SURFACING POSSIBILITIES: WHAT IT MIGHT MEAN TO WORK WITH FIRST-GENERATION HIGHER-EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Preface
Graduates of South African universities are prominent in business and law, medicine and academia, research and engineering around the globe. At the same time, South Africa is one of the most unequal societies anywhere with privilege and poverty placed starkly side by side.

The challenge for South Africa’s universities is not only to ensure they continue to produce graduates who can confidently and competently play their part in global society but also to ensure that talented individuals from more disadvantaged backgrounds achieve their potential. This is a challenge shared by universities throughout the developing world, many of whom do not have access to the significant resources available to the University of Cape Town. In South Africa extended curriculum programmes and related Academic Development initiatives have been established to respond to this challenge. This book focuses on a variety of curriculum options to highlight what has been learned and what is not yet understood about this challenge.

Academic, administrative and counselling staff of the Academic Development Programme in the Commerce Education Development Unit (EDU) have shared a commitment to addressing educational disadvantage and building a community. This has meant not only that graduation rates of students on the Programme have improved but that the students are likely to leave the university as more thoughtful, more literate and more socially conscious young people. Many of these students are now involved in their own initiatives to bring about social change in South Africa.

This book, Surfacing Possibilities provides a case study of an effective education development initiative. The contributions to the book are as diverse as the writers; they describe what it means to lead and give coherence to a project such as this as well as providing a lively sense of the experiences and interventions of dedicated teachers and student counsellors. In many ways the book is more practical than theoretical, a volume that can be dipped into here and there to learn more about particular aspects of education and development. Yet what may not be immediately apparent is that the work of this Programme has been built on years of research and scholarship in a number of different academic fields. Our hope is that the book will provide inspiration and guidance to academics around the world as they address similar challenges!

Dr Max Price
Vice Chancellor: University of Cape Town
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This book would not have been possible without generous funding from the Saville Foundation. We are very grateful for their longstanding support and belief in the work of the Education Development Unit (Commerce), UCT. This work has significantly impacted on hundreds of first generation students who have not only graduated, but achieved personal growth and developed attributes to equip them for the challenge of working in South Africa and the world.
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Introduction

Academic Development (AD) programmes, of the kind designed and run by the Commerce Education Development Unit (EDU) at the University of Cape Town (UCT), have three decades of history in South Africa. The AD movement was founded in the 1980s – effectively the last decade of the apartheid era – for the purpose of extending higher-education opportunities among the black majority, who were then subject to institutionalised discrimination, and it has continued to grow and evolve. Its mission has expanded to encompass improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning in higher education as a whole, but the interests of students from historically marginalised groups – the great majority of whom are first-generation entrants from socio-economically disadvantaged communities – remain at the heart of AD work. There thus continues to be a special emphasis on the goal of equity and redressing historical inequalities – for its own sake as an essential element of social justice in post-apartheid South Africa, and also as a key means of growing the advanced knowledge, skills and competencies that the country needs for all forms of development (see also the following chapter, by June Pym, where the issue of equity is further addressed).

The field of AD in South Africa evolved independently of that in the developed world, partly because of the isolation South Africa experienced as a result of sanctions and academic boycotts applied by many other countries during the years of apartheid. However, this independent evolution occurred mainly in response to the special needs and conditions that have prevailed in South Africa as a result of its history of racial inequalities. Thus the term Academic Development as used in South Africa encompasses all forms of educational development in higher education. The South African Higher Education Quality Committee’s 2007 definition of AD still applies:

A field of research and practice that aims to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning in higher education, and to enable institutions and the higher education system to meet key educational goals, particularly in relation to equity of access and outcomes. Academic development encompasses four interlinked areas of work: student development (particularly foundational and skills-oriented provision), staff development, curriculum development and institutional development. (HEQC 2007, 74)

Because of key systemic problems in South African higher education, AD has had to give particular attention to developing alternative curriculum structures, to provide a framework for developmental interventions for which the mainstream curricula could never make room. Almost all AD initiatives across the country have come to be based on such structures, now generally known as extended curriculum programmes, which represent a central strategy for redressing historical inequalities and thus improving the outcomes of higher education as a whole.

This chapter discusses the origins, purposes and development of these programmes with the aim of assessing their significance in addressing the challenges of equity and development.

The Need for Good Graduates in Africa
It is now common cause that a successful higher-education system is vital for development in the contemporary world. Advanced industrial countries are contending aggressively with one another not only over the generation of new knowledge but also to produce, attract and retain the high-quality graduates needed for economic competitiveness. The need for good graduates is arguably even greater in less-industrialised countries, where shortage of advanced skills and competencies is a major and growing contributor to the North–South divide. Moreover, in developing societies, good graduates in sufficient numbers are essential for applying as well as producing knowledge, for social as well as economic development, and, critically, for educating the next generation. The importance of this is clearly evident in the massive investment in higher education that has already been made by some emerging economies, such as South Korea, and that is in progress in others, such as India, Brazil and China, with the latter reported to be planning to produce 195 million tertiary graduates by 2020 (New York Times 2013).

However, for the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, obstacles to substantial growth in the output of good graduates are great and deeply embedded. Socio-political factors and shortages of human and material resources have kept the higher-education systems very small by world standards: sub-Saharan Africa has under 3 per cent of the global enrolment in tertiary education, and its average gross participation rate in 2007 was 6 per cent, compared with 70 per cent for North America and Western Europe (Unesco 2010). Nevertheless, limited access is not the only obstacle to graduate growth. Higher-education enrolment is in fact increasing more rapidly in sub-Saharan Africa than in any other world region, with a growth rate of 15 per cent (Africa Higher Education 2008), but expansion is revealing deeper challenges, particularly systemic ones.

These challenges are best illustrated in the case of South Africa, which has the highest participation rate in sub-Saharan Africa (Unesco 2010). Since the transition to democracy in 1994, South African higher-education enrolment has doubled, particularly through improvement in access for its historically under-represented population groups. However, it has become clear that access does not necessarily lead to success. If increasing the numbers of good graduates is the goal (as it must be in the African context), this has major implications for higher-education policy, structures and practices, as will be discussed in the sections below.

**Patterns of Higher Education Performance in South Africa**

Even though South Africa has the highest gross participation rate in the sub-Saharan African region, at 17 per cent this rate remains very low by world standards. Moreover, the overall rate masks major racial disparities, with a fourfold differential between participation by black people and participation by white people. The result is that only about 10 per cent of the youth of the largest population groups (black and coloured) gain access to higher education. This indicates two key aspects of the higher-education context. First, the legacy of racial inequalities has persisted, and the goal of equity of access is still far from being attained. Second, in the case of the black and coloured groups, the small intake comprises the top decile of the youth in terms of prior educational attainment, and it follows that this selected group must collectively have high potential to succeed. In fact, the growth of advanced expertise and informed leadership in all fields depends largely on their success.

Regrettably, however, there are major shortcomings in success in the higher-education system, as is indicated in the following key performance patterns. These figures are derived from cohort studies of several intakes of first-time entering undergraduates in all three- and four-year degrees and three-year vocational diplomas across the sector (CHE 2013; Scott, Yeld and Hendry 2007):
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- The overall graduation rate after five years is only 35 per cent. If allowance is made for students taking longer than five years or re-entering at a later stage, the graduation rate is still only about 45 per cent. These numbers include distance-education students, but even if only the ‘contact’ institutions (that is, excluding the large distance-education university in South Africa) are taken into account, the graduation rate after five years is under 50 per cent. There are also substantial racial disparities: the net effect of low participation and high attrition affecting black students is that only 5 per cent of black youth are currently succeeding in any form of higher education.

- The mismatch between the higher-education system and the learning needs of the majority of the students is indicated in a low rate of graduation in regulation time (for example, three years for a three-year degree). Distance-education students can be expected to take longer to graduate, but the rate in contact institutions alone is only 25 per cent, and there are again substantial racial disparities. The mismatch is underlined by the fact that there are more dropouts than graduates by the end of the regulation time.

It is clear that these performance patterns have damaging and in fact unsustainable consequences for South Africa. First, higher education’s output is not meeting the national need for high-level personnel, and in current circumstances there is no prospect of eliminating the skills shortages that are obstructing economic and social development.

Second, two decades after the political transition from apartheid to democracy, the system has not yet come to terms with the educational realities of the majority population groups, who continue to be affected by the legacy of apartheid. The participation and performance figures show that growth in graduate output must come predominantly from these groups, so their success is critical. The lack of progress towards equity of outcomes therefore greatly impedes development, and the ongoing maldistribution of advanced education undermines social cohesion.

The performance patterns therefore show that the goals of equity and development, for so long seen as conflicting, have come together. Without equity – that is, developing the intellectual talent in all South Africa’s communities – there will be no chance of producing the numbers and mix of good graduates needed for economic and social development; and without such development, equity of opportunity will have little meaning. The importance of these twin goals surely justifies an unequivocal focus on achieving them.

The studies from which the cohort data in this chapter are drawn (CHE 2013; Scott, Yeld and Hendry 2007), backed by institutional experience going back to the 1980s, indicate that the performance patterns are robust, and it is evident that they will not change significantly without intervention. Understanding the key problems underlying the patterns is essential for identifying what kinds of intervention are most likely to be effective, and who should be responsible for implementing them, as is discussed below.

Systemic Problems Underlying the Poor Performance in Higher Education

Failure and dropout on the scale shown in the performance patterns, affecting a small and selected student body, cannot be attributed to wholesale lack of ability on the part of the students, but must be systemic in origin. It follows that marginal interventions are unlikely to be effective, and that substantial systemic change is necessary for realising the potential of the majority of the student body. The need for such systemic change is borne out by AD experience over the last three decades.

AD in South Africa was established in response to educational challenges that arose in the universities in the last decade of the apartheid era. Its origins lie in the early 1980s, when the enrolment of black, coloured and Indian students – whose schooling was deliberately kept inferior throughout the apartheid era – began to grow appreciably, albeit slowly and from a very low base.
The growth occurred partly in the institutions at that time reserved for black students but also partly because pressure on apartheid policy opened spaces for students of colour to be admitted to universities historically reserved for white students. After a brief period in which access (with associated material support) was seen as the predominant challenge, the realities of black students’ educational, linguistic and social backgrounds began to come to the fore as the students, despite being the top performers in their communities, struggled to cope with the demands of higher education. The problem affected the institutions reserved for black, coloured and Indian students (see for example Moletsane 1986) but was acute in the ‘liberal’ English-medium universities, which were legislatively reserved for white students but supported non-racial admissions policy. It was the original central challenge for the emerging field of AD.

The initial AD focus was on ‘concurrent’ forms of academic support – such as additional tutorial and study-skills programmes, and special courses in language development and academic literacy for students who did not have English as their mother tongue – which operated within the confines of the mainstream curricula. However, by the mid-1980s it had become evident to many in AD that the difficulties facing most of the black student intake could not be effectively addressed by these peripheral measures, but required more fundamental change.

The reason for this had nothing to do with race per se – that is, race as a biological construct, which the great majority of AD specialists have always rejected as having any bearing on learning. Rather, the students’ difficulties arose from factors associated with race in South Africa: poor socio-economic conditions, inferior schooling, stereotype threat, and having to learn in a second or third language rather than their home language. The educational disadvantages experienced by black students were sharply juxtaposed against the backgrounds of the white, middle-class and largely advantaged students for whom the norms of higher education, and the nature and culture of the institutions themselves, had been designed.

The mismatch between students and system was clearest in the universities historically reserved for white students, but also strongly affected the institutions at that time reserved for students of colour. The latter institutions, even though the great majority of their students came from disadvantaged backgrounds, had largely adopted the structures and practices of the established universities. Systemic faults can affect any society where there are significant educational inequalities, but the consequences in South Africa have been heightened by its history of legislated discrimination and, in contrast with the position in developed countries, by the fact that educational disadvantage is not a minority phenomenon.

Evolving understanding of the tensions between the realities of students’ backgrounds and the traditional practices of higher education has therefore informed the developmental agenda of AD for much of the last three decades. Early experience indicated that, if real redress of the prevailing inequalities was to be possible, systemic change was essential. The AD movement thus saw its role as working in four main areas of higher education: student development, curriculum development, professional development (that is, for academic staff in their role as educators), and institutional development (that is, culture, policies and practices at institutional level). In the 1990s, around the time of the political transition from apartheid to democracy, there were high expectations that the new democratic dispensation would allow for significant progress.

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1 The ‘separate but equal’ notion underlying apartheid made it difficult for the government to deny students of colour access to subjects that were not offered at their ‘own’ ethnic university. This led to the introduction in the 1980s of a permit system that allowed students to cross race-based institutional boundaries to take specific programmes. This system was exploited by some institutions to broaden access more generally. For some detailed accounts of the evolution of AD in South Africa, see Volbrecht and Boughey 2004; Scott et al. 2005; and Scott 2009.
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However, embedded social conditions and systems are hard to change. Despite the important gains that have been made since the transition, the performance patterns show that South African higher education remains a ‘low-participation, high-attrition system’ (Fisher and Scott 2011, 1). It is clear from the patterns that the primary reason for this is that the system at large has not adjusted to the learning needs of talented but disadvantaged students, who already constitute the majority of the intake and whose numbers will increase as the system grows. The challenge of coming to terms with South Africa’s developing-country realities has not yet been met.

The significance of the brief historical perspective offered here lies in the need to recognise the persistence of the inequalities that underlie the system, and the implications of this for what it will take to overcome them. As this book bears out, there is much to build on. Despite having to work on the margins of a mainstream system that has resisted change, the AD movement has made steady progress in analysing and theorising the underlying obstacles to widening access and success, in conceptualising viable alternatives to the status quo, and in implementing interventions that have benefited many thousands of students who would otherwise have had a very low probability of accessing higher education.

Dedicated AD work, such as that exemplified in the Commerce EDU, has thus had value both in itself and also as a laboratory for developing and testing approaches that can be widely applied in higher education to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The remainder of this chapter discusses an example of a central AD response – the extended curriculum model – to a key systemic problem, and what can be learnt from this experience to help realise the potential of the student body.

Addressing Key Systemic Faults Through Structural Curriculum Reform

AD specialists have long recognised the importance of a holistic approach to educational development. Providing material support for indigent students is the first step, but beyond that is the need for both academic and affective measures to enable students to realise their potential.

As a key means of achieving this, AD has over the years focused increasingly on establishing alternative curriculum structures as a central strategy for facilitating effective developmental work. As indicated by the performance patterns and longstanding institutional experience, South Africa’s standard undergraduate educational process is not working effectively for the diverse student intake. In particular, the traditional curriculum structures have been identified as being a major obstacle to learning for a large proportion of the student body, particularly for first-generation, socio-economically disadvantaged students. The significance of curriculum structure is discussed below.

It is important to note that curriculum structure provides a framework for the whole teaching-and-learning process, and so has a powerful influence on it. Curriculum structure – which includes basic parameters such as the starting point, expected pace of progress, progression paths and exit standards of a programme – is commonly so embedded in the system that it is seldom examined or problematised (Scott 2012). Yet curriculum structure varies substantially across different countries, in all the basic parameters as well as in key epistemological elements such as degree of specialisation and balance of depth and breadth. In developing countries where far-reaching changes have occurred in the nature of the student intake, the appropriateness of the current curriculum parameters for contemporary conditions merits review.

In South Africa, many people in higher education and the wider society attribute the high failure rates in the sector to student inability or underpreparedness to cope with university study, arising mainly from poor schooling. The perception of inability (in the sense of a fixed lack of capacity) is belied by the small size and select nature of the intake, as was argued earlier. However, there is little dispute that the quality of public schooling is very low, or that large
numbers of students are underprepared for the traditional programmes offered in mainstream higher education; but the concept of underpreparedness calls for closer examination.

Extensive experience in AD supports the view that preparedness is a relative concept. A student who is underprepared for a particular educational level may well be quite adequately prepared for the level below, or for a different form of provision. This raises a key question: it is clear what township and rural students are underprepared for, but for what form or level of higher education are they prepared? Given that they all fall into the top decile of their age group, their probability of being able to undertake advanced study is high, so the central challenge is to determine curriculum structures and pedagogical approaches that will enable them to unlock their potential.

It follows from this that it is productive to conceptualise the systemic problem as an ‘articulation gap’, rather than just as student underpreparedness. As the term is used in South Africa, an articulation gap is a mismatch or discontinuity between two consecutive educational levels or phases. By far the most prominent articulation gap in South Africa is that between secondary and higher education, and the term is generally used in this sense (CHE 2013).

Secondary–tertiary articulation problems go a long way back in South Africa, but the gap has gained significance with the growth in numbers and diversity of the student intake that has occurred over the last two decades. It is a complex phenomenon. Academically, it commonly arises when the assumptions underlying higher-education curricula do not match the realities of students’ prior learning. Such assumptions are often about content knowledge but usually go well beyond this into matters such as approaches to learning, academic skills and conventions, advanced competence in the language of instruction, and contextual knowledge (for example a knowledge of banking and financial systems, which is common in middle-class homes but foreign to a first-generation student from an indigent family). Moreover, a mismatch between students’ backgrounds and the institutional culture, ethos and symbols of an established university can also be powerfully alienating and hence undermining of good learning, especially when it is overlaid on social vulnerability and stereotype threat.

The articulation gap is not the only systemic problem affecting higher education but it is a dominant one. A high proportion of the key problems that students experience in their learning can be traced back to it in one form or another. Irrespective of how talented they are, students whose home and educational backgrounds are disadvantaging face daunting challenges in trying to cope with a teaching-and-learning process that is unresponsive to their needs. As the performance patterns show, the majority fall by the wayside. Dealing decisively with the articulation gap must thus be a priority, but what elements of the education system can achieve this?

A key feature of a gap is that it can be closed from either side. Many in the academic community believe that it is not higher education’s responsibility to compensate for the shortcomings of the school sector. This view assumes that substantial improvement in the outcomes of schooling is achievable. However, virtually all analyses that have been done in recent years show that such improvement – of the magnitude that would enable higher education to function successfully within its existing structures and practices – is not on the cards for the foreseeable future. Even greater limitations apply to the embryonic Further Education and Training College sector, which faces major challenges in developing capacity for its primary function of intermediate vocational and technical training, let alone producing well-prepared candidates for higher education (CHE 2013; DHET 2011, 39; DHET 2012; Fisher and Scott 2011, 12–20). This leaves higher education with a clear choice: either to accept the status quo or to be willing to act on factors that are within its sphere in order to help remove the articulation gap and other systemic obstacles to learning.
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This pragmatic argument for change in higher education has substance, but there are further objections to it in the academic community. These are based on the view that adjusting to the changing student intake, by means of amending curriculum design or teaching approaches, would undermine the integrity of the academic project. A prime example is the argument that addressing the articulation gap through curriculum change would threaten academic standards. A common assumption behind this is that there is a clear distinction between what is and what is not university-level work, that is, that there is a universal starting level for higher education. However, this argument is not valid: because of their different school systems, England and Scotland are a year apart in their higher-education starting level, and South Africa is a year behind Zimbabwe, but a year ahead of Botswana. The starting level of higher education is not universal, and needs to be determined in relation to the exit level of the upper echelons of the school system. Moreover, standards reside in the exit level, not the starting level, and must remain non-negotiable.

In South Africa, the discontinuity between the starting assumptions of higher-education curricula and the realities of the students’ prior learning has become critical. South Africa’s basic curriculum structure was inherited from the Scottish system almost a century ago, and, in spite of the far-reaching changes that have occurred in the student intake, has scarcely changed since then. Particularly since there is so much wastage of talent and resources in the system, there is a clear case, on principled as well as pragmatic grounds, for reviewing the curricular frameworks within which higher education is having to operate. Nothing is preventing change except the will to undertake it.

Extended Curriculum Programmes and Their Role in Systemic Change

While there have been many positive developments in higher education, the sector has shown longstanding ambivalence about, or resistance to, the key matter of systemic changes such as structural curriculum reform. Evidence of this attitude is the fact that, despite its significance and long persistence, the articulation gap has not been seriously addressed in mainstream higher education, and concerted educational strategies to improve the performance patterns have not yet been put in place.

However, because of its central commitment to equity, the AD movement has espoused the need for systemic change from early in its history, and has taken on the challenge of developing and running interventions that aim to achieve it. As was noted earlier, even the minor widening of access that occurred in South Africa in the 1980s soon showed that the needs of talented-but-disadvantaged students could not be effectively met within the traditional curriculum structure, particularly at entry level. The entrenched assumptions were not valid for many students, and there was no time or curriculum space – and in some institutions the intake was too diverse – to allow for alternative, more realistic assumptions to shape the curriculum. Moreover, the academic difficulties that resulted could not be dealt with by add-on or concurrent support activities. In addition, there were major social-adjustment challenges confronting the same students as were at-risk academically, and for many there was too little time, too much pressure and too little safe space to enable them to cope.

Therefore, in order to establish a more enabling framework for addressing both the academic and affective issues, AD units began to develop foundational courses and approaches, within an alternative entry-level framework that provided more time, from as early as the mid-1980s. The purpose was to promote equity by widening access and providing a sound foundation for successful progression to graduation. During the apartheid era, no support could be expected from the government, and there was considerable resistance within many institutions, so the work was initially very limited in scope, marginalised, dependent on non-recurrent funding from
sympathetic external donors, and confined largely to students who did not meet the institution’s standard admission criteria.

Nevertheless, thanks to committed academic staff and students, real progress was made, with the result that when the transition to democracy came, new policy and funding opportunities enabled AD work to move up a level. Enrolments grew, and foundational modules cohered into comprehensive foundational programmes, which were offered in a dedicated preliminary year that extended the duration of the curriculum for the students involved. Later, as possibilities arose for integrating foundational provision with the relevant mainstream curricula, far more sophisticated models and approaches were developed. The effort to improve integration was signalled in a change of terminology to ‘extended curriculum programmes’, which are recognised variants of standard programmes allowing for an additional year in the curriculum. Formal government recognition of extended programmes came in the Higher Education White Paper of 1997, and state funding for the initiative was implemented in 2004. Regrettably, though, mainstream resistance to systemic change has not yet diminished appreciably, with the result that in many institutions AD influence on the regular educational process remains marginal, and extended curriculum programmes still reach under 20 per cent of the student intake.

However, despite the limitations, extended curriculum programmes and related AD initiatives have produced real achievements. In addition to the many thousands of students who have benefited, there has been high-quality learning – arising from research and extensive developmental experience – about educational disadvantage and potential, teaching and learning generally, and educational interventions that can be effective in the South African context.

What, then, makes successful AD interventions effective? This book sets out to respond to this question, pointing to what has been learned and to key issues that are not yet understood. What can be noted here is that, across South Africa, successful AD initiatives have all, in one way or another, reduced the articulation gap, and to do this they have needed curriculum space over and above what is provided in the standard curriculum framework. This space has been required to allow for realistic assumptions to be made about the students’ prior learning, in order to build on the strengths, talent and drive that have taken them into the top decile of their peer group. It has also been used to create opportunities for personal and social development, recognising the students as whole human beings and encouraging them to understand and value themselves.

The extended curriculum model has thus been essential as an enabling framework, providing the time and space required by students and teachers for fostering meaningful learning. This experience offers an important lesson for higher-education leaders and planners: establishing a sound systemic framework is an essential though not sufficient condition for successful education.

In Conclusion

The AD movement has special significance in South Africa in that it has played a central role in educational development in higher education, with the sole purpose of improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the interests of both equity and development. Given the national importance of raising the level of educatedness in South Africa, the knowledge and experience gained in AD can be a major asset in the ongoing task of enabling the system to fulfil its obligations to the country. This book aims to contribute to the crystallisation of that knowledge and experience.

There are equally significant lessons to be gained from the limitations on extended curriculum programmes in their current form. The limitations include the following:
Chapter 1: Paving the Way for Systemic Change: Curriculum Innovation for Development and Equity

- Severe constraints on curriculum design imposed by the need to work around a rigid traditional mainstream curriculum.
- Constraints on the target student groups: because of conservative institutional policies, extended curriculum programmes are still confined predominantly to students who do not meet standard admissions criteria, while large numbers of at-risk students are admitted to the mainstream and are not given the benefit of foundational provision.
- Ongoing marginalisation: of the programmes, which are often still seen as outside regular institutional structures; of the teaching staff, who often are not granted academic status and are employed on insecure short-term contracts; and of the students, who are vulnerable to a sense of inferiority because of not being seen as ‘normal’.
- Lack of capacity to address obstacles to learning beyond the first year: because of the rigidity of the mainstream curriculum, extended curriculum programmes have focused on the articulation gap and, with some exceptions, have had no opportunity to address the epistemological transitions which occur in the senior years of many curricula and for which students are also differentially prepared.

Perhaps the greatest limitation is that AD work continues to be regarded as a minority activity even though the performance patterns show that it is the majority of the present student intake – let alone future, larger intakes – whose success depends on developmental forms of provision. It is evident from this that the key educational development challenge for South African higher education is to utilise the educational knowledge accumulated over the last three decades – from international as well as local research and experience – to ensure that curriculum structures and teaching approaches that suit the South African context are taken to scale.

It is notable that the limitations outlined above arise predominantly from conservative policy, structures and attitudes. These can be changed if there is a will to deal positively with the challenge of truly opening up higher education to talented people in all classes and communities, in the interests of equity and development.
Chapter 2: Introducing the Commerce Education Development Unit and its Work

June Pym

‘EDU feels like a home away from home, having people motivating me, helping me focus on my work and reaching my full potential.’

A remarkable journey has inspired this book. The authors of the book have experienced this journey in working with mostly first-generation higher-education students in South Africa over the past 11 years. ‘First-generation students’ come from home contexts in which no family member has previously attended a higher-education institution. These students have been part of a successful programme at the University of Cape Town (UCT) – the Academic Development Programme (ADP) – that has managed, in recent years, to achieve a fairly dramatic increase in graduation throughput. The ADP has accomplished this by adopting a more flexible approach – adding value to the curriculum and student experience – while attempting to harness students’ agency and foster in them a sense of belonging to a learning community. This book sets out to document the key elements of the success of the ADP housed in the Education Development Unit (EDU) based in UCT’s Commerce Faculty.

While our story is based in South Africa, we feel that the issues with which it deals, and our responses to them, have global resonance. Throughout the world, an increasing number of first-generation and under-represented student groups (often minorities in some countries but whoever has not traditionally been part of higher-education institutions in the past generation) are being accepted into higher education, widening participation, increasing student diversity and creating a range of challenges for both students and institutions (Crosling, Heagrey and Thomas 2009).

Recent student-experience research pertaining to the international context has shown that experiences of alienation are fairly common for all students, but particularly so for many first-generation students as they enter the middle-class environment of higher education (see Christie et al. (2008), Herrington and Curtis (2000), Mann (2008), Reay (2001), and Reid, Archer and Leathwood (2003), for example). However, various issues specific to the South African context have meant that black working-class and rural learners in South Africa are placed in situations of...
Chapter 2: Introducing the Commerce Education Development Unit and its Work

extreme risk and vulnerability (see Bloch (2009), Bray et al. (2010) and Ramphele (2002)). Such issues include the dislocation of conventional family structures, the breakdown of the culture of learning and teaching in schools, and violence and conflict in the society, all of which are legacies of South Africa’s pre-1994 apartheid system of government. “Ironically, these learners are simultaneously being offered unprecedented opportunities and possibilities of rapid upward mobility. For many students, higher education is seen as an escape, a route out of impoverished home circumstances. Nevertheless, their entry into the new environment of higher education – where very little is familiar and which is physically far from home – often produces intense loneliness and a loss of voice, self-esteem and purpose” (Pym and Kapp 2011, 7). Coupled with this, the academic challenges of the new environment produce a self-perpetuating cycle in which students’ have a deepening sense of lack of worth and capability, feel increasingly disempowered and ill prepared, and experience declining academic grades. It is clear from our experiences that academic and psychological issues are intertwined.

Our Context

The ADP in which our students (who are often referred to as ‘AD students’) participate is housed in the EDU, based in the Commerce Faculty at UCT. The rest of the students in this faculty are often referred to as ‘mainstream students’. There are approximately 900 students in total at any one time in the ADP in the Commerce Faculty; each year an average of 250 first-year students are accepted into the ADP. The ADP students make up approximately 31 per cent of the Commerce Faculty’s equity students (students who would have been disenfranchised in the pre-1994 state).

The University of Cape Town is an historically white institution and is regarded as one of the top universities in South Africa and in Africa. Academic access to UCT is difficult; only students who have excelled in their formal school examinations are considered for admission. UCT’s Commerce Faculty “is viewed as prestigious in terms of academic results and its international professional credibility. It has one of the highest entry-grade requirements in the university. While the student composition of the Commerce Faculty has shifted so that 47 per cent of its students are black (2009 UCT enrolment data), 59 per cent of the faculty’s academic staff are white (Institutional Planning Department 2009)” (Pym and Kapp 2011).

The percentage of students participating in higher education in South Africa is low in relation to other countries at a similar stage of economic development, and participation is highly inequitable. On the UNESCO measure of gross enrolment rate, overall participation is about 16 per cent; white 60 per cent; black and coloured 12 per cent (ADP Review Report 2010). This means that only 16 per cent of school-leaving young people are attending higher-education institutions, and then there is great racial skewing of attendance from this 16 per cent. In terms of equity of outcomes, in key subject areas with particular significance for development, graduation rates of black students are less than half of graduation rates of white students, and the absolute numbers of black graduates are lower than those of white graduates, neutralising the gains made in access. The net result is an untenable situation: less than 5 per cent of black South African youth succeed in any form of higher education. Therefore, the higher-education sector, despite areas of high quality, is still far from meeting South Africa’s needs in terms of both development and social cohesion. The potential of large sections of the population is not being realised, due to systemic flaws and discontinuities (ADP Review Report 2010).

While economic and social circumstances change and therefore our intake cohort becomes more diverse, the majority of our students continue to come from working-class, rural and/or township backgrounds, do not use English as their home language, and are the first generation in their families to attend university. Many of the students’ family circumstances are desperate and impoverished. This is evidenced by the number of students who qualify for financial aid, report experiencing acute overcrowding at home, and are dependent upon a grandmother’s pension;
overall, they are used to coping with very few material resources and benefits. Many either do not
know their fathers or have very limited contact with them. The following quotation from a student
presents a typical example: ‘I was raised by my strong and powerful mother. I have experienced a
lot of violence in my youth leaving me to grow up quickly and see the world with sceptical eyes
or view. I have gone through life not having a father figure this causing me to resent men or
families with fathers and I also became cold and resilient – focused on my books and passing
better than most people.’

Our students have often had to take adult decisions at an early age and have had numerous
life situations in which they have evidenced considerable agency. They have had to develop a
range of coping mechanisms to negotiate trying personal, family and school circumstances. Many
have had to study independently to achieve their results, as the following quotation from one of
them exemplifies: ‘I lost both my parents at a young age, I had to live with a family relative who
did not treat me very well and that motivated me to put more effort to my schoolwork.’ Many
South African households are dependent upon one breadwinner (if any), and there are usually few
adults around to organise study or oversee homework for learners. In addition, learners’ levels of
literacy often surpass those of their caregivers. As a consequence of splintered family life,
academic success has sometimes been a way for our students to exert personal power on their life
direction (Pym and Kapp 2011).

Many of our students’ narratives express ambitious dreams for themselves and for their
potential contribution to their families and communities: for example ‘I would like to obtain my
degree and become a valuable citizen in the upliftment of my community’ and ‘There are many
dreams I still have ahead for my life and I strongly believe and know that through the education
and knowledge I’ll receive in this place I will achieve.’

As a consequence of their backgrounds, many students pursue a Commerce degree for
instrumental reasons, rather than from interest or as a result of a considered career choice. A
strong motivator is the potential of the degree to secure employment and economic, social and
geographic mobility. The following quotations from students provide typical examples: ‘I want to
be a successful Chartered Accountant in the near future and help my parents out of the difficult
financial situations they find themselves in’; ‘Education is the only way you will get yourself out
of this place [referring to her impoverished living situation]’ (Pym and Kapp 2011).

For many, arriving at the university is a profoundly new experience, offering as it does access
to resources, freedom of movement, encounters with new people, a feeling of relative safety, and
exposure to a range of new possibilities. These comments from students capture some of this
sense of adventure and excitement: ‘Meeting my new and very diverse group of friends that will
hopefully last me a lifetime’; ‘… being able to make my own decisions in terms of what to do and
when to do it has been a very crucial part of my personal growth’ (Pym and Kapp 2011).

Nevertheless, many of our students experience a crisis that relates to academic, linguistic and
affective difficulties and issues. Many of the academic difficulties that these working-class and
rural students experience are similar to those experienced by some mainstream Commerce
students: in many cases, they have not been prepared for the rigours of higher education, for the
demands of independent study, or for analytical engagement at cognitively demanding levels
(Pym and Kapp 2011). “The majority of black working-class and rural learners are still educated
in the print-impoverished, under-resourced environments that characterised apartheid-era
schooling for black learners – environments often also characterised by teacher-centred,
predominantly oral classroom cultures” (Pym and Kapp 2011, 5) which discourage critical
enquiry. There is often a disjunction between students’ experiences and understandings and the
conceptual demands of core disciplinary concepts. This results in a desperate need for skilled and
sensitive teaching, and learning environments that facilitate epistemological access.

In South Africa, close to 90 per cent of learners have to study through the medium of English
(often their second or third language): their textbooks are written in English and learners have to
pass examinations in that language. In this context, school teachers often compensate for their own and learners’ struggles with English by teaching in learners’ home languages. There is little close engagement with texts and limited analysis of concepts (Pym and Kapp 2011). Literacy practices are dominated by rote learning and take on an instrumental character, functional to the externally set examinations that students have to pass in order to gain a school-leaving (matriculation) certificate (Christie 2008; Kapp 2004; Slonimsky and Shalem 2004).

In the school environment experienced by many of our students, teachers were often absent and the overall culture of teaching and learning was not conducive to learning. It might be expected that in such an environment, our students would have acquired skills enabling them to take responsibility for their learning, and that these skills should help them to cope with independent learning at university. However, these school environments do not in fact prepare them to cope with the required level of cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins 1996) and the pace of engagement in the new environment of the university. On the whole, the large classes at university level are usually lecture centred, and the anonymity of this teaching style often limits students’ involvement and intellectual development (MacGregor et al. 2000). Many students are also self-conscious about their level of English competence and feel intimidated and unable to ask questions. As one student has said: ‘I’m finding it difficult to understand … very fast and strictly in English.’ The following quotation from another student highlights the meta-level shift that students have to make in terms of approach to learning and cognition:

Varsity, the pace and the way you do things is completely different to school … I think maybe it’s also the way it was taught and, because some of the things they assume that you know from school and sometimes you haven’t covered those things so you have to go and actually re-teach it to yourself and the standard, they assume that you know a lot more than sometimes you do, and it requires much more time and practice than in high school. I can’t just sit and read some of the things, like I used to have ways of remembering, making up little sayings and things and some of the work now it’s hard to still do those things because it’s much more to remember. … in school you have to learn to remember, here you have to learn to know.

Time management is also an issue for our students because the preprogrammed structures and spoon-feeding practices of school have not prepared them to cope with multiple demands simultaneously. Students therefore often spend inordinate amounts of time on their studies, to the exclusion of other activities, or become so overwhelmed that they complete little – the ripple effect is one of feeling ‘out of control’, as this quotation indicates: ‘Adapting to university and time management. Struggling to stay focused because I am always tired, stressed and overworked. Balancing the time I allocate to courses as I neglect the ones I am not good at.’ (Pym and Kapp 2011).

“A significant number of the students experience varying levels of demoralisation and loss of self-acceptance when they first realise that their schooling has not prepared them for university” (Pym and Kapp 2011, 6). This student speaks about how she is constantly comparing herself to other people: ‘… then you feel inadequate and then I start thinking the people around me are so smart and I’m not.’

In some cases, the difficult conditions of home continue to make demands on students and affect their ability to focus on their university life. A significant number of students speak of missing home and experience loneliness and the isolation reflected in the following quotation from one of them, as they attempt to make connections within a new, very different environment: ‘Because I’ve been living away from my friends and my family and I have to kind of find myself away from all, find out who I am away from all those things that used to define me, ja.’ Diminished self-acceptance often affects our students’ ability to connect with others. Their eroded self-esteem often leaves them feeling unworthy, and a significant number of them indicate that they battle with socialising and self-confidence, as is reflected in these typical quotations:
‘My own true enemy is confidence’; ‘I am intelligent and have always been at the top of my class but despite it all I am not that high on self confidence’ (Pym and Kapp 2011).

**A Crucial Change of Direction**

In many parts of the world, students whose circumstances cause them to be viewed as ‘at risk’ of not adjusting to higher education and failing are often placed in ‘special programmes’ that address their academic and linguistic difficulties. Higher-education institutions put in place structured courses to compensate for the deficit of these students’ schooling. In South Africa, the prevailing notion has been that the content gaps of schooling should be filled, and students should be taught ways of thinking, problem-solving, reading and writing that challenge the formula-driven, rote-learning modes that characterise many working-class and rural schools attended by black learners (Pym and Kapp 2011). Typically, students who have not met the required entry criteria for higher education are placed on a specially designed programme. They are provided with extra courses in small, separate, compulsory first-year programmes taught by specialised staff. Thereafter, they exit into the mainstream programmes to continue with their studies. These specially designed programmes arose as a response to apartheid-era (see footnote 1) education. The intention is to identify potential and provide access to black students, which might mean accepting students with lower admission criteria (Pym and Kapp 2011).

Ironically, the history of special programmes, or Academic Development, has in many ways exacerbated AD students’ experience of being ‘other’ and marginalised in higher-education institutions, as these students’ identities have been constructed as being ‘less able’ and ‘ill prepared’ (Pym and Kapp 2011). “A deficit assumption (Boughey 2010) has predominated, focusing on students’ lack of preparation to cope with tertiary studies. These stereotypes have been compounded by the politics of race and class in South Africa. The silence about the psychological and social aspects of the transition ignores the considerable identity challenges faced by young black students who have come from impoverished conditions and often dysfunctional homes and schools into relatively elite universities (see also Marshall and Case (2010))” (Pym and Kapp 2011, 2). A frequent consequence of the need to counter the stigma associated with special programmes for black students at historically white institutions has been “an avoidance of a direct focus on the socio-cultural and psychological aspects of students’ transitions into higher education, for fear of pathologising black students’ experiences and creating a notion of victimhood. Instead, there has been a strong emphasis on assimilating students into higher education, with a concomitant ‘cultural literacy’ model (Knoblauch and Brannon 1984, 29) foregrounding middle-class, white, Anglicised norms and values. By their very nature, such programmes often have the unintended effect of producing what Steele (1999, 44) calls ‘stereotype threat’, that is, an overarching anxiety that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The consequence is to encourage passivity and dependence, thus stripping students of the agency that enabled them to attain access to tertiary studies despite their home and school circumstances” (Pym and Kapp, 2).

Our realisation of these issues has informed a crucial and fundamental shift in our understanding of our work with first-generation students. We have transformed our practice from one working with a deficit model to a practice that actively engages with the varying linguistic and social capitals that our students bring to higher education. The focus is now on a ‘value-added’ model that engages with students throughout their degree, focusing on academic and affective factors as well as developing graduate competencies such as presentation skills, leadership opportunities, the capacity for meta-reflexivity, productive management of time, and social consciousness. Developing a range of experiences and competencies has caused a fundamental shift in the number of the students in the AD programme (from 74 in 2001 to 950 in
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2011), the number of students who want to be in the programme, the graduation throughput rate (40 per cent in 2001 to 84 per cent in 2011), and the number of students accepted into postgraduate degrees (2 in 2006 to 63 in 2011), as well as a range of meta-reflective capacities and graduate skills.

Four Fundamental Threads

Undergirding all the areas of our work have been four fundamental threads that impact on everything we do: having a clear vision, building a learning community, working with what the students bring, and creating a reflective practice.

Have a Clear Vision

Our vision has been to create an environment for students throughout their degree that will enhance and develop their learning experience, their academic success and their broad graduate attributes and qualities. This has meant working with the micro details of the programme, as well as at the macro level in the Commerce Faculty. Our particular focus has for the most part been black (mostly first-generation) students, but increasingly we are engaging with the needs of all students in the faculty. We do this through, for example, the EDU student-development counselling services, courses to help mediate the transition to university, and specific interventions in courses attended by vulnerable students. We have also introduced a range of ongoing initiatives with academics: forums that engage with teaching and learning issues, tutor training, departmental workshops and staff mentoring programmes. Most importantly, our vision is not static. It is something with which we need to engage seriously on a yearly basis to map out our direction: what is it we want to do, what is our ‘dream’, and where are we heading? Our vision needs to be realisable and genuinely provide possibility for our work. It also needs to take cognisance of the many changes that happen each year, in terms of both the size and the nature of the AD cohort. Class sizes, for example, are increasing dramatically as the AD programme becomes more successful and sought after. The students’ education and life experiences, too, are continually shifting: for example, ten years ago, none of the students owned a cell phone; today, all students have one, even if they are battling to find food money.

Our vision has particularly emphasized a social conscience in relationship to what it means to be a graduate in South Africa at this point in our history. The focus on ‘giving back’ has meant that apart from creating a variety of community engagements, many of the alumni have started foundations and initiatives where they have returned to their previous schools or communities and are spearheading social projects.

A key formal shift in the programme’s vision has been to work in a systematic way with the broader faculty. There has always been an acknowledgement that the broader faculty needs to engage with teaching-and-learning issues, as well as initiatives aimed at enhancing the faculty’s capacity to do so, but this engagement is now far more structured and formalised than was previously the case, as a necessary part of the programme’s work.

