

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS AT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

The importance of increased accessibility to higher education for non-traditional students has been recognised globally. In South Africa, a strong drive exists to provide access to students who were previously excluded from higher education because of the apartheid history. Stellenbosch University attempts to contribute to redress and transformation through, amongst other initiatives, the SciMathUS Bridging Programme (Science and Mathematics at the University of Stellenbosch). The SciMathUS Bridging Programme provides access to educationally disadvantaged students to higher education. Even though these students gained access to higher education, they were struggling to succeed. Many questions about the functioning of specifically educationally disadvantaged students in higher education are still unanswered. This study aims to find answers to some of these questions, namely what are the major challenges educationally disadvantaged students face at a predominantly white, Afrikaans university and how do they function within the university.

The research is a narrative ethnography with the focus on the experiences of seven former SciMathUS students at Stellenbosch University. The data was collected by means of unstructured interviews, student journals as well as social media over a period of four months. Narratives about the seven students' experiences on campus were compiled and analysed within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model by focusing on the reciprocal and dynamic interactions of the students within their campus systems.

The analysis of the narratives showed limited interactions in the academic, social and residential contexts and revealed that these students faced academic, financial, linguistic, social and administrative challenges, which led to very high stress levels. They struggled to become part of the academic practice and responded by functioning on the periphery of the university system.

The implications of providing access to educationally disadvantaged students to higher education, and particularly Stellenbosch University, are threefold. On a theoretical level, gaps in current theory on student development and support were identified. On a substantive level, a disjuncture between university policies and initiatives, and the real-life experiences of the students existed and systemic changes in the academic, social and residential contexts are imperative. Finally, on a practical

level, the narratives of these students provided insight into their experiences and highlighted the need for the reconsideration of current practices around teaching and learning, language, admission, re-admission, financial support, tutoring and mentoring, and social life, particularly in residences.

OPSOMMING

Die belang van groter toeganklikheid tot hoër onderwys vir nie-tradisionele studente word wêreldwyd erken. As gevolg van die apartheidsgeskiedenis, is daar in Suid-Afrika 'n grootse poging om aan studente wat voorheen uitgesluit was, toegang tot hoër onderwys te verleen. Die Universiteit Stellenbosch poog om 'n bydra te lewer tot die regstelling en transformasie, onder andere, deur die SciMathUS Brugprogram (Science and Mathematics at the University of Stellenbosch) wat aan onderwysbenadeelde studente toegang tot hoër onderwys verleen. Alhoewel hierdie studente toegang tot hoër onderwys verkry het, sukkel hul om sukses te behaal. Baie vrae oor die funksionering van spesifiek onderwysbenadeelde studente in hoër onderwys is steeds onbeantwoord. Hierdie studie poog om antwoorde te vind op van hierdie vrae naamlik, wat is die grootste uitdagings wat onderwysbenadeelde studente aan 'n hoofsaaklik wit, Afrikaanssprekend universiteit in die gesig staar en hoe funksioneer hul binne die universiteit.

Die navorsing is 'n narratiewe etnografie met die fokus op die ervarings van sewe voormalige SciMathUS studente aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch. Die data is oor 'n tydperk van vier maande deur middel van onderhoude, studentejoernale en sosiale media versamel. Narratiewe oor die sewe studente se ervarings op kampus is saamgestel en binne die raamwerk van Bronfenbrenner se ekologiese model ontleed deur op die wedersydse en dinamiese interaksies van die studente in hul kampus-sisteme te fokus.

Die ontleding van die narratiewe het beperkte interaksies binne die akademiese, sosiale en residensiële kontekste aangedui en het getoon dat die studente akademiese, finansiële, taal, sosiale en administratiewe uitdagings in die gesig gestaar het, wat tot hoë stresvlakke gelei het. Hul het gesukkel om deel te word van die akademiese praktyk en het daarop reageer deur op die rand van die universiteitsstelsel te funksioneer.

Die implikasies van toegang tot hoër onderwys, en meer spesifiek die Universiteit Stellenbosch, aan onderwysbenadeelde studente, is drieërlei. Op 'n teoretiese vlak is gapings in huidige teorie oor studente-ontwikkeling en -ondersteuning geïdentifiseer. Op 'n substantiewe vlak het daar 'n gaping bestaan tussen universiteitsbeleide en -inisiatiewe en die werklike ervarings van die studente en is sistemiese veranderinge in die akademiese, sosiale en residensiële kontekste nodig. Laastens, op 'n praktiese

vlak het die narratiewe van die studente lig gewerp op hul ervarings en die behoefte aan die heroorweging van huidige praktyke rondom onderrig en leer, taal, toelating, her-toelating, finansiële ondersteuning, tutor- and mentorskap en sosiale lewe, spesifiek in koshuise, beklemtoon.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CAQDAS	Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CMC	Computer-mediated Communication
DET	Department of Education and Training
EDP	Extended Degree Programme
HE	Higher Education
HWU	Historically White Universities
IWWOUS	Institute for Mathematics and Science Teaching at the University of Stellenbosch
LLL	Listening, Living and Learning
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
PSO	Private Student Organisation
SA	South Africa
SciMathUS	Science and Mathematics at the University of Stellenbosch
SES	Socio-economic Status
SRC	Student Representative Council
SMS	Short Message System
SU	Stellenbosch University
UCT	University of Cape Town
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UN	United Nations
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
UNISA	University of South Africa
UP	University of Pretoria
UWC	University of Western Cape
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand

