

**Exploration, Discovery, Reflection: Journeys of Understanding**

*Life histories of first-year students and the impact on their interactions  
in a higher education and residence environment.*

by

**Gillian Cruickshank**

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education: Higher Education

Center for Higher Education Studies  
School of Adult and Higher Education  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Supervisor: Mrs Ruth Searle  
December 2007

**Exploration, Discovery, Reflection: Journeys of Understanding**  
*Life histories of first-year students and the impact on their interactions  
in a higher education and residence environment.*

by

**Gillian Cruickshank**

## DECLARATION

I, Gillian Cruickshank, declare that, except for the quotations specially indicated in the text, and such help as I have acknowledged, this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university.

**SIGNED:** .....

December 2007

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge the following people who have played a great role in guiding me to the culmination of this dissertation:

Ruth Searle, my supervisor. Thank you for your encouragement, support and never-ending patience.

Joan Connolly, for being the educator, friend and mentor that you are.

Sthuthu Mashabane, my colleague, friend, confidante, and shoulder to lean on.

My students, from whom I continue to learn so much.

And finally, RJ. You gave me my wings and now I fly free.

**DEDICATED TO**

Arcudius Ra Mbeje (d. 1999)

Lindani Mpanza (d. 2000)

Mzwandile Mbewana (d. 2005)

**Sons. Brothers. Students. Leaders.**

## ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative inquiry into the lives of first-year residence students at the Durban University of Technology. Six students volunteered to be participants in this study, and they discussed their life stories freely and frankly. Interviews were conducted as conversations rather than formal question-and-answer sessions, and this method elicited rich and vibrant material.

This dissertation considers the specific stories of two of these students, Student A and Student B, and how their life experiences have affected them. The study looks at what these experiences have been whilst the students were at home and at school; what their experiences are as first-year students residing in an institutional residence; and how all these experiences have impacted on their transition to life at university. The theory of development and the search for identity are at the core of this investigation. Their life stories have illustrated the role that development plays in their individual growth and development through the adolescent and young adult years. Their search for their own identity as African youth in post-apartheid South Africa has direct relevance and bearing on the reality of life in the country today.

The students identify issues that cause them difficulty and concerns, such as family relationships, homesickness, cultural conflicts, and peer pressure. They talk at length about specific incidents and situations that have caused them stress and worry, and through their stories we can see how they are developing their own identity as they try to make sense of their world at home, at university, and in residence.

The conclusion highlights the themes that have risen through the analysis of their stories: the commonalities, the pressures, the worries and concerns, and the interventions that could be made to ease the transition phase.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
<b>Declaration</b>	i
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	ii
<b>Dedication</b>	iii
<b>Abstract</b>	iv
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	1
Introduction to the Study	1
The Context of Student Development within Education	1
Structure of Residence Student Development at DUT	2
The Context of First-Year Students	3
Rationale for the Study	4
Impact of the Study	5
Extension of the Research	6
Research Questions	6
Overview of the Dissertation	7
<b>Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework &amp; Literature Review</b>	8
Introduction	8
Development & Identity	8
Summary	20
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b>	21
Introduction	21
Interpretive Paradigm	21
Selection of Participants	23
Ethical Considerations	24
Collection of Research Material	25
Limitations to the Study	30
Summary	30
<b>Chapter 4: Transcriptions: Life Stories</b>	
Student A: Wet Paint...Story Boards...& Levi Jeans	31
Student B: Snapshots...The Boy from Umtata	50
<b>Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion</b>	80
Introduction	80
Thematic Analysis	80
Discussion	89
Summary	92
Conclusions	92
Recommendations	95
<b>Annexure A</b>	97
<b>Annexure B</b>	99
<b>References</b>	100
<b>Ethical Clearance</b>	

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

This study focuses on some first-year residence students who are accommodated in the Durban University of Technology residences. First-year students entering a tertiary institution are bombarded with changes that may cause disruption, confusion and loss of focus in their lives. This change can be exacerbated in youngsters who have moved away from home and reside in an institutional residence, as they then also face the loss of a familiar home environment, their family and the local community. In the struggle to cope with all these changes, the adjustment phase to tertiary education and residence life may have various impacts on their academic performance. There appears to be little direct information as to how students think and feel as they enter a higher education institution. This raises the question of what we know about how a young student fits into university life during the first year. The varying aspects of university life that could have an effect on a first-year student include the general university community (staff and other students); the academic programme; and the residence environment. The discussion will commence with an outline of residence student development, including the practitioners who are involved, and will then provide an overview of the context of residence life in relation to first-year students.

#### **THE CONTEXT OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT WITHIN EDUCATION**

Within the educational ambit, the holistic development of students is recognised as having value for the student, faculty, and the institution. Williamson et al (1937, p. 123) clarified the relationship between the student and development from the student personnel perspective

The student personnel point of view encompasses the student as a whole. The concept of education is broadened to include attention to the student's well rounded development - physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually, as well as intellectually. The student is thought of as a



responsible participant in his own development and not as a passive recipient of an imprinted economic, political, or religious doctrine, or vocational skill. As a responsible participant in the societal processes of our American democracy, his full and balanced maturity is viewed as a major end goal of education, as well a necessary means to the fullest development of his fellow-citizens.

The American perspective is expressed here, however what is said by Williamson *et al* can be applied broadly in the student development context to students at universities in most countries. This view of student development is also supported by Love (1996, p. 1) who reiterates that, "The need to actively integrate intellectual, social and emotional aspects of undergraduate student learning has been voiced periodically throughout the last half century." Chickering and Reisser (1993) looked at student development in terms of their Seven Vectors of development, and advanced this further by associating the developmental Vectors directly with residence living and development programmes (Website source, accessed 26/8/04). It is generally accepted practice that institutions of higher learning throughout South Africa have personnel who are responsible for the general development and well-being of students. The location of Student Development varies from institution to institution: in one institution it may be located within Student Counselling; at another it may be combined with Student Governance; and at yet another institution it may be a stand-alone department. Notwithstanding the institutional location, Student Development practitioners aspire to produce well-balanced individuals who have gained not only an academic education, but who have also developed competence in the physical, social, emotional, spiritual and interpersonal aspects of their lives.

### **STRUCTURE OF RESIDENCE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT AT DUT**

The role and function of the residence development office at the Durban University of Technology is to provide students residing in the residences with holistic development programmes that support and enhance the personal growth, leadership skills, and academic progress of the students. The structural format of residence development consists of three levels: Development Practitioners, Residence Assistants, and House Committees.

### **Development Practitioners**

Two full-time permanent staff members service approximately 2200 students in the Durban residences. The number of students cannot be precisely stated as there has been a constant acquisition of new leased residences, or termination of such leases, on a term-by-term basis by the institution. The main function of the development practitioners is to provide programmes that assist residence students with learning, development, and capacity building. Each of the two practitioners focuses on different elements of development: one on life skills and one on academic development. Where individual or group difficulties have been identified, the development practitioners can do a full assessment and design relevant intervention programmes.

### **Residence Assistants**

Part-time Residence Assistants (RA's) are appointed for each residence. These are senior students (B.Tech or M.Tech) who have displayed strong and constructive leadership skills as an undergraduate. The RA's assist the development practitioners with the implementation of the life skills and academic development programmes, and also identify any specific problems that may occur in the residences.

### **House Committees**

House Committee members are the elected student leadership within a residence. Their role is to facilitate sporting and social activities for their residence community, as well as implementing specific programmes such as community outreach or other relevant programmes of interest.

### **THE CONTEXT OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS**

Within the ambit of my practice as a student development practitioner, I have often seen some young first-year students behaving in an immature and irresponsible way. I have also observed that many first-year students are lacking in self-esteem, or confuse aggression with assertiveness. Some first-year students have displayed low levels of

confidence and appear to have difficulty in setting priorities. These factors are not uncommon in adolescents verging on adulthood, as outlined by Chickering & Reisser (1993) in their 'Seven Vectors' theory. Similar developmental stages were highlighted by Erikson (1964), and other developmental theorists have proffered similar/comparable ideas, as covered by Crain (1980). Molla (1999: website accessed 26/11/07, p. 1 of 6) talks directly of youth and their own development of identity

*One of the first approximations to the problems of youth, is to figure out how to handle one's personal development: to reach a sense of unity and coherence within oneself, to learn the fundamental definitions of one's life, and the key aspects of one's relationship with reality. This attainment of personal development, called "identity", will allow the individual to project him/herself to a personal and social level.*

The issues of identity and maturity are relevant to this study. This development of identity usually takes place during the adolescent and young-adult years, which generally coincides with entry into tertiary education. Keech (1985) outlines various kinds of maturity, including Intellectual, Emotional, Vocational, Sexual, Recreational and Cultural maturity. All these factors come into play for a young first-year student, who will have varying levels of maturity in these aspects. Smith's discussion (2004) centered around the special needs of first-year students which were: to feel secure and important, to understand the learning goals, and to understand the learning process. If these needs are not satisfied, valued and understood, first-year students might fail in their attempt to adjust to university life.

## **RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

A number of residence students have overtly exhibited signs of stress, sometimes manifesting in negative behaviours. Observations indicate that these negative behaviours often include substance abuse, sexual promiscuity and general delinquency, which may be the result of poor decision-making and self-destructive actions. Jessor (1998) outlines the early work on adolescent risk behaviours as being concentrated on specific "problem behaviours" eliciting social sanctions, eg. delinquency, drug and

alcohol abuse, early sexual activity. However, Jessor (1998) raises important points when explaining that more recent work in this discipline has identified facets of risk behaviour that impact negatively on adolescent development in the longer term. These include poor academic progress, depression, and health-compromising behaviours such as poor eating habits and lack of exercise, amongst others. It is important that these aspects of development and maturity are not viewed in isolation, but as parts of a whole, that is, as holistic development. Some of the social issues that may be influencing the lack of capacity to adjust to tertiary education could possibly include homesickness, peer pressure, child-headed families, severe family problems, financial difficulties, HIV/AIDS or other health issues. Of great interest is the fact that there are also many first-year residence students who do adapt well to their new environment of a tertiary institution and residence. Such well-adapted students generally display confidence in their social interactions, make very good academic progress, belong to one or more student clubs or societies, and have good decision-making skills. McNamara (2000) relates the different coping roles that young people adopt when dealing with difficult aspects of their lives. Whilst Problem-Focused coping is linked to lower incidences of depression, Emotion-Focused coping is associated with maladaptive functioning and strain.

### **IMPACT OF THE STUDY**

A study through a life history of a sample of first-year residence students will have an important impact on the understanding of how first-year students think and feel about their lives as a whole, and why some students may respond in a negative way. The study should also provide valuable information as to why some students do adapt well to being away from home at a tertiary institution, so that student development practitioners can use the positive information in a constructive way when designing development programmes. This study is important as it appears that very little research has been conducted on this topic in the South African and African context. The research that has been conducted in this area of student development has mostly been done in the context of countries such as America, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and

a few others that have no direct relevance or bearing on the South African situation or conditions.

## **EXTENSION OF THE RESEARCH**

If potential difficulties can be identified through a life history of some first-year residence students, a follow-up project could then be implemented whereby a questionnaire could be formulated and a survey conducted across all the institutional residences. This would elicit valuable information across a broader spectrum of the residence student population. It would also provide vital indicators for both the student development and academic sectors, as to how they can work together to integrate the academic programme into a 'whole' learning experience for students - holistic development. In this regard, DeCoster & Mable (1974) make a specific linkage of development to education. Their point is that a student does not learn intellectually in isolation, but also carries feelings, worries, hopes and fears at the same time. Of particular note is their comment on the implications for residence education whereby

...developmental concepts, requiring the integration of affective and cognitive education, create the broad base for the learning process that occurs within the residential community as well as within the classroom setting. (DeCoster & Mable, 1974, p. 25)

It is further emphasised by DeCoster & Mable that the residence community, including residence educators and student development practitioners, have a vital role to perform in terms of the integration of the total college learning experience, which is the holistic development approach taken by the majority of student development practitioners.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

The questions that guide this research are:

1. What are the life experiences of first-year residence students?
2. How do these experiences impact on them during the initial period of adjustment of life away from home?

## **OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION**

**Chapter 2** will contain the conceptual framework and literature review, covering the context of this study and setting out the anticipated factors that appear to be having an impact on residence students at the Durban University of Technology. The literature review was conducted by investigating a variety of factors that I have observed, or that have been identified through anecdotal evidence from students or colleagues at the institution.

**Chapter 3** will outline the methodology used for the study. The interpretive paradigm of this qualitative investigation will be discussed here.

In **Chapter 4**, the narratives of the student interviews will be presented. These are transcripts of the interviews that were digitally recorded and that I transcribed. This includes the inserts of my own thoughts and reflections during the interviews and subsequently when transcribing from the tapes.

**Chapter 5** will cover the analysis and discussion of the transcriptions, and will include the conclusions and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the primary values in tertiary education institutions is development of the student. Part of the development of a young adult involves the understanding of what constitutes identity. For young South African students, and particularly those who are from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, this could be a difficult path to tread. Those who have entered tertiary education in the past few years are the first generation of South Africans to have full and free participation in education on an equal basis. That is, without the constraints and limits of the previous education system under apartheid. What has this meant for young African students coming into a university and living in a residence? From student narratives, I will be identifying some of the experiences that have impacted on the developmental processes in the life of these students prior to their entry into tertiary education; what their experiences have been as a first-year and residence student; and how such experiences have shaped the individual in their search for their own identity. The main conceptual focus is therefore development and identity as a South African student entering first-year tertiary studies and living in an institutional residence.

#### **DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY**

Development of the individual can occur in well-documented stages, or phases. These are not necessarily fixed stages that are followed in a linear process. Some individuals may develop according to the relevant stage for their age, whilst others may develop more slowly or more quickly. It is not uncommon for some stages to be skipped altogether. Depending on the characteristics of that particular phase, this could be either beneficial or detrimental to the individual. Crain (1980) discusses in depth the development theories of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Freud. Erikson (1964) explores what he calls the 'Eight Stages of Man', outlining those stages as Trust v Mistrust; Autonomy

v Shame & Doubt; Initiative v Guilt; Industry v Inferiority; Identity v Role Confusion; Intimacy v Isolation; Generativity v Stagnation; and Ego Integrity v Despair. Within the academic teaching and learning process the elements of development and identity are entwined, in the specific context of what identity means for an African student in South Africa. The development of identity is the changing of the boundaries between 'self' and 'other' and how we make this distinction "...constitutes the very core of our experiences of personal identity." (Kroger; 1996, p. 8). For a young African student, this may involve leaving behind previous beliefs and values, creating a schism from the familiar - and then breaking into the new and unknown. Previous generations of young Africans in South Africa have been involved in a struggle for freedom from an oppressive political environment. The limitations and restrictions placed on black South Africans during apartheid fostered an environment of a 'youth crisis', as described by Van Zyl Slabbert *et al* (1994, p. 32)

*An historical survey referring back to the beginning of this century leaves little doubt that South African youth have over the years been victims of political and sociocultural crises. They have been subjected to poverty, blatant political manipulation, racial and other divisions that tore the country apart, and a lack of any systematic youth policy to attend to their needs. In short, as a group they have for many years been largely ignored by the leaders in control of their destiny.*

Further negative effects on the youth are outlined by Van Zyl Slabbert *et al* (1994) as being a breakdown in family structure, with an increase in households headed by females; lack of adequate housing, facilities and jobs; an increasing Westernisation of lifestyles; and AIDS. Another issue that is raised is that of the political influence and effects on South African youth. The impact of political conflict and violence on the youth adversely affected schooling and family relationships, with the result being that there was a

*...reshaping of adult/youth, parent/child and teacher/pupil relationships. Youth created street political cultures and took over the political leadership from their elders. Young people, more politically active and often better educated, ran civil and political institutions, and the generation gap widened. (Van Zyl Slabbert *et al*; 1994, p. 150)*

It is interesting to ponder as to whether this could have had a general negative impact on the phase of Identity v Role Confusion, as one of the developmental stages



proposed by Erikson (1964). Marks (2001) discusses the issue of identity and youth politics in South Africa. The study is concentrated on the Diepkloof area, and looks specifically at the construct of youth movements and the identity that youth find within that collective grouping. This aspect of youth may be an important element in this study, as the movement of youth politics in South Africa can be seen to be rooted in the environment of education. The Durban University of Technology is no exception, with a large number of students seeming to prioritise their political ambitions ahead of their academic progress. Involvement in student politics can be a positive factor, leading to the growth and development of leadership skills for individuals. However it can also be a negative factor, with detrimental effects on the general institutional community, for example where there are strikes that stop the academic programme, or intimidation, harassment and assault of students or staff. The Diepkloof study of Marks (2001) gives important insight into the social interactions and development of identity of black youth in a South African environment, and may have relevance to the development of identity in black youth today.

All the above factors could have an influence on the formation of identity for African youth in post-apartheid South Africa, whether as individuals or as a group. Barbarin & Richter (2001) conducted a longitudinal study on "Mandela's Children". The subjects of the study were youngsters who had been born in the early and mid-1990's and who have essentially grown up in the post-apartheid era in South Africa. The study looked at the physical growth and developmental status of the children, and considered family and environmental influences such as poverty; political, family and community violence; socio-emotional development; employment and household income and debt; and family relationships. They concluded that

*For the majority of Mandela's children, life is happily routine and normal as they are off to a promising start in life. There is every reason to believe that they will mature into physically healthy, psychologically wholesome, and socially competent adults. For a minority, the story is quite different. They are beginning to show signs of difficulty with respect to behavioural,*

*emotional, and academic adjustment that may impede their progress to a normal and well-adjusted adulthood. (Barbarin & Richter, 2001, p. 276)*

As my own study unfolds, it will be interesting to see if the students that participated fall into the former or latter group as concluded by Barbarin & Richter, or somewhere in between. Their study has importance for educators at tertiary level, as these children are now entering the tertiary education system and those from the latter group may well become those students who are academically or developmentally dysfunctional. For these students, the development of identity is just as important as being academically functional.

The issue of identity is also raised by Chickering & Reisser (1993) in their Seven Vectors of Development. The stages they outline are Developing Competence; Managing Emotions; Moving Through Autonomy Towards Interdependence; Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships; Establishing Identity; Developing Purpose; and Developing Integrity. Specifically in terms of student development, they state that

*Few developmental theories have paid much attention to emotions and relationships. More work has been done on thoughts and values. Our theory assumes that emotional, interpersonal, and ethical development deserve equal billing with intellectual development. (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 39).*

It is perhaps this 'wholeness' that has been lacking in many institutions, and in the residences in particular. I have experienced, as a student and as a development practitioner, how emphasis has generally been placed on the advancement of academic learning to the detriment of most other forms of learning and development. This point was made very well by Chickering & Reisser (1993, p. 41)

*Institutions that emphasise intellectual development to the exclusion of other strengths and skills reinforce society's tendency to see some aspects of its citizens and not others. Just as individuals are not just consumers, competitors, and taxpayers, so students are not just degree seekers and test takers. To develop all the gifts of human potential, we need to be able to see them whole and to believe in their essential worth.*

There is clearly overlap, congruency and refinement between Erikson from 1964 and Chickering & Reisser's writings in 1993. The various stages/phases that the respective authors refer to both indicate the movement from birth/childhood, through adolescence, to adulthood and old age. Some of the stages may be skipped, others do not follow in order for some individuals, but the basic premise is that there is growth and development at all stages of life. More specifically, Love (1996) outlines the role that social processes and emotional elements play on the learning process, and that if these processes are ignored by educators there could be detrimental effects on the learning process. Emotional immaturity can lead to poor decision-making and self-destructive behaviours. Goleman (1996) discusses issues of emotional intelligence (or maturity), specifically emotional self-awareness; managing emotions; harnessing emotions productively; reading emotions (empathy); and handling relationships. He links this emotional 'literacy' to increased academic performance in young people. Emotions are described by Goleman (1996) as encompassing Anger, Sadness, Fear, Enjoyment, Love, Surprise, Disgust and Shame. Within each of these 'families' of emotion there are extension members, for example, the family of Anger includes fury, outrage, resentment, animosity and hatred amongst others. There are a lot of very powerful emotions that may affect young people, and how they deal with those emotions is crucial to their transition and progress as a first-year student.