Build a Learning Community

Our focus on building a learning community is inspired by Vygotsky’s (1978) focus on social practice. Underpinning this focus is the belief that collaborative work is richer, more critical and more engaging than individual work (Crosling, Heagrey and Thomas 2009). This focus is evident in our teaching pedagogy, our teaching structures, and the range of interventions we provide, as
well as extending to the whole faculty through the Commerce Education Group, tutor development, staff mentoring programmes, showcasing ‘best practice’, and various other initiatives that will be detailed in the following chapters.

**Work with What the Students Bring**

We aim to find multiple ways of giving a ‘platform’ to students’ lives, experiences, culture, language and ways of being, so as to help them ‘straddle’ the different worlds of home and university. As Haggis and Pouget (2002) suggest, explicit links need to be made between curriculum and first-generation students’ own experiences and views of the world. Crucially, we need to shift our own understandings, practices and ways of doing things. Creating ‘value-added’ experiences enhances students’ own sense of well-being and community, but also begins a formal process of thinking about how we develop students who have a range of competencies and qualities. In moving away from deficit notions that view our students as ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘underprepared’, we are working hard at valuing what our students bring to higher education. We understand that the university is enriched by the diverse cultural and language backgrounds of our students and our staff. In the process of valuing this enrichment (as the chapters of this book will elaborate), we have attempted to develop a deeper understanding of who our students are, what they know, and their diverse cultural backgrounds. Various formal and informal initiatives have helped us acknowledge and benefit from this diversity: these have included surveys; the development of structures that ensure that students have a ‘voice’ (for example EDUSÓ – the Education Development Unit Student Society); the use of several different teaching pedagogies (for example small groups, varying technologies, case studies and problem solving); and the employment of a variety of formative feedback mechanisms (for example class meetings and daily interaction in teaching to elicit feedback).

**Reflective Practice**

Our view is that one size does not fit all. Structure, methods, interventions and ways-of-being need to be varied and to be responsive to a range of life experiences, styles of learning and needs. We need to be continually in tune with whom we are serving, with the needs and issues the students present, and with how these change. Achieving this means a great deal of reflection, flexibility and change in what we do, and in how and when we do it. This work is about ‘process’, with a continually changing terrain and significant moments for students, and about developing forums in which students and staff can hone reflective capacities, and harnessing the power of stories to motivate and help nurture this meta-awareness. This has meant consciously creating spaces in which we can continually reflect on our practice, and has enabled us to be proactive rather than reactive in responding to students’ needs. The subsequent chapters of this book will provide many examples of how this has been achieved. This approach has been crucial to answering with understanding the essential question of ‘who our student is’ in a rapidly changing institutional, national and global context. Reflective practice means that flexibility is crucial in continually assessing the impact of our work, what is working, and what needs to change or be reviewed.

**The Framework of this Book**

The book will begin by giving a brief context of our work and then highlight five major areas of our work, flowing from the four undergirding fundamental threads outlined above, which we believe have made a difference in both the way in which we have worked and in our focus:
Chapter 2: Introducing the Commerce Education Development Unit and its Work

1. **Building a team and community:** A programme like ours can never be a one-person show, and building a team and community has been crucial. To be effective, such a programme needs shared commitment, vision, and buy-in from all concerned. We use nurturing rituals and rites of passage to help cement a sense of belonging, place and social connectedness. The section on ‘Management and leadership’ will examine the model of leadership and management that has maximised team effort and will discuss in detail how and why this has been implemented.

2. **Using a range of learning-centred teaching practices and structures:** The section on ‘Teaching pedagogy’ will look at the varied classroom practices and structures we use. As Bamber et al. (1997) and Jones and Thomas (2005) have confirmed, pedagogies that engage students as active learners, showing respect for students’ views and experiences, will value diversity and be more likely to contribute to a transformative model of higher education. Our pedagogy is particularly focused on being learning centred, and the ‘Pedagogy’ section will consider in some detail how and why we have adopted this approach.

3. **Focusing on language:** The section on ‘Language’ will consider the complexities of teaching and learning language and literacy, models of practice, a model of engaging with the variety of aspects of writing, and the value of practising multilingualism.

4. **Supporting students:** The section on ‘Student support’ will outline a curriculum model, a variety of different initiatives we have introduced to enhance student connectedness, and strategies for engaging with a variety of vulnerabilities.

5. **Sharing our experiences of transforming higher-education practice:** Our motivation in writing this book is informed by the desire to share our experiences with the many practitioners in higher education who are grappling with the changing characteristics of their incoming students – and particularly with the increasing number of first-generation students – and with how the seemingly daunting challenges associated with this change can be transformed into a journey of enormous excitement and growth. Once the focus is no longer on ‘fixing’ the student, and instead on engaging with shifting both the institutional culture and practices of teaching and learning, on a basis of knowing the needs of the students, practitioners can move to a compelling and transformative higher-education practice.
Chapter 3: Leadership That Can Make a Difference

June Pym

‘How to lead from within rather than from above’ (Khoza 2011: 5)

The Context

The Education Development Unit (EDU) within the Commerce Faculty of the University of Cape Town (UCT) has been through a variety of configurations over the past 12 years. It started with about 40 students and 2 full-time staff members. It now has 1000 students with 9 academic posts, 4 administrative posts, 2 full-time student-development posts, a part-time writing consultant and a part-time clinical psychologist. The growth itself has demanded a particular view of leadership, and this chapter will focus on the view I hold and have developed while in the position of Director of the unit. The overriding imperative has been to democratise the unit and develop a great deal of participation and imagination in decisions, action and accountability.

The unit (previously known as the Academic Development Programme) was initially self-contained and seemed to have little impact on the Commerce Faculty (in which it resides). Its work was focused on first-year-level courses that had been extended to give additional time to negotiate the concepts and various courses. After the first year, students entered the mainstream classes. and in many ways this time became a ‘black hole’ : the students had no sense of where they were in their learning, how they were doing or what their teaching and learning and broader issues might be. In making the necessary shift in focus to engaging with the whole degree, as well as with academic and affective factors, the EDU has had to undertake a range of additional work at faculty level, and has developed into a recognised body offering leadership in teaching and learning in the faculty. Apart from the need to work more broadly to ensure impact throughout the degree, the EDU’s increasing numbers and the good academic performance of its students at first-year level also created leverage for credibility and respectful relationships work in multiple ways in the broad faculty. The EDU’s leadership model has probably benefited from this slow growth, which allowed the development of the particular chosen leadership style and profile: starting a unit from scratch involves less engagement with the task of changing an existing ethos. Work in an established unit with a particular ethos could obviously emulate much of what is described in this chapter; however, there would probably need to be a strong emphasis on developing a change orientation in the unit to facilitate a leadership style different from an existing one. In other words, if one is working in an existing unit with a particular leadership model that is not satisfactory, more focus and energy will be required to develop the unit’s capacity to change and develop new ways of being.

The EDU has increasingly had to shift from a total focus on students to include a range of players: parents, schools, academic staff, administrators, departments, the faculty, the university as a whole, funders, bursars and professional bodies. It is therefore increasingly necessary to be effective in engaging with varying interests and demands, diversity and relationship building, and also the provision of ongoing opportunities to foster collective vision and reflection, which have been crucial in keeping a focused sense of core business in the light of potentially competing demands.

As the Director of the unit, my own vision has been strongly focused on participatory and team leadership, hoping to ensure that the EDU is a team, to delegate responsibility and ensure shared decision making and accountability. Apart from espousing the egalitarian nature of this model, I also believe an inclusive model to be most effective insofar as all participants feel part of
something, maximising their potential as well as minimising resentments that usually accompany an autocratic model. This chapter is therefore not simply about spelling out my own vision about leadership, but about opportunities and ways that the staff and student body assume leadership and respond to a participatory model.

Leadership in the EDU has needed to be multilayered in order to develop both a participatory type of leadership within the unit and respectful relationships as a basis for providing teaching-and-learning leadership in the Commerce Faculty in which the unit is based.

**Broad Challenges in Leadership**

Relationships in educational settings are not necessarily cordial; they are often conflictual, technical and bureaucratic, focusing on myriads of tasks and forgetting the bigger picture regarding the mission and objectives of the learning organisation. There is therefore a strong imperative to provide leadership and management that negotiates sometimes competing interests and provides the space for all participants to both own and be excited about being involved in the work that they do.

Leading involves helping to nurture imagination, acting decisively, being ‘responsive to the needs and yearnings of the followership’ (Khoza 2011, 4) and knowing ‘how to resonate with the followership emotionally and humanely, how to deliberate and develop a shared vision, how to declare and achieve collective goals through sound governance’ (Khoza 2011, 5). This involves promoting continuity, as well as continually developing and nurturing a strong ‘change orientation’. What might this mean? To clarify, what follows outlines the underlying principles in the EDU that have informed my leadership style, in order to offer some understanding of how this is lived out in practice.

Building trust is a crucial challenge in leadership. This is particularly true in South Africa, so much of whose history had eroded trust (whether this be along the lines of race, class or profession). Building respectful relationships based on trust is crucial so that any controversies that arise are about the issue and not the person. Such building is about developing a trust in leadership, so that even if decisions are taken that are not be popular with everyone, there is an underlying respect based on the certainly that there has been a genuine consideration of input and decisions have been taken with the best interests of the unit at heart. In the EDU, it is particularly important that the students trust the leadership, as a great number of their vulnerabilities are shared with the staff.

Collegial engagement within the unit, within the faculty and across faculties is crucial to maximise the rich potential of all participants. This arrangement – whereby people are regularly consulted and know that their input is making an impact on the ultimate direction and decisions that are taken – is probably an unusual leadership model. But such collaboration has strengthened the work and credibility of the EDU, as it has widened the degree of participation in any particular project and increased the number and quality of people who are invested in the project.

It is crucial to build autonomy into a leadership model for a unit such as the EDU. Staff and students need to be given considerable space to develop, think, plan, critique and imagine new possibilities. This autonomy should not exist without lines of accountability, but it allows people to feel some independence of thought, as well as nurturing trust and bringing something fresh and different to the whole.

*The Principles Informing the Leadership Style*

Certain aspects seem simply to have occurred in an intuitive way insofar as they have resulted from my own leadership experiences in a variety of contexts. Other aspects have been moulded
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and shaped with time, reading, input from staff and students, and changing internal and external contexts. A number of key elements have been incorporated into the promotion of a participatory style of leadership. The following paragraphs discuss these.

Vision

A key aspect of promoting a participatory style of leadership is encouraging all participants to imagine individually and collectively their ideal toward which the unit should strive. This is not an isolated event, but a process that needs to be revisited continually. The real challenge is to articulate a vision that is realisable, excites the participants and is grounded in reality. Many a great vision remains just a vision. To articulate a vision and then begin to make concrete plans for realising that vision makes the difference. Without a concerted engagement with ‘the dream’, there is no end goal, no passion and a great temptation to be embroiled in a technocratic day-to-day management of functions. Nothing really makes any sense without a goal.

A crucial starting point is to be closely in tune with the immediate needs and issues of all participants and to help to translate these challenges into possibilities that will stir and generate excitement and a vision of something new and in which people feel invested. A sense of something beyond business as usual is necessary: a context, and a goal that participants share and that they feel a strong sense of commitment toward realising. As an academic staff member stated in feedback in 2012: ‘... in a unit such as ours, a visionary needs to be leading and managing staff. The work is mostly “sensitive” and transformative and needs much guidance from an experienced person who can navigate their way through bureaucratic systems as well as be able to engage staff with new ideas and processes and changes to existing structures, curricula, streams and ways of doing things.’ The notion of a common vision is an interesting one. While respecting difference and critique, the EDU has been strengthened by developing a vision and ethos that holds synergy regarding the underlying beliefs about what makes a difference to student learning, motivation and involvement. Without moving toward a homogenous, clone-like identity, the unit has been able to pursue a vision for itself that has held a common core value regarding the environment that can optimise the development and nurturing both of those in the EDU community and of its position in the broader context: as a staff member stated in feedback in 2012, ‘... we all think similarly in terms of pedagogical practice and student learning and that at the core of our practice is the belief that every student accepted in EDU has the potential to succeed.’

Our vision has been to create an environment for students throughout their degree that will enhance and develop their learning experience, their academic success, their own personal development and broad graduate attributes and qualities that are sensitive to the needs and realities of present-day South Africa. Overall, this vision means developing a spirit of optimism and assertiveness, helping students to think more realistically and flexibly about the problems they encounter, nurturing the capacity for meta-reflectivity to act as a ‘pivotal dimension of agency’ (Bandura 2001, 10) and so developing capacity for students to be active agents in generating advantage or escaping from disadvantage (Bray et al. 2010).

While it is critical to provide fora and space to develop a vision, it is also crucial is to find ways to realise and continually reflect on, revisit, adapt and change the vision as the needs and context might shift. It is so easy in the classroom environment – engaging with interventions for students, providing individual consultations and managing day-to-day logistics – to focus solely on the task at hand, and to lose sight of the bigger picture. It is this macro view that seems crucial to moving this type of work beyond business as usual, giving it both the import and value that will raise the stakes for all involved. The work then becomes part of something that matters, rather than routine functions. This means having to be conscious of the ever-shifting terrain of our context and what this might mean for our work, as well having as an understanding of the overall purpose of the unit. The EDU needs to be mindful and thoughtful regarding the type of graduate
that we want to develop, given the enormous disparities of wealth and skill shortages in South Africa.

Level and Type of Engagement of All the Participants in the Programme

The level and type of engagement of all the participants in the programme have profound implications for our work, our interaction with students, our teaching and how we evolve and develop as practitioners in higher education. No single person can be all-knowing, so depending on collective hearts and minds engages far more effectively with the complexity involved in addressing a range of varying interests, histories and understandings, as well as benefiting from the richness of collective strengths. Fostering a collegial ethos goes a long way toward actually benefitting, rather than simply accommodating, the diversity in the unit. Administrative support and teaching strategies don’t arise simply from the immediate context, but from the beliefs, values, habits and ways of doing things among communities of practitioners and how they have coped with similar situations over many years. Therefore it is necessary to create exceptional conditions of communication, trust and understanding. The focus is on creating a culture of sharing, collaboration and inclusion, rather than one of competition and individualism: one’s individual and collective practice is continually shared, reflection is normal and change is anticipated. This has been achieved by the creation of a fairly flat leadership model with a great deal of staff participation, decision making and initiative. It also involves respecting the varying roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the programme, whether administration, teaching, student support, writing and language support, or leadership and management responsibilities.

For this work to be truly effective, the staff members, in all their varying functions, need to care about what they are doing, as well as feel cared for and respected. In a practical way, it involves creating face-to-face group and individual meetings, private and public acknowledgement of work well done and achievement of small and large goals, celebration of birthdays, and rallying with people in times of personal stress or loss. Any slippage in performance needs to be addressed privately and immediately, so that individuals are clear about feedback regarding their work performance (see the discussion of conflict, later in this chapter). Too often in such work situations, a great deal of energy is expended by people on internal politics because there are varying levels of mistrust regarding the value of individual contributions.

A Community Culture of Care

The underlying intention is to create a community culture in which participants deliberately practise care about what they are doing and how they are doing it, and a fundamental belief in the power of this work. They have the ability to ‘relate to other people’s realities while fostering collective capacity and identity’ (Fullan 2011, 6). In every facet of the work, it is necessary to create opportunities for ‘voice’: giving all participants genuine fora to which to bring their varying thoughts, experiences and reflections in the knowledge that these will contribute to the direction and detail of the work of the programme. In the words of a staff member in feedback in 2012: ‘I have always felt that I am working in a team, rather than individually, where my input and opinion are valued and considered important to the work of the unit.’ Individuals need to feel that they are approachable by and can approach colleagues without fear of reprimand or stigmatisation. EDU staff meetings are held monthly and, although limitations on time are ever present, there is an ongoing attempt to keep in mind our overall vision: not just to maximising students’ chance of success in higher education, but also to harness students’ agency and develop a range of graduate competencies, rather than a focus on necessary, but often limiting, day-to-day logistics. Once a year, reflective strategic planning is conducted to review critically past work and plan for the coming year.
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Feedback

Feedback on multiple levels ensures both critical grounds for change, as well as affirmation and support. On a staff level, it has been crucial that people have received continual feedback on their performance and contribution. As was stated previously, this might involve very small details relating to affirming a job well done, someone taking the initiative, or getting back to people efficiently with concerns and queries. Such feedback also involves addressing difficult or uneasy aspects of performance or attitude as they arise, and being clear and transparent around the issue (and not the person). This is important in ensuring that people feel that they know where they stand and that there are no hidden agendas or ‘second guesses regarding work performance or commitment.

Students make two formal written feedback responses during the year. The aspects relating to particular lectures are extracted and sent to lecturers. We encourage lecturers to engage with students regarding their feedback, acknowledging what can and what cannot be changed. Equally, students are given feedback regarding their academic performance, and their engagement or lack of it in the programme. We view feedback as a crucial aspect of managing a team so that experiences are viewed as learning opportunities and points of affirmation and enhancing commitment to the unit.

Reflection

Reflection and ongoing ‘standing back’ from activities is imperative. It is this quality that helps the unit to be sensitive to the shifting terrain of the context in which we work, as well as to our practices and interventions. What worked a year ago may no longer be appropriate; what did not work might need to be refined and relaunched as the historical and contextual time has changed. As this feedback from a staff member in 2012 explains, ‘A flexible approach has been invaluable to our work. There has been a willingness to review our work every year and shift what has not worked to enhance those aspects that have worked well. There has been no “resting on our laurels”. It’s been exciting to work in such a proactive environment.’

A Change Orientation

Leadership involves developing a change orientation in the unit, where change is anticipated and embraced. Education systems are fundamentally conservative and inert, and have a considerable propensity and capacity for withstanding change. Innovations often result in defensiveness, anger or short-term successes. The historian Gustavson states that people

... are afraid of drastic innovations, partly because they prefer the familiar, and partly because the vested interests of most people are normally bound up with the existing set up. Added to the weight against change is what might be called an institutional inertia, a proneness to keep the machinery running as in the past unless strong pressure for change materializes. (Gustavson 1955, 72)

Individuals and organisations that are satisfied with their present performance are most likely to resist change and least likely to initiate or endorse steps leading to a renewal process. It would seem crucial that in order to embrace change, it is necessary to view change as an opportunity for growth and development, rather than as a series of ad hoc events meeting external criteria.

Leadership involves working with change and the change orientation of the unit and the faculty. This work will impact on both the individual and the organisational capacity to anticipate and deal with change, and crucially involves engagement with the structure and ethos of the unit as it impacts on individuals’ commitment to change and development. Because change is complex, multifaceted and dynamic, it is more likely to take root if the interwoven nature of the
individual, organisational and broader contextual arena is acknowledged and engaging with simultaneously. Fullan (2011, 23) speaks about the essence of the change leader being ‘the capacity to generate energy and passion in others through action’. Leadership has needed to establish new practices and experiences that galvanise passion and purpose (Fullan 2011). I cannot remember any year in which there have not been changes in the EDU. Sometimes they have been small tweaks to existing practices; other times they have been fairly large-scale and significant changes to curricula or courses. Change has not simply been for its own sake, but has been a result of genuine reflection on existing conditions and the shifting of practices accordingly.

A sustained time period, thinking big but starting small (Fullan 2011), and building sustainable structures have been crucial insofar as diminishing resistance to change has been concerned, as well as an acknowledgment that there will never be full participation or enthusiasm for any change initiative.

A Conscious Space for Collective Growth and Development

A strong change orientation means that a conscious space for both individual and collective growth and development is made. Neither individuals nor the unit are static, and with ongoing reflection and review, it is important to make spaces for staff and students to attend courses, change direction, change their tasks and skills, work in new ways, and configure positions in relationship to the work differently. In order to do this, while respecting human resource (HR) procedures, there are opportunities for people to do things differently and freshly, as well as to take on new roles and develop their skills and sense of self-worth. This helps prevent stagnation and boredom, as well as reigniting passion and enthusiasm when spirits are failing. The words of feedback from a staff member in 2012 attest to the effectiveness of this approach: ‘I have always valued your management style which fosters a collegial ethos, provides affirmation, promotes reflective practice and encourages growth and development.’ The culture of an organisation that has ‘strong leadership, works collaboratively and encourages enquiry and reflection, should have a greater capacity to anticipate, cope with and initiate change’ (Pym 2009, 254).

The writing of this book is an example of a space for growth and development. All the staff were invited to participate, and some individuals who had very little experience in writing engaged in this project. The high and varied participation rate is testimony to the willingness to explore new terrains and develop potential. An interest in processes that contribute to the transformation of individuals and the unit in relation to broader social transformation will also enhance the change orientation.

There is a constant sensitivity to any schism or contradiction between people’s stated sentiments and their behaviour and responses. Such sensitivity particularly involves ongoing work and ways of giving voice to all participants and negotiating conflict, rather than avoiding or suppressing it. Scott’s (1990) terms ‘public transcript’, describing what is revealed and visible in day-to-day life, and ‘hidden transcript’, describing people’s underlying feelings and attitudes, have been a crucial framework for understanding leadership in the EDU. In the words of Jennings and Graham (1996, 176), ‘... even though at a surface level people may appear to be agreeing, there may well be conflicting values, strategies, meanings or assumptions at work underneath ...’. In other words, it is necessary to avoid simply accepting the face value of what is happening, but to give space for voice to all participants so that there is no difference between what individuals publically espouse and what they really feel.

Creative Use of Conflict

Given the ambiguities surrounding change, conflict can be a part of change. This can be used creatively as a point of growth in the change process. Conflict can be a rich source for ascertaining the problem that lies beneath it and how this issue can be resolved. Potential conflict
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is viewed as a natural part of change, rather than as a stumbling block to implementation (Pym 1999). If conflict is anticipated and recognised as ‘largely functional in “unfreezing” old patterns of behavior’ then leaders will be prepared to provide the types of support required for people to benefit from these experiences (Gross, Giacquinta and Bernstein 1971, 209).

The principles discussed above have informed the leadership practices in the EDU. They have underpinned multiple layers of leadership, including both the style of leadership in the unit itself and the leadership role in the broader faculty and university, helping broaden relationships and impact. The strong focus on having a vision, continually reflecting on practice and building a learning community involves creating fora in the unit and in the faculty to enable this to occur, as well as the development of ways of being that emulate the kind of democratic and ongoing developmental growth that we espouse.

Leadership within the EDU
The preceding discussion has focused on the principles of leadership that have been the driving force in the EDU. Examples of how these principles have impacted on practices within the unit have been interwoven in this discussion. This section is not aimed at being discrete from that discussion, but pulls the threads together to specifically foreground and summarise their impact on working with the EDU’s staff and students.

Staff Leadership

There is a hierarchy of leadership in the EDU: a Director and varying layers of formal leadership hold lines of accountability and reporting. These positions are obviously entrenched in UCT’s existing HR expectations and legalities. These systems are not necessarily counterintuitive to a shared leadership structure. They provide a clear framework of roles and responsibilities. The real task is how to live out those roles and responsibilities so that they inspire participants to feel challenged and empowered and to share accountability. Individual potential growth and development can be hampered, and outcomes can be limited, if leadership is viewed as making decisions with the input of only one or two individuals; resentments would obviously arise if decisions were made autocratically and impacted negatively on individuals or the unit.

Hierarchical leadership models can easily compartmentalise roles so that it is difficult for individuals to assume leadership in a variety of ways. According to these models, there is one leader, and so no one else expects to lead. In an interesting example of this view is seen in one senior administrative person’s approach to an altercation with a parent of one of the EDU students. The administrator’s instinct was to let someone ‘higher up the hierarchical chain’ deal with the parent. However, in accordance with EDU’s leadership model, she was encouraged to respond professionally to the parent to resolve the conflict. This was successful. If it had not been, it would have been appropriate to engage additional leadership, but the moment provided her with a real development opportunity to engage in a fairly difficult contested terrain.

Within the EDU, there is, therefore, a continual attempt to live out the underlying principles and philosophy outlined in this chapter. Formal leadership structures are necessary to link the unit with the broader context, to make final decisions after serious consultation, and to take responsibility for the range of activities and work in the unit. Therefore the challenge is to work with the formal hierarchical structures and allow each individual in his or her role to feel a sense of participation, purpose, development, acknowledgement and accountability.

Student Leadership
In the EDU we aspire to develop a range of graduate attributes in our students. Increasingly, getting a degree is not sufficient to secure a job, to do a job competently or be a contributing citizen to the needs of South Africa. The EDU provides a range of opportunities (see the chapters in this volume on student development for particular elaboration of these) for formal leadership and for practising leadership, including mentoring; leading the first-year induction events; engaging with high-school students; making presentations to school groups; tutoring; running events such as the EDU’s annual awards ceremony; initiating and formalising the programme and activities, leadership structures and accountability of the Education Development Unit Student Society (EDUSO); and undergoing formal leadership training. An alumni structure has not yet been formalised, but there is informal contact with alumni, as well as occasional help from alumni in programme activities. This is an area that still needs work and development, as it is clearly a valuable, mostly untapped resource.

We hope to instil a spirit of accountability and we engage with this on several levels. The overriding ethos is that everyone in the EDU is part of the EDU family, and is therefore caring and responsive and responsible to each other. We have strong follow up if students do not attend workshops or functions to which they have committed themselves. We plan to institute a ‘passport’ for every first-year student: they can elect which EDU student functions to attend for the year, but they need to have signed in for at least four events in the year (these will be signed into their passports). This arrangement will create a fairly formal structure for students to engage with and be accountable to the range of value-added experiences provided. If students fail to meet these requirements, they will self-exclude themselves from the pool of students from which formal leadership positions will be chosen.

We also strongly focus on students being proactive regarding their personal and academic trajectories. This involves dealing with issues on an ongoing basis rather than waiting for a buildup before a crisis. There are obviously numerous examples of this not being possible, but equally many situations in which students become their own worst enemies and become are victims of their own poor management of time and other factors.

Leadership at the Level of Faculty and the Broader University

At a faculty level, the EDU has grown from slow and small beginnings. Twelve years ago, very few students were in the programme, students felt stigmatised by acknowledging that they were on the programme, and it was, at most, a sideline feature in the Commerce Faculty. As the programme grew and we realised that a great deal of students’ learning experiences beyond first their year was beyond our immediate control and ambit, the focus of our work had to broaden to encompass teaching and learning throughout the degree. With time, we also increasingly acknowledged that vulnerable students are not only in the EDU; there are many vulnerable students in the mainstream courses who would also benefit from a range of consciousness and faculty-level interventions focused on factors impacting on students’ academic success.

Original work involved a lot of fact finding through consulting a diverse range of people in the faculty to establish their concerns and issues; then, very slowly, we began to shift focus to include staff development. An early initiative, the Commerce Education Group (CEG), grew from a series of workshops held at the beginning of 2001, focusing on the transformation of the structure, pedagogy and students’ results in the Economics and Accounting Departments at the University of South Australia. In order to sustain the momentum from these workshops, CEG was formed in order to provide a forum for educational discourse within the Commerce Faculty at UCT. This forum involves an exchange of ideas, experiences, opinions and research. It includes input and debates on a variety of educational topics that pertain to the work in the Commerce Faculty and the wider university context. It also provides an opportunity for staff to present aspects of their work and to build a critical self-reflective practice, as well as develop a more collaborative approach to teaching in the faculty. CEG started as a very small group and has
grown to be a recognised faculty structure and forum that impacts on the faculty and beyond. After 12 years, the forum continues to meet at least every 2 weeks and is often better attended than a Faculty Board meeting. An extensive period of time, patience with small beginnings, focusing on ownership and inclusion, and the strategic use of the power dynamics in the faculty have all played a role in enabling this forum to offer leadership and have impact and import in the faculty. Of course, the provision of lunch at these fora always helps! Every year, all the academic staff are consulted regarding issues or topics that they feel are particularly pertinent to their practice, general and specific invitations for presentations are made, particular panels to address key issues are earmarked, and it is ensured that an academic teaching mainstream courses continues the coordination during period when I am on sabbatical. The faculty’s Dean and department and section Heads have specifically been requested to participate in certain debates. This has raised the profile of the CEG forum and has provided an important role model for academic staff members’ participation. It is difficult to quantify CEG’s impact on teaching quality in the faculty, but if attendance and sustainability of the forum are noted, there is clearly wide and growing interest in teaching-and-learning issues.

Over time, a wide variety of interventions and work with mainstream students have occurred. These have included tutor training, tutor development and tutorial design. Whole departmental work engaging with curriculum, articulation of course outcomes, assessment, course processes and embedding language as an indication of an increasing respect for the EDU, as well as of its increasing role in providing education leadership.

The EDU’s recent initiative to launch the work of the Teaching and Learning Working Group has focused work on team teaching, mentoring new academics, working with the broader UCT initiatives promoting the first-year experience, and an early-warning system for vulnerable students. The Teaching and Learning Working Group is a recognised faculty group with broad participation, having representation from all the sections and departments in the faculty, as well as regular reporting mechanisms to the Faculty Board. Apart from its proactive role to impact on teaching and learning, the working group is increasingly being asked to respond to a range of learning issues.

Change processes are always difficult and its is potentially threatening for people to think about what they are doing and to shift practice. The potential for mistrust continually reinforces the need to focus not only on goals, but also on the process regarding innovation and change. This required ongoing nurturing of respectful and authentic relationships in the faculty. I have found that nurturing a range of relationships throughout the faculty has been important in being able to work with people in a terrain that potentially holds deep threat. It is not always easy for academic staff to engage with their teaching and learning when most of them have had no formal training in education. They are discipline experts, but the diverse classrooms that are a feature of the changing face of higher education require particularly skilled and sophisticated teaching ability on the part of academic staff. Relationships based on trust and respect are crucial to move into an area that academic staff are having to encounter daily, but in dealing with which they are in many ways ill equipped and ill supported. The benefit of being regarded as both an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider’ (given the EDU’s affiliation to an education faculty and its location within the Commerce Faculty) has also helped this difficult aspect of a change process involving shifting and raising the involvement and stakes of academic staff in teaching and learning.

The privilege of moving to a place of leadership in the faculty, both in terms of formal structures, and, more importantly, in terms of relationships built up over a long time period, has assisted a range of education initiatives in the faculty. These initiatives have been crucial in enhancing the work of the EDU, as after their first year, the students are very much part of the ‘mainstream’ in terms of their course experiences. Apart from slowly having a greater and more impactful influence in the faculty, this situation has enabled the EDU to embrace a larger pool of students. The words of a staff member in feedback in 2012 attest to this: ‘The most important feature for me of effective leadership is keeping a balance between internal needs and the
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demands of the external world. If June had only attended to the running of the programme our successes would have benefited our students only. By being responsive to the requests of external groups in higher education more broadly (both UCT and other South African institutions) June has been able to share the work widely and more students have been able to benefit from our experience. The unit now plays a leadership role for several universities in South Africa: we have had numerous visits from other staff of universities, who have sat in on our lectures and engaged with UCT staff and students to learn more about the EDU model.

An additional benefit of the participatory leadership in the faculty (in terms of involving greater numbers of people in varying teaching-and-learning initiatives) is that there is a growing group of academic staff who have enrolled for the Master’s Degree in Education or who are taking over responsibilities for a range of curriculum and learning initiatives. The leadership group is growing, which bodes well for a broader base as well as building succession into the faculty leadership.

Conclusion

Leadership can take a variety of forms, both formal and informal. Some leadership qualities are intuitive, and many can be learnt by role modelling ways of being, giving people opportunities to take initiative, risks and responsibilities. Overall, leadership involves not being daunted by the unknown and providing appropriate support for individuals and groups to negotiate new and untested ground.

In the work of the EDU, a continual balance between the micro and macro levels of leadership is necessary. No educational unit will benefit from a tight, specific focus on itself only. Context and the broader community will always be part of the specific work to be undertaken. One has to be in touch with ‘the ground’ – the day-to-day concerns and realities – as well as provide options and imagination to tackle the unknown, while being mindful of the macro context and imperatives.
Introduction

Most higher-education institutions are fairly reliant on the lecture model as the primary structure used for teaching and learning. While increased class sizes have contributed to this, there is an assumption with this learning format that all students are auditory learners, learn at the same pace, don’t need to dialogue about the material, have good note-taking skills and possess the prerequisite knowledge to benefit from the lecture. Too often this model is not effective as there is very little time on task.

We in the Education Development Unit (EDU) of the Commerce Faculty at the University of Cape Town (UCT) believe teachers’ thinking and what they do in the classroom can shape the kind of learning that takes place. Deeper engagement and more lasting learning arises from the active use of the concepts introduced in a class, as well as from students being given the opportunity to construct their own knowledge and meaning.

Our vision has been to create an environment for students, throughout their degree, that will enhance and develop their learning experience and their academic success, and to help students to think realistically and flexibly about problems. Overall, this vision means developing broad graduate attributes and qualities that are sensitive to the needs and realities of contemporary South Africa.

The backdrop to the learning environment is that all students coming into higher education experience varying degrees of alienation. This is particularly so with many first-generation students as they enter into the middle-class environment of higher education. To assist academic success, we therefore consciously develop social connectedness, student identity and agency. In our teaching approaches we actively promote the creation of a learning community.

Communities of Learners

A sense of belonging is one of the most important conditions that can be created in a learning environment (Astin 1993; Palmer 1998; Seymour and Hewitt 1997; Tinto 1993). Being a part of a group not only promotes conceptual development but also enhances personal development and increases satisfaction. This means developing communities of learners who discuss, debate and summarise (Bruffee 1993; Kurfiss 1988; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991; Vygotsky 1978). Identifying and challenging assumptions and exploring alternatives can involve elements of threat and risk taking. Creating a supportive environment that encourages students to take risks (Lowman 1984), and providing peer support to do this, gives a powerful psychological boost to critical-thinking efforts.

The academic-development (AD) classroom is strongly focused on forming a cohesive group of learners rather than a disparate group of individuals. Although class sizes vary from 60 to 250, lecturers have photographs of the students in the class and know many names, and they engage informally with students’ different narratives, issues and lives. There is a great deal of humour, compassion, firmness and direction to optimise excellence in the classroom. We promote frequency of student–student interactions and student–staff interactions, as we feel these are the best predictions of positive outcomes for students. Working in pairs and groups is often the norm.
Many students learn best from other students who can explain new information using language that is more understandable for them, and this is actively encouraged in small groups as well as in a plenary.

The Learning Structures We Create and the Way We Teach

The increasing diversity of students and learning styles is a strong motivator to explore a variety of different teaching structures and pedagogies. Teaching structures and methods, interventions and ‘ways-of-being’ need to be varied and continually responsive to a range of life experiences, styles of learning and needs. We use varied learning structures in addition to the traditional lectures and tutorials: the AD learning environment is made up of formal lectures, tutorials, workshops, one-on-one consultations and other fora, including online chat rooms, web-based scenarios, online communication with the lecturer, and a Learning Channel that uses a TV format of questions.

The range of teaching techniques used, including the following: clickers or colour cards whereby students respond to various tasks; questions; multiple problem solving; simulations; students convincing others of their answers, paraphrasing an idea, correcting an error, supporting a statement, selecting a response, writing a minute paper on an idea, answering a question in the last few minutes of a class, constructing their own sample test problems, discussing why a particular answer is unacceptable or incomplete, predicting something and taking responsibility for learning a portion of the material and teaching it to the rest of the group; problem-based learning; and structured academic controversy. This variety of teaching pedagogies is focused on engaging with the diversity in the class, acknowledging that ‘one size does not fit all’ in terms of ways of learning, as well as a strong belief in the power of involving students in their learning.

Critically there is a need continually and consciously to align outcomes of a course with what is happening and how it happens in the class. If students are required to synthesise information, solve problems and so on, these skills and experiences have to be incorporated into the planned teaching and learning activities and experiences.

Learners Are Active and Engaged

A person entering the various AD learning venues would be struck by the variety of teaching styles in the different classrooms and lecture halls, and would see a range of scenarios making various learning demands of the students.

Students are constructed as active participants: to facilitate learning, the various disciplines use case studies, annotated texts that mediate conceptual understanding, problem-solving scenarios, problem-based learning, simulations and experiential situations. Deeper engagement and more lasting learning arise from such active use of the concepts introduced in a class. An excellent lecture may elicit great involvement, while a poorly run workshop may mean minimal student involvement. Analysis of the research literature (Chickering and Gamson 1987) suggests that students need to do more than just listen: they need to read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems. Importantly, to be actively involved, students need to engage in higher-order thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Bonwell and Eison 1991). Within this context, active involvement means developing strategies that promote involving students in doing things and thinking about what they are doing. Students will learn what they practise, which means that they need to be actively involved in legitimate tasks that will lead to the desired outcomes (Bonwell and Eison 1991). As McKeachie et al. (1986, 7) argue: ‘If we want students to become more effective in meaningful learning and thinking, they need to spend more time in active, meaningful learning and thinking, not just sitting passively receiving information.’ This
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means giving students the opportunity to construct their own knowledge and meaning, creating varied learning structures – as well as different spaces in those structures to provide students with opportunities to be challenged – and ensuring that there are regular reviews of prior learning and a range of opportunities for guided practice (moving subsequently to unguided practice).

Working with Diversity and What Students Bring

Students evince greatly differing degrees of preparedness, a wealth of languages, and great diversity in life experience, schooling, culture and beliefs: clearly teaching focused on a homogenous student body and one size fits all is likely to fail.

The AD classroom therefore treats students holistically and provides multiple opportunities and space for students’ narratives, personal experiences, concerns and joys. Carla Fourie’s chapter in this volume (‘Innovations in a Financial Accounting course’) highlights the multiple ways in which she engages with students so that they feel both a sense of her world and a space to express themselves. There is a great consciousness of the rich variety of students’ experiences and contexts, and every effort is made to weave this, as well as the richness of being in a very diverse class, into the examples used while learning. Rather than attempting to homogenise the environment, AD lecturers foreground the differences as a way of affirming the students’ varying attributes and using the diversity as an opportunity for both learning and enrichment.

Thus prior learning and varied experiences are used as a resource, rather than framing students’ schooling in deficit terms. Leonard Smith’s chapter (‘Teaching approach to the first-year Economics course) highlights the power of using case studies that are relevant and varied to include the variety of contexts and realities that students experience.

Language

EDU lecturers also use students’ home languages as a resource in the learning environment, encouraging students to explain concepts in their own languages. There is sufficient linguistic skill in the classroom for translation and understanding, and these moments help to affirm students’ strengths and contexts, as well as genuinely making certain concepts more accessible.

There is also a focus on the scaffolding of terms that are particular to the discourse of specific disciplines. It is not taken for granted that students will understand particular terms, for example ‘equity’ and ‘equilibrium’. New terms are decoded and spelt out in ways and contexts with which the students can identify, and then the discourse terminology gradually becomes the ‘norm’.

Reading, writing and understanding academic literacies and discourse is embedded in the course material rather than dealt with as a separate ‘language issue’. This is discussed in depth in the section of this book covering language issues.

Feedback

We view feedback as a critical part of the learning process. Assessment can give a mark, or motivate or demoralise a student, but it might prompt very little learning in the process. Prompt and descriptive feedback is an important predictor of powerful teaching and learning (Chickering and Gamson 1987; Walberg 1984) and an important indicator regarding the student performance.

Any task completed, whether formal or informal, is an opportunity for students to get feedback as a way of learning about a particular concept, problem or topic. There are obviously limitations on giving individual feedback with a large class, but there is a range of ideas to give feedback and elicit the type of learning taking place: pick up on a few specific tasks completed by
the class and give feedback to the whole class; indicate broad patterns of misunderstanding; or use an anonymous student task to allow the students to engage critically with what is an appropriate/inappropriate response. A question can be asked to a few random students at the end of the class and their responses posted in the chat room. This will then be used as a resource in the following lecture. Students can be also be given immediate and effective feedback while on task in the classroom. Quick spot questions can be employed, such as ‘Jot down what you still don’t understand/what didn’t work for you in this lecture.’ A lecturer walking around and listening to student conversations can redirect students’ thinking by asking a further question or by marking students’ work and commenting on the output immediately.

Importantly, feedback gives lecturers a real sense of whether learning is taking place, and what the gaps or misconceptions are. These offer opportunities to engage with redirecting the teaching-and-learning process to address these areas.

**Thinking about Teaching and Learning**

The EDU actively cultivates a reflective capacity in both lecturers and students. We need to be continually in tune with who we are serving, what the needs and issues are, and how these change. This requires a great deal of reflection on, flexibility in and change to what we do, how we do things and when we do them. This work is about process, with a continually changing terrain and the creation of significant moments for students. A simple example illustrates the changing terrain and the need to be always thinking about our teaching practice: twelve years ago almost no student owned a cell phone, while today, although some students might battle to find money for food, everyone has a cell phone. This development obviously presents profound opportunities to change the way learning engagements can happen.

Acting on such opportunities means introducing fora for students and staff to develop reflective capacities, and utilising the power of stories to motivate and help develop this meta-awareness. It is necessary consciously to create spaces for continuous reflection on our practice, enabling us to be proactive rather than reactive in responding to students’ needs. Such reflection has been crucial to understanding ‘who our student is’ in a rapidly changing institutional, national and global context. Reflective practice has enabled flexibility, which is crucial in the ongoing assessment of the impact of our work to determine what is effective and what needs to change or be reviewed.

