planar social being. Indeed, Archer (2010) has increasingly made reflexivity the focus of her works. However, the last two levels of the MELDARZA schema, i.e. re-enchantment and the zone of awakening with their calls for unconditional love, the oneness of religion and an utopian world belong more fully in a spiritual movement as they actually

exert a spiritual imperative that requires followers of the philosophy to believe and behave in a specific fashion.

## **2.6 Conclusion: Critical Realism and Meta-Reality**

In this Chapter I have explored critical realism and its development. Critical realism, dialectical critical realism and Meta-Reality are all very complex philosophically and I have only touched on the various aspects presented above. I hope that this chapter has made critical realism slightly more accessible to the reader. The best summary I can make of critical realism would be to extract from this chapter its main tenets and present them as an overview in the form of a list.

### **Main Tenets of Critical Realism**

1. Ontology exists as a stratified, depth ontology. Being, Reality, and the World exist and have three ontological domains:
  - the Real which has causal powers, generative mechanisms and tendencies,
  - the Actual which is the domain of events that EMERGE from the Real domain and
  - the Empirical domain in which we experience reality.
2. Emergence is very important. The Actual event emerges from the Real domain.
3. Critical realist ontology is bivalent because it includes absence/non-being/negativity.
4. Critical realist causality rejects constant conjunctions (cause-effect) in a closed system and proposes that the generative mechanisms, causal powers and tendencies of the Real domain are causally efficacious in an open system, i.e. reality.
5. The natural and social worlds exist independently of human knowledge of them, i.e. reality is out there and in here whether we know about it or not. These worlds pre-exist humans and human knowledge of them.
6. Knowledge is socially produced, fallible, laden with values and theory. There are transitive and intransitive objects of knowledge. The transitive are in the realm of epistemology and intransitive in realm of ontology.
7. Each person may experience the world differently because of his/her geo-historical social and economic positioning and cultural conditioning (i.e. epistemic relativism).

8. Individuals can make reasoned judgements in choosing one belief or claim about reality above another (judgemental rationality). Some beliefs/claims may be better than others. This judgement is always made in a social, cultural, historical context.

9. Reflexivity is essential for transforming praxis.

10. Critical realism has developed from basic critical realism through dialectical critical realism to Meta-Reality. The latter two have developed and expanded the ontology of critical realism.

### **Main Tenets of Meta-Reality**

a. Ontology now includes both an all-inclusive Ground State and the Cosmic Envelope. The Ground State is the spiritual ground of a person. The Cosmic Envelope is the linkage of all the individual Ground States.

b. The self comprises: the illusionary ego which is causally efficacious; the embodied personality which has body, mind, feelings; the psychic being which mediates between the embodied personality and the transcendently real self which is the Ground State of the self.

c. Reflexivity and being as inward are important concepts. Reflexivity is the prime personal power (PEP) used to deliberate inwardly.

d. Four-planar social being suggests that every event in life needs to be understood on four levels that occur simultaneously: our interactions with nature/environment, relations with others, relations with the social structure and our embodied personality. The four planes of social being must be seen together as one moment.

e. Self-change is important. There is a dialectic between self-change and social action because any way we act will affect others and the social structure.

f. Demi-Reality – this is the dualistic world of split and difference. This is when four-planar social being splits into four separate moments.

g. The eudemonistic world is a utopian (future) world of unconditional love and oneness of being in which there is no split.

I consider myself a critical realist and in my research project use critical realism as a theoretical framework. In this way I recognise that the knowledge that I will produce by means of this study will be both theory-laden with the concepts of critical realism and value-laden with the values of critical realism and Meta-Reality.

**Chapter Three** invites the reader to journey on through identity which is a trickster concept. I discuss how certain authors view identity, namely Taylor, Walker, Wenger, Smith, Archer and Bhaskar. I will draw together aspects of Bhaskar's notions of ontology, identity, especially constellational identity, the self, absence and emergence and four-planar social being and weave them into a Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IDENTITY – THE TRICKSTER CONCEPT



32

*Don't think you are who you think you are*  
(Bhaskar, 2002b, 97)

#### 3.1 Introduction

*The chapter will discuss writers on identity, i.e. Taylor (1985, 1989), Wenger (1998), Walker (2005), Gee (2000-2001, 2005) as well as Archer (2000, 2003, 2010), Smith (2010) and Bhaskar (1993, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). In keeping with the theme of identity being a trickster concept, I have named the trickster for each of the writers and added a short explanation for each in situ. Finally, in the last section of this chapter where I discuss Bhaskar's perspectives on identity I will present a Bhaskarian explanatory framework of emergent identity which I use to discuss the concept of identity in critical realist terms when analysing and interpreting my data in Chapter Six. To create this*

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<sup>32</sup> The image is available on 123RF.com under the open source commons licence. I chose this image of the trickster as he seems to be in reflexive mode. This is the famous 1862 Matejko painting of "Stanczyk during a Ball at the Court of Queen Bona after the Loss of Smolensk"

*Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity, I draw on Bhaskar's philosophical perspectives on ontology, identity, non-identity, absence and emergence, the self and four-planar social being in order to weave them into a framework.*

Identity, beyond the field of psychology, is widely discussed in the academic literature of many different disciplines such as education, academic development, philosophy, sociology, organisational studies, and social anthropology among others. This makes identity a tricky concept. It is like the trickster who assumes different guises and when one thinks that one has finally laid hold of him, he suddenly changes form yet again to frustrate and confuse and yet also to amuse, because that is the essence of the trickster. I draw this analogy because in my research through the academic literature on identity, I often thought that I had grasped the concept, only to find that I had to search further. What makes identity such a tricky concept is that so many different definitions and conceptions abound in the literature; moreover, some of the literature presents the concept of identity as an everyday, common-sense concept that needs little definition (e.g. Oliveira, 2007).

In reading and researching, I realised that initially I had come into this research project with a rather petrified concept of identity – my personal trickster had turned to stone. This was because I had thought that student identity would be somewhat homogenous as I had not anticipated older, mature students with many years of work experience taking the same course as eighteen-year olds fresh out of high school. This realisation breathed fresh life into my trickster who immediately writhed out of my grasp and disappeared so that I had to set off in search of him.

My search for an understanding of identity was further influenced by my own stance as a critical realist and awareness of critical realism's stratified depth ontology which made me examine the ontology behind the particular definition of identity that I was exploring in the academic literature<sup>33</sup>. To carry the above analogy further, I had to grasp the trickster and find his ontological form. Thus, I found that I had to reject definitions that were strongly social

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<sup>33</sup> I read deeply and widely and reference here only some of my reading on identity, self and the person: O' Mahoney, 2011; Cruickshank, 2010; Smith, 2010; Archer, 2010, 2007, 2000; Collier-Reed *et al.*, 2009; Martins, 2009; Clegg, 2009, 2006; Walker, 2005; Barnett, 2009, 2004; Haggis, 2002; Gee, 2000-2001; Sayer, 2000; Bhaskar, 1998, Wenger, 1998; Taylor 1994, 1985; Mauss 1985. I read into student identity as well: Kasworm, 2005, 2009; Scanlon, Rowling & Weber, 2007.

constructionist<sup>34</sup> in nature, because its ontology does not and cannot reconcile with critical realism.<sup>35</sup> While the latter holds that there is an independent reality that exists whether we know about it or not (Bhaskar, 1978), strong social constructionism holds that “reality cannot be discovered: it does not exist prior to its social invention” (Kim, 2001, unpagged). Easton (2010, p. 123) concurs: “The difference between critical realists and social constructionists lies in the acceptance of the possibility of knowing reality in the former case and its rejection in the latter who, in general, concentrate instead on uncovering the constructions that social actors make”. These ontological stances show how wide the chasm is between critical realism and strong social constructionism on the question of ontology. Strong social constructionism’s stance is anti-realist and relativist (Andrews, 2012). I realised that because identity is part of being, the ontology that one espouses will influence the understanding of identity that one adopts.

I also had to question those authors who hold that identity is discursively constructed (e.g. Collier-Reed, 2009; Walker, 2005) because this implies that identity is developed through discourse, while I, on the contrary, take the ontological stance that identity emerges from being. O’Mahoney (2011, p. 124) points out that without a layered, emergent ontology empiricist and discursive approaches cannot relate the “interdependent levels by which individuals engage with society”.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the concept of identity by turning a critical realist gaze on it to evolve an understanding of identity in order to present an explanatory framework of identity based on critical realism that I can use when analysing and interpreting my data. To do this, two things are necessary. Firstly, because the literature is so vast I have to select good examples that are representative of these important theories to critique. Secondly, using immanent critique<sup>36</sup> I have to show why these other, important theories are not suitable for my purposes.

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<sup>34</sup> Social constructionism and social constructivism are terms that are often used interchangeably, although their epistemologies differ (Andrews, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Here I found that Sayer (2000, p. 82) holds the same idea “I shall also argue that ‘social constructionism’ - often opposed to essentialism - is unsatisfactory with regard to ontology, epistemology and the conceptualisation of nature and society...”.

<sup>36</sup> Immanent critique, very simply stated, means critiquing something from inside the thing itself by looking at the claims it makes and the position it takes.

I have chosen to explore identity using the work of Taylor (1989), Wenger (1998), Walker (2005), Gee (2000-2001, 2005a and 2005b) as well as Archer (2000, 2003, 2010), Smith (2010) and Bhaskar (1993, 1998a, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). Smith is a critical realist personalist; Archer is a critical social realist, while Gee takes a New Literacies Studies approach, all of which are of value in understanding the concept of identity. Both Bhaskar and Archer have written on identity, but from two completely different angles. Bhaskar (1998a) originally took a constellational view of identity, while Archer's view is that of a stratified ontology of self where personal identity hinges upon mature reflection on the three orders of reality – the natural, practical and social – and accommodating our most important concerns to them (Archer, 2000, p. 9).

### 3.2 Some understandings of identity as found in the academic literature

#### Charles Taylor and the trickster as moral and authentic - Hero



**Figure 3.1:** The hero Odysseus

(Source: Wikimedia, Wikicommons)

*Figure 3.1 depicts the Ancient Greek Hero Odysseus. I have used this image of Odysseus to depict the trickster identity as 'hero' because of Taylor's strong emphasis on morality in his identity philosophy. It is rather apt because Odysseus was moral in terms of the morality of his time. Lawrence (2003) makes the point that Odysseus does not automatically act morally because of his moral conditioning, but because he chooses the moral path. In the Iliad he is depicted as a good counsellor. In contrast to Achilles, he is self-restrained and rational. However, he was also a trickster in the sense that*

*he used guile and cunning, e.g. in planning the fall of Troy by using the Trojan horse.*

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor <sup>37</sup> (1989, p. x) in defining identity talks about “modern inwardness, the sense of ourselves as beings with inward depths and the connected notion that we are selves” and links modern subjectivity to notions of morality. In fact, Taylor stresses the moral element in identity. Taylor also states “my discovering my own identity doesn’t mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others... my own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others” (Taylor in Gutmann, Ed., 1994, p. 36). Here Taylor indicates the inner voice and its role in identity formation. He stresses this dialogical nature of identity: “the crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally dialogical character. We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression (Taylor in Gutmann, 1994, p. 32).” Sadian (2009) states that Taylor “consistently considers two basic identity-constituting relationships – an introspective self-interpretation and an outward-looking sense of cultural belonging – to be essential components of any fully-developed, coherent or healthy identity” (p. 13). In short, in Taylor’s view, identity has the following elements: it is constituted by relationships: an interior relationship with certain aspects of ourselves requiring self-interpretation (including our inner voice) and an exterior relationship in identifying with the best qualities of others in joint enterprise. Identity has moral dimensions; it has potential to be authentic, it has inwardness and an inner voice. Language plays an important role in defining identity dialogically. Archer refers positively to Taylor’s ideas and cites and comments on them in her social realist view of identity (e.g. Archer, 2003, p. 141; 2000, p. 222, p. 227 and more).

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<sup>37</sup> I have included Taylor’s definitions here because it is interesting to note that Taylor holds the view (which Archer follows and cites as will be seen in my later discussion of “Archer and the trickster”) that a person is an agent with a sense of self, an inwardness, reflexive and one who can choose and make plans for his/her life for the better. “...to be a person in the full sense you have to be an agent with a sense of yourself as an agent, a being who can thus make plans for your life, one who also holds values in virtue of which different such plans seem better or worse, and who is capable of choosing between them” (Taylor, 1985, p. 257). There is some similarity here to Archer’s “primary concerns” which refers to the importance one places on career choice and plans/projects (and reflexion upon that choice) that allows an individual to thrive rather than just survive.

## Etienne Wenger and the trickster as Janus



**Figure 3.2:** Janus – the two-headed God on coin  
(Source: Wikimedia, Wikicommons)

*Figure 3.2 shows the double-faced image of the Roman god Janus looking both ways simultaneously. I feel that this image represents the closeness of the relationship between practice and identity in Wenger’s theory of identity as explained below in the sense that it is one head, but two faces - identity and practice.*

Wenger’s work on identity is set within his notion of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) for practice-based learning. Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 98) define a community of practice as ‘a system of relationships between people, activities, and the world; developing with time, and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice’. Roberts (2006) has developed a useful table of the characteristics of communities of practice drawn from Wenger as shown in Table 3.1 below.

**Table 3.1** Key Characteristics of a Community of Practice

Sustained mutual relationships — harmonious or conflictual
Shared ways of engaging in doing things together
The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
Very quick setup of a problem to be discussed
Substantial overlap in participants’ descriptions of who belongs
Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
Mutually defining identities
The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
Specific tools, representations, and other artefacts
Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter

Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
Certain styles recognised as displaying membership
A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world

(Source: Roberts (2006, p. 625) compiled by Roberts from Wenger, 1998, pp. 125-6).

In Wenger’s (2006) view, identity stands in a close relationship to practice – so close, in fact, that he comments that the characteristics of practice can be considered as characteristics of identity and “the result is a characterisation of identity that inherits the richness and complexity of practice”. Identity is about how learning effects personal change within a community of practice and creating “personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities of practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 5) through active participation in “the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to those communities” (1998, p. 4). Identity is formed not only by participation, but also by non-participation<sup>38</sup>, e.g. being an outsider (Wenger, 2006). He also holds that learning transforms identity (*ibid.*). Although Wenger regards identity formation as part of a dialogical process whereby “an experience and its social interpretation inform one another” (Viczecko and Wright, 2010, p. 14), he firmly makes the point that he does not believe that identity formation is a discursive process (1998, p. 151). In other words, although experience and interpretation may ‘dialogue’ with one another, this does not mean that discourse *per se* is identity formation, which sets him apart from Walker who holds that identity is formed through discourse.

There have been several critiques of the notion of CoPs in the academic literature (Ranmuthugala, Plumb, Plumb, Georgiou, Westbrook and Braithwaite, 2010; Roberts, 2006; Handley, Sturdy, Fincham and Clark, 2006; Gee, 2005b; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004). However, as the concept of the community of practice *per se* is not under discussion in this chapter, I have only included Gee’s critique. Gee (2005b, p. 214) states that although “the notion of a community of practice (CoP) has been a fruitful one”, several problems have stemmed from it, such as the notion of community from which close ties might arise that are not always suitable for classrooms and workplaces. The term ‘community’ suggests that one belongs to the CoP as a member, which might have different meanings in the many different contexts where communities of practice are to be found such as in the workplace, educational

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<sup>38</sup> As a critical realist, I find Wenger’s emphasis on the importance of non-participation in identity formation very interesting because it reminds me of Bhaskar’s insistence on the importance of absence.

settings, disciplines, professional practice, among others. Gee (2005b, p. 215) identifies the key problem as one of “labelling a group of people” leading to the complicated issues of exclusion from and inclusion in the CoP. I would agree with Gee in this concern about exclusion, because by its very nature of having “those who know” and “those who do not know”, an aspect of deliberately creating “otherness” in the CoP is added; hence, the notion of exclusion within the CoP. However, I would add to this that a CoP can create social exclusion within the social context in which it is set up if only selected people are invited to join the CoP, as often happens within the university community.

I am concerned that within a community of practice there may be skewed power relations as a result of its notion of ‘apprenticeship’ where a newcomer is only accorded peripheral participation until such time as when the newcomer has proved through practice and forming an identity, which resonates with the specific CoP, that he/she is deemed worthy of inclusion in the group. I am concerned because I think this may lead to elitist thinking and hence, epistemological exclusion from the tacit knowledge of the CoP in question. I base this concern on having been a member of an academic writing CoP in which the published writers were the main members of the group, and the novice writers were on the periphery. Feelings of not being ‘good enough’; ‘I’ll never be able to publish an article’; ‘they are so good’ did the rounds of the novice writers’ conversations. What, in effect, happened was that the novice writers began to consider the main writers of the group as “the others; those who know”; thus, the CoP did not function effectively. It would appear that in such an academic writing CoP a peripheral member would only join the CoP fully once she/he had published an article and could engage in the same discourse as the main members, as well as assuming the identity of a writer after publication of the article. Using this latter example of CoP writer identity, I would fully agree with Wenger that in terms of a CoP, identity is closely linked to practice in a CoP.

Turning to Wenger’s notion of identity being bound up in practice, it is clear then, that when one is a newcomer to the CoP, one’s identity must be that of the novice – the one who does not know or does not know enough. I would say that this is a negative identity and I question the effect that this outsider identity would have on the self-esteem and self-confidence of the novice.

## Melanie Walker and the trickster as discursively constructed



**Figure 3.3:** Discourse constructing identity  
(Source: Wilke, Wikimedia, Wikicommons)

*I chose this image in Figure 3.3 to represent identity as discursively constructed because it is a trickster image of illusion - now you see it, now you don't. This points to what I would think is fluidity in a discursively constructed identity. Furthermore, this may be an apt description of discursively constructed identity in the sense that this may imply that as the discourse changes, so will the discursive identity. There is also the question of who is discoursing.*

For her understanding of identity, Walker (2005) draws on Dolby (2001) and Weeks (1990):

Identity formation is understood here as an interlocking personal and social project under particular discursive conditions of possibility, 'formed in constant conversation with the structures of the world' (Dolby, 2001, p. 114). But identifications also reference our desires for affiliation and recognition; we distinguish ourselves from others and with others and in relationship to our world across time and space. Weeks explains that identity 'is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others' (1990, p. 88) (Walker, 2005, p. 42).

This citation clearly shows that Walker, following Dolby, sees identity as discursively constructed 'in constant conversation with the structures of the world'. What is interesting is Walker's assertion that the identity formation processes create an identity that interlocks both the personal and the social, i.e. that the personal and the social cannot be separated from each other. Walker (2005, p. 42) states that she comes to this concept of identity by following Layder's (1993) understanding of the self by which he means "the unique psychobiography of each individual within the context of social experience, a biography both individual and

necessarily collective”. Walker (2005) then concludes: “*Thus, there is no dichotomous distinction between each student and his/her social and educational world*” (p. 42, my emphasis). Although nobody exists in isolation, it would seem rather extreme to conflate each student’s social and educational worlds in this manner. I need only to think of the social contexts/worlds of my UoT students which are in many case vastly dissimilar, and how this must influence their transition into and agency in the same educational context/world they attend.

The students’ social worlds are linked to their socio-economic class, while their educational worlds are still influenced by the legacy of apartheid’s “Group Areas Act” policy that divided the nation into ethnic groups and separated them into distinct living areas. This apartheid policy saw heavily funded schools for white children in white areas, whereas the coloured schools were funded less and the black schools grossly underfunded. Zoch (2013, p. 1) writing 19 years after SA democracy began states that both class and socio-economic affect a South African child’s opportunities in life, particularly schooling and job prospects. Zoch (2013) indicates that “the likelihood of an emerging adult reaching matric by the age of 19 or 20 vastly differs between those from a poor socio-economic background and those from more affluent households (17% vs. 88%)” (p. 7). He adds that socio-economic background plays a major role in explaining who enters university and who does not (p. 17). To this one may add who succeeds at university and who does not (Scott *et al.*, 2013).

Thus, when students come to university they bring both their socio-economic class and primary and secondary educational worlds with them into tertiary education. The opportunity cost for a student from a poor home is much higher than for a student from an affluent home. As a result of apartheid’s ongoing education legacy, the schooling of students who attended private or former “Model C”<sup>39</sup> schools is closer to tertiary education than those who attended township or rural schools. Marius Roodt of the SA Institute of Race Relations concurs “in 2009 the matric pass rate for Africans in former ‘Model C’ schools was 88%. The overall pass rate for African pupils in that year was 55% (Roodt, 2011, unpagged).

To make a point about how different students’ social worlds are (worlds that they bring with them into their tertiary education setting; particularly into one classroom at my UoT), I

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<sup>39</sup> The “Model C” school is the government school attended by white children under apartheid (Roodt, 2011).

graphically illustrate this with photos. Figure 3.4 below illustrates the different types of dwellings in which my diverse body of students live and call home. The top left photo shows rural dwellings in the Eastern Cape, SA. The top right photo shows farm labourers' cottages. The photos in the middle row show shacks and RDP houses in a township. In the South African context 'RDP' stands for the "Reconstruction and Development Programme" initiated by the newly-elected ANC government under President Nelson Mandela in 1994. These RDP houses are very small, consisting of two small rooms with running water and a flush toilet. Often a number of people live in one house. The bottom left photo shows a mansion (one of many) which may be found in any of the upper-middle-class suburbs of a South African city. These large houses are not only the prized homes of affluent white South Africans as many upper-middle class black South Africans live in the suburbs too. The bottom right photo shows a middle-class home that might be occupied by black, coloured or white residents.

The point of these photos in Figure 3.4 is to show the differences in the socio-economic contexts of my students to refute Walker's claim that there is no disparate distinction between students' social and educational worlds. In fact, as the visuals show there is indeed a distinction. In one classroom I may have students who attended rural, farm, township, former Model C or private schools while living in a socio-economic class of house similar to those depicted in Figure 3.4. The photos also illustrate one aspect of South Africa as one of the most unequal societies in the world (World Bank, 2012, p. 15).



Rural dwellings Mvezo, Eastern Cape, SA  
(Source: Conway-Smith, 2011)



Farm Labourers' cottages, Nuy Valley  
(Source: Simpson, 2013)



Shacks in a squatter camp  
(Source: John Hogg/World Bank, 2012)



RDP houses in a township  
(Source: John Hogg/World Bank, 2012)



Upper-middle-class house in the suburbs  
(Source: Golding, 2011)



Middle-class house in the suburbs  
(Source: OLX, 2014)

**Figure 3.4** The social contexts of some of my students

Furthermore, these houses are not merely dwellings but are symbols of an unjust society where the gulf between rich and poor is huge and impacts on many levels such as schooling, nutrition, health, transport, basic needs and in terms of higher education, epistemological access as well as formal access. Poor students who come into higher education from a shack with no electricity and running water in an informal settlement have much greater obstacles to face than affluent students who can afford food, transport, good accommodation, books and stationery required for their studies. This is borne out by the World Bank Report (2012) which states:

Inequality of opportunity among children in South Africa is shaped to a varying degree by different types of circumstances. Whether a child lives in a township/informal settlement or a rural area as opposed to other urban areas and education of the household head contribute the most to inequality of opportunity in most cases ... Location is particularly important for opportunities relating to infrastructure (p. x).



## **Gee and the trickster as four-leaf clover**

“People learn most deeply when they take on a new identity that they really want” (Gee in Foreman *et al.*, 2004, p. 54).

*I have chosen the image of the four-leaf clover to represent Gee’s identity theory because he holds that there are four aspects of identity (the four leaves) as well as a core identity represented by the stem. This is a rather simplistic image to represent Gee’s sophisticated explication of identity and does not represent Gee’s theory adequately, but I could not think of any other image that holds the five aspects together organically.*

In taking a sociological approach to identity (Case, 2007), Gee defines identity as “being recognised as a certain kind of person in a given context” (2000-2001, p. 99). Gee’s identity theory is very sophisticated, coherent and has depth in that it is stratified and emergent. I would locate Gee’s theory of identity within ‘weak’ social constructionism because there are strong elements of discursive formation of identity, yet he brings in stratification and depth that resonate with critical realism.

Before looking at Gee’s notion of identity, it is important to consider his concept of Discourse, with a capital ‘D’ because he draws on this in his definition of identity, particularly social and core identity. Gee (1996) defines a Discourse as follows:

A Discourse (with a capital ‘D’) is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and ‘artefacts’, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’, or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful ‘role’ (p. 131).

Gee defines discourse (with a lowercase ‘d’) as “connected stretches of talk or writing” (2000-2001, p. 110). Gee goes on to distinguish between two kinds of Discourse: primary Discourse and secondary Discourse.

**Primary Discourse**<sup>40</sup> is a framework that is created from infancy during our “primary socialization as members of particular families within their socio-cultural settings... and constitutes our first social identity” (Gee, 1996, p. 137). This is an important point – Gee locates social identity within a particular social setting and time, adding the important element of what Bhaskar calls ‘**geo-historicity**’ to social identity. Primary Discourse thus creates our conceptions of who we are, who our social group is and what we and our group value “when we are not in public” (*ibid.*) – another important point, i.e. that we have a social identity that is not on public display, but is contained within a particular social context such as a family or social grouping. A (rather extreme) example of this would be a white racist family in the new South Africa in 2012, who freely express their racism (i.e. their racist identity) within their own family social context, but outside of the family, they keep their racism under wraps so as not to be identified within the broader social context (i.e. in public) as racist.

**Secondary Discourses** are encountered when we move outside our primary home and peer-group to become members of institutions such as schools, churches, and are socialized “within various local, state and national groups” (*ibid.*). According to Gee (*ibid.*), secondary Discourses “constitute the recognisability and meaningfulness of our ‘public’ (more formal) acts”. Secondary Discourses extend Primary Discourses. The separation of these two Discourses cannot be cast in stone as the boundary between them is “constantly negotiated and contested in society and history” (Gee, 1996, p. 138), which can be illustrated by my example above of the white racist family who do, in fact, have to negotiate and contest their identity moving between their primary and wider social contexts.

As stated above, Gee (2000-2001, p. 99) defines identity as “being recognised as a certain ‘kind of person’ in a given context”. In this sense of the term, all people have multiple identities connected *not* to their ‘internal states’ but to their performances in society. Hence, Gee makes a connection between identity and performativity; this is similar, but different to

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<sup>40</sup> Bhaskar has a similar notion that he calls ‘primary polyadization’ (1993, p. 164). I speak to this later in this chapter.

Wenger's connection between identity and practice in a community. Moreover, this is in contrast to Archer's notion that identity emerges from the internal states – the internal conversations and their primary concerns.

Gee's notion of multiple identities is not to deny that each person has what he calls a 'core identity'. Gee defines this core identity as each person

. . . having had a unique trajectory through 'Discourse Space', i.e. he or she has through time in a certain order had specific experiences within specific Discourses...this trajectory and the person's own narrativization of it are what constitute her or his (never fully formed or always potentially changing) "core identity". The Discourses are social and historical, but the person's trajectory and narrativization are individual (though an individuality that is fully socially formed and informed) (Gee, 2000-2001, p. 111).

Gee makes the following important points about one's core identity: it is unique to an individual in terms of the individual's geo-history within a social context; the formation processes happen within a certain chronological order, i.e. they happen diachronically – across time; and the individual narrates this development and formation of the constantly evolving core identity. Gee holds that it is this individual narrativization (i.e. telling one's story) that forms the core identity. Furthermore, one's core identity develops through an individuality that is "fully socially formed and informed" (*ibid.*). This is reminiscent of Archer's notion that the *personal identity* only forms at maturity; however, Gee is talking here about the core identity which he sees as different from the personal identity, which forms earlier through the Primary and Secondary Discourses.

Furthermore, Gee makes the point that this core identity holds "uniformly, for ourselves and others, across contexts" (2000-2001, p. 99). This means that one can recognise oneself as the same person across the different contexts one occupies and the identities that one assumes and expresses in each context. For example, when I walk into class and stand in front of the class to teach, my identity is that of a teacher. I still have the same core identity as Bernie, but in this classroom context, I am also Bernie-the-teacher. As Bernie-the-teacher I say, do, act and 'be' in a specific way that I only am in the classroom teaching-context. When I leave work and go home, I occupy different identity contexts of being a mother, a cook, and a wife, but my core identity does not change from one context to the next. This is akin to Archer's

continuous, evolving sense of self that she sees as a precursor to agential and social identity although it comprises them. Archer (2000, p. 255) stresses that this continuous sense of self gives one a sense that over time the three orders of reality (the natural, social and practical) act upon the same subject.

Gee (2000-2001) provides a specific perspective on identity built around four aspects of the meaning of being recognised as a “certain kind of person” (p. 100) – (i) a nature identity, (ii) institution identity, (iii) discourse identity and (iv) affinity identity:

(i) A **nature aspect** – I am born with blue eyes because of my genes which is the **power** (i.e. the capacity, the natural force) that has put me in the state of having blue eyes and hence of having this particular **nature identity** of having blue eyes.

(ii) An **institutional aspect** (which I can either choose or which is imposed on me) is a position in an institution. For example, I am a lecturer at a university of Technology (UoT); I chose that, but the contractual nature of my institutional identity has been imposed on me – I would like to have tenure, but the authorities deem that I can only have a one-year contract. So here the authorities are the **power** that affect and effect my **institutional identity**, i.e. a temporary lecturer on a one-year contract.

(iii) A **discourse aspect** refers to an individual trait that I have that is talked about by other people, i.e. it is discursively constructed in me (I cannot be kind and generous all by myself, e.g. on a desert island). I have the disposition to be kind and generous, but it becomes an individual trait through the discourse of others. As I go about being kind and generous to others, people recognise me as kind and generous and talk about me as kind and generous. So in this case Gee says that it is the discourse and dialogue of rational others that deem me to have an identity that is kind and generous. So their discourse and dialogue is the **power** that **recognises** me as kind and generous and creates my **discourse identity in the sense that this is how others converse about me and discursively construct me**. This is the identity bestowed upon me by the discourse of others in recognition of a particular individual trait of mine. As Gee (2000-2001) states, “people can construct and sustain identities through discourse and dialogue” (p. 103).

(iv) An **affinity aspect** is the experience and practices I share with others in a group. For example, I belong to the Faculty of Engineering Teaching and Learning Committee at my UoT. This is an affinity group in the sense that we are like-minded individuals who have chosen to join and have volunteered our time, energy and intellectual resources to be part of

this teaching and learning group. Here it is the practice or set of practices that is the **power** that creates my **affinity identity**.

Table 3.2 below summarises the above in tabular form to show the relationship between the identity aspect, the power that it derives from, and the source of power.

**Table 3.2** Four Ways to view Identity

Process			Power	Source of power
1	Nature-identity: a state	Developed from	forces	In nature
2	Institution-identity: a position	Authorised by	authorities	Within institutions
3	Discourse-identity: An individual trait	Recognised in	The discourse/dialogue	Of/with “rational” individuals
4	Affinity-identity: experiences	Shared in	The practice	Of “affinity groups”

(Source: Gee, 2000-2001, p. 100)

Each of these four perspectives has its own system of interpretation connected to the recognition of identity: (i) the historical/cultural views of nature; (ii) norms, traditions and the rules of the institution; (iii) discourse and dialogue of others; and (iv) the working of the affinity group (Gee, 2000-2001).

I find Gee’s identity theory very interesting because gazing at it through a critical realist lens, there is some compatibility with critical realism in terms of the strata he posits, e.g. the source of the power, the power, and the arising/developing aspect of identity.

In terms of weak social constructionism, I would say that Gee has developed the most coherent and sophisticated theory of identity.

## Margaret Archer and the trickster as the A (alpha) and the Ω (omega)



**Figure 3.5:** Alpha and Omega interlaced  
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

*Archer describes the Self as the Alpha and the Person as the Omega; hence my description of the trickster as the alpha and the omega without any religious connotations or overtones. The image is apt because the letters are interlaced indicating a complex relationship as is Archer's view of the self and the person.*

Benton (2001, unpagged) describes Archer's work on identity and self as "a stratified ontology of selfhood" in his review of her book "*Being human: the problem of agency*" (2000). This is, indeed, an accurate description because Archer's social realism introduces a very complicated and complex, stratified, depth view of the individual whose different personal properties and powers (PEPs) emerge at each level (Archer, 2000, p. 254).

According to Archer (2000) there are four strata of human being: the self, the person, the agent and the actor. However, the relationships between these four strata are not simple. I have decided to explain Archer's theory of identity by creating a visual representation (Figure 3.6 below) of the four strata as she has explained them in "*Being human: the problem of agency*" by drawing on her explanations in different pages of this book.

Thereafter, I take the reader through a detailed explanation of the diagram. Figure 3.6 must be read from the bottom of the page up to understand the relationships between the four strata. Archer (2000, p. 256) states that the self may be seen as the Alpha and the person as the Omega in this stratified view of the subject "whose different properties and powers (PEPs) emerge at each level" (2000, p. 254). I take this to mean that the self is the start of the process and the person is the end. However, because identity is such a dynamic process, the end is not fixed and static, but a new starting point for the process to engage again. Figure 3.6 illustrates

the process of the emergence of the person through various relationships and processes from the self through social and personal identity to the person.

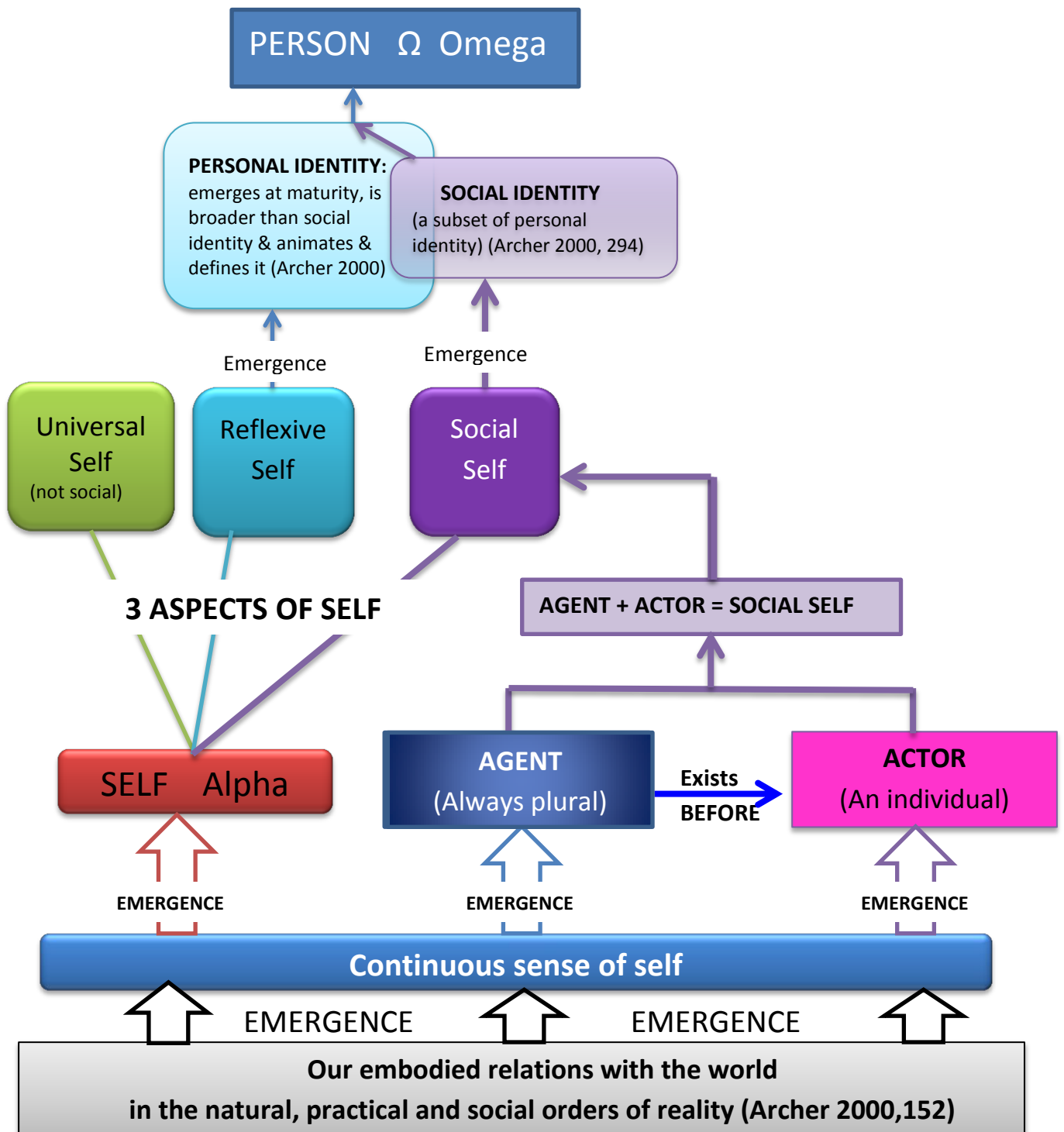


Figure 3.6: The relationships between Archer's 4 strata of selfhood (PLEASE READ FROM BOTTOM UP)

Reading from the bottom of Figure 3.6 up, the process of emergence begins with the emergence of a continuous evolving sense of self (2000, p. 255) from the way we engage with the world in Archer's three orders of reality, viz. the natural, practical and social orders. This continuous sense of self is the consciousness of one's uniqueness in the world and the stability of the conscious awareness that "I am I, and I am not you/ he/ she" (Archer, 2000, p. 7). This means that although my circumstances may change radically over time, I am still the same being with my own continuous sense of myself over time. In other words, my own sense of self affords me a stability that allows me to recognise myself in different contexts – having arthritis, being a mother, cooking a meal, teaching at university, researching. My sense of self evolves over my life-time.

This notion of the continuous sense of self is not reserved to Archer, but also appears in Gee's theory of identity where he refers to the "core identity" (2000-2001, p. 99) as mentioned above in the section on Gee's identity. Smith (2010, p. 66) uses a similar notion, but refers to "centers of durable identity...persons can, must and do have singular identities that they are capable of generating, knowing, communicating, and sustaining over time and space". In essence, these three expressions of an inner sustaining identity (*continuous sense of self, core identity and durable identity*) mean the same and are also to be found in psychology. For example, Erikson (1963, p. 261) defines identity in the following way, "identity is a complex concept which can be defined as people's images of themselves, including the feeling that *a thread of continuity runs through their lives*, and that their self-images and the views that others have of them are essentially in agreement" (my emphasis).

In Figure 3.6, **the self** emerges from the continuous sense of self and has three aspects, namely the universal self, the reflexive self and the social self. Archer (2000, p. 124) differentiates between evolving *concepts of the self* which are social and the universal *sense of the self* and states that the universal self is not emergent nor is it social. Here she draws on the work of Marcel Mauss<sup>41</sup>, Durkheim's nephew, "the self is everywhere present ... there has never existed a human being who has not been aware, not only of his body but his individuality, both spiritual and physical" (*ibid.*). This universal sense of self is then the

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<sup>41</sup> The social anthropologist Mauss' influence is not surprising because "the work of the Durkheimian school became a standard reference point in the teaching of social anthropology at Oxford and elsewhere and in many ways has shaped much research and theoretical debate in the discipline over the last half-century" (James and Allen, 2001, p. 118).

awareness of one's own individuality that is common to all human beings. In other words, by means of my universal self I know that I am an individual.

**The agent**, which Archer regards as always being plural, exists before the individual actor. So, for example, parents could be considered an agent and their baby an actor. The agent and actor together give rise to the social self. (Archer's use of the term 'agency/agent' is plural, while all other scholars including Bhaskar talk about 'agent' in the singular. It seems confusing to have to read about 'agent' and remember that this means a collective/group rather than an individual).

**The individual actor** exists in the singular. Hence, a person is an actor. However, Archer places a caveat on her use of 'actor' – there are strict criteria for possessing a unique identity which rest on the way that an actor personifies her/his chosen role in society (2000, p. 285). Parentage and social position can influence the kind of actor that one can become and the roles they can personify. For example, if an impoverished young person from a school in the deep rural areas of the Eastern Cape, in South Africa comes to university in the city of Cape Town, he will personify the role of student differently to a wealthy young man from the urban environment. In this instance the two young men share the same opportunity of coming to university; however, the opportunity costs are stacked differently for each.

From the social self, social identity emerges which Archer considers to be emergent, but this emergence does not happen in a single move. According to Archer (2000, p. 260), **there are three developmental phases involved in acquiring a social identity at maturity:**

1. ***“How society impinges on the human self, i.e. the development of primary agency”***. Archer (2000, p. 261) defines 'primary agents' as “collectivities sharing the same life chances” through birth into pre-existent society. Archer (2000, p. 262) maintains that we are always involuntarily born into a system of social stratification, e.g. a class system or stratification based on socio-economic levels. An example of such a collectivity/agency could be particular socio-economic sections of society, e.g. a group of middle-class families who have similar socio-economic profiles, live in a specific area and whose children go to the same school. This view makes everyone an agent because everyone occupies a place within a group sharing resources, whether it is a position of privilege or disadvantage. Based on this, Archer states that Agency

always refers to the plural; even when the singular ‘Agent’ is used, it denotes a group (*ibid.*).

2. ***“How primary agents collectively transform themselves in seeking to transform society, i.e. the development of corporate agency”***. If a group of people collectively decide on action, e.g. protest action, to change a situation, they are termed ‘Corporate Agents’ by Archer. From this corporate agency (groups, movements and organisations wanting to transform society) emerge personal powers (PEPs) (2000, p. 263). An example of this would be parents at a particular school who decide to protest, as a group, the decision by the local department of Education to close down the school<sup>42</sup>. This group of parents are corporate agents. As a group they have personal emergent powers (PEPs) to bargain with that they would not have as individual actors.

3. ***“How social reproduction or transformation affects the extant role array and thus the potential social identities available, i.e. the development of social actors”***. This statement means that either social change or maintaining the status quo impacts upon the types of social roles<sup>43</sup> available to build social identity. Archer (2000, p. 284) makes the point that we are agents before we are individual actors (as shown above – I am born involuntarily into a family group which automatically makes me an agent; or as a girl is born, she is part of the female corporate agency; a boy would be part of the male corporate agency. Thus, we are always agents first.). Archer (*ibid.*) maintains that corporate agency has twofold importance. On the one hand, by interacting with others in the same collectivity, agents become more aware and also articulate about their interests and the roles they would like to personify; on the other hand, working with other collectivities broadens the scope of roles for agents. For example, in a family where parents hold university degrees, it would be easier for their children to adjust to university life than for first generation first-year students.

As shown in Figure 3.6, social identity emerges from the social self. However, social is considered to be a sub-set of personal identity which is broader than social identity and only emerges at maturity according to Archer (2000, p. 288). Unfortunately, Archer does not

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<sup>42</sup> This happened in 2013 (John, 16/6/2013).

<sup>43</sup> It may be useful to distinguish between identity and role at this point. Archer (2000, 313) links social identity to the acquisition of roles in which we can invest ourselves, e.g. as a parent I fulfil a social role and acquire the social identity of parent. Thus, role and identity are not the same.

specifically state what she means by ‘maturity’ or give an age limit. Thus, ‘maturity’ is left open-ended and could mean 21 years of age, or 35, 40, 50 or even 60 years of age. The only indication that she gives is that the first cycle of the internal conversation should have been completed by maturity – again, this is vague.

Figure 3.6 shows that personal identity arises from the reflexive self, which is the deliberative self engaged in internal conversations. The person emerges from personal identity together with its subset of social identity. Importantly, social identity is only assumed in society, but personal identity influences the way in which we relate to the world around us. Archer (2000, p. 285) makes the point that a dialectical relationship exists between the personal and social identities. This means that although each identity is emergent and distinct, they are in a mutually sustaining relationship that does not conflate them in any way.

In summary of the above explication of Figure 3.6, it may be said that in Archer’s stratified ontology of social and personal identity there are four strata: the agent, actor, person and self. The continuous evolving sense of self is prior to agent and actor which together make up the social self which comprises the continuous sense of self, the universal self and the person. Archer maintains that personal and social identity cannot be conflated as personal identity regulates one’s relations with reality as a whole while social identity is only assumed in society by stratified social subjects comprising primary, corporate and social agency. Moreover, personal identity only emerges at maturity through a process of reflexion on the three orders of reality – the natural, practical and social – by means of the internal conversation to determine one’s most important concerns in the world which Archer maintains are located in the practical world.

### **Critique of Archer’s theory of social and personal identity**

Archer’s theory of personal and social identity has come under critique in various aspects: as under-socialising the self (Gronow, 2008; Luckett, 2008); Archer’s particular way of thinking about practice and its priority (Benton, 2001); the importance Archer affords the internal conversation (Benton, *ibid.*) and her lack of consideration of intersubjectivity, language and the complex nature of power (Luckett, 2008).

I agree with the critique of these writers. While I accept most of Archer's theory, when reading "*Being human: the problem of agency*" (2000), I have the feeling that the questions of the self and identity have been thoroughly theorised in a social vacuum in which there is nothing other than theory; there are no people. The self is abstractly theorised; however, Archer does not demonstrate the self in relationships with other selves to test and demonstrate the theory.

What Archer's theory lacks is any element of the spiritual side of human beings. Smith's (2010) notion of identity encompasses the spiritual because he talks about 'an ensouled identity' and Bhaskar has expanded his notion of identity in *Meta-reality* (2002a) to include the spiritual in terms of the ground state.

A further lacuna, and not only in Archer, is the issue of gender which is not addressed although society is so deeply gendered that gender attaches to identity. This gives rise to the question of hidden identities – people who are homosexual, bisexual or transgender.

I agree with Benton's critique (2007). I cannot come to terms with two aspects of Archer's theory: the importance she places on the practical order of reality, especially as she prioritises it and her elevation of the internal conversation to major importance in understanding human selves. These two aspects have come to dominate her writing over the years.

## Christian Smith<sup>44</sup> and the trickster as ensouled



**Figure 3.7** Diagram of labyrinth  
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

*I have chosen the image of a labyrinth to represent Smith's notion of identity as 'ensouled' because the labyrinth has been a symbol of spirituality for centuries.*

Identities are self-understandings derived from occupying particular stable locations in social, behavioural, mental, and moral space that securely define who and what somebody is, for themselves and for others. Every normal human animal rejects being a *something* and drives mightily to be a *someone*. Achieving this requires the successful exercise of forming personal and social identity (Smith, 2010, p. 51) (original emphasis).

Smith (2010) is a self-named 'critical realist personalist' whose identity theory openly makes room for and advocates the spiritual. The aim of his book "*What is a person?*" is to "construct a theoretical model of the ontology of the nature of the human being" (2010, p. 10). To understand Smith's theory, it is important to understand what it means to describe him as a personalist. Personalism is system of thought that has many different forms; however, the one Smith ascribes to is that of Karol Wojtyla (who was Pope John Paul II). Smith, follows Karol Wojtyla's definition of personalism as expressing "a belief in the primordial uniqueness of the human being, and thus in the basic irreducibility of the human

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<sup>44</sup> The American critical realist personalist Christian Smith shared the critical realist Cheryl Frank Memorial Prize for 2011 for his book "*What is a person?*" with Alan Norrie. This prestigious prize is awarded annually for a book or article that constitutes, motivates or exemplifies the best and/or most innovative new writing in or about the tradition of critical realism, including the philosophy of MetaReality, in the previous year (Bhaskar, 2012).

being to the natural world” (Smith 2010, p. 104). Williams (2004, p. 164) offers an explanatory expansion on Wojtyła’s definition:

The title “personalism” embraces any school of thought or intellectual movement that focuses on the reality of the person (human, angelic, divine) and on his unique dignity, insisting on the radical distinction between persons and all other beings (non-persons). As a philosophical school, personalism draws its foundations from human reason and experience, though historically personalism has nearly always been accompanied by biblical theism and insights drawn from revelation ( p.164) ... the importance accorded to the person by personalism is not the fruit of arbitrary choice; it derives from the ontological status of persons vis-à-vis other beings. Likewise, the decision to focus on the person as the key to understanding all of creation and, indeed, as the pinnacle of that creation, responds to the demands of intellectual integrity rather than subjective preference (Williams, 2004, p. 174).

From both quotations above it can be seen that personalism places the human being/ human animal above all over animals and nature<sup>45</sup>, which is the biblical view: “And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:26, King James Bible, 1997).

As with all writers, the thought system, philosophy, beliefs or ideology of a writer colours her/his research and influences topic of research as well as the chosen conceptual framework or meta-theory that informs the research, for instance a feminist brings a feminist lens to the research, while a critical realist brings a critical realist lens. Thus, it is interesting that Smith who is an avowed personalist has turned to critical realism. In a sense Smith appears to use critical realism exactly in the way that Bhaskar often speaks of it – as an underlabourer to clear a path.

In the light of this understanding, we can read Smith’s definition of identity again.