### ***First-year students***

Studies that have been conducted show that many first-year students are confused, with uncertainties about themselves as individuals, and with doubts about their choice of career. Most of the research that has been done on first-year students has been concentrated on first-world countries such as America, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and other similar countries. There appears to be little research that has been done in the South African context, where there are a variety of cultures, languages and customs, together with the emerging social issues from the remnants of the apartheid era. The HIV/AIDS situation in South Africa is a further complication to the

lives and environment of young students. Together, these factors make students entering the tertiary education system in South Africa particularly vulnerable, as they are also coping with changes in cultural perceptions, values and practices. For example, there are many students who are the first in their family to study beyond matric. It can be difficult to be in this position, as on the one hand they have the expectations of their family and community, and on the other hand there is no specific example or role model for them to follow. If a student does not have a parent, sibling or other close relative who has passed through the tertiary education system, difficulties may be experienced by trying to meet the family expectations whilst not having academic support and understanding from the home environment. Having grown up in a home and community with perceptions, values, customs and practices being African in nature, the student then enters tertiary education in South Africa and finds that the majority of the perceptions, values, customs and practices are Westernised.

The studies of Asmar & Peseta (2001), van de Meer (2004), Philis (1999), and Emmitt, Callaghan, Warren & Postill (2003), focused on first-year students. In their paper on encouraging collaboration among first-year students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, Asmar & Peseta (2001, p. 2 of 8) suggest a student-focused approach, both formal and informal. With the utilisation of peer mentors, study groups and informal tasks, these activities integrate the academic and the social aspects of life at university. The study and findings of van de Meer (2004) were mostly related to the academic activities and adjustments of first-year students, and did not cover the social, cultural and development aspects of first-year student life. The life of a first-year student also involves new social and cultural environments and situations, as well as general growth and development as an individual moving from adolescence into young adulthood. Philis (1999) covered a wide variety of issues that are known, or are suspected, to impact on first-year students. He argues that there are numerous issues faced by students making the transition to tertiary education from their secondary schooling, and that from the institutional perspective the increasing diversity within the

higher education sector causes difficulty in dealing with those issues. Philis (1999) also touches on issues external to the institution, such as family matters, culture, the socio-economic background and type of high school attended by the student. The Philis study was conducted at an Australian university. The points are well-made and have a close relevance to the purpose of this study and they could, in general terms, be used as a benchmark. However it must be borne in mind that the situation and perspectives of Australian and South African school-leavers are vastly different. Whilst Australian first-year students enter a Western-based university with a Western-based upbringing, the majority of South African first-year students do not. The diverse cultures and languages within South Africa, an African-based upbringing, and the contradiction of rural and former 'Model C' schools, create a unique environment for academic progress together with personal growth and development.

The study by Emmitt *et al* (2003) has many logistical, operational and socio-cultural similarities to the Durban University of Technology. Deakin University is, like DUT, a large multi-campus institution with a diverse student population. The study was conducted at a specific campus, Warrnambool, on the Victorian South West Coast. Like DUT, Deakin University has first-year students dealing with multiplicity of issues

*The results of the study highlighted the particular challenges faced by first year students, and indicated that a number of interrelated issues: personal, social and academic, impacted on their transition and success. A major finding was that success was linked to a sense of identification with a University, academic preparedness, class attendance, financial viability and good health. Those least likely to be successful were those from a low socio-economic background and had neither parent having attended University. They had health problems, financial concerns, had not regularly attended lecturers (sic) and had accessed the library infrequently. (2003, p. 3 of 9)*

Of great importance here is the aspect of '...neither parent having attended University.' This is the situation that is commonly found with South African students, mainly due to the imbalances of the apartheid era. However, it must again be borne in mind that this study was conducted at a Western-based institution where the majority of students had a Western-based schooling and upbringing.

In a South African context, Diako (2006) presents a case study of a first-year student at the University of Johannesburg. This is more directly relevant to the purpose of my study, and although it is conducted from a counselling perspective it does present some interesting information. Diako points out the difficulties faced by South African students regarding the diverse nature of the country's cultures and languages. He also raises the issues of the socio-historical context of first-year students after ten years of democracy, and how this affects their adjustment and academic success. This is well-illustrated by the perspective of the student's mother

*The student could not face another semester because he feared that he would fail. His mother on the other hand was concerned with seeing his (sic) son become something in life, an opportunity she could not get, given their social background and the political background of the country (2006, p. 9)*

This is not a unique perspective. Many parents and students in South Africa are in this situation, where the family wants the child to attend at a higher education institution and gain a formal educational qualification beyond high school. First-year students often feel the pressure of this parental and community expectation, especially where the student is being pressured to study in a particular field. This may happen because of the perception of the family that power, authority and money are attainable within that specific career path, or because the community requires those particular services. First-year students are therefore under pressure to perform well academically, possibly in a field of study that is not their choice but the choice of their parents or community. This situation exacerbates an already stressful event - moving away from home, family, school friends and community; coming to a university with all the normal pressures on tertiary students; and finding their own identity as individuals as they move through the adolescent and young adult developmental stages of their life.

### ***Development Programmes***

Soga (2004) in his address at the Winter School of the National Association for Student Development Practitioners, explains that best practices in student affairs could be

derived from the very purpose why student affairs are included in the learning experience of a student. This is the well-rounded development that was raised by Williamson *et al* in 1937 - that is, student affairs and academic personnel working closely together to ensure the optimum growth and development of the student, not only academically, not only socially, but jointly. Matiso (2004, p. 8) reiterates the need for student affairs to put the student at the centre of all efforts. In support of this approach, he proposes a broad range of activities for student development programmes. These include study skills; leadership and governance; organisational skills; diversity; entrepreneurship skills; democracy and citizenship; and general life skills programmes such as peer counselling, health and sexuality, and coping with relationships. The approach of Soga (2004) and Matiso (2004) towards development is supportive of the holistic model proposed by Chickering (1993) and adopted by UKZN and DUT. Exposing new first-year students to well-designed programmes on a varied selection of life skills, leadership skills and academic support, could alleviate many anxieties and difficulties of both an academic and social development nature. However there is a cautionary note from Matiso (2004, p. 12): "Is it possible to sustain the 'student first' principle and put it above the socio-economic interest of staff, managers and leaders?".

Keeping a student-centered approach should be the guiding philosophy of student affairs, if there is to be effective development of students. Young (2003, p. 91) emphasises this point in his discussion of the philosophies and values guiding the student affairs profession. Four philosophies are presented: Rationalism, Empiricism, Pragmatism and Postmodernism. The practice and role of Rationalism is teacher-centered; those of Empiricism are rooted in pure scientific research and training. The philosophy of Pragmatism looks to knowledge that is measured by its benefits to students. Postmodernism moves towards a student-centered approach with the emphasis on learning and educational processes from the ground up, instead of the 'top-down' approach of Rationalism and Empiricism. In terms of best practice, the most effective fit for a student affairs philosophy would be a combination of pragmatism and

postmodernism. This does not mean to exclude any consideration of the role of rationalism or empiricism within student affairs, as cautioned by Young (2003, p. 97)

*However, it is impossible to position a complete student affairs philosophy within any one of these four philosophies, just as it is impossible to find all of higher education in one and only one of them. Each of the philosophies has influenced higher education and student affairs. Research and student services are justified using empirical, scientific methods. Teaching, learning, and advising reflect rationalistic, pragmatic and postmodern ideas.*

There appears to be only one major publication on student services from the South African perspective. 'A Guide to Student Services in South Africa' (2003) was edited by Martin Mandew with contributions from practitioners at various institutions across the country. The institutions represented (at the time of publication) included the Durban Institute of Technology, University of the North, University of the Witwatersrand, and Technikon South Africa. There was also an independent contributor. The contents of this book cover the broad spectrum of student services in South Africa, including Origins & Development, Organisational and Management Structures, Student Development, and Core Functions and Challenges. The Student Development section incorporates aspects of Lifelong Learning, a Framework for Student Development, and a Schema for Student Development programmes, amongst others. As this book has been written by South Africans within the context of South African tertiary education, the work has value for all student services staff, including student development practitioners. Through relevant development programmes and guidance, young students can be assisted in finding their own identity within the new environments in which they find themselves.

### ***Residences***

When considering the environment of institutional residences, a good point can be taken from Jones (2004) when she states that: "The context and environments in which learning takes place may promote or hinder student learning and development." Indeed, it is internationally recognised that learning and growth extend well beyond the traditional classroom walls (University of Minnesota Duluth: 1998). This is also the view



of Winston, Anchors & Associates (1993, p. 159), who write that the residence environment is an “exceptionally powerful educational environment, perhaps even more so than the classroom”.

The overall effect on students of residence life, and the impact that it can have on their academic progress and social development, cannot be underestimated. Lau Chi Pang and Wong Wan Man (1998, p. 2 of 8) raised this point in their Student Affairs presentation. Their findings were that negative aspects of residence hall life could lead to student frustration, and that the “...physical environment and social factors can have a substantial impact on students’ satisfaction with their residence hall experiences”. In order to ensure that the environment is positively conducive to the social development of students, relevant and appropriate programmes need to be implemented. These programmes may vary depending on the demographics of the residents, perhaps with specialised programmes for the general residence student population. The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) implemented a Residence Life Curriculum programme (2005) with the specific intention of supporting the classroom academic programme within the residence structure, and also to provide an environment conducive to personal growth and development

*Students living in residence will be provided with many significant opportunities to grow and develop in the areas mentioned above. The communities developed in the residence halls and the programs and activities they provide have the potential to profoundly impact the quality of life for resident students while enhancing their academic experience and supporting the academic mission of the university. (UKZN: The Residence Life Curriculum; 2005, p. 1 of 6)*

The developmental areas indicated above are based on a six-dimension wellness model: emotional, intellectual, physical, social, spiritual and vocational. This is congruent with holistic development posited by Chickering & Reisser (1993), Love (1996), and Barr, Upcraft & Associates (1990). At the Durban University of Technology, responsibility for residence development programmes is vested in the department of Student Governance & Development. The guiding philosophy is that of pragmatism and

postmodernism, with programmes covering aspects such as peer tutoring; assertiveness training; study skills; critical thinking skills; managing relationships; how to cope with peer pressure; how to cope with home sickness; personal planning; and leadership skills. These development programmes are offered in support of the academic programme and can provide students with the knowledge, skills and capacity to understand who they are as an individual.

Chickering has shown through the work on the Seven Vectors: Possible Problems & Programs in Residence Halls (Website, n.d., accessed 26 August 2004) that it is possible to provide a comprehensive and holistic developmental programme for residence students. For each of the Seven Vectors, potential problem areas were identified. For example in *Vector 1: Developing Competence*, issues such as inappropriate social interactions; experimenting with alcohol and drugs; and being unable to effectively communicate with others, were raised. In *Vector 5: Establishing Identity*, Chickering outlines problems such as sexual orientation issues; establishing personal value systems; and acceptance of personal responsibility. Each Vector is similarly viewed, with expected or anticipated problem areas that may occur within the life of a residence student. The extension to this is a chart with possible programmes for residence halls. Continuing with the above examples, this chart outlines possible programmes for *Vector 1: Developing Competence* as assertiveness training; alcohol education; and communication skills. In *Vector 5: Establishing Identity*, possible programmes include sex role awareness; values clarification; and the power of positive thinking. The DUT, UKZN, and Chickering models all work on the basis of providing programmes that support the academic instruction of the residence students, together with programmes that assist students with personal growth and the development of identity.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter has considered the elements of development and identity. Development is important in the formation of identity, and identity may have importance in the transition from home and school to tertiary education and residence. Both development and identity are important for a student in relation to growth and maturity and academic progress. In the next chapter I will discuss the methodology that I used for the project, the selection of participants, and how the research was conducted.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The research was conducted with first-year residence students of the Durban University of Technology, based at the Durban campuses and residences. Interviews were conducted with voluntary participants in the study. The interviews were recorded with the participants knowledge and transcribed by the researcher. The data collected was extracted directly from the transcripts of the interviews conducted with the participants.

#### **INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM**

The interpretive paradigm is one of three approaches to research, and is used mainly within the human and social sciences. The other approaches are the positivist and critical paradigms. The purpose of the interpretive paradigm is to gain understanding and meaning of relations and of human nature and reactions. It looks at multiple ways in which humans create meaning, in terms of attitudes, values and beliefs. Unlike the positivist paradigm, where the emphasis is on objectivity, and the critical paradigm where the emphasis is on agency, the emphasis in the interpretive paradigm is on subjectivity. The methodologies utilised within this paradigm include life histories, ethnography, case studies and focus groups. The interpretive paradigm was the most appropriate for this research, specifically through the use of life histories, to gain understanding and meaning of the relationships and experiences of first-year students.

The life histories have been written as a narrative utilising the words of the participants. The methodology of life histories uses the narrative to express information gained in the study. The narrative of a life history lays bare the stories of the participants in the research and exposes human experiences, either of an individual or of society in a broader context. In this research, the life histories have been written as a verbatim narrative directly from the words of the participants in the study. Josselson & Lieblich

(1995, p. ix) describe the narrative approach as coming into contact with participants as 'people engaged in the process of interpreting themselves', and it is then for the researcher to 'decode, recognize, and recontextualize' the raw data. As this qualitative style takes a more subjective and inclusive form, it was most appropriate in examining experiences, attitudes, emotions, social processes, perspectives, values and beliefs of the first-year students who took part in this study. The narratives were written from transcriptions of the recordings of interviews with the participating students. Interviews are one of the modes of observation for compiling a life history. Mouton (2001, p. 172/3) outlines life history methodology and indicates that other modes of observation could be 'autobiographical sketches, analysis of letters, diaries and other personal documents'. In this study, in-depth interviewing was chosen as the most appropriate method, given the time limitations for the study. The main strengths of life histories are that they give a deep view into the lives of a few individuals, together with the subjectivity of the researcher. If there are weakness to a life history, it is generally the small number of participants in a study and also the potential bias of the researcher, both described by Plummer (1983). Through in-depth interviews, the researcher can penetrate the outer shell of the participants and explore their inner thoughts and experiences in order to express a rich and substantial life history narrative.

Individual interviews were conducted in a conversational format, thereby enabling the interviewee to be relaxed and at ease with me, as the researcher. Taylor & Bogdan (1998, p. 99) believe the interviewer should create an atmosphere in which the individual being interviewed feels comfortable in talking openly about themselves. The emphasis then is on the approach of the researcher. Gillham (2000, p. 6) gives a useful guide for interviews, ranging from 'Unstructured: Listening to other people's conversation; a kind of verbal observation' through 'Semi-structured interviews, ie. open and closed questions' to 'Structured questionnaires: simple, specific, closed questions'. In terms of the interview and transcription process, Atkinson (1998, p. 56) recommends re-listening to the tape after the initial draft transcription has been completed, before

moving on to the interpretation stage. However, in this study this was not necessary as the transcriptions were done by myself, listening and re-listening to sections of the tape where necessary for clarity. I therefore heard some sections of the tape perhaps three or four times whilst transcribing, and familiarity with the content excused a further hearing after drafting the transcriptions.

Having worked with students for eleven years, and having considerable experience of conversations with students on a variety of personal and difficult topics, I felt strongly that the best way to conduct the interviews was for the initial interview to be semi-structured. Subsequent interviews would then lead off with a few questions that stemmed from the previous interview, giving the interviewee the opportunity to expand on previous discussions before moving onto new topics. As the exact substance of the initial interviews would not be known until they commenced, the first questions would have to be fairly broad-based. It would then be from the responses the student gave that I could then focus on specific topics or issues.

## **SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**

The process of selection began when I requested assistance from the residence student leadership (House Committees) and senior residence students. Each of the assisting students was provided with a brief verbal overview of the project as follows:

*“For my Master’s degree in Education, I will be investigating the lives of first-year residence students. I want to discover what life experiences they bring with them to this institution, how these past experiences impact on their transition to being away from home at a tertiary institution and residence, and how they cope with being here in their first year as a DUT student. I am looking for some students who are in their first year at DUT and who live in one of our residences. These are the only two qualifying criteria, they can be male or female, any language or cultural group, any age group, and studying in any Faculty of the*

*institution.”*

Within two weeks, the student assistants had provided the names and contact numbers of some students who were interested in being part of the project. I then contacted those students and set up individual meeting times to discuss the project with them in further detail, and to follow the appropriate ethical protocols and processes.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Within any framework of research it is essential that ethical considerations are made. Mouton (2001) raises such issues as acknowledging assistance and informed consent. It was imperative that high ethical standards were adhered to during the whole process of the selection of participants, interviews, transcriptions, and the interpretation and analysis of the material. Kidder (1981) talks about how some researchers have given participants misleading information for a variety of reasons. All these issues were clarified and dealt with in the correct and appropriate manner at the beginning of the study.

The process outlined below was followed:

- A letter of request for permission to conduct the study was submitted to the Executive Director: Student Services at DUT. Permission was granted with no other specific conditions attached.
- The University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Clearance Application Form (Human & Social Sciences) was submitted to the ethics committee. This was approved without any conditions being attached. The interviews were conducted after this approval was received.
- At an interview as part of the selection process, each potential participant was provided with a full verbal explanation of the study, including his/her role, and the

general process that would be followed. An Informed Consent form (**Annexure A**) was provided to each student and they were asked to read through the form and give it careful consideration. The participants were given the opportunity of doing this away from myself and the interview, and also advised that they had the freedom to consult with any other person that they wished to in terms of their participation, or their decision of non-participation, in the study. The students were asked to take up to a week to make their decision and if they were comfortable participating in the study, then the Informed Consent form should be signed and returned to me.

- Once the student had made the decision to participate, the signed form was filed and a copy was given to the student for his/her own personal records and reference. It was at this stage that the first formal individual interviews were scheduled per participant.

## **COLLECTION OF RESEARCH MATERIAL**

Interviews were set with the participants so that they did not compromise the students' academic activities. The interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis. Participants were advised that the interviews would be recorded and asked if they had any objections to the digital recording device being used. All participants were very comfortable with this concept, and indeed they seemed to rather enjoy the whole experience. No objections were raised by the participating students at any stage. A schedule of the interviews that were conducted can be seen as **Annexure B**.

### ***Interviews***

Each participant had been fully briefed about the general process of the first interview, in that it would cover their life at home and school. As the material substance of the initial interview would not be known until the interview was under way, the first few questions were broad-based. The following questions or topics were raised in the initial



interview with each participant:

- Perhaps you could start by talking about your life at home as you were growing up.
- What about your life at school, particularly your high school?
- What were the types of things that affected you most at home or at school?

The responses to the above usually covered a full interview, and it was from examining the responses of the student that I was then able to focus on specific topics or issues to raise during the subsequent interview.

The second sessions of interviews started with a brief recap of the first interview, with a few supplementary questions where relevant, before raising any new topics or areas of discussion. This resulted in a natural extension of the first interview into the second interview, rather than a disjointed leap direct to a new topic.

The participants were eager to talk about their lives. There did not appear to be any holding back - they answered questions forthrightly, and freely gave additional information. The participants responded well to me as a researcher, in terms of being comfortable with any subject topic and with the aspects of confidentiality. This was a very important aspect of this study, as many of the substantive issues raised were of an extremely sensitive nature. Student B in particular became quite emotional at times, when he was referring to various situations at home, and his relationship with his father in particular. His willingness to continue with the interviews and to talk about these topics in particular could perhaps be interpreted to be confidence in me. In working with students, my approach to them has always been to be professional, but understanding and compassionate. This is partly due to my status as a mature woman with three grown-up children of my own, and also to being a student myself fairly late in life. Having been through many traumatic events with my own children, and faced the trials

and tribulations of being a student within user-unfriendly tertiary institution systems, it was relatively simple for me to understand the difficulties that can cause distress to young students. This could have been a difficult situation in terms of the interaction and responses between the participants and myself as a researcher. I am female, white, aged fifty, with English as a first language. The participants are black, five female and one male in their late teens, and speaking English as a second or third language. Through an investigation into the trustworthiness of qualitative data, Tabane & Bouwer (2006, p. 553) found that the potential variables in cross-cultural interviewing included gender, language and culture. The main question in their study was whether a black individual would respond in the same way to identical questions when interviewed by a white person and a black person. This was an issue that I had to carefully consider when undertaking the interviews, and also with the analysis and interpretation of the data that had been generated.

Differences in language and culture particularly could have led to stilted communication, or misunderstanding of the meanings or context of the information being relayed by the participants. Dodd (1995, p. 44) raises this very issue, with a clear example of the conversation in English by two people where one person had English as a second language. Although the use of words such as 'individual', 'unique', and 'self' were used frequently during the conversation, Dodd explains that the cultural understandings of the two conversationalists were different, with the man from China not understanding the sense of individualism expressed by his English counterpart. The same difficulty could have arisen in the interviews conducted in this study, with the meaning of the information not being understood by me in the context of the use of English as a second language, together with the differing cultural backgrounds of the participants. Although the participants in my study had a good command of English, we did stop on occasion to seek clarity from each other if either the interviewee or myself was uncertain of what was being expressed. I was still aware though that there could be misunderstandings.