In monthly meetings, EDU lecturers talk about their teaching, what they feel is working well and why, and what they feel needs attention. A culture of sharing teaching practices obtains, creating multiple engagements which enable reflection on teaching practice. These include conversations; mentoring; peer networks; filming; and visiting classrooms, both to team teach and to observe and share insights. We also host numerous people from other universities, who visit our teaching spaces and engage in conversations about what and why we work as we do. All of these practices help foreground a strong teaching discourse. Lecturers also participate in teaching conference presentations.

The teaching model itself needs to develop a reflective capacity in students and to aim to encourage in them careful observation of their own learning. This requires the creation of multiple moments in which students can think about what they have learnt, how they have learnt it and what their most urgent and compelling questions are. Bandura (2001) speaks about developing ‘meta-cognition’ as a core feature of human agency. This reflective framework helps students to begin to understand the assumptions, practices, rules and ways of being in an academic environment.

A cross-disciplinary collaboration among lecturers has helped the development of an explicit meta-language which plays a role in developing students’ capacity for reflective learning and facilitates transfer of knowledge and skills across disciplines.
Chapter 4: Teaching Can Make a Difference: Why Do We Teach the Way We Do?

**AD Lecturers and Case Studies**

The success of the EDU is strongly impacted by the group of strong, dedicated teaching staff. In selecting lecturers, the EDU is stringent about meeting the discipline demands, but particularly about using a variety of ways of evaluating the candidates’ competence as teachers and interrogating their commitment to engage with teaching and learning. We have also benefited from long-term commitments in EDU, with a very low turnover of staff and an increase in new posts as the unit has become larger and more successful.

There is a culture of care in the EDU’s learning spaces. Lecturers genuinely care about students’ wellbeing and ability to optimise their potential. This culture of care is also nurtured between students.

The teachers in the EDU are demanding of themselves, have absolute commitment to the students and demand the very best from students. The case studies that follow in the chapters in this section all show evidence of these principles of teaching, and in very different ways: Tim Low’s innovativeness in the classroom, particularly enhanced with the use of technology; Carla Fourie’s passion, energy and sheer love of teaching to engage students in multiple ways; Leonard Smith’s determination to make Economics accessible to students, using a range of case studies and being very accessible to students. All three have received UCT’s Distinguished Teacher Award in acknowledgement of their excellent teaching. All three lecturers have mostly had better pass averages in their courses than mainstream courses can claim (even though many EDU students do not meet UCT’s entrance requirement for mainstream courses and may arrive at the university with acute gaps in their learning).

The case studies in the chapter that follow will give a living sense of what these principles might mean in the classroom and the learning environment. While they show the different forms these can take, depending on individuals and courses, they all indicate both the EDU’s attitude of deep, ongoing care toward the students, as well as the discipline of continually thinking critically about teaching and learning to transform the learning experience.
Case Study: Thabo

Thabo comes from a small village in a rural area 1 000 kilometres from Cape Town. He had to walk 10 kilometres to a school each day, sometimes on an empty stomach. His primary school had a few rooms and lacked running water, toilets or electricity. His first teacher lacked formal training, and used English, her second language, as the chief medium of instruction. When Thabo went to secondary school he continued to be taught in English by second-language speakers. In the absence of a mathematics teacher he and his peers had to teach themselves. He matriculated along with three of his peers at the age of 20. He was offered a place on the Academic Development Programme in the Commerce Faculty at the University of Cape Town, and when he went to Cape Town to take up this offer, it was the first time he had ever travelled more than 100 kilometres from home, the first time he had ever spent more than a few nights away from home, and the first time he had ever visited a city.

Case Study: Liziwe

Liziwe lives in an informal settlement 20 kilometres outside Cape Town. She does not know her father, and she lives in a small two-roomed tin house that is supplied with electricity but has no running water, with her mother, grandmother and three siblings. She attended the local primary and secondary schools where she was one of at least 45 children in her class. English was the preferred medium of instruction at both schools, and she was usually taught by teachers who had English as a second language. Although she lived in a warm and supportive home, and had good friends, the larger world presented many challenges as it was dangerous and threatening environment. When Liziwe was offered a place on the Academic Development Programme in the Commerce Faculty at the University of Cape Town, she had her own cell phone and she had travelled the 20 kilometres to Cape Town on many occasions with family and friends, but she did not know how to use a computer and she had not visited the university campus.

The Academic Development Programme (ADP) in the Education Development Unit (EDU) based in the Commerce Faculty at the University of Cape Town (UCT) offers its lecturers a wonderful opportunity to work with a diverse range of young people from all over South Africa. Our teaching allows us to play a part in enabling academic development (AD) students to develop their understanding of various subjects, and to use this as a tool to comprehend some of the workings of the real world. We find it very rewarding to watch over the development of these young people, many of whom come from deprived socio-economic backgrounds, and to witness their growth in confidence and ability as they make their way through their careers at university.

It is our belief that, given sufficient support, most AD students can succeed at university. This is a belief that we communicate to students. We see it as our job to create an environment in which students can develop the confidence to succeed in their first-year courses. The environment must be such as to inspire and motivate students so that they want to learn, and to do so as
comprehensively as possible. However, inspiration and motivation, although necessary, are only two parts of what is required to enable AD students to cope with the rigorous demands of academic life. It is also important that students are able to contextualise the material in terms of their own life experiences. We make every effort to use examples in our teaching to which students can relate and in which they can find meaning. In addition, it is necessary that lecturers carefully design courses to build students’ confidence and to enable them to master the variety of skills required to succeed at university. To achieve these aims, lecturers need to build an integrated structure of teaching, learning, application and assessment.

In the AD Economics courses, in addition to enabling students to develop their understanding of economics, we give attention also to the development of their writing, study, quantitative, and English-language skills. We feel that lectures and lecturers, the tutorial system and the methods of assessment are the chief components of a successful AD course in Economics.

Lectures and Lecturers

In our lectures, we deliver the content of the syllabus, explain key economic concepts and discourse, encourage independent learning through the development of students’ note-taking skills, and endeavour to stimulate students to ask questions and make contributions so as to facilitate their understanding of the subject.

Unfortunately, the textbook prescribed by the Commerce Faculty each year for all first-year Economics courses is published either in the United States or the United Kingdom. This faculty-wide prescription creates particular difficulties for AD students, many of whom have English as a second language – North American and United Kingdom English differ from South African English. Further, the prescribed textbook reflects the norms, practices and culture of the society for which it was written. This poses problems for South African students in general and AD students in particular.

We aim, always, to try to make Economics, a complex and difficult subject, accessible to students. We endeavour to create a relaxed environment in which real learning can take place, and in which students feel able to ask questions and develop their understanding of the material. Throughout, we apply economic theory to the real world. This serves two purposes: firstly, students can see that Economics is directly applicable to the lives they experience, and secondly, we have the opportunity to broaden students’ intellectual horizons.

Examples: Making Economics Directly Applicable to the Lives AD Students Experience

- The law of diminishing returns is often illustrated in US or UK textbooks by using a factory as an example. We choose to use maize farming as our example.
- In discussions of ‘opportunity cost’, US and UK textbooks refer to a range of consumer and capital goods with which our students may be unfamiliar. We choose to embed our examples in the South African context: we refer, for example, to the opportunity cost of providing more treatment for people who are HIV positive – there are fewer resources available to build houses for people living in the many informal settlements.
- Wherever possible we replace ‘English’ first names with indigenous ones. Similarly, we replace the names of foreign goods and services, and companies, with local names.

Meeting Specific Challenges in Teaching Academic Development Students

Teaching academic development students presents a number of challenges, which we try to meet.
Chapter 5: Teaching Approach to a First-Year Economics Course

The Challenge of English as a Second, or Even Third, Language

Firstly, we are always aware that many of the students have English as their second, or even third, language. It is important to us that the students understand what we are saying. We use overheads, which are also posted on the course website. We clarify and define any new term we use, and we scan faces to see whether or not students are following what we say.

Example: Ensuring Students Understand What We Are Saying

The concept of ‘price elasticity of demand’ is one many students find difficult. Elasticity is a measure of responsiveness or sensitivity. Price elasticity of demand refers to how sensitive or responsive the change in the quantity demanded of a good is to a change in its price.

We use several examples: How responsive is the sexual behaviour of people to increased prevalence of HIV/Aids. How responsive is the quantity of SMS calls to a change in price? How responsive are students to changes in fashions?

As a first step, we use a piece of elastic, which we have brought to the lecture. We demonstrate that the elastic stretches by a greater or lesser amount, depending on the object attached to it. We then introduce the notions of the independent and dependent variables: the object on the end of the elastic is the independent variable and the elastic is the dependent variable. The next step is to explain that the change in price is the independent variable and the change in quantity demanded is the dependent variable – the price elasticity of demand is a measure of the degree to which the quantity ‘stretches’ when there is a change in its price. Finally, we introduce the formula for calculating the price elasticity of demand.

The Challenge of Students’ Lack of Self-Confidence

Secondly, many first-year AD students lack self-confidence. We make every effort to create a comfortable, non-threatening environment, in which students feel free to speak up. We respect our students for who they are and what they have achieved, and we endeavour to give them our full and undivided attention whenever we are in their company. We work hard in lectures, but there is always time for a joke and a laugh. We always make sure that we are the last people to leave the lecture venue – this makes it possible for even the shyest students to stay behind and ask a question, or make a point, should they wish to do so. We also have generous office hours and usually operate an open-door policy. Also, we see it as part of our job to offer support to students over and above that particularly related to the subject matter.

This approach allows us to develop a much better understanding of our students and their backgrounds, which is difficult to achieve in relatively large classes. We have found that students respond positively to the interest we show in them and we believe that this is reflected in the good results many of them achieve.

The Challenge of Presenting Course Material Clearly

Thirdly, we feel that it is very important that we present the course material in as clear a manner as possible. We make every effort to ensure that in each lecture we explain the key points clearly. Also, we frequently summarise past work to set in context what we are currently doing, and move forward to point out where we are going. In short, we like to present material in the form of a story with many chapters. It is the themes that run through the chapters that are the key to understanding the subject and how it can be used to analyse real-world events.
Chapter 5: Teaching Approach to a First-Year Economics Course

Example: Presenting Course Material Clearly

The first-year microeconomics syllabus is a story with many chapters. Very simply, we start by developing an understanding of the perfectly competitive market economic system. This requires an understanding of the behaviour of consumers (demand) and firms (supply). We are then able to develop the students’ understanding of the perfectly competitive market. This leads to the concepts of productive and allocative efficiency.

From here we introduce the notion of market failure: why it is that the market system does not always deliver the best of all possible outcomes for society at large. This in turn gives rise to the notion that government intervention in the economy is required (mixed economy) to ensure a more efficient outcome than is achieved under the conditions of perfect competition.

The Challenge of Raising General Knowledge

Fourthly, many of our students have a poor level of general knowledge and come from environments that have not offered them much intellectual stimulation. We see it as part of our job to stimulate their interest in the world around them and to make them excited about the possibilities that are open to them. Stories and anecdotes, drawn from our experience or from the media, are an excellent way to encourage students to develop their general knowledge and their understanding of some of the forces operating in the world at large. Particularly, when these stories are related to the students’ own experiences this allows them to make connections, which enable them to gain a better understanding of the content of the Economics course.

Examples: Raising General Knowledge

- Several people we know run their own businesses. We use them as examples when we are looking at theories of the firm.
- We make reference to advertising campaigns, brand names, and large corporations when discussing the different market structures. Most students are strongly brand conscious, nearly all have cell phones, and most are aware of Eskom’s (South Africa’s state monopoly energy producer) pricing power.
- Since the financial crisis of 2007, many people known to our students have lost their jobs. The students are interested in knowing why this is the case. We discuss this.
- South Africa is subject to rapid urbanisation, which was suppressed during the apartheid era. Many of our students are part of this process and they are keen to gain a better understanding of its economic and social implications. We consider these matters.

This strategy is important because, as was explained earlier, the prescribed textbooks are written for either a US or a UK audience. Our students find it difficult to relate to the world described, and examples used, in these textbooks. In addition, as many of our students have English as their second or third language, they battle to comprehend the forms of English used in such textbooks. Therefore, it is important that we develop examples with which our students can identify in a language that they can understand.

Tutorials

AD students are required to attend weekly tutorials in Economics. Each economics tutorial group consists of some 15 students. Each week, students complete and submit written answers to a set
tutorial, which includes a variety of types of question. Students submit their answers to their tutor prior to the tutorial. Tutorials are graded; the aggregate mark for the year counts 5 per cent of the final course mark. The questions set in the tutorials are similar to those set in tests and the examination; this encourages students to use the tutorials to prepare for the tests and examination. It is in the tutorials that students get the opportunity to develop their understanding of the subject with the help of their tutor and peers. They have to formulate answers in writing and to argue their case in small groups. Tutors play a vital role in developing students’ understanding, in a small group situation, of Economics.

The tutorial system plays a key role in developing students’ subject, learning, writing and quantitative skills. A variety of approaches is used to encourage students to become independent learners. These approaches include clearly defined tasks, co-operative and group learning, relating new concepts to the students’ existing knowledge, and developing students’ cognitive and language skills through essay writing.

Some of the questions are designed to test the students’ knowledge of content and theory. However, a significant proportion of the questions require students to apply economic theory to real-world situations.

**Example: Applying Economic Theory to Real-World Situations Through Tutorial Questions**

Early in the course students are introduced to price and quantity determination. They learn about the price and non-price determinants of supply and demand, and about ‘shifts’ and ‘slides’. In tutorials, they are required to use this analysis to analyse the effect of various changes in demand and supply on the equilibrium price and quantity.

Examples include the effect of strikes by trade unions, the role of advertising, speculation in commodity, currency and stock markets, minimum wage legislation, taxes and subsidies, and the food and housing markets.

In the main, the tutorials are made up of clearly defined tasks, and students are encouraged to engage with these in order to find meaning. Exercises requiring students to read the textbook and articles from other sources are also set. In a similar vein, tasks are set that students will recognise as useful for their better understanding of course material, and other questions encourage students to ‘learn through doing’. Included in each tutorial are a few more difficult and open-ended questions, which are used as a basis for small-group discussions. Students get feedback in the form of comments by their tutors on their written work, and from their peers and tutor when they present their answers to the tutorial group.

In general, we make every effort to provide carefully graded questions in each tutorial to enable students to build up their understanding of each topic. It is essential that students develop a sound understanding of economic theory. Only then can they hope to apply it successfully to the analysis of real-world events.

**Example: Using Carefully Graded Questions to Build Up Understanding of the Theory of Maximisation**

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1 The standard tutorial includes multiple-choice, paragraph, true/false, fill-in, calculation, and case-study questions.
Chapter 5: Teaching Approach to a First-Year Economics Course

The theory of utility maximisation poses problems for many students:

- Firstly, we set questions on the budget line.
- These are followed by questions on the indifference curve.
- Students are then required to do some calculations to demonstrate that the consumer is maximising utility subject to the budget constraint.
- This is followed by a series of more complicated exercises which require students to determine the utility-maximising bundle of two or more goods, given the consumer’s income and utility schedule and the prices of the goods.

Tutorials offered by the non-AD (‘mainstream’) Economics courses, in contrast, pay relatively little attention to the development of students’ learning skills. In the mainstream system, students are given few opportunities to engage with the course material along the lines encouraged in our tutorials. Each week, mainstream students attend a shorter tutorial period, during which a few multiple-choice and essay-type questions are discussed. Rarely are mainstream students required to submit written work and, if they are, the grades do not count towards their final marks.

We place a strong emphasis on the selection of tutors, and on monitoring their performance throughout the duration of the course. We assume that the quality of the tutors’ inputs in the tutorials determines the extent to which students benefit from the tutorial experience. Economics tutors are chosen on the basis of their academic performance, experience and ability to act as role models for AD students. Where possible, we try to employ students who have successfully completed AD courses in Economics. Not only are they au fait with the course, but they are closer to the students in terms of age, home language, and background. They are also able to identify closely with needs and aspirations of the students they tutor as they have been through the same kinds of experiences themselves. Specialist and experienced language tutors are chosen to run the language and communication tutorials. Tutors meet once a week with their respective conveners to go through the following week’s tutorial and to discuss theoretical and practical issues. This is also the time when the tutors can let the lecturers know of the topics that the students are finding difficult.

**Assessing Students’ Academic Performance**

In addition to the lectures and lecturers, and the tutorials, the third key to a successful academic development course is assessment. Sound assessment practices give students the opportunity to learn economic theory, as they are required to apply it in a variety of ways – for example through explanation or calculation – and they receive written and verbal feedback, which enables them to gain a better understanding of the material on which they have been assessed. Sound assessment practices also give students the opportunity to develop their learning, English language, writing and quantitative skills. Each of the elements of assessment mentioned in this section is designed to achieve these two general objectives.

We devote considerable effort to assessing students’ academic performance. Ideally, assessment should take a variety of forms, for example written tests and examinations, essays, projects and presentations. In general we use essays, tests and the final examination. We encourage students to submit at least one draft of each essay for comment. Course tutors and lecturers attend a marking workshop, and students receive a comprehensive report on their performance. The tests and the examination comprise a mixture of multiple-choice and structured/essay questions in a ratio of 30:70. The emphasis on the structured/essay questions is designed to encourage students to engage with the tutorial material and to enable them to develop
their understanding of Economics and their skills in the areas of learning, writing, and English language.\textsuperscript{2} In addition, the written tutorials also count towards the students’ course marks.\textsuperscript{3}

We believe that students should be assessed regularly. This gives students feedback so that they can assess their progress. It also enables us to monitor their academic performance and to make any educational interventions that may be required, either at the level of the individual student or the group as a whole.

It is only in the past few years that mainstream Economics courses have required students to write essays as part of their formative assessment; the change was a result of the success of this approach demonstrated in the AD courses. The mainstream essay-writing task is managed in collaboration with UCT’s writing centre.

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{2}] In contrast, most of the assessment of mainstream students is in the form of multiple-choice questions.
\item[\textsuperscript{3}] The final mark was made up as follows: 3 essays at 5 per cent each (15 per cent), 3 tests at 5 per cent each (15 per cent), 1 test at 10 per cent (10 per cent), 20 written economics tutorials (5 per cent in total) and the final examination (55 per cent).
\end{itemize}
Chapter 6: Innovations in a Financial Accounting Course

Carla Fourie

I teach the first-year Financial Accounting course to students on the Education Development Unit’s (EDU) Academic Development Programme (ADP). In this section, I shall discuss my pedagogy and highlight issues faced in this teaching environment. I aim to illustrate these explicitly with concrete examples from my teaching practice.

Background

The first-year Financial Accounting course is an extremely demanding one set to the level required for students studying to qualify as Chartered Accountants. The subject is predominantly an applied discipline based on broad conceptual principles that students will be expected to apply with a high level of technical competence. It is therefore of the utmost importance that students develop a sound understanding of these conceptual principles in order to be able to apply them practically; further, course content covered at the first-year level forms the building blocks for content learnt in subsequent Financial Accounting courses the students will take. As outlined in the course documentation, as numerous issues in Financial Accounting remain unresolved, students are encouraged and expected to debate such issues.

The aim of the teaching-and-learning environment should not only be the achievement of academic success and good results, but should also encompass the development and enhancement of graduate qualities and attributes. Of course, teaching should be centred on curriculum, but in order to encourage the development of a student as a whole person, teaching and learning must go beyond curriculum. The teacher’s greatest challenge, then, is to identify and create the appropriate environments in which a student’s potential can be unlocked and stimulated both to meet the objectives of the curriculum and to enhance personal growth.

If provided with appropriate support through varying teaching structures, each student accepted onto the ADP has the potential to succeed. Through the use of a range of pedagogies and teaching structures, and through students’ interaction with their peers and me, I aim to create a learning environment in which students know their rights and responsibilities, feel secure about themselves, and are able to explore new relationships as well as their understanding of course content.

The academic staff of the ADP believe that deeper engagement and longer-term learning both arise from, firstly, the active use of concepts introduced in a class – students being given the opportunity to construct their own knowledge and meaning – and, secondly, the creation of a student learning community. This means creating varied learning structures, as well as different spaces in those structures to provide students with opportunities to be challenged. Regular reviews of prior learning, as well as opportunities for guided practice (moving to unguided practice) with ongoing feedback, needs to be provided.

Engaging with Diversity in the Class

Most of the students tend to sit next to their friends in lectures and remain within a peer group that they can relate to and feel secure in. Providing opportunities for students to work in random partnerships and small groups exposes students to the diversities that the various students bring to the classroom. The small-group structure allows for the student voice to influence learning and for peers to challenge one another’s thinking. I have witnessed students who do not feel
comfortable answering a question that has been posed to the class as a whole becoming animated when working with their peers in small groups, contributing their thoughts and ideas to solving a problem. Students learn best from one another. They are able to communicate new information using ‘their’ language, which is often more comprehensible to them than the language teachers use. Students seem to feel safer and less threatened when working in a group. They are more willing to take the risk of attempting to solve a problem and are challenged by their peers to think and contribute.

While working in groups, students are able to appreciate at first hand the experience of many in the class who have to engage with complex theoretical concepts and principles in their second language, and who encounter challenges in understanding and interpreting the subject because it is not being taught and learnt in their mother tongue. Through group work, this experience can be foregrounded and then discussed with the class as a whole. Students can be asked about the difficulties they think students on the course are experiencing, and these can then be discussed and engaged with openly.

Where a second-language student is competent in the Accounting concepts as well as in English, this joint competence can be used in the classroom to teach a group of students in their mother tongue. To facilitate this, before the lecture begins I identify a student who is learning the subject in their second language and who, when asked, demonstrates an understanding of a concept through verbal explanation. I then invite the student to use his or her home language, which is home language also to a number of other students in the class, to teach the class the concept that he or she and I have just discussed.

Case Study: Code Switching As a Response to Linguistic Diversity

A few years ago, while teaching the definition of an asset, I asked an isiZulu-speaking student to explain to me in English what he understood by the asset definition. When I was satisfied that he could explain the concept with a clear understanding, I asked him if he would teach the class the definition in his home language. There was excitement amongst the students as their peer stood up, greeted the class and began speaking:

\[ i \text{ asethi in-to elawul-wayo (an asset is a resource controlled) } \]
\[ N\text{genxa (as a result of) } \]
\[ Y\text{esigameko ese-zekile (a past event) } \]
\[ K\text{ulento kuzobakhona inzu } \text{o esikathini esi-zayo en-gen } \text{e bhisinisini (from which future economic benefits are expected to flow into the business). } \]

Assume the class was a face: I stood back and watched as its expression changed from complete surprise, to relief, to joy. The energy in the class was electric. The students were clapping, cheering, laughing and ‘hau-hau-hauing’. There was an atmosphere of celebration, and rightfully so. The class’s personality was changed forever. The students had been seen and recognised for who they were. Even though they had varying home languages, and isiZulu was just one of these, a hope had been born. A space had been created in an authentic and respectful way for the students to be themselves. They had been encouraged to foreground who they were and to be true to this. This enabled them to identify not only with their own language but also with the content being taught. Code switching in my classes was to become the norm, and the students had been armed with a tool that would allow them increased access to and understanding of the complex course content.
Accounting uses a language of its own. To enable students to become fluent in the terminology specific to the discipline, I try to use simple and familiar vocabulary to break down and replace complex ‘Accounting speak’. This allows students to construct meaning for the parts first and then move on to constructing meaning for the whole, as demanded by the content being covered.

**Case Study: Making Meaning**

As part of the curriculum, students need to learn, understand and apply the definition of an asset, which reads as follows in the Accounting Framework:

*An asset is a resource controlled as a result of a past event from which future economic benefits are expected to flow to the business.*

How can the first part of the definition, given in bold above, be practically broken down and converted into accessible language that will allow students to create the meaning of the definition? As follows:

- **‘Resource’**: What does this term mean? A resource is something that can be used or sold.
- **‘Controlled’**: What does this mean? Risks and rewards of ownership lie with the business.
- What is meant by ‘risks’ of ownership? If anything happens to the asset, for example if it is stolen or damaged, the business will suffer the loss.
- What is meant by ‘rewards’ of ownership? The asset can be used or sold to generate benefit, for example cash, for the business.

Another way to enable students to make sense of concepts and principles is to explain a concept within various contexts to which students can relate. The following feedback from the 2011 course evaluation by a student suggests that it is important to use appropriate examples to trigger meaning and relate what is being taught to what is already known: ‘She makes examples that are applicable to the real world/life.’ For example, students who have grown up in a rural environment will have an understanding of a bartering or trading system to acquire goods and services. Therefore, rather than discussing a corner cafeteria, I will refer to a ‘spaza shop’, as this term is embedded in the majority of students’ experiential frameworks and they will have immediate understanding and a picture in their heads of what I am talking about.

Approximately 65 per cent of the students in the first-year group have prior knowledge of basic Accounting concepts and principles because they studied the subject at school. These students are referred to as ‘priors’ by academic staff and tutors teaching and tutoring on Financial Accounting courses at UCT. Students who have no prior knowledge of the subject (‘non-priors’) have indicated that they feel insecure around those who have prior knowledge, and their perception is that the subject is more difficult for them to grasp. Rather than being seen as a threat in the classroom, how can students who have prior knowledge be used to motivate and support students who are new to the subject? For certain topics, I identify, randomly, students who have prior knowledge, and then ask them to sit next to a student who has no prior knowledge. This partnership provides a space where students with different levels of knowledge can work together rather than against one another. While the course content is being delivered, non priors receive support from a peer who understands the challenges and difficulties that may be experienced around a topic. Conversations between partners often continue after lectures and friendships are developed. Following this exercise, it is not unusual to see the students who were paired up continuing to sit next to one another in lectures.
Building Community: Get to Know One Another!

Through informal conversation before and after lectures, I make an effort to get to know students, learn their names and hear about some of the experiences that they bring to the classroom. This is important from a teaching-and-learning point of view, to ensure that new content is presented in a context to which students can relate and that students are appropriately guided from the known to the unknown, building their confidence to explore new content. In addition, it gives me knowledge about what students are doing in their personal lives and the impact this might be having on their studies. As the students share personal aspects of their lives, the lecture venue provides a valuable space to develop a sense of community.

This kind of knowledge can be gained in simple ways, for example asking the students what they have planned for the forthcoming weekend. But then, it is important to follow up in the Monday class to find out how their weekend went. The students might talk about a parent’s birthday party, family weddings, or student dances and events at their previous schools.

Getting to know the students also means letting them get to know about me! Students enjoy hearing about their lecturers’ children or spouses, the special things in which they are involved, their hobbies and interests. I have found that the more I share with students, the more eager they are to share with me and their peers.

We all have an invisible line around us, our personal space, or ‘bubble’ as I like to call it – an area that is no-go for some and all-go for others. The nature of the relationship often determines who is welcome in our space and who is not. A feeling of comfort, trust, security and familiarity are conducive to welcoming.

My immediate instinct when I see a bubble is to pop it – both in the lecture venue and outside it! My being in the role of lecturer does not mean that I have to stand at the front of the venue and separate myself from students, creating a ‘me against you’ scenario. I move into the ‘students’ space’ when chatting to them before a lecture, as well as during a lecture. It is rare for me to stand for a whole lecture in front of the class. I prefer to walk around the lecture venue; I am often found lecturing from the side, middle or back. Particularly when working through examples in a lecture, my favourite position is in a spare seat in the midst of students. This allows me to see what students are doing, assess how they are tackling the example, and understand their thought processes as they are working. This more informal interaction builds community among the students and effectively enhances my teaching role.

Case Studies: Building Community Through Diversity

1 Acknowledging Diverse Religious Affiliations

Students in the class belong to various religious groups. Throughout the academic year, religious festivals and events are celebrated: Christian students celebrate Easter, Muslim students Eid and Hindu students Diwali. These celebrations offer a perfect opportunity for students to talk about themselves and what makes them who they are. I acknowledge such celebrations by inviting students to talk to the class about them: they speak about, for example, what is being celebrated and why, what they eat or don’t eat during the time, and how and why they may change their dress from secular to traditional.

The 30-day period of Ramadan, a time when Muslim students fast from sunrise to sunset, occurs at a varying time each academic year. Students from this group have explained that this period can be a difficult time for them, as they often lack energy and concentration during the day, and find learning more difficult. I speak to these students before or after class, asking them how they are coping and explaining where they can access additional support if they need it. This
creates a sense of caring and compassion and a sense of community, of working with each other rather than around each other.

2 Broadening Ownership of Personal Achievements

During the 2011 academic year, a student named Paul was selected for the South African Men’s Water Polo team. He was scheduled to travel with the team to Greece in August of that year. During lectures, on behalf the class, I wished him well and told him how proud we were of him. I received the following e-mail from Paul on 18 August:

Hi Carla

I just wanted to thank you again for your support on my endeavour.

And I would especially like to thank our accounts class, they've been so kind and friendly- wishing me luck and even offering to take notes for me (all from people I have never met before) :)

These small gestures have made me feel as equally proud to be an EDU student as I am a Springbok!

See you next semester

Paul

In establishing rapport, all teachers need to think about the specifics of their context and students. Creating appropriate boundaries, and being transparent about what these are and why, is highly beneficial in sustaining rapport. Some of the classes on the ADP have these kinds of boundaries:

- Students are not allowed in to the lecture if they are late (I give the students five minutes leeway).
- At the start of the lecture, the lecturer greets students as a group and receives a group response.
- Students and lecturers address one another with respect (in use of tone and language).
- Students do not talk while others are responding to a question asked by the lecturer or if another student is asking the lecturer a question.
- Students have a responsibility to prepare work requested by the lecturer and required for the next lecture, so that the objectives of the lecture can be met.
- Students complete an attendance register, if requested to do so.
- Students are encouraged to view themselves as members of a team, working together to achieve success within the course, and contribute where required/asked to.

Inspiring Students to Learn and Engage, Rather Than Simply Prepare for Assessment

Pinpointing and describing exactly what inspires students to engage at a level deeper than simply preparing for assessment is an elusive task since we are all different personalities in the classroom. Different students respond differently to various styles of teaching. An individual teacher may inspire some, yet bore others.

Nevertheless, encouraging students to engage in this way is an important task, but it is a difficult one, especially when the curriculum list is long and time is short! In this section, as I attempt to explain how I inspire students, rather than simply preparing them for assessment, I will
describe my own attitude towards my teaching, how I go beyond the curriculum to encourage
students to learn more than just the course content, how I try to encourage students to think for
themselves and to participate in their own learning, and how I use formative assessment to gain
insight into what students know and have learnt.

**It Starts With the Teacher!**

If a teacher is passionate and enthusiastic about teaching, and takes this energy into lectures, this
not only motivates students’ interest in the subject, but also demonstrates to students the
importance of being genuinely interested in, committed to and intrinsically satisfied with the
career one pursues. Two responses have assured me that my teaching is living up to these goals:
being awarded the Distinguished Teacher Award (made annually by UCT to academic staff in
recognition of excellence in teaching) and positive feedback from students, for example ‘Very
motivated and passionate about this course therefore this feeds to us. She is very encouraging.’

**Broadening the Curriculum**

I want and need my students to do well! This is one of the ways in which I can benchmark,
against the same courses taught by other lecturers in the mainstream, whether or not I am
achieving learning goals and objectives laid out in the curriculum. Results are an indication as to
whether students are ‘getting it’ or not. Good results please me, please the students and help drive
throughput rates. But there is more to learning than just a final mark next to a name. What else
are students ‘getting’ and ‘taking away’ from my lectures?

I teach so that students will learn course content and meet curriculum objectives and I teach
to develop and enhance graduate qualities/attributes. I believe that my role as teacher should
naturally incorporate the interest of wanting to be part of an education process that strives to
develop a student as a whole person rather than simply addressing a part of the person focusing
only on learning Accounting for a semester. Believing in the potential of students, inspiring and
motivating them to be and do their best, is a key to unlocking student growth and development,
not just in the course curriculum but in attitudes and self. Students comment on this in their
evaluations; the following example is typical: ‘Our lecturer is inspiring in so many ways. Many a
time she has deferred from the topic to not only teach us about the course but life as well.’

I tell students that we are not in lectures just to achieve marks. I have an expectation that
lectures will provide ‘other’ learning, beyond curriculum. We are in lectures to learn about, and
from, one another. Through varying class activities and interactions between and with students, I
aim to build a strong learning community in which students are provided with an opportunity to
think about others, to work with and support others, and to experience what it means to come
from diverse backgrounds.

Many of my students are living away from home for the first time and find themselves in a
new and alien environment. I believe that there is much ‘other’ learning that needs to happen, for
example basic manners (including how to interact with one another), how to respect time, and
how to consider language and tone when e-mailing friends as opposed to prospective employers
and staff members.

Students enter the university trusting. They trust a system that, amongst other things, strives
to provide them with ‘a superior quality educational experience through inspired dedicated
teaching and learning, stimulating the love of lifelong learning … and supporting programmes
that stimulate the social consciousness of students’ (University of Cape Town’s *Mission
Statement* 2011).

I am part of the system. Therefore students trust me. They trust that I am going to teach them
the correct course content and that I will be committed and dedicated to this primary task. They
also trust that I am going to play my role in meeting the mission to which the system is committed. If I have only taught for marks, I have failed myself – and, more importantly, my students.

### Case Study: Going Beyond Curriculum by Introducing Social Responsibility Programmes

Two main reasons motivated me to introduce a social-responsibility project as part of my course:

1. Students who are registered on the EDU programme are predominantly from ‘vulnerable’ backgrounds. These students are well supported in terms of funding opportunities and also in terms of the staff’s commitment to providing well-organised administrative structures and social and educational support. I want students to recognise and appreciate the support that they experience within the EDU programme, and to value the opportunities to which they have access. Further, I want to encourage them to think about how they can give back and support others not as fortunate as they are, and to provide them with the opportunity to do so in a practical and effective way.

2. The first-year Accounting course identifies the main objective of a business as being to increase shareholders wealth through business operations, that is, the main objective of a business is to maximise profits, commonly referred to as the ‘bottom line’. Within this context, I want to give students the opportunity to think about the impact of a business’s main objective on society, and about the responsibility that a business has towards uplifting the community in which it operates. I want them to consider that within the South African context, it has become imperative for businesses to serve communities and partner with government to meet economic and social objectives.

When we deal with the main objective of a business, I incorporate a discussion on the various backgrounds that students in the class represent, inviting volunteers to share information with the class about their family, home and schooling. I then give students a space to identify how, if the class was a business, they could ‘give back’ and make a difference to a community.

For the past 2 years, students have been collecting loose change before lectures. Money raised in the first six months was used to purchase food and toiletries for a home that rehabilitates, cares for and provides support to abused women and children in the local community.

Subsequently an educare facility in Khayelitsha (a local township) was identified as needing support. Students’ monetary donations have been used to fund two fire extinguishers and fifty blankets. The class’s next project – purchasing fifty sleeping mats for the children at the educare facility – caught the attention of a Cape Town business, which sponsored the full price of the sleeping mats as well as the transport to deliver them. This was an inspiring experience for the students. They witnessed at first-hand how the act of social responsibility is ‘catchy’ and how people are motivated by the difference that others are making in communities.

A number of students have visited the educare and spent time with the staff and children. They have witnessed how their input is making a difference to the children and caregivers’ on a day to day basis. This is an on-going project.

### Responses: What do the Students Say?

The following quotation from a student is typical of the responses students have towards this broadening of the curriculum:

> Often we complain about the calibre of leaders we have in society and forget to grow future
leaders. It is with gratitude that we are involved with such a lecturer who is willing to give lessons that go beyond the classroom. We are being brought up to be compassionate and ethical individuals. University doesn’t teach us that. It was rather humbling, touching and inspiring to see the triumph of the human spirit. The happiness, gratitude and hope in kids’ eyes was a memory that shaped me. A worthwhile experience invoking involvement.

Responses: What Do I say?

Big or small, individual or group, we can all make a difference. It has been awe-inspiring to watch some of my students experience the emotion of what it means to give back, to touch lives, to think beyond themselves. They have felt at first hand that there is no greater joy than giving! And within the South African context, there is no greater lesson to be taught than how to give! Students have experienced what it is to be socially conscious and to feel empathy and sympathy for others. I believe that involvement in a social-responsibility project gives students an appreciation for the opportunities they have been, and will be, presented with, and provides a clearer perspective of their journey towards self-actualisation. The experience encourages students to think critically about business objectives as opposed to impact on local community, as well as stimulating their social consciousness, which is a UCT objective.

Think and Learn!

Thinking and learning are about ‘doing’. The classroom should be full of action … student action! I insist that students think for themselves. When they think for themselves, something starts to happen: there is action. They start making connections between what they know and understand and what they need to know and understand. They start asking the ‘why’ and ‘how’ and ‘what if’ questions. They start engaging. They start learning!

Encouraging Students to Think

Questions asked by students create valuable learning opportunities. I very rarely just give students an answer. Instead, I may ask them what they understand by a concept or principle that underlies the question and then ask them to think about how this might be applied, or I may ask them to think about other examples that have been worked through around a concept or principle and to identify the similarities or differences between what they are being challenged with now. I use a sequence of high-order questions (few yes and no answers) as a mediation tool, or scaffold, to guide students from the question asked to an answer. I ask students questions that encourage them to access and think about existing knowledge, and to use this to construct new knowledge.

Questioning students in this way also allows me to find out what knowledge has been constructed in the past, what students know now, and what knowledge still needs to be constructed. It also provides students with a sense of what they know, which is often more than what they think they know! Providing scaffolds is a way of unlocking already acquired knowledge (which may often have been rote learned), breaking the knowledge up into pieces, and placing it in a logical sequence, creating meaning and understanding. Scaffolding can also be a tool that students can learn, a way to identify using ‘what I know’ to get to ‘what I need to know/answer’: put very simply, it can facilitate and establish a way of thinking.

Case Study: Using Questions to Encourage Students to Think for Themselves and to Unlock Existing Knowledge to Move From the Known to the Unknown
Chapter 6: Innovations in a Financial Accounting Course

**Scenario**

Students are given a simple interest calculation on a loan amount that a business has borrowed from a bank. The loan is for an amount of R500 000 and was taken out on 1 February 2011. An interest rate of 10 per cent charged per annum on the loan. The business has a year end of 31 December.

**What are the Students Required To Do?**

They are asked to calculate the interest expense that was incurred by the business for the financial year.

**What Happens Next?**

Students attempt the required calculation individually. This is followed by a class discussion on why interest is calculated and how to calculate interest. A student then puts up his hand and asks a question.

**The Student’s Question**

How did you calculate the interest figure because I didn’t get that number?

**Possible Answers**

The following are three possible ways of responding to this question:

1. Where have you been all this time? We have already covered that. You will have to find this out on your own and in your own time. Now, let’s move on to the next example.

2. You take the loan amount of R500 000 and multiply this amount by the number of months that the business has used the loan – which we know is 11 months – and apply the interest rate of 10 per cent to this.

3. Let’s get you to think about how we calculate the interest expense. I am going to guide you by asking you some questions and the answers to these questions are going to help you answer what you have asked. Here we go …

   When we want to calculate an interest expense, we need three things. We need the amount of the loan, the interest rate and the time that the loan was used.

   Can you identify what amount was loaned from the bank?

   Can you identify what interest rate was agreed on?

   When was the loan borrowed from the bank?

   When is the business’s year end?

   Now, using a time line (draw one on your note book), can you calculate how many months the business used the bank’s money?

   Now that you have identified the three components of calculating interest, can you calculate and see how we got to the number on the board?

   The third answer is the best for encouraging students to think.
Encouraging Participation

There will always be students who prefer not to contribute to lectures by answering or asking questions in front of peers. They may prefer to remain silent for a number of reasons, including feeling shy about speaking in public, afraid of being wrong or perhaps intimidated by a lecturer and peers.

How do I motivate and encourage these students to think for themselves and participate in their own learning? One way is to identify students who do not contribute to lectures and ask them to stay behind after class. Prior to the lecture, I think of a concept or term that will be covered later in the week. I tell the student why I have asked him or her to remain behind, and then ask if he or she would be prepared to research the said concept or term outside class time and prepare a few sentences on this to share with the class at the appropriate time.

If the student agrees to engage with the task, thinking starts. The student has to think about where to research the task given, for example on the internet or in the textbook, or perhaps think about who would be an appropriate person to ask. The student has time to prepare the task in a non-threatening and less-pressured environment. He or she has time alone, time to think. Before the student can share findings with the class, he or she has to explore ways of personally understanding the term or concept. Through this exercise, students are given the opportunity to contribute to their peers’ learning and their own personal development in a way that feels safe to them and may overcome their reluctance to speak up in the context of a lecture hall.

I use many other ways of encouraging students to participate in lectures, for example:

- asking a group of students to write their answers or input on a piece of paper and pass it to the front of the class, and then choose the input randomly as an anonymous contribution to the lecture
- having students work and report back in small groups or partnerships
- walking up to a student in class and converseing with them quietly one on one, and asking for input, and then sharing the input with the class on the student’s behalf (students respond to this – they feel acknowledged)
- telling the students that I am going to ask for participation from students wearing red or green (or any other random colour) or in a particular row, and moving along from one student to the next (this is a neutral way of getting students to participate – I cannot be accused of favouritism or always asking or ‘picking on’ the same students for answers).

My absolute favourite tool to use in the classroom to encourage students to participate is the lollipop! I don’t know what it is about students but they love lollipops and are prepared to work for them. Perhaps it is just a common human characteristic to enjoy being rewarded or acknowledged, even if in some small way. During a lecture in which participation and interaction may be slackening, I suddenly ask all the students to feel under their chairs. Some students will find lollipops, which have been stuck there by me before the students entered the venue (forward planning is essential here!). The students who find lollipops don’t have a right to keep them until they have worked for them in some way. The students love this exercise. It creates hype and excitement in the class and the participation and interaction levels increase immediately. Students have fun while participating in their own learning and thinking for themselves.