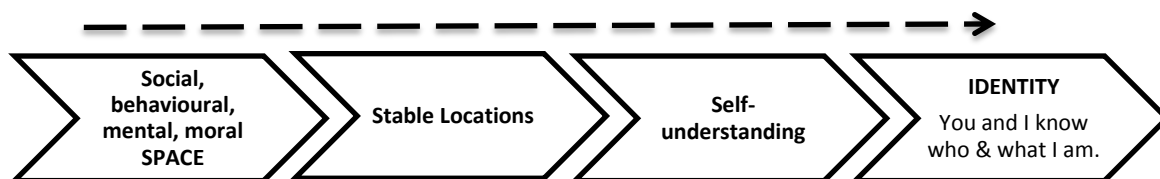
Identities are self-understandings derived from occupying particular stable locations in social, behavioural, mental, and moral space that securely define who and what

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<sup>45</sup> Personally, I do not subscribe to nor agree with this notion of humans being superior to and having dominion over nature and animal; however, in the interests of academic research, I have included this section of personalism so that one may understand Smith’s point of departure and belief/thought system that informs his writing.

somebody is, for themselves and for others. Every normal human animal rejects being a *something* and drives mightily to be a *someone*. Achieving this requires the successful exercise of forming personal and social identity (Smith, 2010, p. 51) (original emphasis).

Unlike Gee, Archer and Bhaskar, Smith does not talk about geo-historicity (place and historical time), but talks about occupying locations in different kinds of space as illustrated in Figure 3.8 below which I have depicted as the linear process it appears to be. However, Smith does not seem to accord space to those people who do not have ‘self-understanding’ and might need therapy to come to a deeper understanding of themselves. I would also suggest that we do not always occupy stable locations, and often the identity of those who are in an unstable location reflects this instability. Although Smith is a critical realist personalist, he does not seem to have embraced Bhaskar’s concept of absence, and may be operating monovalently, i.e. only from a positive aspect.



**Figure 3.8:** Diagram of Smith’s notion of identity derivation

The pointer to Smith’s personalism is the statement, “Every normal human animal rejects being a *something* and drives mightily to be a *someone*” (p. 51), i.e. an ‘I’ and not an ‘it’. One may also question Smith’s linking of identity to a “normal” human being because it may happen that people develop ‘faulty’ understandings of themselves and need psycho-therapy to help them correct their self-understanding. In terms of Smith’s notion of identity formation as sketched in Figure 3.8, this would mean that a person, who, for example, has this faulty self-understanding, would be stuck in the mental space (on the left-hand side of the figure) and not develop an identity. This is surely incorrect, because even someone with a faulty self-understanding has an identity that incorporates that faulty misunderstanding.

Like Archer and Bhaskar, Smith considers reflexivity important for personhood, but sees it as a causal capacity (2010, p. 51) – one among the 30 causal capacities he lists. According to

Smith (2010, p. 154), these 30 capacities define what a ‘normal’ human being is as opposed to other forms of life. These capacities are placed into five clusters, i.e. from the lowest Existence capacities, Primary Experience Capacities, Secondary Experience capacities, Creating Capacities to Highest Order Capacities such as interpersonal communion and love. Smith regards these capacities as causal.

As a personalist who seems to see humans as a higher life form than other beings, he stresses the point that humans are “uniquely self-conscious animals” (*ibid.*). Following Bhaskar, he sees humans as embodied. Smith also sees a person as having a soul, “human persons are always unified beings of existent duality. They are all the time both material body and immaterial “soul” existent in singular unity” (2010, p. 63). Here, he uses the term ‘human persons’ to distinguish between human and angelic persons.

Smith takes a very specific, moralistic and strong stance towards personhood and identity which is based on his Christian, Roman Catholic personalism. Hence, unless one follows the same belief system as his own, it becomes difficult to agree with his views.

Sayer (2012) has critiqued Smith’s book rather strongly in his well-considered review of it. For example, he critiques Smith’s discussion of the qualities of moral goodness stating that it “invites a charge of parochialism; wasn’t the subordination of women legitimised by this old moral system for instance?” (2012, p. 130).

## Bhaskar and the trickster as Monty Python: “And now for something completely different... in search of the Holy Grail”



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*When I read Bhaskar’s ‘Dialectic: the pulse of freedom’ (1993), it struck me how completely different his ideas on identity were to anything else that I had read on identity. Therefore, I decided, in keeping with the name of the Monty Python films entitled “And now for something completely different” and “Monty Python and the Holy Grail”, to use the titles as a name for Bhaskar’s identity trickster because my search for identity seemed to have become something of a quest for the Holy Grail of identity.*

Bhaskar’s notion of identity is truly completely different, complex, and dialectical. We need to start thinking dialectically to understand Bhaskar’s notion about identity within non-identity. It might be helpful to first consider Bhaskar’s explanation of dialectical thinking (1993, p. 190): “Thinking dialectically is the art of thinking the co-incidence [happening at the same time] of distinctions and connections” (my bracketed insertion to explain Bhaskar’s use of the word co-incidence). In other words, when thinking dialectically, we need to think of two terms that are antithetical such as ‘distinction’ and ‘connection’ as separate yet at the same time dialectically related.

Bhaskar (1993) defines identity in the following way:

It is the case that identity always pre-supposes non-identity, and non-contradiction, incompleteness and change. Thus, identity is always an abstraction from a process or set of processes of formation; and re-identification of a token not only depends upon differentiation from others of the token’s type, but also turns on the possibility of a situation in which the individual is constituted by something other than itself and/or

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<sup>46</sup> This is an image taken from the poster of the film “Monty Python and the Holy Grail”. This image is in the public domain and taken from Wikimedia Commons.

becoming something other than it was (the co-incidence of identity and difference and identity and change, respectively) (p. 190).

To parse Bhaskar's definition, 'identity always pre-supposes non-identity, and non-contradiction, incompleteness and change'. Here we should recall Bhaskar's view that absence is *prior* to presence as explained in Chapter Two, i.e. absence exists before presence. In Bhaskar's MELD schema **2E** is the Second Edge that refers to the introduction of absence/negation into ontology. Thus, Bhaskar ensures that the concept of non-identity forms part of his definition of identity. What is very important is that Bhaskar states that identity presupposes change. Identity cannot emerge without change of some kind taking place as will be demonstrated in Chapter Six where identity is analysed and discussed in detail. The most basic change that takes place is the change from non-identity to identity.

His definition goes on to state 'thus identity is always an abstraction<sup>47</sup> from a process or set of processes of formation'. In other words, identity is a notion emerging from a process of formation. As such it is independent of and cannot be reduced to the formation process; however, being emergent it can act back on that from which it emerged. 'And re-identification of a token not only depends upon differentiation from others of the token's type, but also turns on the possibility of a situation in which the individual is constituted by something other than itself and/or becoming something other than it was'. This means that if I want to identify something ('a token'), for example my red car, in the parking lot at the shopping mall, I have to take into consideration all the red cars in front of me in the parking lot, but I can differentiate my red car from the others because my red car is an Audi ('differentiation from others of the token's type'). I can further identify and differentiate my car from others because its bumper has a white ZA sticker that was placed vertically and so something has been added to my car to make it different to what it had been before, and this helps me to recognize it. If, by a giant leap of imagination, I were to become a rally driver on weekends, my red car would have to be changed into a rally car, e.g. roll bars added, the suspension strengthened and a more robust gearbox and stronger brake system installed ('the possibility of a situation in which the individual is constituted by something other than itself and/or becoming something other than it was').

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<sup>47</sup>According to the New Shorter Oxford Dictionary (1993), an abstraction is "a thing that exists only in idea; the state of being considered independently of its associations, attributes or concrete accompaniments".

Considering the final part of Bhaskar's definition of identity: "the co-incidence of identity and difference and identity and change", we can explain the "co-incidence of identity and difference" with the example of two people whose weight differs. They are identical (i.e. having the identity of 'person') in that they are both people, and they are different in that the one weighs 65kg and the other 87kg (Bhaskar, 2012). We can explain "the co-incidence of identity and change" with the example of a person who works as a professional paramedic. When he is about to go to work, he puts on his uniform which identifies him as a paramedic. He is still the same person as before, but he has changed in that he is a paramedic now.

In sum, Bhaskar's definition of identity indicates that identity exists together with non-identity as an abstraction that emerges from a formation process. Furthermore, identity implies difference from other similar entities either by having been formed differently, or by having become something different. This definition of identity also allows for change in the identity e.g. my passenger car becoming a rally car on weekends.

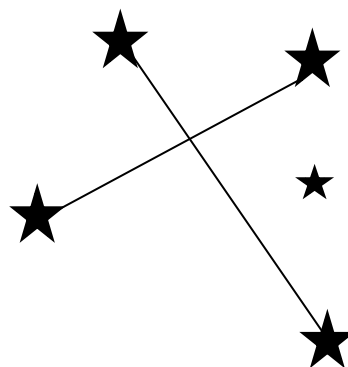
### **Bhaskar's constellational identity**

Constellational identity is the containment or co-inclusion of one thing within or by another. Dispositional identity is the identity of a thing with its changing causal powers. Rhythmic identity is the identity of a thing with the exercise of its changing causal powers (Bhaskar 1993, p. 299).

Critical Realism challenges the postmodern and social constructionist view of the self which sees "the self as a decentred contingency which cannot transcend its socio-historical location" (Cruickshank, 2003, p. 1). What this social constructionist view implies is that the identity of an individual would be bound to its socio-historical situation – it could never be other than it is in a particular society at a particular time. Morgan (in Hartwig, 2007) suggests that this rigid view of identity denies contradiction and change. This particular view would make identity monovalent, i.e. referring only to the positive and ignoring the negative, e.g. contradiction and change (in Bhaskar's concept of absence, change could be seen as absence). This social constructionist ontology of individual identity is static, and also commits the epistemic fallacy because it seems to reduce identity to our knowledge of identity.

In contrast to this ontologically static identity, Bhaskar posits a constellational view of identity in terms of a coherent, depth ontology which includes causal powers. Bhaskar took the term ‘constellation’ from Hegel, but reworked it to refer to the containment or inclusion of one thing within another without conflating or reducing the one to the other (Morgan in Hartwig, 2007). A good example of this idea of constellationality would be the critical realist notion that epistemology is contained within ontology in the sense that ontology is bigger than epistemology. However, they cannot be conflated or reduced to one another. So, one could use these two concepts of ontology and epistemology together, i.e. as a constellation – a Bhaskarian constellation.

To reiterate, Bhaskar’s constellational identity refers to the inclusion or containment of one thing within another without conflation. In very simplified terms this idea becomes understandable if one thinks of a constellation of stars, for example, the five stars of the Southern Cross which form the Southern Cross constellation as illustrated in Figure 3.9.



**Figure 3.9:** The five stars of the Southern Cross Constellation

All five stars are necessary for this particular constellation because of the causal powers and generative mechanisms at work. The constellation has a dispositional identity with causal powers even if we cannot see or know those causal powers. When the causal powers are exercised the dispositional identity (e.g. the five stars) is manifested as the rhythmic identity (i.e. the Southern Cross).

Hartwig (2007, p. 79) states that Bhaskar’s constellationality “names (i) the relationality of the elements as well as their internal and necessary connectedness and (ii) their distinctness”. These two points can be understood in terms of the Southern Cross – (i) all five stars are

necessary (as explained above), and necessarily internally connected (i.e. held together within a constellation by the natural forces at work) and yet (ii) distinct (each star is unique, but together they form the constellation).

As change is an aspect of reality, any concept of the identity of fundamentals of reality (Ultimata)<sup>48</sup> must be compatible with change and must allow for process, transformation, potential, real absence as potential and real contradictions or tension... in an open totality where ultimata are themselves not fixed (Morgan in Hartwig, 2007, p. 251).

The above quotation highlights the essential aspects of Bhaskarian constellational identity, namely that constellational identity can only be viewed within an open system which is dynamic allowing for change, potential, and contradiction. Bhaskar's constellational identity also allows for absence as explained above – absence as change or potential<sup>49</sup>. Furthermore, a relationship exists between the essential aspects (i.e. the dispositional and rhythmic identities) of the constellational identity that indicates their connectedness as well as their separateness. This means that the dispositional identity has causal mechanisms which when exercised manifest as the rhythmic identity within space and time.

It is important to recognise the incompleteness of dialectical processes and that the dialectical process is only resolved momentarily before it starts again because this points to the dynamic nature of identity which is always complex and changing. Since dialectical processes are incomplete (without an ending) and find their momentary resolution in a new state, in Bhaskar's concepts of the dispositional identity and rhythmic identity of an entity, *potential* is an important aspect of constellational identity.

Some of the ultimata must consist in (a) the dispositional identity of things with their changing causal powers, so that in a dialectical kinetic pluriverse<sup>50</sup> *to be* is not only just to be able to do, but *to be able to become*; and (b) their causal powers must be exercised, so that the constellational identity of (embodying the distinctions between) structures, mechanisms and spatio-temporal processes manifests itself in the *rhythmic identity of those changing causal powers with their spatio-temporal exercise*. In short,

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<sup>48</sup> Bhaskar's use of the term 'ultimata' here refers to "the most basic ontic levels (kinds of entity) ... viz. constellational identity, dispositional (self)-identity and rhythmic identity of a thing's nature with its causal powers, its changing causal powers and the exercise of its changing causal powers, respectively" (Hartwig 2007, 489).

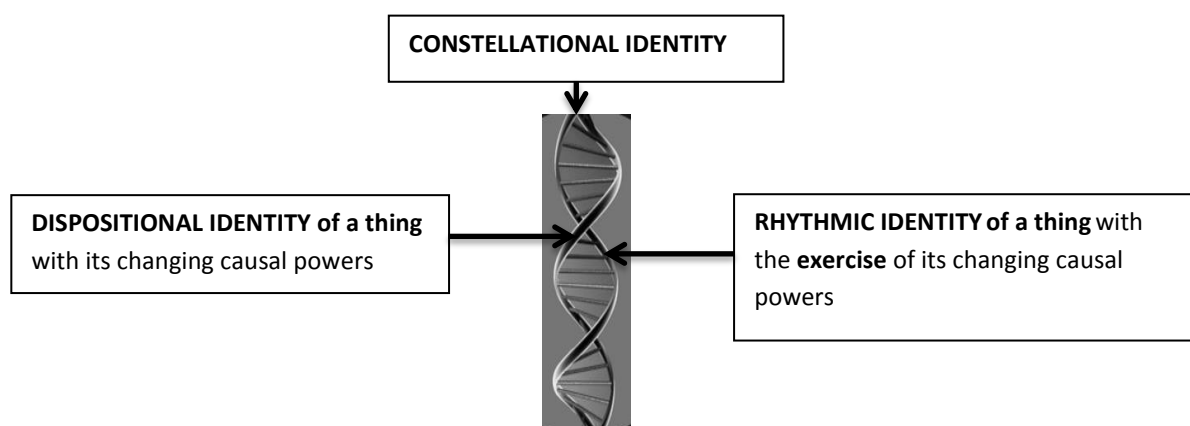
<sup>49</sup> The notion of absence as potential means that because 'potential' contains a future outcome within itself, potential will change (become absent) as soon as the outcome is realised. Potential is 'being able to become'.

<sup>50</sup> 'Kinetic pluriverse' here means inner 'dynamic, changing, shifting multi-worlds' as opposed to 'universe'.

for at least some ultmata, *being is becoming*, whether manifest or not” (Bhaskar 1993, p. 77 with original emphasis).

The important point that Bhaskar makes here is that we are not constrained just to ‘be’, but we have the potential to be able to become. In other words we are never merely stuck in a particular state of being, but because of ‘absence’ (i.e. potential) we can become something else; being is always enabled to become. Bhaskar (1993, p. 54) makes the point that “(1) change is irreducible and (2) the causal efficacy of a process constitutes, or rather manifests itself as its spatio-temporal rhythmic” pointing to the importance of keeping considerations of space and time in mind when exploring the self, personhood and identity.

I imagine Bhaskar’s constellational identity as a double helix . Thus, in Figure 3.10 below, I have used an image of DNA to illustrate Bhaskar’s constellational identity to show more clearly that dispositional and rhythmic identity are not conflated nor by-products of one another (epiphenomena), but interact as dialectically necessary in a dynamic process. I think it apt to use an example of DNA to represent the double helix of constellational identity because it would suggest that this constellational identity is integral to life.



**Figure 3.10:** An imaginary of Bhaskar’s Constellational Identity

(Source: Millar, K., 2011)

Figure 3.10 depicts the double helix of dispositional and rhythmic identity within constellational identity showing them as non-conflated. One could explore a specific constellational identity by applying analytical dualism<sup>51</sup> to artificially separate the dispositional and rhythmic identity for the sake of understanding the whole (constellational

<sup>51</sup> Archer (1995) explains that analytical dualism is a methodology based on two premises, (i) That there is a stratified depth ontology (the Real, Actual and Empirical domains) in which the emergent properties of structures and agents are irreducible, but can be separated analytically (i.e. by using analytical dualism); (ii) the assertion that structure and agency can be distinguished in terms of time (i.e. structure always exists before agency) to explore methodologically the interplay between them and explain changes over time.

identity) by looking more closely at the parts. It is important to note that Bhaskar's concept of identity is not only reserved for human beings, i.e. it is not only anthropic, but can be used for things and structures, for instance.

A simple example will illustrate this concept of constellational identity more clearly:

Annelisa is a bright, diligent young student who also happens to be very good at singing. She has an innate disposition to sing well. We could call this talent for singing her “dispositional identity” which has its own causal powers and generative mechanisms that are dynamic and changing. These causal powers and generative mechanisms could lie dormant and her singing talent would never be exercised. However, Annelisa also has a rhythmic identity which upon the exercise of these causal powers of the dispositional identity becomes activated and in doing so, her constellational identity as a very talented singer begins to emerge.

It is clear that identity is a complex, fluid and changing abstraction from processes of formation and it comprises both presence and absence. As identity and self are intimately inter-related, Bhaskar's notion of identity must be seen within the context of his notion of self; however, one first had to understand his concept of constellational, dispositional and rhythmic identity (as explained above) to understand his notion of self because he uses these terms.

## **Bhaskar and the self**

Bhaskar's concept of the self is intricate and posited in terms of critical realist stratified depth ontology. I shall work here with his concept as it appears in “*Dialectic: the pulse of freedom*” (1993) and in terms of how it appears in his philosophy of Meta-Reality (2002a).

Bhaskar talks about “conceptualizing the self as the dispositional identity of the embodied agent and her changing causal powers”<sup>52</sup> (1993, p. 183). There are important concepts in this dense statement that need to be explored. Dispositional identity has already been explored above; however, we need to examine what Bhaskar means by an ‘embodied agent’. There are two Bhaskarian notions in the term ‘embodied agent’, namely ‘embodied’ and ‘agent’ that we need to understand when attempting to comprehend Bhaskar's notion of self.

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<sup>52</sup> In the same work, Bhaskar puts it as “The self is nothing other than the dispositional identity of the subject with her changing causal powers” (1993, 165), he equates ‘subject’ with ‘embodied agent’.

In explaining the notion of the ‘embodied personality’ Bhaskar (2002a) states:

As an embodied personality I am clearly differentiated in time and space...What is the embodied personality? The embodied personality definitely has a mind, emotions, feelings and it definitely has a physical being...We are at least tripartite beings – we have mind, emotions and bodies (p. 239).

Thus, when using the term ‘embodied personality’ Bhaskar means that as persons we are embodied, i.e. we have a physical body, a mind and emotions. He emphasises his inclusion of emotions (*ibid.*) because philosophy had generally concentrated only on the body and the mind. It is important to note the inclusion of space and time in the explanation of the embodied personality because he links space, time and causality since space and time are intrinsic to the process of causality (1993, p. 404). He considers space, time and causality as 2E categories (the domain of absence in the MELD schema) of negativity/absence (1993, p. 208), because he sees two modes of absence – the mode of gulf (in space) and the mode of split (in time) (1993, p. 257). In other words, as embodied persons we have what Bhaskar calls ‘geo-historicity’ (another way of saying space-time), i.e. we exist at a specific place in a specific time and our past is always present with us in our present moments and change and absenting is always possible and present.

In addition, in terms of Meta-Reality, the embodied self has a core Ground State, which is a spiritual centre. In many religious and spiritual traditions this spiritual centre has variously been called the spirit/soul/the divine centre/the divine spark/the Christ centre/the Higher Self. Bhaskar (2002a) states “we have a fundamental or innermost level of being... the transcendently real self. This is the state that underpins our embodied personality. This is what I am going to call our ground state” (pp. 240-242). This appears in Level 5A of Bhaskar’s MELDARZA schema “Being as spiritual; Being as reflexive; Being as inward” (Bhaskar, 2012). Bhaskar (2002a, p. 262) states “the ground state is our core universal nature”.

This brings us to Bhaskar’s concept of agency. Again, being Bhaskar, the concept is complicated. The definition of agency which Bhaskar provides reads as follows:

[Agency is] intentional transformative praxis caused by real, even if routinized, unconscious, multiple, anterior (including long prior) and/or contradictory reasons;

which issues in a state of affairs that, unless it was overdetermined (as in a firing squad), would not have occurred otherwise (1993, p. 394).

In other words, Bhaskar links agency strongly to practice, which is different to Archer who links agency to people's ultimate concerns in the practical order of reality. It is to be noted that Bhaskar considers this agentic praxis to be transformative, i.e. change happens even when the activity is a routine one. Furthermore, it is 'intentional' (4D of the MELD schema); this suggests that I, as an agent, deliberately engage in the transformative praxis (whether or not I realise that it is transformative). Moreover, Bhaskar (1993, p. 239) regards agency as absenting, i.e. as changing something when doing/acting.

With the above explanations in mind, juxtaposing Bhaskar's notions of the embodied personality and agency, we can now understand that 'embodied agent' means a geo-historical person with intentional transformative praxis.

## **Interactive generative mechanisms**

In research undertaken into disability in 2006 Bhaskar and Danermark employed a laminated system of seven conjunctive (i.e. connected), interactive generative mechanisms (Bhaskar, 2010a). These seven mechanisms are physical, biological/physiological/medical, psychological, psycho-social<sup>53</sup>, socio-economic, cultural and normative (2010a, p. 5). They regard these as explanatory mechanisms "operating at radically different levels of reality, including four-planar social reality, and orders of scale" (Bhaskar, 2010a, p. 10). Their investigation revealed social-material, social-institutional and social-cultural forms and aspects of human practices within the human social field (*ibid.*). Mechanisms in the domain of the Real have the power to produce events in the domain of the Actual. Danermark (2001) comments that all events are produced in highly complex contexts. It occurred to me that naming generative mechanisms that produce events in these complex contexts makes them useful for an exploration of the causal powers and generative mechanisms that cause identity to emerge, because the context in which identity emerges is itself highly complex. Using these seven interacting mechanisms to understand a phenomenon like identity will add depth

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<sup>53</sup> Psycho-social means relating to a person's psychological development in and interaction with a social environment (The Medical Dictionary for Health Professions and Nursing, unpagged).

to the understanding. I bring this into my exploration of the development of the dispositional identity in students and professional paramedics.

### **3.3 Creating a critical realist (Bhaskarian) explanatory framework of identity**

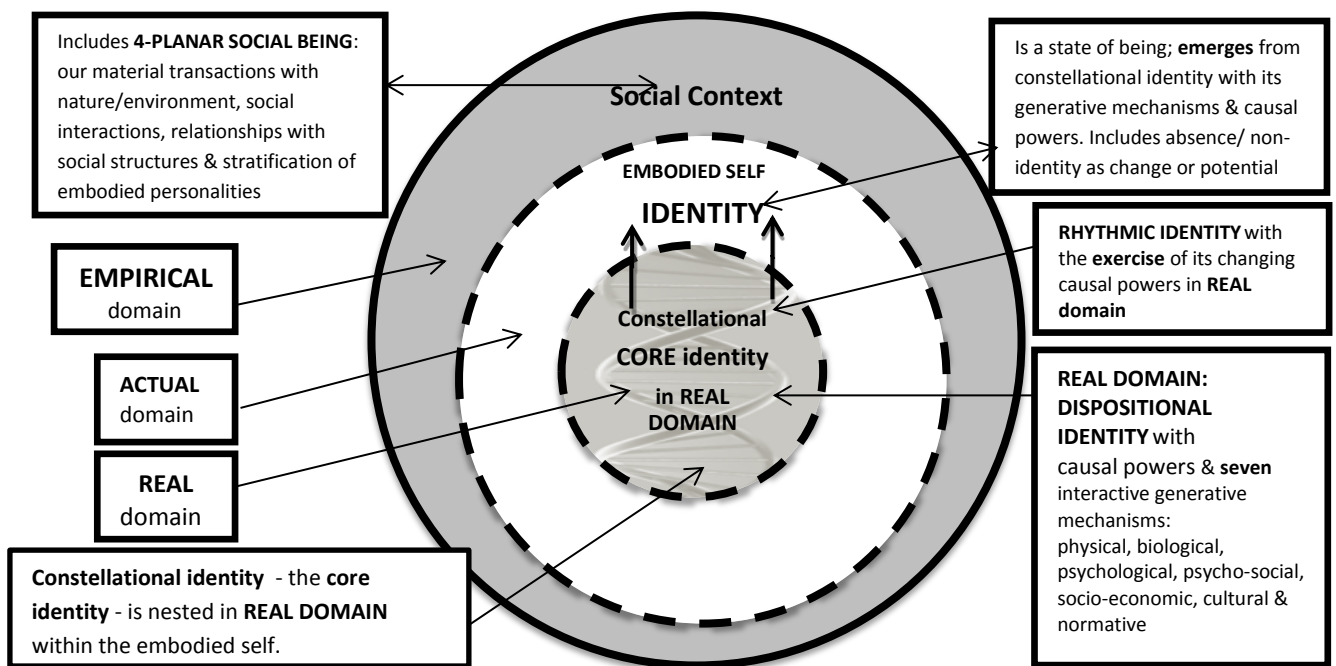
Having worked through Bhaskar's explanations of identity and non-identity as well as his notion of constellational identity, it occurred to me that here lay all that was needed to create a Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity. Therefore, taking critical realist concepts of depth ontology, emergence and absence, Bhaskar's notions of identity and non-identity and constellational identity, four-planar social being as well as the seven generative mechanisms (as named by Bhaskar and Danermark), I have woven them together to form an explanatory framework for the emergence of identity. I have named it a Bhaskarian framework because it comprises Bhaskar's thought. In creating the Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity (Figure 3.11) I have drawn on Bhaskar's notion of primary polyadization (i.e. socialisation) (1993) as well as Gee's notion of primary Discourse (with a capital 'D') (1996). I have chosen these two because they both address our earliest socialisation. In critical realist terms, I realise that this explanatory framework of identity may be fallible and open to change.

#### **A critical realist Bhaskarian definition of identity**

To ground this Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity, I have used Bhaskar's thinking about identity and his own definition to create a critical realist definition of identity as follows:

Human identity is a changeable state of being in a social context emergent from non-identity. Identity emerges within the embodied self/agent from the individual's core constellational identity through (always incomplete) dialectical processes of formation within a social context of four-planar social being and its interaction with the interplay of structure, culture & agency. Identity (to be) allows for absence (non-identity i.e. to not be) as change and potential (to be able to become).

I regard this as a nested concept, much like Russian Matrushka dolls, which I have tried to illustrate below. Figure 3.11 attempts to show a nested image of identity emerging from dialectical processes of formation happening within constellational identity which is nested within the embodied self which manifests the state of being, i.e. identity being manifested. The dotted lines attempt to show the permeability of the process.



**Figure 3.11:** A critical realist Bhaskarian explanatory framework of **nested** emergent identity

I suggest that one's constellational identity is an individual's core identity with causal powers, generative mechanisms and tendencies which exist whether they are known, exercised and manifested or not. The constellational identity comprises the dispositional and rhythmic identities. The dispositional identity has casual powers and generative mechanisms including the seven interactive generative mechanisms, i.e. "(i) physical, (ii) biological, and more specifically medical or clinical, (iii) psychological, (iv) psycho-social, (v) socio-economic, (vi) cultural, and (vii) normative" (Bhaskar, 2010a, p. 5). The rhythmic identity is the exercised causal powers of the dispositional identity. These processes of formation contain within themselves the possibility of both positive identity and negative non-identity, i.e. incompleteness, absence and change. Furthermore, because identity formation is so dynamic and fluid, non-identity co-exists with identity, because as identity changes, so it becomes non-identity until it reforms into identity. This process is synchronic, but could be

diachronic, for example where someone is in psycho-therapy and is in the process of discovering their personal identity over time.

I would add that an individual's core dispositional identity is formed from birth by her/his primary socialisation which Gee (1996) calls the 'Primary Discourse', and which Bhaskar calls 'primary polyadization'<sup>54</sup> (1993, p. 164). I will demonstrate the effect of primary socialisation on identity in Chapter Six.

I follow Bhaskar in his concept of four-planar social being because identity emerges within a social context as explained above.

Four-planar social being presupposes that every event in life has to be understood in terms of four dimensions: our material transactions with nature/environment; our social interactions with others; our relationships with the social structure (i.e. languages, economies, political forms); and the stratification of our embodied personalities (i.e. person, body, mind, emotions) Bhaskar (2002a, p. 305).

In the interests of brevity, I will not explain this again here, but respectfully refer the reader back to the explanation in Chapter Two. I use Bhaskar's notion of four-planar social being when discussing the emergence of identity in Emergency Medical Science students later in Chapter Six.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to understand identity by exploring various understandings and explanations of the concept by different academics including the social realist Margaret Archer and the critical realist Roy Bhaskar. This process has afforded me a deep understanding of what is meant by identity and how it is understood and explained differently in various paradigms. I do not feel comfortable with some of the paradigms because they are basically alien to my own system of thought and belief. I am comfortable with Bhaskar's philosophy of critical realism and Meta-Reality. This led me to choose to base the explanatory framework of identity on Bhaskar's philosophy.

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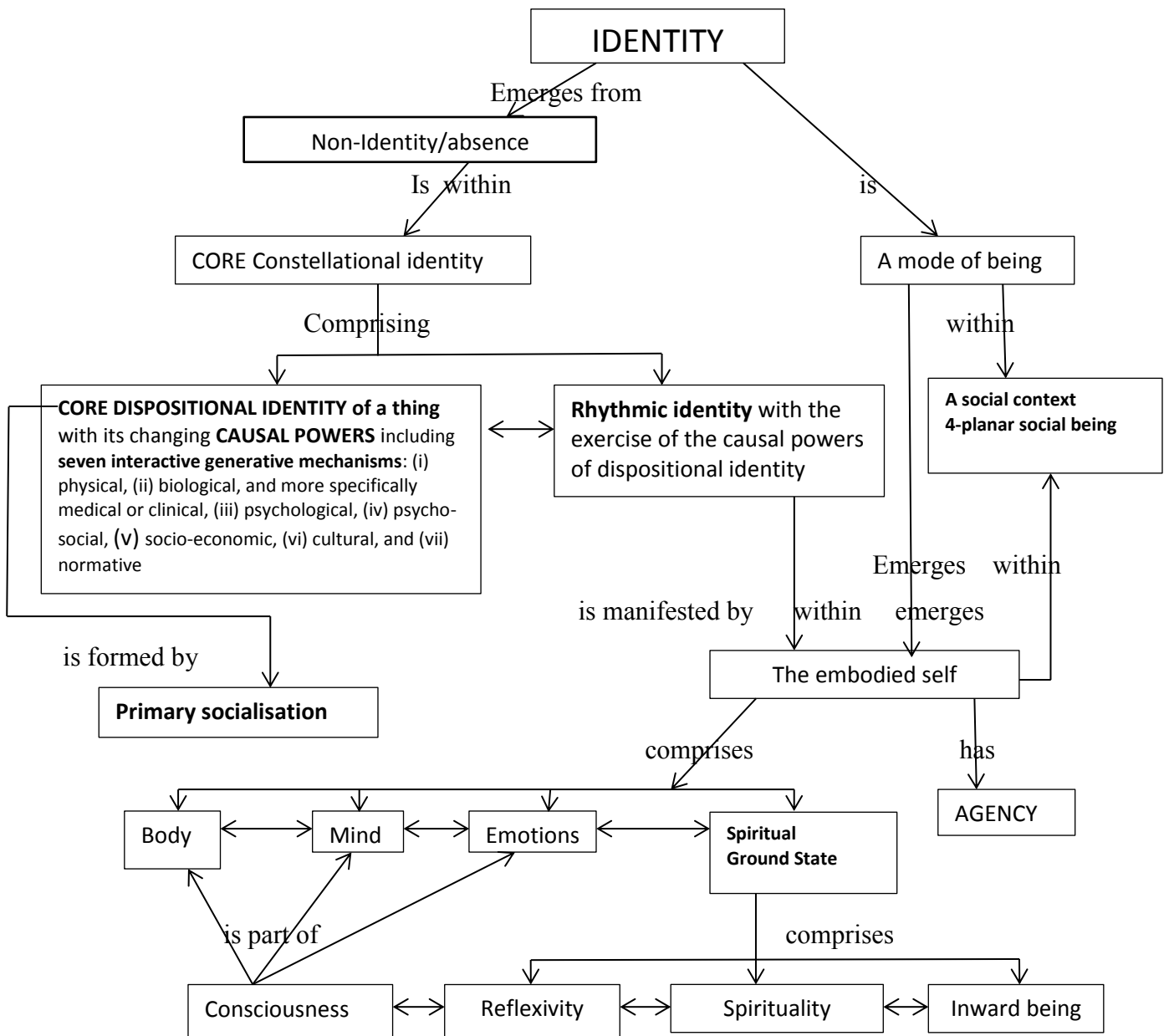
<sup>54</sup> "The primary polyad comprises the infant and the context of people, material objects and social relations with which she first comes into contact...leading to alterity and individuation" (Hartwig, 2007, p. 367).

In conclusion, the Bhaskarian theory of identity posits the following:

- Human identity emerging in the domain of the Actual is a complex event.
- Identity emerges within a social context and four-planar social being (which includes the embodied personality/self).
- Human identity always emerges in an embodied personality/self which is stratified in the sense that a person comprises body, mind, emotions and spiritual Ground State and is differentiated in time and space.
- Identity emerges in the Actual domain from the core constellational identity.
- An individual's Constellational Identity consisting of the dispositional and rhythmic identities comprises an individual's core identity. This is in the domain of the Real.
- The core identity is formed through primary polyadization/socialisation.
- The dispositional identity of the core constellational identity has causal powers and generative mechanisms (Bhaskar 1993, 77). The dispositional identity is formed through primary socialisation/ Primary Discourse. I propose that these generative mechanisms include, among others, the open system of seven interacting conjunctive (connected) mechanisms (Bhaskar 2010a, 10). These seven mechanisms are physical, biological/physiological/medical, psychological, psycho-social, socio-economic, cultural and normative.
- Identity is not monovalent, i.e. not only positive. Identity is bivalent and thus encompasses both being and non-being as absence; and absence as change and potential (to be able to become). This means that identity emerges from non-identity which is always prior to identity in that identity pre-supposes non-identity and in the same way that absence is ontologically prior to presence.
- Emergence of human identity can be either synchronic (i.e. emerging at one moment) or diachronic (i.e. emerging across time, over a period) as a result of dialectical processes of formation within the core constellational identity.

These points may be summed up in a concept map as illustrated in Figure 3.12 below which should be read from the top down as sets of propositions. Please follow the direction of the arrows and note the cross link words which indicate the relationship between concepts.

**Focus Question: What is Bhaskarian identity?**



**Figure 3.12:** Concept map of a critical realist framework of identity (Millar 2013) **(Please read from top down)**

**Chapter Four** that follows will deal with graduate attributes. I will ask a critical realist question about them, i.e. what must the world be like for graduate attributes to exist?

## CHAPTER FOUR

### OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES AND ONTOLOGY

*Graduate attributes are the qualities, skills and understanding a university community agrees its students should develop during their time with the institution. These attributes include but go beyond the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most university courses. They are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future (Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell and Watts, 2000, p. 1).*

*It would be fair to say that learning outcomes in Australian higher education courses have become more attuned to industry needs and graduate employability in the past ten years...Current graduate attribute statements make clear links with industry and the professions (Oliver, 2011, p. 10).*

*...for some three decades or more, there has developed an agenda of 'skills' in higher education. As a result, western universities have slid almost imperceptibly from a dogma of knowledge (as such) to a dogma of skills: the knowing student has been replaced by the performative student. ...This move, which has been nothing less than a largely unnoticed revolution in higher education, can be understood as the exchange of one dogma for another: from knowledge to skills (Barnett, 2009a, pp. 438-439).*

#### 4.1 Introduction

*First, I present a number of understandings of graduate attributes in this chapter. Then I sketch a background of graduate attributes. Thereafter, I ask a critical realist question: "What must the world be like for generic graduate attributes to exist?" I diverge into a discussion of neoliberalism and globalisation so my explication of graduate attributes may be understood within the context of these two forces that have been shaping society and higher education. This*

*is followed by the answer to my critical realist question. Finally, I critique graduate attributes.*

Generic graduate attributes (GAs) are a contested concept as seen from the above quotations. They are widely discussed in academic literature in thousands of articles from various parts of the world<sup>55</sup>. Here I mention the names of but a few writers of papers about graduate attributes such as Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell and Watts (2000); Hager, Holland and Beckett (2002); Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick and Gagnolini (2004); Barrie (2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010); Yorke and Knight (2006, 2007), Bridgstock (2008); Barrie, Hughes and Smith (2009); Griesel and Parker (2009); Hammer, Star and Green (2009); Jones (2009); Gunn, Bell and Kafmann (2010); Day, Cleary, Cooper and Hilsdon (2012); Oliver (2011), Bosanquet, Winchester-Seeto and Rowe (2012) among many others. Much of the discussion goes about how to embed and assess graduate attributes. The interesting and surprising aspect of this vast literature is how little of it is critical of generic graduate attributes or questions why or how generic attributes have come to exist. One of the most important voices to critique generic graduate attributes is that of Ronald Barnett (2000, 2004, 2009a, 2010) who advocates an ontological approach. Some other voices of critique or who present a different perspective are Holmes (2001), Nussbaum (2009), Wheelahan (2010), Hinchliffe (2010) and Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011).

Graduate attributes are presented as seemingly neutral concepts, i.e. as asocial, acultural, apolitical or ahistorical both by universities who publish headline statements of generic graduate attributes and those who write about them in the academic literature. In this chapter I would like to explore this seeming neutrality of generic graduate attributes through a critical realist lens. I am particularly interested in their ontology i.e. their being, what they really are and what the generative mechanisms are that have given rise to generic graduate attributes. To do this I ask a critical realist question apropos Bhaskar, “What must the world be like in order for generic graduate attributes to be possible?” I attempt to answer this question in this chapter.

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<sup>55</sup> A Google Scholar search of “Generic Graduate Attributes” produced 110,000 results within 0.05 seconds.

## **4.2 Of terminology and definitions: what's in a name – a rose by any other name would smell as sweet**

In the academic literature, graduate attributes are a rose with many names – generic attributes, generic skills, employability skills, core skills, transferable skills, key competences, graduate capabilities, graduate qualities, graduate abilities, graduate competencies and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Oliver (2011) states that a good deal of the written debate about graduate attributes appears to be about the nomenclature. In this chapter I use the term generic graduate attributes (GAs).

The various names may be linked to the changing emphasis of graduate attributes. Bosanquet, Winchester-Seeto and Rowe (2010, p. 105) indicate how perceptions around graduate attributes have changed over fifteen years, i.e. 1995 to 2010. They demonstrate four broad notions about the purpose of GAs, namely employability, lifelong learning, preparing for an uncertain future and acting for the social good. From 2005 to 2010 there has been a shift towards community and participation. Although there has been a progression in the understanding of GAs, this progression is not bound to different times periods in the sense that notions of GAs that were popular in the 1990s still exist today and are written about, e.g. Yorke (2006) and Bridgstock (2009) write about employability although the GA debate has moved on from that notion. Definitions of GAs are also linked to these varying conceptions.

### **Definitions of Graduate attributes**

In the literature the definition of graduate attributes that is most often repeated by academic writers is the one by Bowden, Hart, King, Trigwell and Watts (2000):

Graduate attributes are the qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students would desirably develop during their time at the institution and, consequently, shape the contribution they are able to make to their profession and as a citizen (p. 1).

This definition is linked to the notion of employability because the outcome of developing these GAs are to “shape the contribution they are able to make to their profession and as a citizen”. Bowden *et al.* (2000, p. 4) make the point that “generic attributes are seen to be inextricably linked with the learning of disciplinary content, but in an explicit rather than implicit manner”. This explicitness requires provision of learning experiences and

opportunities that will offer students the opportunity to develop particular attributes, and, of course, assessment for quality assurance purposes (*ibid.*). The definition of Bowden *et al.* is taken from their “Generic Capabilities of ATN University Graduates” report (2000) on research done in Australia in five universities of technology. The conceptual framework of the study into generic capabilities was informed by three main ideas: (i) the idea of generic capabilities has to be elaborated within the context of a discipline to become meaningful, (ii) all have to buy-in to develop generic capabilities using a student-centred approach to curriculum and (iii) the assessment of generic capabilities is complex (Bowden *et al.*, 2000, p. 2). It is the idea of elaborating GAs within a context of a discipline that has been particularly difficult to implement as shown by the literature (e.g. Gifford, 2006) as well as that of assessment (e.g. Hughes and Barrie, 2010).

Yorke (2006) states that graduate employability:

is taken as a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes –that makes graduates more likely to secure employment and be successful in their chosen occupations to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (p. 8).

Yorke’s definition also relates to the world of work: “to secure employment and be successful in their chosen occupations” (*ibid.*).

The most prolific voice on graduate attributes in Australia appears to be Simon Barrie. His definition of generic graduate attributes has changed over a five-year period. It moved from ‘the skills, knowledge and abilities of university graduates, beyond disciplinary content knowledge, which are applicable to a range of contexts’ (Barrie, 2004b, p. 262) to “graduate attributes are an orientating statement of educational outcomes used to inform curriculum design and engagement with teaching & learning experiences at a university” (Barrie, 2009, p. 1). Barrie and his work at the University of Sydney into graduate attributes has significantly influenced the development of GAs in Australia and other countries, e.g. Scotland in its “Graduates for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” movement (Nicol, 2010).

The Australian National Graduate Attributes Project (GAP) report defines GAs as “key generic skills identified as important by employers embedded and integrated in courses” (Barrie, Hughes and Smith, 2009, unpagged) and “the set of core outcomes a university community agrees all its graduates will develop during their studies, and are usually stated in

institutional policy” (*ibid.*). The project maintains that higher education is fundamentally about ensuring students are changed in particular ways by their learning at university. Statements of graduate attributes are universities’ attempts to articulate what this change is (*ibid.*). This report also looks at the implementation of GAs in the curriculum, assessment and quality assurance.

There has been a noticeable shift in the literature from the late 2000s away from locating generic GAs institutionally to positioning them within disciplines, e.g. Jones, 2009; Moore and Hough, 2005. Jones (2009) understands generic attributes as “discipline knowledge in action” (p. 95) and conceptualises them as having three central features: multiplicity, connectedness and transformation. She explains multiplicity as the “multiple dimensions of each skill...connectedness refers to the ways in which the skills are integral to the disciplines and the interrelationships between the skills themselves ...transformation is the move from unexamined information to a more considered position. In addition, it is the personal transformation that occurs as someone learns” (Jones, 2009, p. 95). This understanding indicates a move away from employability to the disciplines and personal transformation of the student. Moore and Hough (2005) also argue that GAs need to be integrated within the context of disciplines as a move away from skills for employability.

In sum, graduate attributes mean different things to different people and institutions. There has been a change in their perception and the nomenclature linked to the perception. Higher education institutions have statements of graduate attributes and require departments to embed and assess these generic GAs within disciplines. Indeed, in Australia, government funding is linked to the institutional statement of generic GAs (Barrie, 2011).

### **A brief background to Graduate Attributes**

Since the early 1990s, and most specifically in the context of seeing the role of higher education as a provider of knowledge workers in a globalised economy, various commissions across the world have looked at higher education and what skills are needed to ensure that graduates are employable. Examples of report arising from these commissions are the 1991 Finn report in Australia, the 1992 Mayer report on key competencies, the 1997 Dearing Report in the U.K. and the SCAN 2000 report in America, the OECD DeSeCo report (2005).

The 1998 “World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” stresses relevance in higher education in terms of “the fit between what society expects of [HE] institutions and what they do. This requires ... a better articulation with the problems of society and the world of work” (unpaged). This Declaration also calls for graduates to be well-informed, motivated, critical citizens. In addition, it suggests that curricula should be reformed to go beyond cognitive mastery of the discipline to acquisition of skills, competences, and abilities to communicate, think critically, develop entrepreneurial skills and work in multi-cultural teams, although it does not refer to these as generic skills or graduate attributes *per se*. However, the same Declaration also states that “higher education should aim at the creation of a new society – non-violent and non-exploitative – consisting of highly cultivated, motivated and integrated individuals, inspired by love of humanity and guided by wisdom” (*ibid.*). Although this may be rather utopian, it is interesting to note that the espoused values have not been taken up and fostered in higher education globally as the dearth of literary evidence indicates. The challenge to be ‘non-exploitative’ may have fallen on deaf ears because neoliberalist capitalism and its bearer globalisation are the world order and exploitation is one of the drivers of capitalism.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) ran the “Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo) Project” consulting experts and stakeholders across the OECD countries from 1997 to 2002. The aim of this project was to determine which key competencies were needed for higher education to meet the needs of the labour market and to produce graduates who would be able to adapt to a “world characterised by change, complexity and interdependence” (OECD, 2005, p. 7). Thus, instead of graduate attributes, the report discusses key competencies. According to the DeSeCo Report, a key competency is “...more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context” (OECD, 2005, p. 4). For example, the ability to communicate effectively is described as “a competency that may draw on an individual’s knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating” (*ibid.*). Interestingly, the attitudes are not discussed as being intrinsic to the being of the student, i.e. they are not perceived as ontological. Wheelahan and Moodie (2011) point out that the main problem with the competency discourse is that it separates competency from knowledge. ‘Competency’ is presented in the OECD document as an abstraction which exists separately

from knowledge, structure, culture and agency and has, somehow, to “be learned within a favourable learning environment”.

The DeSeCo key competencies are conceptualised as three broad inter-related categories: (i) using tools (e.g. language, information technology) interactively, (ii) interacting in heterogeneous groups and (iii) acting autonomously which together form a framework within which specific key competencies may be mapped. Reflective thought and practice underpin these competencies as the report claims reflectiveness to be the heart of key competencies. Reflectiveness is seen as using “meta-cognition, creative abilities and taking a critical stance” (OECD, 2005, p. 9). The report makes the point that competencies change throughout one’s life and may improve or deteriorate; therefore, it advocates lifelong learning (*ibid.*).

Although there is no explicit mention of graduate attributes in the Bologna Process documents, Schaeper (2008) makes the point that because an explicit objective of Bologna is to enhance graduate employability, it links directly to key competencies which are recognised world-wide as integral to the notion of employability. Adam (2008) states:

Learning outcomes were not mentioned in the original 1999 Bologna Declaration or in the Prague Communiqué 2001. Since then they have appeared in every new ministerial Communiqué, culminating in the most recent London pronouncement where no less than four separate references were made. They have gradually assumed greater importance as the practicalities of implementing radical educational reforms across Europe were encountered (p. 4).

This indicates how the notion of GAs has gradually infiltrated European and western universities.

Leoni (2011, p. 18) indicates that there has been a shift in the Bologna process towards competencies, “the so-called Bologna Process and the Dublin Descriptors<sup>56</sup> are an attempt to change the university’s mission and unit of measure, seeking to move from the transfer of knowledge from the teacher to that of learning by the student, and from disciplinary knowledge to competencies”. In the Bologna Process Implementation Report (2012, pp. 48-49) skills and competencies appear in the discussion around defining learning outcomes. Of importance here is the foregrounding of the student in learning and the change from

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<sup>56</sup> The “Dublin Descriptors” are learning outcomes that would be called “Critical Cross-Field Outcomes” in South Africa.

disciplinary knowledge to competencies. This is exactly the point that Barnett makes in his opening quotation to this chapter (Barnett, 2009a, pp. 438-439).

From 2004-2008 the OECD conducted a review of tertiary education policy in 24 countries around the world. The OECD states that higher education is:

A major driver of economic competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy has made high quality tertiary education more important than ever before. The imperative for countries is to raise higher-level employment skills, to sustain a globally competitive research base and to improve knowledge dissemination to the benefit of society (OECD, 2008, p. 13).

Here the move is towards employment skills and mention is made of the knowledge economy, economic competitiveness and globalisation. These are all elements of neo-liberal capitalism of which the OECD is a driver. The language in this quotation has a hegemonic tone that belies the final phrase “to the benefit of society” in that higher education is seen as a “driver of economic competitiveness”.

The Washington Accord signed in 1989 is an agreement between signatory countries about accrediting their engineering degrees. In 2013 a paper on graduate attributes and professional competencies for engineers was published. It sees “the fundamental purpose of engineering education is to build a knowledge base and attributes to enable the graduate to continue learning and to proceed to formative development that will develop the competencies required for independent practice” (IEA, 2013, pp.1-2). The paper defines GAs as:

Graduate attributes form a set of individually assessable outcomes that are the components indicative of the graduate's potential to acquire competence to practise at the appropriate level. The graduate attributes are exemplars of the attributes expected of graduate from an accredited programme. Graduate attributes are clear, succinct statements of the expected capability, qualified if necessary by a range indication appropriate to the type of programme (IEA, 2013, p. 2).