### ***Transcriptions***

Transcriptions of the interviews were completed within one week of the interview, and a hard copy given to the participant. A request was made for the student to review the hard-copy transcript and make any corrections where he/she felt that I had in any way misinterpreted what had been said in the interview. This proved a useful method when working with certain names, eg. those of a school or a rural village. The hard copy was then given back to me and filed for later use during the interpretation and analysis phase. By doing the transcriptions myself, I had gained extensive familiarity with the substance of the material. This proved to be very helpful when analysing the interviews, as it allowed for a fairly quick process of spotting similarities, trends and themes between the students.

At the conclusion of the final interview, the participants were asked if they wished their names and those of friends, family, schools, places, etc. to be used, or for another mechanism to be used so that they could not be directly identified. Both chose the latter option, hence the referral to Student A and Student B, and the use of initials only to identify certain place names, schools or other individuals mentioned in the interviews.

The chapter containing the life stories of Student A and Student B is written in their own words from the transcriptions of the interviews. This is how they spoke during the interviews, and it is my opinion that this gives vibrancy and richness to their stories. It is not something where I am writing what I *think* is being said or meant by the student, they are not my words that are being used to express their thoughts and feelings and to relate events and situations from their lives. It is the voice of the student that is coming through, giving life to the page and expressing **who** the student is: what his/her life has been, and is now; where they have come from; what they have endured or overcome; where they have triumphed or fallen by the wayside. This is the reality of the majority of our students in South Africa, with it's multi-cultural, urban/rural, pre- and post-apartheid citizens, farm- and Model C-schools, eleven languages, extended

families, collective consciousness, cell phones but no electricity at home - this is the environment of the South African student. I wanted their voices to be heard, I wanted to know who they are, what they think and feel, what their own interpretation is of their lives in South Africa today, and how this affects them in their academic progress and their lives in residence.

These are not my versions of their life stories, they are **their** life stories. Having said that, at various points in their stories are text boxes with my own comments in them. The contents of these text boxes encapsulate what I thought during the conversations (marked '**THOUGHTS**'), or how I felt when I was listening to the recordings and transcribing them (marked '**REFLECTIONS**'). For me, this was an integral part of the research. Taylor (2005, p. 3 of 28) describes this method as being a way to expose the 'multiple voices' that may be involved in research discussions. I wanted to expose the interlinking relationship that occurs between the participant and the researcher. It is my experience that the stories that are told by the students being interviewed cannot be seen in isolation. As the researcher, it was almost impossible for me to switch off my own thoughts and feelings. As the conversations were unfolding, I found that my own experiences and emotions were entwined within their life stories. There were many similarities between the events and situations that they had to deal with, and some of my own personal or professional experiences. It thus became difficult for me to disentangle my own emotions from theirs at certain points in their stories. And indeed, I am not sure that they would have felt as free and easy with the contents of the conversations had I tried to remain detached and impersonal. All the students interviewed made similar comments at the conclusion of the discussions that it was 'just like talking to one of my aunts'. I feel that this was a beneficial method and approach that did not detract from the essence of the research, as it allowed me to gather real information about their lives.

## **LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY**

It is recognised that there are limitations to this study.

The major limitation is that there were only a few participants that took part in the study. Six students were initially interviewed, and the decision was made to use the transcripts of two students only because of the volume of material that had been produced. However, it would not do justice to the other students who so willingly gave of their time and energy to this project, if their stories did not form some part of the official record. To this end, I have included short excerpts of material from the transcripts of Students C, D, E & F within the analysis and discussion section of Chapter 5. The excerpts chosen are directly relevant to the themes identified from the transcripts of Students A & B, and in my opinion they add value to the overall analysis and discussion in this project.

A further limitation is demographics, in that tertiary institutions and their residences are multi-cultural, multi-language environments. Student A is female and Student B is male, therefore there is gender balance in the study. However it was not feasible to include students from all cultures and all language groups in this type of study.

It was anticipated that a possible limitation may have been the cross-cultural interviewing, details as outlined on page 6 in the section titled **Interviews**. Whilst it appeared that there was honesty and openness from the participants whilst being interviewed, it is not definitively known whether there may have been some bias or negative impact on the substance of the interviews because of cross-cultural interviewing.

## **CONCLUSION**

Student participants were selected through a voluntary process in which I was assisted by senior residence students and the residence student leadership. All participants

were given full details of the project and had a fair and reasonable opportunity to consider their participation independently. The interviews were conducted as semi-structured conversations, which were digitally recorded and then transcribed by myself. The relaxed method of interviewing together with physically transcribing the conversations myself, enabled me to gain a full perspective and understanding of the information elicited from the students. Within the transcripts is a record in text-boxes of my own thoughts and feelings on the subject matter, either at the time of the conversations, or at a later stage when doing the transcriptions. The transcripts are the core material of this study, and are contained in the following section, Chapter 4.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**TRANSCRIPTIONS: LIFE STORIES**

**STUDENT A**

**Wet Paint...Story Boards...& Levi Jeans**

I don't have a specific home town because I moved around a lot, especially after my parents got divorced, but I guess I can say that perhaps Johannesburg is the closest place I have to a hometown. I think that the divorce and moving around such a lot did affect me to a certain extent, it's the little things that I notice every now and then. I do know that it affected my siblings because recently over the holidays we had some trouble at home. My brother and two sisters are all younger than me and all our personalities are different. The elder sister and I are like best friends and I knew that there would be a lot of trouble when I left to come to University as we always did everything and went everywhere together. My brother and I fight quite a bit and my youngest sister is the one that is spoiled by everyone...but my closest sister, she is just one year younger than me and it was almost like we shared the 'eldest' title in the family. Whenever I made a mistake, it was like the **two** of us made the mistake, and she was just like my back-up.

I was very young when the divorce happened, only about seven or so, and there was quite a problem with things like school fees. At school though I always did well, except in matric, but up to grade nine I was very good in my schoolwork. It was after grade nine that it started getting difficult. I

think that this was because up to then I had been to schools that I had liked, but then I had to move to S. High because my Mom got a job in Vanderbylpark. I

<p><b>THOUGHTS:</b> This is really sad to hear, that changing schools can be so difficult and that it is often the negative attitude and actions of teachers that can destroy self-confidence and academic performance.</p>
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

had really enjoyed it at my previous school, the H. High in R. I had friends everywhere

and it was just like my ideal high school situation. And then I moved to S. High and it was not good. The teachers were not as supportive as the ones at the H. it was as though they did not really care about the students, and for me that was hard. I cannot see myself missing that school at all. They even ruined my matric farewell! I had spent a lot of money on my dress, my shoes, the after-party outfit and some other things but when we got to the venue...they had not even painted the place it was just a mess. They **had** painted the floor the day before. . .and it was still wet and kept sticking to our shoes! The place was far too small for 150 people and the music was from about ten years ago. It was all just terrible. . .and then there was no food. . .the people that were catering said that Black people do not eat before ten at night, and I'm thinking; "I eat at six, so what do they mean?!" My cousin was my date and he said we should go to Spur to eat, so we did. Me in my matric farewell dress, which was very revealing! It was just. . .difficult. . .and I wish I could just re-do that day.

When I changed schools I lost contact with my old friends, although I did speak to one of them on her birthday a few years ago. And then S. . . .Oh! . . .the girls were so hostile,

**THOUGHTS:** Why is it that people want to pull others down when they are 'achievers'??

the whole school was hostile. I did a whole lot of things when I was there, so those girls were like. . .jealous. . .some of them just did not like me. I joined the

choir, I did netball for a little while but I was not that good anymore. The first year I was there I was the first person to actually bring in an exchange student, from Austria. She stayed with us as well. I was also in the newspaper in my first year there, I was representing the school in a library function and then also for the choir and some other things. I got a lot of certificates and I was good at what I did and I always got A's - in grade nine I got A's for maths, in grade ten too. And then grade eleven and twelve were not that good.



Now I am at university studying Fashion & Textile Design. At school I was not going to take fashion, it was just the thing that I loved more than anything else, but I liked fashion because my cousin studied fashion and she was my role model at the time. After the divorce, we moved and stayed with my Mom's sister for a while, and she had a daughter who became my role model and she used to make me clothes and everything. After that I just started with fashion, I started designing my own things and making them and then everyone was telling me, 'You know what, you just have to take Fashion.' So I did.

**REFLECTIONS:** Good! Having a passion for something is a good start. . .if you don't like what you are going to study then what is the point. . .

I have a passion for it, and I am not really sure what I would be doing right now if I had not known my cousin so well. I am enjoying the course and am glad I decided to do it, but it is very

expensive. . .we are always having to make story-boards, which means buying fabric, buying this thing and that thing, and this was something I had not realised. So I have to cut down on my other expenses and just have to concentrate, because my next story-board might need other decorations and things.

When I applied to study at university, everything was smooth except when I applied for residence. When I was still at home they told us to pay a fee of R45.00 and that would secure a room. But when we came here, thinking that I had a room, they said, "No, you don't have a room." I don't know

what had happened to that R45.00, but we had to re-apply for residence again that day and the residences were full and it

**REFLECTIONS:** Yes, this a common occurrence with the Housing department - forms and money being 'lost', applicants not being in the system, rooms being allocated without a proper system being in place. . .

became a big problem. I am glad my mother was with me as she said to them, "You know what, I'm leaving today and I can't leave my child not knowing where she's going to sleep tonight." So in the end, they gave me a room. I had actually wanted a single room but now I am glad that I am sharing with somebody. It is good as a first-year

student to have some company when I am in the room, but I don't spend a lot of time here. I leave at 7.00 in the morning and usually come back at about 4.30 or so. On Monday's I come back at 3.30 and on Friday at 1.00, so I don't spend much time here and when I **am** here I am just. . .like. . .working on my work or I'm tired and I sleep, or I just cook and then sleep, and. . .like. . .that's it. But if I was in a room on my own I think that I might have gone mad! I'm away from my family now, and it's just. . .that company. . .like. . .this family at home right, without my father. . .I've always been in a big family. . .it was only when. . .it's only been the five of us for the past couple of years, but from the beginning of my life we used to live with our step-sisters and brothers, cousins. . .there were nine children and two parents, so I really would have suffered if I was by myself in this room. Even at home I don't have my own room, I share, so. . .it's like that. To have a room or a place of my own. . .I'll wait until I'm working, I'm not sure how I would handle it...I'm not used to sleeping by myself and being totally alone and hey. . .I'm just. . .like. . .the stories that go around this residence about it being haunted and things like that. . .! The plaque that's by the door, it's very disturbing - the one that's written "Here died Thomas Baines". That one is really **scary**, they should remove it. . .it's scary!

My roommates. . .at the moment I'm sort of having a fight with one of them, but usually we get on very well, but at the moment I'm just not speaking to that one. We had a clash but it's such a little thing that it frustrates me! Sometimes the little things can cause the biggest problems. . .there was a time when I didn't speak to my sister for two weeks at all. . .and we were living in the same house. . .I still don't remember what we were fighting over! My mother just got so mad at us that she started shouting and made sure that everything we did was done together. When she said 'go cook'. . .she would tell both of us to do it. . .to go to the kitchen and do it, or 'go to the

**REFLECTIONS:** Yes, little things sometimes do cause the biggest problems. . .it is how we deal with them and overcome them that matters - have we learned our lessons from the 'little' things, so that when we have to deal with the big things we have those experiences to draw on???

shop and buy me this'. So in the end we had to talk to each other because there was no-one else. Or else we would not be speaking even to this day!

My mother works at the G. Department of Education, she does training. . .she teaches teachers, does lots of workshops and stuff like that. So, not carrying on with our education. . .oh. . .that's not an option. . .we never even ask, we know it's not an option! I would never say "No, Mummy, I don't want to carry on studying", because the thought of carrying on studying. . .it's a privilege. . .you actually think 'I'm actually being allowed to carry on studying' because money is tight for a single parent, so I don't even know how that is happening, but I'm being allowed to carry on studying. That's why it's also

**THOUGHTS:** This is good to hear! Most of us have bunked though at some stage - even I did on a few occasions. At least the time she bunked off school it was for a compassionate reason.

not easy for me to bunk off. . .OK. . .I've never really bunked in my life, well, maybe a few times for necessary things like. . .my friend's best friend passed away and she found out during school

and we had to comfort her and it was just, like, for one period, stuff like that. But not on a normal day, I would never just not go to class. . .that's like. . .I'm going to miss out on all that work and in the end it might add up and then I can't catch up. My mother is a very strong woman. . .you would not believe it! She got married at a young age, then when she got divorced she got stuck with four screaming children because at that time it was like. . .ooo. . .she could not handle us at that time, I don't understand. . .because we were always fighting, always messing everything. One was still very young and I still cannot understand how she even got

**THOUGHTS:** This is what so many of us Mothers have to do - go without so that our children can have what they need, whether it is food, school books, shoes, or other necessities. Your Mother is doing this for you and your brother and sisters. Sounds like a good woman. Her picture is so pretty, such a pretty woman, and she looks strong. . .I can see the strength in her face, I know that look. . . she has been to some of the places that I have been as a Mother.

through that period and moving from place to place. . .I just know that was difficult for her. She had a strong impact on us when we were growing up. An incident when I

noticed that the whole divorce thing and moving around did influence me. . . as students you are not quite able to handle your money at the beginning, and everything. . . the thing is, when I've run out of money totally. . . the times when I've been thinking about my Mom. . . there's times when she also did run out of money. For me, I'm by myself so when I blow my money and I think 'tonight I'm going to starve'. . . I just think, whenever she came to that point, how did she handle it. . . 'cos she had the four of us. I'm alone, so it's just me that's starving, she had to think about herself and her four children. That showed me, that, you know what. . . it always turns out right in the end. Now she's all together, she's done well. I keep looking at her picture, that's her picture over there. . .

It was hard for her, being divorced and raising the four of us, but she looks good now, she looks much better than when we were very young. . . as I remember her face then. With my father. . . yes, we do have a relationship, it is just that I don't see him as much because he lives in Diepkloof, and Vanderbylpark is like an hour away from there, so it's not very easy for him to just drop by anytime he wants. We visit him for weekends and stuff like that. . . for Friday to Sunday. . . but ever since I came here to university it hasn't been that easy because. . . when we are back home. . . you know, like in our family for some reason. . . I am sort of. . . like. . . the representative for all of us, you know. . . I have to be there for him to have all of us visit him, so. . . I don't understand why he doesn't visit the rest of them when I'm not there. . . I don't understand how he thinks. . . so he doesn't visit while I'm not there, he visits when I'm there, and that's that. But other than that, we do have a good relationship. He is very, very strict. . . oh my goodness. . . he is **strict!** I think it's because he's seen a lot in his life, so. . . he doesn't want us to actually go through all of that, but now. . . eish!. . . he takes it all overboard! If I was there I would not be allowed to go out of the house. As soon as the sun moves an inch and it looks like it's going to get dark. . . oh, you have to be in the house, you cannot go anywhere, the gates have to be locked, and it's just. . . oh, my goodness. . .! And the

time he saw me standing with this guy. . .this guy wasn't even like. . .my boyfriend or anything. . .oh, I wasn't allowed to date until I was eighteen. . .so, I'm standing with this guy, I was about sixteen years old, and he came over to visit. We were still living in R. at that time. Now I'm just standing with this guy, he's even on the other side of the fence and I'm just standing. . .and we're talking. . .oh my goodness! He went on the whole night. . .'cos he was fetching us so that we could visit him, he went on about how I'm going to give him a heart attack and why am I doing this, and next thing I'm going to be a prostitute. . .he exaggerates a lot. . .I'm going to be a prostitute. . .all these men are this and this. . .oh my goodness, my Dad! . .he's just scared and wants to protect us. . .and the fact that we're not living with him. . .I think he feels that he. . .he can't teach us as much, so in the little time that he has to teach us stuff he teaches us a whole lot of things, and they just get mixed up in

**REFLECTIONS:** So many Fathers wanting to protect their girls! How many times, when I worked in Housing, did I meet a Father during first semester registration who would absolutely insist that his daughter be nowhere near boys in the residence...that they wanted a females-only res for their daughter?! So dignified in their stance, so determined to keep their daughter 'safe'. Can identify with this as a parent, can see as a Development Practitioner why the kids want to rebel. . .

our heads and then we get confused and everything like that, it's so weird! As we've got older and I've left school, he get's worse. Because as I grow up. . .you know I said that I was not allowed to date until I was eighteen. . .so between. . .when we were still young and everything, he wasn't worried about boys as much. . .but **NOW**. . .I turned eighteen and left home to come to Durban. . .I can just imagine what is going on in his head, he thinks I came down here to come and get AIDS or something like that, and whatever. . .he definitely was against me coming to Durban, because he actually even grew up here so he just thought I would be living in his house, going to Tech and coming straight home and just being the good little girl! But I'm not, like, corrupt. . .I did actually learn a lot from him and I did listen. . .not that he actually thinks so, but I did listen to everything he was saying and I do all the things they've been teaching me all this time. I think that, at this moment, I wouldn't really want him to let go a bit more, because you know. . .I mean. . .since the divorce I know that it affected him a lot, because in one

swoop he just lost his wife and his children and he moved an hour away. . .he can't just see us every day when he comes home from work and stuff like that. . .so a lot has already been taken from him so I don't think. . .I don't mind him actually being so over-protective because it makes him feel better and stuff like that. So I'm cool with it if he's like. . .extra strict. . .I'm just like. . ."Yes, Daddy, Yes Daddy"! And I just listen and listen and listen and just leave it like that.

My Dad has remarried, so I have a stepmother but. . .traditionally. . .I don't think they've actually signed the papers, you know. . .the actual Government papers, but he's taken out cows for her and stuff like that. So I think. . .traditionally. . .she's my stepmother.

**THOUGHTS:** Wow! This is hot stuff, I can see she is stressed, she is really very churned up about this situation. . .the hostility coming from A. right now is just filling my little office. . .I could almost reach out and touch it. What do I do now? Do I stop her and comfort her? Do I advise her to go for counselling? Maybe I should talk to Mrs M. and ask her advice, as a social worker she will have dealt with this kind of thing before. . .that's what I'll do, I'll ask Mrs M. without giving names or details, get a guideline from her on what is the best thing I can do. A. needs help here, this whole thing is cutting into her very deeply.

I don't get along with her. OK. . .well, we get along for my father's sake, but there's no warmth there. We can sit and laugh and everything because obviously. . .I have to respect my elders and everything and I can't show her any sign that I don't really like her, but I always have to be the child. . .if she makes a joke it's not that I have to laugh all the time, there's times when I

genuinely do laugh, as in, OK. . .I may as well accept that she's my stepmother, but I'm not really a big fan of hers. We clash a bit. . .but I'm not allowed to voice that, obviously, because I have to respect my elders. I have to be polite and respectful in a way that is acceptable so although. . .inside. . .I may feel dislike. . .I have to keep that to myself. . .I have to. . .but I tell my Mom. . .actually, all four of us don't like her but we tell my Mom everything. . .but she can't do anything about it because you know, traditionally. . .we are my father's children, we are not **her** children, so she can't go and interfere with my father's relationship with us because, obviously, by interfering with our relationship with **her**, with our stepmother. . .that would be undermining my relationship

with my father, something like that. . .so she can't really talk about it and say anything. Being a first year student, before I came here. . .well, I pretty much thought that the place where I would be studying would be like the universities overseas and stuff like that, you know. . .big campuses and stuff like that. But I ended up in a small campus instead, and it wasn't exactly how I imagined. . .I thought there would be like. . .initiation and all those things that I heard about from other people that went to different universities, but it wasn't like that when I came here. It was actually very different, because my intake is very small and there was no initiation and I didn't really get lost 'cause it's a small place, and it was just stuff like that.

In the academic context, the adjustment from being at school to university. . .it was OK, I guess. Because actually the subjects that I took at school were very difficult for me, so I was really suffering with those. **NOW**. . .it's actually subjects that I like and love going to do every day, so it was a bit of an adjustment but it was quite a good thing and it sort of caught me off-guard, 'cos I thought I would have to sit and work and everyone was telling me it would be so difficult and everything like that. . .but it's actually things that I enjoy, no matter how difficult it is I actually don't mind because it is stuff that I actually do enjoy. So from an academic context I see that more as a challenge. . .a positive challenge. . .not something negative, but a positive thing. My expectations of the residence - I've seen different res's, like back home. . .and instead of having like, one building. . .it was actually a big yard with different cottage-type things and each cottage had it's own kitchen and bathroom and stuff like that. . .whereas here. . .you know you have to walk quite a while to get to the bathroom or to get to the kitchen and stuff like that. But then other than that it's pretty cool, I'm liking this res. . .it's fine.