Test Time: Finding Out What the Students Know Before Formal Assessment

There is a strong connection and overlap between ways of encouraging participation in lectures and getting students to think for themselves, on the one hand, and the informal assessment of
students, on the other. These ‘actions’ in the lecture venue are not independent of each other, but, rather, inform the other.

Informal assessment is invaluable in that it gives immediate feedback about where a student is “at” at a particular point in the course. A number of the methods used to encourage participation in lectures (as outlined earlier on) are also effective in informally assessing students. In terms of specifically testing what students know at a particular point, I might stop a lecture and ask students to write down what they have just learnt or what they understand about a concept or term, or how they are feeling at that moment about the work being covered. Sometimes, at the beginning of a lecture I pose a question addressing work that was covered the previous day; I ask students to discuss the question with a partner and give feedback to the class. Immediate student responses to content taught in class also offer an excellent tool for informally assessing the class. To do this, at the end of a lecture I randomly select two to three students and ask them to write down their responses to a short question that I put to them, based on content of that lecture. Directly after the lecture, I post both the questions and the answers onto VULA (UCT’s web-based communication and learning-support forum for students), under a heading ‘What do you think?’ Students have time to think about and form an opinion on their peers’ responses; this feedback is discussed at the start of the next day’s lecture. Students’ responses to the questions posted on VULA are anonymous, so I find that feedback from the rest of the class is objective, bold and highly critical. Students love to be in the judge’s seat!

An exercise like this not only enables me to test what was learnt in the lecture the day before, or identify a common misunderstanding in a principal or concept, but also allows students the opportunity to think critically about their peers’ responses and how the question was answered. So, the students and I chat not only about the content of the question but also about ways in which the question could be tackled, use of language and clarity of answers. Students are able to experience in a very small way the kinds of responses to questions that examiners face, and how marks can be lost or gained.

Another way that I test students’ understanding informally is to post a short exercise on VULA directly after the lectures. The exercise is called “think about it!” Students are challenged to think about what they have been taught in the lecture, and to test their understanding through the application of the theory to a practical example. The exercise is discussed as the opening to the next day’s lecture.

I have found that testing students in this way, gives all students an opportunity to think about and clarify their understanding of work taught in lectures in their own environment and over a period of time. Students are more confident to volunteer answers in class the next day as they feel more prepared to do so.

Following formal assessment (tests and examinations), I spend time with the students in the lecture or a Head Space session (discussed later), highlighting markers’ comments and identifying areas that students answered well and areas where they struggled.

The timing of feedback is crucial in making a difference in a student’s learning and momentum in the course. Identifying problem areas from a test five weeks after the test has been written is ineffective: the course has progressed to cover new work in time that has passed. By this time, students have forgotten their concerns regarding the test and also what was tested! They tend not to have the time to go back and revisit errors.

Delayed feedback can place weak students in an even weaker position. New concepts continue to be introduced in class following formal assessment, so it is imperative to keep the gap between assessment and feedback as small as possible. Delaying feedback may result in these students struggling to accommodate new information and to build knowledge because their difficulties and lack of understanding around earlier concepts taught and tested have not been addressed.

After feedback on informal or formal assessment, I encourage students to revisit lecture theory and then the assessment tasks, so that they can retest their understanding and identify for
themselves where the weak link is in their understanding of a section, concept or principle. Students are encouraged to keep a journal or a record of errors that they have made, record why they were wrong in their thinking and what concept or principle needs to be understood and followed in the future when engaging with similar tasks.

**Case Study: When the Time For the Assessment Was Up, Still Oliver Asked For More**

Accounting students are notorious for blaming time for their poor performance in assessment tasks.

I challenge students to vindicate themselves of blame before blaming time. They are encouraged to perform the assessment task without time pressure, and then to mark it and compare the result with the one achieved under time pressure.

Result? Often, students see for themselves that they could take four hours to do a one-hour assessment task, and they would still get the same result. They realise that they haven’t actually understood parts of the work that was examined. They need to re-examine the books, and also re-examine themselves. Were they really prepared? Did they put in the work necessary for their success? Or did they just rely on the lecture input? If they did, it’s time to admit that they didn’t keep their side of the bargain – being active in and accountable for their own learning.

**Alternative Teaching and Learning Environments to Cater to Diversity**

A 2011 student evaluation stated: ‘Sometimes I will just be left behind during the lecture.’ What happens if a student feels this way? The bad news is that he or she has to catch up. The good news is that lectures aren’t the be all and end all of learning.

Taking into account the fact that students learn in different ways and at different paces, the ADP offers a variety of teaching structures/environments outside the large-group lectures, and these alternatives provide opportunities for students to engage with content in their own way.

Owing to the huge diversity of the class, I have found that teaching structures need to be re-evaluated and changed to suit the learning needs of individual cohorts and the changing student body – structures cannot remain constant from year to year.

The opportunity to investigate and create alternative environments to meet the needs of student learning provides a valuable learning experience for me, in that I am constantly challenged to think about teaching and learning in different ways and to create spaces that are effective in enhancing student learning. Various teaching structures provided within a course should feed into each other and, while providing support in alternative ways, clearly integrate the course objectives between them.

**Examples of Support Structures**

**Small-Group Tutorials**

Alongside the large-group lectures, it is mandatory for students to attend small-group tutorials. There are approximately 12–18 students assigned to each tutorial group, and the tutors of these groups are senior students on the ADP studying Accounting as their major.

The tutorial is a space for the student to consolidate knowledge of accounting concepts covered in the previous week’s lectures. In tutorials, the students tackle and complete unseen assignments and receive feedback, either through discussions or graded assignments. They
participate in problem-solving tasks, working in partnerships, in groups and/or independently. The following evaluation by a student highlights both the reality that lectures are pressurised in terms of time and the value of the tutorial in remedying this: ‘The tutorial assignments take the lecture example to a more in depth understanding of the work.’ A considerable number of students will not fully follow what is taught in lectures. A small-group tutorial provides a second chance: students can engage with work on a deeper level and in a more intimate way. The following evaluation from a student again highlights the need for students to work with and learn from one another, and the fact that a smaller environment for learning is often less threatening: ‘It is easier to ask questions in tutorials because there are few people and I can engage with other students.’

Tutorials provide a place where students and/or tutors can identify areas in the curriculum that are problematic. Through the tutors, I am provided with feedback on the effectiveness of the lectures and teaching materials as well as on students’ individual progress.

Learning Channel

The Learning Channel Live sessions are based on Mathematics and Science television programmes in South Africa. The host of the show answers telephonic questions posed by high-school pupils preparing for final examinations in the final year of school.

In my initiative, students are asked to prepare questions for the sessions, based on work covered up to the point of the session being held (that is, in lectures, tutorials and textbook readings). Attendance at the sessions is voluntary unless I feel, through consultation with a student, that extra support is required, in which case attendance for that student is made compulsory for a period of time. Student evaluations have indicated that the initiative is valuable and gives students the opportunity to be actively involved in, responsible for and committed to their own learning process.

Head Space

I introduce this support forum by asking students the rhetorical question, ‘Where is your head in all of this?’ The Head Space sessions address various issues around course content feedback on tests, and any other pertinent issues that students may raise over the semester. Head Space is different to the Learning Channel in that I usually identify, following input from students, what is to be covered in a session, and I work around that. I might provide a task to be completed and marked by students, with immediate feedback, I might divide the students into teams for a quiz session, or I might use the time to relook at a concept with which students are continuing to have difficulty. Attendance is voluntary.

Hot Seat and One-On-One Consultation

The hot seat is staffed by a tutor in Accounting, who offers one-on-one help to students. Consultation is help offered by me, as lecturer, and is either one-on-one or in a group, depending on how students arrive at my office. Both the hot seat and consultation are offered to students during specified time allocations each academic week.

Chat Room

The chat room on VULA provides an online space where students can ask me questions regarding course content in the comfort of their own environments and in a way that is public, but at a distance.

The chat room gives the students who are not confident to speak up in class an opportunity to ask their questions in a less threatening environment. This is illustrated by the following student’s
comments about the chat room: ‘I have been able to get useful information through other people’s comments on the site although I have not asked questions myself. It gives people who are shy to ask questions in class a chance to ask questions anonymously.’ I also believe that the chat room is important for literacy – both reading and writing. When students have to type out a question, they have time to think and reflect on the way that they word the question in order to express themselves coherently and clearly in order to be understood. Students get an opportunity to read other students’ questions, too, and see the importance of making oneself clear in the process of communication.

Revision Sessions Prior to Final Examination

Revision sessions provide a space in which consolidation of course content takes place and continuing problems with certain content are revisited and revised. These sessions happen at a time when students need to be interested and understand where and why they are going wrong in the subject if they are to pass and progress with their degree. Mind mapping in these sessions helps students to see both a bigger picture, identifying key areas within a topic, and the underlying concepts that should be understood within this. Exam technique is also discussed with students in these sessions.

Tutor Development

Sourcing and Training

I spend a great deal of time sourcing tutors from senior students in the ADP studying Accounting as their major. Not only do students apply for the position of tutor out of their own interest, but I am also constantly on the lookout for students – from the first year of study – who I believe have the academic and personal attributes to be effective role models and tutors in their senior years at university. I keep track of their academic record until they are in a position for me to invite them to apply for a tutoring position and to give them the opportunity for development and growth in a leadership position. Tutor training is mandatory and is usually over a period of three days. Usually I run the tutor training myself and link it closely to the objectives of the tutor review process as described below.

Tutor Review

Over the last eight years I have developed, and continue to refine, a tutor-review process that aims to continually train and evaluate tutors while carrying out their duties. At the beginning of 2005, I stopped tutoring formally each week, in order to investigate what was happening in tutorials. I had two main questions:

- Was the tutor sufficiently equipped for his/her role?
- Was there evidence to suggest that the students’ learning was being enhanced by the tutor?

To answer these questions, I wrote down in detail what I witnessed in a tutorial and gave oral and written feedback to the tutors. I wanted, through this process (which became known as “Tutor review”), to create an environment of accountability. Candidates for tutoring positions were told at the outset about this review process in which they would have to participate. The method used to review tutors is not intended to create a threatening environment for them. Rather, in an honest and supportive way, I set out to equip the tutors with skills necessary for their positions and to focus on their development. Through continuous ‘on the job’ tutor training, I aimed to further
Chapter 6: Innovations in a Financial Accounting Course

develop, add to and refine their skills as tutors in the hope that these skills will not be limited to
the tutorial environment at university, but can be transferred and applied in their work place in the
future.

I believe that this process of review has added tremendous value to the tutors as individuals,
the students being tutored and the course itself. The process not only provides immediate
feedback to tutors on their performance, but also allows me to evaluate how the tutorial space is
used and what needs to be put in place to improve tutorial delivery. Further, it gives me an
indication of how students are responding to the tutorial system and the course as a whole. Table
1 outlines what I look for when reviewing tutors. During tutor training, students are given the
guidelines for review, so that they are aware of the kinds of things that I will look for when
reviewing.

Table 6.1: Broad outline of guidelines used for tutor review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue and use of space</th>
<th>i.e. layout linked to format of the activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resources available &amp; practical equipment needed</td>
<td>i.e. chalk, whiteboard pens, dusters, overhead projector (OHP) pens, OHP transparencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial resources needed for tutorial</td>
<td>i.e. tutorial guidelines, tutorial questions, tutorial solutions, tutorial tests, tutorial activities, students’ submissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of board work</td>
<td>Writing on the board/OHP (legibility, size, where on the board)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on the board, i.e. how have the resources been used to achieve aim of explanation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body language and use of personal space</td>
<td>Does the tutor look the students in the eye and engage with each one during a tutorial session?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the tutor look over the students’ heads towards the back of the tutorial room?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the tutor look just at one particular student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the tutor depend on a space to feel safe, e.g. standing behind a desk, standing in one place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the tutor move into the students’ space to create one-on-one communication or really know what a student is up to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of voice and vocabulary</td>
<td>i.e. tone for emphasis (too loud, too soft, clear, unclear)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the tutor aware of their pronunciation of words?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the tutor sensitive to various language diversities in the class that might have difficulty with tone, pronunciation etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the vocabulary used appropriate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the vocabulary too simple or too complex?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the vocabulary accessible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the tutor aware of various languages spoken in the class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the tutor encourage use of mother-tongue vocabulary (code-switching) amongst the students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the tutor use other languages if spoken, to allow students to access new terms and concepts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment created</td>
<td>What environment is created in the tutorial by the tutor?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do students feel safe, insecure, threatened?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How is the environment created?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are students given praise?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are they encouraged?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the tutor show an interest in their progress?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code of conduct, i.e. respect and discipline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there evidence to suggest respect between student and tutor, and between student and student?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is this achieved?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is group work mixed in terms of diversity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a code of conduct that is evident?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are students quiet when the tutor is addressing the class?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the tutor quiet when being addressed by a student?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the tutor ensure that the class listens to a student who is addressing the group?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are students late for the tutorial on a regular basis?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions asked by tutor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are questions asked?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are they asked? (tone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of questions asked (low order vs. high order)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are they used to assist with or mediate students through a task (i.e. used as a scaffold)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are they used just for an answer to be provided and to move on to the next question?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions asked by students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are questions appreciated? (e.g. That’s a good question.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are questions used as a valuable teaching tool?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are questions encouraged?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do questions make the tutor feel insecure, edgy?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answers provided by tutors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do students listen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are students satisfied?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are students unsettled when the tutor has provided an answer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do students feel that they can challenge the tutor’s answers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the tutor respond when they have provided an incorrect answer?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answers provided by students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are answers encouraged?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are answers actually waited for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are answers actually listened to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are answers used as a valuable teaching tool?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are answers scorned?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are answers praised?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Promotion of interactive learning
Chapter 6: Innovations in a Financial Accounting Course

| **Is the tutor aware that he or she is not the focus point of the tutorial – the student is.** |
| **What kind of role does the tutor play in a students learning – trying to achieve facilitator role between the student and work being covered?** |
| **Does the tutor ensure that the students are engaged in their own learning and interactive during a tutorial?** |
| **How does the tutor ensure/achieve this?** |

**General**

- Are the tutorial guidelines followed to achieve the aim of the tutorial session? (Ensuring that work is linked to lectures etc.)
- Is an unnecessary and inappropriate level of detail provided by the tutor in relation to the first-year level of Accounting?
- Does the tutor show an inappropriate authority on what work is important and not important?
- Is the tutor in support of/loyal to the aims of the ADP and course?
- Does the tutor bring in an individual sense of creativity in a tutorial (within the aims and framework of work expected to be covered)?
- Does the tutor own the session and really value and take seriously the role of tutor?

Tutors are given further ongoing support through detailed written tutor guidelines and weekly meetings. Each week, tutors are required to e-mail me feedback on the week’s tutorial sessions. This is an invaluable exercise as it provides feedback on tutor experience as well as on how students are responding to and coping with course content. It also allows me to identify student issues and to deal with these appropriately in the alternative teaching structures.

**Case Study: Development of a Tutor**

Siya was a promising student in my first-year class and achieved excellent marks in his second-year Financial Accounting course. Following an interview, I appointed him as a tutor and felt that he would be a perfect role model and a symbol of hope for first-year students.

After Siya’s first tutor review, I walked out feeling despondent. What had I done? I had been irresponsible. I had misjudged his potential. I had placed him in a position that he was not equipped for, despite the tutor training.

I was naïve, and I had been too liberal in my belief in him. It’s one thing to believe in a student’s potential; it’s another to follow through on this when the going gets tough and one is responsible for the learning environments of already vulnerable students. I had to put my money where my mouth was, but bursting Siya’s bubble was not an option. I was determined to trust him and believe that he wanted to learn and that, until proven otherwise, and with the necessary input, he could rise up and look his role as tutor straight in the eye. The following is an excerpt from the first tutor review:

> I would like to see the layout of the venue changed (this also depends on the structure of the tutorial). The way that it was laid out together with the class size does not enhance interaction between students and tutor. Possibly change to a U or a circle. You tended to stand in the same place while talking to the class. Move into the student’s space to engage with them more one on one and to examine their work … There is also an overhead projector available for use. Don’t be afraid to use this. It is sometimes much more practical than the board and you keep facing the class when using this tool.

Following one-on-one sessions with Siya, talking honestly about his weaknesses, auditing other tutors’ sessions with him and getting him to think how he could improve himself and what he wanted to gain from this experience, he was ready for his second review.
I was dumbstruck when I walked into the tutorial session. The students were engaged with Siya and he had their full attention. An excerpt from the second tutor review reads as follows:

I noticed that you were working on the overhead projector instead of the board. We discussed the advantages of this after your previous review and it was recommended that you make use of this tool. I noticed the change in the communication with the students immediately! You were constantly engaged with them as you did not have to turn to face the board and you were able to be closer to them and worked within their space as opposed to at a distance … Well done.

There was no doubt in my mind that learning was taking place and that Siya felt proud of what I saw and his being a part of it. When he went on to tutor in the second-year Financial Accounting course and he was asked why he wanted to tutor, his response was: ‘I feel alive when I tutor.’ In The quotable teacher, Albom (cited in Howe 2006) asks, ‘Have you ever really had a teacher? One who saw you as a raw but precious thing, a jewel that, with wisdom, could be polished to a proud shine?’ I would hope that Siya’s answer to the above question would be a ‘Yes!’, because I saw him change from a raw gem to a shining jewel, and the change was awe-inspiring to witness.

Conclusion

I absolutely love what I do and when I step into a teaching space, I feel alive! Coupled with this is the enormous responsibility and accountability that I have in the position of working with and in young people’s lives. Through critical reflection and formative evaluation through a course, I strive to teach effectively for the most part and to get things “right”. But above all, there is so much to learn from the students. I often walk out of a lecture knowing more than I did when I walked in, and for me this is the beginning of true learning that I take away, reshape and use to teach those who have taught me.
Chapter 7: Thinking Out of the Box in Mathematics and Statistics

Tim Low

I teach the Statistics and Mathematics courses to students on the Commerce Faculty Academic Development Programme (ADP) at the University of Cape Town (UCT). This chapter aims to show how Mathematics and Statistics can be taught in a fun and practical way that enhances the learning and these subjects’ relevance to undergraduate Commerce students.

Key Qualities to Develop in a Course and Techniques For Achieving This

I want all students to walk away with an understanding of how Mathematics and Statistics can benefit their lives, not just their degrees. Through the course, they will see how numerical common sense can both enhance their learning and understanding of Accounting and Economics and develop in them the key qualities necessary for critically examining real-life uses of Mathematics.

To make this happen, I want to take students on a journey using real-life examples, mathematical history, technology, stories, personal experiences and fun.

To enable students to understand the mathematical concepts and how they relate to their degrees, examples are taken from real-world situations or, if fabricated, they are presented as if they are taken from the real world. For instance, a newspaper article might be used to introduce a topic that can be developed as the material becomes comprehensible to the students (see the example in the box below).

After feedback on informal or formal assessment, I encourage students to revisit lecture theory and then the assessment tasks, so that they can retest their understanding and identify for themselves where the weak link is in their understanding of a section, concept or principle.

Example: Newspaper Article

THE CAPE TOWN ECHO
University students find new frog species

On a recent Education Development Unit Student Organisation (EDUSO) walk a couple of students discovered an army of unknown frogs in a ravine.

One of the students, Nomathemba Mdladla, would only indicate that the walk had taken place somewhere on Table Mountain. ‘We don’t want this army disturbed or their habitat destroyed,’ she explained.

Another student, Vimal Samji, produced some photographs of the frogs and some measurements that they had made before carefully returning the frogs to their habitat.

Source: Idea adapted from Porkess 2005.

When the example above is used, the names of two students from the current class are included in it. I just hope that they are attending the lecture in which this happens! This injects a bit of fun into the example. A set of data representing the frog measurements is then introduced to the class, and this is followed by a discussion of the types of statistical method that could be used to obtain some insight into the frog species, with reference to topics recently covered in the course.
At the start of the next day’s lecture the topic is developed with a follow-up article or email/Facebook message ‘quoted’ from the newspaper, giving more information. The box below provides an example.

**Example: Follow-Up Message from Facebook**

*THE CAPE TOWN ECHO*

*ECHO Talk (emails)*

I recently came across some old notes about frogs on Table Mountain written in the 1960s which I was about to throw away but having read your interesting article about the findings made by the EDUSO students I wondered if there was any relation. The notes indicated that the average length of the frogs was 78 mm.

*Harriet Smyth, via Facebook*

Additional qualities that I wish to develop in students are time management and an ability to work together with other students. It is also important that students learn to be respectful and respected. The ways in which I aim to achieve these goals are addressed later in this chapter.

**Finding Out What Students Already Know and Building on This**

Various opportunities allow lecturers to identify what students already know, in order to be able to build on this knowledge base. Initially, on the first day of the semester, before students begin their first-year course in Mathematics for Commerce, each of them takes a Mathematics-skills test. This test assesses school-level algebra by means of 30 multiple-choice questions and lasts for a maximum of 75 minutes. No calculator support is allowed. The test is used to establish each student’s understanding of key algebraic concepts, and provides the basis for any intervention required to support the student’s learning of Mathematics.

Although this initial test does not carry any marks or have any consequences for the way a student performs during the year, it is used as a basis for advice for both students and lecturer as to whether it would be best for the student to follow a single-semester course or an augmented year-long course. (The augmented course follows the same material offered in the semester course, but spread over two semesters of an academic year.) The test does not specifically place a student into one or the other course.

Students who select the year-long course – a voluntary selection, although students are advised about their choice, based on their performance in the Mathematics skills test – have the opportunity to revisit some of the key material initially taught in school, but of which they need a reminder or might not have a full grasp.

Students most often struggle with Mathematics when their foundations in the subject are weak. The skills test and revisiting of the school-level material can strengthen these foundations, and once this support is in place students are able to move forward reasonably quickly. This principle of going back before moving forward is key in working with all first-year undergraduates, especially students who might not have English as their home language.

During the course it is essential that the lecturer grasps the knowledge gained by students so that misunderstandings can be addressed. This is particularly important in subjects such as Mathematics and Statistics, in which knowledge is compounded daily and any slight misunderstanding can have grave consequences very quickly.
Chapter 7: Thinking out of the Box in Mathematics and Statistics

The key to mastering any mathematically based subject is practice. To ensure practice is beneficial, students need carefully scaffolded questions and time to think and reflect on the material they have been studying and through which they have been working.

The main medium of testing in courses at UCT is summative assessment, which usually includes two or three tests during the course and an examination at the end of it. Approximately two weeks are usually taken in marking and processing these tests, and during this time further material is being taught. Thus, although the tests expose difficulties encountered by the students, this exposure often comes too late for lecturers to address these difficulties – students’ misunderstandings have already been carried through to other topics.

It is my view that formal assessments (exams and tests) are not accurate measures of how well a student has understood the material. Assessment should be an ongoing process, through practice in lectures, homework and tutorials. It is therefore imperative that lecturers make use of formative assessment and feedback which encourages student participation and discussion, and which tracks student understanding throughout the course. The following are some of the techniques I use to assess students continuously:

- **Traffic lighting:** Students are given three pieces of card – green, orange and red – which they can display at any time during a lecture to indicate if they are following, are unsure or are not understanding the material being explained or the questions being asked.
- **Clickers or voting:** Students are asked to use multiple-response tools (electronic clickers) or simply to raise their hands. These techniques provide a sense of their understanding. This can then be built on or used as a basis to reflect on the material in question.
- **Consultation:** Consultations are held with individual students and small groups. Encouraging students to consult with the lecturer outside the classroom facilitates a very powerful way in which to assess the knowledge a student has gained in lectures and tutorials. Such consultation enables students who feel less confident about asking questions during lectures to have the space to interact with the material and discuss it with other individuals while receiving reassurance from the lecturer.
- **Tutorials:** Small-group tutorials are held, which give students the space to work further on material being covered in lectures and thus enabling an essential aspect of Mathematical and Statistical understanding. Here students have a different guide (the tutor), who may explain material slightly differently from the way in which the lecturer presents it, and students are encouraged to discuss the topics and work through questions together.
- **Group work:** Students are asked to work in groups in class, while the lecturer walks around the classroom checking on individuals. Lectures should be about doing Mathematics and Statistics, rather than about note-taking, which doesn’t aid understanding and often prevents students from listening. When the amount of note-taking is decreased and active participation in a lecture is increased, students can discuss material with their neighbours, work on problems and be visited and observed in their group. Individual misunderstandings can be addressed, and if many groups have similar misunderstandings then the focus can be shifted back to the whole class and a problem can be worked through together.
- **Question-and-answer sessions:** Such sessions are used during lectures. It is crucial that the lecturer employs carefully constructed questions so that students are given the time to reflect and discuss the materials being covered.

**Engaging with the Diversity in a Class**
Chapter 7: Thinking Out of the Box in Mathematics and Statistics

I believe that no matter what a student’s background is, he or she has the ability to understand the material I am teaching. I communicate this to the students, and aim at creating a safe environment where they can speak up and contribute confidently in the classroom.

Every student brings something unique to the classroom, and I have faith in each person’s abilities. In my lectures I encourage collaborative learning, thereby empowering the students and embracing their diversity.

Students have the opportunity to speak in their own languages by discussing mathematical concepts and explaining their understanding to each other in groups. The students are then able to feed back to the rest of the class, and this then encourages a wider discussion and questioning.

The students bring to the lectures a great deal of diversity in terms of knowledge, learning styles and backgrounds, which adds a richness to the understanding of both the lecturer and students’ peers.

**Inspiring Students to Learn and Engage, Rather Than Simply Preparing For Assessment**

Through the lecturer’s use of real-life examples, the students get a feel for the subject; this helps them understand the material better because it contextualises the material (see the example in the box below). This approach helps them to become enthusiastic about the subject because they can appreciate its relationship with other courses.

### Example: Anscombe’s Quartet

The students are asked to investigate the following set of data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Set</th>
<th>1 - 3</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obs. No.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>8.04</td>
<td>9.14</td>
<td>7.46</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.95</td>
<td>8.14</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>7.58</td>
<td>8.74</td>
<td>12.74</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.81</td>
<td>8.77</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>9.26</td>
<td>7.81</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>9.96</td>
<td>8.10</td>
<td>8.85</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>7.24</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>10.84</td>
<td>9.13</td>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>7.26</td>
<td>6.42</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By the time they have worked out the mean, variance, standard deviations, correlations and coefficient of determination, students will notice that, comparing each of the respective x-variables and y-variables, there is no difference:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 - 3</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variance</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard Dev</strong></td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Correlation</strong></td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multiple R</strong></td>
<td>0.667</td>
<td>0.666</td>
<td>0.667</td>
<td>0.667</td>
<td>0.666</td>
<td>0.666</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 7: Thinking out of the Box in Mathematics and Statistics

However, after plotting scatter plots of the data, students can observe the following differences:

\[ y = 0.5001x + 3.0001 \]

\[ y = 0.5x + 3.0009 \]

\[ y = 0.5002x + 2.9993 \]

\[ y = 0.4998x + 3.0035 \]

Another method I use to inspire students to learn and engage is to have discussions during lectures, allowing students to brainstorm what a particular topic encompasses.

Further, my lectures are well structured and relate the material currently being covered to previously taught material, in order to ensure continuity. I constantly refer to previously introduced examples to develop new material. This ensures that students have a frame of reference and can better appreciate how different topics are related.

Since my lectures are not about note-taking, their focus is on talking and doing. By circulating around the class and responding to individual queries and misunderstandings, I show that every student matters. This gives each individual student the chance to ask something he or she might be afraid of asking publically.

**Using Feedback to Students as a Learning Activity**

If students fail a test, they are given the opportunity to attend workshops to revise the material. This is particularly important because misunderstandings in Mathematics or Statistics are carried through into further topics.
Another method I use is to ask students to identify past students’ mistakes and to correct them. The box below contains an example of such an activity.

**Example: An Activity Requiring Students to Identify and Correct Past Students’ Mistakes**

*Question from a Past Exam For a First-Year Course in Statistics:*

The following is part (c) of a question from the STA100F Exam 20**. The answer given by one of the students follows the question. The student has made a number of mistakes. Your task is to:

(a) Point out each mistake
(b) Explain why it is a mistake
(c) Give the correction

*The Question (STA100F Exam 20**) Background:*

The irradiation of food to destroy bacteria is a growing phenomenon. In order to determine which one of two methods is best, a scientist took a random sample of 62 one-kilogram packages of minced meat and subjected 31 of them to irradiation method 1 and the remaining 31 to irradiation method 2. The bacteria count was measured and the following statistics were computed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method 1</th>
<th>Method 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\bar{x}_1 = 86$</td>
<td>$\bar{x}_2 = 100$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$s_1^2 = 324$</td>
<td>$s_2^2 = 841$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The scientist noted that the data are approximately normally distributed.

(c) Do these results allow us to infer at the 5% significance level that the mean bacteria count with method 1 is less than 90?

*The Student’s Answer (STA100F Exam 2002):*

$H_0 : \bar{x}_1 = 90$

$H_1 : \bar{x}_1 < 90$

Rejection region: $t < -t_{0.025,30} = -2.042$

Test Statistics:

$$t = \frac{\bar{x} - \mu}{s/\sqrt{n}} = \frac{86 - 90}{\sqrt{324}/\sqrt{31}} = -1.237$$

Conclusion: Since $-1.237 > -2.042$, accept the null hypothesis and conclude that there is insufficient evidence to infer that the mean bacteria count with method 1 is less than 90.

After each test, students are given time to review the feedback from the markers. They are encouraged to discuss with their peers the reasons for their errors and identify how they can avoid making the same mistakes in the future. Where a large sample of the class show similar misunderstandings, we go through the questions again.
Chapter 7: Thinking out of the Box in Mathematics and Statistics

As was described earlier, clickers in the lectures give immediate feedback regarding students’ understandings or misunderstandings, which can then be reviewed.

Using Technology

Technology offers an opportunity for students to visualise mathematical concepts that they might not understand, providing a sense of the richness of the diversity we are studying. Technology also facilitates students’ increased access to their lecturer and peers and their engagement with the material.

The Mathematics and Statistics courses are offered with UCT’s supporting open source web-based learning environment, VULA, which is similar to WebCT® and Blackboard® and is readily accessible to students through UCT’s campus-wide internet provision. (This provision includes the students’ residences at UCT. Not all students are able to secure accommodation in a UCT residence, however, and this means that students do not necessarily have ready access to the internet off the campus, but many students do have smartphones (cell phones) that enable them to go online – the high costs of this access being one potential obstacle.) VULA enables students to access past tests, past exams, lecture slides and notes, forums, and chat rooms, and to receive announcements, manage tutorial groups, and submit work, among other things.

Where no internet access is available and a student’s cell phone permits it, cheap communication has been made possible by MXit software. It costs 1 cent to send a message on MXit; the message can be picked up by a recipient via their cell phone or PC. Messages are limited to 160 characters, similar to an SMS (cell phone text). Figure 1 shows a screen grab of student–lecturer interactions using MXit.

Figure 7.1: Screen grab of student–lecturer interactions via MXit

Cell phones cannot communicate mathematical formulae, so students have to describe a mathematical problem in English, which then has to be summarised in 160 characters. The person receiving the message then has to decode the message back into mathematics before replying. MXit, originally set up for communication, has actually created learning opportunities, as
students have to understand the problem to encapsulate their difficulties in only 160 characters and enable someone else to interpret their query.

During some lectures and workshops it can be very helpful to obtain instant feedback from students related to specific questions. The use of multiple-response tools (clickers) was mentioned earlier in this regard. This technology has enabled all students – including the shyest and most introverted ones – to participate in lectures without the fear of other students knowing how they responded. The lecturer is able to find out how many students have not responded, and each student is able to see how he or she compares to the class as a whole. Time limits can be set for answering the questions to ensure a reasonable pace is maintained. Afterwards all students can receive feedback on their responses, which compares these responses to those of the whole group.

Making Students Accountable

When students arrive at a higher-education institution, they are not only there to gain a qualification. For most students, this is the first time they have left home, and they arrive in an environment that feels alien – a university is a little town on its own. To support this transition, daytime programmes at UCT are highly structured. As a result, time management is the first aspect of university life with which students experience difficulties.

To start making students accountable in Mathematics and Statistics lectures, a few basic ground rules of lecture etiquette are established on day one of lectures:

- Lectures start on time.
- Nobody is permitted to enter a lecture once it has started.
- If a student is going to be late then it is their responsibility to inform the lecturer before the lecture starts.
- A register is taken daily, which students sign.
- The register is captured daily. A minimum of 80 per cent attendance is expected at lectures.
- Lectures are a safe environment where a student is able to ask and respond to questions without the fear of ridicule from fellow students.
- When someone is speaking the class will respect that person and listen.
- If you are asked to work on a problem during the lecture, sitting around twiddling your thumbs is not an option. Discuss it with your neighbour but have a go!

These lecture guidelines (rules) are surprisingly easy to uphold, especially when lectures do start on time and when the first student(s) are refused entry into the lecture for being late!

To ensure that no student has the excuse of not being able to inform the lecturer if they are going to be late, they are given the following contact details: email address, Facebook account, telephone numbers, Blackberry Messenger details, WhatsApp details and MXit account, all of which can be accessed via the lecturer’s smartphone up to the second a lecture starts.

The daily register is very useful (even for a lecture of 250 students): it encourages students to attend and identifies when a student is missing too many lectures in a row. Follow-up emails are then sent out to find out if a student is managing (they may be experiencing sickness, time-management problems, or stress, for example). At the same time it can be quite interesting to see which students start pairing up and taking similar days off in a week, or if Monday is a bad day for some, for example! These patterns can also be fed back to the students, which can create considerable discussion amongst the class and also have the added benefit of encouraging them to feel that they are not alone and that their lecturers take an interest. This helps to re-enforce the sense that the lecture is a safe environment that we are all sharing.
Chapter 7: Thinking out of the Box in Mathematics and Statistics

Students are also required to participate in a weekly tutorial. This is a space for students to work in small groups to discuss new material in the Mathematics and Statistics courses and put into practice some of the tools they have encountered during the lectures.
Introduction

Increases in numbers of students participating in higher education, and the linguistic and social diversity that they bring with them, have been similar worldwide, although reasons for widening access may have not been the same in different parts of the world. For instance, in many developed countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America, these changes have come about as a result of policies and discourses of increasing participation and widening access to higher education. In such countries, these policies and discourses have led to significant increases in mobility for both ‘international students’ crossing national borders and local adult students entering higher-education institutions from the workplace. In contrast, in South Africa these changes came in the post-apartheid era, when institutions historically reserved for white people opened their doors to black students, who were more multilingual than their white counterparts and who had come from schools that had been poorly resourced during the apartheid era.

However, although the reasons for expansion and inclusion in higher education might have been different, the consequent complexities and the need for change in institutional structures and approaches to teaching and learning have been similar. Literature addressing higher education in a global context often foregrounds language-and-literacy issues. This foregrounding occurs because language is an essential resource in all teaching and learning, and because globalisation has led to situation in which students and staff in the higher-education institutions of the twenty-first century are far more multilingual and multiliterate than was the case fifty years ago. On the campus of the University of Cape Town (UCT), 70 different ‘home’ languages were ‘declared’\(^1\) at the last count, and many institutions in developed countries would not regard this statistic as unusual. This linguistic diversity in higher-education institutions where English is the medium of instruction presents challenges both for learning and for identity.

This introductory chapter to the language-and-literacy section will focus particularly on the need to cater to a more diverse multilingual student population. Many of these students are first-generation students (see June Pym’s Introduction to this volume for more on first-generation students), and therefore they may find reading and writing in academia a tremendous challenge. The chapter will provide a brief background to the complexities of language in the South African higher-education context. It will then consider the ways in which the language-development staff have framed the language-and-literacy issues theoretically, before describing the multipronged approach we have adopted in the Commerce Education Development Unit (EDU) at UCT in order to address students’ language, literacy and learning needs.

Language Context in South African Higher Education

\(^1\) To collect this data students are asked to state what they regard as their home language. These figures are therefore often unreliable because of the high status enjoyed by English in the perception of both students and South African society at large, and because many students speak multiple languages in the home.
Following the transition to democracy in South Africa in 1994, the new government recognised 11 official languages, which were the main languages spoken in the country. At that time, this was the most multilingual state policy in the world and it positioned South Africa at the forefront of international language-policy development. Yet, there are, as always, many contradictions between policy and practice. Although the student population in South African higher-education institutions exhibits a vast range of home-language backgrounds, the language of instruction in these institutions has continued to be either English or Afrikaans. Materials such as university textbooks have not been available in any of the South African languages other than English and Afrikaans, and the appropriate academic registers for African languages are only in the very early stages of development. It was in this context that, in 2002, the government issued the Language Policy for Higher Education, requiring all higher-education institutions to include in their rolling plans the strategies they had put in place to promote multilingualism and ensure the development of all the official languages as academic/scientific languages (Ministry of Education 2002). In response to this UCT developed a Multilingualism Plan, and in 2004 launched the Multilingualism Education Project to begin the process of promoting multilingualism in its institutional policies and practices and making the campus more of a home to all students. The Multilingualism Plan underlined the fact that, some ten years after the transition to democracy in South Africa, the medium of instruction at UCT still privileged those who had had the benefit of developing a significant linguistic competence in English, and made academic curricula inaccessible to speakers of English as an Additional Language.

**Theoretical Underpinning of our Teaching and our Research**

Our main aim as language developers in this context has been to facilitate students’ access to, and proficiency in, the medium of instruction and the literacy practices of the university. In the context of a changing student population, we have emphasised socially situated approaches to reading and writing, drawing on the tradition of New Literacy Studies (Street 1984; Street 1993; Street 2001; Gee 1996). We see literacy as a set of social practices, which means reading and writing are linked to what people do in the material and social world. This brings context to the fore, and it has meant that we have had to develop a reflective approach so that our research has focused on trying to understand the values, beliefs and practices of students from rural and ‘township’ backgrounds in South Africa. In addition, we have had to identify the gaps and the connections between the students’ literacy practices and the range of academic literacy practices in UCT. Viewing language and literacy through the lens of social practice has also emphasised the need to embed writing and reading in specific discourses, not only so that students see the relevance of learning to read and write in ways appropriate to the particular discourse, but also so that they learn through reading and writing. Because Economics is the most language-rich discipline that Commerce students study in their first year, we decided to integrate language-and-literacy teaching in the discipline of Economics.

The findings from a research project (Paxton 2006; Paxton 2007) which used academic literacies research methods to understand student writing in Economics indicated that students in the transition phase from school to university develop ‘interim

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2 Academic literacies research is an emerging field that draws on a number of disciplinary fields such as applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, anthropology, new literacy studies and critical discourse studies. This research represents a significant shift in research on writing, away from a focus on text (Halliday and Martin 1993; Swales 1990) to a focus on practice, and Lillis and Scott (2007) argue that academic literacies research constitutes a specific epistemology, that of literacy as social practice, as well as an ideology, that of transformation. In academic literacies research, ethnographic methods are key.
literacies’. The idea of ‘interim’ literacies allowed us to move away from a ‘deficit’ view of student writers in the university to capture the way these writers were building on and reshaping past discourses to assist them in the process of learning new academic discourses. This study showed that probing the hybridity in student writing allows us as educators to understand more about the learning and meaning-making processes (Paxton 2007). Insights into students’ developing schemata allow us not only to bridge the gaps between institutional expectations and students’ models and practices, but also to explore alternative ways of meaning making in academia. However, the research also indicated that many of the practices and discourses that students bring with them from other contexts may conflict with the requirements of academic discourse. For instance, drawing on situated meanings to make sense of new concepts can often complicate, rather than assist, the process of discourse acquisition.

This research has assisted in the design and development of the academic-literacy module in Economics (see chapter 9 in this volume, Collaborating by Design, by Gideon Nomdo) and has provided a model for research and design for language-and-literacy embedded courses in a number of other disciplines.

A Multifaceted Approach to Language and Literacy

In the complex multilingual environment described above, we have found it crucial to address the development of language and literacy in a multifaceted way. The chapters that follow will describe the approaches we have used and draw on our experiences and our research to illustrate the impact that this is beginning to have.

The first strand of our approach is the academic-literacy module in first-year Economics, mentioned above. This module has been through many cycles of redesign and development as the needs of the student population and the Economics curriculum have changed over a period of 16 years. We have found it to be important that we are proactive and flexible because the context is ever evolving as the student population changes and UCT’s policy adapts to new national policies and changing circumstances. In addition, academic discourses are not fixed and monolithic, but dynamic and changing. This module will be described in more detail in Chapter 9.

The second strand to this multifaceted approach has been that the expertise gained in the academic-literacy course in Economics has been disseminated and shared more widely, so that it has served as a model for integrating content and language in other courses in the Commerce Faculty and UCT in general. The faculty seminar (see the chapter ‘A Leadership Vision’ by June Pym, in this volume) known as the Commerce Education Group (CEG) has been an essential strand for the work of the EDU; it has allowed a conversation to develop around language-and-literacy teaching in the faculty. In the fairly informal context of these seminars, lecturers teaching mainstream courses have debated issues around learning in a multilingual environment, and they have learned more about the teaching of writing, design of writing tasks, and assessment rubrics. They have also had opportunities to workshop assessment and feedback methods. Academics in the faculty are thus beginning to have a common language for talking about writing, and language-and-literacy seminars for CEG have frequently led to opportunities for consultation and collaboration with staff members in the faculty who are interested in embedding academic literacy in their curricula. For instance, essay writing has now been integrated into Economics courses at every undergraduate level, and language developers have been involved in feedback and discussion with the Economics Department as it engages with perfecting the design of tasks and the teaching of writing to large classes (ranging from approximately 100 to 1 300 students).