Within the same definition GAs change from being “a set of outcomes” to “succinct statements of the expected capability”. Ontologically this definition is interesting because generic GAs then become nothing more than ‘statements’ of capability. Their twelve GAs cover: Engineering knowledge, problem analysis, design and development of solutions, investigation, modern tool usage, the engineer and society, environmental sustainability, ethics, communication, project management and finance, lifelong learning (IEA 2013 pp. 10-

11). It is clear that some can be assessed, e.g. engineering knowledge and project management and finance. However, some would be difficult to assess e.g. ethics and life-long learning. The latter would only take place after the student has left the institution to be employed and so could not be assessed at university.

From the above brief background it can be seen that GAs have grown in importance over the years despite the fact that they are actually difficult to define as some are conceptual, some are practical, some have to do with knowledge and some have to do with being a person.

### **Graduate attributes within the South African higher education context**

This question of graduate attributes has also arisen in the South African context where the need to address the backlogs related to equity and the shortage of scarce skills has been compounded by the simultaneous need to engage with globalisation in the post-apartheid higher education landscape (CHE, 2004). South African higher education is positioning itself globally following the trends set by other countries, namely Australia and the U.K. The trend of universities issuing statements of generic graduate attributes has become noticeable in South Africa as more and more universities are issuing such statements, for example the University of the Western Cape, the University of Cape Town and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

One specific responsibility allocated to the Council on Higher Education (CHE) by the Higher Education Act of 1997 is to advise the Minister of Education on stimulating greater responsiveness on the part of higher education to societal needs, especially those linked to developing South Africa's economy through enhanced higher education-industry partnerships (CHE 2003). In 2001 in South Africa, the Council of Higher Education (CHE) identified a set of generic skills as computer literacy, knowledge configuration skills, information skills, problem solving, teamwork, networking, mediation skills, social sensitivity (CHE 2001). In June 2002 the CHE held a colloquium on "Building relations between higher education and the labour market". The proceedings of this event show general agreement that these relations need to be strengthened and built out. One of the aims was to explore "the knowledge, skills and competencies required by the world of work and how these relate to the diverse social purposes of higher education" (CHE, 2003, p. 12). In March 2011 the Consortium for Higher

Education in the Cape (CHEC) held a symposium<sup>57</sup> on “Researching Graduate Quality” giving voice to the main stakeholders: universities – academics and administrators, students, representatives from the workplace and the Provincial Government of the Western Cape. Here four areas of action are designated for universities:

- (i) Coming “to grips with ‘graduateness’ or graduate attributes
- (ii) Arriving at consensus on the meaning of graduate attributes
- (iii) Engaging with universities “to ensure that graduate attributes are embraced and embedded in all spheres of university life...and to assess their attainment”
- (iv) Over time track and monitor how well universities respond to GAs and graduates achieve them as well as evaluating “the relevance of the graduate attributes” (CHEC, 2011, p. 2).

Thus, graduate attributes are becoming an established part of the South African higher education scene. Graduate attributes feature in the next round of the auditing of HEIs by the South African Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC). Following international practice, South African generic graduate attributes also have to be embedded in disciplines, taught and assessed. This is a particularly difficult thing to do as demonstrated by the myriad articles on the problems of embedding, teaching and assessing GAs (e.g. Chapman, 2004; Cranney *et al.*, 2005; Treleaven and Voola, 2008; Birbeck and Andre, 2009 and O’Neill, 2010).

The most quoted report in South Africa concerning graduate attributes in South Africa is that of Griesel and Parker (2009) who undertook a baseline pilot study for Higher Education South Africa (HESA) and South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) on graduate attributes as seen from the perspective of the employer, i.e. what the employer is looking for in graduates. This report uncritically follows international studies and reports on GAs, using them as benchmarks rather than examining and critiquing them before using them. Their report states (with a sense of pride) that “it is worth highlighting that the questionnaire was benchmarked against similar studies undertaken in the United Kingdom and elsewhere...” (p.6). This report uncritically uses neoliberalist terms such as the knowledge economy and human capital. The report does not problematize the relationship between university and business; on the contrary it states, “Although a baseline study, the report already points to the

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<sup>57</sup> At this Graduateness Symposium a representative from Standard Bank, one of South Africa’s largest banks, gave a presentation on the GAs required of graduates who wish to work in the banking sector. He specifically mentioned “morals and ethics” as two of the most important GAs required. Ironically, the previous week Standard laid off/retrenched 2000 employees quoting shareholder dissatisfaction with the profit not being large enough as the rationale for this harsh action! (Personal observation at the Symposium). It would seem that graduates are to be ethical and moral, but not the employers.

need for more innovative ways in which higher education and business can work together to create a seamless interface between these two crucial sectors of society” (p. 1). Unfortunately, this report has become a voice of authority<sup>58</sup> in South Africa on generic skills and graduate attributes influencing many universities to adopt the same uncritical stance towards GAs and the relationship between business, government and higher education that the report takes.

Graduate attributes appear in the 2013 CHE proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa, taken as a *fait accompli* as they are not problematized in the document, but are linked to “the potential for curriculum reform” (p. 30). The task team who wrote the document ally themselves with the Scottish “Graduates for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” movement (p. 36) which espouses GAs especially those of Australia and, in particular, those of Sydney and Melbourne universities (Nicol, 2010). The report states that “graduate attributes beyond technical and professional expertise are of major significance. In addition, it is now widely recognised – and expressed in the ‘Graduates for the 21st Century’ movement, for example – that the rapid and sometimes fundamental change occurring locally and globally makes it essential for higher education curricula to be enhanced to meet contemporary national, regional and world conditions” (p. 36). This alliance with the “Graduates for the 21st Century” movement is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, the social, cultural, economic and historic context of Scotland is vastly different to that of South Africa which has inequality, poverty and racism as part of its apartheid legacy. Scotland is a first world country. South Africa is both first and third world. Graduate attributes from one context do not necessarily translate to another context. Secondly, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century project has as basis for its GAs, “developing in students the ability to critically evaluate the quality and impact of their own work” and that of their peers (Nicol, 2010, p. 7), i.e. self-regulation and learner responsibility from which all other GAs would flow. However, Scottish students are not South African students, many of whom are first time university entrants. Many SA students battle poverty as a daily reality. Many students come out of a very dysfunctional school system (Jansen, 2012). Thinking that denies context and geo-history of students, reifies students. The being of the student is not taken into consideration.

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<sup>58</sup> I base this statement on my perceptions while attending a number of different presentations by different universities on graduate attributes at South African conferences and the references made to the HESA report.

### **4.3 An excursus: a critical realist question *apropos* Bhaskar, “What must the world be like in order for graduate attributes to be possible?”**

To answer this critical realist question, I have read a great deal of literature about the world of the late 20th and present 21st Century (Giroux, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2005, 2002; Harvey, 2007, 2005; Chomsky, 2013; Monbiot, 2013; Chipana, 2012; Thorsen, 2009; Baatjes, 2006; Lynch, 2006; Olssen and Peters, 2005; Levidow, 2002; Bourdieu, 1998 among others). The literature shows that ours is a globalised neoliberalist world which has had dire consequences for society as well as higher education. To examine graduate attributes within this context, it is necessary to learn more about neoliberalism to determine the relationship between them.

Neoliberalism and globalisation are partners. Therefore, I will start this section by first looking at neoliberalism followed by globalisation. Then I will endeavour to answer the critical realist question.

#### **A brief overview of neoliberalism**

Although it is a contested concept, the academic literature agrees that neoliberalism emerged in the 1970s influenced by the economic theories of Hayek and Friedman (Giroux, 2005). In the 1980s it was embraced by Reagan in the U.S.A. and Thatcher in Britain and has since influenced most countries, even post-apartheid South Africa which is also neoliberal (Harvey, 2007). The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the OECD have been strong drivers of neoliberalism (Lee and McBride, 2007; Monbiot 2013) particularly in the developing nations.

In order to have a working definition of neoliberalism, I have selected the one by David Harvey whose definition is much quoted. This definition states that:

Neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee,

for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary (Harvey, 2007, p. 22).

From this definition we can see that the free (deregulated) market, free trade, the right to private property and individualism are the cornerstones of neoliberalism. This definition illustrates the hegemony of neoliberalism where the state military and police apparatus ensure not the constitutional rights of ordinary citizens, but private property rights and the free market. A striking example of this neoliberal role of the state can be seen in the president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma's State of the Nation address on 14 February 2013. Here he announced that new courts would be established to try violent protesters and strikers as a priority "Courts will be allocated to deal with such cases on a prioritised roll," he said. "The law must be enforced and it must be seen to be enforced – fairly, effectively and expeditiously" (Zuma, 2013, unpagged). This is a powerful example of the state fulfilling its neoliberal role by stepping in to the defence of big business (in this case mining and agriculture) that was experiencing strike action. However, at the same time the country is in the grip of murder, rape and violent crime, but these cases are not prioritised and take years to come before the courts in the event of the perpetrator actually having been apprehended. In these cases the law is not seen to be enforced effectively or expeditiously.

Olssen and Peters (2005) state that neoliberalism is a politically imposed discourse which "constitutes the hegemonic discourse of western nation states" (p. 314). Harvey (2007) makes the important point that neoliberalism is such a hegemonic discourse that so affects our ways of thinking and practices that it has become common-sense in how we understand and interpret the world around us. In this way neoliberalism has become normalised and citizens have become compliant.

In his definition Harvey (*ibid.*) points out that markets have to be created for what was once a public good, e.g. education, and as such used to fall under state provision. As a result neoliberalism's free market economy demands that the public good be privatised under the guise of free market efficiency (Harvey, 2005). In this way the state can pass the burden of

cost onto the individual (Lynch, 2006; Quiggin, 2005). South Africa has experienced this privatisation of the public good with the rapid rise of expensive private education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. For example, the northern suburbs of Cape Town are areas of very rapid urbanisation and growth because young people may still be able to afford either a home of their own or rented accommodation there. In spite of the influx of children of school-going age in these areas, no new schools have been built by the state leading to nine private schools being established from 1992-2013. Private tertiary institutions have also sprouted in the South African neoliberal landscape, e.g. Monash University, St Augustine Catholic University and numerous distance or online tertiary education providers such as the Institute for Marketing Management (IMM) in Johannesburg (SAQA, 2013).

Furthermore, the expense burden of university education is shifted away from the state onto the individual. Poor and middle-class students become heavily indebted as they have to take out bank loans or obtain financial aid loans from the state to fund their studies. In South Africa low-income students may apply for study loans from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme of South Africa (NSFAS). These loans become repayable once the student is employed and earning R30 000 or more per annum at 3-8% of his/her salary; some of the study loan may be converted to a bursary when the student obtains good marks (NSFAS, n.d.). Thus most students graduate with a huge study-debt that will take them years to repay.

Similarly, there has been a sharp increase in the number of private hospitals in South Africa, while the public hospitals are perceived to be overcrowded and understaffed with facilities that are often incapacitated due to vandalism (Washinyira, 2012). The South African private medical aid industry has seen the growth of 34 medical cover companies of whom some have become giants in this industry, e.g. Discovery and Bonitas. Even emergency medical care has been privatised with private companies vying for a share of this profitable market, e.g. Netcare911 and ER24 in the Western Cape. Where the state used to be the chief provider of health care to its citizens, where no market existed, new markets have now been created, as stated in Harvey's definition above. The private individual is left to bear the cost while shareholders in the companies enjoy the profits. Success in the market place has become the new indicator of efficiency and performance.

Workers are held responsible for meeting targets and are subjected to performance management reviews which are often linked to pay increases or promotion. The emphasis in

work has shifted to performativity, e.g. the KPAs (Key Performance Areas) that have to be performed by the worker who undergoes a performance management review often without hearing any feedback on it; the performance management review has become an annual feature for all academics at my university.

Job security of a permanent position with benefits has been replaced, in many instances, with part-time, temporary or short-term contract posts with little or no job security (Bourdieu, 1998). I see this in my field of work which is as an academic at a university. Permanent tenure is no longer a valid expectation when applying for an academic post. Instead academics are offered short-term contract posts or are employed in part-time positions where they are paid by the hour with no pay over weekends, university vacations or public holidays. To make ends meet, I have seen that such part-time academics often have to work at three or four different part-time jobs to earn a living wage. Von Werlhof (2008) supports my contention by stating that “one job is usually not enough to make a living”. Universities save vast sums of money by not having to pay benefits such as medical aid, pension or a housing allowance to their part-time or short-term contracts workers who cannot accumulate sabbatical leave either. One must question the ethics of such universities.

In 1998 Bourdieu warned that neoliberalism would produce “a reserve army of the unemployed” (unpaged). In 2013 it is blatantly obvious that such an army of the unemployed exists in most countries. In South Africa which has a labour force of 18.3 million, there is an unemployment rate of 24.7%, i.e. 4.6 million people are unemployed, (StatsSA, 2013). In South Africa unemployment largely affects young women, disabled youth and youth in the rural and peri-urban areas (*ibid.*). With such an army of unemployed desperate for work waiting in the wings, compliance of employed workers might be easy to secure.

In the literature neoliberalism seems to evoke powerful emotions in its critics, e.g. Von Werlhof (2008) calls it a ‘weapon of mass destruction’ (unpaged). Giroux (2005, p. 1) speaks about the ‘terror of neoliberalism’. Chipana (2012) argues that “neoliberalism is capitalism in its most brutal and antidemocratic form; it is the total domination of capital over labour” (unpaged). On 16 August 2012 in South Africa, this domination of capital over labour was violently demonstrated by the massacre of 34 striking Marikana miners and 78 wounded at the Lonmin mine by policemen armed with live ammunition.

## Globalisation

Globalisation is a contested term as there is no fixed definition of it. However, it seems to be defined as the economic process of removing barriers to commerce across borders and international capital flows in the service of neoliberalism with its privatisation of resources and services (Makwana, 2006, Von Werlhof, 2008, Quiggin, 2005). The internet has lent great mobility to the flow of money and capital across the planet.

Clarke (2003) states that:

Globalization has been identified as a central force in the remaking of welfare states. Globalization has been seen as marking: the dominance of economics over politics; the power of global capital over nation-states; the installation of markets as dominant institution of co-ordination; and, finally, the “end” or dissolution of nation-states and welfare states (p. 202).

Clarke’s definition shows globalisation as the ‘carrier’ of neoliberalism across borders to install the policies of privatisation and the free market which leads to the collapse of the welfare state and the nation-states. Although the literature agrees on the collapse of the welfare state, there is some contestation about the effect on nation-states.

Globalisation has opened up the world to the mega-corporations and multi-nationals who may design goods in one country (e.g. England), manufacture them in another (e.g. China) and sell them in many other countries. For instance, I am looking at some paper clips I bought in Cape Town whose packaging states “Designed in Australia. Made in China”.

The hegemony of neoliberal globalisation has created enormous wealth for a few and poverty for most. This is seen in South Africa which has the highest income inequality gap in the world (Hodgson, 2012). Outsourcing of jobs to countries where the work may be done more cheaply has led to the destruction of many traditional jobs. Vasudevan (2004) explores the notion of the ‘comparative advantage’ of free trade which argues that each country specialises in producing particular products at relatively lower cost than others and that if a service or goods can be manufactured more cheaply in another country, then it makes common sense to import it than make it locally. This comparative advantage of free trade has led to China becoming *the* global manufacturing giant. Unfortunately, the reality of the situation is that the South African Textile Industry is slowly dying with thousands losing their

jobs and livelihood because of this so-called comparative advantage (Vlok, 2006; Truett and Truett, 2010). In this case it seems that the advantage is all on the side of China.

Several writers question how it is possible that ordinary citizens have acquiesced to this state of affairs. Caperchi (2012) is baffled by the vast majority of citizens all over the world consenting to this neoliberal agenda. He speculates that part of the answer may lie in the TINA statement which has become a 'neoliberal mantra'. TINA stands for 'There Is No Alternative'. Von Werlhof (2008) also points to the influence of TINA on citizens. Caperchi (2012) then links this to Gramsci's statement that "consent to the hegemony does not arise solely out of elites coercing the masses, but through the denial of alternative world-views" (Gramsci in Caperchi, 2012), i.e. views alternate to neoliberalist capitalism. In this way, hegemony assumes a façade of TINA inevitability that cripples all opposition. However, there is opposition in the form of different protest movements across the globe.

Neoliberalism's 'Darwinian world' (Bourdieu, 1998) of 'the survival of the strongest' has bred competition, managerialism and commodification. The free markets create 'niches' and encourage citizens to become super-consumers and afford them the means to consume by giving them access to credit at high interest rates; thus, locking them into cycles of debt.

This neoliberalist, capitalist and globalised world is what the world is like. On this note I move from the general to a separate section on neoliberalism and higher education in order to come closer to answering my critical realist question about generic graduate attributes in higher education.

## **Neoliberalism and higher education**

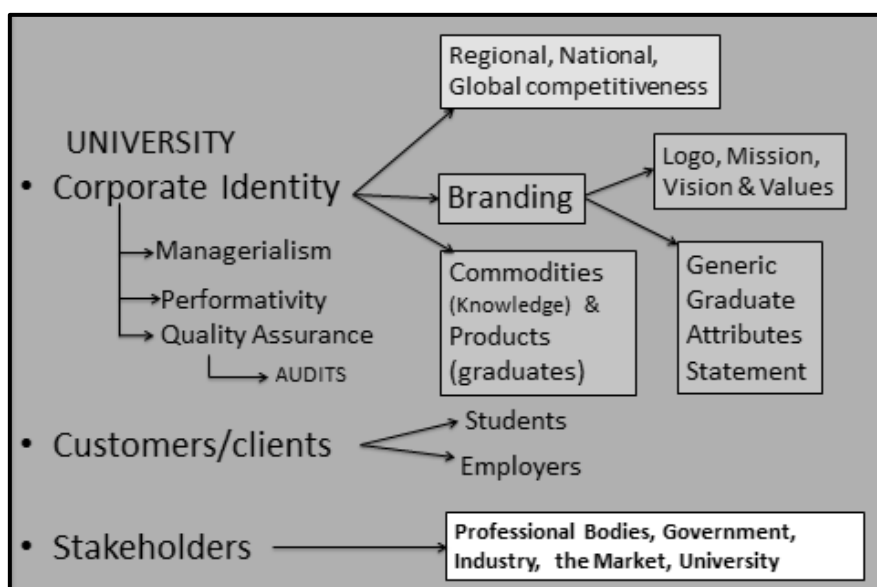
There are very close ties between neoliberalism and higher education which has been suborned to its ends. This is well attested in academic literature (e.g. Giroux, 2012, 2011; Lynch, 2005; Baatjes, 2005; Molla, 2005; Torres and Schugurensky, 2002; Singh, 2001).

The term 'academic capitalism' has been used for this close relationship between higher education and neoliberal capitalism. Rhoades and Slaughter (2004) explain the term to mean higher education institutions (HEI) engaging in "market and market-like behaviours" which raise income to fund the HEI's operations. The essence of market-like behaviours is competitiveness; thus we have seen the rise of university league tables and fierce competition

between institutions for a share of the available student pool with expensive media advertisement campaigns, for instance. Lynch (2005, p. 2) points out that the “pace, intensity and moral legitimacy” of the marketization and commercialisation of higher education is different from earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century commercialisation when the sciences, particularly in America, became more commercial. It would appear that a common-sense view has come to prevail that regards this commercialisation of higher education as normal and, therefore, legitimate (*ibid.*).

Under the influence of neoliberalism universities have become commercialised, commodified and corporatized (Giroux, 2002; Lynch, 2005; Chomsky, 2013). A very obvious example of this corporatization can be seen in one large South African university having a ‘Client Services Centre’ which “provides integrated and technologically advanced service through customer relationship management” (as stated on this university’s website). Here students have been relegated to the status of customers who are buying a service. There are implications attached to this – the status of the university becomes that of a ‘service provider’, while students are not seekers of knowledge but, in the first place, clients buying a service or a product.

As corporates, universities now have mission and value statements and develop their own brand when marketing themselves in an ever more competitive environment. Figure 4.1 shows this corporatisation.



**Figure 4.1:** Corporatisation of universities

Figure 4.1 shows how a corporatized university builds up a corporate identity by ‘building its brand’ through its logo, mission, vision and value statements. It positions itself competitively on regional, national and global levels. The commodification of knowledge has led to university graduates being seen as products of the university. The graduates are reified and depersonalised in the sense that graduate-as-product comes with a corporate statement of generic graduate attributes of this product upon delivery to the work-place. It is as if the statement of generic graduate attributes were the ‘guarantee’ that the university attaches to its products. The statement of generic graduate attributes serves the purpose of branding its product.

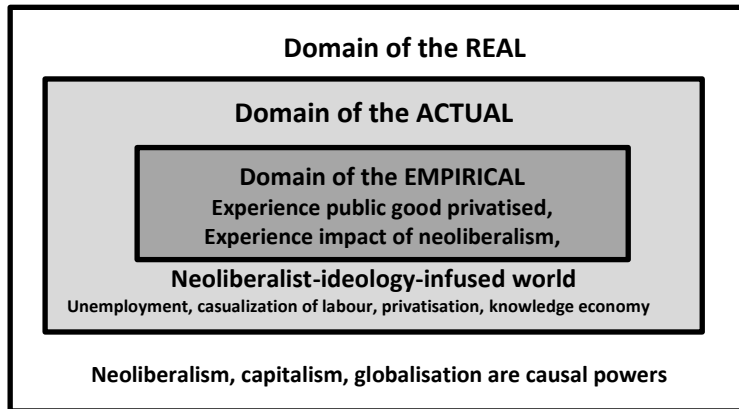
A new corporate discourse has risen around the corporatisation of universities as they have become increasingly managerialised. At the university where I work, there is talk of line-managers, quality audits, performance management reviews, subject reviews, mark reviews, programme reviews meeting targets, the marketing of departments and disciplines. Included in the discourse is the notion of quality assurance and quality audits of subjects, departments and the university itself. Jonathan (2006) points out that under apartheid with its complex system of separate education departments for each racial group, there was no single system that could be subjected to quality assurance; hence quality audits were not required.

### **Answering the critical realist question: “What must the world be like for graduate attributes to exist?”**

From the excursus into neoliberalism and globalisation, it has become clear that the westernised world is one of neoliberalist capitalism and globalisation. This is the world in which graduate attributes exist. Higher education, too, has been affected. Corporatisation, managerialism, competitiveness and quality assurance with its audits and reviews have entered higher education which has become commodified. This is the world of higher education in which graduate attributes exist.

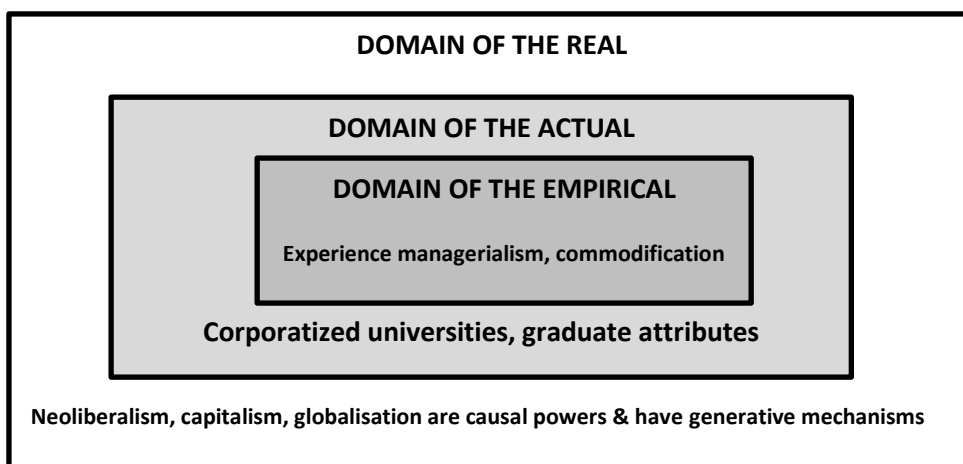
In critical realist terms, neoliberalism and globalisation exist in the Real domain of critical realism’s depth ontology. In the domain of the Real, neoliberalism, capitalism and globalisation are causal powers and have generative mechanisms that cause events to emerge in the domain of the Actual. The Actual event that emerges is a world dominated by

neoliberalist ideology with its knowledge economy. On the Empirical level everyone who lives in a neoliberal society experiences its impact every day. This depth ontology is depicted in Figure 4.2.



**Figure 4.2** Neoliberalism, capitalism, globalisation as causal powers in REAL domain

If we apply this to higher education, then it is clear that in the Real domain the same causal powers and generative mechanisms of neoliberalism, capitalism and globalisation exist. From them there emerge universities that are corporatized and commodified in the domain of the Actual. The academic staff experience this event of the corporatized university in many ways in the domain of the Empirical as they encounter managerialism, and find themselves having to market their department and subjects; having to draw up business plans for their departments; experience casualization of labour. Staff are subject to close scrutiny in terms of performance management reviews, programme reviews, and subject reviews where their heads of department and deans are now their line managers. In terms of teaching and learning lecturers have to incorporate graduate attributes into their subjects, teach them and assess them. The students find themselves measured in terms of these graduate attributes.



**Figure 4.3** Universities and graduate attributes in depth ontology

Figure 4.3 shows neoliberalism, capitalism and globalisation as causal powers on Real level. Corporatized universities emerge on Actual level which is then experienced by staff and students on Empirical level. Graduate attributes have emerged on the level of the Actual as a result of this neoliberalist, capitalist and globalised world through the neoliberalist commodification of the university. In this corporatized university which has close ties with the world of work graduate attributes are necessary to ensure that the marketplace/world of work receives graduates who will meet the high expectations of employers. This shows that *the ontological status of graduate attributes is an emergent entity in the domain of the Actual having emerged from the causal powers and generative mechanisms of neoliberalism, capitalism and globalisation in the domain of the Real.*

#### **4.4 Critique of Graduate Attributes**

In the uncritical literature graduate attributes are mostly regarded as a *fait accompli* within higher education of the westernised world. Graduate attributes are seen as neutral. In the GA discourse students are reified in the sense that they are regarded as products of higher education and the individual being of a student is not considered. They are not seen as beings with individual attitudes and characteristics. However, Barnett (2004, 2010) is an important voice of dissent. Barnett (2000, 2004, 2009a, 2009b, 2010) takes an ontological approach and talks about students knowing, being and doing within higher education.

Barnett (2004) comments:

Generic skills, by definition, are those that surely hold across manifold situations, even unknown ones. I want to suggest, however, that the idea of skills, even generic skills, is a cul-de-sac. In contrast, the way forward lies in construing and enacting a pedagogy for human being. In other words, learning for an unknown future has to be a learning understood neither in terms of knowledge or skills but of human qualities and dispositions. Learning for an unknown future calls, in short, for an ontological turn (Barnett, 2004, p. 247).

This is a radical movement away from sets of skills and lists of competencies towards an ontological perspective. Barnett (2010) states that “the main educational challenge in a world of uncertainty is that neither of knowledge nor of skills but of *being*”, (p. 61 original emphasis). Using this approach, higher education is not merely a process of obtaining a

qualification, but it is the start of “a personal voyage of human becoming” (*ibid.*) in which new relationships with the world are forged. When students report that doing a course or gaining some knowledge has changed their lives, we have to do with an ontological change in the student. As Barnett says “what is being brought out here are changes in human being as such” (2010, p. 62). This change is a very important part of being human, because it is linked to our identity and to our self. Without change we could not grow or develop. Recognising that people change prevents reifying them. Bhaskar (1993) links change to absence and absenting of what was a given and replacing it with something new.

I follow Barnett in his ontological approach to the question of graduate attributes, because in researching graduate attributes over a period of years I came to realise that generic graduate attributes have no significance, but the traits and attitudes/dispositions do. I see a disposition as a way of being and a trait as an aspect of a disposition. I came to the latter realisation while researching graduate attributes in the Emergency Medical Science department. When I came to read Barnett’s excellent work, I realised that my traits and dispositions were akin to his qualities and dispositions. In this way I moved to an ontological stance regarding students’ process of becoming and being. Barnett regards this process of becoming a professional as forming “dispositions and qualities characteristic of the practices in the different fields of knowledge” (2009a, p. 435) which is an ontological stance. He distinguishes between qualities and dispositions in the following manner. Dispositions are “those tendencies of human beings to engage in some way with the world around them...they are forms of energy...they furnish a will...they form human beings in a fundamental way” (2009a, p. 433). Qualities are “manifestations of dispositions in the world. They give colour and definition to dispositions...they characterise an individual. They are an individual’s character...e.g. courage, resilience, respect for others...” (2009a, pp. 433-434). This shows the depth of Barnett’s ontological approach.

In critical realist terms I would locate attitudes/dispositions in the dispositional identity of the core constellational identity of an individual where they would have causal powers and generative mechanisms. I would locate traits/qualities in the stratified, embodied personality of an individual.

Together with Barnett I would propose qualities/traits and dispositions/attitudes as a viable alternative to graduate attributes because they are ontological in the sense that they deal with

the *being* of students and are not the external imposition that graduates always will be. Qualities/traits and dispositions/attitudes can be fostered, but not imposed. They become embodied as part of the student and graduate's being. They cannot be assessed or quality assured because each individual student has her/his own geo-history and it in this individual context that the traits and dispositions would be nurtured.

### **An excursus into critiquing a real-life set of graduate attributes**

The following is an example of a statement of graduate attributes from an anonymous South African University of Technology:

We [the UoT] are also cognizant of the fact that a set of graduate attributes has little value unless it is directly linked to teaching and learning practices and becomes part of the ethos of the institution. Nevertheless we agree in broad terms that all our graduates should possess the following attributes.

Our students should be **Technologically Adept** both in the ability to use technology and in their capacity to apply knowledge to real life issues

Our students should be eminently **Employable** because they have a solid disciplinary knowledge base and the capabilities to apply this knowledge

Our students should be **Socially Responsive** in the sense that they should be aware of the important social issues in South Africa and be able to apply their knowledge and skills to address social needs

In line with one of our crosscutting themes, our students should be **Innovative** in their thinking and actions

All our graduates should be **Environmentally Conscious** (Anonymous UoT, 2012, original emphasis).

Although the UoT has the caveat that GAs should be linked to teaching and learning, its list of GAs contain some that would be difficult to embed, teach and assess, e.g. socially responsive, innovative and environmentally conscious. Interestingly, this list of GAs does attempt to bridge the divide between knowledge and skills that had developed over the preceding two decades with its emphasis on knowledge.

In using very general terms to describe the GAs in the list, the UoT does not provide an adequately close enough definition of the attributes. What does it really mean to describe a graduate as “**technologically adept**”? When is one considered to be so? Is it when an Emergency Medical Science graduate can set up an ECG to monitor a patient’s heart and be examined in an OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Examination)? Is the measure of this ‘technological adeptness’ obtaining 100% or 80% or 50% in the OSCE? Will a student who obtains 100% for the OSCE in a closed examination situation, be able to operate with the same technological adeptness under open, unpredictable, high-stress situations when chaos is erupting around her on every side? A graduate attribute seems to raise many questions.

One may say that graduates are **employable**, but in a real-life context, they are only so if there are actually jobs in the economy. In South Africa where millions of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 (including graduates) are unemployed (StatsSA, 2013), and where Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment<sup>59</sup> (B-BBEE) applies, the graduate attribute of employability is not guaranteed to be effective in reality for all graduates no matter how good their disciplinary knowledge is (or their marks). This points to a disconnect between the graduate attribute of employability and the real-life South African context in which the graduate attribute is to be lived out by students upon graduation.

Being aware of social needs in South Africa and being **socially responsive** is highly contestable because in South Africa’s post-apartheid society with its legacy of continuing racism and poverty, a student’s living out of this GA will depend very much on his personal geo-history and socio-economic circumstances and political/ideological leanings. Hence this graduate attribute of social responsibility is not neutral and may mean different things to different people to the point that it becomes meaningless.

How is one to teach and assess “**being innovative**”? It is only through actually knowing, doing and being within professional practice, that one builds up sufficient experience and understanding to develop innovative “*nous*”<sup>60</sup>. It seems unreasonable to expect a young person of 21 or 22 years of age to have enough life-sense to be innovative in thinking and actions. How innovative are the lecturers? Do they set an example of innovative action and

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<sup>59</sup> B-BBEE is a government strategy to “advance economic transformation and to enhance the economic participation of black people in the South African economy” (DTI, 2013).

<sup>60</sup> *Nous* is a Greek word that means mind or intellect, but has gained the additional meaning of “to know how to”.

thinking in their teaching? An individual's culture, gender and geo-history may well influence the degree of innovative thinking in which she is accustomed or prepared to engage, especially in such a multi-cultural country as South Africa.

The final GA is to be '**environmentally conscious**'. Again, this may hold different meanings for different graduates. Being 'environmentally conscious' is an ontological concept, part of one's being and would be acquired during one's primary socialisation. Thus, one's understanding of the environment would depend on one's own geo-history. It is possible to raise students' conscious awareness about the environment in different ways, e.g. by using new media. However, this raises the question of who is the gatekeeper of environmental consciousness, i.e. a lecturer may only present certain environmental issues that she thinks pertinent. Are these, then, the same issues that the UoT, the workplace, the profession, the economy, society think pertinent? What leadership does the UoT give its students and graduates on environmental issues? A debate about whether or not to frack in the Karoo has been raging in South Africa for two years. Fracking is an important environmental issue. However, this particular UoT (as well as other South African higher education institutions) has remained silent about the fracking issue and has offered no guidance or leadership, yet says that its graduates will be environmentally conscious. This dichotomy seems to move generic graduate attributes *ad absurdum*.

This excursus has problematized a particular set of GAs to show what a complex issue it is to set out a statement of generic graduate attributes to be applied to all graduates. It is simply not possible to create one-size-fits-all generic graduate attributes at an institutional level. The critique has shown that although generic graduate attributes are always presented as neutral, they are actually not neutral and they always reify the graduate. One also wonders whether the teachers who are to embed and teach these graduate attributes actually embody them?

**As a final critical aside** I would add that generic graduate attributes are an example of the fallacy of composition in the sense that the proponents of GAs are making a logical error, because they are reasoning from the characteristics of individual members of a class or group to a conclusion regarding the characteristics of the entire class or group (Sayer, 1992; Blackburn, 2005). In other words, by claiming that one graduate will have the graduate attributes of working with accuracy and attention to detail, everyone in the whole group, i.e.

all the graduates of an institution will have the same attributes of working with accuracy and attention to detail, which is neither logical nor sustainable.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has considered different definitions of graduate attributes as well as a brief background to their development. I posed a critical realist question, “what must the world be like for generic graduate attributes to exist” and came to the answer that the world is globalised and neo-liberalist because of which universities have become commodified and corporatized. Thus, it is because of this neoliberalist commodification of universities that graduate attributes have come to exist. Graduate attributes are an ideological construct because they promote neoliberalist capitalism in espousing a close relationship between universities and the workplace, where the latter, especially as professional bodies, can dictate the very graduate attributes a university is to hold.

Graduate attributes are not neutral as shown in the critique of a particular UoT’s set of GAs. South Africa has a very complicated and complex society as a result of its apartheid past and the legacy of apartheid. This alone would make the idea of neutral, apolitical, ahistorical GAs unfeasible. Generic graduate attributes cannot so simplistically be imposed on graduates as universities would wish.

Students and graduates are reified in the quest for one-size-fits-all GAs. Graduate attributes are always an external imposition and that is why they will be difficult to embed, teach and assess. On the contrary, qualities/traits and dispositions/attitudes are ontological because they are part of human *being* and as such can be fostered. In critical realist terms, traits and dispositions would be located in the domain of the Real, i.e. the core constellational identity of an individual. South African universities should make an ontological move towards the idea of graduate *attitudes* which are embodied, rather than attributes which are merely imposed.

The following chapter explores the methodology that has been used in the process of researching and writing this dissertation. The chapter explores the research design employed and the use of critical realism as a way of understanding the data.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 5.1 Introduction

*In this chapter I briefly discuss the methodology employed in this research project. As research methodologies are structured around research questions, I include my research questions here to bring them to mind. Firstly, I discuss the use of critical realism to explore and understand the very complex phenomena of identity and that of graduate attributes and my use of certain critical realist concepts in analysing and interpreting the research data. Then I consider my position as a critical realist researcher. Thereafter, I also explore abstraction, relations and structure. This is followed by a discussion of the research design I have used. I conclude with a discussion of ethics.*

A methodology is a principled and well-argued position about how techniques of research are going to fit a given research topic. Your methodology is a proposed set of techniques combined with the underlying assumptions about the world (the ontology) and the assumptions about how to establish true statements about the world (the epistemology) (Olsen, 2007, p. 2).

With reference to the above quotation, I am a critical realist; hence I have come to my research with a particular bias and underlying assumptions about the world that inform my world view, my thinking, my research and any epistemological claims I may make. This bias is the critical realist understanding of ontology, namely that a stratified reality exists independently of people whether they know about it or not. Furthermore, my stance is a critical one of social justice and emancipation. Similarly, my epistemological bias is critical realist which holds that there are transitive and intransitive objects of knowledge; that knowledge is fallible and that knowledge is socially constructed by agents in a social context.

Critical Realism also holds that epistemology cannot be conflated with ontology (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 232). My methodological stance is one of explaining, understanding and interpreting (Mingers, 2006). Because of my critical realist stance any observations I may make are theory-laden (Sayer, 1992).

I have been greatly inspired by Andrew Sayer's very useful and user-friendly book "*Method in Social Science*" (1992) and his interpretation of methodology as:

a broad view of 'method' which covers the clarification of modes of explanation and understanding, the nature of abstraction as well as the familiar subjects of research design and method of analysis. The terrain of the discussion is therefore the overlap between method, social theory and philosophy... Method is also a practical matter. Methods must be appropriate to the nature of the object we study and the purpose and expectations of our inquiry (1992, pp. 3-4).

Sayer's definition speaks to the different dimensions that are present in my research. Furthermore, his description of method *per se* is important in as much as it points to the alignment of the thing studied, the purpose of the research and the expectations. Sayer adds that method, object and purpose need to be considered in relation to each other.

### **Research Question**

What is the relationship between the emergence of student, graduate and professional identities and graduate attributes and curriculum design in an Emergency Medical Science programme at a University of Technology?

### **Sub-Questions**

- How do student, graduate and professional identities emerge in Emergency Medical Science (EMS) students at a University of Technology?
- What are the implications of the interplay of Structure, Culture and Agency for the emergence of these identities?
- What are the implications of this emergence for the construct of graduate attributes?
- What are the implications for the use of graduate attributes in curriculum design?
- What relationship exists between identity and graduate attributes?

## **5.2 Using critical realism as a mode of understanding and explanation**

Chapter Two has provided an in-depth discussion of critical realism. Thus I will only briefly refer to concepts that relate to my research, data analysis and interpretation, especially retrodution, absence and emergence and truth and knowledge claims.

Using critical realism as a meta-theoretical framework for this research places it firmly within critical realist notions of depth ontology (i.e. the domains of the Real, Actual and Empirical) and epistemology. Hence, everything that has been said and done in this research has as its constant referent that stratified reality exists outside of us whether we are aware of it or not. Christ (2010) comments on critical realism's different levels of reality ranging from the objective, i.e. independent of human understanding, to subjective truths that individuals understand and use in making meaning.

There are primary concepts that are integral to this critical realist stratified depth ontology, namely a new understanding of causation, emergence and the concept of absence/real negation. I find the critical realist understanding of causation to be particularly suited to qualitative research because it allows one to move away from the traditional constant conjunction of cause and effect, to explore various generative mechanisms and causal powers that bring about emergence or absence of emergence. Thus, critical realism does not concentrate on the event observed in the Actual Domain, but on what that event tells us about enduring underlying causal relationships and generative mechanisms in the Real domain (Johnston and Smith, 2011).

### **Retrodution**

To get to the domain of the Real with its causal powers and generative mechanisms, a researcher can use retrodution which Sayer explains as a "...mode of inference in which events are explained by postulating (and identifying) mechanisms which are capable of producing them" (Sayer, 1992, p.107). Using retrodution one can "examine the fundamental structures and properties inherent in participants' experiences resulting in exploratory descriptions and explanations" (Christ, 2010). Olsen states that "retrodution involves asking 'why' about the evidence, about the theories and about the causes of the thing itself" (2009, p. 7). Easton (2010) offers a useful explanation: "retrodution is a metaprocess the outcome

of which is the identification of mechanisms that explain what caused particular events to occur” (p. 124). All of these definitions point to a process of identifying causal powers and generative mechanisms in the domain of the Real to explain events or phenomena in the domain of the Actual. Quite simply, I like to think of retrodution as “thinking backwards” from the Empirical to the Actual to the Real domain to explore what is really going on in terms of casual powers in the domain of the Real.

## **Emergence**

The concept of emergence is itself very important to a critical realist understanding of an event or phenomenon because it moves change away from the action of an agent and shows that real change lies in the emergence or absence that the underlying causal powers bring about. What I mean here can be illustrated by contrasting the concept of emergence with the notion of construction, e.g. an identity emerges as opposed to an identity being constructed. The latter presupposes someone/an agent as the constructor, while an agent cannot construct/grow/develop/form emergence which occurs through the action of causal powers and generative mechanisms in the domain of the Real. What emerges is different to that from which it emerged, and cannot be reduced to it although it can react back on it (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 397).

By asking a critical realist question “what must the world be like for this event/phenomenon to exist?” and using retrodution and abstraction, we can come to an understanding of the underlying structures and the generative mechanisms in the domain of the Real. Using this stratified depth ontology, critical realist notions of causation and emergence to understand graduate attributes, have led me to a completely different understanding of graduate attributes because I have not confined my experience of graduate attributes to the Empirical domain, but have sought their ontology in the domain of the Real.

## **Knowledge and truth claims**

As a researcher my truth and knowledge claims are conditioned by my theoretical stance, which is critical realism. Thus, as a critical realist my truth and knowledge claims are both theory-laden and value-laden. Any knowledge claim in critical realist terms would be fallible because the basic tenet of critical realism is that many objects can exist independently of

“particular knowledges or claims about them” (Sayer, 2011, p. 47). Critical realism maintains the ontological reality of social systems, but recognises that our knowledge of them has cultural and historical epistemological limits (Mingers, 2006). I would add to this that we also have agential limits because each agent with her own unique geo-history knows and understands differently. Archer (2004) comments that our judgements are socio-historically situated and conditioned by our current knowledge and criteria of evaluation (p. 4). Thus, something may exist, but our knowledge and interpretation of it will always be fallible because we can never know its total reality and we are limited by our own knowledge or lack thereof and by the criteria we set ourselves to understand the event or phenomenon and by our conceptual mediation of it. All knowledge is fallible, but it is not equally so (Sayer, 1992, 68). This is explained by Bhaskar (1993; 1998a; 2007) in his notions of epistemological relativism (consistent with the transitive dimension) and judgemental rationality (consistent with the intransitive dimension) (1993, p. 218). The former refers to the beliefs that we hold as being relative in terms of our geo-historical, social and economic conditioning and positioning. The latter means that when we choose one belief/judgement above another, we have to be clear why we chose that particular belief or claim about reality above other beliefs/claims.

Groff (in Hartwig, 2007) explains that there is no single agreement in critical realism on the concept of truth and that it has changed over time (p. 487). Bhaskar posits a complex ‘truth tetrapoly’, i.e. four components of truth:

- (i) truth as *normative-fiduciary*, truth in the ‘trust me – act on it’ sense;
- (ii) truth as *adequating* as ‘warrantedly assertable’, as epistemological, as relative in the transitive dimension;
- (iii) truth as *referential-expressive*, a bipolar ontic-epistemic dual, and in this sense as absolute; and
- (iv) truth as *alethic*, as the truth, ground or reason for *things* and phenomena, *not propositions*, as genuinely ontological, and in this sense as objective in the intransitive dimension (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 217).

Examples of these would be the following statements:

- (i) **It’s raining outside.** (“You can trust me. What I say is true so you can act on it – take your umbrella”.)

- (ii) **The rainstorm caused a flash-flood.** (This assertion can be checked, i.e. ‘warranted’ as true.)
- (iii) **Rain is formed in clouds.** (We know this is true. Science has proved this.)
- (iv) **Water consists of hydrogen and oxygen.** (The alethic truth of water is its generative mechanisms: energy that works to arrange and combine the molecules of hydrogen and oxygen in a particular fashion). Groff states, “the alethic truth of frozen water would be its molecular structure”, i.e. its generative mechanisms (Groff in Hartwig, 2007, p. 487).

In my research I am mainly exploring the fourth aspect of truth, namely what are the causal powers and generative mechanisms at work that lead to emergence or absence of identity. However, in my academic reading and researching documents (such as the HPCSA protocols), speaking to others (lecturers and students), and working with the transcriptions the other aspects of truth have come into play as well.

### **5.3 Positioning myself as a researcher**

There is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one’s biases. And if you do not appreciate the force of what you’re leaving out, you are not fully in command of what you’re doing (Rose, 1985, p. 77 in Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 55).

In light of my stance as a critical realist, I accept that it is not possible for a researcher to be neutral because each individual has particular personal stances that have developed over time within his/her socialisation. Compounding this lack of neutrality is the notion that one is on the inside of the knowledge researched, or one is on the outside. In the academic literature a great deal has been written about the insider-outsider positioning of a researcher (e.g. Hellowell, 2006; Eppley, 2006; Breen, 2007; Keval, 2009; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009 among many others). The term ‘insider-research’ refers to the researcher being a member of the group being researched and, thus, having certain membership status as well as some shared identity, experience and language (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Keval, 2009). In contrast, in ‘outsider-research’ the researcher is not part of the group being researched and thus comes in cold. The benefits and drawbacks of both positions have been argued in the literature. Drew (2006) takes a rather strong position on researchers as outsiders whom he refers to as

'seagulls' with the explanation that "a 'seagull' is a researcher or consultant who flies into a community; craps all over everything then leaves the community to tidy up the mess" (p. 40). I have endeavoured in my research not to be a seagull.

This binary position of insider on the one side and outsider on the other side has been contested. Eppley (2006, p. 1) offers "a re-conceptualization of insider/outsider positioning, not as a fixed and binary positioning, but an unsettled, tenuous positionality situated within a continuum". Here Eppley follows Hellowell (2006, p. 488) who regards the researcher as moving on "a continuum from insider to outsider". Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 61) propose a space between the outside and the inside because "our perspective is shaped by our position as researcher (which includes having read much literature on the topic)". I would agree with the idea that a researcher occupies a changing space between outsider and insider rather than a fixed one of either insider or outsider. I found that when I initially started my research, I felt like an outsider although my son had studied to be a paramedic. However, the more people I interviewed, the more interactions I had with students in focus groups, the more I learned by reading into the discipline, the more students and staff within the EMS recognised me and what I was doing there, the more I started feeling that I was no longer a complete outsider; but was beginning to move along the inside-outsider continuum.

My initial positionality was rather unusual in that my son Xavier had studied to be a paramedic completing his National Diploma in Emergency Medicine at the same UoT where I was doing my research and where I work. He then went to work as a paramedic for a private company providing emergency medical services in another town while simultaneously doing his B.Tech. degree part-time with the same UoT. Thus, I had been exposed to the study of emergency medicine and the job of paramedic through my son during his studies.

I was welcomed into the EMS department at the UoT for two reasons, (i) because of my son's very engaged studies in the department, and (ii) because I was a lecturer at the same UoT, but in a different department. It happened that everyone I interviewed knew my son, if not personally, at least by name or reputation. I have thought about this a great deal and am aware that it gave me a vicarious insider status through my son. This could have influenced the research by the type of relationship that the interviewee or focus group participant had with my son, i.e. whether they liked him or not and so how they might project this onto our research relationship. However, in the interviews and focus groups, I managed to establish

rapport with the respondents on my own cognizance and found that the participants related to me personally.

### **My assumptions**

As research is a lived and living process, the parameters change and the boundaries shift. I came into the research with certain assumptions that proved incorrect; hence, I had to change ideas and strategies.

For instance, I had originally assumed that the students would be a homogenous group in terms of their age and experience. However, I was wrong. The students were diverse in every way possible – age, experience, culture, religion, home language, and socio-economic grouping. I dropped my assumption and dealt with the students as they presented.

Another assumption that I had to change was that I could easily use free-writing (Elbow, 1973) as a research instrument to access the student voice, but it did not turn out that way. Thus, I had to abandon this idea because the process of free-writing took up too much time as the students were completely unfamiliar with it and many were writing in English which was not their home language. Therefore, I was loth to spend fifteen minutes of my focus group time on explaining freewriting and asking them to free-write. I discovered that having a conversation and letting the students talk, listen and debate with one another was a more effective and productive way of hearing their student voice than free-writing.

Another mistaken assumption, namely that time would be readily available for everyone concerned, turned into a lead balloon. I discovered that time was very restricted by the participants' schedules as well as my own; hence, finding a time that would suit both the participants and myself became a very difficult task. It would have been much easier if I had been on sabbatical with much available time.