Have things impacted on me? Yes, lot's of things have! At the residence I'm fine, it's pretty much like a home environment, except you find some people that are nasty and then people that are nice, you know. . .and stuff like that. . .and there I don't really mind because I have my own space when I need it and it's fine. And then at school, since

it's such a small campus we're actually pretty close so I don't mind like. . .people there, because I don't really have any enemies, and I'm not really a person that gets like, really, really, close, close, close to people. . .even though I may have lot's of people around me. . .I don't really get too close, so I don't have people that I think are like close, close, close friends, and stuff. But I don't have any enemies there, so I'm comfortable there too, so I can work. . .it's a very comfortable learning environment because like, at my campus it's only fashion designers and textile designers, so it's not like really too mixed so I get to concentrate on what I'm doing and the people that I talk to they also speak my language so it's something that I can get used to really fast, I got used to it really quick, and we've got a lot in common so that has had a positive impact on me. And then the social life, that was. . .well. . .that was different, it was very interesting.

At the beginning it. . .it's changed a lot since the beginning, but it's OK now I guess. In the beginning, I had this friend who came with me from home. . .she also came and attended at DUT. We weren't close at home but when we got here it was like. . .so OK, we're in this place both alone, so naturally we would like hang out together, and then, let's just say she had a very different personality to mine, so all she wanted was to party all the time and stuff like that. I don't really mind partying, it's just that I don't, like, make it happen that I **have** to party every Friday, Saturday, Sunday. . .like when I go to a party I'm comfortable there, but when I don't go then I'm still comfortable. So, she like. . .wanted to go to a party all the time. We got hooked up with these guys that. . .ooooohh. . .very interesting characters! And then this guy who I did not know at first, but he was married and he just had his eye on me and he spent all his money on me and wanted to see me every single weekend and everything like that, and just. . .everywhere we wanted to go he would just like. . .whip out his credit

**REFLECTIONS:** This is not good, I've heard this from too many female students. Listening to this again on the tape makes me cringe. What do I do about this, as a Development Practitioner? We know it is happening, but what do we do? What do we get Housing to do? How far do we go with these girls and their private lives. . .what is protecting and helping them and what is interference????



card and just **buy**. . .buy, buy, buy! Everything we wanted to do he was just there. And then like. . .at the beginning of the year I think I went out every Friday, Saturday, Sunday for the whole of the. . .about. . .say. . .eight to ten weeks straight out - every weekend going out, coming back in the early morning and it was just. . .OK. . .it was just too much for me, 'cos it was like. . .obviously at home my mom didn't say like. . .you aren't allowed to go out to parties and stuff, so I was really used to going out to a party and stuff so it wasn't like. . .really new to me and whatever, that I would get into it, so I didn't really, like. . .it was fine, I didn't go. . .'cos it was something I was used to anyway, so I'm guessing she was into the whole thing of. . .like. . .'**FREEDOM!** I **have** to go out. . .I just **HAVE TO!**' And I got caught up in that and I think I felt a bit responsible for her, because, you know, we were like. . .alone here. . .so obviously I can't let her go out, what happens if something would happen to her or something like that. . .so I guess I felt responsible. But then after a while I noticed that this guy could get quite dangerous, he did that one time, he was screaming in the street. . .'cos from the beginning I told him that, you know what, I already have a boyfriend, so I can't like. . .be with you the way you want me to be. . .at first he was fine with it and then later he started, No, he wants to take over and be my man and whatnot. . .he just started to get really violent and I was not comfortable with that, so after a while I just broke it off. And then. . .I had the phone calls from his wife's mother. . .telling me he stole his wife's car and stuff like that. . .and I'm thinking right now. . .he's in jail or something - so that was pretty hectic! And then after a while I stopped hanging out with this girl and started hanging out with my friends from school, like there's a group of friends that I would say are actually my friends, but, they're not really my **friends, friends**, you know. . .as friends go, but they are the closest people to me at school. There's five of us in our group, and like. . .we hung out at the beginning and started partying too and then I said, like. . .'No, I just got out of this situation, I don't want to get caught up in that situation again', so I just slowly got out of

**THOUGHTS:** Good girl! You have made a smart decision here, I'm glad you saw what the situation really was and did not let yourself get sucked in by material things.

it, but they still do party a lot though, because obviously. . . fashion designers. . . you have to go out all the time, see the world, and everything like that, but I stay at home some of the time and I go out some of the time. I go out where I think it's important, like, I **should** really go. . . but not. . . so that's pretty much the change and now. . . I'm pretty moderate, I think. I've learned to adapt my behaviour to what I feel more comfortable with and what is more reasonable for me, not just follow what somebody else is doing 'cause they happen to be doing it. . . that kind of thing. I've gained in. . . maturity, I think. There is a lot of pressure on us to be with the older men. . . OK. . . the pressure was there but I didn't let it get to me, but I think it does happen because obviously, as a student, you don't really have much money of your own and stuff like that. . . you know I told you that I have to spend lots of my money on school work and stuff, so. . . money and nice things. . . you're thinking, Oh man. . . this guy can get me these Levi jeans and everything I need, 'cause I mean I've had lots of instances where guys just come up to me and, like. . . say. . . 'Oh I want to take care of you and buy you Levi jeans and I want to buy you this. . . and that. . . and that'. . . and I'm thinking. . . OK, I came here to be independent, I didn't come here to be dependent on you, so I don't want you buying me Levi jeans and stuff, but obviously it's not that easy, for me. . . like. . . it's easy. . . but for other people it's not that easy because being a student is tough, and there's 'friends', and you'll find the friends actually live with their parents, they actually get money from their parents, they actually get everything they need, whereas you. . . you're alone here and it's like, OK. . . I mean. . . I need to actually go out on Friday because I can't always be staying at home and, obviously, you don't want to tell your friends that, "I'm a little short on cash", and stuff like that, so these guys. . . they're even offering to drive your friends to wherever, and it's just the life that he's showing to you. . . it's all glitz and glamour and everything and then. . . obviously you know. . . OK. . . you're thinking it can't really hurt and then. . . I know some people that actually do that, but I don't really like it though.

**REFLECTIONS:** This is really nasty stuff. But it is reality, this is what is really happening to our young female students.

Do the men deliberately target young students. . .for sex? Yes! Especially first-years, because they know that first

year students have just left their mother's house and they are into this whole freedom thing, and obviously they're easy targets, you're just showing them. . .all you have to do is just drive by with your car. Just tell them you'll buy this, this, this, this. . .tell them you'll take them wherever they want to go, and then it's. . .like. . .after that. . .after a while, they start saying. . .'OK, you can't just have this for free, you have to do something for me in return'

And then. . .now you're really into this, you can't tell your friends you're now all of a sudden. . ."Oh No, I'm broke"! 'Cause they know you are having money all the time, you know. So it's like, OK, you get caught up in that thing and they. . .you know. . .have sex with the guy I guess. I never really had sex with that other guy, I didn't even kiss him! So, I. . .but then that's where he was headed, I saw that from the beginning 'cos every now and then he'd get close to me, he wanted to be alone and whatever, so...

But then the thing is, obviously guys our age, they. . .obviously the girls do have boyfriends and stuff. . .and then the guys our age. . .that's the guy you're going to be comfortable with and sit on a bench with and love him and stuff like that, but at our age the guys don't usually have jobs and money and whatnot and can't take you out and stuff, and so it's like, obviously they call them. . .the 'Minister of Finance', and the 'Minister of Transport' and whatever! The 'Minister of Health' and whatnot! So. . .it's like there's lots of different guys that take care of different needs. So the guys our age are also players, you know.

You ask if I would say that how you choose your friends is an important factor? I think it is, because, like. . .I have this one friend whose always talking about. . .she and her

boyfriend, they sleep together all the time and everything, and it's so good and whatnot, you know you also start

**THOUGHTS:** Peer pressure here. . .subtle, covert. . . dressed up in pretty wrapping paper. . .

thinking. . .mmm. . .maybe my boyfriend would stick around more if I did do this, and stuff like that, and OK, obviously. . .I haven't slept with my boyfriend or anything like that, right. . .but you know, after a while you start thinking OK, well maybe I **should**, it wouldn't really hurt. . .they. . .they. . .clean it out and they decorate it so nice you wouldn't really think of the bad parts about it, so obviously. . .the friends. . .obviously if all your friends have, like. . .a. . .'Sugar Daddy'. . .then you know you start thinking, this friend of mine, you know, she does dress nice, and she does go out all the time, maybe it wouldn't hurt if I did it too you know, not really because she's, like. . .pressurising you into it. . .but it's just like. . .OK, I wouldn't really mind having all that stuff. . .and then, after a while, it doesn't become 'maybe I **should**'. . .it's. . .OK. . .now I **have to** 'cause she's always talking about how she's gone to this place and that place and that place, and then, you know, it just goes on from there. Choice of friends is really an important thing, the thing is, sometimes it's not that easy to see what a person is like at the beginning and then, you know. . .you think. . .I'm far away from home, I need to have someone to support me, to be there for me and stuff, and once you're already caught up in that it's not that easy to just say, 'you know what, I think you're a bad friend so just leave me!' You're already there and it's not that easy to get out of.

And at Tech it's very difficult to get out of that...it's very difficult when it's a whole group of you because you can't say. . . 'this one person did me wrong so I just want to leave the whole group' they all have to do something bad for you to leave the group. I tell you I have five friends. . .when you are with **this** one, they talk about this other person, when you are with **that** one they talk about that other person, and when you are with **this** one they talk about the **other** person and then. . .you know, the thing is. . .people don't usually think about this but then a friend of mine actually asked me. . .if this person is talking about all your other friends, what makes you think they are not talking about you to

somebody else? But the good thing is, if you asked me that question before I came to Tech, so when I actually got here and the gossip actually started and everything. . .then I thought. . .why should I actually talk about this because she's gonna go and tell everything of mine to someone else anyways. So I don't really trust her and like that. . .and I don't really like gossiping anyways so I was like, oh Gosh. . .but when it actually started it hit me hard. . .yo! I was like. . .I cannot believe this, a person who actually. . .and you know when they're sitting together they are laughing as if nothing is wrong and then as soon as the person leaves. . .then it's like, 'chchchch'. . .and I'm like. . .No! It was really shocking, 'cause the thing is, like OK, I've mostly had guy friends and they don't usually do that. . .oh they tell you straight if you do something, they tell you straight. . .and then this now. . .it's the first time I've actually had a big group of friends that I actually hang out with, so it's like they. . .just. . .I was **very** shocked at that: why don't you just tell the person when they were here, instead of telling **me**! . . .what am I gonna do about it!?

**THOUGHTS:** This I can identify with - A. has much the same outlook as me here - tell someone to their face what is on your mind, not behind their back!

At my campus. . .there's **nothing** recreational there, I mean there's no sports there's absolutely nothing, we all just go to Tech and then go and study, study, study, and then you just want to get home and there's nothing that makes you feel like staying at school or anything like that. I'm not really sure what happens at S.B. and other campuses because I don't spend a lot of time there, but at my campus I think, you know, having

**REFLECTIONS:** I'm getting a sense of A. feeling very isolated and excluded here, of feeling that she is not part of the mainstream student body. I've listened to this part of the tape three times now, and she actually sounds a bit angry at it all, at the separation and not being on one of the larger campuses, but 'sidelined' at a small satellite campus - as she sees it.

something. . .you know I don't think any first-years really actually like hanging out at Tech, 'cause B. isn't really a very safe road as you've probably read from all the magazines and others, so I'm not sure, but first of all. . .I've noticed that when something happens at S.B.

Campus nobody actually tells us at our campus. Like, the first time we ever saw the SRC was when there was the strike and they only just came there that one time and then they never came back. We only got one poster at our tech which was the Miss DUT thing, nobody kept us updated or anything like that. . .nobody ever tells us **anything**. I remember there was something that happened. . .we didn't get any insight into that, and there was something that happened with Fanta, and I only know this because of my residence, my roommates told me. . .I know that there's lot of things that actually happen at these campuses because they're closer together, but at our campus we don't hear anything about it, so I actually wouldn't mind hearing about the stuff that happens over here and, you know. . .people actually inviting us to come, you know, 'cause I mean. . .the only time I've heard of anything happening where we were included, something that actually happened here was on Women's Day, I think, when there was the Fashion Show here. . .I

think that's the only thing I've heard about, other than that there hasn't been anything else. I don't think anybody on my campus participates in any sports here, and like the dance classes, I know that a lot of people at my campus have just heard about the dance classes

**REFLECTIONS:** Another example of a campus service not being student-friendly with it's operations! Surely it occurs to managers and staff that not all students are based at the main campuses, and not all students have long breaks between lectures - some of them have a solid day of one lecture after the other with only a small gap here and there. The University really needs to consider this aspect more when planning opening and closing times for services.

about at least a month ago and everyone is now thinking. . .oh, OK, I'd like to join the dance classes and stuff..but none of them actually go with our time frame, because we are at tech for most of the day, from seven until around about four, and the dance classes start at three, and we still actually have to get here first, change and all of that, so the time is all wrong. . .and then. . .even the doctor. . .there was a time when I came here, on a day when I had gotten sick and then I was told that I have to make an appointment and then the only space that was free was around ten or something like that, whereas I actually have to be at tech at that time and I had to leave at seven which means that I have to wait for the twenty past seven bus and go and then I'd have to

come back and then. . .the whole tedious thing. . .we would actually like to have some things happening in our time frame obviously since we come out after three, the school doctor closes at three o'clock and then she opens at seven and closes at three. . .at seven we have to be at tech and at three we are only coming out from tech and still have to get here, so we never really have any access to the medical support that they give and stuff like that, so maybe they should extend the time to about five o'clock so that we can actually make it here and. . .you know at sports and stuff, we wouldn't actually mind getting invited to all these things like sports events and stuff like that. I heard about a month ago or back, that there's actually a basketball team here and the year's nearly over, I mean, you know. . .we don't hear about all of this stuff. . .we do get the paper but that only tells us the results when the games are already finished and if anything happens here nobody tells us. I only really hear about it at res and at our campus we don't hear anything and I think it would be better if we actually did get to hear about the things, and if they could make it so that we could actually get here on time to actually see these things happen and everything like that. . .I think that really would help.

In terms of development programmes in the res. . .I think it would actually be nice, 'cause I know that at res there's different people doing different courses. Maybe we could have functions to actually showcase the stuff we've been doing, you know, like, we can actually have a goal. . .maybe if I was doing a fashion show at res. . .get parents and stuff to come and see our work just to show what we actually do at res so that they can see that we actually do work and do go to school, and we can work towards it., like, I **really** want to show my stuff here, and I **really** want to do this and. . .I'm thinking, just stuff. . .like sports. . . maybe at res. . . but obviously there's sports at S.B, I think, and I don't really know. . .I'm not really sure what would actually be possible, so. . .but a talk show, where we could talk about things, various topics then I would be interested. They tried to do something like that at the beginning of the year but I'm not really sure what happened to it because it was gonna be like a time on a Saturday when we would just chill and talk about maybe sex or something like that, you know. . .and I don't really

know what happened to that, I heard about it at the beginning of the year but it just didn't happen. I think that would be helpful 'cause maybe, most of the stuff that is happening there is happening because people are bored, so if they had something keeping them busy then I think they would actually, you know, stick around and enjoy living at res, because some people just see it as going back to res just to have a bed to sleep on and just to go to school again and then go out all the time then just come back. . .to sleep, and that's it, you know, maybe they should actually just enjoy the environment that they actually live in you know.

The idea of an 'Open Forum' in the res, where people can nominate topics - there will be a little box where people can write a certain topic down and the paper goes in the box and then that week or that month we pick and read out a topic and that becomes the topic for the evening, and then we talk about whatever that is - that would be so nice, that would be very nice, I'd love to come all the time and sit and listen and put in my two-cents worth. . .that would be very interesting! I think that would be fantastic, people do love saying what they're thinking, number one, they would come there just to say what is on their mind, and you know, to actually get information from other people. . .because, I mean. . .you know, when you don't know anything about something it becomes a difficult topic to think about even, so, obviously if you actually get information from other people about a certain topic it would actually be very nice.

**THOUGHTS:** Must remember to mention this to Mrs M. when she is planning her Life Skills programmes for next year. She could include this in one residence as a pilot project in the first semester, then perhaps expand to another two or three residences in the second semester.

A Newsletter would be interesting, 'cause there's also like. . .in high school we had a quarterly-type of newsletter where students would even put in their poetry and stuff like that. I used to collect those newsletters and they were very interesting and you actually get very talented people, or get actual writers or people who actually want to be



journalists and stuff, they get practice by writing for the newsletter and I think it would be. . .we would actually know what was going on with the rest of the campuses and with the residence, and. . .Yes, but it must not be just an intense newsletter, something that is 'hard core'. . .it could have like, cartoons in it and things that would actually make it interesting for us to read. That would be so nice! It gets boring after a while with just magazines and stuff. . .so it would be nice hearing what other people are thinking, seeing what is going on in their heads, that type of thing.

**STUDENT B**  
**Snapshots...The Boy from Umtata**

I come from Umtata, just a little city, it was best known when the Eastern Cape was part of the Transkei. It was quite big at the time but now. . .it's all gone downhill. It's a small town where *everyone* knows *everyone*, it's just a town basically you know. . .'cause it's not really a big city. There's all types of people. . .rich, OK, and poor, and I think I'm in the middle with the middle class, but we've had our fair share of struggles at home, this is the highest peak we are now. I grew up with my parents sacrificing almost everything for me, a lot of things for me actually, to give me a good education and I think there's a lot of. . .there's a mix in Umtata, as I see it, it is rich people, middle class and really poor people, so it's a mix of urban and poor rural areas and I've had the privilege of experiencing all types 'cause I've lived in urban areas and I've, like, the first five years of my life were in the rural areas where I grew up with my grandparents and I moved then to my parents in. . .what do you call it now E. . . .There's really no English word for it! And then I grew up there, lived in a two-bedroom flat and that's where two years of my life was spent, actually one-and -a-half, I spent it there. Then in 1996 we moved to a more. . .slightly more. . .middle class area but still not rich, a poor area, so yes, it's a mix of all different types.

For the first five years of my life I was staying with my grandparents in a rural area, this was because, at first when I was the only child. . .my parents were quite young 'cause she got me when she was twenty, my mum, and my dad was a little older than that. . .but I think really because she was working, and my dad. . .he's a soldier so he normally goes to Maluti and to many places, so, I couldn't stay with him because he was all over the show, and my mum was working at the time, a busy hectic lifestyle and she really didn't

<p><b>THOUGHTS:</b> He speaks with such fondness and longing here, also with maturity and understanding for the decision his parents made at that time - trying to do what was best for him in the circumstances they were living in.</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

like the idea of me having a nanny when my grandparents could actually look after me, because they were not working and they are fine, I could stay with them, it was no big deal and besides, where I was going to stay there were no children so I was just gonna stay there and get bored. . .basically, because. . .but I mean really they didn't. . .didn't live in a very great place you know because of the crime and everything. You don't want your child growing up in a place like that, so the humble life of a rural area because. . .you don't get much crime and *everyone* knows everyone. . .*respect* and the whole thing, that was actually the best years of my life. . .the best ever years of my life.

My mum was a clerk at an insurance company, it was called. . .ACA, yes, ACA. It was a long time ago, but they closed down in 1996. And now she's a teacher. She and about two or three other friends of hers, started a school. It's a community school 'cause there are no schools in the area, so they started a school from creche to Grade 9. She really didn't have any qualifications at the time so she was doing this creche, and as time went by she studied and now she's got a diploma and she's gone beyond the diploma and stuff and she might actually be. . .not be the Principal of the school, at least just be the Deputy or Head of Department or anything so, yes, she's working. She's got. . .like. . .this. . .this. . .this motherly view of everyone, especially the youth. She's got a great sense of trying to help the youth in every way she can, and that's why I love my mother so much, she's a phenomenal woman, I think she's. . . she's sacrificed a lot for us. I mean if you are in the community, sometimes people don't like what you do, or when you are doing something for other people, they don't like that very much, so you get a little bit of hatred from other people, but she never. . .she never. . .it may have been serious but she never made it stop her from doing what she wanted to do. She's where she is now 'cause of a lot of people gossiping about what she is doing, saying like. . .she's closing down opportunities for

**REFLECTIONS:** L. shows his deep respect, admiration and love for his Mother here. Listening to this during the conversation was touching, his voice was strong and clear, his face animated, as he spoke of his Mother and her achievements.

other people now, because she is all over the place, she's doing a creche. . .and now she's opened a school and stuff and the biggest question to me was, if there's no one doing it and she can do it then she has to do it, she's not just doing it for *herself*. . .she's doing it for **their** children. She's not even getting paid very much, she's earning like R1500 per month, a very small amount, so you can't really say she's closing down opportunities when you are only earning that much money.