A further strand to our multifaceted approach has been the establishment of a satellite Writing Centre in the Commerce Faculty (see the chapter ‘Possibilities and challenges in a faculty-based writing centre’, by Megan Riley). This has meant that the writing consultant staffing the Writing Centre has specialised in writing practices of the disciplines in the Commerce Faculty and that,
being based in the faculty, she is more accessible to students than the writing consultants in
UCT’s central Writing Centre are. Her services are available to all students in the Commerce
Faculty, and she has adopted a holistic approach that works at the intersection between writing
consultant, teaching staff and students, assisting students with their writing and feeding back to
course convenors on the difficulties students experience with writing tasks.

Finally, multilingualism will be highlighted as the fourth strand. The chapter ‘Valuing
Linguistic Diversity’, by Moragh Paxton, in this volume) will describe a number of initiatives
that have focused on valuing and acknowledging students’ multilingual backgrounds. A relatively
new, but potentially highly significant, initiative by the Multilingual Education Project is the
development of online glossaries for first-year students in South Africa’s eleven official
languages: isiXhosa, isiZulu, isiNdebele, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda,
Xitsonga, English and Afrikaans. These glossaries are currently being piloted with first-year
Economics students. In the Language and Communications course in Economics we have run a
project that allowed students opportunities to enhance their understanding of new concepts by
means of informal peer-group discussion in their home languages. The research that ran parallel
to this project (Paxton 2009; Paxton and Tyam 2010) showed that students’ learning of economic
concepts was enhanced by the use of the home language alongside English.

In the three chapters in this section we will outline our approaches to language-and-literacy
teaching and use students’ stories as well as some of the findings from our research and our
evaluations to illustrate the ways in which our multipronged approach is beginning to have an
impact
Chapter 9: Collaborating By Design: Language Embedded in an Economics Course

Gideon Nomdo

Introduction

The Students studying the first-year Microeconomics course within the Academic Development Programme (ADP) in the Education Development Unit (EDU) in the Commerce Faculty at the University of Cape Town have to take a Language and Communications module within this course. This module is a collaborative initiative aimed at integrating academic literacy into the discipline of Economics through the use of Economics content. The project has been running over a sustained period of 14 years, and involves a language development specialist working closely with the convenor of the Microeconomics course to maintain and build upon that sustainability.

The Language and Communications (L&C) module has, since its inception, involved experimentation with a variety of formats for achieving the integration to which it aspires; through an in-depth process of trial and error, Language Development staff who work with the Commerce EDU have settled on a particular model which we feel has done just that. Given the complexities faced by South African institutions of higher education in addressing the varying levels of preparedness (amongst black students in particular) for operating within the higher-education sector, we have adopted ‘a collaborative philosophy of learning’ (Kezar 2005) approach to our work. Such an approach has made us consciously aware of the need to reflect critically on our own teaching practices. It has also forced us to identify, confront and re-evaluate the ways in which we can change and add value to student learning, so as to facilitate more effectively students’ integration and acceptance into disciplinary discourses, while simultaneously boosting the levels of graduateness. The notion of graduateness referred to here concerns ‘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’ (Bowden et al. 2000 cited in Chetty 2012, 3). This definition of graduateness combines the specific technical skills and knowledge required by the degree, with general transferrable skills which relate to ‘attitude and behaviour’ (Chetty 2012, 3).

Our teaching-and-learning practices have enabled the collaboration between language specialists and Economics lecturers to develop a distinct identity that has come to be widely acknowledged amongst higher-education academic-development (AD) circles both within and outside the University of Cape Town (UCT). Our collaborative module has recently received official recognition from UCT in being granted a Collaborative Educational Practice award in December 2009. In his official notification to us, the deputy vice chancellor chairing the committee for this award stated:

Your application based on your Language and Communications in Microeconomics project was found to be an excellent example of collaborative educational practice ... your project addresses the challenge of developing a sustainable integration of academic literacy practices into the discipline of economics ... We commend you on the strong system of evaluation and continuous improvement that you have developed ...

This collaboration model clearly serves as an excellent example of good practice in terms of embedding academic literacy in a discipline. This chapter will outline and define the nature of the collaboration between language and Economics. The authorial voice in this chapter will be from the perspective of the language development specialist, in order to show how specialists from
outside a particular discipline are able to make meaningful contributions to learning in the
discipline, through constructive collaboration strategies. The manner in which we integrate
academic literacy into Economics content will be explored; this will be complemented by some
discussion of the impact of the interventions, from the perspectives of various players in the
collaboration. The intention is to show the applicability and adaptability of this model as an
innovative teaching and learning tool, and to convey the importance of a student-centred
collaborative approach to learning, which takes seriously the nurturing of students’ sense of
belonging and security in the world.

The Mission and Structure of the Collaborative Model

A core component of the EDU programme in Commerce is the Economics H (whole year) course.
The Economics H course lecturer, hereafter referred to as the discipline specialist (DS), and the
language development specialist (LS) have embraced the challenge of teaching a highly diverse
group of students, whose members’ varying levels of proficiency in English\(^1\), impact on their
learning of the literacy practices associated with the discipline of Economics. The collaboration
between the LS and DS takes to heart the issue of promoting access – a central mission of AD
work in the South African context. The idea of access is related to the provision of a safe space in
which to increase and facilitate the integration of disadvantaged students, within an ethos of
social justice and redress. As part of the commitment to improving access and redress to those
previously disadvantaged by the apartheid regime, UCT aligns itself with S37 of The Higher
Education Act, No. 101 of 1997, which states that South African higher-education institutions
‘must provide appropriate measures for the redress of past inequalities and may not unfairly
discriminate in any way’. In order to identify previously disadvantaged students, UCT has
developed ‘redress categories’ for those identifying as black, coloured, Indian, and Chinese. Such
identification by race is part of the statistical reporting procedures required by the Department of
Higher Education and Training, and allows UCT to put appropriate redress measures in place
(University of Cape Town 2012). This visible commitment to the process of transformation within
the academy – aimed at increasing access to black students at a more nuanced and systemic level –
is complemented by openness to innovative teaching-and-learning practices; this openness, too,
has been incorporated within the collaboration between language and Economics.

In terms of structure, questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’ are significant in determining and guiding
the developmental processes that frame cross-disciplinary collaborations such as ours. The
answers to these questions all point to the importance of the contexts in which collaborative
partnerships evolve. Such contexts shape the nature and texture of the partnerships formed (see
Amey, Eddy and Ozaki (2007) and Sheridan (1992) for more insight into this). The overview of
the South African higher-educational context outlined by Moragh Paxton in the introduction to
this section has provided some important insights into the degree of underpreparedness amongst
many first-year black students (who are often also first-generation students). This
underpreparedness, caused by the disadvantage prevalent in many such students’ schooling,
means that they find their first encounters with academic discourses that are new to them –
Economics, for example – cognitively demanding and highly decontextualised. This is especially
apparent amongst many of the students in the Economics H course, because a large percentage of
them do not take Economics as a school subject.

What was happening at UCT before the collaboration between language and Economics came
into being? This question locates the current debate about collaborative practice. An answer to it
necessitates some brief reflection on a few key historical moments that led to the recognition and

\(^1\) Current figures show that about a third of UCT students do not regard English as their home language
(Language Development Group 2009).
institutionalisation of AD programmes at UCT as legitimate and necessary responses in addressing issues of access and equity within South African higher-education. In order to address the needs of black students who spoke English as a second language and were finally being allowed to enter UCT (an institution reserved for white students during the apartheid era), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses were offered. When unpacking the merits of EAP courses, EAP practitioners realised that these courses tended to homogenise black students and ‘to perpetuate deficit models of student competence’ (Thesen and Van Pletzen 2006, 6). Furthermore, the decontextualised and generic nature of the content of these EAP courses made it difficult for students to integrate the knowledge they gained from them into the discourses of the respective disciplines they were studying. Clearly, a new strategy was needed to address the weaknesses of EAP. Further, with the onset of democracy in South Africa in 1994, the tone for transformation in education was set, creating a space for the adoption of collaborative teaching-and-learning models. This move was in line with UCT’s transformation focus, which, as was mentioned above, was aimed at developing change and increasing black students’ access at a more nuanced and systemic level, achieved through the core concepts of ‘development’ and ‘student diversity’ (Thesen and Van Pletzen 2006, 7).

The shift from the EAP model to the current discipline-specific strategy has ensured that the nature of the service we deliver to students has changed from an isolated and marginal learning experience to one that is meaningfully and purposefully integrated into the discipline. The integration and embedding of academic literacy in the discipline of Economics have, therefore, signalled a space in which students learn and engage in a much more proactive way. This initial shift to the current L&C module in the Economics course set in motion a long and arduous process of conceptualising and developing a meaningful collaborative teaching strategy geared towards adding value to students’ learning experiences and graduate attributes. The L&C module is taught alongside the Economics curriculum, and it has reached a stage at which it has become fully sustainable. The skills that are taught are also transferrable and can be applied elsewhere in the students’ curriculum.

The Nature of the Collaboration

Over the past few years, we have gone to great lengths in sharing the nature of our work with various faculty-based colleagues at UCT. During these interactions the same important questions are always posed: ‘What is the L&C module?’, ‘How does it work?’, ‘How is it structured?’, and ‘What do you teach and what is the relationship with Economics?’ Our responses have, over the years, become increasingly informed and sophisticated, in conjunction with our growing understanding and appreciation of our roles within the collaboration. The dynamic nature of the L&C module means that it has always been responsive to the needs of both students and the curriculum. Change has always been managed and maintained as part of the reflective practices of the LS and DS. These important elements of change and reflection are emphasised in Sheridan’s definition of collaboration: ‘an overarching framework ... a conceptual umbrella’ (Sheridan 1992, 90) that takes cognisance of different ways in which educational goals can be achieved. The construction of such an understanding of collaboration implies that the collaborative process ‘is not absolute; it is not a concrete product, mechanism, or technique. Rather it is a dynamic process that enables educational personnel to access and develop new, creative alternatives’ (Sheridan 1992, 90).

These elements of change are applied, of course, in relation to core elements of the L&C model. These core elements act as constants, as mechanisms that hold together and provide a framework in which the collaborative teaching that takes place in the L&C module can be recognised as a legitimate part of the teaching-and-learning arena within the higher-education context. As such, the L&C module satisfies the conditions under which official courses are
developed and sanctioned by UCT, in that the module meets the assessment-practices criteria that academia uses to evaluate students’ learning. The following are some further core elements that provide the L&C module with credibility within the Commerce Faculty and UCT as whole:

- a detailed course outline
- formal assessment process forming part of the Economics coursework mark students achieve
- a combination of lecture-, tutorial- and workshop-type teaching models
- formal planning and execution around the content to be taught
- a course reader comprising a combination of texts, worksheets and study resources
- a web-based tool for adding additional materials, making announcements, managing and listing tutorial groupings and venues, and highlighting issues in the web-based chat room; an online detailed course evaluation is attached to this web tool.

The Initial Meeting: Making a Meaningful Impression

The adage that first impressions have a lasting effect immediately springs to mind in considering the rawness and naivety that students bring to our first encounter with them, for it is exactly these characteristics that provide us with the scope for surfacing possibilities for growth and development. At the first meeting of the class, the L&C staff member taking the class (in these classes such staff members are referred to as ‘tutors’, for reasons that will be explained later) provides the students with the course outline and the course reader. These set out the rationale for the L&C module, specify the proposed learning outcomes, and draw attention to what is expected of the students in the course. We spend some time talking through this with the students, giving them an opportunity to absorb and process the information. Space is also provided in this meeting for the students to identify what it is they hope to gain from the module and what their expectations are of the course lecturers. This provides an important opportunity for identifying and agreeing upon the code of conduct the class will adopt. Thus, from the outset, students are involved in the decision-making process so as to encourage them (or to at least present them with the opportunity) to take ownership of their own learning and development. We regard this initial meeting as the ‘getting to know how things work around here’ talk, aimed at encouraging students to unpack some of their first real encounters with academic discourse in higher education. Faculty members who have become familiar with everyday challenges facing new students who have been deemed historically disadvantaged may, without vigilance, become desensitised by familiarity with these issues, and may neglect to acknowledge that first-year students face the arduous task of having to negotiate classroom discourse together with the institutional culture of the university setting. Many EDU students do not have the benefit of a tradition and ethos of higher education; for them, being confronted with messages about how ‘we do things around here’ (Jansen 2004, 1) can exacerbate feelings of alienation and otherness as they negotiate their transitions into university life. We recognise the need for creating spaces in the formal teaching setting to talk about issues of identity and transition. Since orientation programmes are often overwhelming for first-years, and overloaded with information, the formal setting of the L&C classroom creates an opportunity in which students can be encouraged to reflect more deeply on their experiences. We therefore devote some time in our first session to asking students to grapple with the question ‘Who am I?’, so as to encourage them to articulate the nature of their transitions into their newfound status as students. We enter into a conversation about what it means to them to be a university student. An important part of this conversation is to help students unpack and acknowledge some of the fears and aspirations that they carry with them to UCT. There is a sharing of life stories, with the L&C lecturers sharing some personal encounters related to their own transitions within the higher-education setting. Through the sharing of these stories, we hope to convey to students that change can be difficult, and that
finding one’s feet and direction in a higher-education setting often takes courage, commitment and perseverance.

The element of sharing experiences also sets the tone for putting in place mechanisms for developing trust in the teaching-and-learning relationship. We regard this element of developing trust as an important part of the foundations of successful collaborative relationships – it signals from the outset that the L&C space is a safe space for talking not only about what one learns, but also how one experiences and relates to what is being learnt. We regard these elements of developing trust and a safe space for expressing the self – which are often deflected to the margins of academia as soft options amidst the hardcore practice of producing real knowledge – as crucial for achieving the teaching-and-learning objectives of the L&C module in Economics. For these students, having a safe space to be heard – through their talking and writing about the impact of economic issues on real life – adds value to the teaching-and-learning process, and helps them to negotiate and learn the language of Economics in a more meaningful and integrated way. We think of the L&C space as the place where theoretical concepts are spoken and written into life – where they become real. The conversational atmosphere developed in the L&C classrooms helps boost students’ confidence and reassure them of their legitimate status as Commerce students. The notion of being a ‘person in process’ (Herrington and Curtis 2000) is an important indicator of the dynamism informing the development of our students (and also our own) identities, and in this sense certainly informs our collaborative philosophy towards learning as a dynamic and lifelong process.

The final component of the first session of the L&C module is dedicated to the writing of an autobiographical narrative. Students, having gone through the process of sharing their stories with each other, present their individual stories on paper, talking about their families, their schooling experiences, their language histories, and their feelings about coming to UCT. The weaving of their language histories into their autobiographies is revealing, especially since a large percentage of our students have English as a second or additional language; their autobiographical pieces, handed in to the L&C tutors at the end of the session, serve as a diagnostic tool, providing a sense of their competencies in writing English. The pieces also provides us with significant insights into the backgrounds of the students, and some of the issues, concerns and frustrations the students carry with them in their first interactions with the university setting, as these representative extracts from such (unedited) autobiographical pieces show:

This year I’m at varsity and everything is done in english and I know that I have to do my best in order to know english because there is no other way. I know I cannot change the past but I can make my future a success regardless of the difficulties I had on my literacy life. I believe that I am going to survive varsity because I am willing to learn (English second language black student).

My problem is that I can’t speak in front of many people especially English (English second language black student).

Now that I am in varsity I am finding it really hard communicating with other people. It bores me having to speak English the whole time because some of the things I want to say only hit home in my own language (English second language black student).

The first out of my siblings to enter into a University ... I have enormous Pressure put on me coming from all angles (English first language coloured student).

The value we extract from this type of information informs and sensitises our approach to the type of collaborative teaching we do, and makes us aware of our students’ varying backgrounds, on one level, and, on another, of the common anxieties spanning such heterogeneity in relation to the students’ transitions to university life. The four autobiographical snippets presented above reveal such commonalities and provide a sense of some of the anxiety, anger, frustration and,
even, guilt experienced by Commerce EDU students around language and writing issues and their statuses and locations in the EDU programme. Students’ language and cultural identities, their ideas about race and class, and even their sense of socio-historical locations embedded within South Africa’s apartheid past all overlap and intersect within these autobiographical narratives, impacting as they do on students’ sense of belonging within the university setting. The intersections of markers such as race, class, gender, culture, language and sexuality are cumulative in nature (Crenshaw 1995) and act to create hierarchical structures within the university setting. The intersecting identity markers (of being, for example, a black, rural, working-class, township-schooled, female, Zulu student in an institution historically reserved for white students) can therefore culminate in producing forms of otherness based on a deficit model of difference (see Crenshaw (1995) for more insight into the ways in which socially and culturally constructed categories interact and intersect on multiple levels in creating social hierarchies that marginalise black women in western society).

South African higher-education institutions faced with the challenge of accommodating the new intake of first-generation, black, working-class students often lack the expertise (and sometimes even the inclination) to address these students’ needs in a coherent manner. This lack is evident from observation of the institutional social culture operating at some higher-education institutions, the nature of their curricula, their methods of teaching, and their assessment practices, all of which give preference to students with specific types of capital, while marginalising others who do not possess, or who have very little of, such capital (Jansen 2004, 1–2). This giving of preference develops into hierarchical hegemonic structures of white, English, middle-class norms and values residing in higher-education institutions regarded as being ‘historically white’ institutions. It is against this backdrop that black students have to locate and measure their identities and sense of acceptance. Such hierarchical structures are not the things about which we tell our students, but they do inform our practice of making students aware on a general level that not everyone starts on the same footing (for example, some have English-first-language backgrounds, whereas others come from backgrounds with English as a second or additional language). Therefore, by identifying the common elements in our students’ early impressions of life at UCT, we are able to address the notion of shared experiences in our collaborative teaching model. In an attempt to level the playing field in L&C classes even more emphatically, we go a step further, as was mentioned earlier, and identify L&C staff members as L&C ‘tutors’, rather than as ‘lecturers’, to reduce the power differential between lecturers and students.

But how does making such shared knowledge available benefit the students? Over the years, our experiences in the classroom have shown that students often have similar problems and concerns about using academic discourse in expressing themselves adequately and eloquently. Sharing such knowledge has led to students’ status being less that of outsider, and to the feeling that we are all in this together, which provides a sense of common purpose that complements the aims and objectives of our collaborative L&C module and the Commerce EDU as a whole. This type of information-gathering process makes us aware of what our students recognise as deficits within their newly acquired university identities. This information then provides the collaborative endeavour with the necessary motivational stimulus to promote student agency so that they ‘become the actors in the learning process’ (Bain 2004, 52), actively engaged in turning their deficits into gain.

An Integrated Approach to Language and Writing in Economics: Design, Frame, Consolidate

The L&C module in Economics H has, since its inception, been advocating for a form of assessment that readily combines verbal, reading and cognitive writing skills needed in the
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discipline of Economics. We have gradually moved from a model in which oral presentations formed part of the official assessment to one which features three written assignments. The LS and DS collaborate in the design of these essay tasks, finding appropriate readings and drawing up the marking criteria for each task. The DS identifies the core question to be answered, while the LS goes about framing, scaffolding and contextualising the task at hand in a way in which students are able to see how the different parts of the question relate to each other.

The design of the essay tasks focuses on conceptually demanding aspects of the Economics curriculum, such as economic systems, the production possibility curve, gross domestic product (GDP), and supply-and-demand theory. Each essay is structured so that students need to explain and define the theoretical concept addressed in the essay, and then apply their understanding of that concept to a real-life situation, such as the rise in oil prices or the impact of the 2010 Soccer World Cup on South Africa’s economic growth. The topic of discussion is always current, and offers students the opportunity to draw on academic texts as well as media sources.

The essays also include a visual or graphic component, which requires students to construct graphic representations of their written explanations of the real-life economic issue under discussion. In this way, they gain experience of working with and analysing graphical data alongside their written explanations, which is an important practice within the discipline of Economics. Students thus learn the discourse of Economics in a concrete way and consolidate their learning through writing. Students seem to appreciate this, as the two (unedited) quotations below indicate – it enables them to grapple with and apply their Economics knowledge in a practical and focused way:

I felt pleased because I didn’t do Economics last year… The economics language helped me to tie things up with the subject and related the theory I got in lectures with real life – practical examples… It clarified things (student evaluations, 2009).

... it gave me a broader understanding of economics. I can go home and watch the news and understand when they talk about economic growth and oil prices (student evaluations, 2009).

Marks for the three essays count towards the final summative mark a student receives for Economics. The essays deal with such central concepts that a thorough understanding of them is crucial to passing or failing in Economics. The move towards including the written assignments in the composition of the year mark for Economics has cemented the integration of L&C into the Economics course, and is indicative of the high level of functionality and the applicability of our collaborative model.

It is worth noting that the move away from making oral presentations a formal part of the assessment has not minimised the importance we attach to improving our students’ ability to express themselves in English, the language of business. On the contrary, the emphasis on the oral component has been fully integrated into the design of the classroom activities, in which students have the opportunity to engage in small-group discussions, not only in English, but also in other languages, if English is not the home language. For English second language students who struggle to grasp some of the more complex concepts in Economics, this approach to group work has functioned well, especially in cases where there has seemed to be no mother-tongue equivalent for certain English terms and concepts used in Economics.

Our approach to group-learning activities tends to facilitate and consolidate the level of clarity students express in the report-back sessions, which are presented only in English. We have learned valuable lessons in this regard. As mostly English first-language speakers, faculty staff, including we ourselves, sometimes have a tendency to favour interactions in the class which are more fluent and in line with standard spoken English. Very often, staff tend to address only a specific group of students in the class (most likely those with whom we presume to share similar background experiences). Staff do this subconsciously, without even realising that equal attention
is not being paid to the class as a whole. In a setting in which students are highly sensitive about their English-language proficiency and cognisant of the historical hierarchical positions their home languages and English occupy, it is necessary to guard against the use of English as a mechanism that exposes difference, rather than promotes solidarity. A ALS was made acutely aware of this some years ago while reading his students’ evaluations of the course; one student spelt out emphatically that the LS should try not to speak to, and spend so much time with, a particular group in the class to the exclusion of others. Given the compositions of that LS’s classes that year – they included a large contingent of English, middle-class, coloured and Indian students – the LS realised that through this unintentional favouring, he was in fact ostracising the very students for whom these courses are primarily designed. Upon reflection on our collaborative practices, we regard this as a lesson well learnt, and one of which we constantly remind ourselves and which we share with colleagues. The sharing of such lessons has come to form an important core of our collaborative teaching ethos, and is something we embed in the training and induction of new tutors.

The adoption, therefore, of the making of allowances and creation of spaces for the incorporation of multilingual approaches to teaching and learning the discourse of Economics (as in the group-work example alluded to above) has increased the value of both what these students learn and how they learn. In the South African context – which features 11 official languages, although English alone is the formal medium of instruction at UCT – this approach of encouraging students to use their home languages to unpack Economics discourse certainly complements our educative and transformative mission.

The approaches explained above to designing and unpacking essay tasks in the classroom have empowered students to take the initiative and to become agents of their own learning, thereby reinforcing the value-added approach advocated by the Commerce EDU programme. This approach has produced a particular type of teaching-and-learning space, in which students are gaining and developing confidence in their abilities to express themselves and to establish meaningful relationships with their peers and lecturers. The following representative observations made by students about the teaching atmosphere in L&C classes provide a clear sense of how this unfolds:

The atmosphere was highly encouraging and positive. I formed a strong relationship with the tutor and my peers and as a result my learning and understanding of the topics were enhanced.

Very interactive. Comfortable classroom atmosphere. The tutor often listened to even the most ridiculous opinions and points of view without shattering judgement.

The atmosphere in class was great. Everyone felt free to express their thoughts and opinions. Discussions were always encouraged which enhanced the learning process.

The Tutorial Space: Practising What We Teach

Tutorials are often regarded as one of the most important learning spaces within the structures of higher education. Tutorials run concurrently with lectures, and are traditionally used to complement, unpack, problematise, prioritise, verify, put into practice and consolidate the broad theoretical and conceptual frameworks covered in lectures. The distinctive feature of tutorials is incorporated in the mandate that they cater for the learning needs of small groups of students, which in Economics ranges from 15 to 25 students, on average. The tutorial space presents students with the opportunity to engage on a one-to-one basis with their discipline tutors (usually honours, master’s or doctoral students) about the lecture content. Tutorials therefore act as the pulse of a course, providing valuable insight into the amount and nature of learning that is taking place in the course as a whole. In the Economics H course under discussion, there are two distinct
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types of tutorial spaces: one where Economics content is dealt with explicitly (as outlined above),
and the other where the discourse of Economics is taught. The L&C module takes the form of the
latter.

The Economics H L&C tutorials run only in the first semester. There are two L&C tutorials
per week, which are compulsory for all students doing the Economics H course. L&C tutorials
are geared towards teaching students the literacy practices (problem solving, discussion, reading
and writing) required for succeeding in Economics. The module’s compulsory nature makes it a
formal part of the requirements for the Economics H course.

We face certain challenges in teaching students. Their varying proficiency in English
language, mentioned above, is one such. Another challenge, both in terms of the Economics
lectures and the L&C tutorials, is the variation in the students’ academic preparedness. The
Economics H students’ educational backgrounds range from poor, rural, township schools to
wealthier, urbanised, former-Model-C schools (schools reserved for white learners during the
apartheid era). In other words, the range is from schooling backgrounds that are poor and working
class to backgrounds that are middle- and upper-middle class. Such diversity poses particular
challenges regarding the teaching of academic literacy skills: some students feel somewhat
resentful at having to take a course on reading and writing, skills which some students from
former-Model-C schools feel they have already acquired and at which they are proficient.
Addressing these students’ needs while also catering for those who need the basic academic
literacy skills means that this type of teaching is multilayered; a combination of higher-, middle-
and lower-order questions is used to appeal to the different levels of sophistication students may
be able to apply to prescribed written tasks. This combination is evident in the structure of the
course reader (which will be dealt with in some detail later on), which contains worksheets that
attempt to challenge students at various levels. For example, in a section dealing with the
importance of introductions and conclusions in academic essay writing, students are provided
with an introduction, which they then have to analyse and critique by addressing questions about
it. These set questions become progressively more cognitively demanding, which allows
individual students to engage with the issues at different levels. The box below features an
exercise from the course reader: an example illustrating the use of Economics content to teach
academic literacy.

Exercise 2

Consider the following example of an introduction to an essay ...:

Gold mining has an important impact on the economic development of the country in which it is
mined. There has been a steep increase in the price of gold in SA. Supply and demand graphs are
important here.

Based on your reading of the above introduction:

a) What do you think the topic of discussion is?
b) Which issue or issues related to this topic does the essay wish to address?
c) Do you think this introduction has provided enough information concerning what the reader
should expect to see in the body of the essay? (Yes/No)
d) Can you think of any additional information that you would include to improve upon this
introduction? List these in point form.
e) Rewrite the introduction in your own words, taking care to include your suggestions for
improvement listed above in (d).

Further, a variety of teaching formats is used in the tutorial space; these include lectures,
discussions, individual work, group work, and free-writing exercises. In the free-writing
exercises, students simply put pen to paper and brainstorm a particular allocated concept, issue, or task, and are free to use diagrams, flow charts, key words, sentences, paragraphs or any combination of these. Figure 1 shows an illustration of some of the basic thinking that would be incorporated into brainstorming an essay-writing task. Free-writing exercises of this sort are useful in establishing students’ conceptual understanding of the task as well as their knowledge base.

Figure 8.1: Basic thinking incorporated into brainstorming an essay-writing task

These various teaching formats are aimed at providing a range of teaching methods to expose students to different modes of learning and knowledge-production spaces. Variation in learning formats presents learning and growing opportunities for students. During group work, for example, academically stronger students are placed in positions encouraging them to assume a teaching and mentoring role within their groups – for example explaining the more complex issues to peers who are struggling. This peer-teaching and peer-mentoring strategy builds confidence and communication skills and sharpens argumentative skills, since it is often the case that certain positions need to be validated (this mentoring philosophy is carried through in our own one-to-one consultations with students). Since the LS is not a DS, there is also an opportunity for the students to discuss and gain insight into their understanding of the Economics content they are taught in Economics lectures. The L&C course reader offers many opportunities for engaging in this type of group-work practice. The reader’s section on ‘Argument and evidence’, for example, asks students to complete an exercise based on an actual piece of text extracted from a first-year Economics essay (the entire essay is included in the L&C Reader for students to consult and to use as a basis for identifying, analysing and critiquing the academic literacy skills taught in the course). The box below, featuring another exercise from the course reader, provides a sense of what such a group-work task would entail. A single L&C session will frequently feature a combination of teaching formats: the workshopping of concepts and ideas for writing are the order of the day.

Exercise 3: Worksheet on Argument and Evidence

Read the following extract based on Student B’s Economics essay on GDP (found in the yellow pages section of this reader), keeping in mind the above explanation about academic arguments.

The use of GDP as an accurate measurement of economic growth and social welfare in society is misleading. In terms of economic growth, the marginal costs outweigh the marginal benefits and GDP takes no account of these costs. GDP takes no account of income distribution, or the
depletion and degradation of natural resources (Breslow 1996). GDP is merely a gross tally of products and services bought and sold, with no distinction between transactions that add to social well-being and those that diminish it (McConnel and Brue 2002). For example, tobacco industry sales and the costs incurred as a result of developing lung cancer due to smoking are both included as part of GDP.

In groups, discuss the answers to the following questions:

1. What is the topic of discussion in the extract above?
2. What idea do you think the author (student) is trying to convey about this topic? In other words, what is the main claim she is trying to make in this passage?
3. List the evidence she uses to offer support for this claim? Explain why you think this evidence is either reliable or unreliable?
4. What do you think the relationship is between the last 2 sentences in the extract? Does this relationship strengthen or weaken the overall argument.

Academic literacy theory has informed both the design of the L&C tutorials and the materials used, and its importance needs to be emphasised here. Our embedding of academic literacy in the curriculum is based on theory that sees literacy as a social practice (Gee 1998; Street 1999) embedded in context. Therefore, in L&C tutorials, we make explicit the discourses and social practices of Economics and provide students with language-enriched learning environments in which discussion, problem solving, reading and extensive writing practice can take place within the context of the discipline. This approach to teaching language in Economics has proved to be beneficial even for those students who did not initially feel the need to be taught reading and writing and who were resentful about being placed in the L&C class. This, and the representative comment below, shows that teaching academic writing skills through the use of discipline-specific content exposes to students the gaps between the demands of essay writing at school and that at university, thereby creating a fuller awareness in these students of the requirements of the academic essay:

I realised that just because you know how to do it does not mean you can do it well. My marks have improved consecutively (student 1, course evaluations 2011). At the beginning of the year I honestly thought that this class would be a waste of time, but as the course progressed I found out that it was extremely helpful in guiding me in writing essays and academic literacy, and it was not a waste of time after all. It is actually very beneficial to the rest of my university career (student 2, course evaluations 2011).

The following comments from students, made as part of the 2011 course evaluation, reveal the success of our collaborative project in illustrating for students the centrality of language and writing in constructing an understanding about Economics discourse, which we mediate through a variety of teaching formats:

The course showed things to me about essay writing which I never took into consideration. It also helped a lot as this was my first time writing an academic essay. It helped me see the vast different in how you write an academic essay compared to other types of essays.

Because essay writing at university is slightly different from high school and the topics that we are given to write about are very much different from what we are used to so this course has helped adjust to the way I’m expected to do things.
This course does not only help you for writing in ... economics ... but it is helpful for all academic writing needed, so having learned those skills I feel equipped for the rest of my tertiary life.

Collaborative Assessment: An Evaluative Exchange in Learning the Tools of the Trade

The importance of the tutorial system as a tool for gauging student learning was outlined earlier in this chapter. The Economics tutorial space furnishes the DS with a sense of how students are managing the Economics content, and the L&C tutorial space provides the LS and the DS with a sense of how students are using the language of Economics to express themselves as economists through their writing. The use of Economics terms and concepts to teach academic literacy within the L&C tutorials signals the necessity of the LS (regarded here as an outsider to the Economics discipline) having some basic understanding of the Economics terms and concepts used in the L&C teaching. LSs have to enter foreign and often uncomfortable spaces, in order to immerse ourselves in the disciplinary contexts in which we work. Similarly, the DS also needs to have some sense of how students are using the discourse of Economics and how this is revealed through their writing. Thus information about, understanding of and insight into each other’s work are crucial components of a successful collaboration.

To ensure that presence of these components, the Economics H–L&C collaborative project provides special staff workshops that provide spaces in which the respective collaborators can furnish each other with relevant information. These workshops create an appreciation amongst the collaborators of their respective practices, and of how these practices impact on the types of learning to which students are exposed; just as the tutorial space sets up particular relationships between students, disciplinary content and tutors, the Economics H–L&C staff workshops set up complementary relationships between collaborators around issues of practice. But the scope of the workshops is not limited to this: these workshops sustain the collaborative enterprise, and play a crucial role in creating formal staff structures within which the DS and LS are able to engage substantively as partners.

The collaborative workshops for Economics H and L&C staff are divided into those that deal with language and writing and those that deal with discipline-specific content.

Collaborative Staff Workshop 1: Focusing on Core Concepts in Economics

The first workshop deals with the core Economics concepts in the Economics essays, and is held in conjunction with the planning and structuring of the essay tasks. At this workshop the Economics lecturer, as the DS, informs the LSs – by way of explanation, illustration and application – how the Economics concepts are to be used in the essay task. Through this type of instruction, the LSs gain valuable insight into the Economics content knowledge required for teaching in an integrated intervention such as this. For those LSs who have taught on this course for several years, this workshop is a helpful refresher and adds layers to their understanding of the Economics content and develops the confidence of their teaching practice within the discipline. As a non-specialist in the discipline, each LS receives a copy of the Economics textbook and uses the information supplied by the DS to ground his or her own understanding of the material dealing with the conceptual components on which the essays are based. The LS therefore has the opportunity to obtain clarity about Economics concepts to be covered, and can be guided by the DS regarding what the students should know about them.

An important underlining factor should be emphasised here: namely that the designer of an academic literacy adjunct module, such as the L&C course, requires a fairly in-depth knowledge of the discipline and its epistemology, so as to gain acceptance from the DS and to facilitate the
design of the intervention. This in-depth knowledge goes far beyond the workshop training we provide to incoming temporarily employed L&C tutors. The member of staff who initiated and previously convened the L&C course module, completed a first-year Economics course to provide herself with the proper Economics grounding she needed to develop the appropriate reading and writing intervention in the Economics curriculum. Other LSs have been fortunate enough to benefit from her Economics knowledge and insights, through our ongoing work with her. Even though we are reminded by Jacobs (2010) that we are non-specialists within the disciplines, our familiarity with the discourse of Economics allows LSs to model and imitate the literacy practices of Economics.

Academic theory about collaboration is often difficult to apply, and getting it right takes time, patience and experimentation. Literacy specialists are constantly challenged by the level of proficiency required to deal with the more complex and technical components of the disciplinary content. Our experiences within the L&C collaborative project provide ample evidence of this. During the early days of our collaboration with Economics, weekly meetings of L&C staff were frequently punctuated with reports of the Economics students’ constant complaints about their L&C tutor’s lack of expertise within the discipline of Economics. These complaints posed a problem for the L&C convenor, given the limitations of the extent of the training possible amongst tutors who are employed for only one semester. It presented what seemed at the time to be a weakness in the collaborative model. Upon reflection, however, we realised that the problem was, in fact, an opportunity: to clearly demarcate language-based academic literacy teaching from the teaching of the discipline of Economics. The ‘problem’ forced both the language and the Economics collaborators to identify and claim responsibility for their respective spaces within the relationship. To a certain extent, this episode also forced language practitioners – with an obvious outsider status to Economics – to defend and validate the contributions we felt we could make in increasing the graduate attributes of Economics students in the Commerce EDU. The result was a sharpening of the mission, focus, and intended outcomes of the collaborative project, in which both the identities of language and Economics were clearly defined.

This type of clarity of focus has allowed LSs to adopt a straightforward strategy in the classroom to get around the problem of being viewed mistakenly as DSs: the L&C tutors simply state at the beginning of the module that they are not discipline specialists and that their knowledge is limited to a general understanding of the Economics concepts used to teach reading and writing practices within the discipline. This strategy creates an opportunity: it leads to a more thorough explanation of the various components of the collaborative model and how each functions. The LS is thus able to define for the students how the Economics content lectures and tutorials are structured to complement, and not replicate, the aims of the L&C tutorials. This distinction between the various components of the collaborative model makes it easier for complex economics questions to be referred to the space of the Economics tutorials – where senior Economics tutors provide specialised attention – while the L&C class deals with the manner in which students frame and structure their ideas in their writing. The students’ recognition of this division helps to focus different aspects of their learning.

**Collaborative Staff Workshop 2: Focusing on Essay Writing and Assessment Practices**

As a complement to the first workshop, discussed above, the language staff facilitate a second workshop for the DS and the Economics tutors for the course. This workshop deals with essay writing and assessment practices. It is used to discuss marking criteria and how these criteria should be weighted in the essay, and to establish through a process of discussion what constitutes good, average, and weak essays. Economics and language staff are tasked with marking a pre-selection of student essays for this workshop; it has become evident that there is often a tendency on behalf of Economics tutors to focus heavily on the Economics content in students’ essays, without paying much attention to issues such as essay structure, argument, cohesion, coherence
and student voice. The workshop unpacks individual marking practices and offers staff the opportunity to talk through their different approaches to the marking of essays, thus providing a valuable space in which language staff can raise awareness of the structural issues in essay writing.

As part of this process, Economics staff gain useful and practical insights into the intricacies involved in evaluating and providing meaningful feedback to students. For example, the LS poses the following question to Economics staff in relation to an essay that has failed by a margin of 3%: ‘What type of advice would you provide in your comments on this essay to guide and help this student perform better next time round?’ This type of question sensitises staff from within the discipline to the importance of providing feedback that will not only help students to recognise the gaps within their writing, but also suggest mechanisms for addressing these gaps. In this way, just as the language specialists become aware of the discourse of Economics by posing often mundane and seemingly unimportant questions to encourage the DS to make the practices of Economics more explicit, so too, through the active engagement with students’ essay writing – does the LS make the academic literacy practices language specialists use more explicit for those in the Economics discipline. This type of sharing of practices within the collaborative project is well established within the L&C module, and the impact on the L&C students has been such that those who have gone on to become Economics tutors have stated that the experiences gained in the L&C classes have provided a sound basis for their own tutoring practices in Economics.

The impact of the collaboration has not been felt only by the tutors who have come through the Economics H–L&C system. Amongst lecturers teaching students studying Economics on what are known as ‘mainstream’ courses – that is, non-EDU students – there has also been an increasingly deep appreciation of the importance of language. Discussions between EDU and mainstream lecturers on the subject of language input have led to a deepening of the collaboration. The LS has now taken on the additional role of assisting both EDU and mainstream lecturers in the first-year Economics course in evaluating Economics exam questions for language clarity. In addition, since 2010, language-based assistance has also been rendered in the structuring of the first-year mainstream Economics essay – input ranges from providing assistance for the structuring of an essay-writing workshop for students to training tutors about the effective use of questioning as a teaching strategy. These examples illustrate the extent of the impact collaborative modules such as L&C make beyond the Economics H course.

This type of recognition and appreciation underpin much of what our collaborative project aims to achieve, a sentiment echoed in the Commerce EDU programme’s 2009 review process. As part of this review, the collaborative L&C module was placed under scrutiny. In response, the Economics lecturer, in her capacity as a DS and a collaborator, was able to foreground the importance of the use of Economics content for teaching academic writing in the discipline. She explained the importance of the nature of this collaboration as follows:

The examples used in the Language and Communication course mirror the content covered in Economics lectures. Students are able to revisit economic language through a different lens with the focus on unpacking questions and content in Economics. Students are thus able to engage with the same content in different but complementary ways in two environments which make the Economics lectures run more smoothly.

This complementary element, which we view as a core outcome of our collaborative work, is perhaps the most vital piece of evidence that substantiates the success of our collaborative endeavour. The extent to which the different facets of the collaborative project are able to complement each other serves as a beacon of what can be achieved through establishing the common ground of a collegial base. It signals the importance of establishing common ground – a collective basis for identifying, consolidating and harnessing the different frames of reference which collaborations bring together – to achieve common purpose, a meaningful ‘complementarity of experience’ (John-Steiner, Weber and Minnis 1998, 776, 780). Such
achievement is process driven, and is built upon conflicts, upheavals, and pressures that pave its way. This ‘complementarity of experience’ derives from the ‘complementary domains of expertise’ held by those in longstanding collaborative relationships, whose roles mean that they: ‘not only plan, decide, and act jointly, they also think together, combining independent conceptual schemes to create original frameworks ... there is a commitment to shared resources, power, and talent (John-Steiner, Weber and Minnis 1998, 776).