### **5.4 Of abstraction, relations and structure**

Sayer (1992, p. 87) defines abstraction as “the activity of identifying particular constituents and their effects” when dealing with wholes. Sayer (*ibid.*) posits a double movement in

abstraction when working with concrete<sup>61</sup> events or objects, from the concrete to the abstract and back again from the abstract to the concrete. Abstraction is necessary to identify the relations of constituents. There are different kinds of relations as shown below in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1** Relations

Type of relation	Relation
<b>Formal relations</b>	Relations of similarity and dissimilarity where two tokens are either similar or dissimilar.
<b>Substantial relations</b>	Relations of connection and interaction. Things that are connected need not be similar and vice versa.
<b>External/contingent relations</b>	Objects can exist without one another; it is neither necessary nor impossible that they stand in relation.
<b>Internal/necessary relations</b>	What the object is, is dependent on its relation to the other e.g. a landlord and a tenant relation is internal and necessary because for there to be a tenant there has to be a landlord and vice versa.
<b>Asymmetric internal relations</b>	One object in relation can exist without the other, but not vice versa e.g. money and a bank, i.e. one can have and use money without having a bank account, but a bank cannot exist without money.

(Source: created from Sayer, 1992, p. 89)

Thus, when talking of relationship, it is important to understand the type of relationship by looking at its components and determining what kind of relations are at play. This can only be done by applying the process of abstraction. My main research question inquires after the *relationship* between the emergence of student, graduate and professional identities and graduate attributes and curriculum design in an Emergency Medical Science programme at a University of Technology. It is in this area where I need to look at what kind of relations are operating and why they are. I find Sayer’s lucid explanation of relations most helpful in teasing out the interplay between the constituents.

The use of abstraction is important to identify structures which “can be defined as sets of internally related objects or practices” (Sayer, 1992, p. 92) beyond social structures, such as a town or a university. The term ‘structure’ can also include conceptual structures and non-social ones such as biological structures (*ibid.*). Archer (1995) concurs with Sayer’s point that abstraction is important to identify structure and uses analytical dualism to separate “the parts and the people to analyse the interplay between them” (p. 184). Bhaskar (1993) states, “the

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<sup>61</sup> When using the term ‘concrete’ Sayer explains that this does not only refer to “everything that exists”, but that ‘concrete’ also refers to the processes, influences and properties that constitute the concrete, any of which may be abstracted in thought (1992, 87).

structure of a thing is constituted by its causal powers, which when exercised manifest themselves as tendencies. A structure will typically be instantiated in a multiplicity of structurata” (p. 404), for example society has economic, social, political and ideological structurata. The causal powers and generative mechanisms of structures are located in the domain of the Real. Olsen defines structure as a whole having “emergent properties that differ from the properties of the things inside the structure ... Thus the word ‘structure’ when used by a realist, usually refers to both the internal organisation of something and to the relations between that thing’s parts that make it work/act the way it typically does” (Olsen, 2009, p. 8). An agent can either reproduce or transform structure which always pre-exists the agent (Bhaskar, 1993).

## **5.5 Research Design**

Sayer (2000, pp. 20-22) states that there are two main categories of research: extensive and intensive. Extensive research employs large-scale surveys, questionnaires and statistical analyses, while intensive research employs qualitative research focussing on agents using interviews to question what causes change, seeking to understand processes and what agents do. This research project falls within the intensive research category.

This research is qualitative and has taken the form of a basic case study focussing on complex phenomena in real-life contexts while using several sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). The complex phenomena are identity, curriculum, graduate attributes, the transition from graduate to professional identity and the relationships entailed. The real-life contexts are the EMS department within a South African UoT, its EMS programmes, culture and curriculum, and professional practice. The primary sources of evidence are the EMS department lecturers, undergraduate and postgraduate students, CREMS Academy lecturers and students as well as professional paramedics, emergency care workers and managers in both the private and public (CREMS) services. The secondary sources of evidence are the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) particularly the documents relating to EMS, numerous articles, reports and books, as well as the EMS curricula, examples of policy briefs and the Three-Peaks handbook supplied to me by the EMS department.

Nieuwenhuis states that case study research is aimed at “gaining greater insight into and understanding of the dynamics of a situation” (2007, p. 75). A case study approach was

chosen because it would allow me to come to understand the dynamics of the structure, culture and agency at play in the EMS department. I made the assumption that structure, culture and agency play an important role in the emergence of the different identities as well as the traits and characteristics that emerge in the students as a result of this interaction. Furthermore, I chose to use a case study because it deals in in-depth description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit (Merriam, 2002, p. 8) and allows a researcher to explore a phenomenon in its context using different sources of data (Baxter and Jack, 2008). The approach that I used of analytical narrative, analysis and conceptual re-description provided opportunity for this in-depth description and analysis required in case study research. Easton (2010) in writing about critical realist case study research holds that explanation is the fundamental aim of critical realism because it requires the researcher to answer questions by looking at causal powers and structures. I would concur with Easton because a critical realist researcher uses retrodution to try to explore the causal powers in the domain of the Real. To shed light on my inquiry I used several sources of data such as student focus groups, interviews, curricula and HPCSA documents. Hence, in exploring the questions of identity and graduate attributes I used a student lens, an academic staff lens, a professional paramedic lens as well as documentation to find explanations within causal powers and generative mechanisms.

There has been criticism of case study research, namely that its results are not generalizable to a broader context or to real life (Tellis, 1997, unpagged). Flyvbjerg (2006) examines and repudiates five misunderstandings about case-study research. The five are:

*Misunderstanding 1:* General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge.

*Misunderstanding 2:* One cannot generalize on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development.

*Misunderstanding 3:* The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building.

*Misunderstanding 4:* The case study contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions.

*Misunderstanding 5:* It is often difficult to summarize and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 221).

In summary, Flyvbjerg states that these misunderstandings indicate that theory, reliability and validity are at issue; “in other words, the very status of the case study as a scientific method” (*ibid.*).

After much exposition Flyvbjerg turns Misunderstanding One on its head concluding that “predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs” (p. 224).

Based on examples taken from several writers such as Giddens, Galileo, Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Beckhofer and Platt as well as Beveridge, Blaug, Kuhn and Popper in Misunderstanding Two, Flyvbjerg argues that generalisation on the basis of one case is possible and central to scientific development by way of “generalisation as supplement or alternative to other methods” (p. 228). He sees formal generalisation as over-rated. He sees Misunderstanding Three as arising from the previous Misunderstandings in One and Two and concludes that “the case study is useful for both generating and testing of hypotheses but is not limited to these research activities alone” (p. 229). In Misunderstanding Four Flyvbjerg states that as a researcher moves from beginner to expert, simpler forms of understanding yield to more complex ones and that the researcher often has to rid him/herself of preconceived ideas (p. 237). With regard to Misunderstanding Five, case studies often contain narrative which may be difficult to summarise. However, Flyvbjerg states that this may indicate a “particularly rich problematic” uncovered by the case study (*ibid.*) which calls summarising and generalisation into question. In conclusion, Flyvbjerg states that the conventional wisdom about case study research is “wrong or misleading” (p. 241).

## **Research sites**

There were three sites of research. The primary site was located within the Department of Emergency Medical Science at a South African University of Technology (UoT). My research initiative was warmly welcomed and supported by the Head of the Emergency Medical Science Department and the other members of staff. I am very grateful for their support and willingness to grant me access to their students, their department and their knowledge.

The secondary site was within *the Emergency Medical Care Services* where professional paramedics in both the public sector (CREMS<sup>62</sup> which is the local government Emergency Services) and the private sector (COMPANY A) work. The professional body, the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) oversees work in the emergency health care services, and its documentation and information pertaining to paramedics were vital.

Thirdly, I would like to mention another very important site of research, namely *desk-top research*. I could never have contemplated this research project without extensive desk-top research because I was coming into the research and research sites as an outsider in the sense that I personally had no knowledge of pre-hospital emergency medical care as I had never studied it formally. Therefore, I had to build up my knowledge before engaging with the EMS staff and students. I immersed myself into the Emergency Medical Care Services (EMCS) domain by downloading and reading many papers, theses and reports on pre-hospital emergency medicine and perusing websites so that I could understand the discipline. I also had to learn the terminology of the discipline, the ‘insider-speak’, which consists of many acronyms, e.g. medical terms – MI: Medical Infarction and others like BAA – Basic Ambulance Assistant.

## **Participant selection**

The student participants were selected as randomly as possible in all cases except one. I asked the course co-ordinator concerned at the UoT for a list of students in the course, e.g. first-year students and then randomly chose names from the list which I then emailed to the course co-ordinator. The one exception was the organising committee of the Three-Peaks Rescue 48-hour exercise whom I invited to a focus group. However, it turned out that the committee was large and only a few members volunteered for the focus group. In this way I managed to have focus groups with students from every course and level in the EMS department: BEMC I, National Diploma I, II and III, B.Tech. as well as ECT I and II.

I tried to interview as many staff in the EMS department at the UoT as possible. I interviewed the Head of Department, five lecturers and a technical assistant. I could not interview the remaining two lecturers due to time constraints. One of the lecturers I interviewed on two

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<sup>62</sup> CREMS is a fictitious name for the local government public emergency medical service and stands for City Rescue Emergency Medical Service.

occasions. Where clarification on any points in the interview was necessary, I emailed respondents.

## **Data generation**

Data gathering comes with a caveat: Be aware of the influence of the researcher on the research and the researched (Barbour, 2007). With this caveat in mind, I endeavoured to bring a high level of reflexivity to the research process, so that I might become conscious of the influence I might be exerting on the research, especially during the interviews and the focus groups.

Data gathering is an iterative process in that I was asking the same questions of different groups of people or individuals. I used two principle methods of gathering data from participants, namely focus groups and personal conversational interviews. Barbour has created a broad definition of focus groups, “any group discussion may be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging of and attentive to the group interaction” (2007, p.2). The important point here is that the researcher not only has to moderate the discussion, but also has to observe the interactions within the group and pay particular attention to the process that is taking place and the insights generated which may be different to what the researcher had originally anticipated. This calls for setting up effective stimulus topics and allowing the group dynamics to flow. I found Barbour’s description of focus groups to be accurate in that I had to moderate the discussion, particularly for those students who were more vocal and dominant. I observed the interactions among the group and drew in students who were keeping quiet by sitting on the side-lines of the discussion.

Following Lather’s approach to qualitative research (1991), the interviews with the EMS staff and the professional paramedics were open-ended, dialogic and collaborative in trying to come to a mutual understanding of the underlying generative mechanisms at work in identity emergence. I hoped that this interactive approach would encourage what Lather (1991, p. 58) calls ‘reciprocal reflexivity’ which means that both the researcher and the participants engage in reflection in such a way that they feed back their thoughts and understanding to each other so that they might negotiate a shared meaning and common understanding.

These focus group sessions and interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. The interviews and focus groups were generally one hour in length, but I found that often the participants would want to speak longer, especially the students who really enjoyed the focus groups once they settled into the rhythm of the process. Before starting the actual interviews and focus groups, I did an hour-long pilot run with a second-year EMS student to check the questions and prompts I wished to use.

I consulted the website of Company A to download its mission and vision statements. I downloaded EMS protocols and relevant documentation from the Health Professions Council of South Africa's (HPCSA) website.

## **Focus Groups**

A focus group consists of participants who are guided via a facilitated discussion. A set of open-ended questions initiates focus group discussions. The facilitator can steer the participants back to the focus group questions or go along with the direction of the focus group discussions, depending on the research questions posed. Focus groups concentrate on a clearly defined topic, and efforts are made to gather information and opinions from group members (Leung and Savithiri. 2009, p. 218).

The above definition stipulates that a focus group is a facilitated discussion that guides participants by means of open-ended questions. The facilitator can guide the conversation back to the question or move with the flow of the discussion. Billson (2006, p. 3) adds that the cross-fertilization of ideas happening in a well-facilitated focus group may generate insights that would not otherwise occur without the group interaction.

There are several advantages to using a focus group, i.e. it is inexpensive and participants may provide more candid responses (*ibid.*). Leung and Savithiri make an interesting point that participants may “build on each other’s ideas by ‘piggybacking’” (2009, p. 219). This proved to be true in the focus groups conducted for this study.

There are also disadvantages to focus groups, namely the role of the facilitator is crucial in eliciting discussion and guiding the group discussion so that everyone joins in. Thus, the facilitator needs to be experienced in guiding groups. It may happen that one or two dominant

voices take over the discussion silencing the voices of the other participants. Here the role of the facilitator is crucial in giving each participant an opportunity to speak. In addition, the large amounts of data that are generated and transcribed verbatim may be difficult to analyse (*ibid.*). Billson (2006, p. 6) refers to the large amounts of data produced by focus groups as “mountains of words”. Difficulties within the focus group may arise from cultural differences among the participants (Billson, 2009, p. 9). This caveat is particularly relevant in the South African context which is multilingual and multicultural. Billson advises the facilitator to plan carefully for these cultural differences and language difficulties (*ibid.*).

I conducted nine focus groups with the EMS students at the UoT across all levels of study from first-year to B.Tech. fourth year. In total there were 48 EMS student-participants in the focus groups. These focus groups were, indeed, multilingual and multicultural, as they comprised students of different ethnic groups, languages, religions and ages. In terms of the language question, if there was a difficulty with an English question, I was able to rephrase it in Afrikaans (as many of the participants were Afrikaans-speaking). For any difficulty expressed by a Xhosa student, I would ask another Xhosa student to explain in isiXhosa.

What I found was that initially the students in the focus groups were rather withdrawn and often said what they felt that I would like to hear or what they thought was the “correct” thing to say. It was only as the students relaxed and realised that the confidentiality I had promised them was real that they opened up to me. This would often happen after a fellow student had taken the risk of speaking openly and honestly about a topic that was on everyone’s minds. Consistently in all the focus groups, the most important moment in the group discussion was when one participant made her/himself vulnerable and took a risk in saying out loud what many in the group were also thinking (as usually transpired from the discussion following the participant’s “risky” statement).

## **Interviews**

Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008) state that “the purpose of a research interview is to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters” (p. 292). Before an interview the participant should be informed about ethical principles like confidentiality and anonymity (*ibid.*). Opdenakker (2006) points to the synchronous nature of face-to-face interviews which allows the interviewer access to non-

verbal social cues such as facial expressions, tone of voice and body language of the interviewee. These afford the interviewer much information beyond the verbal. In turn, the interviewer has to be able to listen carefully while adopting “open and emotionally neutral body language, nodding, smiling, looking interested and making encouraging noises” (Gill *et al.*, 2008, p. 292). A further advantage of face-to-face semi-structured or unstructured interviews is that the interviewer can react immediately to what the interviewee says or does (*ibid.*). There are disadvantages to interviews; the main one is that they are time-consuming. Another is that the audio-recording has to be transcribed which is a lengthy process. Even though the interview is being audio-recorded the interviewer should make field-notes to help later in the data analysis (Gill *et al.*, 2008, p. 293).

I conducted personal semi-structured interviews with the Head of the EMS Department at the UoT, a senior lecturer, four lecturers and a technical assistant. These interviews were between 45 minutes and one hour long. They were audio-recorded with the participants’ consent. I interviewed the senior lecturer twice. I emailed the Head of Department with any queries that I had.

In the staff interviews, the lecturers seemed to be hesitant initially, but then warmed to their topic. It occurred to me that this might be because I was not only a researcher, but also a fellow lecturer and academic who (they felt) might scrutinise and judge them. However, as the interview proceeded they too relaxed and all the staff interviews were enjoyable and informative.

In Company A, I interviewed two paramedics, an Emergency Care Technician and a manager. These interviews were each an hour in duration.

In CREMS I interviewed a senior lecturer. I also interviewed 6 paramedics. Two of these were also managers. There was cross-pollination with some CREMS staff because they were working as CREMS paramedics and managers, but they were also doing the B.Tech. course part-time.

## **Transcription**

I did the transcription of the recorded focus group discussions and personal interviews myself for two reasons. Firstly, I regarded transcription as the very first level of analysis and a way of immersing myself in the data so that it might ‘speak’ to me in my close listening. Secondly, I wanted to maintain the confidentiality of the participants as I had assured them that I would be doing the transcription myself. For the transcription I used Express Scribe software.

Gibson and Brown (2009) make an interesting point: “Transcription is perhaps best thought of as an approach to generating analytic focus, of pointing to particular features of data and of filtering out less important ones” (p. 111). I found this this statement to be true, especially because I was doing the transcription myself. Importantly, as the researcher, I needed to be aware that the way I filtered and what I filtered influenced the research.

While transcribing the interviews, I built up a matrix of important points and themes that were emerging from the interviews. In the matrix, I noted the recording time of important points so that I could go back and listen to the nuances of what was being said in the interview or focus group at any time. In this way I constructed a physical overview of the first analysis of the data.

When all the recordings had been transcribed, I encoded the data using qualitative data analysis software, NVIVO 10. I found the software very helpful and made four sweeps with the data on NVIVO 10 to refine the nodes into themes that I could work with when analysing the data. I found that encoding the data was a process of abstraction that reduced it to sets of essential characteristics which were very helpful in the analysis.

## **Challenges in gathering data**

I had already received ethics clearance from Rhodes University, but as the primary site was the UoT, I had to apply for ethics clearance from their Ethics Committee. Thus the first challenge came in having to wait three months for ethics approval from the UoT’s Ethics Committee because my application got lost between the ethics committee and its secretary.

This delayed the start of the data gathering in the EMS department at the UoT. However, the EMS department was very supportive.

My biggest constraint was time – both my own time and that of the participants because the EMS department like my own at the same UoT runs classes from 08h30 to 16h00 after which it is difficult to get hold of students and staff. Thus, time constraints hampered my access to participants. I had to fit in the interviews between my own heavy teaching schedule (22 contact teaching hours per week together with class preparation and marking) and the schedules of the participants. At no time during my research did I have the benefit of a sabbatical because I am employed on one-year contracts which do not entitle one to a sabbatical.

When I applied for permission to interview staff at the private companies which are EMS service providers, the first company, whom I shall call Company A, also took three months to respond with approval – again there appeared to have been a lack of communication within the company. Company B never responded to any of my several requests for permission and did not even acknowledge my approaches. In consultation with my supervisors, I decided to work only with Company A as representative of private service providers. When I had the necessary approval in place, I approached Company A and found them very helpful and their staff made themselves available to me for interviews.

When I applied to the local government emergency service, CREMS, for permission, I received it immediately from the person in charge of CREMS. However, a couple of weeks later I received an email from the person in charge of the emergency medical care services in the entire province putting a halt on my research until my research proposal and ethics clearance had once again been scrutinised by him personally. This took a few weeks, but I was finally given the necessary approval. I had arranged to interview the principal of the CREMS College where the CREMS staff are trained. The principal's secretary confirmed the time and date; however, when I arrived at the college the principal told me that she did not feel like being interviewed by me and took me to see one of the lecturers who 'would tell me everything that I wanted to know'. This resulted in a rather embarrassing situation because the lecturer had not been asked nor briefed about my visit and interview and had to stop her own work to attend to my request for an interview. Fortunately, the lecturer concerned was helpful and very knowledgeable which led to a good interview rich in data.

In a separate incident at the CREMS College, a particular young lecturer was aggressively dismissive of me and would not allow me to speak to his students although I had all the research and ethics approvals in place and had the permission of the principal of CREMS College and the head of CREMS. I experienced further frustration at the CREMS College when another lecturer simply did not turn up for his scheduled interview with me. Although he had chosen the date and time for the meeting, on enquiring how I might contact him, I was told that he was actually on leave. It was at this point that I decided not to fight against this obstructionist (in my interpretation of it) behaviour, but to work with the rich data that the one lecturer had so generously provided. However, I was fortunate also to interview paramedics and managers who worked for CREMS.

In contrast, working with the one private company in the EMC industry that had agreed to my research was most enjoyable, because those I interviewed kept their appointments and were most helpful.

Although I had obtained the required permission, overall I found the process of collecting data very frustrating and unsettling. One of the most demanding aspects of this research project was making appointments and going out to interview individual participants or focus groups of EMS students. As mentioned above, with some participants it happened that although I had made an appointment (and confirmed it) to interview a particular individual or a group of EMS students, I would arrive on time to find that the person or group were not there, had forgotten the appointment or were not available. On the basis of this, I made the decision to work with those students who had arrived for the focus group, even if they were only two or three, because with a focus group, the size is not as important as the depth of the interaction and discussion.

## **Methods of Analysis**

In analysing data I kept my critical realist stance at the forefront. My research questions point to two major aspects: the emergence of identity and graduate attributes. When analysing the data, I used as my unit of analysis extracts of conversation from the focus groups and interviews.

In Chapter Three I discuss a Bhaskarian explanatory framework<sup>63</sup> of identity that I drew together from Bhaskar's concepts of ontology, identity, absence and non-identity, especially constellational identity, the self, the embodied personality and four-planar social being. I incorporated Bhaskar's notion of a laminated system of seven generative mechanisms into the core identity which I located within the constellational identity.

To aid my analysis of the emergence of identity, I used Bhaskar's laminated system of seven interactive generative mechanisms (2010, p. 5) to map onto the unit of analysis, i.e. the excerpt of conversation. I saw this mapping as a conceptual tool, i.e. an analytical artifice, to gain a deeper understanding of the Real domain from where identity emerges. I also mapped the four-planar social being onto a unit of analysis to explore how the interplay of structure, culture and agency relate to the emergence of identity.

Absence/negation plays a very important role in emergence and change. Thus, I also mapped the four aspects of Bhaskar's radical negation (1993, p. 6) onto specific units of analysis. This particular type of negation has four aspects: self-undermining, self-transformation, self-realisation and self-overcoming. By mapping these onto a unit of analysis, I could trace the process of transformation that a student had undergone. This conceptual tool of mapping is a form of analytical dualism because it separates the parts and the people to better understand the interplay between them.

When analysing the excerpt of conversation, I used an approach that I adopted from the work of Karl Maton (2013). This approach is to first present an analytical narrative in which I talk about the unit of analysis. This is followed by the analysis of the excerpt of conversation. In the analysis I used the conceptual tool of mapping in most instances. Here I sometimes also used critical discourse analysis<sup>64</sup> to discuss the student's conversation. Finally, I presented a conceptual re-description of the analysis where I drew in theory. This approach allowed me to come to grips with the data and the theory.

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<sup>63</sup> This is explained in great detail in Chapter Three on Identity.

<sup>64</sup> I follow Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (2001, 2003, 2005) because he has moved to a critical realist position regarding CDA and I feel that this aligns well with the critical realist stance of this research.

## **Validity of the Research**

Validity in qualitative research can easily be compromised by the unknown or unstated assumptions of the researcher as well as her bias and pervasive conditioning (Keller and Casadevall-Keller, 2010). To try and offset this I have stated my orientation as being Critical Realist, and my stance as emancipatory and one of social justice. I have also tried to maintain a critical self-reflexivity throughout the process. I have tried to reflect upon my assumptions which I have mentioned above, and have tried to be aware how these assumptions might affect the research.

Lather talks about catalytic validity as representing “the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses and energises participants towards knowing reality in order to transform it” (Lather, 1991, p.68). The participants include the researcher. I would say that this catalytic validity applies to my research in the sense that I have gone through a process of re-orientation, focussing and energising while data gathering and have observed the same process occurring in members of the focus groups and in interviewees.

The approach that I have adopted, namely that of analytical narrative, analysis and conceptual re-description coupled with critical discourse analysis, has ensured that the analysis of the data is grounded in theory to validate it. The extent to which there is constant corroboration between the data and the theoretical stance of critical realism with its emphasis on exploring the causal powers in the domain of the Real through retrodution is itself a manner of validating the research.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Approval was obtained from Rhodes University via the functioning of the Education Faculty’s Higher Degrees Committee as a sub-committee of the University’s Ethics Committee. Once ethics approval was obtained from Rhodes University, a letter stating that I had obtained this clearance from Rhodes University and my approved proposal was submitted to the UoT’s Ethics Committee to gain approval to conduct the intended research in the EMS Department at the UoT.

Consent to conduct the research was obtained from the UoT Ethics Committee, the EMS Department as well as the EMCS company, CREMS and participants. Participation was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw at any stage. Participants were informed beforehand of the nature of the research and what it would require of them. Thus the informed consent of all participants to the research was obtained and participants were asked to complete a form stating their voluntary participation and giving permission to use their information for research purposes. Confidentiality was maintained as far as possible, e.g. I personally transcribed the audio-recordings. This was explained to all participants. The names of the participants were not disclosed in the research. When writing about participants I randomly assigned names to them to protect their identity. I devised a code for referencing names in-text: S = student, P = paramedic, L = Lecturer, M = manager; thus, PC/15/8/13 refers to Paramedic Conrad interviewed 15 August 2013.

I attempted to maintain an ethos of respect for the dignity of each participant throughout because I was aware of the vulnerability of participants. I tried to apply the EMS department's motto of "First, do no harm!" in this research process in dealing with all the participants.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at both the methodology and the methods employed in this research as well as the theoretical framework and stance of the researcher. In particular it has looked at the underlying assumptions of the world held by the theoretical framework of critical realism. All research is informed by the stance of the researcher. My stance is that of a critical realist. Thus, the depth, stratified ontology of critical realism, the notions of absence and emergence play an important role in the analysis of data. Critical realism also affects my truth and knowledge claims. Any knowledge claim that I may make is fallible. Any truth claim must be regarded within the critical realist 'truth tetrapoly'.

The assumptions of a researcher can be influential. Therefore, I have made my assumptions explicit so that I might become aware of them and their influence on my research.

The unit of analysis was the excerpt from a conversation of a student, paramedic, lecturer or manager. To help in understanding the causal powers and generative mechanisms at play in the domain of the Real, a technique of mapping, i.e. a conceptual tool was created to allow the generative mechanisms to be mapped on the unit of discourse as well as the four-planar social being. An approach to analysis was adopted, i.e. using an analytical narrative, analysis and conceptual re-description when analysing an excerpt of conversation.

Chapter Six will look at the analysis and interpretation of data concerning student, graduate and paramedic identity. This chapter has two parts. First, there is a prologue that introduces the reader to the everyday life of paramedics and paramedic students in order to create a context for the reader and second, the chapter proper. I also provide an *aide memoire* about the Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity.

## CHAPTER SIX

### EMERGENCE OF STUDENT, GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

#### PART ONE: PROLOGUE

*Chapter Six consists of two parts. Part One is a prologue and Part Two is the chapter proper. Before discussing and interpreting the data relating to the emergence of identity, I have inserted this prologue in order to contextualise the research. The prologue has two parts: (i) an illustration of the reality of being a paramedic in South Africa, particularly in the Western Cape and (ii) a discussion of being an EMS student at a South African University of Technology (UoT).*

*The first part of the prologue has been created with the help of a professional paramedic (Conrad) and an Emergency Care Technician (ECT) (Bonnie) after an in-depth 90 minute interview with them (PC/B/12/8/2013)<sup>65</sup>. In this first part I present a description of the working life of a professional paramedic in Cape Town in order to contextualise the research for the reader in terms of the experiences of paramedics (i.e. in the Empirical domain) of the events (i.e. in the Actual domain) in their daily working lives. As my research was based in Cape Town, I speak only about the greater Cape Town Metropole<sup>66</sup> area. In the second part I give a glimpse into the actual events in the students' lives and their experience thereof (i.e. the Actual and Empirical domains of being an EMS student) including certain important aspects of their curriculum. I do this to facilitate*

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<sup>65</sup> These are not their real names. In the interests of maintaining confidentiality all names of persons are fictitious and coded as follows: PC/12/8/13 means Paramedic Conrad interviewed 12 August 2013.

<sup>66</sup> This Metropole area covers all parts and suburbs of Cape Town as well as the outlying areas of Stellenbosch, Strand, Gordon's Bay and Somerset West.

*understanding to what end Emergency Medical Science (EMS) students are studying and under what circumstances they will be working when they move to the workplace after qualifying.*

### **Being a paramedic: what it's all about**

Paramedics are pre-hospital advanced life support (ALS) practitioners; as such they have a scope of practice and drug protocols<sup>67</sup> specified by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). South African paramedics generally drive a fast response car to arrive at the scene of crisis as rapidly as possible at any time of day or night and in all weather conditions. As such a paramedic is often the first responder to arrive on scene. Time is of the essence in saving lives. The time taken between traumatic injury and reaching definitive care, i.e. in a hospital is referred to as the “Golden Hour” (Staley, 2011, unpagged). It is in this golden hour that paramedics are required to be most effective in treating patients before they are taken to hospital.

South African paramedics do not only deal with motor vehicle accidents, but also do ambulance transfers of critically ill patients from one hospital to another that has more appropriate facilities. It often happens that patients are transferred from rural hospitals to urban ones. These inter-hospital transfers happen fairly frequently because “the level of care in some local hospitals may not be of sufficient standard” (Staley, 2011, unpagged).

On the affective level the pre-hospital emergency situations of motor vehicle accidents may be highly stressful and traumatic for the paramedic; however, inter-hospital transfers of critical or I-C-U patients may be equally stressful (PC/12/8/13). This is because the patient who is being transferred in an ambulance usually has many different intra-venous lines going into her; she may be on a ventilator and attached to an ECG machine; her airway may be intubated, but, above all, she is in a critical condition. It is the paramedic's task to connect the patient to the relevant equipment in the ambulance and ride in the ambulance with the patient to ensure that all the equipment functions optimally during the journey so that there is no change for the worse in the patient's condition. Often it may be an I-C-U transfer which requires very close monitoring of the patient. Paramedic Conrad says, *“You get the patient there in as good a condition as what you left. But oxygen can run out, equipment can*

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<sup>67</sup> Drug protocols are the list of drugs that paramedics are competent and allowed to administer to patients.

*malfunction; the ambulance can break down<sup>68</sup>; you can have an accident” (PC12/8/13).*

Conrad describes the stress of transferring a patient:

*Ja, like, if you speak to any paramedic and you ask them, “tell me about a hectic ICU transfer”, they’ll have a couple of stories to tell you where for the whole time of that trip they were **sweating** (PC/12/8/13).*

Conrad recalls his first experience of an ICU inter-hospital transfer:

**Conrad:** *My very first ICU transfer, like, it was hectic. It took me something like two hours to get the patient ready for transfer. Because you walk into the hospital ICU and there’s this guy and he’s got, like, all these tubes and pipes sticking out of him and now you have to rearrange all of that onto your equipment, put him into your ambulance and go. So ja, it’s hectic, you know. It’s hectic (SC/12/8/13).*



To illustrate how seriously dependent a transferring patient may be on technology, the photo of a baby about to be transferred in Figure 6.1 has been included. This particular baby’s lungs collapsed after birth and a paramedic had to transfer him to another hospital. Fortunately, the intervention and transfer were successful and saved the baby’s life

(ER24 EMS 2012).

**Figure 6.1:** Baby ready for transfer

(Source: ER24 EMS 2012<sup>69</sup>)

In addition to being called to traffic accidents and doing inter-hospital transfers, paramedics are also called to a variety of domestic situations such as attempted suicide, drug overdose, domestic violence, heart attacks, strokes, geriatric falls and other medical episodes. They may be summoned to the aftermath of shack fires in the informal settlements that abound in Cape Town. Paramedics may be called to one of Cape Town’s beaches to deal with incidents of near-drowning or to the mountains to rescue someone. They are also despatched to deal with industrial accidents in the workplace. They could work on a medical helicopter where they fly in to transport critically ill or injured patients to hospital where it is the paramedic’s task to keep the patient stable under the changing conditions of the flight (PC/12/8/13). They also serve at sports events. In fact, any situation that requires advanced life support would be the

<sup>68</sup> As happened when Mr Nelson Mandela was being taken to hospital in June 2013: “The military ambulance that transported Nelson Mandela to hospital two weeks ago broke down due to “engine problems”, says the presidency” (Mail & Guardian online, 22 June 2013).

<sup>69</sup> I have been granted permission by ER24 to use photos from its websites, and have also used photos from the creative commons.

working arena of a paramedic. In this way they are exposed to and deal with many different casualties.

The photos in Figure 6.2 below show some of the different types of events that paramedics experience. These have been included to illustrate some of the events in the working life of a paramedic that were discussed above.



**Treating a cyclist at mountain-bike race**  
(Source: ER 24, 2013)



**Treating a near-drowning**  
(Source: ER 24, 2013)



**At an industrial accident**  
(Source: ER 24, 2013)



**Transporting a patient by helicopter**  
(Source: ER 24, 2013)



**Assisting at a train accident**  
(Source: ER 24, 2013)



**Transferring a baby in an incubator**  
(Source: ER 24, 2013)



Teaching schoolchildren to do CPR



Treating a fallen mountain climber

**Figure 6.2:** Photos of S.A. paramedics experiencing different events  
(Source: ER24, 2013)

It often happens that paramedics have to deal with the results of criminal violence because Cape Town is a violent city, e.g. 44 murders were perpetrated in a single weekend:

“The Cape Argus reported that 29 people were stabbed to death and 12 were shot dead between 16:00 on Friday and 07:30 on Monday. The other three victims were beaten to death” (News24.com, 2 July 2013).

Thus, in Cape Town’s endemic gang wars – highly volatile and dangerous situations – paramedics are summoned to attend to gunshot or stabbing victims where the victims are often children caught in the crossfire. In such cases they are often required to go in under police protection (ECTB/12 /8/2013). Paramedics themselves are often attacked and robbed in the townships of Cape Town. There were 12 such attacks on paramedics in Cape Town in 2013-2014 (Dolley, 2014)

Bonnie describes her experience of working in a CREMS (i.e. public service ambulance) and being summoned to an incident where two women had been reported as stabbed in a gang fight:

**Bonnie:** *Two gangs were fighting with pangas (machetes). There were two patients. Both were women. I’m in a CREMS ambulance, so I’m taking both. This is not a private service so we take lots of patients. To us it’s no difference, like, whoever comes into the ambulance, you treat them, but to them it’s not. They were fighting before we got there. I had to pick a patient and the people in the background made it very clear by holding a panga wrapped in a piece of material “If you don’t take **my** girlfriend there’s going to be trouble”. So I grabbed the woman who was closest to me that was injured the worst. I grabbed her on her shirt and I pulled her in and I shut the door and we drove off. And they chased us with the pangas (ECTB/12/8/13).*

Bonnie's description of the incident shows the danger involved in being called to a gang fight where the gang members are armed and dangerous. Being in a public service ambulance, she was prepared to take both women, but she realised that it would not be safe to get out the ambulance and attend to both women before putting them into the ambulance and transporting them to hospital. Thus, she had to make a choice and physically pulled only one woman into the ambulance. From this description of a serious incident, I turn now to a conceptual re-description of it.

An exploration, in critical realist terms, of Bonnie's words above allows us to see that causal powers and generative mechanisms at the level of the Real led to an Actual event in the form of a gang fight. In the Empirical domain Bonnie experiences the Actual event in front of her when she opens the ambulance door – the wounded women and the very hostile gangsters. Each group of gangsters demand that she attend to their woman gang member. Bonnie feels afraid, but exercises her agency and makes a choice, acts and manages to pull one of the women into the ambulance before having to flee the scene pursued by enraged gangsters. This incident of only rescuing one woman can also be seen as an example of critical realism's notion that a reason that is acted on can be a cause (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 51). The reason why only one woman was rescued was because the circumstances were too dangerous for Bonnie to get out the ambulance and attend to both women.

What really caused this series of events? Through a process of retrodution one may get to the domain of the Real to see what the causes of this series of events were. Gang warfare erupts regularly in the greater Cape Town area especially in the Cape Flats and townships where unemployment, poverty and drug dealing and drug use are rife. Cape Town's 130 gangs with a membership of approximately 100,000 have a long history that goes back to the forced removals of apartheid which destroyed community and family cohesion (Zille, 2012). The real causes of gang fights are many and varied rooted in socio-economic problems that beset the poverty-stricken communities – dysfunctional families, inadequate schools, drug abuse and vicious cycles of revenge killings (John, 2012). Hence, the Real causes of the event that Bonnie experienced lie in these deep socio-economic problems, poverty and dysfunctional communities and could be any of a number of inter-related causes such as gang turf war, fighting over drugs, or retaliation for killings of gang members. When retroducting to the level of the Real, it is not always possible to point to the exact causes in absolute terms because the causal powers and generative mechanisms are multiple and often unobservable or

even unknowable, but the tendencies which are the causal powers exercised may be understood even if not observed (Pinkstone in Hartwig 2007, p. 458). From this re-description of an actual incident, I now move back to describing the daily life of a paramedic.

When a paramedic is first on the scene of an accident or crisis, the mnemonic ‘*hazards, hello, help*’ applies (PC/12/8/13). ‘Hazards’ is a reminder for the paramedic to check all dangers that the scene may hold for emergency personnel, patients, bystanders, traffic and others. ‘Hazards’ could be anything such as petrol or fluid spillage, visibility, debris, and traffic around the scene of accident. ‘Hello’ refers to first contact with and assessment of the patient. ‘Help’ means assessing the situation to determine what help needs to be summoned. For example, the paramedic might need to call for several ambulances if there are many patients as well as traffic officers to help secure the scene. The Police will be summoned especially if the situation involves death or danger and the Forensic Department called if people have died on scene and bodies have to be removed. Fire and Rescue are summoned if people are trapped in vehicles and have to be cut out using the Jaws of Life or other hydraulic tools; they provide access to the patient. If there is a particularly critical case, the paramedic might summon the medical helicopter. When there are multiple patients, for instance in an accident involving a bus or minibus taxi, triage has to be performed whereby treatment of patients is allocated according to the severity of their injuries (PC/12/8/13).

A report of an accident is included below to illustrate the points made above.

### **Three die in Heidelberg crash**

August 12th, 2013 ER24 Admin

Just before midnight last night, a VW Citi Golf and a minibus taxi collided into one another at the intersection of the R550 and R103 in Heidelberg. The VW collided into the side of the taxi causing it to roll.

When paramedics arrived on scene they could immediately see the severity of the collision; the front of the



Golf had been ripped and the engine compartment appeared shredded. Three people were killed as a result of the collision while three others suffered critical injuries. A further eight patients required treatment for moderate injuries. It was difficult for paramedics to determine from which vehicle each of the injured had come from, as due to the carnage on scene patients were strewn across the area.

A six month old baby was airlifted to Charlotte Maxeke Hospital for urgent care, while a woman and another young child were rushed to hospital by ambulance for care of critical injuries. The remaining eight patients were treated for their injuries and transported by various ambulances to hospitals in the area for further care.

Local authorities are still investigating the cause of this fatal crash (ER24 Blog 12 August 2013).

**Figure 6.3:** Vehicle accident

The report states that the paramedics could “immediately see the severity of the collision”

and would have had to implement the *hazards, hello, help* mnemonic as this accident involved two vehicles, three fatalities as well as multiple casualties who were “were strewn across the area”. This would make the area very hazardous for the patients’ and emergency personnel’s safety; therefore the paramedics would have had to implement the *hazards* part of the mnemonic first and make the scene as safe as possible. Then they would have attended to the patients (the *hello* part of the mnemonic) and summoned extra *help* such as other ambulances and a helicopter. The paramedics would have had to triage the patients. The triage is visible in the description of the injuries “three others suffered critical injuries. A further eight patients required treatment for moderate injuries”. Furthermore, in triage, the critically injured are treated first as shown by the emergency airlifting of the baby and the rushing of a woman and child to hospital first, while the remaining patients were only then treated and transported to hospital. From this illustration of the *hazards, hello, help* in action I now move to a re-description in critical realist terms of the accident described in the report.

Looking at this report in terms of critical realism’s domains of the Empirical, Actual and Real, the paramedics arrive on scene and experience the carnage of the accident as do the patients. This is the Empirical domain. The event, in the domain of the Actual, is the collision of two vehicles as reported, “a VW Citi Golf and a minibus taxi collided into one another”. The cause of the accident lies in the domain of the Real with its causal powers and generative mechanisms. However, the Real cause will only become evident when evidence is gathered by the police either forensically or from eyewitness accounts, as stated “local authorities are still investigating the cause of this fatal crash”. What *really* caused the accident? What were the causal powers at work in the Real domain? Was it drunk driving, excessive speed, distracted driving, vehicle failure, poor lighting, a road problem, a combination of these, or some other as yet hidden cause?

In an accident scene such as the one reported above, the paramedic may have to be the manager in charge of the scene, where he would be designated as the ‘incident commander’. As such, he has to give instructions to everyone on scene, such as the police and fire and rescue services stating how the scene should be managed, what needs to be done and how these needs are to be met. This is explained by Davids, a lecturer in the UoT EMS department:

**Davids:** *So, automatically once you have completed your three or four years’ qualification you are a manager. So, regardless of your experience, as soon as you*

*say “I am a paramedic” or “I am a National Diploma or B.Tech. graduate” because of your skills and your qualification is higher, you are expected then to provide leadership and support to the other people, although their years’ experience might far exceed yours (LD/7/11/11).*

Davids (*ibid.*) is making an important point about the relationship between graduating as a paramedic after three or four years, the graduate’s skills set and assuming a leadership role because one’s qualification is higher. This also points to the hierarchical structure of the Emergency Medical Care Services (EMCS) in South Africa, which in turn sets up its own specific culture of respect and obedience. Hierarchy is present within EMCS because of the hierarchy of registers, i.e. each level of emergency care within this hierarchical structure has its own register on the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) as well as its own scope of clinical skills and drug protocols. Each level can only operate within its own scope and protocols; that is why the person who is more highly qualified may assume the leadership position irrespective of experience, because theoretically they know more. Thus, it might happen that a Basic Ambulance Assistant<sup>70</sup> (BAA) and an Ambulance Emergency Assistant (AEA) on the ambulance might have 10 years’ working experience while the newly qualified paramedic only has his work-placed learning experience, but because s/he has wider scope and protocols, he may assume the leadership role. However, as Conrad and Bonnie (12/8/13) explain, in Cape Town, the application of qualification status is often relaxed because of respect for the many years of road experience that other emergency personnel on scene have and the fact that the Fire and Rescue Department have ranked officers with much experience under their belts. So, although a paramedic may technically be the highest qualified person on scene, he often does not insist upon exercising their status. The wisdom to know when to do so comes with practice, with emerging confidence in one’s own abilities and one’s emerging professional identity as a paramedic. This is tacit knowledge which is not made explicit to newly qualified graduates. Therefore, it takes time for them to access and develop this particular know-how, this way of professional being (PC/12/8/13).

Paramedics are accountable for their actions on scene; hence, they have to complete a great

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<sup>70</sup> There are basically four levels of emergency care: Basic life support (BLS) which is the lowest rung and administered by the Basic Ambulance Assistant (BAA) who is the ambulance driver. Then comes the Intermediate Life Support (ILS) which is administered by the Ambulance Emergency Assistant (AEA). This is followed by the Advanced life support (ALS) which is administered by the paramedic or Critical Care Assistant (CCA). Then there is the B.Tech. (degreed) paramedic who has a more advanced scope of practice and drug protocol. This has been discussed more fully in Chapter One.

deal of administration and paperwork regarding the calls, their response and actions. In addition, paramedics have to manage a shift at their base as well as the ambulance crews. They are also involved with training initiatives at work, as paramedic Zack (15/8/12) states “I’ve got involved with education at my base specifically a lot more. I’ve started developing some Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses”. They also do outreach to communities, such as schools where they teach CPR. Paramedics are also required to mentor third-year students from the UoT who do their work-place based learning with a paramedic.

## **Being an Emergency Medical Science student at a University of Technology**

*I don’t think that we are the typical kind of student if you compare us to other students (SH/25/10/11).*

The Department of Emergency Medical Science (EMS) is a small department in the UoT with 269 students. Classes for all undergraduates run from 08h00 to 16h00 with physical training (PT) in the morning from 07h00 from Monday to Thursday. On Fridays there are no formal classes, but students are expected to use this time for study group sessions and self-study.

EMS students are indeed not typical students in the sense that they are distinguished from other students by the uniform they are required to wear (although their lecturers do not wear a uniform). In the classroom itself there are two further distinguishing features. Firstly, EMS students are required to show respect to their lecturers and senior students by standing up when a lecturer or senior student enters the classroom. Students are also required to greet any lecturer they meet outside the classroom, as recounted by student Sarie:

**Sarie:** *Stand up when they walk into the class. Stand up when they leave.*

**Interviewer:** *How do they teach you that?*

**Sarie:** *Exercise! In first year if they walk in and if you don’t stand up, they say “OK well, you’re starting the course like this, obviously you don’t have respect – 20 push-ups”.*

**Interviewer:** *I see, they enforce it, physically enforce it.*

**Sarie:** *Definitely. Or if you walk past them in the corridor and you don’t greet them and you get in class, they will say “A certain student in your class did not greet me. That will be an extra hour’s PT for the whole class this afternoon”. So, ja, they*

*literally force you to show respect. Then I think it becomes implanted, so you just naturally stand up... It is weird, but I think they teach you a lot about respect in first year (SS/15/10/11).*

Sarie's example indicates that a behaviouristic and paramilitaristic approach is used in the first year, which one would not find in any of the other courses at a UoT. There is a 'boot-camp' discourse present that expects performativity from students, e.g. being respectful. In the absence of that performance physical 'punishment' is dealt out, e.g. "twenty push-ups" and "an extra hour's PT for the whole class this afternoon" although there may only have been one culprit, the entire class is punished. This behaviourist approach does achieve its intended goal because respect becomes instilled within the students and accepted by them.

Secondly, there is a great diversity of students in the EMS classes. Not only does this diversity pertain to the culture, ethnicity, gender and geo-history of students, it also pertains to their marital status and differing ages. Some students come straight out of school, while other students are much older and may have been working for some years before coming to the UoT to study EMS, and may have exercised considerable agency to pursue their EMS studies, particularly those who are married and have children. For example, students Hassan and Lukas are both married with young families and had worked as fire-fighters for 15 years before enrolling for the National Diploma in EMS. Student Jeremy had been a lawyer for several years before deciding on a complete change of direction in life to become a paramedic. Student Jabulani had been a senior financial officer in a large insurance house. Student Nathan had worked as a paramedic for the Air Mercy Service for 20 years before doing the B.Tech. degree. Student Maria had been an ambulance emergency assistant in the military medical corps for three years before coming to do a National Diploma. Thus one could say that the geo-histories of the students in any one class are widely divergent.

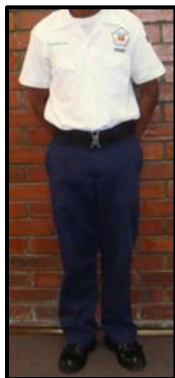
Some of the students have been sent by their employers to study the National Diploma in EMC full-time, but still have to work in their shifts as paramedics and despatchers over weekends. Other students had completed the short courses<sup>71</sup> offered by the local government CREMS academy – Basic Life Support, Intermediate Life Support and Advanced Life

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<sup>71</sup> By these 'short courses' I mean that all their formal learning had been achieved by short courses rather than by longer periods of formal study at a UoT. These short courses have been discussed in depth in Chapter One and have been described again in Footnote 6 above.

Support – over a number of years, and had actually been practising as Critical Care Assistants (the short course equivalent of a paramedic). However, they wanted to further their scope of practice and protocols by doing the B.Tech. degree. The only route open to them was to register for the full three-year National Diploma in EMS while receiving recognition of prior learning (RPL) for certain subjects. Once they had completed the National Diploma, they would be able to register for the B.Tech. course which would qualify them for the highest paramedic register of the Health Professionals Council of South Africa’s Board for Emergency Medical Care. Thus, it is common that there is a range of ages from eighteen to the early forties in any of the heterogeneous EMS classes.

### **Wearing the uniform: the lecturer perspective**



**Figure 6.4:** EMS uniform (Source: own photograph, 2013)

**Reddy:** *With the students we insist that they wear the uniform for the reason that we usually have a diverse group of students and in this diversity we don’t have a long time to have them converge at a particular acceptable level of conduct so the uniform helps big time, because once you’re in the uniform, it’s all eyes on you. You draw attention to yourself. You have to conduct yourself like that. So it’s an external – it’s a tool that we use – an external tool to try and develop internal processes. And mostly it works and these learners also must be employable. And so one of the things that employers look for is the level of discipline, can you toe the line and can you take orders because it is very hierarchical and structured in that way. So we do do that (LR/14/11/11).*

In the above quotation, lecturer Reddy regards diversity as something that needs to be controlled by lessening the divergence and making it convergent, i.e. bringing the students closer together. However, this may also suggest that at the same time there is a levelling out of the students’ individualism. The uniform becomes a tool to bring about personal change, particularly in behaviour as suggested by “a *particular acceptable* level of conduct” (my emphasis). This suggests that the specific level of conduct has been decided upon beforehand in the department, and is one that is presented to the students and requires their acceptance. This would point to a power differential between academic staff who have the power and

first-year students who do not. It is interesting that Lecturer Reddy sees the uniform as “an external tool to try and develop internal processes” because this points directly to staff agency in the personal development of the students and the change in their identity (LR/14/11/11). The notion of requiring a specific type of conduct, requiring respect, together with wearing a uniform, would appear to suggest the development of a paramilitaristic culture particularly in the first-year of study. However, Reddy does link the discipline of wearing a uniform to the workplace in that employers want disciplined workers because the emergency medical services are very structured and hierarchical and a paramedic would have to be able to take and give orders. Thus, wearing a uniform could be seen as pragmatic rather than militaristic.