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CHAPTER ONE

INITIATING STORIES

John sat in front of the SciMathUS Bridging Programme's offices on one of the available chairs in the passage. He seemed to be in no hurry. People scrambled back and forth without paying him attention. At some stage much later, he was still sitting there. When asked by a staff member what he was waiting for he told her his story.

John's family lived in Gauteng. With one suitcase and very little money, he embarked on a journey he believed would open up doors and help him reach his dream. He came to Stellenbosch to enrol at the university. He arrived in town without anybody picking him up at the bus station and with no place to stay. At the university his dreams were shattered when he realised he would not be allowed to register for his course because of his poor marks. A staff member at administration referred him to SciMathUS.

The SciMathUS Bridging Programme was John's last hope. He had no food, money, or place to stay, but he came to Stellenbosch University to reach for his dream.

Even though the entries to the programme had closed, he was accepted into the programme since his marks were acceptable. He completed the bridging programme successfully and registered at Stellenbosch University for a commerce degree. Although he entered the university through the bridging programme, his first year still posed many challenges...

1.1 Introduction

This study presents the stories of seven educationally disadvantaged students' experiences at Stellenbosch University (SU), a predominantly white, Afrikaans institution. The students all entered the university through the SciMathUS Bridging Programme (Science and Mathematics at the University of Stellenbosch). The students belong to the ever-growing group of disadvantaged students all over the world who enter higher education (HE) through alternative routes. In this chapter, I discuss the diversified student population in HE and the problems the diversification brought about. I then highlight what I propose to achieve with these stories and the framework the stories will be presented in. Next, I provide an overview of the elements of the research process. The scope of the study and structure of the dissertation concludes this chapter.

1.2 Background to the study

The need to increase accessibility to HE for disadvantaged students has been recognised throughout the world. This drive to increase the level of participation in HE, especially for disadvantaged, non-traditional or minority students started as early as the Second World War (Ndlovu, 2011; Rollnick, 2010; Scott, 2009a). In order to address this need for widening participation alternative access routes have been designed and these became a well-recognised option for the mentioned students. Access, bridging or foundation programmes provide access for thousands of students who have not been able to access HE before.

In South Africa (SA) a strong impetus exists to provide access to students who were previously excluded from HE because of the country's apartheid history. Although the country has been a democracy for 18 years and apartheid policies have been repealed and related practices renounced, the legacy of apartheid still affects the South African society (Essack & Quale, 2007). Realising the gate-keeping function of HE in social, cultural and economic development the historically white universities (HWUs) in SA have the additional transformation agenda to redress the exclusionary practices and injustices of the apartheid past (Essack & Quale, 2007; Ndlovu, 2011). Access programmes have been initiated at many South African HE institutions since 1991 and more urgently after 1994 with the demise of apartheid (Hlalele, 2010; Ndlovu, 2011; Rollnick, 2010). The widening of access has resulted in a complex and multi-layered diversity in the student population instead of the homogeneous, elite institution HE previously represented (Van Schalkwyk, 2008).

Through the process of providing access to many more students to HE the student population has diversified. Many of the students entering HE through these alternative routes are under-prepared (Hlalele, 2010). Approximately one out of every three students entering HE in SA drops out at the end of their first year (Van Schalkwyk, 2008). In analysing undergraduate performance patterns in SA, Scott (2009a) did a quantitative analysis of the 2000 and 2001 first-time-entering undergraduate intakes. He found the black¹ graduation rates in almost all fields to be below 35% and that less than 5% of the black 20 to 24 age-group succeed in public HE and graduate with a recognised qualification. He further points out that with these high attrition rates the progress made with equity is effectively lost. Besides

¹ Due to the apartheid legacy it remains important to use racial classifications. In this study 'black' refers to African black people.

underpreparedness, these students face a range of academic and/or non-academic challenges.

Students not only differ in academic ability but also socially, economically and culturally (Van Schalkwyk, 2008). Regardless of these differences, all students should be able to participate in academic practice and be successful. The notion of participation in academic practice is conceived in Morrow's epistemological access. This notion entails physical access to HE and a campus environment that enables the student to become part of the academic practice (Council on Higher Education, 2010; Hlalele, 2010; Morrow, 2009). Many students in the diversified pool of students do not succeed in becoming part of the academic practice.