The Course Reader: Thinking Collaboratively about Reading, Writing and Studying in Economics

The Economics H–L&C course reader is designed to assist in developing in students acceptable levels of proficiency in reading and writing in Economics. We regard the course reader as a dynamic entity: it is very much a work-in-process, subjected to being reshaped and reconceptualised in line with the course’s annual review process. There is a growing concern amongst academics about students’ general lack of interest in reading, and the problem seems to be exacerbated when it comes to traditional academic textbooks. In contexts such as that of UCT, where English is often not many students’ mother tongue, this formalised language of the academic textbook acts as a barrier to learning and the understanding of disciplinary discourse. It is not the simple act of reading per se that is an issue here, but instead the manner in which the students are able to conceptualise, contextualise and link the threads of what they read to the broader workings of Economics. It is thus only through the practical application of the theoretical concepts in the textbook that students are able to develop a more coherent understanding of how Economic constructs operate and function in the world.

Bearing this in mind, we developed the course reader as a collaborative tool that combines articles and extracts from Economics textbooks with extracts from newspapers, magazines, study guides, comic strips and the internet. Each of these is framed with guidelines and leading questions on how to read and navigate these texts. Since we place so much emphasis on application, provision is also made for students to apply the knowledge and skills they gain by completing specially designed worksheets forming part of the various sections of the reader (as seen in the exercise on introductions and the worksheet on argument and evidence extracted and displayed in boxes earlier in this chapter). Another example of this type of practical application in the reader can be seen in the worksheet in the box below: students are provided with several different texts and asked to analyse their language to identify where these types of text would be found. In the exercise given in the box below, students identify typical discourse features of various genres from different contexts. For example, the use of contractions and the level of informal register in text 4, when viewed in relation to the formal register and use of specific terms such as ‘price’, ‘quantity’, ‘downward slide’, and ‘shift of demand curve’ in text 1, forms the basis of a comparison between these texts. It is therefore not only terminology that the students need to identify – such as the long list of adjectives in text 3, which typify advertising –but also the style, structure, and tone present in these texts. The aim here is to demonstrate the ways in which certain types of language usage pertain to and frame specific types of texts. Helping students in identifying Economics discourse is therefore a direct outcome of this exercise.
Language in Economics: Worksheet on Different Texts in Their Contexts

In groups discuss these extracts from different texts and decide:
(a) Where the text would be found
(b) How you know this

Following last week’s upbeat presidential address, Many people waited with bated breath for the finance minister’s budget speech. Although social spending may not top the hit-list of topical issues it is critical. Without appropriate government intervention, the truism holds – the rich get richer and the poor poorer – and the have-nots will eventually take from the haves. [2]

At the price of $3 per bushel, the quantity of corn demanded will be 100 bushels, however if there is a decline in the price of corn to $2.50 the quantity of corn demanded will increase and this will result in a downward slide along the demand curve. If consumers’ taste changes and they become willing and able to buy more corn, this increase in the demand for corn will cause a shift of the demand curve to the right. [1]

The course reader also lends itself to use in a more general application of academic and study skills, thereby aiming to assist students in developing various competencies required to succeed in higher education. The second part of the reader is a resource section, comprised of:
- a glossary of key words often featured in essay questions
- notes on the issues surrounding plagiarism
- guidelines on how to understand and apply academic referencing conventions
- sample essays (as guides to the elements of effective academic writing, and its opposite)
- a basic English grammar guide addressing some of the common grammatical errors made by English second language students in their writing (the guide includes, for example,
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explanations of the rules of concord, the use of articles, and the correct usage of ‘there’ versus ‘their’ or ‘they’re’, and ‘its’ versus ‘it’s’)
• useful general advice on how to prepare for the examination
• specific advice on how to approach multiple choice questions, which have become the norm in Economics examinations at UCT.

The course reader has important residual value for the students; they can continue to consult its skills and resource components long after completing the L&C course. The appeal of the reader also extends beyond the confines of the L&C module, as has become evident from the increasingly frequent requests for the reader by both DSs and LSs both inside and outside UCT. These requests speak to the reader’s high level of adaptability as a collaborative teaching and learning resource. Each year the DS, Economics tutors, and the writing consultant in the Commerce EDU programme receive copies of the reader, which they then use and refer to in their interactions with students.

Requesting language specialists from beyond UCT to evaluate our work has proved enlightening. The L&C course was fortunate to be able to contract the services of a specialist with considerable experience in the field. She taught on the L&C course for some time before taking up employment as a Writing Centre Coordinator at another university. For those of us who had been working on the course for a number of years, her reflections on her own use of the reader were affirming:

The course workbook the students and teachers used throughout the semester was clear, well-structured and interactive, which made planning classes more focused, and also gave the students something concrete to work with, and to use to revise and practise the skills they were learning in class. The students were very positive about the workbooks in their course evaluations, and particularly liked the section on what a good, reasonable and weak essay would look like and how this was mediated through feedback; as well as the practical sections on paragraph writing and coherence. I have taught language and development courses for a while at other institutions, and found this to be one of the most helpful course workbooks I have used, and took a few lessons from it in terms of content and design (Sherran Clarence, personal communication submitted in support of the L&C module’s successful application for the Collaborative Educational Practice award).

The 2011 student evaluations of the L&C module awarded the course reader 93 per cent rating in the ‘really useful’ to ‘quite useful’ category. Content in the reader and that in the Economics textbook complement each other; through their use of the course reader, students feel more comfortable in the Economics course. This signals students’ awareness and growing acceptance of the role of language and writing in their study of Economics as a discipline. For example, students become much better able to grasp the relationships between headings and subheadings in texts, to identify the types of claims authors make, and to explain how these claims are supported and illustrated in the piece.

Such cross-fertilisation of skills embodies the spirit of collaboration being discussed here. By involving and encouraging students to participate actively in their own learning, collaborative models can create a discourse of empowerment whereby students can develop their own voices and earn the right to be heard. Within such collaborative teaching-and-learning contexts effective and meaningful communities of practice can grow, in which students can nurture a sense of belonging and recognise their own worth as legitimate members of an institution. The L&C classroom is where all of these pieces of what it means to operate within the discipline and be a competent student within the UCT setting come together in creating a foundation for growth.

Barnett’s (2004) unpacking of the term ‘being’ captures some core elements of the value-added dimensions of graduateness that can be achieved through the design of collaborative
teaching models such as the L&C module this chapter has discussed, and warrants some attention here. As a fully interactive and dynamic collaborative setting, the L&C class becomes a safe rehearsal space, where students are afforded the opportunity of learning about being and how to be in an environment that is multidimensional and complex. Barnett (2004) focuses on the challenges facing higher education in delivering pedagogy that prepares students for a world of uncertainty. He contends that knowledge production and skills production (core outcomes of pedagogy) are not sufficient in themselves for producing students who are able to operate and negotiate successfully a world framed by unpredictability and uncertainty. He puts forward the argument that epistemology needs to be complemented by ontological security, in which the student’s sense of ‘self’ and ‘being’ is nurtured to produce a person who is ‘capable of having some security in the world’ (Barnett 2004, 254). For this to happen, Barnett calls for an ‘openness of the pedagogical frames’ to come into play, giving rise to contexts in which ‘students come to know each other as persons; and to a degree, too, they come to know their teachers as persons’ (2004, 258). This fostering of the student’s sense of being, alongside knowledge and skills, concretises the development of student agency within our collaboration, and injects added value into the concepts of rehearsal space and complementarity already highlighted in this chapter. Barnett’s view of the type of student such an open approach to teaching and learning can produce is captured below, and is drawn on here to sum up aptly a core outcome of our own collaborative vision, one which is student centred and embraces the concepts of openness, personal growth and development:

What is being underscored here is the idea of confidence ... The students have, as it were, an indwelling in themselves, a confidence in themselves, an investment in their own selves that enables them to go forth into a challenging world. They have the confidence to speak in public ... to have a go, to launch themselves forth in a world that will furnish responses that cannot be entirely anticipated (Barnett 2004, 253).

Conclusion: Harnessing Agency Through Collaborative Practices that Empower

This chapter has gone to some length to show how we adopt a student-centred approach in the L&C classroom. The impact this approach has had on students is encouraging. The Commerce EDU students, both as individuals and as a group, must be acknowledged as, and given recognition for, claiming their status as legitimate members of the UCT community. In post-1994 democratic South Africa, the growing rate of economic inequality in the society threatens this recognition of their status. It is therefore worth remembering the challenges that historically hampered disenfranchised people’s access to higher education in South Africa, and to record progress in improving that access. Recognition of this history of struggle is particularly important in the Commerce EDU, located as it is within a higher-educational setting that has traditionally conformed to the dominant middle-class values at the expense of marginalising the experiences of working-class, non-traditional students. Therefore, students’ experience of a sense of belonging and of feeling at home in this space are important precursors to their effective learning (Mann 2008; Read, Archer and Leathwood 2003; Reay 2001). Collaborative practice allows faculty staff to realise that this sense of belonging that students need often has to be nurtured and developed in classrooms, especially since ‘academic culture is not uniformly accessed or experienced’ (Read, Archer and Leathwood 2003: 261). This chapter is written in the hope that its discussion reveals this act of nurturing as an important process in the type of collaborative model outlined here.

The chapter has emphasised the commitment it takes from collaborators to launch a project like that described here, and the kind of mission and vision required to render it a meaningful and sustainable intervention. The aim here is not to deter those wishing to embark on collaborative work, but to show where commitment to transformation of the learning experience can lead. Much more of this type of practice is needed.
The joint commitment from LSs and DSs in Economics to achieving a common goal – of being able to think, plan and act together – epitomises one micro-level intervention within the structures of the Commerce EDU; it is, however, also symptomatic of common types of practice operating within, and holding together, other micro-structures of the Commerce EDU. This ability on the part of the micro-structures to complement each other through form, function, and purpose makes the broader structure of the Commerce EDU such a valuable example of macro collaboration. The impact of administering this type of interdisciplinary collaboration constitutes a ‘framework for service delivery’ (Sheridan 1992, 92), which collaborators can draw upon and utilise as a meaningful resource for transforming teaching-and-learning practices and institutional cultures. As active contributors to a climate of change within the higher education sector, the Commerce EDU staff embrace this meaningful transformation to frame our approach of collaborating by design. As a macro model of educational development, the Commerce EDU has certainly put transformation into practice within the UCT context, and thus provided a framework the larger South African higher-education sector could employ.
‘I’m in commerce because I like numbers, not words.’

Academic writing in the different discipline-specific discourses in the Commerce Faculty at the University of Cape Town (UCT) poses a variety of challenges for many students, particularly speakers of English as an additional language. This, in turn, presents the challenge for staff, once they have acknowledged the need to address the difficulties faced by students, of finding the most effective ways of doing so. The writing centre in the Commerce Faculty was established over ten years ago to address these challenges, and it has created opportunities for the writing consultant staffing the Writing Centre to work both with students and staff in doing so. The development of students’ literacies is a cumulative process that requires holistic, systematic and ongoing interventions and a range of strategies. Given this, the work undertaken by the writing consultant is both proactive and responsive to the identified needs of students and staff in this regard.

This has meant, as far as possible, adopting a holistic approach to encompass the interrelation between staff, the writing tasks they design and assess, the students who do the writing, and what these students write. Such an approach is important to avoid a lopsided focus covering only the students’ writing, without sufficient regard to the significance of the contexts created for this by staff. The interrelationship between these aspects can thus be visualised as a Venn diagram with the writing consultant interacting, within each of the circles and at the intersection thereof, as a resource (see Figure 10.1).

Figure 10.1: Venn diagram illustrating the interrelationship between aspects of the holistic approach adopted by the writing consultant

Although these aspects are interrelated it is easier to discuss the working dynamics separately.
Chapter 10: Possibilities and Challenges in a Faculty-Based Writing Centre

Working with Staff

Working collaboratively with staff is essential to raise awareness of and to begin to address the many facets pertaining to the contexts in which students are required to write and the diverse frames of reference that they have for doing so. Without this intentionality, the default mode remains operative. One consequence of this is that unintended but very real difficulties are created for students by the assumptions and expectations that exist regarding their familiarity with the genres and the specific requirements and characteristics of academic writing in a particular discourse. As Street (2010, 349) has noted, ‘there is a growing body of literature … based upon this approach’, which suggests that one explanation for student writing problems might be the gaps between academic staff expectations and student interpretations of what is involved in student writing.

Students in the Commerce Faculty switch between disciplines and courses, and within each there may be different assumptions about academic knowledge, learning and the nature of writing. For example, in the chartered-accountant stream – the most popular stream – within the Bachelor of Commerce degree, students do courses in Financial and Management Accounting, Finance and Tax, Economics, Statistics, Mathematics, Business and Company Law, Information Systems and Business Ethics. As Lea and Street (2006, 368) have observed, ‘from the student point of view a dominant feature of academic literacy practices is the requirement to switch their writing styles and genres between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of literacy practices appropriate to each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes.’

There is a great diversity of students and a range of disciplines in the Commerce Faculty. It is important to recognise that having to ‘handle the social meanings and identities’ that each of these settings evokes is a much more fraught experience for some students than for others. Switching writing styles and genres and being able to utilise a gamut of literacy practices is challenging for most students, but is particularly so for speakers of English as an additional language. The challenge is compounded when the appropriate literacy practices and specific requirements for the assignment and the characteristics of the genre are not made explicit. Staff may omit to make these things explicit because of the assumptions referred to above. However, in some cases these omissions are intentional and stem from the attitude that students should be proactive and self-reliant in these matters. While self-reliance should indeed be built, insistence on it should not amount to an abdication of responsibility for providing the necessary learning opportunities. When this responsibility is abdicated in this way, students become confused, or they use the explicit requirements for the assignment in one course, sometimes inappropriately, in another because the assumptions regarding what is deemed acceptable practice remain tacit. Thus, for example, in some instances students will be encouraged to use headings in their essays, while in others this will be decried. In certain courses they will be instructed to use the first person in their writing, but, when they transfer this practice to other contexts, it will be penalised as non-standard. Certainly, students should not have to guess or find out the hard way who wants what. Comments during consultations with the writing consultant and in students’ evaluations of workshops reveal that students feel at a distinct disadvantage if the various requirements and practices of the academic discourse are not made explicit and mediated. It is therefore important that lecturers become aware of why the conventions of writing in their discipline, which they may take for granted, need to be made evident to the students.

Task design and assignment criteria are also central to creating the context for students’ writing. Some difficulties students experience in writing start with poorly designed tasks and inadequate or inappropriate criteria for assessment. It is evident that ambiguously framed tasks, a

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1 The academic literacies approach
lack of clear instructions, mismatches between the genre specified and the topic, and the misalignment of assessment criteria and the demands of the task all exacerbate the problems students encounter when writing. Work with staff on the purpose and design of the writing task and appropriate assessment criteria is therefore a pivotal element of the writing consultant’s work.

Collaboration with discipline specialists on task design and the assessment criteria to be used involves a process of interrogating each aspect of this in order to arrive at answers which can then determine the framing of the writing task and assessment criteria. Figure 10.2 illustrates some examples of the types of question asked in relation to purpose, task design and assessment criteria.

What do we want the students to do? What characterises the discourse in the discipline? What are the dominant modes of enquiry and thinking? What types of evidence and data are important? How can this writing assignment be linked to significant course objectives?

What type of rubric will be most appropriate to evaluate this particular writing task? What criteria will be used? How can these be linked clearly to the goals which inform the assignment? Are the standards and possible levels of achievement on each criterion demarcated and explicated in a way that will be useful both to the writers and the markers?

What are the fundamental conventions of writing in the discipline? What is the situation that gives rise to the writing? Who is the writer in this situation? Who is the audience? What is the genre? How familiar are students with this genre? How can the topic best be conceptualised and expressed to make it clear and accessible to students.

Does the task fit the purpose? What will students learn from doing this assignment?

Figure 10.2: Examples of questions asked in relation to purpose, task design and assessment criteria

Systematically working through the questions listed in Figure 10.2 can produce writing tasks that are purpose designed, comprehensively framed, integral to the course and engaging for students. Thus, the most successful writing projects integrate writing and learning in meaningful ways for the students. The projects in one course, for example, were designed to present students with a real problem scenario in management accounting that gave them an opportunity to apply their current theoretical learning and specific, course-based knowledge. The task incorporated analysis, calculations, problem-solving and strategic thinking, and required students to prepare a report in their professional capacity as management accountants. These projects were demanding but were comprehensively introduced and accompanied by specific guidance. Students responded well to the challenge and, given the task design, did not view the endeavour as an artificial, tacked-on
exercise in writing far removed from the core business of their learning. The generally high standard of work produced encouraged both staff and students that the time and effort had been worthwhile. A staff member, who had been involved in the process throughout, took the initiative to collect and keep samples of students’ assignments to serve as examples of best practice for the next cohort of students.

Together with well-chosen and well-designed writing tasks, an enabling environment can thus be created for students by building a process around the assignment rather than allowing the assignment to be peripheral and standing in isolation. This can be done by devoting time to introducing the assignment and by providing support for students in tackling the task. For example, staff made provision in course timetables for the writing projects to be introduced by the writing consultant in conjunction with the course lecturer. These sessions were designed around the stages in the writing process, with an assignment-specific focus on topic analysis, modelling the approach required by the task and strategies for developing coherence. The technique of modelling the approach is important for students who are unfamiliar with the demands of the genre and inexperienced in writing within the particular context. As Rose (1989) has pointed out, students who lack experience of responding to particular writing tasks (for example a task requiring analysis) will approach the task in terms they can handle. What staff then have to do is model the approach the task requires.

In addition to modelling the approach the task requires, support for students can be provided in the form of more detailed guidelines regarding the task. For example, guidelines for both the assignment and the writing process were developed for the students and handed out with the writing projects. The guidelines covered the pre-writing stages (understanding the task, accessing and processing information, planning), the writing stages (first draft: organisation and development of ideas, coherence, tone and style; review: checklists for relevance, coherence, tone and style; second draft) and the post-writing stages (checklists for format, presentation and proofreading).

The integration of writing and learning is also enhanced when attention is paid to all writing done by students, and not only to that done in writing projects. To this end, staff teaching Financial Accounting courses provided the writing consultant with samples of students’ writing done in tutorials and tests in response to questions on theory. The analysis of students’ responses made it apparent that there were two central difficulties experienced to varying degrees. Many students knew the theory and principles and could state these baldly; for some students, however, the difficulty arose in applying this acquired knowledge to a new situation and in articulating the resultant reasoning logically and precisely.

Students struggled to identify and think through the implications inherent in the specific scenario or lost sight of these implications while answering the question. It was also evident that many students were not familiar with the demands implicit in the requirement to ‘discuss’. Further challenges were posed for speakers of English as an additional language by detailed scenarios that contained unfamiliar terms and by the need to use the appropriate terminology in order to write precisely about the principles and to discuss these in the context of the given scenario.

As a result of this analysis, an intervention was implemented in the form of a series of tutorial and lecture sessions in which the writing consultant focused on the following:

- methods of sifting essential from non-essential information in the scenarios
- strategies for relating relevant aspects of the scenario to specific components of the principles
- questions to ask as a means of directing thinking
- ways of determining the meaning of terms from context
- means of structuring a response.
Chapter 10: Possibilities and Challenges in a Faculty-Based Writing Centre

On the basis of this work, and in keeping with the principle that staff be encouraged to assume responsibility and accountability for guiding students through these processes, a report containing the following recommendations was sent to the Accounting Department:

For first-year students, lecturers and tutors should model an approach to question/task analysis and the type of response required. This does not refer to model answers or solutions but rather the strategy of modelling an approach which provides students with the tools to analyse a question and to use this analysis to provide an organising structure for their response. Thus, the context of the question should be mapped for students and methods of interrogating the scenario should be demonstrated. This type of modelling makes ‘ways of thinking like an accountant' tangible for the students. Mediation of this kind is particularly necessary at first-year level when, for the first time, students enter an academic discourse which demands particular linguistic, cognitive and academic competencies. Regular feedback, which identifies problems and suggests strategies, should be given in relation to written responses undertaken in objective tests, tutorials and class exercises. The practice, where this exists, of students responding in point form to these questions, must be discouraged. Unless students are required to write coherently in continuous prose whenever they write, they will not develop the ability to do so.

This type of feedback is essential in the process of working with staff and students as it can help to inform future practice and foreground the relevance of academic literacies. Thus, in the writing tasks in some courses, students were given the opportunity to resubmit assignments initially deemed inadequate. In the redrafting process they worked with feedback from both the marker and the writing consultant. Reports on the writing projects undertaken and the students’ difficulties identified during the course of consultations help both to raise staff consciousness about these issues and to plan interventions. For example, in response to reports, workshops were requested by staff responsible for writing assignments in which referencing, task analysis and structure had been identified as presenting particular challenges for students.

Collaboration with staff in the ways described, together with the work done in the Commerce Education Group (CEG) sessions (already mentioned in Chapters 3 and 8) has resulted in evolving processes for identifying and engaging with issues of language and academic literacy. There is also greater recognition and pursuance by faculty staff of their role in creating meaningful learning opportunities via the contexts they fashion for, and the ways in which they engage with, students’ writing. This recognition and practice are invaluable because, as Bazerman (1994 as cited in Johns 1997: 1) strikingly observes, ‘it is within the students, of course, that the learning occurs, but it is within the teacher, who sits at the juncture of forces above, below and sideways that the learning situations are framed.’

Working with Students

Graves (1965) wrote that ‘there’s a cool web of language winds us in’ to shield us from ‘too much joy, or too much fear’. For many students in the Commerce Faculty the opposite is true – it is the cool web of language that elicits, if not fear, then trepidation and resistance in the context of having to write. As more than one student has said: ‘I’m in commerce because I like numbers, not words; I don’t like writing.’ These feelings are intensified in students when the cool web of language and its milieu are not their own. As Hutchings (1998, 109) has pointed out, ‘a major challenge facing students is the acquisition of academic literacy in the face of great contextual disjuncture (contextual disjuncture being that disjuncture between the present learning/living context and those contexts from which they have come).’ Numbers of students on the Academic Development (AD) programme within the Commerce Faculty come from school contexts in which the nature of the literacy instruction provided and the types of literacy practices engaged in are ineffectual preparation for meeting the demands posed by academic literacy. First-year
students, faced with the initial academic essay assigned, may feel ‘I don’t know where to begin.’ This sense of powerlessness is fuelled by the multiple layers of unfamiliarity that confront them:

- The discourse and its conventions are unfamiliar.
- Much of the language in which the topic is couched may be unrecognisable.
- They may have no experience in manipulating information in the academic and discipline-specific manner expected.
- They may be encountering ideas, values and attitudes, specifically in relation to traditions and religion, that are not only alien but also generate emotional conflict.

The impact of and obstacles created by all this unfamiliarity should not be underestimated. As Rose (1989, 222) has said, staff need ‘to keep before our eyes the negative power of the unfamiliar’.

In recognition of what has been explained above, the writing consultant has developed strategies for scaffolding and mediating the initial academic-writing process for first-year AD students. This work with AD students is a strand in the collective strategies of the Commerce Education Development Unit (EDU) to empower students to navigate the ‘great contextual disjuncture’ to which Hutchings (1998, 109) refers. Being recognised by students as part of the EDU team that ‘is there for them’ makes the consultancy resource more accessible and helps to dispel any notions of consultations as intimidating or stigmatising. These students come for consultations with more confidence in their voice because this is being heard and affirmed in many other contexts in EDU. Consultations thus become a safe space where students can express their anxieties about writing and talk about what they are thinking, what they want to say and what they intend by what they have written. This is particularly important for first-year students who are speakers of English as an additional language, for whom writing in an academic context poses particular difficulties. As one student so tellingly commented: ‘It (the consultation) is useful especially for people from disadvantaged communities where English is never spoken even in their school.’ For these students, navigating the challenges presented by academic essay writing, reading, research, referencing and the fear of plagiarism is doubly daunting.

Students new to both academic writing and argument, when confronted within unfamiliar frames of reference with complex and cognitively demanding topics, may struggle to find an entry point for engaging with the issues, let alone be able to position themselves within the debate and fashion an argument in support of their position. Assignment-specific writing workshops, writing tutorials and small-group sessions provide contextualised support for students in this regard. These interventions allow for the interactive analysis of topics in order to arrive at shared understandings. Such interventions also provide students with opportunities to brainstorm ideas with their peers, to give voice to what they bring to the task, and, in so doing, to trace where this connects with or is disconnected from the specific demands of the task. In this way, students can overcome their feelings of being overwhelmed and of not knowing how or where to start. The following comment from a student makes this clear:

I didn’t know how to start writing an academic essay at university level. If it wasn’t for the extra tuts, I don’t know what I would have done. The analysing of the essay topic and structure of the essay discussions were VERY useful. When there were a number of us that needed consultation and you grouped us together that really helped because we were able to discuss the essay topic and get back to you when we need clarity. Discussion of the essay topic was very helpful considering that I could not even start the essay.
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The formulation of a thesis statement is traditionally regarded, in specific contexts, as one of the markers of academic literacy. Thus, in one first-year writing assignment, which for many students is their introduction to academic essay writing, the assumption is that they will know implicitly that a thesis statement is required and will be familiar with the mechanisms for formulating one. Such an assumption presupposes a pre-existing and fairly sophisticated engagement with the literacy practices of the discourse, and it seems that the learning situations created in this course are predicated on similar assumptions. The reality is that many students would not recognise the cue implicit in the task as they are completely unfamiliar with this literacy practice. The writing consultant provides contextualised support in writing workshops to introduce students to this practice and works in consultations with students on their texts in order to enable them to formulate a thesis statement. Below is an example of one student’s initial response to the following essay topic: ‘Some university lecturers forbid students to use Wikipedia as a reference in academic essays. Explain why you would agree or disagree with this policy.’

Wikipedia claims that about itself that: ‘we are only collectors of knowledge and information’. Wikipedia is an example of the world revolution in online collectivism. Wikipedia’s mission is to bring free knowledge to everyone and can be contributed to by everyone. However, some university lecturers forbid the use of Wikipedia as a reference in academic essays. Is this an acceptable policy that these universities are setting? I agree that Wikipedia should not be used as a point of reference in the academic essay. And I will give acceptable, relevant and good ground reasons why I say so.

Workshops and writing consultations may help students to transform statements such as the one in bold text in the above example into workable thesis statements. However, the construction of thesis statements is an exacting task and students have too few opportunities to write in this way to be able to develop the necessary confidence and skill.

First-year students are also understandably anxious about referencing, given that incorrect referencing may be penalised heavily and plagiarism has serious consequences. Students face two difficulties in this regard. Firstly, they have to become familiar with the specific referencing conventions required. Referencing guides, while useful, are not sufficient. The purpose of referencing needs to be understood and the practice mediated. It takes time to develop confidence in using the conventions, and citing electronic sources is often most challenging. Secondly, students have to negotiate the often unchartered terrain of consulting relevant sources and incorporating these meaningfully into their writing. They may also find confusing and contradictory the expectation that they should arrive at and present their own position in relation to an issue (explain why you agree or disagree; discuss whether you believe …) and in so doing should also use the ideas of others. For some students this translates into a fraught quest to ‘find stuff to put into my essay’. Once this ‘stuff’ has been found, ‘putting it in’ poses further challenges. In many cases this is done verbatim – often because students have very little experience of doing independent research and come from school contexts in which rote learning is still a common practice. They do not have confidence in their own voice and thus rely heavily on sources. When students use material verbatim from a source this is often not placed within quotation marks, although the source may be cited. As one student commented: ‘But if I put in the quotation marks, then the whole essay will be in quotes.’ In other cases students, aware that they should paraphrase but not having mastered the art of doing so, will change only a few words

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2 The assignment is part of a first-year course compulsory for all students in the Commerce Faculty. The course is described as follows: ‘... intended to furnish students with the main intellectual skills required in the study and practice of business at all levels. The focus is on the development of critical reasoning skills, including the ability to analyse and construct logical arguments, to research problems, to articulate competing viewpoints and to form independent judgements about contentious issues of policy and practice.’
of the original text. Their understanding is that doing so obviates the need for quotation marks, in the mistaken belief that providing synonyms for a few key words in the original is ‘putting it into my own words’. In yet other cases the excessive and indiscriminate use of synonyms in an attempt to paraphrase the original can have unfortunate results. In the example provided in Figure 10.3, the original text is on the left and the student’s version is on the right. The words in bold in the original have been replaced by synonyms (in bold) which the student found by using the thesaurus function in Microsoft Word.

Figure 10.3: Excessive and indiscriminate use of synonyms in an attempt to paraphrase the original

Workshops in which students can practise paraphrasing and citing sources, and the availability of referencing guides and FAQs on the electronic site for EDU students, go some way to supporting and guiding students as they grapple with these complexities.

First-year students’ evaluations of the writing consultant’s interventions indicate that the work done via this range of interventions has helped to make their initial venture into academic writing less intimidating and alienating. The following quotation from a student presents a typical example:

I improved my essay writing skills because of the sessions we had. It did not only improve in content being connected to the topic but I feel more confident to write academic essays. The consultation showed me that I missed the understanding of the question – you showed me this in such a way that I don’t feel I am dull but feel that I am in a learning environment. You helped me understand why I was writing. I also got to understand things that were very confusing to me, such as referencing and structuring an essay.

It is evident that if students allow sufficient time to go through the mediated drafting process, this has a definite impact on the quality of the work they produce. A student who had gone through this process with her second essay, but not her first, had this to say in an email:

‘Good day. I would like to thank you for helping me with my second essay. I got 67% for it. This was a big improvement from the 35% I received for essay 1.’

The drafting process also encourages students to be more conscious of and reflective about their own writing. Thus, a student who had never engaged in a drafting process before said:

‘Thank you so much for the help. This is the first time that I have had a consultation and the experience was very insightful! Your suggestions made the essay much easier to read and more logical. Just goes to show how many bad habits sneak into writing even when you think they aren’t there.’
However, many students leave writing to the last moment for a variety of reasons. They are reluctant to write because they dislike it, saying, for example, ‘I didn’t like writing essays at school and I don’t now. I’m good with numbers not words.’ They face genuine pressures of time, or manage their time badly. The following student’s comment bears testimony to the latter: ‘I have consulted you before but it was once in 1st year. I did not use you again until now due to being disorganised and finishing my work just when it is due. Thus I never had a chance to get assistance when needed which is a great pity.’

A different approach and the efficacy of giving focused, guided attention to writing can be illustrated by the journey of a student named Lumka (see the case study below).

**Case Study: The Efficacy of Giving Focused, Guided Attention to Writing**

Lumka’s first exposure to academic essay writing (in the first-year compulsory course described in footnote 2) required that she craft an argument in support or refutation of a viewpoint expressed in a dense, highly wrought text. For many students, both this extract and the assignment task resided in a cognitive and social vacuum. Her first handwritten draft showed that, while she grasped some of the ideas in this difficult text, she struggled to express herself; her writing was circuitous and often lacked coherence. Her difficulties in controlling punctuation also made it harder to follow her reasoning. The essay topic was as follows:

Critically evaluate the following claim, made by J.S. Mill in his book Utilitarianism. Offer an argument for or against Mill’s claim: ‘It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the equation. The other party to the comparison knows both sides.’

Lumka’s introduction to her essay ran as follows:

If being a dissatisfied human is better than being a Pig satisfied if being a Socrates is better than being a fool who is satisfied Mills claims are supporting that it is better to be a clever human who is unsatisfied than being an animal which is satisfied or being a fool which is satisfied but I don’t agree with him. Being satisfied and being not satisfied are two totally different pleasures no matter how clever or how stupid you are but you can all differentiate between satisfaction and dissatisfaction but the more pleasure most people will choose it is the one which they prefer or the one which satisfy their need at that moment and most people will almost give up everything they have to pay for the risk and painful that they will get from obtaining that particular pleasure.

In consultations during the course of Lumka’s first year, work was done on the following:

- identifying central ideas in her essay
- developing each idea in a paragraph and then organising these into a coherent whole
- punctuation and usage.

In her second year, Lumka returned for consultations with each of her essays. To avoid the pitfall of her developing a dependency on the consultant without owning the process of shifting her own practice, she would be asked, at the beginning of each consultation, to identify the areas where she felt there might be issues related to relevance, organisation and connectivity. After these consultations, the following comment was made on her consultancy record:

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3 Late in her final year
4 An extract from John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*
Lumka’s writing has improved not only on the level of sentence construction and usage but also in overall structure and coherence. Her writing has lost the tendency to ramble in a disconnected and often generalised outpouring. There is more coherence and logic. However, she still has a tendency, in places, to present information without interrogating it or providing a critique for the reader.

Towards the beginning of her third year, Lumka was able to produce a first draft that was well organised, coherently argued and, while not error free, had greatly improved in usage and punctuation. She was required in the Business Ethics course to write an essay on the following topic:

Discuss the Contraction foundation to morality. In doing so, make sure to describe how thinking about the ‘state of nature’ can lead us to this alternative foundation for morality, and also show how the Contraction alternative justifies the idea that it is often in your best interest to be altruistic rather than selfish.

Here is Lumka’s introduction to her essay on this topic:

The Social Contract is as a result of the state of nature, that is, the fact that Man is free. We live in a society of liberation; a modern society where humans have the ability to live life without restraint. Thus, the social contract tries to establish a method of how we can be free and still manage to live with each other in a civilized community. Freedom allows us as individuals to act and behave in a certain manner which suits us, however if we were to let everyone behave or act as they please we would live in a world of chaos, because a certain behaviour which pleases you might not necessarily please me, in extreme circumstances that behaviour might offend me. The social contract tries to achieve harmony by encouraging members of society who are also free individuals to come together and make a social pact, that is, form an agreement collectively on how to treat one another (Rousseau 2006).

During the consultative process it is possible to determine whether a student is, as was initially the case with Lumka, struggling to articulate clearly, in writing, their understanding of concepts or is struggling with conceptual understanding per se. The distinction is important; the former is a writing issue, while the latter is not. Given the current climate, in which the standard of students’ writing is lamented persistently, there is a risk that many of the difficulties perceived in writing assignments and tutorials will be categorised by staff as ensuing from ‘poor writing’. Such blanket responses run the danger of allowing other conceptual difficulties to remain masked.

The acquisition of academic literacies and writing proficiency is an ongoing, cumulative process. This chapter has highlighted some of practices by staff and students that can either enhance or hinder this process, and considered the role the writing consultant plays in endeavouring to foster enhancing rather than hindering practices.

The challenges that remain and the potential opportunities that could be created in the Commerce Faculty can be considered in the context of the observation that there is the need for extensive opportunities to write in a wide variety of genres if students are to develop coherent and powerful writing proficiencies. Corrective feedback and guidance from teachers are also crucial in this process. Writing expertise may be a central cognitive ability, but extensive reading and exposure to academic registers are required to realise this expertise in any particular language (Cummins 2000, 22).

The extent to which students have opportunities to write has decreased over the past decade in the major courses in UCT’s degree programme that leads to an eventual professional qualification as a chartered accountant. This decrease is a result of increasingly crowded curricula evolving in
response to pressures from accountancy’s professional body. At the same time, there is still the concomitant expectation on the part of both the professional body and corporates that graduates will be able to communicate effectively and appropriately in a range of contexts. The relevant departments in the Commerce Faculty thus face the challenge of balancing these demands, within the given constraints, in as effectively and educationally sound a manner as possible.

The provision of corrective feedback and guidance necessary to develop students’ ‘coherent and powerful writing proficiencies’ (Cummins 2000, 22) will continue to present challenges and to require collaborative, proactive envisaging and utilisation of opportunities. The newly established Commerce Teaching and Learning Working Group, in its work to promote effective and innovative assessment practices, may create further opportunities to reflect on and develop strategies for this aspect of the practices employed in the assessment of writing assignments.

There is a growing recognition in the College of Accounting of the negative impact that the legacy of information poverty – specifically regarding the functioning of business, various industries and the stock market – has on the performance of students throughout the degree and at postgraduate level. The challenge, which is currently being grappled with, is to begin to reverse this legacy by integrating opportunities for extensive, mediated reading into the planned reconfiguration of one of the courses.

This chapter has considered certain challenges in the limited context of one faculty in one higher-education institution. These challenges exist, of course, in the wider context of the multifaceted challenges faced at UCT, in higher education in general, in South Africa as a whole, and internationally. Given this, EDU and other UCT staff cannot, in the words of Eliot (1955) ‘cease from exploration’. We need always to be seeking, to borrow a term from physics, choice points – points of possibility that will lead to transformations in what we do, how we do it and for whom it is done.
Chapter 11: Valuing Linguistic Diversity

Moragh Paxton

I grew up in place where we were always speaking African language. We started learning English when we were doing grade one. The method of teaching student at primary level was not good because we were given words to know not necessary knowing their meaning. The teacher would point at the board and we pronounce the name she had had pointed. At grade 3 it where we started learning tenses and writing compositions as well as letter. We were repeating the same thing ‘My school’ and ‘My self’. Some of the words we had to search them by ourselves and know their meaning. We were not given chance to express ourselves. The survivals were those who expose themselves to the language by moving to the place where there was English speakers then will start gaining skills of expressing yourselves (Vuyani, a student on the Academic Development Programme of the Education Development Unit in the Commerce Faculty at the University of Cape Town).

Vuyani is from a rural village in KwaZulu-Natal. His parents are semi-literate and unemployed, and he is the first member of his family to go to university. He speaks four languages – Sesotho, isiZulu, Afrikaans and English. Although English had been the medium of instruction in his high school, he said that in reality they had been taught ‘in the vernacular’ to Grade 12 (the final year of schooling in South Africa). Vuyani had few opportunities for practising English outside the classroom, as people in his village could not speak English. He said he had managed to be one of the ‘survivals’ because he had spent a holiday in a flat in Johannesburg with some of his extended family and had learned to speak English from the Italian family living next door.

Vuyani’s written English competence probably represents the lower end of the scale in terms of the students who enter the Academic Development Programme (ADP) in the Education Development Unit (EDU) within the Commerce Faculty at the University of Cape Town (UCT). But he is not unique; his story and those of others like him have led me to ask some searching questions about myself and others as teachers in a context with such a diversity of languages and cultures. Do we really understand what it means to have to study university-level subjects through a language that is not our home language? Can we appreciate the complexities our students are coping with if we ourselves have been privileged to complete our studies in our home languages? How can we make the language environment less alienating and more welcoming for students like Vuyani, who do not have English as a first language?

The majority of students in higher education in South Africa are learning through a language that is not their home language, and it seems important that we gain a better understanding of the impact of this on learning. Quite often, a person’s inability to express him- or herself in a second or additional language can hide a brilliant mind at work; it can give others the impression that the person struggling with language is struggling with concepts and understanding. It is very difficult to separate the two. Frequently the very people who complain most vociferously about the poor English or poor grammar of a second-language student are themselves unable to say more than a few words in the student’s language.

It is also important on any multilingual campus to understand that it is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) point to the very complex negotiation of identity that takes place in multilingual contexts, where different beliefs about language and identity come into conflict with regard to what languages and what language mixes should be spoken by particular kinds of people and in what context. These authors remind us that in multilingual situations, language choice and language attitude are inseparable from relations of power. Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck (2005) have recognised that space or environment can incapacitate language; it affects a person’s ability to use linguistic resources. Therefore, in some environments people who are fluent in three or four languages are highly valued, whereas in
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others, such as the English-dominated campuses in South Africa, we have often failed to value the multilingual ability of staff and students.

This chapter attempts to sketch a picture of the complexity of the multilingual context of UCT and of the ADP in the Commerce Faculty’s EDU by drawing on UCT’s data as well as data from a series of ethnographic studies which set out to gain a clearer understanding of the role that students’ primary languages play in meaning making in an English-medium university. The chapter will use the voices of first-year students as a way of exploring issues of language and identity and what it means to learn through a language that is not a home language.

The chapter will close by describing some of the responses that we have evolved in the ADP to begin to address these complex issues.

National and Institutional Context

Recent studies of undergraduate programmes in South Africa have shown that, in almost all cases, the graduation rate of black students is less than half of that of their fellow white students (Scott, Yeld and Hendry 2007), and inevitably these discrepancies have much to do with socio-economic and socio-political issues that have their roots in the separate and unequal schooling systems of apartheid. Nevertheless, the fact that, in present-day South Africa, the majority of black students are learning through a second or additional language is also impacting on tertiary completion rates.

The picture at UCT is changing because, although black students now constitute just over 50 per cent of the university’s student population, in this second decade of democracy, large numbers of black students regard English as their first language, either because it is a home language (possibly one of many) or because they studied English as a first language at school. An increasing number of black or coloured students received their primary- and secondary-level education at relatively well-resourced, middle-class schools – formerly attended by white learners only, but now racially mixed – and were taught in English. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of UCT’s students still come from rural and working-class schools. These students may have been taught in a hybrid language – two, and sometimes three, languages being mixed – and many find that learning through the medium of English is a significant barrier to learning. In addition, the university now attracts large numbers of foreign students, particularly from different parts of Africa, who speak English as a third, fourth or fifth language.

UCT has recognised that the medium of instruction privileges those who have had the benefit of developing a significant linguistic competence in English and makes academic curricula less accessible for speakers of English as an additional language. Therefore, although the UCT Language Policy declares English as the primary medium of instruction, it recognises the importance of UCT students acquiring effective literacy in English, through academic literacy courses and adjunct modules such as the one described by Gideon Nomdo in an earlier chapter. However, the policy advocates many languages of communication and ‘takes as its starting point the need to prepare students to participate fully in a multilingual society, where multilingual proficiency and awareness are essential’ (UCT Language Policy 2011). The language policy recognises UCT’s linguistic diversity ‘as a resource, rather than a problem which resides in individuals’ (UCT Language Policy 2011). It also recognises the personal, social and educational value of multilingualism and of language development. To this end, in 2004 the university established the Multilingual Education Project, which has adopted different strategic processes to raise critical awareness about the reality of multilingualism within the institution and in South African society, and to develop multilingual proficiency among students and staff. These strategic processes will be described in more detail towards the end of this chapter.
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Context of the EDU’s Commerce ADP

In many ways Commerce ADP presents an even more complex language picture than that presented by the wider university because many of the students on the programme come from rural or semi-rural/township schools in South Africa. Data from a language survey conducted in the Commerce ADP (Paxton 2007), which set out to probe issues related to language attitudes and multilingual learning, provide valuable insights into students’ language backgrounds and experiences as well as into the very complex relationship between language, learning and identity. Inevitably the data from the survey sometimes seem ambiguous and contradictory because, as has been indicated, opinions about language are often unreliable, as they are influenced by power relations and often tend to be emotional rather than rational.