This notion of wearing a uniform as pragmatic is echoed by Lecturer Adams (LA/11/11/11) who states that it makes sense for the students to become accustomed to wearing a uniform because they are going to work as uniformed professionals upon qualifying.

**Adams:** *We're trying to make them understand that within the uniformed setting we are always going to wear a uniform... We want three years to work on it. We've had numerous uniform inspections.... And that's why we bring them in and we let them dress as the professionals we want them to be and we can work on it for three years... There has to be that discipline – we abide by rules and regulations. We can't just do our own thing – that's the medical world for you. It's very rules and regulations orientated and it's so for a very good reason (LA/11/11/11).*

Adams points to the aspect of grooming students for three years to become uniformed professionals: “we want three years to work on it ... that's why we bring them in and we let them dress as the professionals we want them to be and we can work on it for three years”. He stresses that this grooming takes three years by repeating it. This indicates that there is a pre-existing notion in the department about what it means to be a graduate student and a professional and that students are actively groomed towards that perception. This pre-existing notion arises from the fact that every lecturer is also an advanced paramedic and has had several years of professional experience in the pre-hospital emergency medical services. Adams sees discipline as important because the emergency medical services are “very rules and regulations orientated” which need to be obeyed. Later in the interview Adams returns to the question of discipline when talking of third-year students as being “*totally focussed, less individualised, more disciplined to the product that we are trying to produce*” (LA11/11/11)

which indicates his view of students as ‘a product’. In contrast, Reddy is adamant that students should not be viewed as products:

**Reddy:** *But you know the product mentality is neoliberal kind of thinking. We don't see them as products because they're humans. They are not inanimate objects manufactured on a production line. These are unique individuals; you have to see them exactly for that. I think there is a hidden danger in seeing our students as products. It is dehumanising and it steals away from their dignity. So, certainly that is something that we would frown upon big time (LR/6/ 6/13).*

Reddy adopts a strong stance against viewing students as products and stresses his opposition to the idea. In doing so he distances himself from this neoliberal notion and places himself in a opposition to Adams. These two extracts (Adams and Reddy) from the data indicate that there are contrasting opinions and discourses among the academic staff in their approach to students. Hence there are contrasting cultural conditions in the domain of the Real. The one is militaristic, and the other humanistic<sup>72</sup>. It does appear that all staff hold the opinion that first year students, in particular, need to change upon entry to the department and become other than they were changing to fit departmental norms.

Lecturer Malan agrees with Reddy and Adams that wearing a uniform prepares a student for the workplace, but questions whether the department is actually doing this firmly enough. Malan takes a more militaristic view. Malan feels strongly that students should wear a uniform, but decries what he perceives as the students' lack of respect for their uniform. Malan alludes to a potential breakdown in authority when he comments that second and or third years would be setting a bad example to the first years and that the department is not empowered enough.

**Malan:** *For instance, here now there's things here that I don't like – like someone walks around with his hands in his pockets – that's rubbish. You can't have uniform and not have discipline. ... You can't have a semi-militaristic type of set-up and with the interest of preparing the student for the workplace. Everywhere you work, you're going to wear a uniform. Everywhere they have grooming standards, but we don't – so are we really preparing them for the workplace?... When you get someone walking*

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<sup>72</sup> This divergence in outlook may be as a result of where the lecturers themselves trained. Adams and Malan come from a militaristic training at Technikon Witwatersrand, while Reddy comes from the more humanist approach of Durban University of Technology (LD/7/11/11).

*here with a Mohawk or a bokkie<sup>73</sup> and his hands in his pocket wearing the uniform because he doesn't know what it's all about. And we are not enough empowered as staff or the department doesn't have a firm enough stance on teaching these guys that when you wear a uniform people's going to look up to you. When you're third year or second year and you look like shit, the first years are going to look and say "look at the third years or the second years; they're doing this". I think they need a little more enforcement in terms of something like that (LM/27/3/12).*

In the above extract, the students with individualistic traits such as hairstyle and beards walking with their hands in their pockets have emerged as an event in the Actual domain. They are experienced as such by lecturer Malan in the Empirical domain. However, from the domain of the Real the event has emerged as the outward manifestation of some students trying to assert their individuality in the face of uniformity being imposed on them. The domain of the Real holds the real causes of this 'rebellion' in the face of authority. It may be that it is a question of personal agency, because the students who act divergently are in the minority (Personal observation on my visits to the department, 2011, 2012, and 2013). The few divergent students may be exercising their agency in deciding to challenge authority by expressing their individuality.

### **Wearing the uniform: the student perspective**

**Olga:** *I think wearing a uniform takes away a bit of your sense of individuality and your uniqueness because you are all the same. For me, at least, it limits my expression of me as a person. I enjoy expressing myself in different ways. I do get why they do it – to take away the focus from other things and you project it onto your studies or to prepare you for work where people wear uniforms (SO/25/10/11).*

**Alta:** *Actually wearing a uniform is OK. Before going into the shops, I'll sit in the car and tuck in my shirt. I'm proud to wear my uniform and I would walk into the shop with this - not with an attitude - but I would walk, like, straight up and know I represent the university. So I think if you take the uniform away, it would change the whole discipline thing (SA/27/10/11).*

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<sup>73</sup> The 'mohawk' means a Mohawk hairstyle. A 'bokkie' is an Afrikaans word meaning a small goatee beard.

**Monika:** *You stand tall. All people on campus know who you are – a health provider. I am not ashamed of wearing my uniform...I think a uniform is good (SM/27/10/11).*

**Ralph:** *I think with the uniform, it does a lot of things. For one it gives a sense of equality because not everyone comes from the same background and the same privileges, but if everyone wears the same clothes you can't tell the difference. I think that's better because some people might be judgemental or even people who don't have the same privileges might feel embarrassed... It also gives a sense of teamwork and a sense of everyone being the same and in the same situation. You know, it's a very demanding course and I think all of us can say that at one point we all felt low and vulnerable within ourselves. But then we look around us and see that we are all the same and we're all wearing the same uniform and we're all in the same boat and that gives us the strength to say "we're all in the same situation so let's pull together and make this succeed". I think that everyone needs that (SR/27/10/11).*

These quotations from four different students show that although the students experience the uniform differently, there is some sense of agreement about, and even pride in wearing a uniform, except for Cathy who sees the uniform as a constraint on her individuality. Ralph takes a social justice perspective and makes an interesting observation that uniform is a social leveller, recognising that some of his peers may have a different socio-economic geo-history to his own. In light of what these students are saying, it could be said that the departmental policy of students wearing a uniform is effective in its purpose of getting the students to converge as a group by using the uniform as a leveller and to instil discipline.

### **Considering curriculum and asking a critical realist question**

Both Archer (1995) and Bhaskar (1989) make the point that 'society pre-exists the individual'. Thus, for instance, one could say that a social structure such as a University of Technology (UoT) pre-exists the students that come to study within its halls. Within the university, the Faculty pre-exists the academic department which pre-exists its students. Within the department, a social structure such as a programme of study already exists before

a first-year student arrives to register for the programme and its pre-existing courses. These programmes pre-exist the courses and curriculum<sup>74</sup>.

“What must the world be like for first-year student identities to emerge?” The world in question would be the University of Technology (UoT) where one would look at the critical realist depth ontology of this world, i.e. the domains of the Real, Actual and Empirical. For example, curriculum may be said to exist in the Real domain. From curriculum in the Real domain there emerges a series of curricular events in the Actual domain which students experience in the Empirical domain. Thus, curriculum operates across all three domains. For the purposes of this study curriculum is regarded as an emergent structuratum that arises out of a course which in turn arises out of structures like the education system, and the political and cultural domains. In critical realist terms, curriculum is a structure that is in all three domains of Bhaskar’s ontology, as stated above. As such a curriculum is inherently an ideological socio-cultural construct at the level of the Real, a series of events at the level of the Actual, and the experience and observation of those events at the level of the Empirical by agentic teachers and students. This is illustrated below in Figure 6.5 below.

<b>Empirical domain</b>	<b>Curriculum as the experience and observation</b> of the actual events
<b>Actual domain</b>	<b>Curriculum as a series of events</b> , e.g. PT, 3 Peaks challenge, Evidence-informed decision making, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL): Service Learning, Workplace-based learning, simulations, practicals, OSCEs
<b>Real domain</b>	<b>Curriculum as an ideological socio-cultural construct</b> , i.e. a social structure

**Figure 6.5:** A critical realist view of curriculum within EMS department at the UoT

In the EMS department important curricular events in the domain of the Actual are the physical training (PT) that the students are required to do and the Three-Peaks rescue exercise; both form part of rescue modules. These are important for the emergence of student identity as is Work-integrated Learning (WIL) which comprises service learning, workplace-

<sup>74</sup> I have researched Bhaskar to find out if a curriculum could possibly be considered as a “structure” on the level of the Real. The answer is “yes”. A curriculum meets the criteria he posits in “Possibility of Naturalism” (1998b, p. 170-171) where he discusses the two types of structure: “the abstract form or type and the particular concrete instantiation of structure... the *structuratum* (a structured thing)...”. In addition Hartwig (2007) states “The structure of a thing is constituted by its causal powers, which when exercised, manifest as tendencies. A structure will typically be instantiated in a multiplicity of *structurata* (i.e. structured things). So for instance, a course is instantiated as *structurata*, which are the curricula of the different subjects comprising the course. Hence, I will use the curriculum in this sense as an emergent *structuratum*.”

based learning (WPBL), simulations, practicals and the objectively structured clinical examinations (OSCE).

In PT the students do physical exercises, jog and swim every day even in the winter. The primary objective of this PT is to get the first-year students to be fit, strong and limber so that they can carry out the physical tasks required of them without physical injury during their rescue exercises, the Three-Peaks physical endurance rescue challenge and their work-integrated learning (LA 11/11/11). From the data, the secondary objective seems to be to mould the students into behaving in specific ways.

In other words, a behaviourist<sup>75</sup> approach is used as indicated by lecturer Davids below:

**Davids:** *The whole group would start off and they would do PT in the mornings. That starts at 7a.m.<sup>76</sup> and you must be in proper uniform. You must not be late because if you are late the rest of the group have to do extra exercises because you are late. You have work together in teams, and then all of a sudden the weaknesses start to emerge in terms of who's stronger and who is weaker. What we are trying to encourage is not to leave your mate behind – you have to carry the weaker person (LD/7/11/11).*

The behaviourist elements are clear in the above: “we start to slowly introduce and influence it ... 7a.m. ... you must be in proper uniform ... not be late ... the rest do extra exercises because you are late ... work together in teams ... not leave your mate behind ... carry the weaker person”. The desired behaviours are clearly indicated as are the consequences for non-compliance, e.g. ‘punishing’ the whole group for the lateness of one person.

Davids’ words above are endorsed by student Sarie:

**Sarie:** *For example, PT sessions, they always teach us you're only as strong as the weakest man. You're not allowed to jog on – you have to jog on the spot with the slowest person ... in first year we struggled a lot (SS/15/10/11).*

The behaviourist approach achieves its aims of influencing and changing the group as evidenced by the following statement by student Kate taken from the data.

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<sup>75</sup> Behaviourism learning theory is based on the idea that changes in behaviour are acquired through stimulus-response associations made by the learner; the desired outcome must be specified, a nurturing environment developed, intrinsic and extrinsic rewards used, reinforcement used, reduction of rewards, and evaluation and assessment (Standridge, 2012).

<sup>76</sup> 07h00 is 90 minutes before the rest of the campus begins daily activities.

**Kate:** *They force discipline upon you; they force respect upon you. They teach with all of that...they teach you not only to respect others, but to allow yourself to be respected. They force you to have discipline, like I said, respect and responsibility. There's no way of getting out of it because if at any stage you are fighting what they are forcing upon us, you are going to fall out ... They had broken all of us down and built us up exactly the way that they need paramedics to be ... we all feel that we gained the same thing from this experience. And there's nothing negative about it. It was hard and it was tough at times. I think it was for the best (SK/27/10/11).*

The PT sessions are events that emerge in the domain of the Actual from the structure and culture of the curriculum in the domain of the Real. As Archer (1995, 1996) states, structure and culture always have both 'parts' and 'people' who interact with the parts. Thus, these 'parts' – the events - are experienced by the students in the Empirical domain. Kate indicates the power differential that is concomitant with paramilitarism, “they force discipline upon you; they force respect upon you”. This would imply that a certain type of change is ‘forced’ upon the student as well. In critical realist terms change is absencing one thing while ‘presencing’ (making present) another. Change also implies that one is not only able to be, but to become (Bhaskar, 1993, p.77). Thus, in getting the students to exercise to make them fit, their lack of fitness is being absented and they are able to become fit. Where there was previously an absence of discipline, it is now present. As Bhaskar would say the absence of discipline has been absented allowing for the presence of discipline. Where there was previously an absence of respect, that absence has been absented and respect has now become present in the students. This paramilitaristic approach elicits compliance successfully in that it results in Kate defending it “And there's nothing negative about it”. She states that she thinks “it was for the best”.

## The Three-peaks Challenge Rescue Exercise



Carrying 100kg



High-angle rope rescue<sup>77</sup>



Night rescue of manikin

**Figure 6.6:** Three-Peaks Challenge photos

(Source: SC/2012)

This Three-peaks event is organised wholly by the second-year students who have to conceptualise, plan, organise, fund-raise, cater, run and evaluate the 48-hour endurance exercise. It requires months of careful planning and dedication by these second-year volunteers who give many hours of their free time to do so. The 2012 organising committee decided to collate all their experiences of the various tasks into a Three-Peaks manual that could be used by future committees. Over the course of the three-year diploma each student experiences the event from a different point of view. First years are the participants; second years are the organisers and the third-years are the assessors of the different team exercises in the event. The event covers different kinds of rescue: surf-rescue, high-angle rope rescue, and motor-vehicle extraction of trapped survivors (LA/11/11/11).

### Work-integrated learning (WIL)

The WIL to which EMS students are exposed varies considerably. In each year of study there are practicals, patient simulations, OSCEs (Objective Structured Clinical Examination). In addition, students are required to do workplace-based learning (WPBL) which is different for each year of study. The first-year students also do a Service Learning project.

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<sup>77</sup> High-angle rope rescue refers to rescuing a person where there is a very steep slope or cliff involved requiring the rescuers to use ropes for the safety of everyone involved.

An example of a practical would be practising to put up an intravenous drip on a person or to intubate an airway (e.g. putting a tube down a patient's throat). The patient simulations require the students to work with very advanced and thus very expensive manikins that can be programmed to have a medical condition such as a myocardial infarction (MI, i.e. heart attack) and to be responsive to treatment (PC/12/8/13). Students could also practice using the various machines by operating them on the manikin, e.g. taking an electrocardiograph (ECG) and interpreting it. However, patient simulations have been problematic because not all students manage to have hands-on time with the manikin, because there are too many students and too few manikins. In addition, the laboratories are too small for everyone to have an optimal view of the team of students doing the patient simulation (SM/26/10/11). In 2013 construction started on a new wing to the EMS building which will provide large laboratories to solve the problem of space.

While the OSCEs are strictly examinations, the lecturers give students an opportunity to practise for the OSCE by doing one in the practical laboratory. The workplace-based learning (WPBL) in the first year requires students to work shifts in an ambulance going out on calls (SS/27/10/12). In second year, the WPBL requires students to work in different hospitals and clinics where they work in various wards of the hospitals from the maternity ward to the trauma ward or Casualty (SS/26/10/11). In the third year students go out in response cars or an ambulance with a professional paramedic who ideally would act as a mentor for the time that the student spends with him or her (SC/27/10/11). The ideal situation would be for a single student to be placed with one paramedic for the whole WPBL period. However, a particular student may be assigned to several paramedics over the course of the WPBL so there is not necessarily a continuity of the mentorship.

Sometimes it happens due to a shortage of professional paramedics that one paramedic may be assigned two or more students on consecutive shifts. This is recounted by B.Tech student Kim (who works full-time as a paramedic, while studying for the B.Tech. degree part-time) who states:

**Kim:** *We have students with us. I have an average two to four students with me three of the four shifts that I work. The students come in at different levels. You have two third year students together. One will be fantastic; they'll be perfectly proficient in their skills and know what's going on. The other one will be clueless. It's got to do with the fact that there's no follow up. They are too embarrassed to say to a new*

*paramedic, that they don't know, to say "I actually really don't know a lot about this and this" (PK/15/8/12).*

Being a mentor to third year students may become onerous for the paramedic as seen above where three out of four shifts Kim is guiding, checking and mentoring two or more students, as well as doing her job as a paramedic. This is made more difficult because the students have different levels of competence. Kim put this down to "the fact that there's no follow up". One student may have learnt very well from a professional paramedic who is prepared to teach and guide the student, while the other may have been with a number of other students with little opportunity to learn from the paramedic. So when a third-year student has to work with a new paramedic whom she has never met, she feels uncomfortable admitting her own ignorance. This indicates a clear flaw in the current system of WPBL and mentorship for third year students at the UoT<sup>78</sup>.

Using a critical realist gaze, one might say that in terms of such a not-yet-competent student's four-planar social being<sup>79</sup>, on the second level her social interaction with others is not satisfactory. On the third level her relationship with this particular social structure, i.e. mentorship, is not functioning well. These disconnects on the second and third levels of four-planar social being affect her on the fourth level as well where her emotions are involved and she is too shy or afraid to voice her absence of knowledge. Looking at the seven kinds of interacting mechanisms of constellational identity<sup>80</sup>, it becomes apparent that here too there is disconnect resulting in the absence of these seven mechanisms interacting effectively. On the physical level, she is loath to speak; on the psychological level she feels embarrassed; on the psycho-social level she feels constrained by her psychological discomfort. Finally, not

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<sup>78</sup> In 2013 an ambulance and second response vehicle were acquired by the UoT to create mentoring and WPBL opportunities.

<sup>79</sup> **Four-planar social being:** our material transactions with nature, our social interactions with others, our relationships with social structures and the stratification of our embodied personalities – mind, body, emotions and spiritual ground-state.

<sup>79</sup> The core constellational identity has changing causal powers and generative mechanisms, and includes **seven kinds of interacting mechanisms**, namely the physical, biological – especially medical or clinical, psychological, psycho-social, socio-economic, cultural, and normative.

speaking or asking questions become normative for her which has a negative effect on her learning.

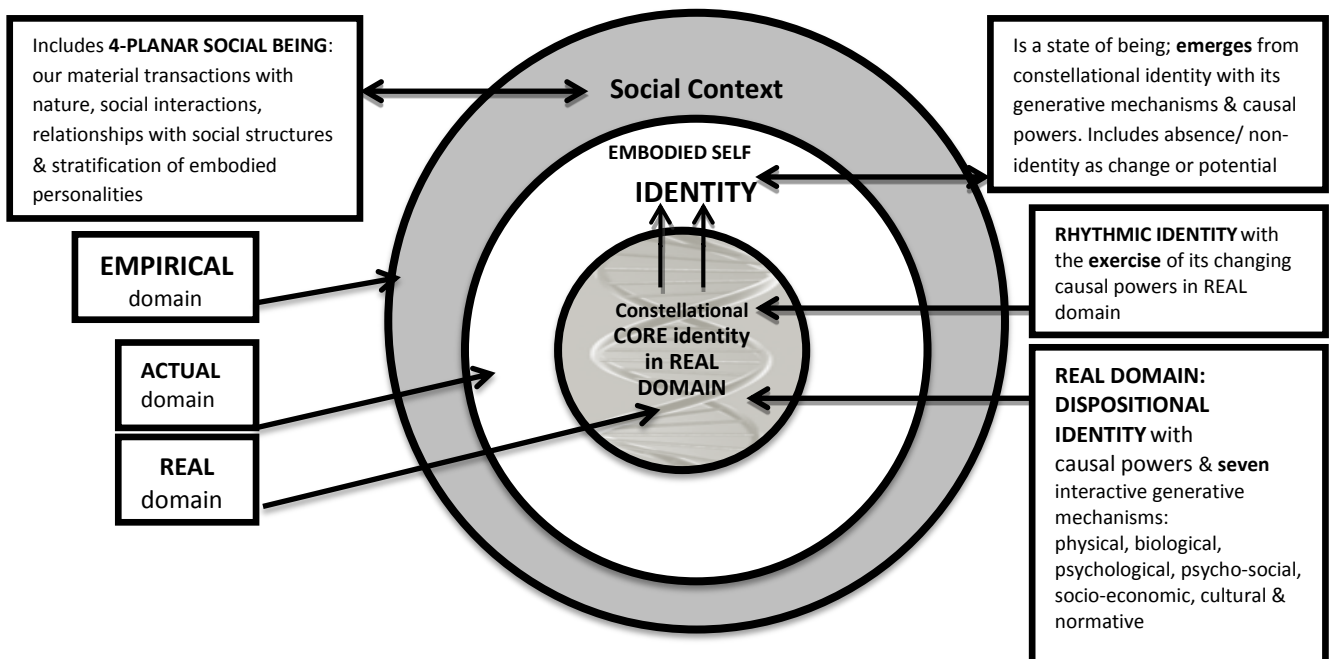
Thus, in answer to the critical realist question, “What must the world be like for first-year student identities to emerge?” one could say that the world of the EMS department at the UoT has as causal powers in the domain of the Real behaviourism and paramilitarism. The curriculum which is a social structure in the Domain of the Real is influenced by these causal powers of behaviourism and paramilitarism and cause particular kinds of curricular events to emerge, namely PT and the Three-Peaks.

My purpose in writing this prologue was to create a context of the working life of paramedics and being an EMS student at a UoT for the reader. I now move into the chapter proper (i.e. Part Two) where I discuss the emergence of student, graduate and professional identity in terms of the research data and answer my research questions.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PART TWO

*In Part Two I explore the emergence of EMS student, graduate and professional identity at a UoT by using Bhaskarian identity theory and a critical realist lens. For ease of reference and as an aide memoire I include the Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity here and the main tenets of identity theory before proceeding onto the chapter itself.*



**Figure 6.7** The Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity

#### **Bhaskarian definition of identity:**

Human identity is a changeable state of being in a social context emergent from non-identity. Identity emerges within the embodied self/agent from the individual's core constellational identity through (always incomplete) dialectical processes of formation within a social context of four-planar social being and its interaction with the interplay of structure, culture

& agency. Identity (to be) allows for absence (non-identity i.e. to not be) as change and potential (to be able to become).

**The Bhaskarian theory of identity posits the following:**

- Human identity emerging in the domain of the Actual is a complex event.
- Identity emerges in the Actual domain from the constellational identity, within a social context and four-planar social being (which includes the embodied personality/self).
- An individual's Constellational Identity consisting of the dispositional and rhythmic identities comprises an individual's core identity. This is in the domain of the Real.
- The dispositional identity of the core constellational identity has causal powers and generative mechanisms (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 77). The dispositional identity is formed through primary socialisation/ Primary Discourse. I propose that these generative mechanisms include, among others, the open system of seven interacting conjunctive (connected) mechanisms (Bhaskar, 2010a, p. 10). These seven mechanisms are physical, biological/physiological/medical, psychological, psycho-social<sup>81</sup>, socio-economic, cultural and normative.
- Identity is **not** monovalent, i.e. not only positive. Identity is bivalent and thus encompasses both being and non-being as absence; and absence as change and potential (to be able to become). This means that identity emerges from non-identity which is always prior to identity in that identity pre-supposes non-identity and in the same way that absence is ontologically prior to presence.
- Human identity always emerges in an embodied personality which is stratified in the sense that a person comprises body, mind, emotions and spiritual ground state and is differentiated in time and space.
- Emergence of human identity can be either synchronic (i.e. emerging at one moment) or diachronic (i.e. emerging across time, over a period) as a result of dialectical processes of formation within the core constellational identity.

*Dialectical critical realism (DCR) is used in the analysis and interpretation of the data; therefore the MELD schema is important*

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<sup>81</sup> Psycho-social means relating to a person's psychological development in and interaction with a social environment (Medical Dictionary for Health Professions and Nursing, 2012).

because it summarises the four moments of DCR. I present it here again for ease of reference and understanding. The first level 1M refers to basic critical realism and its ontology. Absence comes in at 2E. The third level (3L) comprises the emergent whole, totality. The fourth level (4D) comprises transformative agency or praxis and reflexivity. This is illustrated in Figure 6.8.

<b>M</b>	<b>1M First Moment Level of ontology</b>	<b>First Moment</b> refers to NON-IDENTITY (i.e. DIFFERENCE) RELATIONS; <b>BEING AS STRUCTURED (ontology)</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>2E Second Edge Absence</b>	<b>Second Edge</b> refers to the <b>POINT</b> of transition or becoming; pertains to <b>ABSENCE/ NEGATIVITY; BEING AS PROCESSUAL (being-in-process)</b>
<b>L</b>	<b>3L Third Level Totality</b>	<b>Third Level</b> is an emergent <b>WHOLE</b> , capable of reacting back on the materials from which it emerged, process-in-product <b>TOTALITY; BEING AS EMERGENT WHOLE;( process-in-product)</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>4D 4<sup>th</sup> Dimension Transformative Agency &amp; Praxis</b>	<b>Fourth Dimension: BEING AS INCORPORATING TRANSFORMATIVE AGENCY OR PRAXIS;</b> reflexivity; ( <b>product-in-process</b> )

**Figure 6.8:** The MELD schema adapted from Norrie (in Hartwig 2007, p. 197) and Bhaskar (1993, p. 392)

*The four planes of Four-planar social being (material transactions with nature; inter-/intra-personal relations; network of social relations in which former are embedded; embodied personality and agent's own subjectivity) span the four DCR levels, but in reverse order (see Figure 6.8). There are all present simultaneously in any social act in which we engage. Bhaskar (2002a, p. 307) holds that "whatever you do, you will be acting on all these four fronts simultaneously".*

<b>Ontological-axiological Chain</b>	<b>1M Non-identity</b>	<b>2E Negativity</b>	<b>3L Totality</b>	<b>4D Transformative Agency</b>
Four-planar social being or human nature (social tetrapoly)	<b>d.</b> the stratified person (intra-subjectivity)	<b>c.</b> Social relations	<b>b.</b> inter-/intra-subjective (personal) relations; transactions with ourselves and others	<b>a.</b> material transactions with nature and material object generally (making)

**Figure 6.9:** Four-planar social being in reverse order according to MELD scheme (Source: Bhaskar 1998, p. 645 and Hartwig 2007, p. 421)

## 6.1 Introduction

Change is the most important aspect of emergent identity, because emergence cannot happen without change as will be seen in the analyses presented in this chapter. At the same time, change is a very important aspect of dialectical critical realism (DCR) because change is closely linked to one of the most important concepts of DCR, i.e. absence (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 239). Absence/negation is located in the Second Edge of the MELD scheme where being is seen as 'being-in-process'. Bhaskar (2002a) states, "Most importantly absence is necessary for change. Because change and process is always the absencing of what was present and the presenting of what was absent" (p. 37). For instance, if Jean does not know about critical realism, one could say that Jean has an absence of knowledge about critical realism. Jean wishes to change that, so she studies critical realism. The process that takes place is this: Jean absents her absence/lack of knowledge of critical realism by studying critical realism. The knowledge of critical realism is now present in Jean. A similar process of change happens in the emergence of identity as will be seen in this chapter.

I approach the emergence of student, graduate and professional identity by considering each one in turn because the data shows that there is a definite progression from the emergence of the initial student identity in first year to the emergence of graduate identity in third year to the emergence of professional identity when the students have qualified and are working.

I regard this process of **student** identity emergence as being three moments: (i) student identity, (ii) student-graduate identity and (iii) student-professional identity. Student-graduate and student-professional identity may be seen not only as precursors to actual professional identity but as necessary steps in the process of emergence of professional identity. To illustrate this I present excerpts of student respondent conversation from the data.

In each instance I first present an analytical narrative followed by an analysis of respondent statements and end with a conceptual re-description<sup>82</sup> where I draw in theory. I have created an analytical device, i.e. a conceptual tool to link the seven generative mechanisms that are present in the core constellational identity of a person to the conversation of the respondents. This conceptual tool consists of mapping the respondent's conversation onto the seven

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<sup>82</sup> I have taken this approach from Karl Maton's work (Maton 2013).

generative mechanisms as well as four-planar social being because we always act on all four levels of four-planar social being simultaneously.

After the analysis of the emergence of student, graduates and professional identity, I consider the research questions<sup>83</sup> about identity in the light of the analyses.

## **6.2 FIRST MOMENT OF STUDENT IDENTITY: EMERGENCE OF STUDENT IDENTITY IN FIRST YEAR STUDENTS**

### *Analytical narrative*

As previously mentioned in the prologue to this chapter there is great diversity of age, culture, language and life-experience among the first year Emergency Medical Science (EMS) students who come into the course with different geo-histories and their separate identities. The data has shown that staff in the EMS department have a specific notion of student identity in mind which they wish to develop in first year students, namely neatly uniformed, respectful, polite, disciplined, compliant and able to work effectively in a team. They hold this notion because they want convergence among the first-years, i.e. they want them all to act and behave in a similar manner. To achieve this, the first-year students have to change.

To bring about this change, the staff try to bring this divergent group of students to a point of convergence where they all look and behave the same by applying a paramilitaristic, behaviourist approach with rules and regulations in the first year. In the application of this approach the first-years are put through a strict PT regimen to bring them to the point of putting aside their differences and working in teams by insisting that they operate at the level of the slowest person in the group so that nobody is left behind in order to break down individualism. They are also required to participate in the arduous Three Peak 48-hour rescue exercise which pushes them to the limits of their physical and mental capabilities. In this rescue exercise team-work is essential compelling students to work together over an extended period. The rules of the behaviouristic, paramilitaristic approach require students to stand up

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<sup>83</sup> **Research Question One:** “How do student, graduate and professional identities emerge in Emergency Medical Science (EMS) students at a university of Technology?” **Research Question Two:** “What are the implications of the interplay of Structure, Culture and Agency for the emergence of these identities?”

when a lecturer enters the classroom, to call lecturers ‘Sir’ or ‘Ma’am’ whenever they speak to them and to greet them politely outside the classroom. If they do not comply, they are ‘punished’ with extra PT as mentioned in the prologue.

The EMS staff also wish to make the first year students aware of the hierarchical structure of the Emergency Medical Care Services where they will ultimately be employed. They do so by imposing a hierarchical structure on them right from the start of their studies, e.g. by emphasizing the seniority of the third-year students to whom the first years are required to display respect by standing up when a third-year student enters their classroom. The third-years’ seniority is further emphasized in that they are exempted from the ‘stand up respectfully when your lecturer enters the room’ rule although the third-year respondents said that it was difficult for them not to stand up because it had become so deeply ingrained in them. This first year experience mirrors the EMCS workplace in that both are uniformed, disciplined and hierarchical.

**Nosipho:** *Once you get into this course and, I promise you, three months down the line either you quit or you change in order for you to do this course (SN 27/9/11).*

In the foregoing quotation one of the student respondents, Nosipho, makes an important claim “...either you quit or you change in order for you to do this course” which, for her, makes change a *sine qua non* for success on the National Diploma in Emergency Medical Science programme. It is interesting that Nosipho puts a time limit on the period of change, i.e. three months by which time a student will either have settled into the routine or realised that leaving is the only option. Nosipho’s statement may appear to be somewhat black and white, but its truth is borne out by the fact that **all** student respondents, in response to the question “Have you changed since you started studying”, replied that they themselves had actually changed.

From the above it is clear that change is an essential feature of first-year student life where the staff exercise their transformative agency (Bhaskar 1993) to change (i.e. absent) the identities that students bring with them into the first-year classroom. In Bhaskarian terms the incoming students would have a ‘non-identity’ in terms of being EMS students, i.e. they do not have the same identity that the second year students have, for instance.

In eliciting my data about the emergence of identity I asked the students: “Have you changed since you started studying?” Since everyone answered in the affirmative, I posed two further questions: “How have you changed?” and “What caused you to change?” I now look at some of the answers to those questions with regard to first-year students through the lens of the Bhaskarian explanatory framework on identity.

**Example One: Jana, National Diploma student (studying to be a paramedic)**

**Analysis**

Student Jana gives her opinion about PT and personal change:

**Jana:** *The course – what we are doing is very serious. The PT and all that stuff is serious, but I mean that’s what they are training you for – I mean you are going to be in charge of a situation with high stakes. That is pretty serious. You can’t not change. From first year you are on the road. You see life. You see terrible things. You see people hitting each other. You see people, things that you hear on the radio, see on the news; you actually see it and experience it. You can’t not change being exposed to that. You can’t break down when you are in charge. So you also have to be strong in that situation. So, from the word go, all the PT, all the discipline, all that sort of stuff, it’s for you, so you can chuck yourself in the breach (SJ/27/10/12).*

In Table 6.1a the seven generative mechanisms (Bhaskar, 2010a, p. 5) are mapped onto Jana’s conversation to gain a deeper understanding of the causal powers and generative mechanisms of the Real domain from where identity emerges, although the mapping itself is an analytical artifice, a conceptual tool.

**Table 6.1a** Mapping generative mechanisms and four-planar social being: **Jana**

Seven Interactive Generative Mechanisms (in Dispositional identity of core constellational Identity in REAL Domain)	Quotations
<b>Physical</b>	The PT and all that stuff is serious
<b>Biological/physical</b>	You can’t break down when you are in charge
<b>Psychological</b>	So you also have to be strong in that situation
<b>Psycho-social</b>	You see life. You see terrible things. You see people hitting each other. You see people, things that you hear on the radio, see on the news; you actually see it and experience it.
<b>Socio-economic</b>	You are going to be in charge of a situation with high stakes.
<b>Cultural</b>	All the discipline, all that sort of stuff it’s for you

<b>Normative</b>	That is pretty <b>serious</b> (x3); You can't not change (x2); so you can chuck yourself in the breach
<b>Four dimensions of four-planar social being</b> (in social context, i.e. the <b>ACTUAL</b> domain)	<b>Quotations</b>
<b>Natural exchanges, material transactions with nature</b>	The course we are doing... From first year you are on the road. You see life.
<b>Social interactions with others</b>	You see terrible things. You see people hitting each other. You see people, things that you hear on the radio, see on the news; you actually see it and experience it ... so you can chuck yourself in the breach.
<b>Relationships with social structure</b>	What we are doing is very serious. The PT and all that stuff is serious, but I mean that's what they are training you for ... So, from the word go, all the PT, all the discipline, all that sort of stuff...
<b>Stratification of our embodied personalities</b>	You can't break down when you are in charge. So you also have to be strong in that situation.

The analytical mapping in Table 6.1a shows the engagement of the student on all seven levels. Jana sees PT and the discipline being imposed as so serious that she mentions it twice and uses the word 'serious' three times because she sees it as preparation for working in a high stakes environment where she will be "in charge" in a leadership role. She uses a double negative "you can't not change" twice to emphasize how inevitable (almost inexorable) change is. The first time she uses it to show that PT, the discipline and being trained for a highly responsible job make change unavoidable. The second use of "you can't not change" is to show that the effect of being exposed to trauma is to be changed – "you see terrible things ... you actually see it and experience it". This exposure to trauma happens while on workplace-based learning (WPBL), "from first year you are on the road". The first change comes through the interaction of her core dispositional identity with the structure (PT, being trained) and culture (discipline) of the EMS department. Here her identity as an EMS student is being moulded so that it may emerge in her embodied personality as the disciplined, respectful, compliant student identity that the EMS department requires in a student. This change comes about through absencing the identity she brought with herself into her first year, and making the new identity present.

The second change takes place within the WPBL setting where she experiences (on the Empirical level) unpleasant, traumatic events (on the Actual level) that affect her emotionally, but she feels that she should not show her emotions on the job, especially when in a leadership position – "you can't break down when you are in charge". Jana says that she has "to be strong in the situation" which indicates that for her "being strong" means being

able to keep her emotions under control. She concludes that the change is worthwhile and purposeful because “it’s for you, so you can chuck yourself in the breach”. In other words, change absents a pre-existing state allowing qualities of strength to emerge so that one can step into the breach, i.e. help someone. Jana’s passion resonates through her words and her sharp, short sentences ending with her rather delightful and enthusiastic “so you can chuck yourself in the breach”. Jana concludes that everything on the course and WPBL is to her advantage in that it prepares her for the world of work.

In terms of mapping onto four-planar social being, it is very difficult to separate the four aspects analytically because everything is interrelated and four-planar synchronic. What the mapping does show is that there is engagement with all four planes, i.e. the outside world/the workplace, the social relations with patients, the curriculum (i.e. the course, PT, work-place based learning) as social structure, and the reactions and changes within herself.

### ***Conceptual re-description***

The analysis shows that personal change does happen in first year students. The particular disciplined, respectful and compliant identity that the EMS department requires of its students does emerge in a process of personal change. In terms of the Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity this change is caused by the interaction of causal powers and the seven interactive generative mechanisms in the dispositional identity of the core constellational identity (i.e. on the level of the Real) through dialectical processes of formation and their interplay with structure, culture and agency within four-planar social being. The rhythmic identity of the core constellational identity is the exercise of these causal powers and results in the ‘new’ first-year identity emerging from the core constellational identity.

One has to bear in mind that according to the Bhaskarian explanatory framework individuals have the seven interactive generative mechanisms within their dispositional identity which is part of the constellational identity, i.e. their core identity which is formed from birth. These seven generative mechanisms operate in the domain of the Real together with other causal powers and generative mechanisms about which we may know nothing. Thus mapping these mechanisms onto an excerpt of conversation shows these seven generative mechanisms and causal powers interacting with the elements that are mapped causing the emergence of

identity in the domain of the Actual. What they cause to emerge is not reducible to the seven generative mechanisms *per se*.

In critical realist terms, all change/transformation is negation of some sort. “To negate is to absent and thereby transform. All praxis is transformative. Negating what is given is transforming it, transforming it is absencing something which is already there and making something present which was not there” (Bhaskar, 2002a, p. 71). The type of change/negation that Jana mentions is “transformative negation” (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 5) which is bipolar in the sense that it can refer to the outcome and/or the means that brings about the change. Here it refers to both: (i) the outcome is the strong leader/paramedic who can deal with trauma and be disciplined enough to keep emotions under control; and (ii) the means refers to the PT, discipline and training.

Jana’s words “you can’t not change” are reminiscent of Bhaskar’s five theorems of human action<sup>84</sup> which are part of transformative praxis and reflexivity, especially the second one which states that “we can’t not act” (2002a, p. 225). The fourth theorem speaks about the importance of self-change because if we want to change our practice in the world we have “to change ourselves, our ways of doing things” (*ibid.*); this aligns with Jana’s changing herself (i.e. becoming strong to control her emotions) so that she can change her practice in the world (i.e. not breaking down in public).

Although all the student respondents stated that they had changed as a result of events they experienced, each one experienced change differently. This is because each person has their own core constellational identity which is formed from birth through their primary socialisation which would be different in each individual case with different causal powers and generative mechanisms. In addition, the fact that different students experience events differently (i.e. in the domain of the Empirical) is because several causal mechanisms (in the domain of the Real), which may only be contingently related to one another, may be involved in processes of change (Sayer, 1992, p. 208). This means that “the same mechanism can produce quite different results, and different mechanisms may produce the same empirical result” (*ibid.*). For instance, two first-year students will experience the same curriculum

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<sup>84</sup> These five theorems of action are discussed in Chapter Two. For ease of reference these are: (i) Action is intentional; (ii) There is no way we can’t not act; (iii) All social action happens in terms of four-planar social being; (iv) Whatever we do at some point we must just do it spontaneously, and ultimately all change proceeds from self-change, and (v) Anything we do will immediately affect all planes of social being (Bhaskar, 2002a, pp. 225-226).

event, e.g. PT, and do all the exercises, jogging and swimming that is required, but the change that occurs in each will be different according to her own causal powers and generative mechanisms.

Since critical realism holds that space and time are intrinsic to the process of causality (Bhaskar, 1993, 404), it is important to consider the spatio-temporal aspect of the changes mentioned in the analysis. The change described in Jana's excerpt is diachronic, i.e. it happens over a **period**  $T_1 \dots T_2$  where  $T_1$  is the point in time at the start of the first year when a student comes into the course for the first time, while  $T_2$  is a point in time further along the time continuum when a period of time has elapsed. However, it is important to mention that change does not stop at  $T_2$  as though some 'perfect' state had been attained; rather  $T_2$  should be seen as the 'point of moving on' because the dialectical processes of formation leading to change and the emergence of identity are always incomplete (Bhaskar, 1993).

### ***Example Two: Mary and Zadia, first-year B.EMC students studying to be degreed paramedics***

#### ***Analytical narrative***

In this example, two first-year female students talk about identity and change. Zadia had studied Medicine at Stellenbosch University (a prestigious traditional university) for one year and then dropped out. She decided to pursue Emergency Medical Science studies instead. Mary completed her Matric<sup>85</sup> in December 2011 and started EMS studies in January 2012. They both enrolled for the new Bachelor of Emergency Medical Care degree (B.EMC). I interviewed them at the end of their first term. I asked "How do you see yourself when you think of yourself as a paramedic student; think of yourself as a first-year and your identity? Is there a different identity?"

Zadia answered:

**Zadia:** *When I am here I am like a little guppy<sup>86</sup> in the ocean. I can't really have much identity because I am only a first year so I haven't kind of distinguished myself. I still have to do that. But at home I know who I am. I am this confident person, sure*

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<sup>85</sup> Matriculation (Matric) is the final year of high school in South Africa at the end of which learners write the Matric examinations.

<sup>86</sup> A guppy is a tiny fish.

*that I know everything. That's my identity. The way I am at home is not the same as I am here, like, sometimes (29/3/12).*

Mary replied:

**Mary:** *As a paramedic I'm still, I don't know much. I still feel like I'm a student. I feel like I'm a speck of sand in the dust. I don't know anything yet; I'm still learning. I'm, like, really, I am, like, fresh. I just came straight out of high school and went straight into the programme (29/3/12).*

It is interesting that Zadia says “I can't really have much identity because I am only a first year so I haven't kind of distinguished myself.” She uses the modal verb ‘can't’ instead of the auxiliary verb ‘don't’. ‘Can't’ implies inability, impossibility. By using ‘can't’ she implies ‘not able to/not possible to’ is and gives two reasons: (i) that she is *only* first-year and (ii) that she has not yet distinguished herself. Both reasons have a temporal element – “only first year” and “not yet” suggesting that there is still time to change. This suggests that she sees identity as something that emerges over a long time and that it is connected to performance. Mary also alludes to the temporal aspect in saying “I'm, like, really, I am, like, fresh. I just came straight out of high school and went straight into the programme”, but does not address the identity aspect of the question. Both students see themselves as one of many, as feeling minute within their environment – “I am like a little guppy in the ocean” and “I feel like I'm a speck of sand in the dust”. This sense of personal insignificance may indicate that while their student identity is emerging over time (diachronically) dissonance is at play within them and they feel disconnected from their core identity. Interestingly, Zadia makes the point about her identity at home being different – “I know who I am. I am this confident person, sure that I know everything. That's my identity”. This shows that she is aware of having a personal core identity, but she is not aware of her student identity emerging and feels small and insignificant as a result. Later on in the focus group I asked, “You arrived in January and now it's 29 March – have you seen a change in yourself and a development in yourself since you came here to now?”

### **Analysis**

Zadia answered that she had changed.

**Zadia:** *Yes, yes. I mean like I was an introvert always like... I am. The team work we had. I'm looking forward to come to class. I'm not an extravert, but I think I've*

*become less of an introvert. That also, and respectability – that’s important. I’m not used to doing team work because I have always been on my own. Now we’re in class doing things together and how I’ve learnt respect for my partner and taking responsibility and things like that. Definitely I have learnt teamwork, team-building, respectability. I’ve become a more open person. I’ve always been like very uptight not allowing people in so easily, but here it is just like kind of scattered all over the show. It’s not a bad thing; it’s a good thing ’cause contributing to self-growth potential is good (SZ/29/3/12).*

Mary replied that she too had changed:

**Mary:** *I’d say yes. Definitely. You know, you take life a little more seriously once you realise what’s at stake. Like, you know, you can’t afford to slack off now. You can’t afford to not study for your tests. You know, it’s really like I feel more focussed and more set, like, you know, this is what I have to achieve (SM/29/3/12).*

Both students feel that they have changed. Zadia takes a more inward, reflexive approach in her answers, while Mary is more direct. The mapping in Table 6.1b below shows that the seven levels of interactive generative mechanisms are engaged as are the four dimensions of four-planar social being. The social context that these two students are talking about is the classroom which has become the natural environment in which their changes are taking place. The social interactions are mainly in terms of learning to do teamwork and getting on with peers. In their relationships with social structures, i.e. the curriculum and its emergent events such as teams, tests, and the class, both students are changing in attitude, learning respect, becoming more focussed.

**Table 6.1b** Mapping generative mechanisms and four-planar social being: **Zadia and Mary**

<b>Seven Interactive Generative Mechanisms</b> (in Dispositional identity of core constellational Identity in the <b>REAL</b> Domain)	<b>Quotations</b>
<b>Physical</b>	Both female
<b>Biological/physical</b>	<b>Z:</b> 20 years old; <b>M:</b> 19.
<b>Psychological</b>	<b>Z:</b> I’m not an extravert, but I think I’ve become less of an introvert ... I’ve always been like very uptight not allowing people in so easily... I have always been on my own; <b>M:</b> I feel more focussed and more set
<b>Psycho-social</b>	<b>Z:</b> I’m looking forward to come to class ... Now we’re in class doing things together and how I’ve learnt respect for my partner ... here it is just like kind of scattered all over the show; <b>M:</b> you can’t afford to slack off now. You can’t afford to not study for your tests.
<b>Socio-economic</b>	Both come from advantaged schools

<b>Cultural</b>	<b>Z:</b> Indian; <b>M:</b> White, English-speaking;
<b>Normative</b>	<b>Z:</b> Definitely I have learnt teamwork, team-building, respectability... I've become a more open person; <b>M:</b> you take life a little more seriously... this is what I have to achieve;
<b>Four dimensions of four-planar social being</b> (in social context, i.e. the <b>ACTUAL</b> domain)	<b>Quotations</b>
<b>Natural exchanges, material transactions with nature</b>	Come to class Team work
<b>Social interactions with others</b>	<b>Z:</b> I've learnt respect for my partner... I have learnt teamwork
<b>Relationships with social structure</b>	<b>Z:</b> I have learnt teamwork, team-building, respectability... and taking responsibility. <b>M:</b> you take life a little more seriously once you realise what's at stake ... You can't afford to not study for your tests
<b>Stratification of our embodied personalities</b>	<b>M:</b> I feel more focussed and more set <b>Z:</b> I've become less of an introvert... contributing to self-growth

For Zadia the biggest changes lie in her embodied personality which comprises body, mind and emotions as she feels she is less of an introvert and feels that her studies and all the changes contribute to self-growth. Zadia is aware of the changes taking place in her as she is becoming more open to people and less of an introvert. She has also learnt to work with others in her team. In the process of changing Zadia is absenting certain of her previous dispositions. Mary is changing her way of studying because she has realised “what’s at stake”.

### *Conceptual re-description*

To negate is to absent and thereby transform. All praxis is transformative. Negating what is given is transforming it; transforming it is absenting something which is already there and making something present which was not there (Bhaskar, 2002a, p. 71).

The type of change that Zadia is undergoing is what Bhaskar calls “radical negation” (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 6) which is also transformative, but has four-fold polysemy (i.e. many meanings) of its own: “auto-subversion (i.e. self-undermining), self-transformation, self-realisation and self-overcoming” (Hartwig, 2007, p. 11). This means that in the process of changing Zadia becomes aware of herself and undermines herself. Then there is a process of self-transformation where radical negation absents a state of being or dispositions. Zadia in a process of self-realisation understands what is happening to her and has to overcome/absent hindrances and impediments within her. To illustrate this radical negation more fully, I have included further excerpts from the conversation with Zadia below.

I asked Zadia “what is identity?” to which she replied: “*Identity is how I see myself and how other people see myself and then but it’s more important how I see myself. And so I determine my identity*”. This resonates with philosopher Charles Taylor’s view: “since identities are formed dialogically in social contexts, they require recognition from others (Taylor in Sayer, 2000, p. 183). Zadia says that identity is how others see her, but insists that it is more important how she sees herself.