The impact of SA's history is still evident in many South African HE institutional cultures (Strydom & Mentz, 2009). Hlalele (2010) holds that at some universities and in many programmes, the institutional curriculum looks exactly as it did before 1994 and students are merely expected to fit into the system. Dietsche (2009) finds the processes existing in most institutions to be based on the 20th century industrial age model ignoring student diversity and delivering a 'one size fits all' learning environment. According to Morrow (2009) universities should provide an institutional home for academic practices and access to these practices for all students. Tinto (1982) emphasises that when students are constrained from becoming part of the academic practice, especially so for students from disadvantaged communities, attempts should be made to understand why these students are constrained from completing their studies. Colyar (2003) confirms this emphasis. As the HE populations diversify questions about educationally disadvantaged students' transition into and operation within the HE system are becoming more important.

1.3 The problem statement

1.3.1 The SciMathUS Bridging Programme

SU attempts to contribute to redress and transformation through the SciMathUS Bridging Programme, which was launched in 2001 and run by the Institute for Mathematics and Science Teaching at the University of Stellenbosch (IMSTUS). SciMathUS is an intensive, holistic, year-long bridging programme that recruits educationally disadvantaged students who have not qualified for admission into HE and prepares them for studies mainly in Science and Commerce. Besides academic

support, the students receive socio-emotional as well as financial support (Malan, Marnewick, & Lourens, 2010).

1.3.2 Educationally Disadvantaged

Students gaining access to HE through the SciMathUS Bridging Programme are educationally disadvantaged. In apartheid SA the term educationally disadvantaged was associated with race, due to the effect of Bantu education and the lack of funds for black and coloured education (Essack & Quale, 2007; Young, 2010; Zaaiman, 1998). Discrepancies existed in resources, facilities and teachers. Although the coloured schools were slightly better off than the black schools, most of these schools were overcrowded and many schools did not have doors, windows or ablution facilities. Most teachers were under-qualified and support systems were non-existent (Christie, 1986; Lockhat & Van Niekerk, 2000). It is widely accepted that learners from previously disadvantaged schools are still underprepared for HE (Taylor, Fleisch, & Shindler, 2007; Zaaiman, 1998). Although no official segregation exists anymore many previously disadvantaged schools still lack infrastructure and resources to produce students sufficiently prepared for HE (Essack & Quale, 2007; Taylor, Fleisch, & Shindler, 2007).

The definition of educationally disadvantaged as used by the extended degree programmes² (EDPs) and the SciMathUS Bridging Programme at SU consists of three dimensions namely 1) socio-economic circumstances, 2) educational circumstances and 3) personal circumstances (Young, 2010). Socio-economic circumstances refer to their living environment and circumstances students live in during their school years including access to basic services such as electricity and safe, reliable transport. Educational circumstances refer to the school environment the students come from including appropriately trained and experienced teachers, learner-to-teacher ratios, sufficient resources and infrastructure to facilitate learning, as well as access to opportunities that promote learning. Personal circumstances refer to factors influencing the students on a personal level such as the financial

² “An Extended Degree Programme, or EDP, gives students who do not meet all the faculty specific requirements for a particular degree the opportunity to complete a degree programme by adding one year to the minimum time required for that degree (eg a 3 year BSc degree can be extended to 4 years or a 4 year Engineering degree can be extended to 5 years). The extra time is dedicated to foundation modules that offer additional support to students” (Centre for Teaching and Learning, 2013, p. 1).

position of the family or trauma a student has experienced such as the death of a family member (Young, 2010). Also relating to the personal circumstances is the socio-economic status (SES) of the students' families. Typical indicators of SES used in research would be the educational, occupational and economic achievements of the student's parents (Mabila, Malatje, Addo-Bediako, Kazeni, & Mathabatha, 2006; Zaaiman, 1998). Novick, as cited by Zaaiman (1998, p. 23), summarises educationally disadvantaged as "the net effect of those characteristics of a student's environment that provides less than normal exposure to factors that motivate and facilitate educational growth." A student's socio-economic, school as well as personal circumstances contribute to the net educational advantage or disadvantage he/she experiences.

Determining whether a student is educationally disadvantaged remains a challenge. Care should be taken not to view a student as being educationally disadvantaged based on group membership. Ideally, student educational opportunity should be evaluated individually considering the dimensions of socio-economic status, education and personal circumstances, isolation, rurality, low ethnic group status, second language problems, family breakdown, violence, peer group and gender problems, as well as being a first-generation student (Greenbaum, 2010; Zaaiman, 1998). Educationally disadvantaged is a relative concept in the sense that the level of disadvantage should be measured in relation to other potential students, in this case the rest of the student body at SU. This level of disadvantage could be assessed in two ways, according to Zaaiman (1998), namely 1) the quality of previous educational opportunity compared to what could be regarded as optimal for educational development taking into account the socio-political context in which the selection occurs and 2) differing levels of access to quality educational opportunities.