My Dad's still in the army. He used to travel a lot, but not now. . .actually he got sick now. In 2001 he was diagnosed with kidney failure. Both kidneys are really screwed up, so they don't really work. He actually goes for dialysis like. . .I think it's. . .he used to go every day besides the weekends, but now he goes like, three times a week or four times a week. He's gotten a little bit better though, he's actually gained a lot of weight. There was a time when he actually said to my mum, he was in a bed. . .on a hospital bed and he was like, "Take care of my children, and take care of yourself". A transplant? Ooooooo. . .hard to tell, hard to tell. . .because there's me, and they don't want me to do it and even if I do they didn't even make me go for a test to see if I was eligible to donate, 'cause they don't want me to do it. Number two, the two people that were matches were also. . .are also. . .alcoholics, and so they are out. They are hard-core. . .hard-core alcoholics. They are his brothers, an older brother and a younger brother, so they can't. . .they can't do it. And then, the possibility would have to be outside the family and I mean, there are a lot of people with kidney failure out there and he's just probably at the tail of the whole thing. . .end of the line, 'cause everyone else is waiting for a transplant.

It is very hard on the family. You ask how I deal with it, what effect it has on me? You know, for starters, it changed him completely, he became aggressive, verbally aggressive, and sometimes he would be a bit. . .physical. But he's stopped being physical, and he's really verbally aggressive. . .**really** aggressive, until this day you

know. . .and there was a time when I hated him. . .I literally **hated** him! When he walked in I wouldn't eat in the same room with him. . .or sit for like thirty minutes in the same room. . .I'd just **go**. I'd walk out.

And I told my friends, I remember. . .to be honest, I actually prayed that he'd die. . .I prayed that he'd **die**. . .I know it's not a very good thing to pray about, but I did, and. . .I think because I was a child. . .I was like fifteen or fourteen, somewhere there, you know you don't understand why your father's doing this to you and you think that maybe he's

**THOUGHTS & REFLECTIONS:** I feel a lump in my throat as I listen to this, I can see the pain and confusion on B's face, his bewilderment as he talks of his feelings. My sense of it is that this is the first time he has ever spoken to anybody about this, about his praying for his father to die. I want to give him a hug, tell him not to feel bad. . .but I don't. . .I hold back. . .I don't want to crowd his personal space. . .  
[. . .and now I feel myself crying as I type this, remembering B's face and voice as he told me this. . . he was clearly in so much pain and distress. . .]

just being mean and he's just being a bully because he is bigger and you can't do anything to him so you just. . .hope he'd die. . .or something like that. But you know, now I've realised that maybe he was scared himself, very much scared, and you know when you are in a problem, especially when you know you are going to leave these people. . .they kind of don't want to get attached too much to them because it's going to be hard to let go. . .sometimes it may be that feeling. . .sometimes if you're feeling off, you don't want people having pity for you, feeling sorry for you and you know. . .you don't want it. . .especially for their generation, I think things have changed for our generation. . .we are more open and we are more emotional, and. . .more sensitive in a number of ways. But then, *they* are like hard-core, especially if it's a man. . .he'll be a man through to when he dies, he can't show his feelings and cry. He can't do anything. . .but. . .so. . .during the past year, and from last year. . .the end of last year, you know I grew to understand him actually. . .I grew to understand him. Now I realise that I love my father and I'm lucky, not lucky, but fortunate to still have him now and he **didn't** die when things were as bad as they were and I **didn't** understand him and I still had a lot of question marks in my head. I would never have understood if he had died at that time. . .it's still probably haunting me now, but now I understand and I can even

tell my brothers, my little brothers and my sister, "If he's doing this, you know, just ignore the part that was aggressive, just listen to him saying this, but don't let him do it too much to you". Because now, I remember this other time. . . I think it was about six weeks back. . . they were coming out of the bank with my mother and my mother saw somebody pick-pocketing him and she cried. . . she cried out for help, not really for help, but she alerted my father basically, and my dad. . . big turn of events. . . he shouted at **her!** I found it extremely weird, he said funny things that I'm even embarrassed to repeat, you know. . . very aggressive and things, and. . . he said them, my mother. . . we have this strong relationship me and my mother, she tells me everything and I tell her absolutely everything. . . so she called me, and she told me about it and I called her, it was a Friday. . . and I said I'll call you tomorrow and see what happened. I thought, is he actually going to apologise or something? I slept, and in the morning at about eleven, I called my mum to check if she's OK and she tells me that my dad didn't say a word, he didn't apologise or anything, he just brushed it off, like, "You're still mad about what happened yesterday? No man, I was just. . . you know. . . a little. . . you know....", and I was like, you know, that is stunning. . . when you say something like that to someone I think you should at least have the courtesy to go back to the person and apologise or show that you are actually sorry for something like that. Not actually say it, but do something to indicate that. I was so angry with him that I called him, but I didn't shout, I didn't say anything that was aggressive, but I left him with words. . . I can't really explain them in English but I said them in Xhosa which is my language, like really deep, deep things, I said basically. . . that I don't know what process you are trying to do to my mother but I hope that. . . I just want you to stop the process, to stop delaying the process, just do it and then we can know what is happening, what is at the end of it. You can't really translate it into English though. You know, because I still love my mother. . . she has sacrificed so much for us. . . and I said a whole lot of things that. . . coming from your child you kind of go like, 'Oh, OK', so like, but he never called me after that and I dropped the phone and he never called me after that. But I think I understand why he didn't call, you kind of don't have anything to say when someone says things like

that to you! But I mean we are dealing with other things, not because of the kidney infection or kidney thing, it took a lot for the family breakdown. . .

**NOTE TO SELF:** B. spoke about the situation with his Father with a growing maturity and awareness of what has really been happening, of what has actually been happening to his Father not just physically, but mentally and emotionally. He has now realised that his Father was, more than anything else, just plain scared. Scared of what was happening to his body, scared of dying, scared of what would happen to his wife and children when he was gone if he didn't survive with dialysis or a transplant. . .scared, scared, scared. . .and his son has eventually realised that, and it has helped him to learn who his Father is. . .

. . .I think in every situation when a disease pops up to one member of the family, especially the dominant man in the family, it becomes a problem for everyone, because it influences what they do with their life or with their living conditions and situation. . .it's going to influence **every** single person in the household. Definitely. But now we understand him more and I've told him

I love him, of which I have never heard him say that he loves me, but it's still cool, I understand him, but you kind of yearn for your father to tell you that he loves you, sometimes, but. . .maybe he will before he dies.

My brothers and sister..well, the funny thing is, OK, we're cool. . . with the two guys. My sister now is the problem. I'm like seven years older than her, she was born in '95 and I'm in '88, so yes, it's seven years. She's a silly little monster! But I love my sis, you know we have our little fits and fights but we're still cool because I'm more of the big brother most of the time, 'cause they're still young. . .so I've seen. . .I've seen like, the situation now, so I can't really say or talk a lot of things with them at this moment, so I have to play big brother, I can't be their friend because I can't talk about sex with them or relationships or stuff like that. But she's growing up fast, you know girls always mature faster and stuff, I might have to talk to her about that stuff now, I'm more of a big brother than a friend and I guess with my sister. . .we have a close relationship, all of us. And with my little brothers. . .one is '98 and one is 2000 so there's a very small gap it's like one year or one-and-a-half years, but they're always together. They will fight now

and in, like, two minutes they are laughing together, they are like the best of friends, they are like. . . glue and paper! They stick together like. . . I don't know, I have a very close relationship with them and as I said. . . oh yes, they look up to me a lot. . . a lot, I'm really much of a big brother than a friend to them, especially the two little guys, I do stuff with them. I'm not very social in terms of leaving for a long time and going to my friends every day or stuff like that, I just sit at home, watch TV, sit with them, or maybe in the afternoon I'll go to my friend's house and come back, it's just a basic thing, so yes, we're OK.

I went to U. High School which is a multi-racial school, former Model C, and the school is phenomenal in many ways, it was a fantastic school, it still is. It's. . . it's like the best school in Umtata anyway, it's like. . . it's. . . to compare it with the Durban schools, or the East London or the PE schools basically, you can compare it with that, even the grounds there, like, hockey fields and soccer fields and stuff like that. The funny thing is, it's very cheap compared to the schools here! Oh, the schools here you pay like R15 000 a year! I paid R4000 a year! I literally paid R4000 a year and here it's like R15 000 and R25 000 and stuff, but U. High is a phenomenal school, we had the same things that are happening here. . . the international Exchange students. . . the sports matches with Germany. . . the matches with the big schools basically in the Eastern Cape like C. High and things like that. We had competitions with those schools, it's basically a huge school and it worked for me though, it helped me in a lot of ways. My English teacher Mr Wareham. . . Jim. . . James Wareham, he's actually from Cape Town, he's one of the best people I've ever met in the world, he's a phenomenal guy, personally as a person and as a teacher. . . he helped me learn English and write, I'm a good writer, more than I'm a good speaker of English. I think I write well and stuff like that. He introduced me to poetry also,

**REFLECTIONS:** Yes, B's. English is excellent. I've seen his writing, as he asked me to proof-read a residence newsletter that he wrote a few months ago, it was very good, very well put together, good use of English in all it's forms, both formal and the vernacular. B. has a talent for writing, I wonder why he is doing Photography and not Journalism - he would be an excellent journalist, he has such good ideas and expresses them so very well.



and U. High is a great school, it's the best school around, last year we had a 98% pass rate, two people failed. Normally we would have a 100% pass rate, in the past five years we've never had anything less than 98% pass rate, so it is a good school, and it is very strict, like you can't wear your jersey without your blazer and stuff like that, guys have to wear a tie at all times. . .you can't wear an open necked shirt in winter, and stuff like that, a lot of things like that. And I also found it very motivating in terms of academics and sports and just the general stuff. We had an awards ceremony, you know the colours, what do you call it. . .half-colours, and full colours and honours and stuff like that. Although the first person last year for academics was Dr M's son, he got like, honours, he was passing everything, his aggregate was like 96 I think at the end of the year, and he was. . .that boy was. . .he was an alien. . .he was an alien!

The biggest problem for me was that a lot of people were from the suburbs and I wasn't from the suburbs and I was pretty much like the only person from my area. There were two people, me and this other girl from where I lived, Slovo Park. . .it's just a typical place. I think the biggest problem was that I couldn't associate with those people because those guys were from the suburbs so I couldn't talk personal stuff with them. A lot of times I was trying to fit in to the things that they were talking about but, for a long while, we didn't have electricity in Slovo Park so I didn't watch TV that much. I would go to a friend's house and use the generator and when it runs out then. . .no TV and stuff. I had a neighbour though who had a black and white TV and we would watch theirs sometimes. So, the stuff which was spoken about really was, like pop stuff, music and stuff, I never said anything personal, and I remember I didn't have a close relationship with any of those guys, because of our differences, and. . .until of course I was in Grade 11, at the end of Grade 11. . . then I started mixing with people and I pulled . . .I actually pulled back from the world really, I really did, I was like, 'Mr Cool', separating myself from the world, but the only people I interacted with was when I was back home. . .I didn't have friends at school, I had colleagues, or companions, or I don't know what you call it, but we weren't friends, we were just people who would walk

around and eat lunch together and stuff. Then when I go home, then I have friends and talk personal stuff with them and stuff like that and still you know, besides. . . I did try to fit in with them a little bit but then I pulled back, I'd sell myself short and you kind of put them '**there**' and you think 'oh I'm **here**' and so I can't. . . you fall short basically, I fell short. They had more than me...

In terms of my intellectual capacity? Oh yes, I knew I could stand my ground. I was an 'A' student, I was in the top three, and when I went to the high school I was still doing my A's and stuff and you know intellectually and academically I knew I was good and, but of course sometimes you kinda. . . see something that influences you in a way and I went down, I escalated down, I went really down, I was now like, a 'C' student in the third term in my first year at U. High school I went down completely because you know you're trying to fit in with people and people don't like you very much sometimes and when you compare yourself with them you fall short and things like that basically, but yes, because they had more than I did. . . that I think that they were better than me, but obviously intellectually I grew more confident of my intellect, it started like in Grade 11, 12. I grew more aware of myself as an intellectual and confident person, I grew more, as a person, I got more mature and I knew what I wanted. . . especially last year in Grade 12. I knew what I wanted and I didn't care much about what was being said by other people you know. . . and I think that, in the past years. . . the past two years, the past year to be exact, it's been like a wake-up call for me. A learning curve? Yes, definitely. . . definitely. And I think that more stuff has happened this year too. How did I decide to come to DUT? For starters, I wanted to go to the UK, to London, the London Film School and do a foundation course there, or try to get some way into, or maybe go to, Amsterdam or something, anything, you know just to the United Kingdom. I have an aunt. . . well, we're not blood, she's not my blood aunt she's not my blood family, so she works there she's a nurse. . . there's actually two people, one is in London and one is in Amsterdam, so I was going to stay with them, and my mum, she did raise a lot of money for me to actually go there but. . . my visa faltered out and we couldn't really get as much

money as, you know you have to have like R25 000 in your bank account and all other things, but I didn't want to stay in South Africa, I just wanted a change of scenery. But then I knew, I realised that. . .by December when I finished my Grade 12 I knew. . .oh crap, I have to find a school I can't just stay here it would be a waste of time, just because I was seventeen at the time it doesn't mean I have to waste the entire year, so I went. . .I came here. . .I went to the internet and checked out the DIT, it was DIT at the time, so I checked it out and I saw they actually do have Video Technology. . .maybe I'll do a year here and maybe do my diploma here and **then** go to London, and then by the time I came here it was already too late, I couldn't. . .I couldn't, because Video Technology closes in September the year before so I couldn't apply for it, so I decided to take Photography which was the closest thing and besides, I wanted to do Photography too anyway, Photography was the closest thing to Video Technology so I decided to take that and anyway, I've always wanted to come to Durban. I last came here, the first time. . .the last time, the only time I came here was in 2000, it was a school tour and I loved it, I fell in love with Durban actually, it was like 'I want to go to Durban again!' but I never got the chance to come back in those years, but now I'm living in Durban and it's been nice.

My expectations of being at varsity. . .well, firstly I thought, being in high school, that everyone at varsity, especially second and third years would be a lot bigger than I am, they would be exposed to a lot more things than I am. I mean I'm used to that, when you are junior you can only do certain things, you can't go and do certain things, and when you are senior then you can do certain things, and things like that. So. . . but, when I got here it wasn't like that, everyone has freedom to do anything and everything, you can do whatever you want, you can be in the SRC, you can be in any leadership position if you want if you have the leadership skills and things like that. Also, I thought

really it's pretty much like high school. . . I thought you had your certain groups of people, I thought that people knew each other, but I don't know where I got that idea, I mean I thought that you have your own clan. . . **you** have **your** clan. . . **you** have **your** clan. . . **you** have **your** clan and things like that, but I thought of course people would be a bit more mature than that, but when I got here it never happened. . . people don't know each other, you go past people and you make

your own friends, you make, it's like. . . there's a saying I saw this other time, 'you can get more friends in a month by being interested in other people, than

**REFLECTIONS:** This is where the High School learning curve has led - to greater maturity and understanding of interpersonal relationships and choosing friends. It was a good learning experience for B.

actually trying to make those people interested in you'. So I saw that here, you have to be interested in other people to make friends, you can't really just have your things and think people will just be interested, like people are mature and independent people who do what they want and some people are comfortable with what they are and it's a lot different than I thought, it's very much different than I thought. I mean I thought, really, that money was a big thing, you know. . . you have to have money, you have to wear the most expensive things or clothes, or things like that, but it's not like that really,

**THOUGHTS:** This is **very** interesting! A completely different perspective from Student A in terms of materialistic need - she wanted Levi jeans, craved them, but B. does not see them as really important. Could this perhaps be gender-based perspectives from these two students??

especially here in Durban, it's not like that, people don't really look at what you wear much. Of course your cleanliness and 'presentability' is important, but they don't look at whether you are wearing the latest Levi jeans or anything like that, so a lot of

expectations I had, but of course I expected to be myself, I knew I wasn't going to change or try to conform to anything but be who I am right now. I was happy to come to this environment, there's a lot of freedom, you can do what you want to do, when you want to do it, provided it doesn't interfere with your studies. Expectations. . . a lot of what I had is not here, but I am happy with the current state.

Does it meet my expectations in general? No it doesn't actually, to be honest. I'm critical both of the students and the management of the institution. I'd think there would be a lot more diplomacy and professionalism from people, of course, for instance in my department, what happens is, it's. . .it is the weirdest thing that you can ever come across, you know it's not right what is happening. . .there's lack of professionalism, people don't give their work. . .you know we write a test today and we only get. . .we wrote a test in March and we only got it back in July when we were coming back, that was theory and you are supposed to know your marks before you can actually. . .and a lot of people are complaining, and there are things like from the SRC. . .from the SRC there are things like racism, segregation and a lot of. . .in terms of other people, a lot of judgement, they judge each other a lot and most of the time, and this thing that you have to do things **via** someone, of course there are structures that you have to go through, but sometimes they will neglect you and they won't listen to you, you try to say something and they just don't listen to you, and sometimes there's this whole thing of

**REFLECTIONS:** B's thoughts and opinions here strike at the very essence of what could possibly be wrong with the institution. I have seen many of these things myself, as a staff member, of the lack of professionalism by my colleagues. . .in all departments across the institution, academic and administrative, staff of both genders and all age groups. It is significant that a young first-year student could see these issues so clearly. . .as staff we should really give this matter, this 'problem', some very serious thought indeed!

elitism, you have to be a certain. . . person. . .and to mingle with certain people, for you to be heard. In terms of professionalism and interacting with other people, I don't know how to say this but, yes but as a social thing it's OK, mingling with other people, it's fine, but in terms of being a student, being a lecturer and being management. . .

there is no relationship, there is no bond that we can actually talk through problems that we have and get resolution, there's nothing like that and I mean it's turned to a university now, it's not just a technikon, it's a university and I was thinking there would be a lot more change, and professionalism. I think this institution is trying to mold future business people and you know. . .just. . .career-oriented and functional citizens of this country, but there's just a problem in terms of teaching. I think everyone has to be

professional in terms of. . .if you're not friends or even if you are friends, let's take our friendship out, and if we are enemies, let's take those things out, let's take those things out and be **professional**, treat each other with professional courtesy that we all deserve, things like that. I've been kinda. . .very dissatisfied really, but I mean, out of ten in terms of management and things, I'd pretty much give it a six.

Things that have happened to me? Well, what happened was in our. . .especially in. . .it happened in the residence, B. residence, there's a lot of neglect of that residence, a lot of people [*inaudible on tape*] . . .in terms of management, OK, we can't really have a budget for B. residence every year that's a big, **huge** amount of money, but they are developing residences that are already more developed than B. residence, and they are doing things. . .we try to go to them and ask them for little things like main door keys, just little things for security, and they won't listen to us, they will not listen to **anyone** and we still pay here, I mean, we **pay** here and we should be treated by professionals because. . .not as just students but as

**people who have paid to be here!**

And the services should be delivered!

In the Finance department there is a lot of 'attitude' going around also in terms of. . .a lot of racism, and I've

**THOUGHTS:** Absolutely! You, as a student, are also a paying customer, and the institution should be looking at high standards of customer service. . .of customer satisfaction. . .for students who “. . .**have paid to be here!**”

heard a lot of people complaining about it, and especially in the E. Department. . .some friends of mine have complained about certain lecturers who are racist towards other people and, even in my department there is a lot of, you know, racism, but you have to be. . .there's this thing of elitism really, you look at someone and you think, that's me, and just because they are of the highest order then you tend to listen to them. Like in my department a lot of people, a lot of African students are not listened to, there's like two or three people who when they say something they are listened to. I am one of those people, I don't know why, but it's like that unfortunately. A lot of people are complaining about the racism thing, and there are a lot of good things in the institution

and in my department, but I think there should be a lot more professionalism and people should put their. . .they put what they think as people, as persons, they incorporate it into their careers and their work, so it becomes a problem for other people, I mean, if I'm racist then it's not possible to deal fairly with people. . .they put their personal feelings first.