**Zadia:** *I was first year Medical student at Stellenbosch University last year. OK. I see identity. I couldn’t. When I was in Matric I had this problem of kind of how I saw myself. It was more about how other people saw me and not like how the way I see myself. There was a clash in Matric when I had to make a career decision on which kind of career I would like to follow. I was more focussed on how other people kind of saw me. And then. And people saw me as a doctor. I don’t know what I saw myself as. I was still on the path, the road to self-discovery. Everybody saw me as a doctor. Then, OK, I got accepted for Medicine and I studied Medicine. And then when I was studying I was like, “OK I have this identity as a doctor”, but then I lost track of my identity of how I saw myself. I was focussing on how other people saw me. And then I didn’t enjoy it. And then it kind of changed me. It was very confusing, but if I can’t express myself who I am, then I wasn’t going to enjoy it. Then I came here. I do see myself as like helping other people, but it needs to be. I know who I am.*

**Interviewer:** *And so you don’t have the conflict now that you had last year?*

**Zadia:** *No. Because I can actually see myself as a paramedic – the athletic part of it and the academic part. That’s good. I couldn’t just do the academic part because then part of my identity was being removed – the athletic part. I’m fully. I’m expressed (SZ/29/3/12).*

This extract shows that Zadia became very conflicted about her identity in her last year of high school and her first year of studying Medicine at Stellenbosch University. This was because she was constructing her identity in terms of how others recognised her, i.e. as a doctor while she was unable to see herself as a doctor, “And people saw me as a doctor. I don’t know what I saw myself as”. Thus there was a clash between her and others’ view of her identity. Even when studying she could not see herself as a doctor, although her studying medicine reinforced her doctor-identity in the minds of others. Zadia’s conflict can best be described in terms of radical negation. Zadia’s statements illustrate the four dimensions of radical negation in operation as shown in Table 6.2a.

**Table 6.2a:** The four aspects of radical negation: **Zadia**

<b>Radical negation</b>	<b>Quotations</b>
<b>Auto-subversion/ self-undermining</b>	In Matric I had this problem of kind of how I saw myself. It was more about how other people saw me and not like how the way I see myself... I was more focussed on how other people kind of saw me... I don't know what I saw myself as. ... I was focussing on how other people saw me. And then when I was studying I was like, "OK I have this identity as a doctor", but then I lost track of my identity of how I saw myself... And then it kind of changed me... It was very confusing
<b>Self-transformation</b>	I was still on the path, the road to self-discovery
<b>Self-realisation</b>	But if I can't express myself who I am, then I wasn't going to enjoy it.
<b>Self-overcoming</b>	Then I came here. I do see myself as like helping other people... I can actually see myself as a paramedic – the athletic part of it and the academic part... I couldn't just do the academic part because then part of my identity was being removed – the athletic part. I'm fully. I'm expressed.

Table 6.2a illustrates the radical negation experienced by Zadia as she struggled to find herself in which process she absented certain states of being as well as her confusion and self-doubt. In Zadia's process of **self-undermining**, there is much self-conflict, doubt and confusion. As part of her **self-transformation**, she sees herself on the road to discovering her identity. Her **self-realisation** is her 'AHA' moment where she realises and understands her need to express her being. In the fourth stage of **self-overcoming**, she realises that she has to make a major change, drops her medical studies and takes up paramedicine.

It is interesting that once her doubts and confusion had been absented, her student identity starts to emerge – "I do see myself as a paramedic" and her conflict is resolved. She also considers both the academic and athletic aspects of the course as vital to her emerging identity; to omit one aspect would compromise her identity. Bhaskar (1993) states that the embodied personality "as agent has transformative agency" (p. 209). Zadia has exercised her transformative agency in cancelling her studies in Medicine and taking up EMS studies instead. Thus the radical negation she has experienced has led to her transformed praxis.

In terms of the temporal aspect, Zadia struggled with her identity in Matric and into her first year at university, this could be shown as  $T_1$  to  $T_2$  until she decides to end her medical studies and come to the UoT. At this point the dialectical processes of formation start up anew as  $T_1$  to  $T_2$  because the dialectical processes are incomplete and constantly evolving. A term into her new studies at a new university, her student identity is still in a process of emerging across time as she interacts with the structure (curriculum and curricular events – "academic

and athletic”), culture (the department culture of discipline, respect and responsibility and agency (that of lecturers and peers, especially team mates and her own transformative agency).

***Example Three: Fatima, first-year Emergency Care Technician student, Higher Certificate***

***Analytical narrative***

Fatima is studying the first year of the two-year Higher Certificate Emergency Care Technician (ECT). As explained in Chapter One the ECT is a mid-level worker between an Intermediate Life Support Ambulance Emergency Assistant (AEA) and a paramedic. The ECT scope of practice and drug protocols are more advanced than those of an AEA but less advanced than those of a paramedic.

The ECT class is diverse with students of various ages and experience on the course “*We do have a diversity when it comes to age. We do have people who have been in this career a long time. We have students straight out of Matric (SJ/3/10/12)*. The ECT students do not do any rescue models as part of their course, thus they do not do PT. However, there is strong feeling in the class that they should do PT as expressed by Fatima:

**Fatima:** *I do think that physical training should be compulsory considering that we are lifting heavy things. It’s not just for BEMC, it’s not just for rescue. I think that physical training does improve the way you think and the way you work. I do think that we should all go on the Three Peaks – so ja, that’s it (3/10/12).*

In the paramedic programmes, National Diploma and B.EMC, PT plays a strong role in developing discipline in the students. However, the ECT programme takes a different approach in that the ECT lecturers take the ECT students away on a two-day camp at the beginning of the academic year as a team-building exercise (SF/3/10/12). Student Joe says that they were taught important lessons about being an ECT student on the camp, “*you learn a few points, strong points*” (3/10/13). It is interesting that the same discipline, respect and compliance is expected of these ECT students as the other B.EMC and National Diploma

first-years and yet a paramilitaristic behaviourist approach is not applied. The same required first-year student identity does emerge in these students<sup>87</sup> (Personal observation on my visits to the department 2011, 2012, 2013). This would prove a fruitful area of further research to see why the same identity emerges without the paramilitaristic approach.

### **Analysis**

I asked the ECT students whether they had changed since being on the ECT programme. They replied that they had. ECT student Fatima did not come into the course straight from high school, but did First Aid Courses and the Basic Ambulance Assistant short course and volunteered on ambulances. As her mathematics mark was not good in Matric, she repeated the subject and improved her marks to be admitted to the ECT programme. In response to my question Fatima says:

**Fatima:** *I think it humbled me. Apparently I am - like Joe said – very demanding. I think that the whole experience has humbled me because I always relied on myself, now I had to rely on others. I had to start making an effort in my work. I never always gave 100%, so it has taught me that I must pull up my own socks – nobody is going to do it for me. It is very humbling, very educational. I think I grew a lot in doing this course. Ah, I think ... Ja, I think in knowledge I grew a lot, and in understanding others also. I have worked with others. I have done promotions<sup>88</sup> and always been around people. Being around people who are younger than you striving for the same profession as you kind of makes me think: “What have I done with the past five years of my life?” It really makes me want to work harder because I know that I have that potential in me (3/10/12).*

**Table 6.1c:** Mapping generative mechanisms and four-planar social being: **Fatima**

<b>Seven Interactive Generative Mechanisms</b> (in Dispositional identity of core constellational Identity in the <b>REAL</b> Domain)	<b>Quotations</b>
<b>Physical</b>	Female
<b>Biological/physical</b>	Early 20s; older than some of the other students – “Being around people who are younger”
<b>Psychological</b>	Has humbled me (x3)
<b>Psycho-social</b>	I always relied on myself, now I had to rely on others; I think in knowledge I grew a lot, and in understanding others also; I know that I have that potential in me.

<sup>87</sup> This would be a possible area of further research to explore why this identity emerges without the paramilitaristic, behaviourist approach.

<sup>88</sup> “Doing promotions” means working part-time in a store promoting a brand-name product to customers.

<b>Socio-economic</b>	I have done promotions
<b>Cultural</b>	Muslim
<b>Normative</b>	It really makes me want to work harder; making an effort in my work;
<b>Four dimensions of four-planar social being</b> (in social context, i.e. the <b>ACTUAL</b> domain)	<b>Quotations</b>
<b>Natural exchanges, material transactions with nature</b>	the whole experience;
<b>Social interactions with others</b>	Now I had to rely on others... I have worked with others. I have done promotions and always been around people... Being around people who are younger than you striving for the same profession as you;
<b>Relationships with social structure</b>	I think I grew a lot in doing this course... I think it humbled me;
<b>Stratification of our embodied personalities</b>	I never always gave 100%, so it has taught me that I must pull up my own socks – nobody is going to do it for me. It is very humbling, very educational ... Kind of makes me think: “What have I done with the past five years of my life?”

Fatima shows good insight into herself in her response to my question. Table 6.3a shows the interactive generative mechanisms that are operating in her dispositional identity and the rhythmic identity when these causal mechanisms are activated. It is from her that her student identity starts to emerge. In terms of four-planar social being she has interacted on all four dimensions and hence interacted with the social structures of the course, the curriculum and the curricular event, the teamwork. She also interacted with agency through her interactions with other as described and with culture which resides as a generative mechanism within the core dispositional identity of her embodied personality. Being on the programme has affected Fatima deeply as evidenced by her saying three times that the experience has humbled her because she has had to learn to rely on others and that she had to apply herself to her studies. This change reflects the absenting of previous dispositions of relying solely on herself and of not committing herself fully to her studies. She reflectively asks “What have I done with the past five years of my life?” Her answer is that she needs to start working harder because she recognises that she has the potential to succeed.

### ***Conceptual re-description***

Fatima’s quotation above is a good example of ‘radical negation’ (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 260) as shown below in Table 6.2b. She is able to recognise herself as not fully committed. Being self-reliant, she expresses how this course has affected her in bringing her to rely on others referring to the teamwork and the study groups in which she has to participate. This self-transformation indicates the changes being wrought in her. Coming out of this is her self-realisation that she has ‘pull up her socks’ because she has to take responsibility for herself –

“nobody is going to do it for me”. She feels she has to work harder and commit herself in a process of self-overcoming. It is interesting that she says “I have the potential” because potential is real possibility (Hartwig, 2007, p. 369) and in saying this she is claiming the possibility of change; Bhaskar (1993) sees change as potential, i.e. ‘being able to become’ (p. 77).

Like Zadia, Fatima undergoes a process of radical negation.

**Table 6.2b:** The four aspects of radical negation: **Fatima**

Radical negation	Quotations
<b>Auto-subversion/ self-undermining</b>	<b>Fatima:</b> I never always gave 100%,
<b>Self-transformation</b>	<b>F.</b> Now I had to rely on others. I had to start making an effort in my work ... I think I grew a lot in doing this course ... I think in knowledge I grew a lot, and in understanding others also;
<b>Self-realisation</b>	<b>F.</b> It has taught me that I must pull up my own socks – nobody is going to do it for me... Being around people who are younger than you striving for the same profession as you, kind of makes me think: “What have I done with the past 5 years of my life?”
<b>Self-overcoming</b>	<b>F.</b> I must pull up my own socks; It really makes me want to work harder because I know that I have that potential in me.

In this radical negation process Fatima **undermined** herself by not giving 100%. Her process of **self-transformation** required her to start making an effort. She started to grow in knowledge and understanding. She **realised** that she would succeed only through her own effort. In the process of **overcoming** her absences, she understood that she needed to apply herself and work harder because she had potential.

This radical negation absents dispositions and states of being in the process of bringing about change in Fatima. She is also exercising her personal freedom/autonomy in choosing to improve herself and to act in her own best interests (Hartwig, 2007, p. 213). In this way she also displays the criteria for rational agency, which means that one must:

- (a) possess the knowledge to act on one’s own real interests (the **cognitive** requirement);
- (b) be able to access the skill, resources and opportunities to do so (the **empowered** component); and
- (c) be disposed to do so (the **dispositional or motivational** condition)” (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 260) (my emphasis).

The above analysis of Fatima’s words show that she does possess:

- (a) the cognitive requirement of acting on her own interests, i.e. the understanding that she needs to improve: “I must pull up my own socks”;
- (b) the empowered component to access the skill resources and opportunities to do so, i.e. she is able to use her educational resources “I had to start making an effort in my work” and
- (c) the motivation to be disposed to do so, e.g. “It really makes me want to work harder because I know that I have that potential in me”. Thus she is employing rational agency in terms of her studies and exercising her autonomy to act in her own best interests as illustrated above. This rational agency leads to transformative praxis which enables Fatima to change her praxis.

### Summary of personal change in first-year students

Student respondents indicated that they all changed since starting their studies. As individuals they all experienced change in different ways. Some of these changes are shown in Table 6.3 below together with quotations from the data and interaction with structure, culture and agency.

**Table 6.3:** Personal change in first-year students

Types of change	How change manifests	Interaction with structure, culture, agency	Quotations
Change in interpersonal relations	Learning to work effectively in a group/team;  Changed interactions with others;	Structure – team, curriculum  Culture – departmental ideas of making incompatible individuals work together in a team  Agency – own transformative, peers, others	“I learnt respect for my partner” (SZ/29/3/12) “I learnt that if you share with other people and you do group discussions, they make you grow more and understand a lot better. I have changed from that person who was sitting alone on the side and I started doing with the other guys” (SS/25/10/11).  “I think it has changed how I interact with people” (SL15/8/12)  “This course has taught me to deal with other people as I was really very shy” (SV/27/9/12);
Change in personal ways of being	Becoming more disciplined;	Structure – curriculum: PT  Culture – departmental ideas of respect and	“With the PT and the discipline it also teaches you a lot about your personal team mates, your personal gains – where you are and where you are not” (SG/25/10/11). “It forced me to take this course seriously because if you didn’t get on the boat quickly in first year, you were off and you would have to

Becoming respectful	discipline, responsibility	repeat it” (SO/25/10/11). “They teach you a lot about respect” (SS/15/10/11)
Taking responsibility	Agency – own, team, lecturers, instructors	“You have to earn your respect with them (the PT instructors) which is a good thing I think. You don’t feel so great while you’re doing it” (SS/15/10/11). “They force you to have discipline, respect and responsibility. There’s no way of getting out of it” ST/27/10/11).
Becoming more open & accepting	Structure – WPBL	“I became a lot more accepting and a lot more open” (SB/27/10/11).
Having to deal with challenges	Culture – Workplace & department Agency – own, WPBL agents, paramedic, teams	“from first year we are exposed to everything that challenges you emotionally and psychologically and physically”(SM/27/10/11)

### Summary: first-year student identity

When a very diverse group of students of different ages, languages and cultures first come into the EMS programmes they do not have the identity that the second and third year EMS students have. Nor do they have the identity that the EMS staff would like them to have. Thus, in a Bhaskarian sense they have non-identity.

The EMS department has a specific image of the type of first-year student they would like to cultivate and the identity they would like them to have, i.e. the student should be respectful, disciplined, compliant, a team-worker, hard-working and responsible. To cultivate this identity, the department adopts a behaviourist approach in the first year which is implemented through the curriculum in terms of the physical training that the students are required to do daily where they have to learn to operate as a team. They do this by drilling or jogging at the speed of the slowest member of the team. Respect is inculcated in the students by having the class rise when a lecturer enters the room. Any lapses in respectful, compliant and disciplined behaviour are punished by extra compulsory exercise. Students are placed in teams of diverse members with whom they have to work well. All students wear uniforms to create homogeneity.

Thus, change is an essential feature of first-year student life where the staff exercise their transformative agency to change the identities that students bring with them into the first-year classroom to conform to the new first-year identity. Radical negation also plays a role in

change through the processes of self-undermining, self-transformation, self-realisation and self-overcoming that occur within individuals.

Identity is a state of being that emerges within the embodied self from an individual's core constellational identity through processes of formation within a social context of four-planar social being and its interaction with the interplay of structure, culture & agency. This occurs within the four-planar social being of an individual from the interaction of seven generative mechanisms in the core constellational identity with the interplay of structure, culture and agency.

To investigate the emergence of identity, I used an artifice, a conceptual tool, i.e. mapping the seven interactive generative mechanisms that reside in the core constellational identity of a person and four-planar social being onto the conversations of students to see how the emergence of identity comes about. This allowed me to see how the student experiences of actual events interact with their seven generative mechanisms as explained in the body of this chapter.

Identity emerges through interaction with the structure (curriculum and curricular events – “academic and athletic” as well the social structure of four-planar social being), culture (the department culture of discipline, respect and responsibility) and agency (that of lecturers and peers, especially team mates and a student's own transformative agency). Absence plays a very important role in the emergence of identity as seen from the analyses, especially those of radical negation.

### **6.3 THE SECOND MOMENT OF STUDENT IDENTITY: STUDENT-GRADUATE IDENTITY**

We have seen that the first moment of student identity is that of first-year identity. In analysing the research data a theme emerged showing that third-year students undergo a change of identity in two ways. Firstly, early on in the third year they start to assume a new student identity when they begin to realise that they will graduate at the end of the year. I have called this a ‘student-graduate’ identity and regard it as the second moment of student identity. Secondly, as the year progresses and they spend more time in workplace-based

learning (WPBL), this student-graduate identity begins to assume elements of a professional identity. I have called this ‘student-professional’ identity to distinguish it and consider it to be the third moment of student identity. I will discuss this below. This composite graduate identity emerges diachronically in the course of the third year (T<sub>1</sub> to T<sub>2</sub>) and is fully emergent by the end of the year when they graduate.

I present this by first exploring ‘student-graduate’ identity using two examples. This is followed by looking at ‘student-professional’ identity.

## **Student-graduate Identity**

### *Analytical narrative*

The third-year students are in a position to look back and reflect on their three years of study as indicated by student Gert, “*First year I had a lot more free time. Second year was still fine; I could still see friends ... this year has been one of the most difficult years. It is a battle*” (25/10/11). All the third-year respondents distinguish the third year as different to the first two years of their study. Some see it as the year when everything falls into place as student Lukholo states, “*All the years they have been puzzle pieces, but now it comes together*” (27/10/11). They also state that they have undergone personal change in their third year.

I said to third-year students: “I want to ask you about identity. I want you to think about your first, second and third year. How has your identity as a student changed over those three years? Are you the same type of student that you had been when you were first year?” The student answers to these questions are presented below as part of the analysis.

### ***Example One: Student-graduate Identity: Victor, third-year student***

#### **Analysis**

**Victor:** *No. When I started in first year I was terrified. It takes away from your place of security. And getting to know what my limitations are. It's tough you have to get to know yourself. I think that the second year for me was a lot of confusion. I didn't know enough to be called a paramedic yet, but I knew more than the average guy on the street. So I didn't know where I fit in. I didn't do as well in my tests as I would like*

*to. When I got to my third year I had this calm sort of feeling that I know now what I am supposed to know. I know how to study now after three years (SV/27/10/11).*

Victor makes a clear distinction between each of the three years of study. He answers “No” to the question whether he is the same type of student in his third year as in the first year. He uses a strong, emotive word to describe his experience of first year “I was terrified” and felt that he had been moved out of his comfort zone. Victor had to learn his limitations and get to know himself. He describes this process of developing self-awareness as “tough”. In second year he experiences “a lot of confusion” because he understands that he is not yet a paramedic, but that he knows a great deal more than the average non-student. He does not have a sense of belonging and does not do well academically. This all changed in his third year where he now experiences a “calm sort of feeling that I know now what I am supposed to know. I know how to study now after three years”.

### ***Conceptual re-description***

Victor’s first two years are marked by fear, dissonance, a sense of alienation and quite understandably weak academic performance. In getting to know himself he experiences his limitations. This may be because his first-year student identity as the disciplined, respectful, compliant and responsible student had not emerged fully which may be deduced from his saying that he did not fit in. However, he gives no indication why he had such a negative experience; the reason for which would be in the domain of the Real with its causal powers. Bhaskar (1993) states that “conceptually any ill can be looked upon as an absence, and any absence can be viewed as a constraint” (p. 259). Victor’s experience of his first two years can be regarded as an ill and hence as an absence and a constraint. Bhaskar (1993) maintains that such constraints are unwanted, unnecessary and removable and should be “transformatively negated, i.e. absented” (p. 260) For example, the confusion that Victor experienced in his second year could be absented. This transformative absenting does, in fact, happen, as Victor tells us, by his third year, when the confusion dissipates and he is clear about what he has to study as well as how to study. One could say that epistemological access (Morrow, 1995) was

finally enabled for Victor and with that came ontological access<sup>89</sup> as well in the sense that his sense of not fitting in was absented and he became comfortable with his identity as a student.

**Example Two: Student-graduate Identity: Caleb, third-year student**

**Analysis**

**Caleb:** *For me I was very much brought up that you respect your elders and your teachers. In high school they say “You must do this and you must study that” and you say “Yes ma’am”. You don’t argue; you don’t think about it. You just do it and that’s all that’s expected of you. But coming here – that’s how it was for me in first year. They said, “Study this!” and I studied that. That’s what I focussed on. In the second year you kind of lose your way like Victor said because it is not so demanding as first year. Then you get to third year. For me, in the third year I think I grew completely because I then realised – in the second year you think “OK, well I am in 2nd year, I must start feeling like a paramedic”, but then you realise, “Wait! I don’t know half the stuff I need to know to be a paramedic”. It’s only in third year that everything starts to come together now, like they say – all the skills and everything. And you start to feel like, well I actually know something ... At least I know something and I feel a bit more confident. In third year I feel a lot more confidence practising independently than I did in second and first year (27/10/11).*

Table 6.1d maps the seven generative mechanism and four-planar social being onto the conversations of both Victor and Caleb.

**Table 6.1d:** Mapping generative mechanisms and four-planar social being: **Victor & Caleb**

<b>Seven Interactive Generative Mechanisms</b> (in Dispositional identity of core constellational Identity in the <b>REAL</b> Domain)	<b>Quotations</b>
<b>Physical</b>	V. Young early twenties C. Young early twenties
<b>Biological/physical</b>	V. Male C. Male
<b>Psychological</b>	V. And getting to know what my limitations are. It’s tough you have to get to know yourself. ... the second year for me was a lot of confusion

<sup>89</sup> I take ‘ontological access’ as a corollary of epistemological access, which means to enable students to gain access to particular forms of knowledge (Lotz-Sisitka, 2009), to mean enabling a student to be recognised, accepted and encountered as the person she is within an academic context.

	C. you respect your elders and your teachers... in the third year I think I grew completely
<b>Psycho-social</b>	V. When I got to my third year I had this calm sort of feeling that I know now what I am supposed to know. C. In third year I feel a lot more confidence practising independently than I did in second and first year
<b>Socio-economic</b>	V. Went to an advantaged school C. Went to an advantaged school
<b>Cultural</b>	V. White, Afrikaans C. White, English
<b>Normative</b>	V. I know how to study now after three years C. Well I actually know something... I feel a bit more confident
<b>Four dimensions of four-planar social being</b> (in social context, i.e. the <b>ACTUAL</b> domain)	<b>Quotations</b>
<b>Natural exchanges, material transactions with nature</b>	V. When I started in first year C. In high school... coming here (to the UoT)
<b>Social interactions with others</b>	V. I didn't know where I fit in. C. In high school they say "You must do this and you must study that" and you say "Yes ma'am". You don't argue; you don't think about it. You just do it and that's all that's expected of you.
<b>Relationships with social structure</b>	V. I think that the second year for me was a lot of confusion. It takes away from your place of security. C. They said, "Study this!" and I studied that. That's what I focussed on.
<b>Stratification of our embodied personalities</b>	V. When I started in first year I was terrified. C. I feel a lot more confidence

Caleb points to his primary socialisation in saying that he was raised to respect his elders and teachers. He compares his high school experience to that of first year indicating the high degree of compliance that both demand as well as passivity "You don't argue; you don't think about it. You just do it..." One could say that Caleb's first-year student identity matched the one EMS staff wanted to emerge in students, i.e. respectful and compliant. He concurs with Victor that second year is where "you kind of lose your way" and gives the reason that it is not as demanding as first year. Being in second year he thought that he should start "feeling like a paramedic", but realises that he does not know enough. Like Victor third year is a good experience in that "everything starts to come together now". He feels that he has grown. Caleb feels he does have some knowledge which gives him more confidence than he had in first and second year.

### ***Conceptual re-description***

Caleb's first year is successful in that his compliant, respectful student identity had already emerged at school. Coming into first year was a continuation of this identity allowing him to cope with the demands of the course and lecturers. This required first-year identity aligns

with his socialisation within the social structures of his family and school that has taught him to be respectful and obedient.

An approach that Bhaskar (1998) calls the “Transformational Model of Social Activity” (TMSA) (p. 36) posits:

a dialectical relation between social structure and individual human agency along the lines of Marx’s (1852) famous observation to the effect that people make their history but not under conditions of their own making. Action, according to TMSA, is always initiated from a position within a structure and the action always in some way results in some effect on that structure (Porpora in Hartwig, 2007, p. 424)

Caleb’s statements above can be analysed in terms of the TMSA. A dialectical relation exists between the social structures (high school and the first year of the National Diploma course) and individual agency (Caleb’s agency). In the first year Caleb is indeed making his own history, but not under conditions of his own making in that he is compliant with the power structures that exist in the EMS department. As a student Caleb is temporally (first, second and third year) situated within the structure (i.e. the course) and acts from within the structure. TMSA holds that Caleb’s actions will always result in some effect on the structure. In other words, what Caleb does will either change the structure or re-produce it. Caleb’s words tell us that he actually re-produces the structure by means of his compliance – “They said, “Study this!” and I studied that. That’s what I focussed on”, in other words he actively contributes to keeping the existing social structure of a paramilitaristic behaviourist first-year course in existence. Thus Caleb’s active agency affects the social structure in letting it continue.

Bhaskar (1993) comments that a structure may survive “in virtue of our *compliance* or our passive or tacit acquiescence” (p. 158). This is illustrated by Caleb above. However, Bhaskar adds that a structure may survive “in virtue of our (conscious or unconscious) attentive or inattentive *inaction*” (*ibid.* original emphasis). This latter statement would apply to Victor above who does not re-produce the social structure; but it nevertheless continues to survive despite his ‘inattentive inaction’ (i.e. his fear, insecurity and limitations in first year which hinder him from re-producing the structure by constraining his agency). Interestingly Bhaskar (1993) comments that the “absence of agentive agency encourages the fragmentation and enervation of the personality and a disempowering/impotent sense of self, while underpinning

all manner of projective or introjective identifications, that is, of unhappy consciousness”, (p. 360). This seems to be what happened to Victor in his first year, i.e. his agentic agency (i.e. his capacity to act effectively) was absent leading to fragmentation of the embodied personality and a disempowered sense of self. His consciousness was, indeed, unhappy then.

These two excerpts show that students differentiate between the first, second and third years and recognise how they were in each year. In terms of spatio-temporality, First year would be  $T_1$  to  $T_2$ , Second year would be  $T_3$  to  $T_4$ , and third year would be  $T_5$  to  $T_6$ . For instance, Caleb does not report any change in first year ( $T_1$  to  $T_2$ ) because he states that he came in with the respectful, compliant identity necessary for first year. However, in second year his compliant respectful identity is challenged in some way and he feels unsure of himself, “you kind of lose your way” ( $T_3$  to  $T_4$ ). This would point to there being some disconnect between his school and first-year identity, which only manifests in second year. In third year, the changes of the previous years come together which he recognises in saying, “I grew completely”, ( $T_5$ ) In both students the personal change occurring in third-year results in the emergence of a student-graduate identity.

I now move onto the student-professional identity of third-year students, i.e. the third moment of student identity and present two examples to illustrate what I mean by student-professional identity.

## **6.4 THIRD MOMENT OF STUDENT IDENTITY: STUDENT-PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**

### *Analytical narrative*

While student-graduate identity faces *inward* into the institution (UoT) and concerns itself with students as ‘graduates-still-studying’, student-professional identity faces *outward* towards the workplace with the students as ‘professionals-still-studying’. The latter looks towards their careers wherein they will be employed after graduating and registering as paramedics with the HPCSA. When considering student-professional identity, Barnett’s (2009b) thinking on developing a professional will is highly relevant because he sees this as a will to engage with the world, “a world of trauma and uncertainty” (unpaged) which is

pertinent to EMS students who participate in that world through their WPBL. Barnett comments:

The professional will is integral to the now of being a professional and to its continuing becoming; so the will is not only a matter of past formation but is an abiding presence in being and continuing to be a professional (Barnett, 2009b, unpagged).

Here Barnett makes the important dialectical point that becoming a professional is not a once-off event, but one *acts* and *knows* as a professional while one *is* a professional while being in a continuous process of continuing to become a professional. In other words, being a professional is not static, but is a dynamic, ongoing process of becoming. This accords with Bhaskar's notion of 'being-in-process' with its potential of being able to become (1993). In terms of the third-year student-professional, she is learning to be professional and to develop a professional will, while being in the process of becoming professional.

In the emergence of professional identity of third-year student-professionals, the development of professional will is a vital component of that identity. I follow Barnett in the notion of developing a professional will because the data shows that students are aware of this, although they do not refer to it as a professional will. In the emergence of identity and professional will students exercise their rational agency<sup>90</sup>. In other words, they know enough to act in their own best interests, they are able to make use of the skill, resources and opportunities to do so, and they have the inclination to do this. An example of this is taken from a third-year student Denzil:

**Denzil:** *We are pretty much put in the deep end because we are pretty much forced to. In this line of work, any mistake that you make is going to make a big difference – so you are forced to know your stuff. Can't be like 'Ag, I don't know - make a little mistake won't affect anyone – oh no, just redo it' (SD/27/10/11).*

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<sup>90</sup> As an *aide memoire*, the criteria for rational agency are: (i) a cognitive element, i.e. having knowledge to act in one's own best interests; (ii) must be empowered to access the skills, resources and opportunities to do so and (iii) must be disposed or motivated to do so.

Thus students act in their own interests (and, of course, the interests of the patient) not to make a mistake. They know enough to avoid mistakes and they have the inclination to work precisely.

A very important point is made by Barnett in that he says the student becomes his own teacher in developing this professional will (2009b). This speaks to the student's own agency and particularly to his transformative agency. It also speaks to a lack of pedagogy in developing this professional will (Barnett 2009b). However, it is this very lack of pedagogy that both constrains and enables the student's development of the professional will. It constrains because the students are not consciously made aware of professional will by their teachers, but it also enables because the development of will becomes an internal process that contributes to the development of a student's emotional intelligence as a disposition and maturity as a quality of that disposition.

Barnett (2009b) considers the professional will to have both dispositions and qualities. He sees dispositions as foundational elements of a professional will that enable a professional to carry on (*ibid.*). They are forms of energy (Barnett 2009a). Qualities are "the manifestations of dispositions in the world" giving them colour and definition (*ibid.*). Barnett (2009b) lists some dispositions of a professional will: "a will to learn, a will to encounter strangeness, a will to engage, a preparedness to listen, a willingness to be changed and a determination to keep going". The qualities he lists are: "concern for the intrinsic nature of the profession, fortitude, resilience, doing with care and precision, self-restraint, integrity and respect for others" (*ibid.*). These qualities and dispositions are highly relevant to EMS students. For instance, they have all been willing to be changed, to get to third year they demonstrated a will to learn as student Caleb comments: "*like we put a lot of work into this and a lot of effort and like all our time has gone into this*" (SC/27/11/11). Caleb also mentions the quality of respect:

**Caleb:** *So it's about respecting them. You don't touch them inappropriately. You explain what you're doing. Even though they asked you to be there, you don't have any right to be there. You can't just arrive and start doing. You ask them "Would you mind if...I would like to help you" (ibid.).*

Some of the main influences upon the emergence of student-professional identity are workplace-based learning (WPBL), the culture of the workplace and the agency of the student as well as that of the paramedic-mentor with whom the third-year student is placed.

Workplace-based learning has certain effects upon the students that cause them to change. One of the changes most frequently mentioned is that of becoming more mature as they are exposed to trauma and different socio-economic living conditions. This relates directly to Barnett's dispositions and qualities of professional will. Third-year students also become aware of the responsibility of being a paramedic and what that responsibility entails. In this process, they are broadening their mind-set to include an understanding of the specific ways of being and acting as a paramedic. This works toward creating a professional identity. Wheelahan (2010) states that the holistic development of a student within the context of his or her profession entails "forming an identity as part of that profession or occupation", (p. 139). This is what the academic staff in the EMS department are assisting their students to do as shown in lecturer Adams' words, "*And that's why we bring them in and we let them dress as the professionals we want them to be and we can work on it for three years*", (LA/11/11/11). Wheelahan (2010) adds that that forming this identity "cannot be easily codified as observable outcomes tied to specific skills", (p. 139). Thus, identity is wider than the clinical skills-set that the students bring to their workplace-based learning.

### ***Example One: Student-professional identity: Terry and Prem***

#### ***Analysis***

The two excerpts in the first example (Terry and Prem) deal with the onset of maturity. The second example (Petrus and Alta) covers the growing understanding of responsibility and what *becoming and being* a paramedic entails.

**Terry:** *I think also naturally being on this course would have made anyone more mature especially someone that wasn't in EMS before, like me and some of the other people as well coming straight from school... coming onto the course and being introduced to the harsh reality of what is out there. It feels like you get exposed to a part of life that people who do other things – they read about it in the papers, but it is not the same. We get exposed to a much, much more harsh way of life and I think that forces us to become more mature. Very much more mature (27/10/11).*

**Prem:** *But coming to National Diploma and being a paramedic the sense of independence and to be aware of the responsibility. The sense of your heightened abilities in the sense of being independent ... It's a lot of pressure that you have to change your mind-set and you have to mature very fast in three years because when you leave here you are the person everyone is going to look to. It also changes you as a person to be aware of all the other things... You can't really refer to anyone else. You need to go out there and be ready. I think that also changes you a lot. You walk out with a different perspective when you look at and meet people and do things in a different way (27/10/11).*

**Table 6.1e:** Mapping generative mechanisms and four-planar social being: **Terry and Prem**

<b>Seven Interactive Generative Mechanisms</b> (in Dispositional identity of core constellational Identity in the <b>REAL</b> Domain)	<b>Quotations</b>
<b>Physical</b>	<b>T:</b> Female <b>P:</b> Female
<b>Biological/physical</b>	<b>T:</b> Young early twenties <b>P:</b> Young early twenties
<b>Psychological</b>	<b>T:</b> We get exposed to a much, much more harsh way of life and I think that forces us to become more mature. Very much more mature. <b>P:</b> The sense of independence and to be aware of the responsibility. The sense of your heightened abilities in the sense of being independent... You have to mature... It also changes you as a person.
<b>Psycho-social</b>	<b>T:</b> It feels like you get exposed to a part of life that people who do other things <b>P:</b> You can't really refer to anyone else. You need to go out there and be ready... You walk out with a different perspective when you look at and meet people
<b>Socio-economic</b>	<b>T:</b> We get exposed to a much, much more harsh way of life <b>P:</b> You are the person everyone is going to look to
<b>Cultural</b>	<b>T:</b> White, Afrikaans-speaking <b>P:</b> Indian, English-speaking
<b>Normative</b>	<b>T:</b> Would have made anyone more mature... forces us to become more mature. <b>P:</b> Change your mind-set and you have to mature very fast... a different perspective... do things in a different way
<b>Four dimensions of four-planar social being</b> (in social context, i.e. the <b>ACTUAL</b> domain)	<b>Quotations</b>
<b>Natural exchanges, material transactions with nature</b>	<b>T:</b> Coming onto the course and being introduced to the harsh reality of what is out there <b>P:</b> Coming to National Diploma and being a paramedic
<b>Social interactions with others</b>	<b>T:</b> It feels like you get exposed to a part of life that people who do other things <b>P:</b> Being a paramedic... You need to go out there and be ready
<b>Relationships with social structure</b>	<b>T:</b> Being on this course would have made anyone more mature. <b>P:</b> Coming to National Diploma
<b>Stratification of our embodied personalities</b>	<b>T:</b> We get exposed to a much, much more harsh way of life and I think that forces us to become more mature. Very much more mature. <b>P:</b> Change your mind-set and you have to mature very fast

Through the analytical artifice of mapping in Table 6.1e the elements interacting with the seven generative mechanisms in the domain of the Real of both students are shown as well as their interactions in the domain of the Actual, i.e. the social context. In terms of four-planar social being, the environment that is referred to is the course as well as the world in which they have to work. The interactions with others are linked to doing the work of a paramedic in WPBL and interacting with people who have a different lifestyle.

Terry indicates the interaction between students and the social structure, i.e. the course – “being on this course” and sees the result of this interaction as developing maturity, “would have made anyone more mature”. She also points to another interaction with social structures, i.e. “the harsh reality of what is out there” and “a much, much more harsh way of life” where she uses ‘harsh’ in two different sentences to describe the social reality ‘out there’. She uses a strong form of comparative, ‘a much, much more harsh’ to emphasise the distance that this harsh way of life is from her own. In terms of the embodied personality, she sees this exposure resulting in becoming mature, i.e. “I think that forces us to become more mature. Very much more mature”. Her use of the word ‘forces’ suggests that the process of becoming mature is not a voluntary one, but that it is imposed externally, that they are constrained to change and become more mature. Terry also emphasizes the depth of maturity by repeating herself and adding the forceful “very much more mature”. Prem concurs, “You have to mature very fast in three years”. Once again the element of coercion is present in Prem’s choice of words, i.e. “you *have* to mature”. Thus both students experience the change as inevitable. Hence in terms of the embodied personality, both Terry and Prem have undergone the process of maturing. They have also been developing their professional will in the process of growing the disposition of emotional intelligence, of which maturity is a quality/manifestation.

In her sentence “It’s a lot of pressure that you have to change your mind-set and you have to mature very fast in three years because when you leave here you are the person everyone is going to look to”, Prem indicates that another change that has to occur, i.e. changing her mind-set. Again, she uses the obligatory “you have to” and indicates an external change agent exerting pressure upon students to change their way of thinking. The change agent is the lecturers. For example, student Caleb says:

**Caleb:** *There is a culture of pressure and expectations and that's how the lecturers achieve their goals. They put a lot of pressure on you and they expect a lot; and you feel pressurised and expected to deliver and get good results (SC/27/10/11).*

Other students mention this pressure that is exerted on the third-years, e.g. *"the pressure, the incredible pressure this year..."* (SO/25/10/11); *"you're working under a deadline; you're working under pressure"* (SP/27/10/11).

### ***Conceptual re-description***

As "absence and absencing are central to process and change" (Bhaskar 2002c, p. 87), absencing has occurred in the process of becoming more mature. Both students have absented their lack of maturity thus permitting the presenting (i.e. making present) of maturity. Each student interacts with the seven generative mechanisms in their own way because each one has her own dispositional identity which forms part of the core constellational identity. Each student's core identity differs according to her primary socialisation. From the dispositional identity the student-professional identity emerges through the rhythmic identity with its exercised causal powers and generative mechanisms, but differently for each student. Archer (2007) states that "personal emergent properties give us the ability to make variable responses under the same objective social circumstances" (p. 22). Thus as each student's personal student-professional identity emerges within the same objective social context, i.e. the Emergency Medical Care Services (EMCS) workplace, their individual responses to and experience of events in their workplace-based learning would be different, because each one has different personal emergent properties according to Archer.

As stated above the student-professional identity looks outward towards the workplace, i.e. Terry mentions the "harsh reality out there... We get exposed to a much, much more harsh way of life". In being exposed to the harsh realities, they are developing a will to encounter strangeness and a will to engage that strangeness. Both students are looking to the future when they graduate. Prem mentions this specifically "being a paramedic" and being "the person everyone is going to look to", i.e. she has an awareness of herself in a leadership role. In the foregoing, it becomes clear that students are developing their professional will as part of the emergence of their student-professional identity.

## **Example Two: Student-professional identity: Petrus and Alta**

**Petrus:** *One other thing that leads to change is the fact that people's lives are in your hands. There is so much that you can do to improve the situation or worsen the situation. Coming to the stage where you exit the course, you are actually going to sit back and think "am I really ready with this licence that I am going to get and the drugs and everything that we carry". You ask yourself a lot of questions – "Am I ready?" You actually self-examine yourself. If you sometimes can't handle all that, that's where some guys end up abusing drugs themselves or some actually quit the course. So self-examination is to say, "No, I am actually ready" (27/10/11).*

**Alta:** *I think also except for the fact of putting our own lives into danger, and the amount of responsibility that we have to accept – being brave in the way that everyone else sits there. You are the back up. You are the one they are going to look to. Your decisions are the ones they can hold you responsible for. And also when it comes to patients and making decisions there when it's things like doing surgical interventions that we don't see every day – you have to be brave enough to know I am going to cut this person's throat<sup>91</sup> open although I have never done it before except in the prac labs where we have done it on dolls. It's not something that happens every day. Some paramedics never do it. You have to be brave enough to know that I can do this. I can carry the consequences... It's all about confidence to behave in that way. And they force confidence upon us, because they keep telling you how dangerous things are, but then on the other side they tell you "But you know what, you are the paramedic we are training and you have to be able to know enough to carry the consequences of the danger – of, say, dangerous drugs even – you have to know why this is good even though it can be so hard, you have to know why this is good. Everyone else is looking at you. And it's kind of that feeling that pushes the confidence into you that they are telling you "You know what? The responsibility is on you. If you don't do it, the consequences are going to be on you". So that kind of pushes confidence into you that this is the right thing to do even though it is so hard. You have to be brave enough to know that "I can do it and I will do it" (27/10/11).*

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<sup>91</sup> This refers to a Surgical Cricothyrotomy where a scalpel is used to make an incision into the throat to establish an airway in a patient (Oosthuizen et al. 2013).

## *Analysis*

In these two excerpts one can see both Petrus and Alta looking to the future. A theme that emerges in these excerpts is that of a growing sense of the responsibility that rests with the student-professional student. Petrus makes the observation that the awareness that people's lives are at stake leads to change, "one other thing that leads to change is the fact that people's lives are in your hands. There is so much that you can do to improve the situation or worsen the situation". In this he concurs with Prem's statement in the previous excerpt, "You need to go out there and be ready. I think that also changes you a lot". The change entails becoming more mature and responsible and developing their professional will. Alta mentions the grave responsibility that will rest on them when they graduate. She is going to be required to take responsibility for whatever decisions she makes "your decisions are the ones they can hold you responsible for... the responsibility is on you".

A second theme that emerges is that of working as a paramedic. Both students reflect on their future<sup>92</sup> careers as paramedics. Petrus wonders about his readiness to go out into the workplace. He uses the term 'self-examine' which indicates how deeply he has reflexively engaged with these questions that trouble him. He is engaged in reflexive self-monitoring which is part of transformative praxis as well as "social intra-action" i.e. reflecting on himself as part of social relations in this case interacting as a paramedic with others (Hartwig, 2007, p. 58). His conclusion after self-monitoring is that he is actually ready. However, he adds a caveat that it is at this point of self-monitoring that students may find themselves not ready and either turn to taking drugs or dropping out the course.

Alta talks about being *brave* (a word that she uses four times in the excerpt) as a paramedic: to have the courage to be in a leadership role, to do a surgical procedure on a patient for the first time, to be self-confident and to bear the consequences of one's actions. This is clearly part of the development of professional will because being brave is a quality that emerges from the disposition of determination to keep going even if one is afraid.

She sees confidence as an external imposition (the word 'force' suggests coercion) by the lecturers who "force confidence" on the students. Using the expression "**pushes confidence into you**" twice suggests that confidence does not sit comfortably with her, but that it is thrust

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<sup>92</sup> These third-years were interviewed at the end of October just before their final exams, thus they were on the cusp of graduating and entering the workplace as paramedics.

into her. Only in accepting responsibility for her actions, does she begin to internalise confidence.

On the one hand the lecturers make the students aware of their responsibilities. On the other hand they remind them that this is exactly what they have been trained to become, “you are the paramedic we are training”. In other words, a specific identity i.e. the student-professional identity is starting to emerge in the students. This is mediated through the interaction of the student with the structure, i.e. the course and the workplace through WPBL, the culture of the department, and agency in that the department sets about developing “self-efficacious agents” (LR/6/6/13) as part of their notion of what a paramedic should be like. It should be noted that the academic staff all do know what it is like to be a paramedic as they have all been practising paramedics before they entered academe.

### *Conceptual re-description*

Alta’s excerpt shows that third-year students experience transformation diachronically during their final year of studying. Transformation and radical negation go together (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 6) as shown in Table 6.2c below where Alta’s excerpt is analysed.

**Table 6.2c:** The four aspects of radical negation: **Alta**

<b>Radical negation</b>	<b>Quotations</b>
<b>Auto-subversion/ self-undermining</b>	<b>Alta:</b> Putting our own lives into danger and the amount of responsibility that we have to accept; I am going to cut this person’s throat open although I have never done it before except in the prac. labs where we have done it on dolls. ...they keep telling you how dangerous things are. (As well as Alta’s lack/absence of self-confidence)
<b>Self-transformation</b>	<b>A.</b> Being brave ... that feeling that pushes the confidence into you
<b>Self-realisation</b>	<b>A.</b> ...you (i.e. “I”) have to be brave enough to know that I can do it and I will do it
<b>Self-overcoming</b>	<b>A.</b> I can do this. I can carry the consequences. You have to be able to know enough to carry the consequences of the danger. The responsibility is on you. You have to know why this is good even though it can be so hard. You have to be brave enough to know that “I can do it and I will do it”

In this process of radical negation as illustrated in Table 6.2c Alta is negating/absenting fear and the absence of courage so that she is able to become brave. In this case absence has the sense of potential, of ‘being able to become’ (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 77).

It can be seen that radical negation is a process moving through its four moments. Firstly, Alta’s absence of self-confidence **undermines** herself. She voices this lack of confidence in

talking about performing a Surgical Cricothyrotomy which she has only practised on a manikin in the practical laboratory. Secondly, she moves into growing self-confidence as **self-transformation** until it becomes real within her. Thirdly, she has an experience of **self-realisation** that she can do the procedure. Finally, in **self-overcoming**, she accepts that she can overcome her doubts and lack of confidence. In so doing she reaches a point of self-acceptance where she says, “I can do this. I can carry the consequences”. In this process she has absented the absence of confidence which was a constraint on her agency (i.e. she doubted and was afraid of doing the procedure). Thus Alta has enabled her agency, which Bhaskar (1993) says is “a radically transformed transformative praxis” (p. 9), i.e. she can act transformatively and bring about change because having undergone radical negation she can radically transform her practice. Radical negation is “the pivotal concept in self-emancipation”, (Bhaskar, 1993, p. 6) and, therefore, Alta has emancipated herself in the process.

Petrus has done self-examination, i.e. he has reflected. Bhaskar (1993) defines reflexivity: “in its most basic form it specifies the capacity of an agent to monitor and account for its activity” (p. 273). This self-monitoring and self-accounting is exactly what Petrus has done: “you ask yourself a lot of questions – “Am I ready?” You actually self-examine yourself”. The EMS students learn to reflect from first year onwards through being asked to complete a reflection on each of their workplace-based learning (WPBL) shifts – “*you go and write a report of what you did and what you didn’t do and all the whys and wherefores*” (SG/25/10/11). Lecturer Malan says that reflection also happens in the debriefing process after a call to an emergency has been completed:

**Malan:** *So there’s a lot of paramedics that you work with and after every call it’s inherently that you debrief the call; if it’s between you and your friend or if it is a lateral debriefing between peers or a horizontal debriefing between an examiner/facilitator or something like that (LM/27/3/12).*

It is in the context of learning from a paramedic-mentor that the student-professional identity emerges. Learning from the paramedic-mentor on the WPBL shift is well attested by student respondents, for example:

**Jackie:** *But it is only once you are in that situation that you learn... In our course, from the first year, you are exposed to people who do this, so you learn from that as well (SJ/27/10/11).*

**Terry:** *But being out on the road and doing your practical, like she said, is the only way that you can actually acquire that skill by learning from your seniors, like the paramedic that you are working with (ST/27/10/11).*

**Delia:** *At the end of your road shifts you have to write one long reflection about what you discovered, what you learned; what you think you wouldn't do again. It was great...I had good paramedics who helped me very much (SD12/7/12).*

This process of learning from others reflects four-planar social being in that it involves all four dimensions: personal interaction with elements in the workplace, interpersonal relationship, i.e. student and paramedic-mentor, relationship with social structures, e.g. mentorship and the stratified embodied personalities of both student and paramedic-mentor. The identities of both the student and paramedic-mentor are emergent – the former has the emergent ‘student-professional’ identity, while the latter has an emergent paramedic-mentor identity because he or she has to teach and guide the student. Paramedic Leonie says:

**Leonie:** *Once you have a student on your vehicle, you are no longer just an ambulance responding to priority calls you are also a school and educational institution for the day<sup>93</sup>. You need to have a different mentality and a mind-shift (PL/15/8/12).*

Leonie indicates both aspects: “no longer just an ambulance...also a school”. She recognises a shift in identity in herself “You need to have a different mentality and a mind-shift” because she has the identity of both a paramedic and a mentor. This, once again as above, illustrates four-planar social being acting on all four dimensions at once (Bhaskar, 2002a, p.307). In other words, the environment is the ambulance and the road; the interpersonal relations are between Leonie and her student; the social structure is the mentorship; the intrapersonal relations are within the stratified embodied personality where identity emerges. In Leonie’s case where she has to shift between paramedic and mentor identities, the shift would necessitate a synchronic (at a point in time) emergence of each identity or both at the same time as needed. So, for instance, if she is attending to a patient in a road accident, her paramedic identity emerges synchronically, i.e. immediately so that she can deal with the emergency at hand. It might happen that while Leonie is attending to the patient she is mentoring her student allowing her to work on the patient, e.g. to put up an intravenous fluid

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<sup>93</sup> The ambulance and road shifts are twelve hours long.

line on the patient. In this case both identities of paramedic and mentor would be in play synchronically and simultaneously within the social context of four-planar social being.