In SciMathUS, the net effect of a student's environment is determined in order to assess the student's level of disadvantage by taking all of the mentioned factors in the three dimensions into account. The students involved in this study were all selected to the SciMathUS programme after being identified as educationally disadvantaged. In this study all the participants fall in the category of educationally disadvantaged but at different levels which are evident in the students' stories.

1.3.3 My experience

I am a Physical Sciences facilitator at SciMathUS. During the past 11 years (2001-2011) at SciMathUS I have spoken to many students who completed the SciMathUS programme and were registered as full time students at SU. I realised, as Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) did, that the students were struggling to complete their degrees for several reasons. Over this period of 11 years, of the 482 students who completed the SciMathUS Bridging Programme and registered at SU for their first year, 222 did not complete their studies at the university. These students departed from SU before graduating. Through informal conversations with students, I picked up problems some of them had. I wanted to know more about the experiences of former SciMathUS students on the SU campus. I wanted to understand the major challenges that they face and how they cope in a predominantly white, Afrikaans HE institution (Leibowitz, 2009). These students arrive on campus with different backgrounds³ and expectations. Although the undergraduate student experience has been widely researched, questions about the transition and functioning of educationally disadvantaged students in HE remain mainly unanswered (Colyar, 2003).

1.4 Purpose and significance of the study

According to research transitions to HE and the operation within these institutions are mostly “difficult negotiations within the environment” (Colyar, 2003, p. 4) and it seems more so for educationally disadvantaged students. The general goal of this study is to investigate the experiences of former SciMathUS students, educationally disadvantaged students, at SU, a predominantly white, Afrikaans HE institution.

The following research questions frame this study:

- What are the major challenges that educationally disadvantaged students face in a predominantly white, Afrikaans university?
- What do their stories reveal about their functioning within the university?

Reflecting on the narratives of the former SciMathUS students might open up conversations on the cultural and academic experiences of educationally disadvantaged students in classes, on campus and in residences. The voices and stories of these students may provide insight into their experiences of student life,

³ For the purpose of this study the term background refers to a person's experiences and education.

and may highlight cultural and structural challenges they encounter at university. This study might provide a platform for the voices of educationally disadvantaged students to be heard since their voices are important as part of the academic community (Colyar, 2003).

I therefore propose that the findings of the study may be useful to:

- the SciMathUS programme with an interest in improving/adjusting the programme in order to better prepare the students for HE
- SU with an interest in opening up conversations on possibilities of adjustment in practices with the aim of improving epistemological access for the educationally disadvantaged students.

1.5 Presenting the stories

1.5.1 Theoretical framework

Vincent Tinto's (1975, 1985, 1993) model of institutional departure is one of the most acclaimed models applied in studies on retention and attrition. The model posits that the higher the level of integration in both the academic and social systems in HE institutions, the more likely it is that a student will persist. Many scholars have critiqued the model for various reasons. For example, Kuh and Love (2000) criticise Tinto's concept of one dominant culture that sets the standard of judgment for all groups as it has little use in explaining the experiences of different cultures. Colyar (2003, p. vi) highlights that the model measures success according to the extent to which students assimilate into the established community- "essentially, a white, middle class experience of education", and new tools for research and understanding of student experiences are therefore necessary.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory takes into consideration the background and history of a person as well as his/her personal characteristics. The model acknowledges the environment as well as societal systems a person functions within and accounts for the reciprocal interactions between the person and his/her environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The model allows for the incorporation of an individual's culture, his/her history and background as well as his/her agency in understanding individual experiences. This model therefore provides a suitable framework within which student experiences can be analysed. The study examines

the experiences of seven former SciMathUS students at SU using Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory as a lens.

1.5.2 The research design

In an attempt to understand these students' experiences ethnography and narrative study are used. Ethnography originates from studies in anthropology but is currently widely used by researchers in social sciences to learn from people in different cultures (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). In her study of low-income, minority students experiences in HE, Colyar (2003, p. 39) defines story and narrative as the "what and how students communicate about their college experiences". Narratives have been used in many research studies to give voice to the underprivileged. Similar to Colyar (2003) I combine ethnography and narrative study. This study is a narrative ethnography of the experiences of the former SciMathUS students at SU.

1.5.3 Research participants

Within the interpretative paradigm this work is a qualitative study of the experiences of seven former SciMathUS students registered at SU. The students represent educationally disadvantaged students at SU and were purposively selected to represent first years and senior students, coloured and black students, different languages, ages and cultures⁴. The study reveals the experiences of each of these students on the SU campus.

1.5.4 Data collection

Unstructured interviews with each student were conducted over a four month period. I strived to create a relationship between the students and me in order to produce narratives which validated their experiences (Fontana, 2003). In addition to the interviews, students were asked to keep journals. The purpose of the journals was to enrich and confirm the data that was collected (Hayman, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2012) and to ensure triangulation (Janesick, 1998). During the research the students and I also communicated via social media such as Facebook. This provided an additional source of data as I had insight into the students' day-to-day experiences.