There's people in the SRC. . .the way they treat us, for starters, it really angers me, they treat us like. . .specially the African students, anyone who is African, they treat us with, they think that they are **so** intelligent, in such a way that they can manipulate what **we** think, and a lot of things that influence us. Because you know there's a lot of people with insecurities, especially, a lot of people. . . the African people, have a lot of insecurities towards the White people or the Indian people, they think that sometimes, they have this idea that sometimes. . .they're trying to overtake us, they want to take over the country again, things like that, stupid insecurities really. Not a lot of people do that, not a lot of people have that, and a lot of people. . .this country has been through a transformation, a tremendous transformation that I applaud tremendously, it's a **fantastic** transformation! I think it's good for this country and we don't need racism, but the SRC, sometimes, they try to feed on the racist angle, on the. . .on what happened in the past. They try that angle and they're trying to inflict it, they're trying to

open up a little bit of the wounds that are there from the past, and, they have. . .I don't know what they are trying to do but they inflict those and they feed on those things, and they try to influence the African people. . .the black people. . . into having a bit of an attitude, because they are trying to eliminate people in positions that are White, and there are quite a few and you. . .you [referring

**REFLECTIONS:** It would be perhaps be naive to expect no politics at a tertiary education institution, but B. makes a very strong point in identifying and assessing the negative perspectives, manipulations and activities of some institutional groups. And yes, I have felt the brunt of it in the last year or two. . .my words, decisions or actions taken out of context, twisted and manipulated to make them seem like something that they never were. . . I guess I've been through my own learning curve too. . .how to survive being an apolitical individual within a politically-charged working environment!

*directly to the Researcher*] of course, they have tried a lot of things, they tried to defame your character and things like that, which is unfortunate, and I think, it's irritating really, it's more. . .angry and **infuriating** me, because you kinda think that people would have a little bit of pity and some. . .some. . .passion, or. . .I don't know what to call it, for what happened and we should move on from what happened, but I don't know, they're trying to. . .you know sometimes when you are playing on someone's insecurities, you try to bring up a lot of emotion from those things, from those insecurities, you feed on them, on the fear they have, and unfortunately, sometimes they succeed, like the SRC has, and these people are **very, extremely** political leaders, they are **extremely** political, and I have reason to believe that they want to be like in the ANC Youth League and stuff like that, they want to be real politicians, and I don't know why they don't just go to the ANCYL 'cause they are doing something that is absolutely wrong to us now, because they are trying to catch. . .to get us into. . .I mean unfortunately, we do look up to our leaders for guidance and things like that, but if someone is doing things like this then you can't think that. . .it registers in your head, in a subconscious thing, or even if you are not necessarily trying to do something, deliberately doing something, it comes out maybe in a certain way. I don't know, I can't really explain it. They are playing on emotion really.

The lecturers, well, besides the fact that you know, a lot of people. . .you can't have, like, I've heard about and I actually wanted to write an article about it, I've heard about twenty or more people who are doing E. who are aggrieved and are constantly complaining about certain lecturers, about two or three lecturers, but one specific. Myself, I've encountered a little bit of racism in my department, you know and you get this. . . sometimes it may not be racism as such but it's a feeling of, you know trying. . .it's a feeling of. . .pleasing a certain type of people and then the other people, in my department there's this thing. . .there's elitism, they want certain people with a certain amount of money to do Photography and I mean, I don't see the point because in Video Technology you pay R18 000 as part of your school fees, that's your school fees and



the equipment you get from that R18 000, and then in my department it's R12 000, but they can do it because we spend about five or six thousand a year for things from our own pockets, and in third year you will have. . .when it's like in third year you'll only have like six people or seven people who are third-years, and there were thirty-five people who were in first year, because they can't afford the course. And then there's this other racism thing, I have encountered a bit of racism in my department in terms of. . .I was walking into my lecturer's office and for starters, well, he shouted at me, and he said "Back off, I don't want to talk to you", and I thought 'what did I do now', he said 'Get out!' and so I walked out. And then M. this tall white guy walked in. . .and I had wanted to talk to him about my marks, and I heard they were talking about **his** marks. . .it wasn't a problem, they spoke, it wasn't a problem, and then when I walked in again and said, "Excuse me sir, I think I have a right to be here and talk to you about my marks because they are my marks." and he's like, "You know, you have a problem, your kind have a problem." and I was like "What do you mean, 'my kind'?" And he goes like, '...your kind, your skin kind...'. And I'm ". . .OK. . .that is a very mean thing to do, and a very immature thing to say and I'm very disappointed that it's coming from an adult." and then I walked out. After that he never spoke to me for about two weeks, and then when I tried to talk in class he just, you know when he asked questions of the rest of the class, I'd say something because I'd know the answer, and I purposely did it, I would answer because I know the answers and I'm supposed to answer because it's my class, and then I'd answer a question and he'd let me talk because he doesn't want to show the rest of the class that he has an attitude towards me, he'd let me talk. . .and then when I'm done talking he'd just go to the next topic! Not respond to anything I had said!

**REFLECTIONS:** Appalling, outrageous, unacceptable. . .! Unfortunately, I have actually witnessed these kinds of things myself in the last three or four years, so I know that B. is not exaggerating or making this up. What would this staff member think and how would he feel if someone had done this to his son or daughter. . .would he feel outraged, that his son/daughter had been treated very badly? Or what would he think. . .would he think of his own conduct towards his young students. . .would he do introspection and change his attitude and actions???? This is the staff 'professionalism' aspect again.

These lecturers, they're predominantly Indian. Indian on Black and, you know, I haven't had anything. . . I haven't had any problems with White students or any White people, oh yes, I had a problem with one White guy, but we sorted it out because I explained to him that there's no need for us to be hostile to other races. I spoke to him. . . yeah, I was in a good mood anyway that day so I explained to him, and we spoke about it and yes, we sorted it out, but I mean it's mostly Indian on Black, and Black on Indian, and in terms of the SRC, it's Black on Indian & White. I think White people, at DUT, are specifically targeted. . . they are **really** being targeted. . . people are trying to remove them from leadership positions, and I don't know why. It drives me crazy! And a lot of people, as much as they will hate to admit it, we need White people, we do need a

**REFLECTIONS:** It was very interesting to hear this young 19-year-old Xhosa man give his views in this way. The political ins-and-outs are beyond my area of expertise and understanding, but B's viewpoint strikes a nerve with me in terms of just wanting to do my job in the best way possible and to help my students in whatever way they need help, irrespective of who they are. Maybe I am the naive one, at 50 years of age, in thinking that an individual is exactly that. . . an **individual**, with his/her own traits, characteristics, positive and negative aspects, that are not linked to any kind of 'classification' or 'stereotyping'. Just a man or woman, boy or girl, trying to make his or her way in a complex and often confusing world. . .

lot of White people, it's not about their colour, or anything like that really, it's about the fact that they get the job done, and I'll be honest. . . I'm being very honest. . . they get the job done. White people are professionals and you know, this institution would not be like this if it was run by White people, I'm sorry to say this, but I have to be honest. I'm being **very** honest. If White people were running the institution it would not be like this, the

infrastructure would not be like this, the residences. . . B. residence would not be like that, that's the truth, and it's unfortunate. . . and I might actually give it a lot of consideration myself but [*inaudible on tape*] I'm saying this because it's a fact, it is a fact, and it's unfortunate because. . . we could learn a lot of things because you have the experience, so we could learn a lot of things, but they don't want to admit that. . . they don't want to admit. . . it's not about the colour, it really isn't. We even have a problem of 'tribality'. A lot of people. . . a little bit. . . I think I am going to encounter a lot of

problems myself because I'm Xhosa, and Zulu people do not really like Xhosa people that much, because they think. . .you know. . .Nelson Mandela is Xhosa, Tutu is Xhosa, Biko was Xhosa, Thabo Mbeki is Xhosa. . .they have this thing that every single person there is Xhosa and they think 'we know better than them' and they think that we are so clever that we control, that we have control over everything, like that whole Jacob Zuma and Thabo Mbeki thing that's going on, they think that Xhosa's are specifically targeting Zulu people not to be in control, I mean to become anything in the country, I mean, you know really, if Zuma was another person I would be OK, but I don't care whoever is President. . .if they are an intelligent, mature, diplomatic, professional person and a person who can work very well for the country and can perform well as a President, I don't care **who** it is, I don't care what colour they are, you know it doesn't really matter to me, but if it's Zuma. . .then I have a problem, specifically with him **as a person**. He has serious problems!

When I think of my expectations of living in a residence at varsity, well, I'd never been really exposed to the university, we have a nice and beautiful university, Walter Sisulu University in Umtata, but I've never been there although it's not far from my house, I've never been there, so I never really got exposure to what living in res is like. But a lot of people had told me how it is like. . .you have your room, your bed, the wardrobe, fridge, things like that, but I heard about other residences how nice they are. But when I came here, I thought maybe in a residence. . .I didn't have much expectation, to be honest, but I thought there was a little more than, well it depends on where you are actually, but in my residence, B. residence, I thought it would have a little bit more in terms of. . .a lot more student education programmes or things like that, and there would be more entertainment, but at the moment nothing is happening I mean, the only thing that you get is the 'opening bash' and a 'closing bash', and I mean still that...that is like having people, you know, party, getting drunk, and that still wasn't very conducive in any way, but, insofar as my expectations go, I didn't have much expectation, I didn't, but I thought obviously that living in res was like. . .you would be independent, and you could

come in any time you want, you could do whatever you want to do really, of course no one will stop you. . .but. . .at the same time that comes with responsibility, you have to be responsible for the things that you do and for yourself and for. . .for. . .sometimes you have to be responsible for the people **around** you in terms of your influence to them and how much influence they have on you, and things like that. But generally, you know, pretty much in any place that has youth, young people, you will get things like people smoking and drinking and the casual outbursts of music every single time, but that's pretty much what I thought really would happen. Well, where I live it's much worse than I thought! It's pretty much worse! I thought people had a bit more control, that they were more mature in terms of being responsible for things and having both. . .just having courtesy for other people, professional courtesy and you know, just a feeling for things and really. . .but. . .that's as much expectation as I had.

People don't really interact much in terms of. . .a lot of people don't know each other, but of course there's this like 'elitism' in places, especially in my res, there are certain people that are known by everyone. There's like, a certain elitism you know, sometimes, people are given certain titles, type of thing, you know it's like the 'drunkard', or the clan of the 'people who drink a lot', and there's the 'clan of the nerds', and there's a 'clan of the super-hotties' type of thing, but it's not really taken as a serious thing, really, but it does kind of create. . .a certain thing, a problem, where there are quite a few people who, I hear, don't like **me** at res, I mean, there's not a single person. . .the one person that

**THOUGHTS:** Apologising is not always an easy thing to do - good for you!

I had a problem with, I went and apologised to that person, and we're now, well, not 'bosom buddies', but we are still friends, but, there are people

that don't like me in terms of the fact that. . .I don't know how I do things because I interact with every single person, I come up to anyone I don't even know or I haven't really seen much or I haven't really spoken to since the beginning of the year, I can rock up to that person and speak to them and ask them their name and apologise maybe for

not having spoken to them for such a long time, not really because I have an obligation to, but I mean I say, you know, "Hey, I'm sorry that I haven't spoken to you for so long." you know, so maybe I can still do that, so there's a lack of. . .and people. . .some people don't really have a sense of reasoning in terms of. . .they don't really. . .when someone doesn't fulfill their expectations or what they want that person to be, they tend to, well, not really shy away from that person, but generally just block that person from them, you know, there's that also, and then there's the fact that people are being put up **there**, they've been put up into the sky kind of thing, that person has been put out of reach type of thing, or that person is really so great, type of thing, there is a little bit of that also, and generally I think it's less, it's a little bit. . .some people lack in terms of self-esteem, you know, they don't really have much confidence and they end up shying away from things or backing off. And generally there's no programmes or anything that's happening in terms of trying to get the students, the residents, to interact or to talk to each other, you know, meet some way or maybe there would be. . .

**REFLECTIONS:** B. is raising this again - about people being ". . .up **there**. . ." He also spoke this way about his peers at school. What is he really trying to say? Is this a self-esteem issue for him?

I heard in a certain residence there was something like at the beginning of the year you are assigned a 'friend' or a 'partner' kind of thing, someone you can go to and speak to, especially if you are a first year or you are new in that residence, they will assign you to a senior, someone who has been there before, type of thing, and if you have a problem you will go and talk to that person, you know it's really about interacting with other people, it's not really about 'I have to be friends with this other person', but it's about having someone to talk to and having interaction with other people and meeting them

**THOUGHTS:** Yes B, you are seeing already that teamwork is necessary, even in a learning environment and especially in a working environment.

and just generally speaking to everyone type of thing, and **knowing** people, I mean, that's what we need because we are in a learning institution and we need

to work with people because at the end of the day we are working **for** people, we will be working **with** people and. . .we might be working against people as competition, but we need to be able to interact with other people and need to know how to react to certain situations, but that's not really happening at res and you get the. . .you know there's, there's. . .there's a lack of. . .not really tolerance as such, but there's a . . . because I don't like what that person is, or I don't like, or I don't feel I like what that person represents or what that person is, I just prefer it as 'I hate them' or I put them at bay type of thing, and generally there's. . .I mean we could learn a lot of things from each other, a lot of things from each other, but there's that. . .there's that blocking thing between us and there's like this 'wall' from everyone, but I'm hoping I might be able to break that. I'll try, with the Newsletter, and I'm hoping that if I do make it on House Committee for next year, I would like to introduce programmes where people could interact, you know, I would like to do things like that because, I mean, what's the purpose of spending thousands of rands on a bash or whatever, when people are not really going to gain anything from it really. We can have programmes like maybe a movie night for the girls, or a movie night for the guys, or something like that, you know, at least **something** that is interactive. I mean, **something**! Sometimes you are gonna need something or you. . .maybe your iron breaks, or your kettle breaks, and you can't boil water without a kettle and you can't iron clothes without an iron, so you're gonna need someone to ask, you gonna have to, you're gonna have to ask from your neighbour, but if you haven't spoken to that neighbour for the past three months, then it's gonna be kind of awkward to speak to that person. But if you at least have spoken to that person, and at least you do greet that person when you are walking past in the corridor, you greet each other, then it's not going to seem awkward to actually go and ask for an iron from that person. We need to create a community like that, you know, not really gonna be. . .not necessarily have to be **friends**, but at least if we have that, I don't know what to call it. . .that '**community**' thing. . .that interaction type of thing, then things will be a little bit better.

A 'Buddy System'? Yes, that would be a very good thing. I mean it's like, as a person, as a first year student looking at a senior, you kinda. . .if you are assigned to a person, a senior, you will sort of have that thing of. . .it's like, how do I put this. . .but I mean you are kinda learning things from that person, you are **learning**, you are walking in their footsteps kind of thing, but I don't mean maybe literally taking everything that they do, but I mean you kind of. . .you kind of know how to react to certain situations. At least you learn how to act in certain situations, 'cause I mean you end up as a person who has an experience of how to act and you get to know your way around the residence, not necessarily in terms of, you know, knowing doors and door numbers and things like that, but in terms of being able to know **who**. So, these people are like **this**, certain people are like this, **they** act like this, this will be the most

**REFLECTIONS:** Listening to this again from the recording, it seems to me that B. desperately wants to belong, he wants to be part of the group, part of what is happening, but he also seems to feel that he does not belong, that he is not one of 'them', whoever they may be. . .

appropriate crowd for me to hang around with for the first year, and that will, sometimes, it would help in terms of it would cut the first-year thing of going into tertiary and you find people that 'oh these people drink, you know, maybe, I don't have anyone, I'll just join them' and you drink with them and you end up maybe failing your first year and you know, being kicked out of residence and being kicked out of the institution and things like that. I guess it will be a very good programme if it is introduced.

I'm in a double room, and my roommate, we're buddies, we're very close actually, there's three of us, with my best friend. . .we're all three friends and like. . .tight, you know, very, very close. . .of course he's not as much a best friend as my other friend, but I mean we are still very close and we've established, you know I think we have. . .we've pretty much learned a lot of things from each other, and as much as I would say

he's like, he's like. . . he's a little inexperienced about things, but I've learned a lot of things from him, and I think he's learned quite a few things from me too, and, yes, we're very good friends. We just met here, and I mean, first impressions were not very. . .Ha Ha Ha!. . .were not very good, and I thought he was like. . .oh my word! I thought he was the type. . .I thought he was initially the type that when you ask a question he would just answer that question and he never asks you anything or never does say anything, but you know. . .you know 'first impressions'! I've tried to drift away from that, from judging people on first impressions, I've really moved away from that, and I have, really, I've moved away from that and. . .impressions. . .they're the basis of how you're going to react to that person the next time you meet them, it's a direction, it's like a guide of how you're going to react to that person or whatever, so, yes. . .first impressions were not great, from his side also, he thought.

**THOUGHTS & REFLECTIONS:** As the saying goes, 'Never judge a book by its cover'! B. has learned another valuable lesson here: to find out facts or get to know someone before making any kind of assessment. Another good lesson learned in his first year!

. . .he was a little. . .he thought, 'Oh, this Xhosa guy. . .oh my word!' He's Zulu. But it turned out it wasn't like that! And I told him that. . .that first impressions were not good! "I thought you were lame, Bra, I thought you were this bookworm!", because every time I went into the room he was reading something, oh he's a bookworm. . .**boring!** But it turns out he wasn't like that.

Residence life, it. . .it has quite given me a lot of. . .a lot of drive. A lot of inspiration, and it has given me. . .it has been pushing me towards goals or certain things, certain goals, which I think is good for me, because I mean, having to organise a Newsletter is quite a good thing, and having to organise things like. . .or helping with. . .if I do make House Committee. . .I don't even **have** to make House Committee, I can do it as a resident, you know, as one of the 'people' I can suggest those things or try to influence those things to happen at residence, so it has given me a lot of drive, and a little bit more passion in terms of working with people, and more. . .a broader understanding of



what people are, and . . . of understanding the different people that live or exist within our communities or they live within the world, basically, because we have every single type of person, you know. . . **every** single type of person. So you kind of get to understand

**REFLECTIONS:** B. seems to have found his place of 'belonging', he seems to have realised that it is more about knowing who you are as an individual and feeling comfortable in your own skin, rather than being good enough to 'fit in' with others. He appears now to be in his own space and place and to be at ease with that.

who that person is, and it's. . . it's given me a sense of, well, not really a sense of, but I mean, I am now very **comfortable** with who I am. . . I am **so** comfortable with who I am, and I mean I've said this before to quite a few people who have judged me in certain

ways, and I've told them "You know, nothing can ever. . . nothing you say can ever break me, you know, I am who I am, I am here for a reason and I'm going to. . . as much as I know what to do or the way to move forward, I'm going to implement that into my life and I'm going to try and move forward and not down". It has given me a lot of strength being at res and. . . working. . . a sense of working **for** people, working for the **community** and, just, it's shown me a side of **me** that I never really thought existed. I have a passion for people, I never really thought that! I really thought that 'I don't need people' type of thing, but it turns out it's not like that. . . I work best **with** people, I function best **with** people. I think if I was like, on an island, I would go **mad**! I would really. . . aside from not having the food, I would really. . . you know. . . so residence has given me a good platform to also express myself. Generally speaking, being in the residence has had a positive effect on me, it has strengthened me in a lot of ways, it definitely has. What do I think that Student Development should be doing that they are not, what do I think they should change? OK. . . this is a big one! This is a big one, oh my! You know, I think really. . . if you are doing something for the first-year students, I think really at first you have to have. . . it would be interesting to have like, the Buddy System type of thing, but for starters we would have to have something like an orientation programme or initiation programme type of thing. Of course it would not be anything like what used to happen at high school where you go and they push your face down the toilet, type of

thing, no, nothing like that, but an initiation programme between. . .of course the people who have been at res and the first-year students, so that they can mingle with each other and they can interact and know each other and know Who's Who, exactly, because, I mean, you walk into a residence and you are a first-year student and you don't even know who's your House Committee, that type of thing, and I mean to be honest there's one House Committee person that I didn't even know existed until about four weeks ago, or a month-and-a-half ago, that's the only time I knew that person actually existed, because you don't even know Who's Who, you know. I think that for first-year students that would be a very good thing, to have an initiation programme where they are going to be assigned to certain people or a number of people be assigned to one person, where maybe five students can be assigned to one person, and that person can show them around and tell them what. . .and try to show them what to get, where to get. . .whatever they want type of thing, that kind of programme. Number two, I think, really. . .wow, this is very big question really and I haven't really thought of it...