## **6.5 Structure, Culture, Agency and the emergence of graduate identity**

We have seen from the analysis of the excerpts taken from the student respondents' data that there is indeed an interaction between the emerging identity and the interplay of structure, culture and agency. This has been shown from the mapping of the student statement onto the seven-scalar laminated system of interactive generative mechanisms and four-planar social being where culture is one of the seven generative mechanisms and social structure and agency are part of the dimensions of four-planar social being. In terms of the Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity, the constellational identity is the core identity containing within it the dispositional identity which has causal powers and the seven generative mechanisms and the rhythmic identity which is these powers and mechanisms activated. Identity, encompassing professional will, emerges within the social context of four-planar social being. The individuals, i.e. the students or lecturers, exercise their embodied agency which is always intentional and has emergent causal powers as Bhaskar states (1993, p. 51). For example, Caleb exercised his active agency in doing what was required of him; his emergent causal powers effected a continuation of the status quo.

The structure and culture of the workplace are influenced by their status as a public emergency medical care service (EMCS) like CREMS or a private profit-seeking commercial enterprise such as ER24; for example, CREMS serves the whole community, but especially the lower socio-economic class. ER24 serves those who have a medical aid that can pay for their services, but ER24 also does pro bono work. The differences in structure and culture between the workplaces would also affect the student doing WPBL. For example, when doing WPBL at CREMS, the paramedic often has more than one student to mentor. CREMS Paramedic Jackie says: "*I have an average two to four students with me three of the four shifts that I work*" (PJ/27/10/11). This is not an ideal situation in that it voids the notion of one-on-one mentoring<sup>94</sup>. In the private EMCS sector, the paramedic usually has only one student to mentor; which is an optimal situation. This illustrates how difference in a structure like mentoring could affect not only the emerging identity of the student, but also the learning

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<sup>94</sup> There is a problem with the paramedic mentoring process because there is a severe shortage of professional paramedics who are able to have student mentees (LR/6/6/13).

that is taking place. A manager at a private EMCS company talks about students learning from a paramedic:

**Goode:** *When you grow and develop in your third and fourth year, that's when your level of maturity should shift over to now start seeing this is how work is; this is what we need to do; this is the qualities I need to develop. That's why I am saying that that should be developed together with the paramedic you are working with. You share knowledge and as much as the student learns, the paramedic can learn as well (MG/13/7/12).*

The EMCS manager at a private company, Goode, picks up on the development of maturity that the third-year students spoke about above. He specifies what he means by maturity, i.e. “to now start seeing this is how work is; this is what we need to do; this is the qualities I need to develop”. In other words he sees maturity as developing an understanding of the workplace and the qualities that are needed there. He thinks that these qualities should be developed together with the paramedic in a co-learning situation. However, this is not happening at present as new paramedics generally work on their own in the private sector right from their first call. At CREMS new paramedics have to work with a professional paramedic for three months as an induction (MS/22/6/12). However, it often happens that one paramedic has between two and four students to mentor per shift. A CREMS manager, Simons, explains the pressure and difficult conditions under which the CREMS paramedic-mentors work.

**Simons:** *The mentors that are mentoring the students are also under high pressure; they have got targets that they have to meet. And it's something that is sometimes forced onto them. “Here is a student – you are working with a student today”. “But I don't want to work with this student today. I have had two bad shifts, previous shifts, and now I have to teach a student”... So it gets a bit much. You work four shifts and every time you get someone new and you have to explain to them this is how the ambulance works. Then you also have to take responsibility for them and watch them besides doing your work. So, it becomes a lot. And if you are not a person who does enjoy teaching somebody – it's “Ag, just sit there and don't bother me”. And that student will not get exposure (MS/22/6/12).*

Simons indicates that CREMS paramedics are at times compelled to act as mentors when they do not want to do so. He also points out that adequate mentoring may not take place if the paramedic-mentor does not like teaching and just tells the student to keep out of the way.

The different workplace cultures would also have an effect, i.e. the ethos of the service or company would affect the emergence of the student-professional identity. For example, the ethos of a private, for-profit EMCS will be very different to that of a public, state service such as CREMS.

## **6.6 Conclusion: Graduate Identity**

From the above it becomes clear that there are two moments in emergent graduate identity. The first moment is the emergent student-graduate identity and the second moment is the emergent student-professional identity. Both emerge in third year. The former refers to the third-year students becoming aware of their emerging identity as responsible students who are transforming themselves into efficacious agents. The latter refers to the students becoming aware of themselves as paramedics-to-be as they start taking on the identity of paramedic and begin to develop the professional will of a paramedic. The student-graduate identity emerges in the third year as the culmination of the first two years of study, while the student-professional identity emerges in the course of the third year mainly influenced by the workplace-based learning that the students do during their third year.

Having explored the second moment of identity, namely graduate identity that was considered under two aspects: student-graduate and student-professional identity I now move to professional identity of paramedics in the workplace.

## **6.7 Professional Paramedic Identity**

We have seen that professional paramedic identity starts to develop in the third year of studying as paramedic Alex explains:

*Alex: Once you reach your third year, that's your final year and you qualify and you're a paramedic. So you're told once you qualify it's not a magic ceremony that*

*happens where you all of a sudden become a paramedic – you get given a qualification and now you're this new person. You continue to behave and act as you have been. So that's why in your third year you start to try and take on that paramedic role and learn what it is to be a professional and how you should act because at the end of the year you're going to be a paramedic and you're going to have to act accordingly (PA/15/10/11).*

Alex recognises that becoming a professional paramedic is a diachronic process. The lecturers have all been paramedics themselves and some of whom still do road shifts whenever they can. They point out to the third year students the temporal nature of becoming a paramedic, i.e. it is not a synchronic event “where you all of a sudden become a paramedic” with synchronic emergence of professional paramedic identity “now you're this new person”. Alex emphasizes that the identity that has started to emerge in third year carries on: “You continue to behave and act as you have been. So that's why in your third year you start to try and take on that paramedic role and learn what it is to **be** a professional and how you should **act**”. Although he does not name it as such, his words “learning to be a professional” indicate the development of professional will. It is interesting that he differentiates between *being* a professional and *acting* as one. This is akin to the ideas of Barnett (2009a) and Dall'Alba (2009) who hold that professional education is a process of becoming which integrates knowing, doing and being that emerge diachronically.

Finding a definition for ‘professionalism’ has proved to be difficult both in the literature and the data as this is a contested and complicated concept (Barnett, 2009b). I look at some definitions of professionalism in the literature as they pertain to paramedics.

O'Meara (2009) states that paramedic professionalism includes adhering to professional codes of conduct, reflective practice and continuous professional development as well as a body of knowledge developed through research. Williams, Osman and Brown (2009) consider there to be three important aspects of paramedic professionalism. These are (i) national registration and regulation which guarantee professional competence, safety and accountability, (ii) higher education and the development of a unique body of professional knowledge and (iii) a strategic alliance with medicine, i.e. being considered one of the allied health professions rather than the emergency services such as Police and Fire. Reynolds

(2004) researching professionalism in pre-hospital care cites Greenwood (1984) as offering five characteristics of a profession. These are:

- (i) a systematic body of theory,
- (ii) professional authority, i.e. clients are served; the professional is seen as the expert;
- (iii) community sanction which affords powers and privileges e.g. controlling who gains admission to the profession and recognising those who have been accredited by a professional body,
- (iv) ethical codes of conduct and
- (v) a culture i.e. a language, customs, group norms, values, shared meanings and symbols and the idea that the profession is a career.

Drawing on the common elements in these authors, paramedic professionalism may be said to include a body of professional knowledge, registration with and accreditation by a professional body, professional and ethical codes of conduct. Paramedic professionalism exists in South Africa because these three common criteria are met. One could add alliance with medicine as a further criterion as paramedics have to register with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) before being allowed to practise according to a very specific scope of practice and drug protocols as well as codes of ethics and conduct. The specific emergency medicine professional body is the Emergency Medicine Professional Board (EMPB) under the aegis of the HPCSA. To these professional criteria one might add Beck and Young's "intensive socialisation into the values of a professional community and its standards of professional integrity, judgement and loyalty, i.e. *the creation of a professional habitus*" (2005, p. 188 original emphasis).

To start the process of creating a professional habitus, in the government CREMS EMCS, new paramedics are partnered with an experienced paramedic as mentor for three months as an induction into EMCS (MS/22/6/12). However, in the private service there is no formal mentoring just a brief introduction to the company, its ethos and a job description. Manager Goode explains: "We take them through the process of how you do your documentation; the duties that you need to accomplish; the certain times in terms of staff supervision, how you deal with that, how you should deal with it" (MG/13/7/12).

Much of that into which a paramedic is socialised in the private service is tacit. Professional paramedic Conrad gives the following example:

**Conrad:** *You are not taught the nomenclature that you have to use on your patient report forms. And nobody tells you which hospitals are associated with medical aids and where you can take a patient (PC/15/8/13).*

Thus, the process of creating a professional habitus would happen over time as the new employee got to know the tacit ways of knowing, being and doing. Another example of tacit knowledge is how to behave on the scene of an accident, e.g. when to assume leadership and when to let others take charge. Paramedic Alex gives another example:

**Alex:** *I think the difficult thing is when you qualify is that you're a manager and these people, who are twice your age, are subordinate to you and you have lots of staff issues you have to deal with. In the National Diploma you don't get taught so well to deal with these things and it's very difficult (PA/14/10/11).*

Alex as a professional paramedic explains being a professional:

**Alex:** *As a professional there's certain values and behaviours and sort of states of being that you are supposed to uphold.*

**Interviewer:** *Such as?*

**Alex:** *Ag well, I mean integrity, punctuality, courtesy, uhm, you know. Acting, doing your job properly, you know. Responsibility. Because as a paramedic looking at the SA model of EMCS, you are a shift manager, you are the shift supervisor. You are the senior on scene; oftentimes you are the senior – you are the highest qualified there. People work under you and you have to manage people and manage situations because you are the one who holds the responsibility (PA/14/10/11).*

Alex mentions “certain values and behaviours and sort of states of being” that a professional should uphold as well as doing one’s job properly. He emphasizes responsibility as an important quality of a professional. He adds that it takes about six months before one starts feeling confident as a paramedic and one’s professional identity starts to emerge:

**Alex:** *It does take at least 6 months to a year before you can say “OK now I'm a paramedic. I've been through some hectic stuff. I've had some good experience. I've grown a bit and now I know”. And, but while you're going through those things you don't have any support, you know (ibid.).*

Alex feels very strongly about being left to fend for oneself when first entering private service and comments:

**Alex:** *There needs to be a system where for at least a year you work under someone and they can mentor you and guide you and you can like reflect on things with them and discuss things. And they're paramedics. They're not doctors, crews, nurses, they're paramedics. They were doing what you're doing and now they can help you through your process. So mentorship that's the only thing that's lacking and it's a big thing (ibid.).*

Paramedic Lee concurs with Alex:

**Lee:** *Once you are qualified you have this seed of your professional identity and then you grow it and you kind of fill in your holes and your gaps as you go along because no-one can qualify and be complete you know. There will always be gaps in your knowledge and in your practice. As you go these become exposed and you have to fill them or just suffer. So, it's a continuing thing as well. There is no...once you are out of the institution you are on your own. You have no one to discuss a case with. You have no one to ask advice of or guide you in your practice. It's difficult (PL/12/7/12).*

It is very interesting that Lee talks about having “this seed of your professional identity” which he has to grow himself as he goes along, because this is also how the professional will be grown as Barnett states (2009b).

The lack of mentorship of young paramedics by older paramedics is a serious issue that has come up several times in the data from EMS staff, students and professional paramedics. This is an important absence because it affects the newly-qualified professional by placing her under extra stress as she navigates the rough seas of tacit knowledge in the private sector. Not having a mentor when one starts working in a complex, unpredictable and ever-changing professional environment creates a lacuna in the process of creating a professional habitus and identity. Paramedic Lee states that a newly qualified paramedic needs “*an ethical guide and a moral compass – a reasoning for what you are doing*” (PL/12/7/12) which develops during the three years of study. Having a mentor would keep these strong.

## 6.8 Research Questions

### **(i) How do student, graduate and professional identities emerge in Emergency Medical Science (EMS) students at a University of Technology?**

In this chapter we have seen that there were three moments in the emergence of **student** identity: first-year student identity, student-graduate identity and student-professional identity. Then the emergence of professional identity was discussed.

Identity emerges from the constellational core identity where the dispositional identity has causal powers and seven interactive generative mechanisms, i.e. physical, biological, psychological, psycho-social, socio-economic, cultural and normative, which are unique to each person. The rhythmic identity in the constellation core identity exercises those causal powers and generative mechanisms. This is the domain of the Real. Identity is an emergent event in the domain of the Actual. Our and others' experience of our identity happens in the Empirical domain. Although the students are all doing the same course, they experience change and the emergence of identity differently because each is unique with an individual geo-history and a specific primary socialisation which influences the generative mechanisms and causal powers in their constellational core identity.

Change is an important aspect of emergence of identity. Change happens through the process of absencing and negation. Thus identity always emerges from non-identity. For instance, the first-year students coming into EMS have an EMS non-identity which is then absented by the changes they undergo in the first year; for some the changes will be radical negation. This allows the first-year student identity to emerge.

Student-graduate identity emerges in the third year and faces inward towards the institution, i.e. the EMS department in the UoT. Student-professional identity also emerges in the third year, but faces outward towards the workplace where the third-year students do their WPBL. The former refers to the third-year students becoming aware of their emerging identity as responsible students who are transforming themselves into efficacious agents. The latter refers to the students becoming aware of themselves as paramedics-to-be as they start taking on the identity of paramedic and begin to develop the professional will and being of a paramedic. In other words, the emergent identity is that of being-in-process becoming a

graduate professional. Thus Student-graduate identity and student-professional identity emerges in a diachronic process across the third year of study. This process of ‘becoming being’ where ‘being’ is being a paramedic may be different for each student because of their own unique geo-history and core-identity.

Professional identity starts emerging in the third year of study as student-professional identity as explained above. It takes about six-month to a year for professional paramedic identity *per se* to emerge according to a paramedic speaking from personal experience (PA/14/10/11). However, this professional identity must always be seen as an ongoing process of becoming and being, of learning. ECT Bonnie states: “*There will always be a first: a first gunshot victim, a first suicide; a first drowning; a first mass casualty; a first cot-death; a first rape victim*” (15/8/13).

The Health Professions Council of South Africa recognises the need for ongoing learning. Therefore, it requires paramedics to engage in a process of continuous professional development when they start working. In this way epistemology contributes to the emergence of identity in that new knowledge can influence the ontology, i.e. being of a paramedic which is changeable and changing. Thus it could be said that the identity of a professional paramedic is always in a process of emergence. There is no terminus on the emergence of professional paramedic identity.

## **(ii) What are the implications of the interplay of Structure, Culture and Agency for the emergence of these identities?**

Identity emerges from the core constellational identity in the domain of the Real through interaction with the interplay of structure, culture and agency. Emergent identity has a temporal element in that identity can emerge either synchronically or diachronically, or both as in the case of a paramedic-mentor as explained previously.

Four-planar social being plays a very important role because one acts on all four fronts, i.e. of material transactions with nature, social interactions with others, our relationship with social structures and the stratification of our embodied personality, simultaneously. As human agents we either re-produce or transform the social structures. Our embodied personalities

include agency, which is intentional, rational and transformative. Bhaskar (1993) states that agency is “intentional transformative praxis caused by real, even if routinized, unconscious, multiple, anterior and/or contradictory reasons which issues in a state of affairs that would not have occurred otherwise”, (pp. 393-394). As we exercise agency we bring about change which is an essential element of the emergence of identity. Our agency includes Bhaskar’s five theorems of actions, i.e. action is intentional; we have to act; all social action happens in terms of four-planar social being; at some point we must act spontaneously and change proceeds from self-change; and anything we do will affect all four planes of social being.

The departmental culture of social justice, discipline, respect and empowering responsibility plays a strong role in the emergence of student and graduate identity. As students engage with this departmental culture it interacts with their own cultural interactive generative mechanism in their core dispositional identity to influence the emergence of identity. When student do workplace-based learning, they engage with a different culture, i.e. that of the workplace, to cause the emergence of identity within four-planar social being.

There are several implications of the interplay of structure, culture and agency for the emergence of these identities. Firstly, although structure, culture and agency are inter-related, they cannot be conflated or reduced to each other, i.e. one is not an epiphenomenon of the other. Thus one has to consider the emergence of identity within this inter-play. Secondly, identity does not emerge in a vacuum, but emerges within four-planar social being, i.e. within a social context in the domain of the Actual. Thirdly, human identity always emerges in an embodied personality which is part of four-planar social being. Fourthly, identity emerges from the core constellational identity which comprises causal powers and seven interactive generative mechanisms which interact with structure, culture and agency. Fifthly, structure, culture and agency exist within space and time and pre-exist a person; thus identity has a temporal element. Finally, identity is a changeable state of being emergent from non-identity; structure, culture and agency are not monovalent, i.e. they are only positive, they are bivalent and comprise both presence and absence. For identity to emerge absencing happens within the context of structure, culture and agency.

Thus, the emergence of identity from the domain of the Real is a complex event in the domain of the Actual. This emergence is only possible through the interaction of structure, culture and agency with the causal powers and generative mechanisms of the core constellational identity of an individual.

## 6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the emergence of student identity on a first-year level, student-graduate and student-professional identity as well as professional paramedic identity. The development of a professional will was also considered as part of the emergent identity in third-year students.

To investigate the emergence of identity, I used an analytical artifice, a conceptual tool, i.e. the mapping of (i) the seven interactive generative mechanisms that reside in the core constellational identity of a person and (ii) four-planar social being onto the conversations of students to see how the emergence of identity comes about. This mapping explores the interaction of student experiences of actual events with their seven generative mechanisms. I also mapped student conversations onto the four aspects of radical negation to explore self-change in students.

The EMS department at the UoT uses a paramilitaristic, behaviourist approach to bring about the emergence of the first-year student identity they desire, i.e. the student should be respectful, disciplined, compliant, a team-worker, hard-working and responsible. Change plays an important role in the emergence of identity because change is absenting a given to open an opportunity for something new to emerge. Thus, first-year student identity could be said to emerge from the interaction of structure, culture and agency with the individual students' own core constellational identity.

Graduate identity was considered under the two moments of student-graduate and student-professional identity. The former is influenced by the department and the students' studies, while the latter is influenced by workplace-based learning. Again, change is an important factor in emergence of identity as change is absence and absenting the absence to make room for the new. Curriculum and curriculum design can play a significant role in the emergence of student identity as seen in the emergence of first-year identity, particularly ECT first-year identity. Workplace-based learning also influences the emergence of identity.

Professionalism was seen to be a contested concept. Professional identity emerges over time. However, once emerged, it continuously undergoes a process of emergence as understanding, growth and development of the professional and the professional will and becoming occur. The emergence of professional identity must always be considered within the context of a

changing, unpredictable and complex workplace. The structure, culture and agency of the paramedic workplace are complex and changing too, thus they influence the emergence of the professional paramedic identity.

Identity does not emerge in isolation, but is part of four-planar social being. The emergence of identity is a complex spatio-temporal process. As negation/absence is prior to presence, so it can be said that non-identity is prior to identity; thus identity always emerges from non-identity.

The next chapter of this dissertation is the analysis and interpretation of data around the question of graduates attributes.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES: TO BE OR NOT TO BE?

#### 7.1 Introduction

As seen in Chapter Four, graduate attributes are not neutral, apolitical, acultural or ahistorical. On the contrary they were shown to be an ideological construct that emerges from neoliberalist roots in a corporatized and commodified university. The pursuit of generic graduate attributes reifies students and graduates alike because the GAs are imposed externally without any consideration of the person, i.e. of the ontology/being of the graduate. In Chapter Four the suggestion was made to move away from reifying graduate attributes towards using an ontological approach which looks at qualities/traits and dispositions/attitudes following the work of Barnett (2009a, 2009b and 2010). This chapter takes up this suggestion and locates itself firmly in the territory of traits and attitudes within knowing, being and doing (Barnett, 2000, 2004, 2009a, 2009b, 2010) as opposed to graduate attributes.

In exploring the research data around the characteristics, traits, qualities, abilities, aptitudes, attitudes and dispositions<sup>95</sup> that the EMS department tries to develop in its paramedic students, it becomes very clear that this is a very complicated and complex issue because these traits and dispositions are inter-related and operate at multiple levels of knowing, being and doing. This is a far cry from an imposed, simplistic list of generic graduate attributes, or even discipline-specific graduate attributes because these traits and dispositions emerge from causal powers and generative mechanisms within the interplay of structure, culture and agency as identity emerges.

In exploring the question of graduate attributes with staff and students of the EMS department, it became clear that they operate on a much broader basis than a mere list of generic graduate attributes. In fact, they do not talk about graduate attributes at all, but refer to characteristics and dispositions that they would like their students to develop. These are not embedded or assessed, but are summed up in an acronym, PARAMEDIC, that first-year

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<sup>95</sup> For brevity's sake instead of repeating "the characteristics, traits, qualities, abilities, aptitudes, attitudes and dispositions" each time, I shall merely refer to "traits and dispositions" to represent all.

students are asked to discuss. Although my research questions are formulated in terms of graduate attributes, I do not use that term, but prefer to follow the department in talking about characteristics, traits and dispositions. In this chapter I present the exploration of my last three research questions:

- What are the implications of this emergence of identity for the construct of graduate attributes?
- What are the implications for the use of graduate attributes in curriculum design?
- What relationship exists between identity and graduate attributes?

I first consider the traits and dispositions in terms of being, knowing and doing. This is followed by a discussion of the PARAMEDIC acronym. Then I explore some specific characteristics that have appeared in the data.

## 7.2 Being, knowing and doing

When considering the traits and dispositions<sup>96</sup>, they appeared to fall into three broad categories of knowing, doing, and being (Barnett, 2000, 2004, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). Therefore, I have followed Barnett and Coate (2005) and used their model of three overlapping circles (knowing, being and acting) of importance in curriculum design and adapted it to these traits and dispositions to show how inter-related they are. However, in drawing out the traits and dispositions from the transcriptions and seeing those in their context, their complexity became clear to me in the sense that they are much broader than mere categories of knowing, being, and doing (Barnett and Coate, 2005; Barnett, 2000, 2004, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). Therefore, I have added another three circles in Figure 7.1, namely ‘becoming’<sup>97</sup>, ‘coming to know’<sup>98</sup> and ‘learning to do’ to show the processual dimension

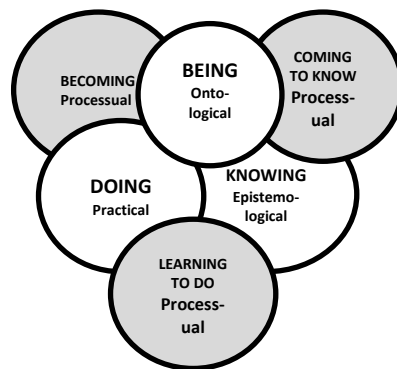
<sup>96</sup> I follow Barnett’s (2009) definition of dispositions as “those tendencies of human beings to engage in some way with the world around them” (p. 433) and are ontological in that they have to do with being. “Qualities characterise an individual’s character...dispositions cannot show themselves in the world unless they are accompanied by qualities” (p. 434).

<sup>97</sup> For ease of reference I have included the MELD schema here. Becoming is at 2E Second edge.

<b>M</b>	<b>1M First Moment Level of ontology</b>	<b>First Moment</b> refers to NON-IDENTITY (i.e. DIFFERENCE) RELATIONS; <b>BEING AS STRUCTURED (ontology)</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>2E Second Edge Absence</b>	<b>Second Edge</b> refers to the <b>POINT</b> of transition or <b>becoming</b> ; pertains to <b>ABSENCE/ NEGATIVITY; BEING AS PROCESSUAL (being-in-process)</b>
<b>L</b>	<b>3L Third Level Totality</b>	<b>Third Level</b> is an emergent <b>WHOLE</b> , capable of reacting back on the materials from which it emerged, process-in-product <b>TOTALITY; BEING AS EMERGENT WHOLE; (process-in-product)</b>
<b>D</b>	<b>4D 4<sup>th</sup> Dimension Transformative Agency &amp; Praxis</b>	<b>Fourth Dimension: BEING AS INCORPORATING TRANSFORMATIVE AGENCY OR PRAXIS</b> ; reflexivity; <b>(product-in-process)</b>

Figure: The MELD schema adapted from Norrie (in Hartwig 2007, p. 197) and Bhaskar (1993, p. 392)

because it became evident from the data that process is an important dimension of being, knowing and doing.



**Figure 7.1:** Inter-relationship of knowing, being and doing & their processual stages.

(Source: Adapted from Barnett and Coate, 2005)

In other words, a paramedic does not simply manifest himself fully-formed as being a paramedic, knowing and doing as a paramedic but first has to undergo the processes of becoming, coming to know and learning to do. Furthermore, this is in line with critical realism which sees ‘becoming’ as the second edge of the MELD schema where it is the point of transition, pertains to absence and is the potential to be able to become through absencing (as discussed in Chapter Two).

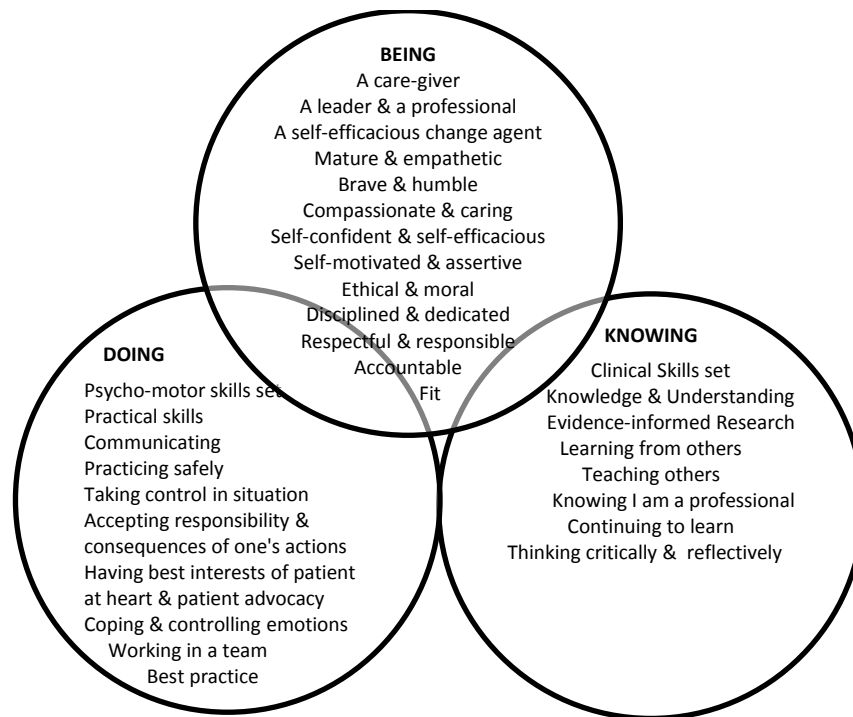
A further reason for borrowing the original three-circle diagram from Barnett and Coate (2005) is to move away from the idea of a linear list. The circles in Figures 7.1 and 7.2 better represent the inter-connectedness of the traits and dispositions in a non-linear manner. Figure 7.1 also shows that these traits and dispositions are not only epistemological, but also ontological, practical and processual.

It is useful to locate the traits and dispositions within categories (as I have done in Figure 7.2) to obtain a clearer idea of their nature, but one must remember to view them within their social, cultural and agential context as well because they do not exist in a vacuum.

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<sup>98</sup> I follow Barnett’s notion of coming-to-know (2009a, p. 435),

In proceeding I first locate, in no particular order, the various and numerous traits and dispositions that came up in the research within their broad categories of knowing, being and doing in Figure 7.2.



**Figure 7.2** Inter-related traits and dispositions

Figure 7.2 shows how many traits and dispositions arose in the discussions during the interviews with staff and focus groups with students. Although these have been listed for ease of reference, they are not simple as the discussion of selected traits will show. I will first broadly discuss becoming, being, knowing and coming to know and doing and learning to do of Figure 7.2. This will be followed by a more detailed analysis of selected traits and dispositions.

## **Becoming**

The second edge in the MELD schema considers being as ‘being-in-process’ with the potential to be able to become. This means, for instance, that an EMS student is undergoing a process of becoming, e.g. becoming more mature which is a change that happens over time as she experiences various events in the domain of the Actual during her studies. Maturity

emerges from her four-planar<sup>99</sup> social being (also called her human nature) diachronically as she engages with her environment, social relations with others, relations with social structures and herself as embodied, stratified agent. As maturity emerges, she can be said to *be* mature. However, she can only come to this point of *being mature* having undergone the process of *becoming mature*. In similar vein, to *be* a care-giver, she first has to go through a process of *becoming* one by coming to know and learning to be. This process of becoming is inter-related to (but not conflated to) the process of getting to know her discipline (Barnett 2009). In the process of *becoming* a care-giver she changes her identity as seen in the previous chapter so that she might *be* a care-giver.

Dall’Alba (2009) uses an ontological stance to reconfigure professional education as a process of becoming and being: “Learning to practise as professionals not only incorporates knowledge and skills, but also entails the development of professional ways of being” (p. 8).

## **Being**

Being concerns the ontological aspect of traits and dispositions as shown in the foregoing example of becoming a care-giver. Having gone through the process of *becoming* a care-giver, the paramedic is now *being* a care-giver. This would place her in 3L to 4D of the MELD schema where she is ‘being as part of an emergent whole’, i.e. a care-giver (3L) and she can exercise her transformative agency (4D) in her position as a care-giver. Having gone through the process of becoming she can now be mature, brave, self-confident, self-efficacious, ethical and responsible.

## **Knowing and coming to know**

Critical realism holds that knowledge is:

inevitably socio-culturally, economically and historically situated. We perceive and know relative to particular perspectives...Human beings collectively and actively ‘produce’ knowledge. They do not simply discover ‘facts’. Nor do they ‘construct’ knowledge in the sense of creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing)...Experience needs active interpretation before it can be turned into knowledge...The ‘facts’ of either

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<sup>99</sup> The four planes of four-planar social being are (i) material transactions with nature, the environment; (ii) inter-/intra-personal relations; (iii) the network of social relations in which former are embedded; (iv) the embodied personality and agent’s own subjectivity (Bhaskar 1998, p. 645 and Hartwig 2007, p. 421).

nature or human social life are not simply perceived; they are perceived through our pre-existing cognitive and theoretical filters (Potter in Hartwig, 2007, pp. 273-274).

The foregoing quotation encompasses important points about a critical realist view of knowledge (epistemology) that has to be taken into consideration when discussing traits and dispositions. As each person has his own geo-history, he perceives and knows according to the socio-cultural, economic and historical perspectives of his own geo-history. For instance, if we take “Knowing I am a professional”, each paramedic will experience this differently according to his own perspectival lenses and cognitive and theoretical filters.

Barnett (2009a) distinguishes between knowledge and knowing regarding knowledge as “a collectively attested set of understandings in the world” and knowing as “an individual’s personal hold on the world” (p. 432). Barnett argues that “the process of coming to know has person-forming properties” (2009a, p. 435), which has implications for becoming. This process of becoming he regards as forming “dispositions and qualities characteristic of the practices in the different fields of knowledge” (*ibid.*). Thus, as a student grows into the role of paramedic, qualities such as communicating appropriately and effectively, for example, start to emerge.

### **Doing and learning to do**

Bhaskar states that “doing is making...this transformative activity re-produces and/or more or less transforms, for the most part unwittingly, its conditions of possibility...social structures and their generative mechanisms, the agent herself and generally what was given and which has now been re-produced or transformed”, (1993, p. 155). This means that when one does something one either re-produces or changes it. Thus, a paramedic when treating a patient can either re-produce or transform the situation. An example of this would be a paramedic treating an old lady who has fallen and broken her hip. The paramedic cannot do anything to change the broken hip *per se*; thus he is not changing the situation. He can make the patient comfortable and pain-free before taking her to hospital; in administering morphine he is transforming the patient’s pain into an absence of pain by exercising his transformative agency.

Having discussed being, knowing and doing of Figure 7.2, I explore the acronym PARAMEDIC that the EMS department uses to teach their students about the qualities and dispositions that a paramedic should have.

### 7.3 Characteristics and dispositions of a paramedic

In their first year of study EMS students are made aware of the characteristics, traits and dispositions that the department requires them to develop over the course of their studies. To this end the class analyses and discusses the word PARAMEDIC as if it were an acronym. However, these characteristics are not presented as graduate attributes *per se*, but rather as the way a paramedic needs to be, to know and to do. This suggests an ontological as well as epistemological approach. Because the PARAMEDIC acronym is so important to the students and high in their awareness, I decided to use it as a framework to encompass the many attributes and qualities that students put forward in the focus group discussions and the staff offered in interviews around the question of graduate attributes. The meaning for each letter of the acronym is given next to its letter:

**P:** Professional; **A:** Academic; **R:** Respect; **A:** Athletic; **M:** Manager;  
**E:** Empathy; **D:** Dedication; **I:** Integrity; **C:** Coping Mechanisms

In Table 7.1 I have listed the different characteristics and dispositions of the acronym and have indicated from where the characteristic or disposition emerges in the right-hand column. Table 7.1 shows that some of the traits emerge from the curriculum, i.e. they are epistemological; while dispositions are mainly ontological, i.e. they are part of the being of the student.

**Table 7.1:** PARAMEDIC acronym characteristics, traits and dispositions

Acro- nym	Characteristic, disposition	Meaning of characteristic, disposition	Whence do the characteristics & dispositions emerge?
<b>P</b>	Professional	Presentable, Neat, Courteous, Precise, Conduct oneself confidently, Sterile when working Conducting oneself professionally	<u>Curriculum:</u> through behaviourist approach in first year students are taught to be neat and presentable  Emerges from the practical classes, simulations and practical shifts of workplace-based learning (WPBL).

		Assertive; give clear instructions Ethical Knowing the HPCSA scope of practice, protocols & ethical guidelines Communicate well	Being courteous one acquires at home and also by observing how a professional paramedic acts. Ethics is taught as a subject. The scope of practice and drug protocols are taught.
<b>A</b>	Academic	Knowledgeable about theory, scope and protocols, Competent in Clinical Skills,  Evidence-informed decision making (EIDM), Observing best practices Life-long learning: research & reading,  Teachable, Able to teach, Reflective thinker, Critical thinker	<b><u>Curriculum:</u></b> Teaching of theory and clinical skills,  EIDM starts in 3 <sup>rd</sup> year and culminates in 4 <sup>th</sup> year with the creation of a policy brief. Through research & reading students get to know best practices.  <b><u>Ontological:</u></b> Life-long learning is a disposition that the lecturers instil in the students by encouraging them not to stop learning when they graduate. This attitude results in a willingness to carry on learning.  Being able to teach others comes out of B.Tech., i.e. 4 <sup>th</sup> year where they study education techniques.  The reflective thinking emerges from the <b><u>curriculum</u></b> where the students have to reflect on their practicals and shift work. They learn how to reflect and practice it.
<b>R</b>	Respect	<b>For:</b> Self, Lecturers, Patients, Team, Colleagues, Others	<b><u>Curriculum:</u></b> Emerges from behaviourist training in 1 <sup>st</sup> year. Standing up in class for lecturers and calling them “Sir”
<b>A</b>	Athletic	Fit  Strong	<b><u>Curriculum:</u></b> Emerges from the curriculum, i.e. PT and Rescue modules. Students are expected to maintain their own fitness
<b>M</b>	Manager  <b><u>Being able to manage:</u></b> Team, Being incident commander, People on scene, Scene safety, Other services, A shift	Effective Leader Assertive Exercise agency Self-efficacious Disciplined Team player Change-maker Responsible Accountable Innovative Flexible Balanced IT skills	<b><u>Curriculum:</u></b> Dept culture of making students take responsibility and providing them with opportunities to do extracurricular tasks such as managing the 3Peaks rescue module. 3 Peaks – rescue module; Service Learning – Primary Health Care; Fund-raising;  Practical classes; Simulations where student has opportunity to act as incident commander; OSCEs. IT skills are taught as part of the curriculum.  Student participation in extra activities e.g. being class representative.
<b>E</b>	Empathy	Caring Compassionate	<b><u>Ontological</u></b> i.e. they are part of who one is, but they are fostered by observing

			paramedics in action
<b>D</b>	Dedication	Self-disciplined Self-motivated	<b>Curriculum:</b> the amount of work forces students to be disciplined and motivated. <b>Ontological:</b> Dedication requires one to be a paramedic at all times even when off duty.
<b>I</b>	Integrity	Ethical Honest	<b>Curriculum:</b> Ethics and Law are taught to students <b>Ontological:</b> being honest is part of who one is
<b>C</b>	Coping Mechanisms	<b>Emotionally Intelligent:</b> Mature Emotionally strong Practise emotional detachment Recognise stress and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	<b>Curriculum:</b> Amount of coursework forces students to take responsibility and thus mature over course of 3 years. Two subjects teach coping mechanisms. Emotional intelligence, strength and detachment is <b>ontological</b> , but can be acquired by observation of paramedic and doing WPBL i.e. the practical shifts.

The Head of Department stated that the department encourages the emergence of the characteristics and dispositions associated with the acronym PARAMEDIC:

*That acronym sums up a lot of what we see them doing. To break the whole public perception that these are ambulance drivers. You must cut your cloth according to what you want to wear. So the whole thing goes with that. See yourself as playing a broader role than just providing, you know, working on the ambulance... So we want to encourage the best practice and it must be evidence-informed. So you must be able to read and be up to date and aware of what the best practices are... Also regarding the professionalism – one of things that underpins it and what we teach from the first year – and the subject is ethics and the ethical guidelines and ethical rules that are determined by the HPCSA. So that becomes the key and that also talks to their professionalism in terms of what is ethically acceptable in medical practice... Dedication what we talk about – whether you are on or off duty you are still a paramedic. The uniform does not define you... So that dedication to your calling to what you said you wanted to be. It's not a job; it's something that you are constantly aware of. The whole thing is about being a responsible member of society... We teach coping mechanisms as well. In the second year, in the first year they get, they cover it so that they start identifying what to expect in the subject called Foundations of Practice. By the time they get to 2nd year, we do psycho-psychiatric emergency care taught by a psychologist. In that subject they reflect on who they are; how they define themselves. I think if you understand yourself, you can begin to understand other people. But if you are not sure who you are and your identity, then it becomes a little*

*more difficult how to deal with that ...They are also taught how themselves to identify stress and other coping measures, to deal with death and bereavements because we pick up now that post-traumatic stress is a big issue ... (HoD/7/11/11).*

As seen in the prologue to Chapter Six, paramedics are not ambulance-drivers; they are professional pre-hospital emergency care providers. The EMS department wants its students to develop a broader image of themselves as paramedics by working through the acronym and understanding what characteristics and dispositions they need to aim for while studying. The Head of Department makes an interesting point about dedication, i.e. it means that being a paramedic is not a job, it is ontological; it is what you are as stated by the HoD “whether you are on or off duty you are still a paramedic. The uniform does not define you”. Hence a paramedic is never off duty, but is dedicated to assisting where needed. The notion that the uniform does not define a paramedic implies that dedication is something internal. Lecturer Yelani states that “*dedication and integrity boil down to your internal motivation*”, (LY/27/3/12). This takes dedication far beyond being a point on a list of graduate attributes.

When I asked the students about the PARAMEDIC acronym, they said that it represents qualities to which they aspire.

## **Exploring specific characteristics and dispositions**

### ***Example One: Communication***

#### ***Analytical narrative***

One of the most complex traits that arose from the focus group discussion and interviews was communication. It became clear that communication is not the simple generic skill that is usually described as “good oral communication and communication in writing for varied purposes/audiences”, (Pool and Sewell, 2007, p. 283). When communication is represented as a generic skill in the academic literature, there is little or no discussion of its complexity. It is merely presented as neutral, apolitical and unproblematic. For instance, the University of Sydney lists communication as one of its five generic graduate attributes and describes it thus:

**Communication:** Graduates of the Faculty of Economics and Business will recognize and value communication as a tool for negotiating and creating new understanding, interacting with others, and furthering their own learning (Treleaven and Voola, 2008, p.163).

The description of communication as ‘a tool’ is somewhat technician and simplistic as it does not encompass the broad complexities of the communication process. A tool is something external to one; thus communication is not seen as part of being. The description of the generic graduate attribute does not indicate how communication becomes a ‘tool’ nor does it explain how to use this ‘tool’.

### *Analysis*

Communication is a good example of how complex a trait can be. *“It’s a process of communication. A lot of what we do is communication. If you don’t have communication, you don’t have patient care”*, (SB/27/9/12). Student Ben makes a direct link between communication and patient care. This may seem obvious, but unless the paramedic actually makes that link no communication will take place. It would be a ‘talking at’ rather than a ‘talking with’. Ben goes on to point out the difficulty of communicating with someone of a different language<sup>100</sup>, *“Let’s say I can’t communicate with them. If it’s a different language, communication is going to be difficult and patient care even more tough”* (*ibid.*). Thus, communication becomes an issue that is **agential** (i.e. the multilingualism of the paramedic); **cultural** (i.e. the cultures of both paramedic and patient come into play) and **structural** (i.e. language teaching is in the curriculum, but it is insufficient and inadequate as reported by students who have to use what they have learnt in the classroom). Professional paramedic Alex also links communication to patient care:

**Alex:** *Well, look, I think the **BIG** (original emphasis) one for paramedics is communication skills, just being able to talk to people. It doesn't matter what language you're talking in, it's just a case of being able to walk into someone's house or walk onto an accident scene, look at people, speak to them clearly so that you can understand and, you know, be able to communicate effectively. Extract information: what's going on, what you need to know. Communicate what you're going to do.... I*

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<sup>100</sup> In the Western Cape the three main regional languages are Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa. The EMS students do a short course in either isiXhosa or Afrikaans in their first year. Black students do a course in Afrikaans, while the other students learn isiXhosa. However, the students have indicated that this is not sufficient to communicate with isiXhosa or Afrikaans patients, and that they quickly forget what they have learned. If a paramedic works for CREMS the majority of patients would be either Afrikaans or isiXhosa; therefore a sound grasp of both languages would be regarded as essential.

*find that often incompetence on scene is not being able to communicate, not being able to deal with people and it's critical. You know. If you want to find out what is wrong with this person you need to be able to speak to them, to get information out of them or the bystanders and the family. If you can't do that you're not going to get very far. If you can't speak to other services, if you can't speak to fire, rescue, police or whoever, you are not going to be able to sort things out (PA/14/10/11).*

Alex indicates critically important aspects of paramedic communication, namely communicating (i) to be able to understand what is happening in the situation by talking to the patient as well as family or bystanders, (ii) to tell the patient what the paramedic intends to do and (iii) to speak to members of the other emergency services. On the point of speaking to patients, Student Cathy similarly states: *“So it's not about I say this and that. You treat the person. You can't just rattle this medical stuff at them – you have to bring it down to their level” (SC/27/10/11).* Cathy points to important aspects of communication as a paramedic, namely being aware of the person being treated and modifying one's language to make the medical terminology intelligible to the patient. In other words, a paramedic has to know her discipline well enough to be able to recontextualise the technical terminology in simple terms for someone else. This is agential because it depends on the paramedic's knowledge and skill at recontextualising. Alex states that incompetence at the scene of an emergency is as a result of not being able to communicate; this indicates the critical importance of communication. Another aspect of communication is that a paramedic has to communicate with a variety of people at different levels such as the patient, family members, bystanders and other emergency service workers. He also has to know how to communicate at different levels.

Paramedic Alex specifies some people that a paramedic may have to deal with:

**Alex:** *In EMCS you are dealing with a lot of people – you are dealing with the community and you're dealing with people in the hospital. So you're dealing with the guy in the gutter and then you're dealing with the specialist in the unit. So you've got to know how to conduct yourself with all different types (PA/14/10/11).*

These are people who come from different socio-economic levels from the homeless person to a highly-trained physician at the hospital. The paramedic would communicate differently and appropriately with different people. When communicating with ambulance crews and other paramedics, the language and terminology of the profession is used.

*By midyear and towards the second half of the first year...we all worked on an ambulance and we all know what you're talking about – the language of the profession becomes more commonplace and you understand all the abbreviations and the terminology that's being thrown around all the time (HoD/7/11/11).*

This is a different aspect of communication, namely insider-communication, knowing the terminology and being able to participate in the conversation of colleagues. A sense of belonging and familiarity comes with insider communication. Some examples of paramedic insider talk are: 'IV' – intravenous; 'put up a line' – insert an intravenous drip; the 'bus' or 'ambo' – ambulance; 'MI' – myocardial infarction; 'resus' – resuscitation; 'MVA' – motor vehicle accident; 'red' – a critically ill or injured patient; 'High Five' – the patient has HIV/AIDS; 'She's gone to Uppington'<sup>101</sup> – she has died. Minnie (2012) suggests that use of medical terminology and insider-talk serves to make the situation impersonal and distances the medical personnel from the traumatic incident as part of their coping mechanisms and allows them "to treat the patient according to a strict protocol which diminishes fear and alleviates helplessness" (p. 30).

Alex also mentions patient advocacy and patient rights and being assertive as part of communication:

**Alex:** *Patient advocacy is to understand that when you start to care for this person they're your responsibility so you need to keep their best interests at heart. When you get to hospital, you mustn't just ditch your person and leave as quickly as you can. Try to see to it that they are seen to, that they do get the care that they need, you know. If the doctor is not looking at them, you go and tell the doctor "Come look at this person, they're not doing well. You need to see this; it could be potentially life-threatening". If your patient is being forced to do something they don't want to do, you need to stand up for them and say "Look your rights...". You need to explain their rights to them and say "Look you don't need to go to hospital if you don't want to. You don't have to receive this treatment if you don't want to receive this treatment (PA/14/10/11).*

Thus, communication is broader than mere talking and writing as it encompasses being, knowing and doing. It also involves speaking out on behalf of another and having the best

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<sup>101</sup> Uppington is a remote town in the North-West Cape. This expression is commonly used by EMCS personnel in the Western Cape (PC/15/8/13).

interests of the patient at heart. Advocating for a patient requires assertiveness in the paramedic to call a doctor to attend to a patient<sup>102</sup>.

Lecturer Adams mentions the importance of reassuring a patient by being empathetic, showing that empathy is an important part of communicating with a patient:

**Adams:** *I also push to be empathetic and just bring it out in my voice and in everything just to make them feel absolutely reassured – the patient that is – “We’re going to get through this. We’re going to be OK. We are a team. We are here for you now. Unfortunate things happen to all people, but we need to get through this (LA/11/11/11).*

Student Olga makes an important point about communication being more than language:

**Olga:** *...communication obviously it’s not just about language; it’s how you present yourself and how you interact with another person... You learn the way how other people communicate with patients, how you yourself communicate with patients. You work in hospitals, with doctors (SO/25/10/11).*

Here Olga indicates non-verbal communication “how you present yourself” and an essential aspect of communication, i.e. interaction. Like Olga other students also indicated that they learnt to communicate from others like doctors, nurses and professional paramedics during their workplace-based learning.

Student Gert says:

**Gert:** *Communication is instilled in you because first year you are working on an ambulance as a third up, as we call it; you are the third person. You have got two crews, so wherever you are it’s those people that’ve been working out there. You see different races, you see different genders. You go to different cultures and everything in communication working with a patient, speaking to them and asking them questions and how you interact, just even interaction with different people in different areas (SG/25/10/11).*

It is interesting that Gert says that communication is ‘instilled’, i.e. it is not taught formally. He indicates the different people that a student meets in workplace-based learning.

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<sup>102</sup> Patient advocacy is particularly relevant in the State hospitals which are understaffed and overcrowded (PA/14/10/11).

Paramedic Alex makes an interesting point about the difficulties that female paramedics face:

**Alex:** *Ja, look it's difficult for women, hey, and very androgynous males, because it's a rough job, you know. You're dealing with, like you're in the community, you're in the street dealing with people on the street, you know. You're dealing with drunk people. You're dealing with, like, often the scum of the earth, real dirt bags. And these are people. I mean if you're a beautiful young woman and you've got a crowd of drunk men who've stabbed some guy, and like, you're outnumbered, you're going to have a hard time. They're going to be whistling and jeering at you and touching you. You've got to be strong enough to handle that. And so I think, you know, for women it's difficult (PA 14/10/11).*

Alex's description depicts a rough and difficult sector of society with which paramedics have to deal. Alex uses disparaging language to talk about some of the people with whom paramedics deal<sup>103</sup>. In such a situation communication would be very difficult especially for a female who is being sexually harassed. This also shows that communication is not standardised, but changes with every situation and a paramedic would have to be emotionally mature to adjust to communicating differently and appropriately in various situations. "You've got to be strong enough to handle that" – here 'strong' does not refer to physical strength but to emotional maturity and emotional intelligence including emotional detachment to deal with the situation.