⁴ For the purpose of this study I apply the term as used by Triandis. Culture includes elements such as social norms, roles, beliefs, and values that are transmitted from generation to generation. These elements include, amongst others, familial roles, communication patterns, affective styles, and values regarding personal control, individualism, collectivism, spirituality, and religiosity (Betancourt & López, 1993; Triandis, 2001).

1.5.5 Analysis of data

The analysis of the data consisted of two parts namely the process of narrative analysis and a thematic analysis of the narratives. The process of narrative analysis had as product the narratives of the students. The transcribed interviews were uploaded into ATLAS.ti, which is Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) and were coded according to the topics I collected data on during the interviews. Analysis and coding of completed interviews took place while more interviews were conducted. The journals and social media were used as additional sources to confirm, clarify and illuminate the transcripts. The narratives present the everyday and sometimes 'not-so-everyday' experiences of the seven educationally disadvantaged students on the SU campus and introduce the reader to the student and his/her 'campus world'.

Throughout the process of narrative analysis, I identified recurring themes in the students' experiences. After the initial coding of the transcripts, I proceeded to code them according to these themes. This thematic analysis of the narratives revealed the challenges the students faced and how they functioned within the University.

1.6 Scope of the study

As mentioned before, this study is a qualitative study within an interpretive design. The focus is on the experiences of seven educationally disadvantaged students on the SU campus and the study is positioned within the field of HE. The South African HE, as others in the world, is faced with the challenge of a diversified student population as a result of widening participation. Although I do not propose to generalise the experiences of the students in this study to the entire diversified student population, the study contributes to understanding the very real experiences of educationally disadvantaged students on a campus where they are the minority. The experiences and perceptions of these students are presented from their perspective.

The students participating in this study all entered SU through the SciMathUS Bridging Programme. I do not suggest that the SciMathUS and the former SciMathUS students are the only educationally disadvantaged students on the SU campus. The experiences of the former SciMathUS students are however significant to the programme as the success of the programme is not determined by the number

of students completing the bridging programme, but rather by the number of students who successfully complete their HE studies. The experiences of these seven students may highlight areas in which students entering HE through alternative routes can be better or differently prepared.

Lastly, the students are well known to me since I lectured them all while they were in SciMathUS. Since the students know me well they trusted me enough to reveal their real experiences to me. Babbie and Mouton (2011) state that the qualitative researcher should attempt to put him/herself in the shoes of the people he/she is studying especially when there are differences between the researcher and the people being studied. My background differs hugely from that of the students in this study in terms of race, age and culture. As they trusted me, I was allowed not only to be a researcher but a research participant. My role as research participant may raise issues of researcher bias, which I will address in Chapter three.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

The study includes more than just the stories of the students. It also represents a research story. For some students their studies represent a journey (Hanekom, 2012), for some the weaving of a tapestry (Mostert, 2007) while for others the unpacking of a box (Colyar, 2003). For me this study tells the story of the unfolding of the participants' experiences. The story of this study is presented in the following five chapters. After this brief introductory chapter, the second chapter presents the theoretical framework from which I approached the study. The third chapter expands on the research approach and process. Chapter four presents the data which is the stories themselves. The fifth chapter includes the discussion of the stories, limitations, conclusions and implications as well as recommendations for future research.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced and provided the background to the study and outlined the problem I encountered. I then discussed the purpose and significance of the study and the framework against which the students' experiences were analysed. This discussion was followed by the research process and to conclude the brief introduction I discussed the scope of the study and how the dissertation is structured. In the next chapter I review the literature and elaborate on the theoretical framework.

CHAPTER TWO BEHIND THE STORIES

*We are required to walk our own road – and then stop, assess what
we have learned and then share it with others....*

We can do no more than tell our story.

Albertina Sisulu

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter two I explain the notion of ‘student experience’ and then provide an overview of some of the most prominent theories used to explain student experience. This overview is followed by a motivation to use Bronfenbrenner’s model as framework for this study, a description of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model and a review of applications of the model to research on student experiences in higher education (HE). I conclude by detailing Bronfenbrenner’s ecology in the context of educationally disadvantaged students at historically white universities (HWUs) in South Africa (SA).

2.2 Student experience in higher education

The notion of student experience is as diverse as the student body. This complex and evolving concept is shaped by fast changing student cohorts and HE systems (Benckendorff, Ruhanen, & Scott, 2009). The term ‘student experience’ refers not only to the academic aspects of teaching, learning and curriculum, but also includes student lifestyle and extracurricular activities, academic advice, support and mentoring, and work experiences (Harvey, 2013). The undergraduate student experience is widely being researched as researchers realise that the student experience is linked to a range of important outcomes, including student engagement, satisfaction, quality of education, growth in knowledge and personal development, academic success and persistence, retention and employment outcomes (Benckendorff et al., 2009; Dey & Hurtado, 1995; Terenzini & Reason, 2005). Despite all this research and efforts by HE institutions to improve the student experience little change has been noted in graduation rates, especially for historically underrepresented, low-income, and first-generation students (Rollnick, 2010; Terenzini & Reason, 2005). The question therefore remains, “what happens during the undergraduate years?” In this study, I therefore focus on the challenges

educationally disadvantaged students face during their undergraduate years as well as how they function in HE systems.