I think the other thing would be the fact that as students, or residents, we need to understand that we don't really. . .we shouldn't really expect a lot of things to happen from the management, the House Committee, I mean from the Housing Department, they've proven to us, most of the time. . .especially at B. residence. . .that you know, they work at a slow pace and some things they don't really take into consideration, which of course is a problem, but we need to understand also that we can actually help ourselves too because we have two arms and we have two legs and we have mouths and ears and we are fully functional human beings, and I think we should have. . . maybe. . .fund-raisers type of thing, not necessarily that we have to have a huge thing, but fund-raisers like, for certain things, maybe for a residence computer, or maybe five residence computers with the Internet where you will be given an hour to go over the Internet to check your e-mails, or things like that. Not necessarily have ten or twenty computers, but maybe just five computers. Because the computer lab is close by so we

have those, and we can also try to push the House Committee in terms of having programmes, or things like, if Fanta is doing a promotion programme or promotion of their new product at the institution they should try to go to the residences also. Students **love** free stuff, they love to see and to get free things! And to have promotions happen just to get a 'busy' thing, because I mean, if something. . .there has to be a little bit more entertainment, you know? Not really entertainment as such, but maybe 60% entertainment and 40% educational stuff because you don't really want to have only education or constructive things because they get a bit boring sometimes. But you know, you would like to have promotions there, or say, Ster Kinekor could sponsor a movie for the night and we hire out 'The Arms' or any other. . .or a hall close by, maybe one of the Library Complexes (LC's). . .the LC rooms there, and watch a movie on a Saturday for a guys night out, or a girls night out, or maybe just the entire residence combined having a night out, type of thing. Number three. . .wow. . .but I mean you would actually need to teach people that they should take responsibility and take matters into their own hands if they want improvements. If you do see a problem, that doesn't mean everyone else is seeing the problem, you shouldn't just wait for someone to do something about it, you should try and maybe get some people to help you do it, or if you can do it yourself then just try and do it yourself, you know. As I saw, there's no communication thing, and I went and did it myself because I saw the need for something like that, so just to try to. . .and just get a few. . .a few pointers from the actual residents, just ask them, because I am sure they are going to tell you about fridges and things like that, but that's really for Housing, but in terms of. . .I think they need a little bit more entertainment, because that puts them away from a lot of things, because you know, on a Friday night. . .a movie at the LC's or anywhere. . .instead of going to a club and drinking themselves to a pulp, they won't go to the club, they'll go and watch the movie instead of that because that person was bored, maybe, they are going to go to the club because they don't have anything else to do, but if there is that movie, they can go to that movie and it's going to prevent them from harm, from. . .it's not really going to prevent it as such, but at times it is going to prevent that person at certain times.

I actually wanted to ask, I wanted to find out. . .I've always wanted to know about utilising 'T.A.' as a place where. . .what you said, as a coffee bar type of thing, because it would be a fantastic idea, it would be very good. I mean, people sit around their rooms and they don't even know what to do, they are just sitting and they don't have anything to do, but if there would be a coffee bar and having things like stand-up comedy, because we do have comedians and yes, we do have comedians at the residence! And we could have Simphiwe, who recently had a show with some of South Africa's biggest, Kenneth Nkosi and all those guys. . .was performing at Bat Centre, we could have those people come in and (*inaudible on tape*) is here at S. res, he could just pop by and do a bit of comedy and things like that, and we do have some talent. And we could have a DJ, like, we have DJ's at residence, they could come in and play their songs because I mean we don't have to pay them. . .but they could come and it's about them showcasing their skills and talents, and having a platform, because if you express within your community then people are actually gonna say 'Maybe I should buy this guy's CD' or 'Maybe I should support his show. . .I know him, I know he plays good music, so I might as well support him', kind of thing. It's a way of marketing themselves too. Definitely a coffee bar would be an excellent idea, and we can have debates also, and we can have this Abafundi Talk Show to just come in there and talk about things, but of course. . .they don't have to be. . .of course this is like the residential thing., we can go around residences and things like that, and I've always wanted to ask someone about it, about using 'T.A.', I mean the only thing, the only time that they do use it is when they are serving food, which is at lunch which is about at one, maybe one to three, I don't know, and maybe then at five to seven, that type of thing, that is when we can actually use it, maybe after seven or after six, you know, and have things like that. It would be an excellent idea. Development or life skills programmes. . .yes - peer counselling, not peer counselling as such. . .OK, I said it the wrong way, I meant

**REFLECTIONS:** Good to see that the Abafundi Talk Show is having an impact, as a new group on campus they have been working hard to establish themselves as a student group. . .taking their talk-show topics to most of the residences and giving residence students an opportunity to express themselves freely in a non-threatening environment.

in terms of counselling in. . .reacting or. . .how to act towards being. . .I don't...how to function in residence or how to work, I don't really know how to say this but how to. . . how to **react** to certain situations kind of thing, in terms of the counselling of how to. . maybe you could have a one- or two-day thing where you have a programme where all the first-year students gonna come in and you are going to have two or three senior students and someone who is going to sit there maybe in a certain place, and you can ask questions like 'How did you react to a certain situation, how could you, how did you react if you did face a situation like this, how did you react to it?', so that the first-year students can learn that, or maybe they can then actually say 'Oh, maybe I should try it out if that problem arises, or when I face that problem'. . .and. . .we can have the first-year students asking. . .we can have a professional Counsellor like there was. . .there was once. . .we were doing this peer counselling thing and of course we were being taught how to react or how to talk to our peers and how to counsel them if they come with a problem and how to talk to them and how to react to them and things like that, and we could have someone like that who is professional, and they would come and tell you, or suggest, how you can actually interact with other people, how to react to certain situations. Yes, for first-year students that would be good.

Anything that I'd like to add really, is. . .it's just that there could be more done in the residences, there's more to be done there, and I think that students, a lot of people have so much time on their hands, **so** much time on their hands. . .and they really don't know what to do with it! They really don't, and if we got more students involved, like you said, at A. res. . .A. is a **tight** residence. . .you can have. . .I'm really concerned about B. residence, I really am, because I live there. I don't know much about other residences and how they live, and so I have to be concerned about that. B. residence. . .the residents have so much time on their hands, they just walk around, prance around, they do drag shows and things like that, and I mean, Yes it is entertaining, but I mean really, they have a lot of time on their hands. I wish that Student Development and Student Housing could do a little bit more. Of course in terms of infrastructure it's Student

Housing, and Student Development in terms of the entertainment, the educational programmes and life skills programmes. . .yes, that's it.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

After careful consideration, I decided that a thematic analysis would yield the best comparison of the data from the student narratives. In line with the research question and the topics discussed during the conversations, the issues of family, schooling and university life were scrutinised in the narratives. Within these topics, further issues such as home sickness, peer pressure, choice of friends, finance, and a sense of belonging were identified and examined. These are presented in the section on Thematic Analysis. Following the analysis will be a discussion pulling together the various elements of the stories of Students A and B, my own thoughts and reflections, and relevant excerpts from the transcript stories of Students C, D, E and F.

#### **THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

##### ***Family***

Both students have been strongly influenced by their mothers. They have strong emotional ties to their mothers and seek their guidance and help when they have difficulties in their lives. Student A and Student B also have both shown maturity in understanding and accepting decisions and actions taken by their mothers. They look up to their mothers, and are very protective of them. The influence that their mothers have had on them cannot be underestimated, as both speak with great love and pride at how their mothers have overcome adversity in their lives. Both Student A and Student B became quite emotional during the conversations where they spoke about their mothers. They have both leaned on their mothers heavily during their first year away from home, trying to have contact with them as frequently as possible. Both students appear to hold their mothers as role models, and look to them for support when finding themselves facing adversity. Their close bonds with their mothers, and the advice and support that they gain from the relationships, would provide emotional strength in the

transition to university and residence life. When facing difficult situations on campus or in residence, they both seem to draw comfort and strength from talking to their mothers and following their guidance and advice.

There are clear indications that both students have major issues with their fathers. They both have very complex relationships with their fathers that have caused them inner turmoil and conflict. In the case of Student A, this has revolved mostly around the distance in their relationship, not just geographical but also in terms of protection. Her father has tried to protect her from some of the harsh realities of life, although she often sees this as being stifled and over-protected. There is also great chagrin at the situation with her stepmother, whereby she is culturally restricted in her attitude and responses. She does seem to accept this, but reluctantly and with great resentment. There seems to a conflict of interests and emotions here, a battle between her cultural identity and her identity in a Westernised environment. This is a difficult situation for Student A, as she wants to 'do the right thing' in the cultural context, but she also wants to establish her own identity and values as an individual. This battle for identity is what is described in Chapter 2, and was referred to by Kroger (1996) as the changing of the boundaries between 'self' and 'other' and the establishment of our experiences of personal identity. The changes to these boundaries would be difficult and frustrating particularly for an African student with cultural commitments to the family, but living in a Westernised environment in general. Student A wants to be part of the in-crowd and to be seen as 'cool', but at the same time she is deeply conscious of her cultural background. She is therefore seeking identity whilst in the midst of a conflict of environments. Student A could well be moving through the developmental phase of Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships as outlined by Chickering & Reisser (1993), and discussed in Chapter 2. This could also be the case for Student B whose relationship with his father has become far more aggressive, although in the very recent past he has started to come to terms with some of the issues and incidents that have occurred. Both have seemed at times resentful and frustrated with their fathers, but also seeing that they too



are human. The students have had to come to terms with difficult situations that have placed them in an emotionally strained state. This could also be part of the formation of the vectors of identity and development, where they are both learning how to develop mature interpersonal relationships. This is also evidenced by their interactions with their respective siblings.

In general their relationship with their siblings have been consistently positive. There is evidence that their sibling relationships are fairly average and normal, although again, both students have cause to be protective towards their younger siblings. Student A is wary of the influence or harm that the stepmother could bring to her sisters and brother; and Student B is trying to guide his sister and brothers in the difficult family situation that they find themselves in with their father, his medical condition, and the outward emotional manifestations of their father's own fears and frustrations. The family situations in which the students find themselves seem to have led them to take on a parental role in relation to their brothers and sisters. It is a positive step in that they have a constructive attitude towards the situation and their siblings, and indicates that they are both gaining in maturity through these experiences. Maturity gained in these circumstances would translate well into their overall growth and development during the transitional phase of their first year at university.

### ***Schooling***

High school had a very positive impact on both of them, with both extolling the virtues of the schools they had attended. Both had been high-achievers in the early stages of their secondary education, but they both admitted that in the last few years at high school their academic progress was not so good. Student A became unsettled when she had to change schools, and she did not find the new school as welcoming and harmonious as her previous school. This affected her performance to a certain extent and she did not achieve the high academic levels of previous years. Student B went to what he describes as an excellent and "phenomenal" school, however he did not feel

that he fitted in very well with his peers. In his view this was because they were from the suburbs and he was from an outlying township, and they therefore had very little in common to talk about. Both were affected by these conditions in the secondary learning environment. Their feelings here are indicative of the uncertainty they had as to who they are as individuals, and of seeking their own identity as young African students. This is again relevant to Kroger (1996) and also Van Zyl Slabbert *et al* (1994), referred to in the conceptual framework chapter. This also links in to the longitudinal study of Barbarin & Richter (2001, p. 276), particularly to their conclusion that there are youngsters who "...are beginning to show signs of difficulty with respect to behavioural, emotional, and academic adjustment..." Student A and Student B are seeking their own identity within a mixed environment of African culture and Western culture, and trying to adapt to both influences at the same time.

### ***University life***

The themes that emerged from the analysis of the participants lives at university were identified as homesickness, peer pressure, choice of friends, finance, and a sense of belonging.

- **Homesickness**

On arriving at the university, they both had sudden adaptations to make: to the university in general and to being in an institutional residence. This was difficult for both of them, as they had very close links with their families and with their mothers in particular. For both of them, this transition phase proved traumatic and emotionally expensive. Being away from home was difficult for Student A as she was aware that the family was in cultural conflict over the stepmother, something she has found emotionally debilitating. Her strong emotional ties and loyalty to her mother further exacerbated the pain of the distance between them. Student B is in a similar position, wanting to be close to home to protect his mother and siblings, and finding himself torn between his love and loyalty for his mother, and his love and fear for his father's life. This is evidence of the Seven

Vectors of Development proposed by Chickering & Reisser (1993, p. 39), where their theory considers emotions and relationships, and that "...emotional, interpersonal, and ethical development deserve equal billing with intellectual development." For both these students, their home situation has been a cause of worry and stress in their lives whilst being away from home at university. I had the distinct impression that this caused them the most worry whilst trying to adapt to university and residence life. There did not appear to be any formal structure that they could turn to in these circumstances, other than to attend at Student Counselling. This is difficult for students to do, as there is difficulty in accessing student services without missing too much lecture time. There is also the perception amongst African students that this clashes with their African way of doing things, which is to turn to the elders in the community during times of difficulty, uncertainty and emotional stress.

- **Peer Pressure**

Two major things that have affected both of them emotionally whilst trying to adapt to their new life as a first-year student became difficult situations to deal with. Student A and Student B have both identified issues where peer pressure has caused them to stop and reflect on their attitude and actions. Student A has outlined in great detail the way that first-year female students are targeted by older men with money and high-powered cars. This tempts the youngsters into sexual relationships with material rewards such as Levi jeans, cell phones, and hard cash. It is the perception of many female students that to be part of the 'in' group they have to do what the 'others' are doing. This may mean having branded clothes and shoes, and using sex as a means to gain these material things. In the female-only residence where Student A resides, there is strong pressure on the girls to take up relationships with older men. These men are often married, and appear to have plenty of money to throw at the girls. For young girls away from their homes and families for the first time, this is a very

difficult situation to deal with, especially when the majority of them are short of money and are in a big city for the first time in their lives. From Student A's comments, it appears that they want to have all the trappings that the adverts say are there in the city for them - the labeled clothes and shoes, the cell phones, the trips to trendy nightspots, the cash to do whatever they feel is necessary to be in with the 'in' crowd. There is a need for young students to develop their own sexuality away from the constraints of home and family, but to do so in a safe environment. There is also the cultural perspective of what is acceptable in terms of relationships with older men. In Westernised societies it is generally frowned upon for a young girl to be involved with a much older, and married, man. Yet many African cultures appear to see this more as an opportunity for the girl to achieve status and security. The 'Sugar Daddy' syndrome is a serious threat to young first-year female students, and it was difficult for Student A to keep out of this particular trap. That she did so is a credit to her growing maturity and the positive role model that her mother has been for her. Chickering & Reisser (1993), Goleman (1996), and Erikson (1964) relate this growth in maturity to emotional intelligence and growth through the learning process.

Student B encountered a hostile racial environment for what appears to be the first time in his life. His conversations had not included references to racism during his time at home and school, yet his encounter with racism at university was something that he spent a lot of time explaining during the conversations. He has very strong feelings on this subject, and felt that the race issue had impacted very negatively on his life as a first-year student. It is interesting to see that this negative impact comes not just from staff, but it also comes from the university's senior student leadership. This could perhaps be the remnants of the 'youth crisis' referred to by Van Zyl Slabbert *et al* (1994) and also the issue of identity and youth discussed by Marks (2001). Factors raised by the above authors may well be influencing some African students to retain their political

identity because they have not yet discovered their own individual identity. The attitude of the SRC has caused extreme anger and frustration for Student B. He is in conflict both within himself - his emotions on the subject - and externally, through direct verbal confrontation with lecturers and the student leadership on this subject. In this particular instance, Student B appears to be more aware of his own identity, values and beliefs, as evidenced by his realisation that the SRC are manipulative and that they play on the insecurities and emotions of black staff and students. He is more secure here in the essence of his own identity than in other spheres, for example, where he has felt that he is not one of 'them' in various situations and environments at school and at university. It is also indicative of the continued development of his own values amongst the political realities of university life. Student B also raises the issue of drinking, and that young students are drawn into heavy alcohol consumption through wanting to be part of a group. His comments on alcohol abuse are in line with the deep concerns raised institutionally by the Student Governance & Development department regarding excessive use of alcohol by students, and by residence students in particular.

- **Choice of friends**

Choosing the right friends became very important for both of them. Student A settled with a small group of students from her residence, but then found that one of them was causing a problem for her with gossiping. She was extremely uncomfortable with this young woman and wanted to keep away from her, but she felt constrained by the dynamics of the group. The other students had become her friends and she enjoyed their company. They had formed a support structure that she needed, and it was very difficult for her to know how to deal with the delicate situation of keeping away from one member of the group only, without distancing herself from the other students who were her friends. By the end of the interviews, Student A had not decided how to resolve this problem.

Student B also found that first impressions could sometimes be misleading. Whereas Student A thought positively about one particular student, only to later find that there was a major negative aspect, Student B found himself in the reverse position. Initially he had seen one of his roommates in a negative light, but later, after getting to know him a bit better, found that they actually liked each other and got on very well together. For both Student A and Student B, this was a valuable and important lesson in how to choose friends, and that sometimes first impressions do not always hold true. In this example, the students display the development of their own integrity and how to manage their interpersonal relationships, developmental phases as outlined by Chickering & Reisser (1993) and Erikson (1964).

- **Finance**

Although both Student A and Student B come from families who are not destitute, they still have to be very careful with their financial planning and expenditure. Financial issues are raised in different contexts by these students. Student A has to exercise strong discipline when she wants to spend money, making sure that she has sufficient to cover her academic needs, eg. materials for her story boards. Student B looks at finances not just from the planning and spending perspective, but also from the point of view of a consumer, wanting good value and service delivery in return for the money he is paying to be at university. He acknowledges the financial struggle that his parents had in the early years of their marriage, and the small amount of money earned by his mother. He appears to have learned that everyone should be aware of what they are spending their money on, and should look for 'value for money' when purchasing goods or utilising specific services. He does not seem satisfied with the services he is receiving within the university environment, and appears to be using that dissatisfaction to measure the efficacy of the university as a service provider to himself, as a consumer. He is establishing his own identity here, not just as a

student, but as a consumer. This is an important step in the developmental process of changing the boundaries of identity through growth and maturity. (Kroger: 1996).

- **Sense of belonging**

In both narratives there is the need to belong. Student A and Student B both had difficulties at high school with finding their place within their peer group. There is a sense of 'not fitting in' from both of them, and this is echoed in the stories of their lives at university, and particularly in being a residence student. At university there appears to be a sense of exclusion, of being on the outside of institutional groups. At residence there is the confusion of not always knowing exactly which individuals are the right friends to have, and which are best avoided. Avoiding some people does prove difficult, especially when part of a group where it is only the one individual that is seen as someone not to be involved with. As they moved through the months of being first-year university students living in a university residence, the students slowly started to accept and come to terms with their place in the institution and at residence. There are, however, clear indications that this is not an easy process. From their stories, it would appear that many students appear isolated either by design, which may be because they as individuals feel too 'different' to fit and mix in with everyone else, or through deliberate exclusion by other individuals or groups. The geographical placement of some first-year students at smaller satellite campuses also appears to have a detrimental effect on their sense of belonging to the larger institutional community. On the surface, residences appear to be the ideal environment for young students to mix with others, to make friends and build a support system. However this does not seem to be the case in the two residences where Student A and Student B reside. They have both encountered difficulties in settling in and finding their own space, and with forging constructive friendships with roommates or other residence students.

## **DISCUSSION**

In the transcripts of the life stories of Student A and Student B, my own thoughts and reflections are woven into their stories. In their stories was a mirror reflection of my own story: my difficulties at school with 'fitting in' with my peers and of having my confidence destroyed by certain teachers; the difficult and strained relationship that I had with my mother, which was not resolved before she died in 1981; the problem of surviving as an apolitical worker in a highly politicised environment; and having a fight within myself to find my own sense of belonging. As the students' stories unfolded, as they told me more and more about themselves, I began to see the similarity of all of our lives, despite the differences between us in age, culture, language and ethnic background.