Leonie talks about being a female paramedic:

**Leonie:** *You need to have a spine. You need to be aggressive to a point. Assertive – sometimes you need to be aggressive. We are females in a male environment. It is definitely changing and is not an all-male environment anymore. So sometimes you need to stand up to people and say, "This is the way we are going to do it and these are the reasons". Because very often you get hospital issues and there's management issues and there's personal interaction issues and stuff like that, but you are still the senior and you need to be assertive to a point that is going to save your patient's life (PL/15/8/12).*

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<sup>103</sup> This use of disparaging language may be an early warning sign of burnout known as 'compassion fatigue'. Pflifferling (2000) states that compassion fatigue is a deep physical, emotional and spiritual exhaustion especially as the care-giver continues to work with patients, but find it difficult to maintain a healthy balance of empathy and objectivity.

This extract shows the difficulty a female might face in communicating in a male-dominated environment. Thus gender plays a significant role in communication as well because gender is a structure at the level of the Real from which communication emerges.

A paramedic is also expected to be a manager which requires the ability to communicate with staff and deal with different issues.

**Alex:** *I think the difficult thing is when you qualify is that you're a manager and these people who are twice your age are subordinate to you and you have lots of staff issues you have to deal with. In the National Diploma you don't get taught so well to deal with these things and it's very difficult. People often come with all sorts of issues and often petty stupid squabbling and now you as a manager need to sort this out and take care of business. So, if you are a person who has gone straight from high school to the National Diploma and is now qualified at 21, you have got very little life experience to help you deal with situations and manage people – that's quite hard (PA/14/10/11).*

This comment by Alex illustrates a further aspect of communication, namely the difficulties of having to deal with subordinates who are older and more experienced than one. In the above extract the type of communication required would be conflict resolution which is not taught on the EMS course. Alex points to Bhaskar's (2002a) four-planar social being in action here, i.e. he has to communicate on all four planes by interacting with the environment/job, relating to his subordinates, interacting with the social structures, i.e. the job hierarchy where he is a manager with subordinates) and his own embodied self which is feeling inadequate to the situation.

Lecturer Adams talks about the value of communicating appropriately:

**Adams:** *We can all resuscitate, guys and girls. We can all resuscitate. There's nobody better; no guy, he does it better. Where I find we add more value, where I find we are better for the majority of patients is when we can actually be talking to them in an appropriate way (LA/11/11/11).*

Here the lecturer comments that all the students are competent in their clinical skills using resuscitation as an example. However, for Adams, this technical skill is not as important as talking appropriately to patients. This indicates the value of good communication for paramedics.

### ***Conceptual re-description***

The foregoing shows how intricate the concept of communication is because it is not a “one size fits all” concept but embraces the different aspects of being, doing and knowing in complex relationship with one another. Communication is epistemological in the sense that a paramedic has to learn how to communicate with different types of people in different situations. It is ontological because how a paramedic communicates emerges from her four-planar social being. It is practical because communication is action that is both verbal and non-verbal.

Communication will be different for each person (even if they are in the same discipline, i.e. both paramedics) because it is part of four-planar social being, which is individually unique (Bhaskar 1993, p. 155). As Smith (2010) states: “Each personal self is exactly their own being and not another” (pp. 71-72). Smith adds that each person exercises “complex capacities for agency and intersubjectivity<sup>104</sup>”. In the exercise of agency and intersubjectivity each person is unique. Dall’Alba (2004, p. 680) explains that each practitioner (here paramedics) will develop and use their communication skills according to their own understanding of their practice. Bhaskar states that when an “agent is consciously absorbed in a practice, this constitutes her praxis, i.e. her causal agency” (1993, p. 165). This means that when an agent practises, her agency is causal and brings about change. For instance, if a paramedic is dealing with a patient, concentrating on the communication taking place, she is exercising her agency in being responsive to the patient.

Communication as used by paramedics is not taught formally during their course, but is learnt during workplace-based learning by observing how others deal with patients and colleagues as explained by Alex.

**Alex:** *It’s the same when dealing with people on the street and dealing with families and that. You learn as you go along – like what tone of voice you should use, what language. So it’s a lot of trial and error... I don’t think it would do much good to have a course on manners or how to speak to people, but if you spend time with people on the road and if you spend time with people in the working environment, you can see*

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<sup>104</sup> Smith (2010, p. 70) states that intersubjectivity “consists of the making accessible to other persons the content of a self’s subjective experiences and dispositions. Intersubjectivity is not automatically given. It must be achieved. The primary vehicles for the accomplishment of intersubjectivity are language and other forms of communicative symbolic interaction, the uses of which are publicly shared, not privately owned”.

*how they act. And if you are not falling in line, they can correct you. That's the big thing – it's a practical exercise (PA/14/10/11).*

The workplace of paramedics is the street, people's homes, hospitals, business and industrial sites, sports fields and many other places. The point is that the workplace is unpredictable and changing. At the start of a shift, a paramedic does not know for sure where the emergency calls will take him. Thus, he does not know in advance the kind of people he will interact with or what type of communication will be required. He has to be prepared to communicate in a complex and changeable environment. This makes it difficult to teach communication. At best one could only teach the technicalities and techniques of communication, which might be of little use because ultimately communication is part of four-planar social being informing every social interaction. Four-planar social being concerns the agent's (i) interaction with his environment, i.e. the unpredictable workplace, (ii) interactions with others, i.e. people he has to interact with, (iii) social relations, i.e. working with the social structures such as the police-force, the hospital and (iv) his own intra-subjectivity where he has to deal with his own emotions and reactions as a stratified, embodied agent.

In exploring the concept of communication used by paramedics, it is clear that communication is complex and needs to be used appropriately in a variety of situations. Communicating well is one of the most important abilities that a paramedic can have, as shown in the foregoing discussion and is instilled (as indicated by student Gert above) or picked up rather than taught explicitly.

**Gert:** *And that interpersonal communication, you can't really make that part of a curriculum, because that is as you go, as you grow as a character where you are working in the hospital speaking to doctors, speaking to different paramedics. I think it is part of our course without us realising it (SG/25/10/11).*

## ***Example Two: Compassion and empathy***

### ***Analytical narrative***

In the data compassion and empathy are often mentioned. Empathy also appears in the PARAMEDIC acronym as discussed earlier. Compassion and empathy are similar, but there are important differences. There are many definitions for both going back as far as Aristotle, but I will only consider those relevant to the health care professions. Empathy is seen as a

component of compassion and a product of adopting another person's perspective (Nussbaum, 2001 in Frost *et al.*, 2005), i.e. 'walking in another's shoes'. Empathy is a concept that covers both cognitive and affective domains, i.e. cognitively to understand another's inner experiences and feelings and see the world from the other's perspective and affectively to enter into the feelings and experiences of the other person. "We define empathy in patient-care situations as a cognitive attribute that involves the ability to understand the patient's inner experiences and perspective and a capability to communicate this understanding" (Hojat *et al.*, 2002, p. 1563).

Cassel (2005) explains that since Aristotle there have been three requirements for compassion: (i) the other's pain must be serious, (ii) it must not be self-inflicted and (iii) we must be able to envisage ourselves in the other's situation by identifying with the other person (pp. 435-436). Cassel regards compassion as a social emotion that motivates behaviour, i.e. alleviating the pain (*ibid.*). Compassion shares the pain of a suffering person (Nussbaum, 2008, p. 95). Frost *et al.* (2005) state that compassion consists of three interrelated elements: being aware of another's suffering, feeling empathy and responding to the suffering. Compassion goes beyond empathy to an actual response to another's suffering and pain.

Burack *et al.* (1999, p. 49) see compassion as an attitude and value that cannot be taught systematically, but can be fostered. EMS lecturer Yelani concurs "*Empathy that is not something that you teach someone*" (LY/27/3/12). Cassel (2005) looks at compassion from a medical point of view and states that "it heightens awareness of the patient's best interests, increases the probability that care will be tuned to this patient's needs and promotes an intimacy of knowledge that is required" (p. 442). Thus, compassion is an emotion, an attitude that health care workers need in order to deliver optimum service. Cassel (2005) also points out that people differ in the depth of their compassion which can be explained by the depth of identification with the other.

### **Analysis**

**Leonie:** *If I could make up the perfect paramedic, it would be somebody that is educationally sound; that is skills sound; that is willing to be taught and willing to learn; that is somebody that has compassion and passion not just for the patients, but the people around the patients as well because you look at the patient and the family as a whole (PL 26/10/11).*

In her construction of the 'perfect paramedic' Leonie covers being, knowing and doing. She makes the point that compassion does not only extend to the patient but also to the family. Paramedic Paul strongly concurs with Leonie, "*If you don't have compassion and if you don't love this job and if you don't love helping people then you need to get out of the system*" (PP 26/10/11).

A manager at a private EMCS service, Mr Goode, commented that he would expect someone coming to work for his organisation to be "*extremely compassionate which you need to have because you are dealing with people and their emotions*" (MG/13/7/12). He made an interesting point about nurturing compassion in his paramedics:

**Goode:** *Currently in SA most of your Advanced Life Support paramedics practice alone. They work alone rather on a response vehicle. Yes, you deal with emotions. You see traumatic things. So to keep someone compassionate, to keep someone balanced you need to have a psychological support base and allow these practitioners to consult with professional counsellors, with professional psychologists if they do have issues. Otherwise you are going to find it extremely difficult to be balanced (ibid.).*

Goode indicates a very important aspect of compassion, i.e. that it can be buried or cut off as one becomes hardened to the trauma one has to deal with on a daily basis and closes oneself off from it. This is known as secondary traumatic stress called compassion fatigue and happens when care-givers are constantly involved in helping others who are suffering, and in this way are themselves exposed to suffering (Scott, 2013, p. 14). A result of this compassion fatigue would be to stem one's compassion for those one treats. Paradoxically, there is an alternative reaction to constant exposure to trauma which some paramedics may experience called compassion satisfaction. This happens when they find their work particularly fulfilling (Scott, 2013, p. 15).

Student Brad considers compassion from an emotional detachment point of view:

**Brad:** *Compassion would also be being in balance and being able to withdraw yourself from the patient emotionally. Although, yes, you do need to be empathetic and you really do need to be there emotionally for the patient, you can't get emotionally attached – not without serious consequences by itself. Especially if you*

*keep doing that you're going to get yourself burned out to the detriment of your practice (SB/27/10/11).*

Brad makes the important point about keeping a level of balance and a certain emotional detachment. Here Brad may be blurring the distinction between empathy and sympathy. Empathy shares understanding and a “compassionate detachment” while sympathy shares emotions (Hojat *et al.*, 2002).

Paramedic Delia talks about compassion:

**Delia:** *No-one can teach you compassion. I think it is absolutely inside you... I enjoy my work because I am compassionate. I enjoy my work because I deal with many different people and I learn a lot from people. Dealing with all the issues at work forms me in a way. I think your true self is shaped by all the problems and stuff that happens. I enjoy my work (PD/12/7/12).*

Delia really does enjoy her job as shown by her stating the fact three times. She has a very positive attitude and outlook and may be a person who enjoys compassion satisfaction.

### ***Conceptual re-description***

Compassion and empathy differ from each other, but both may be seen as being both emotion and attitude. Importantly, they are both *social* emotions and attitudes that manifest within social relations. Talking about compassion and respect, Burack *et al.* (1999) state that they are “not discrete specifiable behaviours; rather they are expressed in highly complex and contextualized social interactions” (p. 54). As such they are part of four-planar social being which is complex and is contextualized, i.e. the interaction with the environment as well as social structures and social relations with others.

For paramedics compassion and empathy are part of the caring interpersonal work in which they engage daily. Emotions and attitudes or dispositions are part of the stratified, embodied agent (Bhaskar, 1993). Archer (2000) emphasizes the importance of emotions as being “central to the things we care about and to the act of caring itself” (p. 194).

Compassion and empathy cannot be taught, only fostered or nurtured (Hojat *et al.* 2002). Burack *et al.* (1999) suggest that they may be modelled by lecturers and significant others in the workplace and that students learn from this modelling. These authors suggest a specific method whereby the lecturer calls the students’ attention to what she is modelling by talking explicitly about the modelling, e.g. “what I was trying to do there was...” (p. 54). The most effective type of modelling, they suggest, is that lecturers treat their students with the compassion and respect with which they would like them to treat their patients. They emphasize that it is the responsibility of lecturers to transmit such professional values.

Compassion and empathy cannot be assessed in a classroom test, although a “Jefferson scale of physician empathy” does exist and is used to measure the empathy of doctors (Hojat *et al.* 2002), but this is not an evaluation *per se*. As desirable traits and dispositions for paramedic students to acquire, compassion and empathy do not meet the requirements of generic graduate attributes which require to be embedded in subjects and quality assured by means of evaluations/tests, because compassion and empathy simply cannot be embedded, taught, tested or quality assured. They are ontological, i.e. part of the being of the student. They cannot be generic graduate attributes.

## 7.4 A Departmental view of traits and dispositions

In this section I consider traits and dispositions from a staff perspective. To do this, I have selected some traits and dispositions and tabulated them in Table 7.2.

**Table 7.2** Staff perspective on traits and dispositions

Staff member	Ideational elements of the departmental cultural system taken from conversations	Traits and Dispositions
Davids	<i>To sensitize students then to the place of work and also to the societies to which they may not have been exposed to before;</i> <i>The social responsibility of having to give something back to the community and understanding what the whole community was all about;</i> <i>Prepare students socially and culturally for the work environment;</i> <i>Bring into context the burden of disease and the social evils that lead to the burden of disease;</i> <i>Human dignity – about not having a bias in your care and your treatment and treating all people equally</i>	Sensitizing students  Social responsibility  Preparing students socially and culturally; Social justice  Treat all equally Social justice

Reddy	<p><i>The way we do things always boils down to social justice;</i></p> <p><i>The things we are dealing with are really two sides of the same coin: This pursuit of emergency medicine and, you know, and relevant emergency care is really the opposite side of the same coin and the other side is social justice.</i></p> <p><i>If we can provide our students with a high sense of agency, a strong sense of self-efficacy;</i></p> <p><i>Ensure that the learner is foregrounded in everything.</i></p> <p><i>We try to give them some tools so that they can find by themselves independently answers to question that they have – it's about giving them a toolbox so that long after they have left academia they can continue to use academic sources to answer questions that they have in their real life experiences.</i></p> <p><i>Our objective is to have graduates who see themselves as agents of change, not just employees.</i></p> <p><i>Our primary agenda is to develop the individual. That's what we are the custodians of. Our primary benefactor is the student. What he does with it will be his own choice, but it will be largely influenced by what we presented, and how we presented and how we conducted ourselves.</i></p>	<p>Social justice</p> <p>Sense of agency and self-efficacy</p> <p>Teaching research with an afro-centric agenda</p> <p>Change-agents</p> <p>Individual development</p> <p>Student choice</p>
Adams	<p><i>Discipline – we abide by rules and regulations;</i></p> <p><i>Can you then (i) be neat and tidy yourself which I would translate into is your jump bag neat and tidy? (ii) Are you sterile?</i></p> <p><i>We can only teach them so much. And most of the work needs to happen with them. And I think where I see the changes is when they realise that we expect so much from them and that we can only cover so much in the class;</i></p> <p><i>We are care-givers before we are anything else. We are people who care about other people.</i></p>	<p>Discipline</p> <p>Neat, tidy &amp; sterile</p> <p>High staff expectations</p> <p>Realisation of own responsibility</p> <p>Care givers</p>
Yelani	<p><i>Respect, discipline and most importantly instilling Life-long Learning and giving them skills</i></p>	<p>Respect, discipline, Life-long learning and skills</p>

It becomes clear from Table 7.2 that the lecturers have their own perspectives. Lecturers Yelani and Adams indicate that respect and discipline are part of the departmental culture. Adams views discipline within a medical context which is guided by rules, regulations and protocols. Davids explains that discipline is necessary because:

**Davids:** *When you get to that emergency situation whether it be a rescue or when things need to happen and there is no time for sitting back and having a chat about it*

*because seconds make the difference. Then there's got to be that disciplined type of "Take instruction now and we'll chat about it later" approach (LD/7/11/11).*

Davids and Reddy have a strong sense of social justice which they would like to foster in their students. They also take a developmental stance towards their students sensitising them to the workplace and make them aware of their social responsibilities. Reddy makes a very important point "What he does with it will be his own choice, but it will be largely influenced by what we presented, and how we presented and how we conducted ourselves". He suggests that students can exercise their choice, their free-will to either accept the teaching and development on offer, or to refuse it. This is reminiscent of Bhaskar's point that everyone can exercise their own free-will, but not always in conditions of their choosing (1993). The traits and dispositions in Table 7.2 all relate to the broad categories of being, knowing and doing.

## **7.5 Identity and traits and dispositions**

**Research questions:** (i) What are the implications of the emergence of identity for the construct of graduate attributes? (ii) What are the implications for the use of graduate attributes in curriculum design? (iii) What relationship exists between identity and graduate attributes?

I will briefly recap the emergence of identity before answering the questions. Identity is a state of being that emerges within the embodied self from an individual's core constellational identity through processes of formation within a social context of four-planar social being and its interaction with the interplay of structure, culture & agency. This occurs within the four-planar social being of an individual from the interaction of seven generative mechanisms in the core constellational identity with the interplay of structure, culture and agency. Change is an important part of identity emergence because it is the absenting of non-identity to make way for the emergence of new identity. Here staff may exercise their transformative agency.

### **(i) What are the implications of the emergence of identity for the construct of graduate attributes?**

In the EMS department first-year student identity emerges from the changes that are wrought in the students by means of the curriculum and the behaviourist approach that is adopted. In third year, graduate-student identity emerges through transformative absenting of constraints

in the students as the students find their place in the structure and reproduce it through their compliance. This graduate-student identity faces inward towards the institution and the studies in which the students are steeped. In the second part of the third year students start to face outwards towards the workplace and a graduate-professional identity starts to emerge through workplace-based learning. This prepares the students to qualify and enter the workplace as they start forming a professional paramedic identity. Each student comes with her own geo-history and socio-cultural background; thus, each will have a unique identity.

As shown in Chapter Four, traits and dispositions are ontologically different to graduate attributes which are an external imposition while traits and dispositions emerge in the student through personal change. The implications of identity emergence for GAs are the following: GAs do not emerge, but are imposed, thus they would be imposed upon the identity of students, rather than emerge. GAs are reified and considered from a cognitive, epistemological point of view, while traits and dispositions are mainly ontological. Hence, there will not be an ontological relationship between GAs and identity. Thus there are no positive implications, only negative ones.

## **(ii) What are the implications for the use of graduate attributes in curriculum design?**

If I may substitute ‘traits and dispositions’ for graduate attributes, there would be significant implications for curriculum design. In the first place, staff could build specific traits into the curriculum and foster certain dispositions through the curriculum. For example, the understanding that the traits and dispositions fall into broad categories of being, knowing and doing together with the understanding of the processual becoming, coming to know and learning to do (which have person-forming properties, Barnett 2009a), could be used to link the categories and the curriculum carefully. Barnett (2009b) suggests that encounters with knowledge cannot be effective until the kinds of changes that are to be engendered are decided upon. As the EMS staff know what changes they wish to bring about in their students, they can create appropriate encounters with knowledge. However, these traits and dispositions do not require to be assessed and quality-assured, because they do not have the ontological basis of generic graduate attributes.

Barnett (2009a) states that “dispositions form human beings in fundamental ways” (p. 434). Thus, building ways of fostering dispositions into the curriculum will alter and shape students to take up specific stances towards their emergency care service. Barnett (2009b) makes the important point that dispositions and qualities are “both facets of human being that are necessarily implicated in a pedagogical relationship in higher education”. The EMS lecturers need to explore this pedagogical relationship and tease out ways in which they can implement it to incorporate the specific traits and attitudes that they want to cultivate in their students. These are: a professional attitude and habits of being professional; self-confidence in clinical skills, psycho-motor skills and knowledge; compassionate, caring and responsive; respectful; social justice, sensitised attitude to human and patient rights and patient advocacy; ethical and moral attitude; mindful leadership; mindful of team-mates; and a reflexive attitude.

Again, because graduate attributes emerge from a neoliberalist world and are implemented by corporatized and commodified universities which also emerge from a neoliberalist world, they struggle to be used in curriculum design as the literature has shown, in contrast to traits and dispositions as shown above. Proponents of GAs seek to embed, teach and assess them, while traits and dispositions do not require this, but fostering instead.

### **(iii) What relationship exists between identity and graduate attributes?**

If one considers traits and dispositions instead of graduate attributes, a positive relationship opens up between identity and the traits and dispositions. This is because the latter are fostered as part of the process of change that takes place in identity emergence. These three moments of emergence of student, graduate-student and graduate-professional identity are part of a process of emergence that operates over the three years of study. During this emergence of identity, the dispositions are shaped or fostered, e.g. compassion and empathy, and characteristics and traits, e.g. maturity and dedication developed through various means as consciousness of being a paramedic opens in the students.

Thus there is a close relationship between the emergence of identity and the formation of characteristics or the fostering of dispositions. However, these traits and dispositions are not generic graduate attributes as has been shown in this chapter. Therefore, in terms of the research question, there can be no relationship between emergence, identity and graduate

attributes. The list of generic graduate attributes is an external imposition by an institution on the identity of its students.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored traits and dispositions that EMS staff would like to inculcate into their students. Barnett's definitions of qualities and dispositions were used, i.e. dispositions are ontological in the sense that they are part of being while qualities/traits are part of character, but the two are interrelated.

These traits and dispositions are intricate and comprise different layers of complexity. An example of this is communication which is generally regarded quite simplistically in lists of generic graduate attributes. However, the communication used by paramedics proves to consist of different types of communication such as appropriate and responsive questioning and listening to patients, communicating appropriately with people from various socio-cultural backgrounds, conflict resolution and assertive patient advocacy.

The various traits and dispositions fall into three broad categories of being, knowing and doing which encompass the ontological, epistemological and practical. There are also three processual elements which are becoming, coming to know and learning to do. These are person-forming according to Barnett (2009a).

The exploration of traits and dispositions shows quite clearly that they are completely different to generic graduate attributes which are externally imposed. Lecturers are expected to embed, teach and quality-assure these generic graduate attributes by means of assessment. Most traits and dispositions cannot be assessed because they are ontological, i.e. part of one's being. Some epistemological and practical traits could be assessed, e.g. clinical and practical skills.

The answers to the research questions showed that change is always an element of the emergence of identity and this change is usually self-transformative of the students. As the students change, so they develop certain traits and dispositions, but each is unique according to his own geo-history. Identity has a close relationship with traits and dispositions, but not with generic graduate attributes because GAs do not emerge but are externally imposed.

There are broad implications for curriculum design in the use of traits and dispositions which are emergent and individual, but for not graduate attributes which are a one-size-fits-all imposition that ignores the *being* of students.

The next chapter is the final chapter in this thesis, i.e. the conclusion.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION

#### 8.1 Introduction

*In this chapter I will first present the research questions and my answers to them. Then I will talk about what my findings say to the literature. Thereafter I will consider the implications of my research, look at possible areas of future research and conclude with a short reflection on what I have learnt and what the meaning of this Ph.D. journey has been for me.*

I chose to do a case study because it allowed me to focus on complex phenomena within their real-life contexts as Yin (2003) states. Baxter and Jack comment that:

Case study research enables the researcher to answer “how” and “why” type questions while taking into consideration how a phenomenon is influenced by the context within which it is situated... a case study is an excellent opportunity to gain tremendous insight into a case. It enables the researcher to gather data from a variety of sources and to converge the data to illuminate the case (2008, p. 556).

I had read and understood these words, but their meaning only came alive for me when I started to gather data and began to see what a complex process case study research is. Interacting with students in the focus groups and with the interviewees, I started to gain insight into the complex phenomena I was exploring, i.e. the emergence of identity and graduate attributes. In hindsight now I can see that case study research is a process that is iterative in the sense that one moves into deeper levels of understanding while dealing with the same research questions and data. Gathering the data was not only a process of interacting with sources within a real-life context, but was at the same time a process of analysis because I tried to maintain a reflexive stance to check that I was asking the right questions and following the correct paths as they opened before me in the focus groups and interviews.

A very meaningful part of the research process for me was transcribing the 26 audio-recordings myself. I did them one after the other over a period of six weeks which was a very intense and immersive experience. Transcribing is an iterative process because it entails listening to some snatches of conversation several times; hence, I had time to think about what I was hearing and what it really meant. In this way, I fully immersed myself in the emerging data. As I was listening and typing, I was also analysing what I heard and could see patterns and themes emerging from the data. I also began to match these patterns and themes to critical realist thought and so bringing the data into contact with the theory. Another movement of engaging deeply with the data came with encoding the data using NVIVO 10. As I had downloaded a NVIVO 10 free trial version of 30 days, this was the time limit on my encoding. Again, this was an intense and iterative process during which I managed to do four sweeps with the data.

I found the process of data analysis and interpretation very interesting and exciting because as a critical realist, it was very interesting for me to observe some of the theories of critical realism in action (actually coming to life as it were) during the data analysis. An example was seeing the vital, but non-conflated relationship between change and absence in operation when analysing excerpts of conversation. When I used retroduction to “think back” from an observable event to the Real domain, the causal powers and generative mechanisms started to become more obvious to me. An example of this was the relations that were both substantial and necessary (in Sayer’s terms 1992, p. 89) between a student and the curriculum – substantial because they were connected and interacting and necessary because one could not exist without the other. What had been philosophical words and theory, now started to come to life. This was the stuff that AHA! moments are made of.

## **8.2 Answering research questions**

This has been a critical realist study into complex phenomena, namely the emergence of student, graduate and professional identity and the construct of graduate attributes. As stated in Chapter One this thesis posed the following questions:

## **Research Question**

What is the relationship between the emergence of student, graduate and professional identities and graduate attributes and curriculum design in an Emergency Medical Science programme at a University of Technology?

### **Sub-questions**

- How do student, graduate and professional identities emerge in Emergency Medical Science (EMS) students at a University of Technology?
- What are the implications of the interplay of Structure, Culture and Agency for the emergence of these identities?
- What are the implications of this emergence for the construct of graduate attributes?
- What are the implications for the use of graduate attributes in curriculum design?
- What relationship exists between identity and graduate attributes?

I first reply to the sub-questions because they explore aspects of the main research question. Then I answer the main research question.

### **Sub-question One:**

#### **How do student, graduate and professional identities emerge in Emergency Medical Science (EMS) students at a University of Technology?**

To answer questions on identity using a critical realist lens, I first read up what Bhaskar says about identity. His thinking about identity is not located in one specific book or place within a book entailing close reading through several books. Hence it was like finding and gathering pearls to make a pearl necklace. I called this necklace a Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity.

I explain this Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity in the following way. Identity, which is a changeable state of being, emerges from a person's core identity which is the constellational identity located in the Real domain of the embodied agent. This agential Real domain has causal powers and generative mechanisms which result from one's primary socialisation. The generative mechanisms include seven interactive generative mechanisms, i.e. physical, biological/physiological/medical, psychological, psycho-social, socio-economic, cultural and normative (Bhaskar, 2010). There is interplay between structure, culture and agency in four-planar social being and a person's core identity with its causal powers and generative mechanisms. Identity emerges differently in each person because of an

individual's unique core identity with its causal powers and generative mechanisms and own individual geo-history.

Looking first at the emergence of EMS student and graduate identity, I discovered that there are actually three phases in the emergence of EMS student identity: (i) a first-year student identity, (ii) a student-graduate identity and (iii) a student-professional identity phase.

(i) **First-year student identity** emerges out of non-identity in the sense that a cohort of students of diverse ages, geo-histories, socio-economic backgrounds and languages did not have the uniform identity of disciplined, respectful and compliant first years that the EMS department required.

The structure that proved to be most active was that of curriculum which the academic staff co-opted to cause the required student identity to emerge. Here they used the rescue modules (i.e. physical training) of the curriculum in a behaviouristic and paramilitaristic manner to effect change in their students. In this way the staff were using their transformative agency to effect change in the first-year students. Change is an integral part of the emergence of identity because change is a process of absencing the given so that something new may become present (Bhaskar, 1993). This process of absencing non-identity took place and a new first-year identity emerged in the students.

(ii) **Student-graduate Identity** is the second moment of student identity. Together with student-professional identity it constitutes graduate identity which emerges in third year (i.e. final year) students. Student-graduate identity emerges in the third year and faces inward towards the institution, i.e. the EMS department in the UoT where students are coming to know the subject matter of their discipline intimately and rigorously. They are students in whom the knowing aspect of being a paramedic is being finely honed before they graduate. The identity, i.e. the state of being of these students is that of maturing, focussed students dedicated to their studies. They are in the process of becoming the efficacious agents that the EMS department desires them to be.

(iii) **Student-professional identity** is the third moment of student identity and also emerges in the third year, but faces outward towards the workplace where the third-year students do their WPBL. The identity of these students is that of responsible students aware of

themselves as becoming professional paramedics and taking on the “being a paramedic” mode of acting and being.

Although I have analytically separated the student-graduate and student-professional identities to analyse the emergence of graduate identity, there is not a distinct temporal separation between them, but is a development over time (i.e. the third year) that may happen differently for each third-year student.

**Professional identity** starts emerging in third year as explained above. In the workplace, professional identity is always processual, i.e. a ‘being-in-process’ continuously emerging through the interrelated process of becoming and being. Hence the emergence of identity is intimately ontological. However, the knowing and doing aspects impact upon the emergence of identity in that paramedics are required to engage in continuous development of their knowledge. Thus epistemology contributes to the emergence of identity in that new knowledge can influence the ontology, i.e. being of a paramedic

#### **Sub-question Two:**

#### **What are the implications of the interplay of Structure, Culture and Agency for the emergence of these identities?**

There are several implications of the interplay of structure, culture and agency for the emergence of identity:

- Structure, culture and agency cannot be conflated with and are irreducible to each other. However, they are interrelated and it is within this close interrelationship that the emergence of identity must be considered. These relations between structure, culture and agency are substantial.
- Structure, culture and agency exist spatio-temporally and pre-exist the agent; hence identity has an element of time.
- Structure, culture and agency are not monovalent, i.e. only positive, but are bivalent as they comprise both presence and absence.
- Absence/negation and absencing within the context of structure, culture and agency play an important role in the emergence of identity.
- Human identity always emerges within the embodied agent which is part of four-planar social being.

- Four-planar social being plays a very important role in the emergence of identity because one acts simultaneously on all four planes, i.e. of material transactions with nature, social interactions with others, our relationship with social structures and the stratification of our embodied personality.
- There is interplay between structure, culture and agency in four-planar social being and a person's core identity with its causal powers and generative mechanisms.
- Identity emerges from the core constellational identity which comprises causal powers and seven interactive generative mechanisms which interact with structure, culture and agency.
- Identity emerges differently in each person although they may be exposed to the same interplay of structure, culture and agency because of an individual's unique core identity with its causal powers and generative mechanisms and own individual geo-history.
- The interplay of EMS departmental structure, i.e. curriculum, culture, i.e. social justice and agency, i.e. of the staff and students, affect the emergence of student identity.

The emergence of identity from the domain of the Real is a very complex event in the domain of the Actual and can only happen through the interplay of structure, culture, agency and four-planar social being with the causal powers and generative mechanisms in the domain of the Real.

### **Sub-question Three:**

#### **What are the implications of this emergence of identity for the construct of graduate attributes?**

As seen in Chapter Six, the emergence of student identity is a diachronic process over three years. Coupled with this emergence is change and self-transformation. Students reported that they changed over the period of their studies. The data showed change in the traits and dispositions of the students. For example, they became more mature and responsible; during their time with the EMS department they were exposed to and adopted an ethos of social justice; a sensitized attitude to patients and patient rights emerged in the students. As shown in Chapter Four, traits/qualities and dispositions are different to generic graduate attributes which are imposed externally and emerge differently, while traits and dispositions emerge

through personal change. Thus, to answer the question as it stands, the implications of the emergence of identity for the construct of graduate attributes are the following:

- Graduate attributes do not emerge from the student, but are imposed and thus they do not become part of the student's ontology/being in the way that qualities and dispositions do and they do not become part of the student's identity.
- Graduate attributes are reified and considered mainly from an epistemological point of view whereas qualities/traits and dispositions/attitudes are vital and ontological. As ontology is greater than epistemology, it encompasses epistemology but does not conflate it or reduce epistemology to ontology. Therefore, qualities and dispositions may have epistemological aspects to them, but are primarily ontological, whereas graduate attributes are not.

Thus, the implications are negative.

#### **Sub-question Four:**

##### **What are the implications for the use of graduate attributes in curriculum design?**

Because of their reified and epistemological nature, graduate attributes will always be an imposition from outside. Many academic articles have been written about the difficulty of embedding, teaching and assessing graduate attributes. This difficulty may be directly related their ontology/being, i.e. to their reified nature and their emergence from the neoliberalism and commodification of universities. The proponents of GAs want them to be embedded, taught and assessed for quality assurance purposes (in neoliberalist fashion). However, qualities/traits and attitudes/dispositions do not require this as they are mainly ontological. How would one assess the disposition compassion or its quality caring?

However, if we substitute “qualities/traits and attitudes/dispositions” for “graduate attributes”, then we have beasts of two different ontological characters. “Qualities/traits and attitudes/dispositions” of students hold strong implications for curriculum design, because, in part, they emerge from curriculum design and in part from the being of the students. Thus, a necessary relation holds between them and curriculum design will influence their emergence or not. The understanding that the traits and dispositions fall into broad categories of being, knowing and doing together with the understanding of the processual becoming, coming to know and learning to do (which have person-forming properties, Barnett, 2009a), could be used to link the categories and the curriculum design carefully. Barnett (2009b) makes the

important point that dispositions and qualities are “both facets of human being that are necessarily implicated in a pedagogical relationship in higher education”. The EMS lecturers need to explore this pedagogical relationship and tease out ways in which they can implement it to incorporate the specific traits and attitudes that they want to cultivate in their students.

**Sub-question Five:**

**What relationship exists between identity and graduate attributes?**

There can be no relationship *per se* between identity and graduate attributes because of the fundamental difference in their ontologies. Generic graduate attributes would always be an external imposition on a student’s identity, while traits and dispositions emerge ontologically. However, if we consider their relations, then it is seen that those that exist between the emergence of student, graduate and professional identities and graduate attributes are formal relations of dissimilarity because their ontological emergence is radically different.

**The Research Question:**

**What is the relationship between the emergence of student, graduate and professional identities, graduate attributes and curriculum design in an Emergency Medical Science programme at a University of Technology?**

The sub-questions have explored aspects of the main research question; hence, bringing these different aspects together will answer the main research question. The main research question looks at the relationship between entities. Thus by using a process of abstraction, we have to explore the kind of relations that are at play.

The relations that exist between student, graduate and professional identities are substantial and necessary. Those that exist between the emergence of student, graduate and professional identities and graduate attributes are formal relations of dissimilarity because their ontological emergence is radically different. These formal relations of dissimilarity would also apply between graduate attributes and curriculum because they are different tokens – curriculum is a structure in the domain of the Real while graduate attributes are a phenomenon emergent from the commodification of universities. If we look at the relations between the emergence of student, graduate and professional identities and curriculum design, the data has shown that they are necessary relations.

However, if we were to substitute the concepts of “qualities/traits and attitudes/dispositions” for “graduate attributes”, a different picture emerges because they are ontologically different to graduate attributes and a relationship is possible between the different constituents. The question would become, “What is the relationship between the emergence of student, graduate and professional identities and qualities/traits and attitudes/dispositions and curriculum design in an Emergency Medical Science programme at a University of Technology?” If we answer this new question then the answer is that a relationship does indeed exist between the constituents and that it is a necessary relationship, bearing in mind the close interplay of structure, culture and agency, four-planar social being and generative mechanisms that the data has revealed.

### **8.3 Conclusions drawn**

Having drawn together Bhaskar’s notions on ontology, causality, identity and non-identity, emergence and absence, four-planar social being to weave them into a Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity, I applied it to explore the emergence of student, graduate and professional identity in EMS student and professional paramedics. From this I conclude that:

- The Bhaskarian explanatory framework can be used to study the emergence of identity.
- The emergence of identity is a complex spatio-temporal process in which identity always emerges from non-identity.
- Change, especially radical negation, is most important in the process of absenting non-identity so that identity can emerge.
- Student identity emerges diachronically from the core constellational identity in a three-stage process within a social context of four-planar social being and the interplay of structure, culture and agency.
- Professional identity already starts to emerge in the third-year of study of the National Diploma. Professional identity is not fixed, but changes, emerging and re-emerging within the context of a changeable and changing, complex workplace with its interplay of structure, culture and agency and four-planar social being.

- The emergence of identity has implications for curriculum design because there is a pedagogical relationship between the emergence of identity and curriculum as well as the place of workplace-based learning in curriculum design.
- Graduate attributes emerge from neoliberalism and a neoliberalist corporatized, commodified university. Graduate attributes are always an external imposition because of their ontology.
- The ontological concept of traits and dispositions can be used instead of graduate attributes to foster specific traits and dispositions in students, but cannot be assessed or quality assured.

#### **8.4 The research and the academic literature**

My research into the academic literature has taken me in eight main directions: literature about critical realism and social realism; higher education; identity; graduate attributes; neoliberalism and globalisation; Emergency Medical Science; knowledge and curriculum; and the research process. If I have to single out important influences on me, then I would have to say that the work of Bhaskar was most important in every area of my research, followed by that of Hartwig and Sayer in the field of critical realism. Barnett's work in the area of higher education and graduate attributes was highly significant for me.

Having come to this stage of my research journey, I ask myself, "What do my research and my findings have to say to the literature? What have I contributed?" In answer, I would say that:

- I have contributed to critical realism's body of knowledge because I have taken Bhaskar's notions of ontology, identity, self, four-planar social being, emergence, absence and causality and have woven them together into a Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity that may be used to research identity emergence in different contexts.
- I have used critical realism to explore the ontology of generic graduate attributes showing them to emerge from neoliberalist commodification of higher education. This is a novel approach both in terms of critical realism and graduate attributes.
- I have joined Barnett standing at the edge of the pool of graduate attribute literature and throwing in stones about ontology to cause waves of dissent in the current global

obsession with generic graduate attributes. My findings on graduate attributes support and add to the very important work that he has done in this field, namely that we have to move away from the construct of graduate attributes that have to be embedded, taught, and assessed. We have to move towards exploring the emergence of qualities and dispositions that enhance and enable students as human *beings* – traits and attitudes that are not embedded, nor assessed, nor quality assured. Graduate attributes need to take an ontological turn to become graduate attitudes.

- In the field of pre-hospital emergency medical care, especially in South Africa, I have used critical realism to contribute towards an understanding of how structure, culture and agency affect the emergence of student, graduate and professional identity in paramedics. This has not been done before.

It is particularly my working with critical realism that is most significant because I have taken critical realist concepts and applied them to real-life contexts and have seen that they hold true. An example of this would be Bhaskar's concept of radical negation which deals with absence and self-transformation. I mapped this radical negation concept onto excerpts of EMS students' conversation about themselves and could see the four-fold process of self-undermining, self-transformation, self-realisation, and self-overcoming unfolding in real terms. What has excited me most about critical realism is coming to understand Bhaskar's claim (1993) that absence is ontologically prior to presence because I have seen absence in action, e.g. identity always emerges from non-identity.

## **8.5 Implications of the research**

The findings could be of interest to critical realists who are interested in researching identity because the Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity could provide them with a critical realist approach to explore the emergence of identity instead of constructivist (e.g. Walker, 2005), social realist (Archer, 2000) or personalist (Smith, 2010) approaches. In addition, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of absence/negation in critical realism, particularly when working with identity where change is important in the emergence of identity.

The EMS department at the UoT where the research was undertaken might find this research useful as it could possibly influence their thinking around curriculum design, particularly in how the curriculum as structure may contribute to the emergence of traits and dispositions in students. They may wish to think about how a professional will might be fostered in their students. In addition, the research might enhance both staff and student awareness of the role that structure, culture and agency play in the emergence of student and professional identity.

The research has implications for graduate attributes in the sense that it has shown that Barnett's comment, "... the idea of skills, even generic skills are a cul-de-sac" (2004, p. 247) is true. Graduate attributes reify students. There has to be an ontological turn in the thinking around graduate attributes. For the EMS department the implication here would be that they decide to actively provide the most fertile structural, cultural and agential ground for the emergence of the traits and attitudes they desire. Staff could build specific traits into the curriculum and foster certain dispositions through the curriculum. Thus, building ways of fostering dispositions into the curriculum will alter and shape students to take up specific stances towards their emergency care service. Barnett (2009b) makes the important point that dispositions and qualities are "both facets of human being that are necessarily implicated in a pedagogical relationship in higher education". The EMS lecturers need to explore this pedagogical relationship and tease out ways in which they can implement it to incorporate the specific traits and attitudes that they want to emerge in their students.

## **8.6 Possible areas of future research and some limitations**

It is probable that the possible areas of future research are linked to limitations of this study in the sense that the limitations precluded undertaking research into these areas. Limitations are also linked to parameters and the scope of the study. It is in researching that areas open up that require further research, but time or scope limitations do not allow this research to be undertaken within a particular study. In considering possible areas of future research, it seems that these are in the field of pre-hospital emergency medical care and EMS curriculum design, identity and graduate attributes.

An important lacuna that surfaced was that of mentorship of third-year EMS students by professional paramedics. The data shows that mentorship of third-year students in the private

and public emergency services is inadequate at the present moment. This is due to several reasons:

- the shortage of professional paramedics,
- overloading paramedics with two or three students per shift,
- the unwillingness of some paramedics to mentor, guide and teach students
- the lack of training of paramedics for the mentorship role, and
- the reluctance of some paramedics to allow students to treat patients for fear of them making mistakes.

As a result of this inadequate mentorship, the workplace-based learning that should be taking place is not happening at the *depth* that EMS students need ontologically to shape their consciousness of becoming and being a paramedic and to foster their professional will and hence their identity as professional paramedics.

The future research into this area of mentorship should be undertaken on two levels:

1. **EMS curriculum design.** Here research should be undertaken to explore how mentorship training can be brought into the current curricula of EMS students so that when they become paramedics they know how to mentor third-year students. However, it is important that EMS curriculum design does not only include epistemological elements, but also fosters the ontological because, ultimately, it is *being* a mentor that is important.
2. Running specific **mentorship in-service courses** for professional paramedics to improve their mentorship. Here research into the attitudes of professional paramedics towards mentorship might be of advantage.

The fact that it often happens that third-year UoT students are mentored by CREMS paramedics who have followed the short courses route to becoming a paramedic is problematic because the student and the CCA paramedic mentor come from different teaching and learning paradigms. The student comes from the UoT with emphasis on knowledge and reflexivity while the CCA paramedic comes from a competency-based training paradigm. This requires further exploration and may prove to be an interesting area of research.

Another area of possible future research is into the formation of a professional will in EMS students. Here Barnett's work (2009b) on the professional will is of great importance and should be extended. Barnett (*ibid.*) has pointed out that pedagogy in this area is lacking and therefore students have to teach themselves. It would be worthwhile to explore how EMS curriculum design might aid the development of a professional will. In addition, research is needed into creating a pedagogy that speaks to the development both ontologically and epistemologically of a professional will.

An interesting phenomenon presented itself in the research, namely that Emergency Care Technician (ECT) first-year students'<sup>105</sup> identity emerges without taking part in physical training, and without a behaviourist, paramilitaristic approach, but in a first-year camp instead. It is one of the limitations of this research that this was noted but not explored in-depth. Thus, it would be a good area of future research to explore the emergence of student identity in ECT students. Depending on the findings of this future research, it might be possible for the EMS department to use these findings to develop curriculum design that incorporated these findings instead of the current behaviouristic and paramilitaristic curriculum design in first year.

Further research needs to be undertaken into EMS curriculum design to develop a closer relationship between curriculum design and the emergence of traits and attitudes. Here research needs to be undertaken into the pedagogical situation that causes changes in students to come about as well as a deep consideration of the contribution of epistemological encounters to the emergence of traits and dispositions in students. This might be a fruitful post-doctoral research area for me to pursue.

More research is needed in using the Bhaskarian explanatory framework of identity in different contexts to explore its broader applicability or its adaptation in ways that would make it more suitable to explore the emergence of identity.

Another possible area of future research would be to explore the emergence of traits and dispositions/attitudes in different real-life contexts in order to build up the literature around

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<sup>105</sup> These are students on a separate programme, the Advanced Certificate Emergency Care Technician as explained in Chapter One. However, the focus of this Ph.D. research was not on ECT students, but on EMS students (i.e. the National Diploma and B.Tech.).

this. Here it would be fruitful to consider the relationship of epistemology to their emergence. This would contribute towards an ontological and epistemological turn to graduate attitudes which do not emerge from neoliberalist commodification of universities, but from students themselves and the curriculum design, culture and agency of the academic departments concerned.

## **8.7 What meaning have I derived from undertaking this research?**

I have benefitted greatly – both epistemologically and ontologically – from undertaking this research. Epistemologically, I have learnt much particularly about critical realism, identity graduate attributes, higher education, curriculum design and all the other aspects of this research. I have grown as a critical realist. I have learnt that much of what one learns in a research process goes far beyond what one actually uses, but is always there in the background informing and illuminating one's thinking. I like to think of the brain as a muscle. Over the course of doing this Ph.D. research, I have exercised my brain muscle very much with the result that it has grown strong and flexible. Thus, I can say that I have grown intellectually.

However, what is most meaningful to me is that I have grown ontologically in the sense that I have come to see how important becoming and being are not only in my own life, but in the lives of others around me, e.g. my family and friends, and especially in the lives of students and their teachers. Here I mean not only the EMS students who so graciously gave me of their time, energy and wisdom, but my own students with whom I interact daily and to whose becoming and being I can consciously contribute. All in all, I can say sincerely, “This has been a meaningful project for me”. I hope it is of some meaning to others.

## **8.8 Conclusion**

In conclusion to my research journey of six years, I would like to end with an extract from an EMS student's conversation because I share her passion and delight:

*“And research – I absolutely love this whole finding my own knowledge. I absolutely love it. It is awesome! ... It opened my mind completely ... I feel enlightened and I feel ready to take*

*on the world and change everything. Little bits at a time. I'm ready to go out there and play the game!" (SL/15/8/12)*



**Figure 8.1:** The research journey continues...

(Source: Own Photograph, 2011)

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## APPENDIX A: Consent form for focus group participants

**FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM** for participation in PH.D. research undertaken by Mrs Bernie Millar (UoT). Mrs Millar is a lecturer in the Department of Clothing & Textile Technology at this UoT, and is registered as a PH.D. scholar at Rhodes University in Grahamstown.

Dear participant

Thank you for being willing to participate voluntarily in my doctoral research project. You will be part of a focus group made up of fellow students. The aim of the focus group is to discuss questions about your identity as a student or graduate posed to you by me (the researcher). Please rest assured that everything you say will remain confidential. Your name will not be used in any part of my research as I will use pseudonyms. I will be the only person who has access to the information gathered. The focus groups will be audio-recorded. I will personally transcribe the recording.

Bernie Millar (Researcher)

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (*please print your full name and surname*), agree voluntarily to be part of the Ph.D. (Ed.) research undertaken by Mrs Bernie Millar in the EMS Department at this UoT. I understand that I am under no compulsion and may withdraw at any stage of the research project. I give permission for the focus groups to be audio-recorded and transcribed by Mrs Millar.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B: Personal Interview Consent Form

**PERSONAL INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM** for participation in PH.D. research undertaken by Mrs Bernie Millar (UoT). Mrs Millar is a lecturer in the Department of Clothing & Textile Technology at this UoT, and is registered as a PH.D. scholar at Rhodes University in Grahamstown.

Dear participant

Thank you for being willing to participate voluntarily in my doctoral research project. Please rest assured that everything you say will remain confidential. I will be the only person who has access to the information gathered. Your name will not be used in any part of my research. The personal interviews will be audio-recorded. I will personally transcribe the recording.

Bernie Millar (Researcher)

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (*please print your full name and surname*), agree voluntarily to be part of the Ph.D. (Ed.) research undertaken by Mrs Bernie Millar. I understand that I am under no compulsion and may withdraw at any stage of the research project. I give permission for the personal interview to be audio-recorded and transcribed by Mrs Millar.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX C: Personal interview consent form for a professional paramedic**

**PERSONAL INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM FOR PROFESSIONAL PARAMEDICS'** participation in PH.D. research undertaken by Mrs Bernie Millar (UoT). Mrs Millar is a lecturer in the Department of Clothing & Textile Technology at a UoT, and is registered as a PH.D. scholar at Rhodes University in Grahamstown.

Dear participant

Thank you for being willing to participate voluntarily in my doctoral research project. Please rest assured that everything you say will remain confidential. I will be the only person who has access to the information gathered. Your name will not be used in any part of my research. The personal interviews will be audio-recorded. I will personally transcribe the recording.

Bernie Millar (Researcher)

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (*please print your full name and surname*), agree voluntarily to be part of the Ph.D. (Ed.) research undertaken by Mrs Bernie Millar. I understand that I am under no compulsion and may withdraw at any stage of the research project. I give permission for the personal interview to be audio-recorded and transcribed by Mrs Millar.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_