2.3 Theories on student experience in higher education

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) categorise theories informing student experience into two clusters namely 'developmental' and 'college impact' theories. The developmental theories focus mainly on the intra-individual (intrapersonal) changes of the student by identifying and describing the processes involved in his/her development. The college impact theories emphasise environmental and inter-individual (interpersonal) processes and origins of change by incorporating various sets of variables (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Terenzini & Reason, 2005). A degree of overlap exists between the two clusters of theories and they have much to offer each other (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Schreiber, 2012). Both clusters of theories attempt to inform student experience, or aspects thereof, by focusing on different aspects of the student, his environment or a combination of both.

In the following section, I provide a broad overview of some of the most prominent developmental and college impact theories. The choice for inclusion in the discussion is based on the repeated use of these theories in literature on the student experience (Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2005; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Kuh, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Schreiber, 2012).

2.3.1 Developmental theories

Development is the systematic change in an organism implying biological and emotional maturation which occurs due to changes in the individual, the environment and a combination of both (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Developmental theories of student change focus on the development of the student through a cognitive, moral, emotional, social or identity development lens. These theories are concerned with intra-personal growth but also take note of interpersonal experiences (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In the late 1960s three major developmental theories were introduced and are still frequently used namely Chickering's seven-vector theory of student development, Perry's scheme of intellectual and ethical development and Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning (Evans et al., 2010).

a) Chickering's seven-vector theory of student development

Chickering based his work on the ideas on identity development of Erikson, whom he called the progenitor of psychosocial theory (Evans et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Chickering later refined his theory with his colleague Reisser (Schreiber, 2012) and proposed a developmental theory with seven vectors of development based on the importance of identity formation for young adults (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Steyn & Kamper, 2011). The term 'vector' was chosen purposefully as a vector represents a quantity with magnitude as well as direction. The seven development vectors symbolise the 'magnitude' and 'direction' of development in HE and are: 1) developing competence, 2) managing emotions, 3) moving through autonomy towards independence, 4) developing mature interpersonal relationships, 5) establishing identity, 6) developing purpose, 7) developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The incorporation of direction in the vector does not imply development in a linear way but rather in spirals and steps (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schreiber, 2012). Movement between the vectors can be back and forth. The theory acknowledges that students develop at different rates. The vectors build upon each other and movement from one to another can represent increased skill, strength, confidence, awareness and integration (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Steyn & Kamper, 2011). Chickering focuses on the development of students from an identity development perspective and the vectors indicate the level of development of each student.

In Chickering's refined theory, he and Reisser (1993) include contextual factors that might facilitate or inhibit student development. This inclusion provides a link between his psycho-social model and the college impact theories and is relevant to practitioners in HE. The refined Chickering model indicates that institutional size, student-faculty contact, integrated curricula, flexible teaching, multiple social student communities, integrated development programmes and consistent policies and practices shape student development (Schreiber, 2012). Chickering's seven-vector theory articulates the overlap between the developmental and college impact theories and directs HE institutions towards environments conducive to a positive student experience.

b) Perry's scheme of intellectual and ethical development

Where psychosocial theories focus on the content of development the cognitive structural theories focus on the nature and processes of change (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Perry (1970) expanded on Piaget's cognitive structural theory by focusing on the stages of development. He suggests that students move through four major stages of intellectual and moral development from dualism, to multiplicity, to relativism, to commitment (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Perry divides these stages into nine 'positions' which is comparable to a 'view point' or 'outlook' rather than stages (Schreiber, 2012). Journeying through the stages students progress from dualist thinking to relativist thinking in a non-linear way.

Similar to Chickering, he acknowledges that the rate of development of each student is unique and considers the movement between the stages to be non-linear, but rather cyclical with an expanding radius indicative of a student's broadening perspective (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Development is a series of "constructions and reconstructions" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 35) in order to establish an identity and a commitment to ideas and values (Schreiber, 2012). HE has a responsibility to create an environment where students are supported to move through the stages to grow continuously.

c) Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning

Like Perry's scheme, Kohlberg's theory (1981) is a 'stage' theory. Kohlberg focuses on moral development and is concerned with the cognitive processes involved in making moral choices. Kohlberg structures the stages of moral development in three levels namely 1) pre-conventional, 2) conventional and 3) post-conventional. During the pre-conventional stage, the focus of the individual is 'the self' and 'material gain'. This develops in the conventional stage to a focus of concern about 'what others expect' and 'respect for authorities'. In the post-conventional stage, the development process culminates in a refined differentiated set of principles with the focus on 'equal rights' and concern about 'other' rather than 'self' (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

Students at HE institutions should be in the post-conventional stage where they are developing a refined set of principles concerned with social justice and universal morality (Schreiber, 2012). HE has the responsibility to assist students during this development process to become moral reasoners.