The anguish that both Student A and B expressed regarding their troubled relationships with their fathers was a poignant moment in both their stories. I could relate directly to the feelings that they talked about, particularly with Student B. My mother and I had never had a proper mother/daughter relationship from the time that I can first remember events (age about 5 or 6). I had also suffered from the effects of the same type of fears, anxieties, stresses and strains of the dysfunctional relationship with my mother, that Student B had been going through with his father. The similarity was further emphasised by the situation of ill-health, as my mother had terminal cancer and her personality changed further with the diagnosis and treatment that she underwent. I remember well the impact that this had on me, the negative feelings that I had towards her as she became even colder and more distant towards me. This aspect of Student B's story was difficult for me to listen to because of my own history. At the same time, my own experiences allowed me to fully understand what Student B had been going through and how he felt about his situation. He did confide in me a few months after the interviews that it had indeed been the first time that he had spoken about this situation to anyone other than immediate family members. He admitted that it was difficult for him to talk about, but that he could feel as he was talking that he was talking



about it to the right person. I felt honoured and privileged by this revelation. It may be that confiding in me could have helped him in orienting to the new situation of university and residence. By having the opportunity to confide informally in someone who is an 'elder', he was sharing the burden of his feelings with an empathetic neutral person. For Student B, this was perhaps more in line with his cultural background and beliefs, rather than the Westernised format of attending at Student Counselling. It may well have enabled him to let go of many of his negative feelings, and to regain focus on his academic progress as a first-year student.

I tried not to enter the conversations with any preconceived ideas about what the outcome would be, but after just a few interview sessions with some of the other participating students, I had already begun to see a pattern emerging. Many of the issues raised by Students A and B regarding their time in a university residence were also raised by other students during the course of the interviews. Student A talked about her peers in the residence as being "...not really my **friends, friends**, you know...as friends go, but they are the closest people to me at school." This is echoed almost to the exact words by Student C, who said that "...but I won't call them **friends, friends**, I'll just call them colleagues...". Both Student A and Student C have a similar perspective in what they term as their 'friends'.

As with Student A and Student B, Students C, D & F also raise the issue of abuse of freedom and peer pressure of first-year residence students, as seen in the following excerpts from their transcripts:

### **Student C**

...because if you visit most res's people are smoking, they are drinking, they are having boyfriends, they are just sleeping around, especially first-year students because we are not used to the freedom yet, so we just take everything for granted...we take advantage because we don't live with our parents, we don't have.....a guardian to say, 'No, you should be at home at this time', so especially first-years, they are confused about those things, they are trapped in that...that life of being confused and having no guidance.

**Student D**

My first-year colleagues are getting out of control...they are really getting out of control, because...they easily get influenced on little things like peer pressure...'cause they see someone doing this they do it because they want to be part of the group. If they don't do this...then they're not cool enough to be in that particular group...so what they are doing here they wouldn't do back home where they have to face up to their parents, 'cause a lot of them are now into alcohol...smoking weed...not attending...

**Student F**

OK, in res it's one of those things that people have left home and they've got freedom...I'm gonna get to do anything I wanna do, so there's nobody that can actually tell me that, like fine, you have to come back at this time, you can go out any time. So a lot of people...kind of got used to that thing that...I can just go out and nobody will tell me anything...so I think that's kind of a problem because they end up doing stupid things and we end up later on...

These comments are indicative of a culture of 'anything goes' for many first-year residence students. There is a lack of control and a lack of understanding of what constitutes freedom and individual identity. This relates directly to the emotional literacy as espoused by Goleman (1996). In the South African context specifically, this lack of control and understanding could well stem from some of the national issues raised by Van Zyl Slabbert *et al* (1996) and Marks (2001). Amongst these are the increase in households headed by females, a lack of adequate housing, facilities and jobs, and youth politics. There is also relevance here to Barbarin & Richter (2001) as these youngsters have essentially grown up in post-apartheid South Africa and do not have specific youth role models to follow with regards to their behaviour.

Peer pressure can also work the other way, in terms of isolation. Student B raised this issue when he talked about people not speaking to their neighbour in the residence and the awkwardness of then approaching that person if there is perhaps a need to borrow something such as an iron or a kettle. This is echoed by Student E, who said that

If you don't talk to people they glare at you and think you are arrogant, so you end up acting like that again of which you don't know...sometimes you wake up and they greet you, and you wake up the following day and they don't greet you, and you just don't know, 'what did I do wrong', so it's just like that...

From the points raised above, there appears to be a weakness in the way that first-year residence students interact with each other, and in the mechanism of the institution for encouraging positive and constructive interpersonal social relationships for first-year students. Matiso (2004), Soga (2004), Young (2003) and Asmar & Peseta (2001) make the point that student affairs operates well with a student-centered philosophy. For first-year students, this would provide a developmental background that fosters good interpersonal relationships and nurtures self-management and the development of strong individual identity.

### **SUMMARY**

Both students have been very strongly influenced by their mothers and both have difficulty with their fathers. They have both had difficulties at school, particularly with the sense of a lack of 'belonging', and neither made close friends easily. There are clear indications that the students have been seeking to establish their own identity and values within a multi-cultural yet Westernised environment. Both had difficulty settling in at university and getting used to the way of life on a campus, raising specific issues such as lack of professionalism of staff, racism, lack of a quality service to students, and difficulty with their peers both in the classroom and in residence.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

At the start of this study, I was uncertain about whether I would be able to elicit enough data, and data that was of a good quality. It is my contention that both have been achieved. During the conversations with the six students that I interviewed, issues that were raised by them included their personal and family situations, the facts about peer pressure, their worries and concerns about being at university and in residence, finances, racism, and their individual sense of identity and belonging.

There were four issues that appear to be the main contributing factors in the lives of the students:

◆ **Family:**

All participants interviewed had complex family situations. Their thoughts were always turning to their family problems, even when they had academic commitments. This has placed great pressure on them in their adaptation to being a first-year university student.

◆ **Homesickness:**

A major problem in their transition to tertiary education and residence has been homesickness. All the participating students related how much they missed their homes, their parents, siblings and friends. None of those interviewed felt that they had really made any true friends whilst at university and in residence.

◆ **Peer pressure:**

The situation they found themselves in whilst staying in a university residence has also caused some stress and confusion in their lives, mainly through negative aspects of peer pressure. The pressure to be part of a particular group, which countenanced drinking, smoking, and staying out most of the night 'partying', together with the 'Sugar Daddy' syndrome, placed great strain on the students, particularly the female students. The negative influence of the institutional student leadership was also a factor, and caused difficulty and frustration through manipulation for their own political goals.

◆ **Identity:**

The search for their own identity has led both students through a period of growth and development. Their search for a clearer understanding of their identity has been through a re-organisation and development of their values and beliefs; cultural identity; identity as a consumer; political identity; intra-family identity as a sibling, a son or a daughter; and identity as a young Black South African. Both Student A and Student B appear to have a solid grasp of who they are and what identity means for them individually, even though they still have some misgivings

or uncertainties. This could be because they are still undergoing a period of growth and adjustment to being young adults, and further development will come in good time. The search for identity appears to me to be a positive aspect of the transition phase they have been through.

First-year residence students face a myriad of complex issues during the transition from home and school to tertiary education and residence. These issues cause worry and concern and affect their attention to their academic progress. The negative impact of these stresses, and particularly of family problems, homesickness and peer pressure of all types, cannot be underestimated. The two students whose life stories are told in Chapter 4 are as described by Barbarin & Richter (2001) - they are Mandela's Children. As discussed in Chapter 2, the conclusion by Barbarin & Richter was that there are those children who are considered to be growing up fairly normally, and a minority who are exhibiting signs of behavioural, emotional and academic dysfunction. From my study, I feel that Student A and Student B fall into the former grouping. They are to all intents and purposes doing well in general terms: they are achieving academically and discovering their own identity in different ways. However, both have suffered traumatic family relationships and events, and these things have impacted on their ability to make a smooth transition from home and school to university and residence. Similar stories are essentially echoed by the four other participants whose full transcripts are not included in this document. If, from a small sample of six students, all of these students are relating the same concerns and worries, and are highlighting the problems of peer pressure and the 'Sugar Daddy' syndrome, then these matters should be taken very seriously by the institution. Whilst it is acknowledged that a line must exist between legitimate interventions and interfering in the personal lives of students, it is recommended that the institution devise a strategy for dealing with these problems.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made for assisting first-year residence students with the transition to university and residence life:

1. A 'Buddy System' be implemented, whereby senior residence students become official mentors to the first-year students. The senior students would be in a position to guide and advise the first-year students, so that the first-year's would be given positive peer support. This would also assist in the formation and establishment of individual identity, as the first-year students would have positive role models to refer to when they are facing personal and social dilemmas.
2. The method of residence orientation be changed from a one-off event to a formal, structured series of relevant workshops, carried out over the full first semester of the academic year. The current method covers relevant topics but does so on a surface-basis only. Deeper discussion and dissemination of information is what is really required.
3. Stricter security controls be implemented at the residences, so that there is better monitoring and control of visitors, particularly in residences where female students are allocated. At present there is security access control at the doors to the residence buildings, however, there is no access control to the gardens and general grounds of the residences. These areas have become the first-contact-points for older men targeting the first-year students.
4. Weekly group meetings be held by the Residence Assistants with all first-year students in that particular residence. Topics for discussion should be directly related to the major issues of homesickness and peer pressure. It is at such gatherings that at-risk students could be identified and appropriate interventions could then be made individually and confidentially. These interventions could

perhaps include a further support structure in the form of peer mentors and those who are 'Buddys', so that the senior students are involved directly with problem-solving on a broader basis within the residences.

If implemented as a package, these four interventions together would greatly assist and support the young first-year students in making the adjustments to being at university and residing in an institutional residence. The difficulties of homesickness and peer pressure in particular could be relieved through having a 'Buddy' and having regular group contact sessions. Improved security and ongoing Orientation would further enhance the above support and guidance.

## ANNEXURE A

### INFORMED CONSENT

#### PROJECT TITLE:

#### **Exploration, Discovery, Reflection: Journeys of Understanding**

*Life histories of first-year students and the impact on their interactions in a higher education and residence environment.*

1. This project aims to establish the experiences that new first-year students bring with them to the tertiary institution and its residences, and how those experiences and life at the residences may be impacting on academic performance.
2. The researcher is Ms Gillian Cruickshank, a staff member of the Student Governance & Development Department at the Durban Institute of Technology. Contact details are as follows: **Telephone 031 - 2042753; fax 031 - 2042674; cell number 082 - 6601050.**
3. The Supervisor for this project is Mrs Ruth Searle of the Center for Higher Education Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, **telephone 031 - 2603257.**
4. Participants in this research project have been identified through the criteria of being a first-year student in the institutional residences. Assistance was sought from senior students and the residence student leadership in the initial identification process, in order to establish which students would be willing to volunteer to be part of this study.
5. The involvement of the participants will be through conversations held during individual interviews.
6. All information revealed during the interviews will be treated as confidential. Participants will be given an opportunity to review the transcripts of the recordings made during the interviews, and to raise any objections they have to the usage of any material.
7. It is anticipated that participants will be involved in three (3) interviews, with a maximum of six (6) interviews. The length of each interview will be determined by the time available by the participant, as well as the flow of the conversation at that time. An estimated length of time is between thirty (30) minutes and two (2) hours maximum per interview.
8. The conversations will be recorded, and then transcribed into text format by the researcher. The information will then be analysed and written up into the thesis.
9. The data from the conversations, analysis, and writing-up will be destroyed once the thesis has been finalised.
10. All participants will be given the choice of having their first and/or surnames used directly, or having substitute names allocated for the purposes of writing-up this thesis. If a participant chooses to use a substitute name, a similar procedure will be followed where references are made to family, relatives, friends and home towns/cities, so that there will be no possibility of the participant being identified.
11. Participation in this research project is purely voluntary, and participants are free to withdraw from the project at any time.



- 12. In terms of financial gain, there are no specific benefits attached to participation in this research.
- 13. No participant will be disadvantaged in any way should he/she choose not to continue with this research project.

**DECLARATION**  
**Exploration, Discovery, Reflection: Journeys of Understanding**  
*Life histories of first-year students and impact on their interactions in a higher education and residence environment.*

I.....(full names)

hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, should I wish to do so.

I confirm that I have been given time to read, understand and question the information provided and to consult with other relevant people, before giving consent.

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT:** .....

**DATE:** .....

## ANNEXURE B

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

STUDENT	INTERVIEW 1		INTERVIEW 2		INTERVIEW 3	
	Date	Time and duration	Date	Time and duration	Date	Time and duration
A	20/10/2006	18h00 45 minutes	27/10/2006	15h00 55 minutes	4/11/2006	10h00 35 minutes
B	21/10/2006	11h00 1 hour	30/10/2006	18h00 1 hour	6/11/2006	09h00 50 minutes
C	1/11/2006	16h30 30 minutes	9/11/2006	17h00 40 minutes	N/A	
D	3/11/2006	11h00 1 hour	13/11/2006	07h30 40 minutes	N/A	
E	21/10/2006	12h30 35 minutes	2/11/2006	16h45 55 minutes	N/A	
F	25/10/2006	07h45 45 minutes	10/11/2006	07h45 35 minutes	15/11/2006	07h45 20 minutes

## REFERENCES

- Asmar, C. & Peseta, T. (2001). *'Figuring things out from my friends': Encouraging collaboration among first year students at undergraduate and postgraduate level*. Retrieved on 4 March 2007 from <http://www.aare.edu.au/01pap/asm01362.htm>
- Atkinson, R. (1998). *The life story interview*. Sage University Papers Series on Qualitative Research Methods, Vol. 44. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage
- Barbarin, O.A. & Richter, L.M. (2001). *Mandela's Children: Growing Up in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. New York: Routledge.
- Barr, M.J. Upcraft, M.L. & Associates. (1990). *New Futures for Student Affairs: Building a Vision for professional Leadership and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Chickering, A. *Chickering's Seven Vectors: Possible Programs in Residence Halls; Possible Problems in Residence Halls* (n.d.). Retrieved 26 August 2004, from <http://www.residentassistant.com/reslifepro/programming/Chickering%20problems%20%20Progrms.pdf>
- Chickering, A. & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education & Identity*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Crain, W.C. (1980). *Theories of Development: Concepts and Applications*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- DeCoster, D.A. & Mable, P. (Eds.). (1974). *Student Development and education in College Residence Halls*. Washington: American College Personnel Association.
- Diako, M (In collaboration with Mkhathshwa, T.). (n.d.) *Facilitating adjustment, commitment and academic success of a first year student from a historically disadvantaged background: A case study*. Unpublished paper, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Dodd, C.H. (1995). *Dynamics of Intercultural Communication* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Madison, Wisconsin: Brown & Benchmark.
- Emmitt, M., Callaghan, V., Warren, W., & Postill, K. (2002). *First Year: The Deakin Way*. Retrieved on 2 April 2007 from [http://www.fyhe.qut.edu.au/past\\_papers/papers02/EmmittPaper.doc](http://www.fyhe.qut.edu.au/past_papers/papers02/EmmittPaper.doc)

- Erikson, E. (1964). *Childhood and Society*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Gillham, B. (2003). *The Research Interview*. London: Continuum.
- Goleman, D. (1996). *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Jessor, R. (Ed.). (1998). *New Perspectives on Adolescent Risk Behaviour*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jones, S.R. (2004). *Learning and Student Development: Forty Years of Commitment to Deeper Teaching and Seamless Learning*. (Class handout).
- Josselson, R. & Lieblich, A. (Eds). (1995). *Interpreting Experience: The Narrative Study of Lives*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.
- Keech, R. (1985). *Education for Living*. Johannesburg: Divaris Stein.
- Kidder, L.H. (1981). *Selltiz Wrightsman & Cook's Research Methods in Social Relations* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Kroger, J. (1996). (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). *Identity in Adolescence*. London: Routledge.
- Love, P.G. (1996). *The Interrelatedness of Intellectual, Social, and Emotional Influences on Student Learning*. Featured Article, Vol.5 No.5. Retrieved 6 February 2004 from <http://www.ntlf.com/html/pi/9609/article1.htm>
- Mandew, M.de P.A. (Ed.). (2003) *A Guide to Student Services in South Africa*. Sunnyside: ComPress.
- Marks, M. (2001). *Young Warriors: Youth Politics, Identity and Violence in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Matiso, K. (2004) *Role of student development practitioners*. Paper presented at the Winter School of the National Association of Student Development Practitioners, University of Port Elizabeth, Port Elizabeth, 23-25 June 2004.
- McNamara, S. (2000). *Stress in Young People: What's New and What Can We Do?* London: Continuum
- Molla, M. (1999) (English version by Mautner, R.) *Adolescent Identity, and an Elaboration on a Test of Identity*. Retrieved 26 November 2007, from <http://www.geocities.com/ResearchTriangle/Thinktank/4363/identity.htm?20087>
- Mouton, J. (2001). *How to succeed in your Master's and Doctoral Studies: A South African Guide & Research Book*. Pretoria: van Schaik Publishers.

- Pang, L.C., & Man, W.W. (1998). *The Birth of the Student Hostel: Whole Person Education at the Formative Stage*. Paper presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> Asia Student Affairs Conference and Student Affairs International Symposium, Hong Kong, 22-28 June 1998.
- Philis, F. (1999). *An Australian Perspective on the First Year Experience*. Retrieved on 4 March 2007 from <http://www.usyd.edu.au/ctl/Synergy/Synergy12/fphilis.htm>
- Plummer, K. (1983). *Documents of Life: An introduction to the problems and literature of a humanistic method*. London: Allen & Unwyn.
- Soga, T.H. (2004). *Best Practices in Student Affairs*. Paper presented at the Winter School of the National Association of Student Development Practitioners, University of Port Elizabeth, Port Elizabeth, 23-25 June 2004.
- Smith, V.F. (2004). *University here I am - To be or not to be? Transforming from Within: Teaching and Learning and Higher Education*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the South African Academic Development Association, Durban Institute of Technology, Durban, 28 to 30 November 2005.
- Tabane, R. & Bower, C. (2006). The Influence of cross-cultural interviewing on the generation of data. *South African Journal of Education*. 12(4). 553-564.
- Taylor, P.C. (2005) *Method, Methodology and Methodoltry: A Search for the Holy Grail?* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in the Qualitative Research SIG, Montreal, Canada, 11 - 15 April 2005. Retrieved 21 October 2007 from <http://pctaylor.com>
- Taylor, S.J. & Bogdan, R. (1998). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- University of KwaZulu-Natal. (2005). *The Residence Life Curriculum*. Residence Life programme document of the Student Housing Department.
- University of Minnesota Duluth. (1998). *Student Development Theory: First Year Experience*. Retrieved 6 February 2004 from <Http://www.umn.edu/~tbolen/theory.html>
- van der Meer, J. (2004). *What do first-year students want? A student association's intervention-focussed research activities*. Retrieved 2 April 2007 from [http://www.fyhe.qut.edu.au/past\\_papers/Papers04/043.doc](http://www.fyhe.qut.edu.au/past_papers/Papers04/043.doc)
- Van Zyl Slabbert, F., Malan, C., Marais, H., Olivier, J. & Riordan, R. (Eds.). (1994). *Youth in the New South Africa*. Pretoria: HSRC Publishers.

Williamson, E.G., Blaesser, W.W., Bragdon, H.D., Carlson, W.S., Cowley, W.H., Feder., *et al.* (1937). *The Student Personnel Point of View*. New York: American Council of Education.

Winston, R.B. (Jnr), Anchors S. & Associates. (1993). *Student Housing and Residential Life*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Young, R.B. (2003). *Philosophies and values guiding the student affairs profession*, in *Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) San Francisco: Jossey Bass.



RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)  
WESTVILLE CAMPUS  
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587  
EMAIL : ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

---

4 SEPTEMBER 2006

MS. G CRUICKSHANK (2045211056)  
EDUCATION

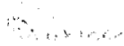
Dear Ms. Cruickshank

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/06396A

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the following project:

**“Exploration, discovery, reflection: Journey of understanding”**

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA  
RESEARCH OFFICE

PS: The following general condition is applicable to all projects that have been granted ethical clearance:

THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE CONTACTED IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY APPROVAL SHOULD THE RESEARCH INVOLVE UTILIZATION OF SPACE AND/OR FACILITIES AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS/ORGANISATIONS. WHERE QUESTIONNAIRES ARE USED IN THE PROJECT, THE RESEARCHER SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE QUESTIONNAIRE INCLUDES A SECTION AT THE END WHICH SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY THE PARTICIPANT (PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE) INDICATING THAT HE/SHE WAS INFORMED OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND THAT THE INFORMATION GIVEN WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

cc. Faculty Research Office (Derek Buchler)  
cc. Supervisor (Mrs. R Searle)