African languages are still the home languages for the majority of students on the ADP, as indicated by the survey, in which 86.5 per cent of students indicated that they spoke an African language at home. Fluency in English and an African language/Afrikaans allowed 29 per cent of the students to describe themselves as fully bilingual. Although, in theory, English had been the medium of instruction at school, 56 per cent of the students said that the language used mostly in school had been an African language, and 45 per cent said that they had been taught mathematics in a combination of English and their home language. Typically, this kind of teaching takes the form of code mixing and code switching, whereby the African language is used as the matrix language but all numbers and mathematical terms are in English. This has been described extensively in studies of language usage in South African schools (Adendorff 1996; Cleghorn and Rollnick 2002; Setati 1998; Setati et al. 2002). Adendorff (1996, 400) describes code switching as ‘a form of sociolinguistic contextualizing behaviour’ and he shows, by means of data collected in an English-medium school with isiZulu–English bilingual students, that code switching is an extremely valuable communicative resource, which enables teachers to accomplish both social and educational objectives, often clarifying information or giving additional meaning to what is said or done in a conversation. He sums up by saying ‘the mother tongue is the solidarity code, the link language mediating between students’ knowledge of the world (which is presented to them at home in the mother’s tongue) and the preferred mode of representing that knowledge at school in English’ (Adendorff 1996, 402).

Not surprisingly then, English as it is used in lecture rooms at UCT presents quite a challenge for these students. In response to a survey question about how students experienced the level of English at UCT, 45 per cent indicated that they found it ‘high’, ‘very high’ or ‘difficult to cope with’. Students’ observations on the questionnaire reveal their discomfort with communicating in English: ‘Coming from all black school where English was spoken about 30% of the time, communicating in English all the time was not easy …’; ‘everything is basically English, even if one doesn’t understand … its hard to find someone to explain in home language’; ‘I wasn’t used to English before, I was use[d] to isiZulu, my home language, so I always thought maybe I will make mistake when I’m speaking English’; ‘At first it was hard to get the words out of my mouth in English but because we have to speak it here, things got better …’

Because English has such high status globally, nationally and on the UCT campus, the survey also showed that there were students who were keen to reflect their respect for and their ability in the language: ‘the world does not work in peoples home language, it works in English’; ‘In the working world they expect us to have good communication skills and the only way to improve ourselves is through speaking (English)’.

There were also those schooled in ‘English’ schools who were now more comfortable speaking English than an African language: ‘I am not that fluent in my home language and being taught through my home language would complicate things.’

Code-switching practices of South African schools are perpetuated in informal settings in the university. As one moves around the corridors and hallways of the UCT campus, one is aware
that students are still using their primary languages predominantly outside the classroom. In the survey, 55 per cent said they used their home languages more than half the time on campus, and 78 per cent said they mixed languages when they spoke.

The greatest concern for the staff in Commerce EDU lies in the fact that 32 per cent of students surveyed indicated that studying through the medium of English was affecting the way they learned. This indicates that we are perpetuating inequality through language. Students’ comments describe a complex process of meaning making for those who are speakers of English as an additional language: ‘Sometimes for me to understand things I have to interpret them as I would in my own language’; ‘Sometimes I miss what the lecturers are saying due to the lack of understanding of certain words’; ‘Sometimes you find that students fail because they didn’t understand the questions properly and not that they don’t know their work’; ‘It’s easy to learn when you using your home language but with English you need to start learning language before you get to the concept.’

**Conceptual Understanding**

Whether students are learning through a first, second or third language, language can help or hinder how they make sense of new concepts. They may be learning a new academic way of expressing everyday concepts that are already familiar to them in English, or they may be learning entirely new concepts and, in order to understand them appropriately, need a variety of support mechanisms. These might be visual aids such as pictures, graphs, diagrams, mathematical equations and, even, gestures, or the translation of conceptual material into the students’ home languages. The difficulty, for those students who are still more at ease in their home language than in English, is that concepts seldom transfer from one language to another with equivalent meaning. For instance, if the isiXhosa word for electricity means ‘lightning’ and the isiZulu word means ‘under the ground’, are students from these language backgrounds understanding the notion of electricity in the same way, and what does this mean for conceptualisation?

The language attitudes survey was followed by a research project to investigate peer learning and the ways in which students on the ADP code switch to build on their primary languages and make sense of new concepts they are learning through the medium of English (Paxton 2009). For this research, speakers of the same African language – isiXhosa – were organised into small discussion groups led by a senior economics tutor who spoke the same language. The tutor was asked to guide a discussion of some of the difficult economics concepts, and it was agreed that he would use whichever language seemed most natural. The construction of these peer learning groups drew on the Vygotskian notion that effective peer learning requires guidance from ‘a more capable other’. Methods of data collection included audio-tape recordings of these tutorials, interviews with tutor and students, and students’ language histories.

Translation and analysis of the tutorials showed that students were using a very hybrid mix of English and isiXhosa to negotiate the meanings of these concepts. The translated transcripts provided evidence that sometimes students were confused about the meanings of the concepts they were discussing, and that guidance from the tutor through code switching helped to clarify meaning (see the case study in the box below).
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Case Study: Tutor’s Code Switching to Help Clarify Meaning

Below is an excerpt from one of the transcripts from the small discussion groups of students led by a senior economics tutor. The excerpt provides a sense of the code switching that took place in these tutorials.

Kodwa i-understanding yedeficit neloss idifferent uyabona. Umzekelo mandenze umzekelo webudget masenze nje in general. Itayma (father) liza kunika ithousand rand and ndiyacinga ukuba kufuneka ndithenge iteki kaPuma yi-seven hundred and ninety nine, incwadi yi-three hundred rand and itracksuit yi four hundred rand so uneeda ione thousand five hundred rand so that means izinto ozifunayo zihigher kunemali onayo, so i-expenditure is higher than income so yideficit leyo, ideficit zivela kwibudget, whereby i-income minus costs kuvele ideficit. So eligama le deficity xa silisa esiXhoseni ke ngoku, sithi siyashota instead of saying we have a deficit. (But in my understanding deficit and loss are different, do you understand? Let’s give a general example, your father is going to give me R1000 and I’m thinking I need to buy Puma tackies and they are 799, a book is R300 and a tracksuit is R400 so that means I need R1500, that means the things I need amount to more than the money I have, so expenditure is more than income, so I have a deficit, the deficit comes from the budget whereby income minus costs create deficit. So this word when we transfer it in Xhosa we use shortfall instead of deficit.)

The research has emphasised the importance of these kinds of exploratory informal discussions in a language that students felt comfortable with, as it allows for possible misconceptions to be revealed and for learning to be scaffolded to broaden understanding. Without the discussion of concepts in the primary language, some students’ alternative conceptions might remain undetected.

In my interviews with the students, they indicated that they sometimes did not understand the English words of the text book and then the only solution was to rote learn: ‘when you are studying you find some words that are too much for us to understand and you go to dictionary, even the dictionary can’t really help, so you tend to memorise when you are writing. So we memorised …’

Students also felt that reading and learning through the medium of English were very time consuming for them, because they took so long to understand what was meant:

Student A: When taught in English you forget easily because you need to sit down and try to understand the terms taught in English in your own language … (you) try to think what does this mean in Xhosa?

Tutor: And if taught in Xhosa?

Student A: It will be easier in Xhosa because it’s my language – I can keep whatever I am told.

Student B: You see you would be a master of a subject if taught in Xhosa because in English you read a book or something two or three times before understanding or not understanding at all or forget about what you read. You read and still do not get the meaning but in Xhosa you would understand fully. You would understand the meaning and would not spend much time reading something you do not understand.

Over an extended period of time the Commerce EDU staff, particularly those of us who are language teachers, have used multiple and varied interventions to try to address the language and learning needs of the diversity of students who are registered in the ADP programme. The
findings from the study described above have assisted us in designing some of these strategies and these are described in more detail in the next section.

**Response to the Issues Multilingualism Raises**

The Commerce EDU has recognised the importance of creating a multilingual environment in which all students feel welcome by having their languages acknowledged and valued. Therefore senior students appointed as orientation leaders welcome new students to our ADP programme, using their own very diverse home languages. The vibrant and enthusiastic response to this multilingual welcome is a reminder to us each year of how language is so much a part of the identity of every human being. The orientation booklet which EDU staff have developed for handing out to students when they first arrive on the UCT campus is multilingual, using languages other than English in captions, and the new multilingual study methods booklet (Hutchings 2010) has large sections translated into both Afrikaans and isiXhosa. These booklets have been developed to assist students in finding their way around the campus and understanding academia in those early, crucial weeks of the first year of study.

UCT’s Multilingual Education Project is working towards promoting a multilingual environment on the campus through multilingual signage and the naming of certain buildings in Afrikaans and African languages, and has introduced a multilingual logo for the university. The Project has focused on the three languages of the Western Cape: English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa, and has promoted access to isiXhosa through an isiXhosa Communication Skills course, which has been offered to more than 800 staff members and to students in their residences. Credit-bearing isiXhosa and Afrikaans courses have been included in curricula in the Health Sciences Faculty, and plans are underway to extend the model to other professional disciplines.

For the EDU staff, one of our biggest challenges has been to address the needs of the students described above who may have difficulty learning through the medium of English. This is a complex issue because on the UCT campus so many languages are spoken (the 11 official languages of South Africa, and 70 languages in total) that it may be difficult to manage multilingualism in the classroom. However, we believe that multilingualism is a resource to be fully exploited for the benefit of the students, and that the use of other languages gives the teaching space a richness it would otherwise lack. The research project described above showed that code switching, used effectively and with guidance from a more senior and more knowledgeable peer, can support learning. Carla Fourie describes in her chapter how she asks top students in her class to use their linguistic ability to translate difficult concepts for other students who are struggling. In addition, many EDU teaching staff encourage multilingual usage in small-group work inside and outside the classroom. But, as the research project has indicated, these peer groups need to be carefully constructed to ensure that students who lead the groups are capable and competent in the discipline.

**Concept Literacy**

UCT’s Multilingual Education Project (co-ordinated by Associate Professor Mbulungeni Madiba) has launched the Concept Literacy Project, which aims to phase in the use of students’ home languages in learning and understanding key concepts in various disciplines at the first-year level. To this end, the Online Multilingual Glossaries Hypermedia on VULA (UCT’s web-based learning-support forum for students) have been developed for Economics, Statistics, Physics and Health Sciences first-year courses. The Hypermedia allow searches for definitions of concepts, concordances and pictures, and uploading of tutorials and podcasts. As illustrated in the screen shot in Figure 11.1, when students search for the definition for a concept, this concept appears in both the source language and the target language. The list of other languages appears at the
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bottom of the screen, and there is space for students to give feedback on the translation. This allows users to assist in the standardisation of the translated terms in African languages, based on popular usage and acceptability by target users (Madiba 2011, 16). The glossary site also includes other functions – such as modules, blogs, chat rooms and forums – and thus offers a more interactive environment than traditional glossaries.

![Figure 11.1 A screen shot from UCT’s Online Multilingual Glossaries Hypermedia](image)

I have been keen to find ways in which students can become acquainted with the glossaries and learn to use them to facilitate their communication and their learning. While most of the lecturers on the Commerce ADP are English speakers, the tutors are often speakers of African languages, and they are therefore an important multilingual resource, which has not really been fully utilised. Therefore in 2012 I introduced multilingual tutor-development sessions for all tutors working on the programme.

The aim of these training sessions has been to develop critical multilingual awareness amongst the cohort of tutors working on the programme and to provide tutors with strategies for dealing with the conceptual problems that students might have. Because of the status of English on UCT’s campus, it has been important in these training sessions to explain the rationale for promoting multilingualism rather than silencing it, and the university’s language policy has been used for this purpose. Mbulungeni Madiba, who has facilitated the multilingualism training sessions, has pointed out to tutors the importance of multilingual proficiency and awareness in the working world. In many careers in South Africa, university graduates need to be able to speak at least two of the South African official languages in order for them to do their jobs effectively. Tutors are well aware that, while English is the medium of instruction on UCT’s campus, it is not
necessarily the lingua franca for many students. If they are second-language speakers themselves, the tutors may also be aware that second-language speakers often have conceptual difficulties when instruction and textbooks are in English, but they may not have known how to address these in a tutorial with students from multiple language backgrounds.

The facilitator leading the training session has modelled an approach for introducing multilingualism that tutors might use in their own tutorials, as illustrated in the next section.

**Brief Description of Multilingual Tutor Development**

The tutor-training session opened with five minutes input from the facilitator in his home language, which was not familiar to any of the tutors. Tutors responded with blank looks and expressions of bewilderment. The facilitator then switched to English and asked the tutors how they felt about being spoken to in a language that they did not understand. The facilitator then taught the tutors how to greet in the language he had spoken. He then used these experiences to initiate a discussion of what tutors’ experiences of multilingualism on the UCT campus had been and asked tutors why they thought it was important to acknowledge and value multilingualism.

Tutors were then divided into same- or similar-language groups to discuss a tutorial question (in English), which was specific to the discipline being tutored. The facilitator pointed out that these groups would need to be constructed quite carefully to ensure that there was a more capable peer in each group who would guide the discussion. The groups were then encouraged to work through the tutorial question using whatever mix of languages worked best. They reported back on their experiences at the end of the training session.

The second training session, held in the computer laboratory, introduced tutors to the Online Multilingual Glossaries Hypermedia on VULA. Tutors were given an opportunity to explore the site, giving feedback on definitions or blogging, for example. In this way they familiarised themselves with the site and were equipped to introduce the glossaries to students in their tutorials. These multilingual tutor-development sessions have been run as a pilot in 2012 and will be evaluated, revised and expanded in the years that follow.

Complex multilingual contexts call for complex responses. Many of the strategies developed by language developers over the past few years have been tentative and exploratory, but we feel we may be beginning to shift perceptions and attitudes, and we have had very clear indications from students and colleagues that this work has been appreciated.
**Chapter 12: Introduction: Theorising Student Support**

*Jean Luyt*

**Understanding Student Success**

There is a long history of research on the role of psychosocial support in facilitating student success in higher education. Theorists such as Spady (1970, in Jama, Mapesela and Beyleveld 2008), Tinto (1975;1988; 1993) and Kuh (2009) agree that student success in higher education is influenced by many interacting variables.

These variables are loosely divided into three categories – personal attributes of the students, social background of the students, and institutional context (Agar 1990) – and it is possible to focus interventions and support at any of these levels (Bean and Eaton 2002). However, since these variables impact on students in interacting relationships, the most successful interventions have been shown to be those that are holistic and focus on both the student and all aspects of the institution (Akoojee and Nkomo 2007; Kuh 2009) and that focus on the specific requirements of a particular academic discipline (Durkin and Main 2002).

**Impact of Personal Attributes of Students on Success**

Students’ personal attributes – including students’ academic potential, academic preparedness, attitudes towards their studies, skills and interests – certainly influence students’ success (Bean and Eaton 2002; Williams 2001, in Yorke and Thomas 2003).

Any holistic intervention aimed at students’ success needs to acknowledge affective demands of learning and provide appropriate support to all students to develop their human qualities and dispositions (Barnett 2004). The psychosocial perspective emphasises that students also face emotional demands at a personal level, in addition to the cognitive demands that learning in higher education present. Learning requires one to be able to acknowledge that one does not know something and to live in a state of “not knowing” while grappling with new information, especially since the future at which the learning is aimed is unknown (Barnett 2004). Immersing oneself in the ‘not knowing’ requires a stable emotional sense of self. Certain people are more able than others to cope with this uncomfortable state.

Theorists such as Bean and Eaton (2002) and Human-Vogel and Mahlangu (2009) use four interrelated theories to describe the psychological processes that underlie student success:

- attitude–behaviour theory
- self-efficacy theory
- coping-behavioural theory
- attribution theory (Bean and Eaton 2002).

Attitude–behaviour theory lays the foundation for the other psychological theories and basically states that a person’s attitude towards a particular situation will influence their behaviour in that situation. Self-efficacy theory argues that if people believe themselves to be competent, they gain self-confidence and display higher levels of persistence and achievement in tasks, and this increases the likelihood of achieving their goals for these tasks (Human-Vogel and Mahlangu 2009). Coping-behavioural theory explains how one adjusts to new situations through assessment of the new environment and adaptation to that environment: adjustment, in terms of this theory, is a process whereby one fits into the new environment, while adaptation refers to changes one makes in one’s behaviour, whether one fits in or not. Attribution theory relates to the notion of locus of control, which is about whether one believes oneself to be in control of certain outcomes, or believes that control over these outcomes lies beyond one. An internal locus of control is
associated with higher effort on the part of students (Bean and Eaton 2002), and has been shown to correlate with academic performance (Bean and Eaton 2002; Hall, Smith and Chia 2008).

The concept of agency is very useful in thinking about students’ roles in their own success, since agency incorporates a behavioural as well as an affective component (Luckett and Luckett 2009; Pym and Kapp 2011). Students’ success in higher education is directly related to the amount of involvement they have in the educational experience, whether directly with academic activities, or with extra-curricular activities or interaction with staff in the higher-education context. In the context of higher education, many students struggle to adopt an appropriately proactive stance to their studies, which is required in Higher Education (Pym and Kapp 2011).

Students’ motivation orientation is affected by their commitment to their studies (Human-Vogel and Mahlangu 2009). Intrinsic motivation is a powerful means to success, since it relies on the agency of the person (Masjuan and Troiano 2009) and is directly associated with deep learning (Biggs 1989). Support of intrinsic motivation relies on the presence of choices, opportunities for self-direction, rationales, acknowledgment of feelings and positive feedback (Masjuan and Troiano 2009). In contrast, extrinsic motivation will operate only if external motivating factors (such as financial rewards) are present (Biggs 1989; Masjuan and Troiano 2009).

However, being in possession of the necessary personal attributes does not always guarantee success; personal characteristics interact with social attributes and institutional factors in complex ways.

**Impact of Social Factors on Student Success**

The socio-economic status of students impacts on their access to adequate educational opportunities to prepare themselves for further studies, and on students’ access to finance to support their studies. Students’ success is also influenced by aspects related to family of origin, including family background and the level of education of family members. The amount of time and energy students have to devote to their studies is influenced by the availability of necessary family support, which is often related to the family’s valuing further education as well as the student’s responsibilities towards their family and income generation (Williams 2001, in Yorke and Thomas 2003).

Traumatic events that students experience – including the death of family members and friends – are sometimes due to poor socio-economic levels and poor access to health care, and high incidence of HIV/AIDS. Many of our students are regularly affected by violent crime – for example muggings, rape, domestic violence and abusive romantic relationships – in their home communities and on the university campus. Coping with the psychological impacts of such traumatic events, as well as with any other psychological difficulties, undermines one’s ability to be still, clear one’s mind of distractions and concentrate on cognitively complex material. Coping with these demands and traumatic events requires a management\(^1\) of negative emotions (Human-Vogel and Mahlangu 2009). While it might not be possible to reduce stressful incidents, encouragement of positive coping styles and enhancement of social support have been shown to improve the psychological condition of students (Luo and Wang 2009). Interpersonal support has been shown to correlate with academic-engagement strategies. Having someone with knowledge guide an incoming student may well set such a student off on a good start, which may have long-term influence on the student’s success (Hall, Smith and Chia 2008; Kuh 2009).

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\(^1\) Down-regulation
Chapter 12: Introduction: Theorising Student Support

Impact of institutional factors on students’ success

Students’ success also depends on institutional factors. Institutions themselves need to have a commitment to successful outcomes for students (Akojee and Nkomo 2007; Kuh 2009). At the most fundamental level, all aspects of the academic experience – including teaching, learning and assessment – have a direct influence on students’ success. In addition, institutional expectations and demands, as well as the availability and appropriate provision of institutional support services – both academic and psychosocial – influence student success (Helland, Stallings and Braxton 2002; Williams 2001 in Yorke and Thomas 2003).

Impact of Interaction of Variables on Students’ Success

The three variables – namely personal attributes of students, social background of the students, and institutional context, described above – impact separately on students’ success, but they also interact in complex ways to influence the likelihood of success in higher education (Agar 1990; Yorke and Thomas 2003; Spady 1970, in Jama, Mapesela and Beyleveld 2008; Bitzer 2009; Human-Vogel and Mahlangu 2009; Masjuan and Troiano 2009; Hu 2011). The central challenge to supporting students in higher education is management of the interaction between the three variables.

At a simple level, students’ expectations, intellectual capacities and levels of educational preparedness interact with cognitive demands of course material and institutional expectations to produce either academic success or failure. Inaccurate expectations of higher education is a direct consequence of a lack of role models in students’ families and communities. Inaccurate expectations can have negative effects on students’ success since their expectations influence their learning strategies and the extent of their involvement in higher education (Byrne and Flood 2005). For example, it is common that students have low expectations of the work commitment required for success in their studies (Byrne and Flood 2005), and this influences the amount of effort they put in until they receive feedback to the contrary.

In addition, students’ academic success relates to an interplay between personal expectations and motivation, prevailing social norms and the university contact (Helland, Stallings and Braxton 2002; Human-Vogel and Mahlangu 2009; Masjuan and Troiano 2009).

The success of any educational intervention is thus directly related to the extent to which the policy or practice can enhance students’ involvement (Astin 1999). When designing interventions for student success, it is essential to focus on what students do, and how educators can engage students’ active participation in a goal-directed way (Astin 1999) – in other words engage their agency (Luckett and Luckett 2009; Pym and Kapp 2011).

Motivation is one of the central psychological constructs in academic success (Davidowitz and Schreiber 2008; Masjuan and Troiano 2009) and is linked to commitment (Human-Vogel and Mahlangu 2009). Students enter higher education with a mixture of intrinsic goals and extrinsic goals (Byrne and Flood, 2005; Masjuan and Troiano 2009). They are more likely to persist in a particular higher-education institution if they believe that the institution is able to assist them in realising their goals, whether these are personal, social or instrumental (Yorke and Thomas 2003). Salient needs and motivations are formed by past socialisation experiences and cultural norms (Guiffrida 2006), but they are continually modified by present conditions.

Maximisation of motivation and engagement is achieved by the provision of opportunities for students to fulfil their most salient needs – whether extrinsic or intrinsic – to maximise their chances of success (Byrne and Flood 2005). Such maximisation is achieved in the climate of learning (Biggs 1989). For example, academic achievement encourages persistence. For this reason, the fostering of motivation requires management of the teaching-and-learning
context of the university to ensure scaffolded learning where success builds on earlier success (Biggs 1989).

Managing the Transition

Bridging of the gap between students’ home circumstances and previous experiences and the institutional factors, such as the demands of higher education, is an example of variable interaction that many students find challenging (Agar 1990).

Adequate adjustment to the higher-education institution and programme of study sets the framework for students’ success at university. All students face a transition from high school to higher education (Tinto 1988; 1993), but for some this transition can be a daunting challenge (Agar, 1990; Sennet et al. 2003). The move students make is measured not only in geographical space travelled, but also in social, moral and cultural adjustments that are required if students are to fit into the institutional culture of a higher-education institution. For all students, the different phases of transition – involving physical and social separation from membership in past communities, the formation of social bonds with members of the new community, and the learning of new norms required – are disconcerting and can also be stressful. Support in managing these difficult feelings is necessary to lessen the chance of students’ departure from higher education (Tinto 1988; Tinto 1993; Thomas 2002).

The distance between prior life experiences and the educational context can also be understood using a concept, institutional habitus, based on Bourdieu’s notion of habitus (Reay, David and Ball 2001; Thomas 2002; Yorke and Thomas 2003; Kloot 2009). Bourdieu (1988 in Kloot 2009) recognises that education is socially and culturally biased and that educational institutions are one of the primary structures maintaining class order by favouring knowledge and experiences of dominant social groups. Working-class students are at an unfair disadvantage, since their social and cultural practices, values, language and knowledge are seen as inappropriate or valued less than those of students from the dominant class.

The more foreign or alien the culture of an institution is to students, the less likely they are to possess the cultural capital to succeed in this environment. For example, the extent to which students’ values and norms are accepted at an institution (normative congruence), as well as peer support, influence how at home students feel, and thus their social and academic integration, which impacts positively on agency (Thomas 2002). Thus students who experience an institution’s culture to be foreign or alien are more likely to feel that they do not fit in, to struggle to make the adjustment, and, possibly, to be inclined to withdraw early (Thomas 2002).

Cultural connections play a much larger role in minority students’ persistence and success in higher education (Canagarajah 1997) than role they play in that of majority students. Guiffrida (2006) argues that minority students have a need to remain connected to supportive members of their home communities. She emphasises the potential for families and friends from home to continue to support students once they are in higher education. In turn, students find it easier to become comfortable in their higher-education environments if they do not need to abandon the supportive environments, or reject the values and norms, of home communities. This tension was also shown in work by Bangeni and Kapp (2005) in relation to students at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

Helping students manage this transition is not a singular event, since the transition between a school/home environment and integration into the higher-education context encompasses different stages (separation, transition and incorporation), and challenges are encountered at different times of the academic year. Although these stages are not necessarily distinct time periods, they may present different challenges for different students, and they may also present differently at different times. A range of institutional actions will be needed at various times to meet changing needs of students, although actions should be concentrated at the very early stages of the students’ higher-education careers, preferably within the first six weeks or first semester
(Tinto 1988). This concentration is best achieved via an extended orientation into the higher-education context, especially for those students whose backgrounds may not have afforded them the cultural capital to appreciate what is expected of them in this particular environment (Tinto 1988; Yorke and Thomas 2003).

Tinto (1988) emphasises the importance of rituals and ceremonies to mark these rites of passage and the process of establishing membership in the higher-education environment. Ceremonies serve the function of publically announcing the movement and successful incorporation of the student into membership of the new community, and they also provide a visible structure to assist the student in coping with difficulties entailed in that movement.

Successful academic and social integration of new students is essential in order to retain students in higher education. Student integration is impacted upon by a wide range of possible aspects, but adjustment does not reside in the student alone – it is relational. Adjustment is facilitated by the relationship the student has with the institution, and every effort needs to be made to foster attachment to the institution. A friendly and supportive institutional climate facilitates successful transition for the students (Thomas 2002). Social interactions are the main way in which such integrative associations arise. Students have to establish contact with other members of the institution – both students and faculty – in order to become integrated into the institution. The more students interact with other students and staff, the more likely they are to persist. If students fail to make the adjustment to the higher education context, they will experience alienation, disconnection, and poor functioning in academic, social and personal activities; adequate adjustment, in contrast, leads to improved commitment to study, success in study and persistence (Tinto 1988). Satisfaction with the higher-education environment (Biggs 1989) and adequate academic performance increases students’ commitment to the institution as well as their motivation (Human-Vogel and Mahlangu 2009).

Research shows that social engagement and integration can be facilitated by the development of learning communities (Zhao and Kuh 2004), the provision of collaborative teaching-and-learning practices – including groupwork activities and group-study spaces – and the provision of appropriate social facilities and mentorship that enable students to become competent members of academic and social communities in higher education (Kuh 2009).

In this way, the transition to higher education involves the incorporation of students into the new environment. It is much more than the mere learning of the skills needed to function in this environment; it involves building meaningful relationships that are centred on the shared goals of the students and that transform the identity of the students to include the relationship students have with the higher-education institution.

**Particular Characteristics of EDU Students**

Many of the students in Education Development Unit (EDU) in the Commerce Faculty at UCT are first-generation higher-education students, and many come from schools that do not adequately prepare them for what is expected at a higher-education institution.

Many of the EDU students have succeeded in reaching the level of higher education by receiving considerable support and encouragement from particular members of academic, religious or community groups, who have taken special interest in them. They feel a great level of responsibility towards those champions who were highly motivating during their school careers and continue to be motivating during their time in higher education.

In other instances, EDU students have to negotiate the application process themselves, especially if their parents or caregivers have no experience of higher education or if they come from communities in which few students proceed to higher education. In these instances, prospective students take full responsibility for the entire application procedure, without any support from parents or teachers.
Chapter 12: Introduction: Theorising Student Support

Like other students (Agar 1990), EDU students may find themselves overwhelmed by the size of the institution (UCT currently has around 26 000 students), large classes and the inability of staff to get to know them as individuals once they arrive at UCT. Many students struggle with being ‘just another number’ and become demoralised once they no longer access the individual attention and encouragement they previously received from their champions.

Like many other students in academic support programmes (Agar 1990), EDU students often have unrealistic expectations about their achievement. In order to be accepted to study at UCT, students need to be top performers at their schools. Their identity is often tied to this notion of academic excellence. However, these excellent results often cannot be sustained at higher-education level, and students then find themselves demoralised by poor performance, and even failure, in assignments, tests and examinations.

They are frequently demotivated by this anonymity and their initial experiences of disappointing results or failure. In this way, the agency that they needed to negotiate acceptance at UCT is eroded by their experiences once they arrive at the university.

Interventions Implemented by the EDU to Enhance Student Success

Recognising that the factors responsible for student success in higher education are diverse and interact with each other in complex ways, the EDU has tried to remain in touch with students’ nuanced needs and to address these needs flexibly in a variety of ways. Successful interventions are premised on the recognition that the pattern of students’ participation in higher education is changing and are based on a preparedness to respond positively to these changes. Students are seen as holistically and contextually as possible.

Research by Yorke and Thomas (2003) into what makes certain higher-education institutions more successful than others in retaining students from lower socio-economic groups shows that this success requires a strong policy commitment to access and retention, coupled with practical action. Random ‘add ons’ are unlikely to suffice (Yorke and Thomas 2003). In contrast, deliberate attempts at translating the access that has been granted to students via the EDU admissions policy into retention, and eventual success in the higher education context, have a much greater ability to achieve the needed outcome: keeping attrition to a minimum and making improvements in throughput rates and the development of students beyond the higher-education context.

The four main strategies used in such deliberate attempts are as follows:

1. a managed transition to higher education, with an emphasis on support leading up to and during the critically important first year of study
2. the development of the EDU as a learning community in which students feel at home and can engage fully with academic material
3. the offering of appropriate, just-in-time, psychosocial support informed by the developmental life stage of students and framed by their felt needs
4. the provision of opportunities for development beyond the curriculum and beyond higher education.

A Managed Transition

The EDU recognises that helping students manage the transition to higher education is a long-term project, since different things put strain on the transition at different times of the academic year. In the EDU programme, a number of structures facilitate this transition from home to higher education. These happen at different times of the year and fulfil different roles in the process. They include the Faculty of Commerce orientation, EDU induction, Step up (a course focusing on
lifeskills and personal development), mentorship programmes, EDU class meetings, ongoing personal support from staff in the EDU, leadership development, support for student representative organisations (EDUSO) and an awards evening.

EDU as a Learning Community

Learning communities are a means of combining academic and social aspects to promote more successful transition, better academic performance and better retention (Zhao and Kuh 2004).

The development of this learning community is achieved in a number of ways in the EDU. The specific classes taken by all first-year students in the EDU offer an opportunity for students to study a number of courses together. In addition, a number of other interventions are designed to strengthen this learning community.

Higher-education institutions are more likely to retain students from lower socio-economic backgrounds if the institutions embrace difference and if the habitus of the institution is close to those of the students (Thomas 2002; Yorke and Thomas 2003; Reay, David and Ball 2001). The EDU staff members are actively involved in supporting students and developing a strong sense of belonging in the students, which has a positive influence on students’ engagement (Yorke and Thomas 2003; Kuh 2009). The institutional habitus of the programme is inclusive and accepting of difference, and it celebrates diversity and difference. The EDU offers students a space where they can connect with other students who share their cultural heritages, and where students find acceptance of and respect for their practices and knowledge. Academic integration when not paired with social integration can have negative effects on persistence at higher education (Hu 2011). The EDU is one place in which the students are able interact with each other as equals, develop good friendships and social networks that provide the support to overcome difficulties, and challenge the power of the dominant codes and discourses in the contact zone of the higher-education context. In the ‘EDU family’, students find a ‘safe house’ (Canagarajah 1997), which offers itself as a social and intellectual space with high degrees of trust and shared understandings. Social connection and mutual support increase social capital, which is important in communities for overcoming social exclusion. In this way, EDU students can feel safe while addressing the sources of conflict in this new community as they develop literacy in the academic ‘contact zone’.

Psychosocial Support Appropriate to the Developmental Life-Stage and Felt Needs of Students

Improved affective factors correlate with improved overall adjustment and academic functioning (Davidowitz and Schreiber 2008). Thus psychological and social support needs to be offered to students who are struggling with these kinds of difficulties, and this support is best offered in flexible and accessible ways.

Psychological support services offered to students need to focus on the important developmental tasks, for example the achievement of ego-identity (Adams, Berzonsky and Keating 2006), that need to be completed for the developmental life-stage that students occupy, namely late adolescence and early adulthood. These developmental tasks include individuation, separation from families of origin, development of an independent sense of self, and exploration of preferences and values. During this stage, peers become an essential source of support (Adams, Berzonsky and Keating 2006). The creation of opportunities for the development and harnessing of this peer support is essential. Group interventions – such as group therapy and peer mentoring, which leverage peer support – are particularly suitable to students’ developmental life stage. They assist in developing the social skills students need to access peer support appropriately (Adams, Berzonsky and Keating 2006).
Psychological support interventions steer away from pathologising individuals, focusing on providing opportunities for developing appropriate coping strategies. Students show a preference for short-term interventions, although in some instances ongoing psychological support is needed. Human-Vogel and Mahlangu (2009) make an important point about the distinction between affective components related to commitment and coping. While coping requires a reduction of negative emotions, commitment requires increase\(^2\) of positive emotions. Psychological support, as such, needs to be able to achieve both these functions.

Students in higher-education settings are primarily motivated by success in their studies, and any psychosocial intervention should be designed to put students back on track with their studies. This necessitates the immersion of support interventions into relevant academic programmes in as holistic a way as possible. By improving adjustment, coping with stress and managing work load, students can improve their academic functioning (Davidowitz and Schreiber 2008).

EDU interventions that assist to help students manage the emotional demands of higher education include the lifeskills programme called Step Up, mentoring, and individual and group psychotherapy.

**Development Beyond the Curriculum**

EDU staff have created opportunities for students to take on leadership roles in the EDU because this enhances involvement (Astin 1999), develops responsible citizenship and grows graduate attributes. Opportunities to tutor and mentor junior students and to take on leadership roles in the Education Development Unit Student Society (EDUSO) – a student representative organisation – create spaces in which students can develop their leadership skills. EDU students are characterised by their commitment to passing on to others the benefits they experience from the EDU programme, and these leadership opportunities allow them to do this while becoming more socially and academically integrated into the academic context. Such leadership opportunities also facilitate the development of skills not ordinarily taught in the formal curriculum, which facilities a transition into the world of work.

**Conclusion**

In the EDU, support work is integral to the work of all staff – academic, professional and administrative. However, the primary responsibility for the implementation of the support programmes lies with the professional staff and academic development (AD) officers. Student Development Services consists of one full-time psychologist, two part-time psychologists and one social worker. Together, these staff members conduct individual and group therapy for students, facilitate the lifeskills programme, manage the mentoring programme, and offer leadership development to senior students in leadership positions. The two academic development (AD) officers consult with students one to one as needed and arrange events and structures designed to assist in the academic and social integration of students into the EDU; these include an induction programme before term starts, quarterly class meetings, academic support tutors, an awards evening and support for EDUSO.

The way in which these components aid transition will be described in more detail in the chapter titled ‘Student support and wellbeing’, in this volume.

\(^2\) Up-regulation
Introduction: Psychosocial Support to EDU Students

All staff – academic, professional and administrative – working with the Education Development Unit (EDU) in the Faculty of Commerce at the University of Cape Town (UCT) take a holistic view of their work with students and all offer psychosocial support appropriate to their relationship with students. The mental-health professionals (counselling and clinical psychologists and clinical social workers) and administrative staff working within the EDU offer a number of fairly innovative interventions to first-year students to support these students’ integration into UCT and the Faculty of Commerce. Some of these programmes – such as the EDU Induction, the Mentorship programme, Leadership development, and the EDU Awards evening – are exclusively for EDU students. Other programmes – such as the Lifeskills programme – are primarily for the EDU students, but offer a limited number of spaces to students from the mainstream programme. The counselling services are for all students registered in the Faculty of Commerce. These are in addition to the first-year orientation programme offered centrally through UCT and managed by staff in the Faculty of Commerce. In this way, we put into practice theories developed through our experience and the experiences of others (see Chapter 12 of this book). As social and academic integration is the most important outcome we are aiming for, these programmes are completely embedded in the experience of the students to facilitate seamless integration into the holistic EDU programme, rather than being seen as ‘addons’ or additional support.

In addition to the formal interventions mentioned above, the administrative team develop and nurture relationships with the students from their first point of entry. They are some of the first people with whom the students have contact. It is of extreme importance that students feel safe and open to discuss any problems they have at the time of first contact; therefore the administrative team make sure that students trust them enough to discuss any little problem or issue they are facing. This rapport is essential, as it will affect whether they feel free to discuss the bigger issues as their academic career progresses. Through this relationship, students are given emotional support and their abilities are affirmed when they feel inadequate or ill-prepared in comparison to other students. Career choices and long-term goals and objectives are discussed with students to encourage motivation, which keeps them on track with their academic responsibilities. Administrative staff monitor students’ academic performance regularly, and academic development (AD) officers discuss with students any concerns about academic performance. AD officers also encourage students to take advantage of opportunities to enhance their university experience with additional academic opportunities, extra-curricular activities and leadership opportunities. This extra-curricular development improves the students’ self-confidence and enhances their graduate attributes and ability to interact with colleagues and management in a work environment once they leave the university. The positive effect of this is affirmed by feedback from several corporate institutions testifying to the fact that EDU students are identifiable by means of their work ethic and team-leadership skills. They have been nurtured in the EDU family to be the kind of employees and managers who make that positive impact on the South African workplace.

Induction

The Induction programme is the first additional programme offered to the first-time entering EDU student’s orientation to UCT. This two-day event happens at the beginning of the
development of their learning community. It aims to reduce the anxiety of being in a new environment through its fun and interactive nature, as this comment from a student illustrates: ‘The EDU inductions of the first years were a lot of fun, learning more about my peers and the people entering the programme.’

Students are thus made to feel at home and reassured that this is a family they have joined. They are introduced to each other, senior students, professional and administrative staff and academics, and are encouraged to make friends. The following quotation from a student indicates the lasting effect of this intervention:

Anything is possible if you work hard towards it. It will not be easy but determination should always carry you through. Through the hard times I experienced at UCT I would listen to the song I first heard at the EDU Induction ‘Can’t give up now by Mary Mary’. I continue striving to make my dream of being a Chartered Accountant one day come true, and make a difference in my area.

During the induction programme students are taken through a Lifeskills programme aimed at mapping their life journey to that point and plotting a path through university. They are encouraged to accept their personal circumstances and to become focused on developing and growing as a person. This response from a student is typical: ‘A great event where all the new students get to know each other and also know the staff as well the university at large. They also get introduced to what EDU is all about.’

The Induction also provides the opportunity to senior students to develop their leadership skills, building their self-confidence and creating pride in being a part of something that changes their lives and that of the first-years, and, as such, is part of the integrated leadership development that happens in the EDU.

Step Up: Personal Management in the Higher Education Context

Flowing from the Induction, the EDU psychologists offer the Step Up: Personal Management in the Higher Education Context course. This is a lifeskills and study-skills programme offered to all EDU first-year students.

The aim of the Step Up programme is for students to learn the lifeskills and study skills they need and to feel a sense of belonging and social connectedness. In helping students to learn and feel these things, EDU psychologists assist students in integrating into both the academic context and the social context. The first six months of a student’s university career is essential for this integration process, and we can reduce student failure, or perceptions of failure, by being available to students to talk about what they need and to direct them in the appropriate way during this crucial time.

While there have been many changes in higher-education institutions since apartheid was dismantled and South Africa became a democracy in 1994, some continuities with the pre-1994 higher-education landscape persist (Badat 2009). As Jansen (2004, 311) has pointed out, institutions in South Africa ‘still bear the racial birthmarks in terms of dominant traditions, symbols and patterns of behaviour that remain distinctive despite the broader changes sweeping the higher education landscape’, and some black students find UCT – as an institution reserved during the apartheid era for white students, and steeped in the traditions and patterns that arose out of this history – very unwelcoming and alienating. In providing weekly small-group workshops, Step Up facilitates students’ successful functioning in higher education by developing connections between students and encouraging a sense of belonging in the institution of UCT via relationships with the Step Up facilitators and Step Up classmates.

The Step Up programme also allows the facilitators to learn to know EDU students well. By seeing the students in small groups over an extended period of time, while the students are talking about their adjustment to university, facilitators have a first-hand opportunity to monitor how the
students are coping. Facilitators know the resources that are available on the UCT campus to assist with various difficulties, and they can make direct referrals. The students learn to trust the facilitators and go directly to them to ask for assistance in particular areas, as the following representative comment indicates: ‘Our facilitator dedicates herself to making us adjust well and feel like we belong, and she reaches out to every one of us on a personal level and that makes me feel cared for and important in my capacity as an individual and not just a number’ (anonymous student feedback, May 2010 course evaluation).