Chickering, Perry and Kohlberg's theories focus on the identity, cognitive and moral development of a student. HE environment and interpersonal relations do however play a role in the development of the student and this is acknowledged by these theorists.

2.3.2 College impact theories

College impact theories are concerned with interpersonal relationships, the interactions of the individual with his/her environment and the effect thereof on the student experience. The overlap with the developmental theories lies in the concern with interpersonal relationships. In addition to interpersonal interactions 'context' is prominent in college impact theories and different aspects of context are relevant in different theories. Structural, organisational or environmental aspects of context are explored in the different theories. Some of the most prominent college impact theories are those of a) Astin (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Terenzini & Reason, 2005), b) Tinto (Barefoot, 2004; Braxton, Milem, & Shaw Sullivan, 2000; Colyar, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Van den Bogaard, 2011), c) Weidman (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Schreiber, 2012), d) Kuh (2003, 2008), e) Pascarella (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), f) Milem and Berger (1997), and g) Bean and Eaton (2001).

a) Astin's I-E-O model and theory of student involvement

Astin (1999) proposed one of the first influential college impact models namely the familiar I-E-O model. This model constitutes three aspects: I – input, E – environment and O – output. Input refers to the demographic and family background, and academic and social experiences of the student; environment includes all aspects of the university including staff, students, practices and policies as well as the institutional culture, while output refers to 'what' the student has become after college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schreiber, 2012). The output aspect is based on Astin's view of HE as one of talent development and is a function of the input (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) which is determined by the interaction of the student with the environment.

Central in Astin's theory is the interaction of the student with the environment and he translates this interaction into the concept of 'involvement'. He finds that a student's level of involvement in university activities determines his/her learning and

development. He posits that the more a student is involved in his/her studies and student life the better the student experience would be (Astin, 1999; Jones, 2010).

In this theory the student plays a central role in determining his/her level of involvement. The levels of involvement are not merely a function of the institutional impact on the student, but also an active choice to become involved. This active choice includes choosing to devote time and effort to specific activities, which influence the student experience. The focus in Astin's theory is on the motivation and behaviour of the student (Astin, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), but he acknowledges the role of the HE institution to present opportunities to enhance student involvement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schreiber, 2012).

Astin's model provides a conceptual and methodological guide (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005) to understand student experience by focusing on what the student brings, how the student interacts and what the student becomes.

b) Tinto interactionalist theory of student departure

Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) work is seminal in the field of student experience. His theory explains the processes of interaction between the student and the HE institution and provides an interactionalist framework describing and explaining the longitudinal process that leads to departure or persistence. According to him students enter HE with different family backgrounds, personal attributes, skills and abilities as well as pre-HE experiences which influence the intention and commitment a student has towards attaining his/her personal goals. These intentions and commitments are continuously revised through a longitudinal process of interactions within and between the academic and social systems in HE (Tinto, 1987, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Van den Bogaard, 2011).

'Interaction' in this model specifically refers to the student interacting with the environment and not the other way round. The environment remains stable while the students come and go. The institution does not have to meet the needs of the students but rather the students have to find ways to meet their own needs (Colyar, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Positive integration into academic and social systems strengthens goals and commitment, while struggling to integrate leads to lowering of goals and commitment and possibly departure from higher education. The model therefore posits that the higher the level of integration in both the

academic and social system in higher education institutions the more likely it is that a student will persist (Tinto, 1987, 1993).

The integration process into the social and academic worlds is described as a three-step process of separation, transition, and incorporation. In order to integrate into these systems a student has to separate from the communities he/she comes from, has to go through a period of transition from the old to the new communities and then finally becomes incorporated into the new communities. These three steps determine the level of integration of a student and whether the student will persist or not (Barefoot, 2004; Tinto, 1987, 1993).

Tinto suggests that the level of integration of the student with the HE environment indicates how positive the student experience will be. His model assumes that a student should fit into the environment and that the environment does not need to adapt to accommodate the student. In that sense, his theory does not acknowledge the need for transformation of the institution.

c) Weidman's model of undergraduate socialization

Weidman (1989) incorporated the work of Tinto, Astin as well as Chickering in his model. He proposes that a student enters college with personal characteristics and a set of values derived from parents and other non-college groups. The student's values are further shaped by intrapersonal change and growth, interpersonal interactions with college groups as well as on-going interaction with parents and non-college groups.

Through the socialisation process the student re-evaluates attained values which in turn shape college outcomes such as career choices, life-style aspirations, values and ideals (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Schreiber, 2012; Weidman, 1989).