Step Up gives voice to the strengths the students bring with them and thus enhances the cultural capital they require to succeed in higher-education contexts. The programme allows the discussion of students’ goals and motivation and gives staff the opportunity to express their high expectations of students, which, together with the development of practical skills, has been shown by research (Thomas 2002; Yorke and Thomas 2003; Kinzie 2005; Kuh 2009) to be an important aspect in improving students’ success.

Structure of the Step Up Programme

The Step Up programme follows on from the Induction programme, which introduces students to the EDU during the UCT’s official orientation period. Step Up is offered in the first semester and consists of a weekly small-group meeting at 8 am. The programme uses small-group, experiential, participatory methodology, and is facilitated by counselling and clinical psychologists and clinical social workers with experience in higher education and in facilitation skills and small-group processes. The programme is a non-credit bearing, but accredited, course, which appears on the official academic record of students who attend it. Although no assessment is built into the course, students achieve a pass or a fail result from it, based on a requirement of attendance at 80 per cent of tutorials.

The Step Up programme has four distinct phases during the first semester, which include both the relational and skills-based focus. The topics presented weekly are aspects related to adjusting to university and achieving success in this context. Themes addressed include adjustment to university; proactive goal setting; time management; stress management; career management; identity and group dynamics; study skills; and exam techniques. The following comment from a Step Up participant points to the efficacy of the facilitation the programme offers: ‘It [Step Up] is an excellent resource, especially for those of us from small, disadvantaged backgrounds. Coming to such a big and diverse place, was a first encounter for me … adjusting seemed a walk in the park, [while] I [had] thought it was going to be a mission and a half’ (anonymous student feedback, May 2010 course evaluation).

The phases of the Step Up programme are as follows:

- an orientation phase
- a lifskills phase
- a self-exploration and opportunity-scanning phase
- exam preparation.

During the orientation phase, facilitators use the time to welcome students, provide an opportunity for the students to get to know us and each other, and assist students in their initial adjustment to university.

The second phase focuses on general self-management tools (lifeskills) that students might need to succeed in the higher-education context. This phase includes goal-setting and time-management activities. The phase lasts a few weeks, and ends before the first short vacation.

After this vacation, students have a more accurate sense of the academic demands of university and have learnt the basic skills they need to manage their workload. They have written their first tests and many of them have spent the vacation working on projects due after the
vacation, or studying for tests. Some students manage to go home for this short vacation, but for many the cost of returning home is too high.

Facilitation then moves on to deeper self-exploration, which includes looking inwards to self-identity. We feel that students have had sufficient time at this stage to get to know each other, and have developed enough trust in the facilitator and each other to take the personal sharing to a deeper level. We use an effective and popular activity – called ‘My Name: Myself’ (see the box below) – to achieve this, which has proved to be an excellent way of facilitating deeper sharing about personal histories as well as providing an opportunity for the introduction, in an unthreatening way, of the cultural diversity in the class.

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**Example: An Activity in the Step Up Programme – My Name: Myself**

After welcoming students back to UCT after the break, the facilitator explains the activity. The activity is done in three components, each of which allows for a different benefit.

In the first part, the facilitator asks each student to think about the following five questions and write the answers down on a piece of paper:

- What are all my names? Please include all names on your birth certificate, family and clan names, nicknames and special endearments that only certain people call you.
- Who gave me my names? For example, who chose the names that are on your birth certificate; by what authority are you allocated certain family names or clan names; who gave you certain nicknames or endearments?
- What do they mean? Do any of your names have a literal meaning, or is there a special meaning for you?
- Which one is your favourite name? Which don’t you like? Why?
- Is there a story attached to your name?

In the second part of the activity, facilitators divide the students into groups of three and ask each student to take five minutes to share what they have written in response to the questions about their names. While one student is speaking, the others should not interrupt, but instead allow the speaking student the full five minutes. Once the student has finished, there is some space for questions or comments.

The third part of the activity is done in the large group. The facilitator asks for feedback from the students about how they experienced the activity and what they learnt about themselves or others in their group.

The value of the My Name: Myself activity lies in deepening personal connections, valuing family connections and growing an awareness of cultural diversity within the class.

Both facilitators and students view their names as an important part of their identity, and most students enjoy the My Name: Myself activity because it gives them the opportunity to reflect on and talk about their names and how they relate to their identity. For many students, this activity offers them the first experience of having five minutes to talk, uninterrupted, about themselves in a validated way. The story attached to one’s name is highly personal. Students share their stories and thus a deeper bond with the others in the group grows.

The My Name: Myself activity also allows facilitators to raise issues of family tradition and allows students to reconnect to their family and personal stories about their families. Many students are missing their families at this point and feeling disconnected from both their families and their home environments (Bangeni and Kapp 2005). This activity allows facilitators to value and celebrate family and home, which research has shown to be important in minority groups (Yorke and Thomas 2003; Guiffrida 2006).
Instead of talking about the diversity in South Africa in an abstract way – which can be somewhat patronising – the My Name: Myself activity raises issues of culture in a highly personal way, by giving students the opportunity to talk about naming traditions and different traditional names in different cultural groups. The activity is part of a way of valuing the cultural heritage of marginal groups (Guiffrida 2006).

Following this period of deeper self-exploration, the UCT Careers Service is allocated two sessions to talk to the EDU students about career opportunities in the commerce field, and to introduce students to the careers service, which is an important motivator for them. The service is particularly useful at this time, as exams are approaching.

The final phase of the programme focuses concretely on specific exam preparation. Facilitators re-evaluate how students are coping with regard to their academic commitment, address stress management and then cover how to manage the forthcoming exam period. In this way, the Step Up programme directly addresses the felt needs of the students and is relevant to their academic success.

The programme has been through many developments, and changes have been made to it based on improved understanding of the needs of the students. Initially, the programme was grounded in the assumption that students lacked specific knowledge and skills to be successful in the higher-education context, and thus used course readers and skills-development programmes to fill that gap. But, over time, Step Up facilitators developed a more sophisticated understanding of the challenges facing students, and moved away from a deficit model to a model valuing diversity and emphasising the student experience. Therefore the Step Up programme moved to an increasingly relational model, which foregrounded relationships between students themselves, between students and staff, and between students and the institution. Instead of teaching new knowledge and skills, we now start from where the students are, to create an environment in which they are welcomed and valued, and to build on the skills they already have to enable them to continue their journey of success.

Mentoring

In order to facilitate increased social integration, improved academic achievement and long-term retention (Jacobi 1991; Bean and Eaton 2001), a formalised mentoring programme was piloted in 2011. It involved recruitment of senior EDU students who were interested in supporting first-year students. These senior students were trained in mentoring by a clinical psychologist and assigned to first-year students in the orientation phase before the start of the academic year. The senior students then met with their first-years weekly.

Many students find seeking help difficult. Mentoring is a useful way in which students can access assistance on the university campus, since students prefer to seek help from people known to them, and who have similar characteristics, rather than from unknown or professional people. Even though the mentors are senior students, they are at most two years older than the first-years, and have very recently experienced the same issues the first-years are encountering. This was confirmed in the mid-year evaluation of the mentoring programme: we found a large majority of students (64 per cent) indicated that they would ask for assistance from a friend. Some 50 per cent said they would go to a family member for assistance – the second-most popular option.

The aim of the mentoring programme is to act as a first-level support for new students and a referral source for academic and social assistance. This kind of first-level assistance and support is important in the alien environment the first-years may be experiencing; it makes it feel more manageable for them.

The Mentoring programme operates in the following way. The mentor and his or her allocated group of first-years become a manageable group of people who can get to know each other and through whom the social integration that is so essential for student success can be
facilitated. At the weekly meeting of each group, the mentor shows an interest in how the first-years are doing. Although there are no fixed topics set for each meeting, the mentors set topics that they feel will meet the needs of the students, based on the demands the various academic processes place on students. The mentors keep abreast of when their group needs to sign up for tutorials, when written assignments are due and when tests are coming up. The mentors are advised to address the needs expressed by the students as a first point of departure. The mentoring programme is thus completely student focused and provides just-in-time support as students face new challenges.

As has been mentioned, the mentoring programme was evaluated in the middle of the year to assess how it was meeting the needs of the students. Students reported that they had found it very useful. The following is a typical response: ‘It makes you feel that you are not alone and that there is help and other people like you who are feeling as lost as you are’ (anonymous student feedback, May 2011 mentorship evaluation). However, some logistical matters were flagged for improvement in the future years.

The mentoring groups allow individuals to become a part of family. UCT is a large entity, and even the scope of the EDU itself can initially seem daunting to first-year students, but the mentorship programme reduces the university’s scale, giving the EDU students a more intimate arena in which to come to terms with the demands of higher education. Students particularly appreciate being able to engage with successful senior students who can act as role models for them. They also value having first-hand advice from people who have experience similar to their own.

**Leadership Development for Mentors**

Mentoring offers senior students an opportunity to develop their own leadership and interpersonal skills. This development is first facilitated by the initial mentoring training and then by bimonthly supervision of mentors.

The leadership training is also attended by the executive committee of the Education Development Unit Student Society (EDUSO), which will be discussed in some detail later in this chapter. It starts with the introduction exercises and focuses on the unique characteristics, attributes and skills of the mentors. In it we emphasise the ways in which each of them is different from the others. In this way, we model for them the acceptance and valuing of diversity which we would like them to model to their first-years in their groups and other EDU students. The box below sets out an example of a mentor-training activity.
Example of A Mentor-Training Activity: Arriving At UCT – Feelings, Experiences and Strategies

This activity is in three parts:

1. The first section involves a guided recall. We ask the prospective mentors to close their eyes and to think about the time when they first arrived at UCT and about all the ‘firsts’ associated with that. We ask them to remember the orientation week, the registration process, their first night in residence, their first lecture, their first tutorial, their first test and their first examination. We then divide the trainee mentors into small groups of about five, and ask them to write on large blank sheets of paper all the feelings they had at that time.

2. The second stage involves the prospective mentors thinking about problems they might have faced during all these ‘firsts’. We ask them to recall all the advice other people offered them, and all the ways in which they tried to deal with the problems. The groups write all these strategies down on large blank sheets of paper.

3. Finally, the small groups provide feedback to the whole training group about which of the available strategies worked for them and which did not.

The ‘Arriving at UCT – feelings, experiences and strategies’ training activity has a range of aims. The first part is aimed at helping the mentors identify with the experiences with which the first-years in their mentoring group are likely to be dealing. We create an opportunity for senior students to reflect on their own experiences of adjusting to university. We also like to remind them that a student’s first year at UCT is not all about problems, and that it is essentially a very exciting period. The aim is to enable the mentors to enter into their mentoring relationship with a mindset that moves beyond a deficit mindset. The activity also aims at illustrating diversity: that each person has a range of feelings and experiences and that students can also have contradictory experiences.

The ‘Arriving at UCT – feelings, experiences and strategies’ activity also provides an opportunity for brainstorming strategies for advice and assistance that mentors can give their first-years. The ideas are written on the large blank sheets of paper to show the trainee mentors that their own experiences already provide them with many ideas about what they can offer their first-years, and that they do not have to wait for the trainer to give them the answers about assisting their mentees. The final important aim of this exercise is to develop an awareness that different strategies work for different people, and that one size does not fit all. The mentors need to take time to listen to the needs of their first-years and suggest coping strategies that will work for the particular individuals in their group. This activity allows the senior students to consider the various strategies they used to cope, and the strategies’ varying success. We show that the various skills the mentors have developed, and their varied experiences, are a resource they themselves and the other mentors can use. In this way, the training emphasises the fact that they can rely on each other for support.

The training also includes guidance on how to deal with difficult situations. Mentors are advised about the limits of their assistance to first-years and when to refer mentees for professional help. They are also cautioned about the importance of confidentiality in the mentorship role.

The mentors are supervised by one of the psychologists employed in the EDU in group supervision meetings held twice per month. The quality of the Mentoring programme is thus continually monitored, and the supervisor can step in and advise the mentor in difficult cases. At these meetings, mentors are also able to reflect on their own experiences of mentoring and learn from this reflection. They have the opportunity to share activities they have conducted with their
groups, and to share their insights about the process. The mentors keep notes about each meeting they have with their first-year group. These notes are sent to the supervising psychologist. In an action–reflection cycle, the mentors’ leadership experiences are thus reflected upon and can be crystallised into knowledge for future use.

The EDU Student Organisation

EDUSO is another part of EDU that emphasises the development of the learning community. Social integration of students is enhanced by their membership in this student-led organisation. Students themselves are the impetus behind EDUSO (for more information on this, see the case study about the Student of the Year 2009, Katekani Baloyi, in Chapter 14, The Living Experience of Student Success, in this volume). They felt that the EDU did not have a platform for students to showcase their EDU pride and to connect meaningfully with each other as students in the same way that students in a housing residence would.

EDUSO organises a number of annual events, including a hike up Table Mountain. They also engage in community-outreach events, for example accompanying staff to local schools encouraging high-school learners to come to UCT and connecting with corporate entities to ensure that they receive some sort of funding for EDUSO. Since its inception, EDUSO has grown its membership body to more than 300 students and become a well-known organisation throughout the UCT campus, as well as amongst some of the large accounting firms in South Africa.

The administrative team supports the students in all their efforts when it comes to organising their events and as a sounding board for their ideas and projects. The EDUSO executive committee, which is made up of students elected to their positions by the membership body, is also included in all leadership-development programmes of the Student Development Services of UCT. EDUSO has become a joint project between the administrative team and the EDUSO executive committee. The administrative team work with the EDUSO executive and other students in preparing for the annual EDU Awards evening (discussed later in this chapter), as EDUSO takes charge of the entertainment for the night. This mini-production requires dedication from the executive and the students to pull off entertainment that they deem worthy of the biggest EDU event of the year. Auditions, rehearsals, sourcing of costumes and leading the student participants are all part of the responsibilities they have to fulfil for the Awards evening.

The EDU Awards Evening

Despite facing many difficulties that impact on their success – for example language issues, emotional issues and adjustment to university life – many EDU students are able to compete and perform exceptionally well in their academic life. The biggest event in the EDU calendar is the annual Awards evening held in the third term of UCT’s academic year. This event, which celebrates students' academic and other achievement, gives insight to the real and tangible success stories of the EDU students.

Awards are made for academic achievement in the following categories:

- overall positions in cohort: first, second and third places
- individual award for top student in each course
- most consistent performance for second- and third-year student
- potential graduate with the most progress made
- students who achieve more than 80 per cent
- final-year students who have not failed any courses during their time at UCT.
Initially the evening was conceptualised to celebrate only the academic awards to the students, but it has evolved to a celebration of the spirit of EDU in all its facets. It now also showcases the many creative talents that our students have and is an evening of music and dance hosted, arranged and presented by the students.

The awards evening also highlights the impact that students have had on each other. EDUSO presents an award that recognises the students who have participated in their events and have been outstanding in terms of assisting fellow students and the organisation in making events successful.

A special award is presented to the EDU Student of the Year. Senior students nominate and vote for the student who they feel has managed to combine academics, participation and the feeling of the EDU family. The Student of the Year epitomises the EDU students’ success story as it speaks to the qualities which EDU academic and support staff have attempted to bring to EDU students’ development (see the box below for the criteria considered in making the award).

Since 2008, the Student of the Year award has been presented to a single student who has shown leadership qualities along with proven participation in assisting peers and junior students within the EDU, whilst at the same time upholding his or her academic performance. The award usually goes to a student in his or her final year of study.

Criteria for the EDU Student of the Year Award

- academic achievement
- all roundedness
- motivator: academically and in extra-murals
- commitment to EDU
- attending EDU class meetings, Open Day, Induction, workshops etc.
- helping other EDU students
- friendly and accessible to EDU students
- personal growth and development
- has given feedback
- responsible for self and others
- good time-management
- leading by example
- general self-discipline
- sense of humour
- dedication to the programme

For profiles of three recipients of the Student of the Year award, see Chapter 14, The Living Experience of Student Success.

The EDU Awards evening serves as a symbolic rite of passage, as outlined by Tinto (1988), in the process of enculturation of students into the ‘EDU family’, celebrating their achievements not only in the academic sphere, but all their talents, and making explicit the character and ethos of the EDU community values.
Chapter 13: Student Support and Wellbeing

**Individual and Group Therapy**

Another component of the support services offered in the EDU is psychological assistance in the form of individual, couple and group therapy. We use an eclectic short-term (six-session) model, including psychodynamic, cognitive behavioural and relational psychotherapy.

Extensive stigma is associated with seeking psychological help, both in the general population and in the student population. Many people find it difficult to admit that they have problems, and many people fear what others might think if they are seen to access psychological help, as this representative comment makes clear: ‘I didn’t want help, because getting help meant I had a problem and I didn’t want to have a problem to fix. Fixing stuff is hard, and tiring and weak, and I want to be normal not broken and scary. So I thought if I ignored, if I wasn’t told I had something to fix, then it would go away. But I was wrong’ (anonymous student feedback, May 2011 mentorship evaluation).

Despite the continual struggle this stigma involves, the demand for the psychological assistance the support services in the EDU offer has grown significantly in the three years during which it has been available (see Table 13.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of students seen in therapy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First 6 months of the service (2009)</td>
<td>65 in 189 sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>127 in 382 sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>124 in 423 sessions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From 2010, a therapy group was established in which eight students could be seen together. Although the number in this group dwindled over the year, another intake joined at mid-year. In 2011, this therapy group stabilised at seven students who were seen for the duration of the year. A second group was started in the second semester for another six students – an indication that group therapy may be a way to cope with growing numbers of students in need.

Referral is driven from a variety of sources, including students’ self-referral and referrals from academics in the faculty and administrative staff. The EDU staff offering support services try to collaborate as closely as possible with UCT’s central counselling service (UCT Student Wellness Services), which is available to all students registered at the university. In this way, we can refer students to the social worker, psychiatrist, nurses and doctors at the central service. We do not have a waiting list, but if students cannot be accommodated in time slots when they are available, we refer them to psychologists based at UCT Student Wellness Services.

**Conclusion: Aligning Our Action to the Vision of the Programme**

The primary vision of all offerings in the student support programme is to be proactive rather than reactive in addressing the needs of student development. In everything that we do, we are working collaboratively with other EDU staff and student support staff in the university as a whole, as well as with students and student leadership, to achieve the full potential of the students in the EDU programme. This is a far cry from the historical deficit perspective of working to supplement inadequately prepared students so that they might catch up with the (imagined) prepared student.

A central tenet of all the work EDU student support services do is that we are working to create something of value, rather than to fix something that is broken. The success of this work and the success of the EDU students undermines the commonly held view in higher education that locates the ‘problems’ in the students. The EDU vision manifests in the creation of students
Chapter 13: Student Support and Wellbeing

who can access their own agency and possess the graduate attributes that the EDU values; staff
who are motivated by reflective practice and a set of standards of best practice in the field, rather
than following the lead of other practitioners with different practices; a learning community based
on mutual respect and collaboration and support structures and opportunities for students to
participate in their own development.
Chapter 14: The Living Experience of Student Success

Sherry Stewart and Michelle Abrahams

Introduction

Each year a student in the Education Development Unit (EDU) in the Commerce Faculty at the University of Cape Town (UCT) receives the EDU Student of the Year award (for details on this award, see the chapter ‘Student support and wellbeing’, in this volume). The following case studies of three recipients of the EDU Student of the Year award characterise the backgrounds and life experiences of many students in the EDU. In addition, their stories exemplify how the psychosocial services offered by the EDU supported them on their paths through their degrees as part of the EDU family. Most importantly, these case studies epitomise the strength of character of these remarkable students and their ability to mobilise their own agency within the supportive structures that the EDU provides.

Case Study: Student of the Year 2008 – Dumo

Dumo was born and bred in a small village called Nkantswini in Bizana (in South Africa’s Eastern Cape province). This is where he attended most of primary school at Mabuto Junior Secondary School. Those years were the most interesting, yet tough, times. When he was in Grade 2, his mother decided to go back to school to do her Grade 10. This meant that he had to share house chores with his brothers, looking after livestock and cattle, fetching water from the river and taking care of their own bread and butter – subsistence farming. They had no electricity supply, so they studied by candlelight at night. Later Dumo was sent to a Roman Catholic boarding school, Mariazell Higher Secondary School, in the Eastern Cape town of Matatiele, some distance to the north. At first he was excited because he thought, ‘Now I will be able focus on school alone and forget about all of those other distractions.’ However, Mariazell also came with its own challenges; to Dumo, it mostly felt like a prison. Amongst those challenges was the fact that there was no library, and not enough textbooks. Dumo found the diet very boring (half a loaf of brown bread every morning and evening for five years). Bathing was with freezing cold water in both summer and winter. This hardship, Dumo believes, moulded him, and therefore he has become a strong man today. Having been exposed to many different environments in his past, Dumo did not find it too difficult to adapt to UCT, as conditions on the campus were an improvement on his previous circumstances.

The EDU encouraged positive coping styles and enhanced social support as students were encouraged to make a friend during the Induction programme. During Dumo’s first year at UCT, he was able to adjust and adapt because of the support from EDU. Dumo felt further supported in this transition by other aspects of the Induction, which gives students a space to believe in themselves and set goals of succeeding. He made friends; later these friendships became very powerful in peer support and study groups. The friends interacted socially and shared their academic strengths.

Students find the EDU corridor a gathering space where everyone is friendly. Diversity is also valued in the EDU, and students feel that they can speak about their varied cultures. Dumo always talked about finding a wife. Dumo explains how he felt about these varied types of support: ‘It meant less energy consumed on my part trying to adapt and I could generate my energies on other things.’

Dumo had not studied Accounting prior to his arrival at UCT. He says: ‘EDU provided us with a very brilliant and caring lecturer by the name of Carla Fourie. Because of this support I could reduce the exorbitant number of hours spent trying to understand this course. As a result of this, my sleeping hours during first semester of first year were increased from 15 hours a week to
Dumo was eager to visit the EDU offices, and in this way became popular with staff and developed a trust relationship with them. He felt free to ask for guidance or input to clarify any uncertainties. The commitment by the EDU to support student success was a motivation to students; Dumo found the trust relationships with staff aided his success. He could use EDU staff as sounding boards and receive guidance to reaching his goals. He explains: ‘My prior UCT school life and UCT were worlds apart and required a strong soul in order to triumph. I had the willpower to conquer the transition part, and EDU also played its role and staff made me feel valued as a person.’

He was reflective in his studies and quick to identify gaps in his learning. Mindful of the fact that he had not done Accounting at school, he developed a proactive attitude in his approach to this course, putting in many long hours working at mastering this material. This effort paid off: he later pursued a career as a Chartered Accountant.

Dumo was devoted to his studies because of his mother’s return to school to complete her Grade 10 when he had still been a boy. She demonstrated to her children that she valued further education. He, too, was driven to complete his studies and pursue his career to provide financially for his family. He says: ‘Many ‘A’ students never made it through their first year at UCT, simply because UCT also exposes learners to a different world of temptations. These carrots easily distract students and they lose their focus for a proper balanced student life. Whenever I was tempted I always reminded myself of the reasons for being at university.’

Dumo was fundamentally motivated and made choices to be self-directed and focused in his studies. Positive feedback encouraged him to do better, and every year he was on the Dean’s Merit List (published annually in recognition of academic excellence). He was also selected as the most versatile student in 2005, received the Golden Key award (for the top 15 per cent of students for the year) and, in his final year, was nominated by his peers for the Student of the Year award. In his words:

I was never the type to be easily influenced by peer pressure. I always believed and preached that students need to live a balanced life. Clubbing was not a priority. I went to a club for the first time as a third-year student at UCT because I was house-committee member and had to attend. Before leaving home for UCT, a wise man told me that the only time one can pat yourself on the back and say you are successful is when you have attained a minimum of two degrees. One being the academic degree and the other being a good personal profile ‘degree’.

EDU provided a range of leadership and soft-skill opportunities, for which Dumo enrolled. The graduate attributes he gained have stood him in good stead for work in industry. He explains: ‘UCT and EDU offered many resources which would enhance my learning experience. Things I was not used to, like library, computers and internet, mentors and tutors, student wellness services and in a funny but serious note balanced diet and hot water. I made a point to take advantage of all these comforts.’

Dumo’s vision to be responsible, to acquire a better life for his family and community, and, eventually, find his life partner was supported by the EDU. Dumo’s expectation was that the university could help him realise his dreams, and he felt motivated by the support of lecturers and academic development (AD) officers.

EDU supports the throughput of students with many extras, for example presentation skills, which provide students with self-confidence for public speaking. Dumo was Master of Ceremonies at an annual EDU Awards ceremony and charmingly kept his audience entertained. Students who make use of all such interventions offered grow and develop, and are able to apply their learning from them in the world of work.

Dumo eagerly embraced the learning-community concept and combined academic and social facets to increase his academic performance. He excelled, and during his second year at UCT he signed up to become an Accounting mentor. He felt a strong sense of belonging and wanted to
Chapter 13: Student Support and Wellbeing

engage in a meaningful way with the ‘EDU family’. He found mutual support for his efforts and became a role model for many junior students. He explains how this happened:

Believe it or not, towards the end of first year I had other EDU (mostly Thuthuka bursary) students coming to help with Accounting and Statistics study groups. Second year I decided to become an official EDU mentor and still stayed approachable to my fellow classmates for assistance where possible. From third to fourth year I became a tutor for both EDU and mainstream UCT students. Many EDU students whom I tutored continued to approach me for help while I was enrolled in postgraduate studies.

The EDU makes provision for leadership opportunities, and students are supported by EDU staff in this regard. This is a growth experience for students, who can become more responsible and confident. Feedback on how to improve skills are filtered to students. Dumo recalls the benefit of this approach:

This is the area that I am mostly grateful for when it comes to UCT and EDU. During my varsity life I acquired a vast range of leadership experience worth including on my CV. A few roles that I played included mentoring, tutoring, induction leader, orientation leader, Thuthuka camp leader, MC at Saville awards, house committee member and sub-warden, just to name a few. It is also worth mentioning that for all the contribution I made, I receive the recognition. In the same year, I received two very important awards that complemented each other, i.e. Senior Student of the Year 2008 (for Leo Marquard residence) and EDU Student of the Year 2008.

Dumo had a stable sense of self, with a strong work ethic and was excited by challenges, as his words make clear:

It has always been my family’s passion to give back which transferred to me at seven years old. This is when we made mud bricks (with no machinery) to build the first pre-school in Nkantswini Village. From then there has been lot of successful stories due to the charity events we have done. In 2009 we decided to start an official foundation that will focus more on educational development for the community. The foundation is called Dumekhaya Foundation (DKF); this is the combination of my name and my twin brother Nkosekhaya. The foundation assists students from Grade 7 up to matric in order to get good results. We also provide all the assistance (admin and finance) for them to apply to tertiary and bursary institutions. If a learner is unable to obtain a bursary or NSFAS, we also pay for first-year tuition and residence for a maximum of a year whilst the beneficiary is applying for funding. At the moment the foundation has no external funding and so far has had two graduates.

Dumo is elated when he speaks about this community project: ‘Life can’t be better than this, now I feel like my arms have been extended to be able to assist and develop more kids in my village.’

Dumo acknowledges while being on the Thuthuka bursary and EDU programme, he received the best education offered in South Africa. He later worked as a trainee accountant, and his hard work and dedication were recognised – hence the promotion to Management Accountant, as he explains: ‘As of the 1st of November 2012 I would have completed my articles and get registered as a qualified Chartered Accountant (SA). As of that day I have also accepted a position of Management Accountant – Group, for Sappi Limited.’

The leadership skills Dumo gained, and his interaction with EDU staff have contributed to Dumo’s confidence in his career. When he communicates his successes with EDU, there is jubilation over his achievements. Dumo has been an inspiration to others by returning to UCT to address students and tells his story, from tending the cows to his career today. He reminds students that he was able to show the world, through hard work and commitment, nothing is impossible, regardless of where a person comes from.
Case Study: Student of the Year 2009 – Katekani Baloyi

Katekani Baloyi started his academic career in 2006 as a first-year Bachelor of Business Science student, and graduated in 2009 with a Bachelor of Commerce degree in Economics and Finance. The following are his enthusiastic memories of EDU’s support:

I’d have to say the support structure that the EDU offered was unbelievable. I got there intent on JUST studying, getting good marks and then getting the hell out of there to start my business – because truth be told, I only went to varsity to please my parents. When I got to UCT, the EDU made it easy for me to settle in with the smaller lectures and longer tuts. It made focusing on academics and getting that right a far smoother process than it would have been otherwise.

The administrative team plays what might be termed a ‘preventative’ role in EDU students’ academic life at UCT. It ensures that any issue raised by a student is dealt with before it becomes a problem that may result in failure or exclusion from the course for which the student is registered. Katekani is living testimony to the fact that constant communication with and nurturing of the students results in success in academia as well as a maturity in terms of problem-solving at the employment level. In Katekani’s words: ‘The fact that I was in an environment where I consistently got to see familiar faces on a near daily basis made my integration into varsity life that much smoother. UCT is not a small place by any stretch of the imagination, so feeling like part of a family – the EDU family – was huge for me.’

Katekani made use of the many opportunities offered to him as an EDU student, such as becoming an academic mentor, participating in a vacation internship at the financial institution Sanlam during his second year of study, and always attending the class meetings that we arrange quarterly to encourage and motivate EDU students as well as to receive feedback from them. Katekani explains:

It gave me the freedom to explore student leadership and in so doing better equip myself with essential soft skills that would differentiate me once I got out into the real world. I was fortunate to start off at a company and with a team who were intent on leveraging every asset they had to become the best at what they did when I began working at Markham as part of the Foschini Group training program. I began my professional life as a trainee merchandise planner and within 14 months I had completed the program and earned my first promotion.

Katekani was a founder member of the EDU Student Society (EDUSO). After a few planning meetings with EDU staff, Katekani launched the society. He was voted into the chairperson role and immediately started work with events and plans to bridge the gap between the degree programmes within the EDU and make sure that students would come together outside their academic work.

The leadership skills that Katekani gained and his constant communication with the team of administrators in the EDU helped him in decision-making when he joined the employment sector. His academic career was not always smooth sailing; he experienced difficulties in terms of time management, felt some confusion about career choices and questioned the purpose of his being at UCT. He made use of the resources available and spoke to the AD officers in the administrative team, with whom he had developed relationships. He trusted the staff enough to voice his issues and managed to find his way back to his chosen career path. It took hard work, time, serious motivation and a keen interest in the well-being of the student – on the part of staff and Katekani himself. Now, as he explains, in his personal and working life he is able to use all the skills and problem-solving tactics he developed while with the EDU:

When I moved up to Joburg I wasn’t getting the same ‘work life experience’ I’d had while in Cape Town. This frustrated me because I knew what a great company I was working for, and yet it wasn’t living up to the standards I knew it was capable of. I had a lot of hurdles to get over and a
lot of bump-my-head-against-a-wall-and-have-to-get-up-again-moments. I had long hours, standing on my feet all day with a lot of asking ‘what the hell am I doing here, and where did I make the wrong turn that landed me here?’ The soft skills I picked as a member of the EDU and as a member of student leadership went a long way to helping me navigate arguably the most frustrating six months of my life – and this is coming from a guy who had to repeat second year finance at U-C-T!

Figure 14.1 Katekani Baloyi, EDU Student of the Year 2009

The importance of nurturing that relationship with the student and the administrative team can be seen in the way that our ex-students feel about returning and giving back to the EDU. Katekani has returned to the EDU a number of times as an alumnus to encourage and motivate the students – he feels comfortable and at home at the EDU. Students who have been a part of the EDU remain related to the EDU family, and continue to feel that through communication with the administrative team and, in particular, the AD officers, who have been with them from their first
day at UCT and have seen them through to graduation.

### Case Study: Student of the Year 2012 – Nandipha

Before she arrived at UCT, Nandipha had faced much adversity in her young life. Nandipha comes from a family of seven, and has four siblings. She is the eldest child. She says that her father is smart and has a qualification (N6 diploma) in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, while her mother dropped out of school in grade 10. Her mother’s desire is to further her studies, but due to personal problems she is not able to study at present. After the birth of her second child, Nandipha’s mother became ill. Nandipha relates that it was a very stressful home environment in which to grow up, but that her aunt and uncle then took care of the kids. Her mother recovered and had three more children. During Nandipha’s last year at school, her father left the home and her mother became depressed about the loss of her spouse; it was a challenge to concentrate on her academics while having to care for her family. The children also lost the father–child relationship when he moved out. While at university, Nandipha has to manage the loss of a once close father–daughter relationship and support her brothers, who feel angry at their father for disrupting their lives.

During her first year, Nandipha did not find the transition from school to university easy. From a psychosocial perspective, when Nandipha arrived at UCT, she was faced with emotional anxieties at a personal level in addition to the cognitive challenges of higher education. She says that her self-esteem was at zero at that time, and that she was prone to giving up. As a first-generation student, she found the idea of being at university very stressful. EDU encourages students to become part of a learning community early in their time at UCT. However, due to financial constraints and uncertainty as to whether she would study at UCT, she arrived late and attended neither the university-wide Orientation Week nor the EDU Induction programmes. Also, as she explains, she did not live in a university residence: ‘I was clueless about university stuff. Managing the transition to university was hard and getting used to how lecturers taught because it was very different from school. At school I did not have to work consistently and would cram before an exam or test. I did not have access to internet because I lived off campus.’

During her first year at UCT, Nandipha looked up to senior students as her role models. She was stimulated by these students’ reaching out to first-years and encouraging peer support. Nandipha is from outside Cape Town, and was relieved to find friends from different cultural backgrounds, whom she could relate to in terms of language, culture or location. She felt: ‘Here is someone else like me.’ Nandipha made good friends with students who were not interested in clubbing and going out socially, but who are who are driven and focused, like herself. Occasionally they would have movie night out.

The EDU programme provides a space for students to be themselves’ in a safe, accepting and comfortable space. She adapted to a new environment by learning to fit in. Nandipha felt very grateful that when the intensity of loneliness gripped her, she had ‘a home’ while she was far away from her family.

Nandipha talks about how she has learnt to know more about herself through the Step Up class offered in the first semester of the first-year in EDU. She has grown and developed skills such as time management and planning. It became important for her to have a good balance between personal and academic demands. Step Up staff encouraged her emotionally. Initially she was withdrawn in class, but she found the Step Up class helpful and felt empowered while learning life skills. Interacting with fellow students encouraged her to make friends and gain self-confidence. Nandipha also accepted that she needed to take charge of her destiny by working hard

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1 Not her real name. In these case studies we have the permission of the students showcased, but we have used a pseudonym here to protect the privacy of the student.
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The EDU provided a dedicated person whom Nandipha could go to, who went beyond an advisory role to listen to her and who knew her name. Nandipha visited the EDU offices and acquainted herself with staff, including the AD officers, who readily gave positive feedback, encouraged her emotionally and motivated her to press on even harder.

Nandipha explains that UCT as a whole is a tough environment. The medium of instruction is English (not Nandipha’s mother tongue) and she felt hesitant to speak in class. EDU acknowledges the language barrier many students experience, and EDU lecturers use different techniques to encourage student input. Confidence levels to speak in public are enhanced. For example, students are encouraged to speak at EDU tutorials and workshops and can use their mother tongue to express themselves. Nandipha was committed to achieving successful outcomes and felt supported by a learning community. She has developed a strong work ethic when it comes to her studies and has excelled academically.

The varying backgrounds of EDU students present a challenge. Although Nandipha had the experience of mainstream students thinking less of EDU students than students like themselves, she found it an interesting challenge to change their mindset. ‘Stay true to yourself and do not accept their judgements,’ she says. ‘Accept that your circumstances are different from spoilt kids and plot your success against your own achievements.’ She manages to smile and faces a range of challenges and responsibility with sheer willpower, commitment and much personal sacrifice.

During her second year, Nandipha felt that things had improved, and she understood what lecturers required. The EDU structures facilitated the transition from home to university by making her aware of due dates, upcoming events, and skills taught, and provided ongoing personal support. In addition, lecturers stipulating their expectations. Nandipha explains: ‘The EDU interventions assisted my success as they strive to remain in touch with student needs. The registration process and personal curriculum advice is staggered and students do not have to queue all day.’

Workshops are an intervention open to senior students. In these workshops, academic concepts are consolidated and reinforced. Nandipha found these systems give a platform for students to grow and reach their potential. EDU students develop a strong work ethic to find solutions and not wait for the lecturer to provide them. While the stigma of a deficit model has changed a great deal, students still feel that they have to work extra hard in the mainstream classes to prove themselves. Nandipha felt that there had been gaps in her schooling; many times she had to catch up or start from scratch because learners at her school had not been taught to think critically.

Financial constraints provided challenges throughout Nandipha’s university career, but she refused to allow them to get her down. For example, although she did not own a laptop, she did not allow this to stand in her way, and would work on assignments through the night in one of UCT’s computer labs, where students can access this technology.

In addition, although her father initially paid her fees and accommodation, in Nandipha’s final year of study he erred in respect of her rental, and she was evicted from the flat in which she lived, without being able to take any of her belongings with her. Once again, she put others before herself and did not want her family to worry about her. This incident did not crush her because she had developed good relationships and built on a support network. She had to squat at a friend’s place until emergency university accommodation was made available to her. The EDU director called her former landlord and negotiated for her to retrieve her textbooks. Combined with the support on this programme, her determination to get her family out of dire straits combined with her spiritual faith. Nandipha persevered through this experience and continued to work hard.

Nandipha had arrived at UCT with a low score on entry points and was placed on the four-year programme of study toward her degree. However, she adopted a positive attitude to her studies and soon excelled academically. She is currently on track to complete in her third year of
enrolment. She told herself that she could not make the excuses of personal circumstances and workload constraints, because everyone has the ability to tap into their potential and succeed. Her choice to drive herself and build on a strong work ethic paid off in good results from tests.

Nandipha has grasped the opportunities created by the EDU to develop her leadership abilities. She has tutored an Accounting course (ACC1106F) and has been a support to first-year students in Economics courses (ECO1110F and ECO1011S). She believes that this has contributed to her developing graduate attributes to stand her in good stead when she enters the world of work. She spent twenty hours a week assisting first-year students on ECO1110F and ECO1011S courses, without wanting any remuneration. She took the initiative to organise and facilitate peer workshops and tutor for the Financial Reporting 2 and 3 courses. She has also been a champion for many causes and put others before herself.

Nandipha participated in UCT societies, and has been an intercession leader at UCT (Student Christian Fellowship (SCF). She is energetic and has a positive outlook on life. The EDU recognises students as holistic people, and this allowed her to developed character, learn independence, and form positive coping styles. She learnt about growing in pain and becoming a stronger person.

Having experienced such great support from senior students, Nandipha felt inspired to follow her role models and become a part of giving back in this learning community. She felt motivated to share her knowledge and expertise. She wanted to share her experiences and tell how they helped her as a student. She wanted to let other students know how skills learned and enrolling for extra courses each year contributed to her completing her degree within three years. She informally helps junior students and peers. Being selfless has made her learning experience richer; she is not at UCT only to get a degree. She has a vision and realises how she can make an impact her community. By giving back, Nandipha has become a reflection of what EDU strives to create in integrating students socially and academically.

Although Nandipha has received an award of excellence since her first year at UCT, she was shocked and humbled by being awarded the EDU Student of the Year award for 2012. She did not realise that her peers thought so highly of her. Fellow students responded that this student has a sense of humour and that her simple lifestyle makes her stand out from the rest.

Nandipha was elated to receive a laptop computer at the awards ceremony as part of her Student of the Year Award; the laptop will give her an advantage for preparation for her final undergraduate exam and postgraduate studies next year. She will no longer be forced to work through the night in the computer labs. The laptop is a resource that will allow her to spend more time effectively doing academic work. She explains:

I am more motivated now to be successful and to continue contributing to success of fellow students. I want to help students who fail to give them back their self-confidence and not allow them to be crushed. I hope by sharing my experiences others will fight all odds and be encouraged to ‘never give up’. I want to be a voice to students, to recollect and be mindful of all EDU has done for them and give back. Examples of ways to contribute could be part of EDUSO (Student Organisation), or academically or share ideas of improving EDU. Become pioneers to keep this program great and sustainable and share values you learnt while at EDU. Everyone should pitch in any way they can – take free time to contribute in just one way.

Nandipha’s future plans for giving back are to enter the farming sector, which she feels is an area that should be given further concentration and is not reaching its full potential in poorer communities. She wants to start a community project in which the land belongs to the community and there is self-sustaining farming. People will be taught the necessary skills, creating jobs for the community. Another community project she plans is the erection of a youth centre to help youth with issues surrounding drug and pregnancy. It will be an open community centre where sports skills will be taught by qualified people involved to empower youth and facilitate entry into professional leagues. Nandipha’s brother is also eager to support this objective. Nandipha
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says that youth need to be encouraged to see the bigger picture and plan for a better future. By making sacrifices, she feels she can break the cycle.
Chapter 1: Paving the Way For Systemic Change: Curriculum Innovation For Development and Equity


Chapter 2: Introducing the Commerce Education Development Unit and its Work


REFERENCES


*Chapter 3: Leadership That Can Make a Difference*


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Chapter 10: Possibilities and Challenges in a Faculty-Based Writing Centre


Chapter 11: Valuing Linguistic Diversity


Chapter 12: Introduction: Theorising Student Wellbeing


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Chapter 14: The Living Experience of Student Success

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