Weidman focuses on the socialisation process of the student on campus. He highlights the overlap of the college impact theory with the developmental theories by acknowledging the influence of the intrapersonal change and growth in a student on his student experience.

d) Kuh's theory for student engagement

Student engagement is positively linked to academic outcomes including persistence, retention, and gains in general abilities and critical thinking as well as quality learning

(Bryson & Hardy, 2010). According to Kuh (2008, p. 543) “student engagement represents both the time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities and the effort institutions devote to using effective educational practices.” Kuh (2003, 2008) developed a framework for student engagement based on five benchmarks namely 1) level of academic challenge, 2) enriching educational experiences, 3) active and collaborative learning, 4) supportive campus environment, and 5) student faculty interaction. These benchmarks reflect the level of engagement of a student. A student however needs to feel at home at an institution before he/she will engage (Schreiber, 2012). Like Chickering, Kuh highlights the responsibility of the institution to create an environment where the student feels he/she belongs and as a result chooses to become engaged.

e) Pascarella’s general model for assessing student change

Pascarella’s (1985) general model for assessing change is a causal model that considers the direct and indirect effects of an institution’s structural characteristics as well as its general environment. Five sets of variables are considered in assessing student change namely 1) a student’s background and pre-college characteristics, 2) the structural and organisational features of the institution, 3) the university environment which is shaped by variables one and two, 4) the frequency and content of interaction of a student with other students and faculty, which is shaped by variables one, two and three, and 5) the quality of student effort which is shaped by all four previously mentioned variables.

The quality of student effort, interactions experienced by the student and the general environment of the institution shape student change (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) and therefore the student experience. Pascarella acknowledges the institutional culture, history, values and structural characteristics as well as the environment of the institution in shaping the student experience.

f) Milem and Berger’s model of college student persistence

Milem and Berger (1997) base their model of college student persistence on Astin’s theory of involvement and Tinto’s interactionalist model. Their model attempts to elaborate on the process of transition and incorporation as described by Tinto as part of the integration process a student undergoes in college, and to describe the mechanisms by which a student forms judgments about his/her level of integration. According to this modified model students begin to engage in behaviours that

represent different levels of involvement. Involvement in these behaviours influences a student's perception about his/her student experiences, which in turn influences the likelihood of continued involvement and commitment and eventually successful integration (Berger & Milem, 1999; Milem & Berger, 1997). Milem and Berger's modified model reflects the relation between behaviour, involvement and perception and the effect thereof on the student experience.

g) Bean and Eaton's psychological model of college student retention

Four psychological theories namely attitude-behaviour, coping-behavioral, self-efficacy and attribution theory form the basis of Bean and Eaton's model (2001). The model holds that a student enters college with a set of psychological attributes including past behaviour, initial coping strategies, initial self-efficacy, and an initial locus of control. These attributes influence the student's interaction with the institutional environment. The student assesses his/her interactions and links these self-assessments to feelings about the college experience. Bean and Eaton (2001) hold that a student's level of persistence is determined by his/her perception of his/her competency, efficacy, control in the situation and positive attitude towards the institution. HE institutions can assist students in developing coping mechanisms, self-efficacy skills and an internal locus of control. The focus of this model is on the psychological processes a student undergoes that lead to social and academic integration (Bean & Eaton, 2001). As in previous theories, the responsibility of the institution in guiding the students to a positive student experience is highlighted.

2.3.3 Summary

The described college impact theories explore student involvement, social and academic integration, socialisation, student engagement and psychological processes involved in the student experience. The theories have different foci but all acknowledge the importance of pre-college student attributes, the institutional environment and the effect of the environment on the student experience. The college impact theories have as focus the interpersonal interactions of the student within specific environments but do not ignore the intrapersonal change that occur within the student as mentioned for example in Weidman and Bean and Eaton's models. This illuminates the overlap between the college impact theories and developmental theories.

Apart from the abovementioned developmental and college impact theories many others, including some that are adaptations and extensions of the above theories, still exist in the field of student experience. Among these is Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development. Developmental ecology focuses on the individual, the interpersonal interactions as well as interactions of the individual with the developmental context (Evans et al., 2010). These types of theories are coined integrative theories and aim to explicate the complete developmental experience while recognising environmental influences as well as psychological changes (Evans et al., 2010). Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development therefore represents a theory considering aspects of both college impact theories and developmental theories.

2.4 Application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model in this study

'Student experience' in HE involves all academic and social systems (Harvey, 2013) as well as a developmental process during which students mature intellectually, personally and emotionally (Jones, 2010). The ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1993, 1994) is therefore an appropriate model to study the student experience as the model recognises that development is a function of the reciprocal interactions between the person and the environment. Attinasi (1989) emphasises that it is the context of a student's decisions and the student's perspective on the context that should be investigated to understand the student experience. The ecological model allows for the examination of the reciprocal and dynamic interactions between the student and the campus environment. The examination of these reciprocal processes reveals more than merely the outcomes of the student experience - it also reveals the processes leading to such outcomes (Renn & Arnold, 2003).

Since the ecological model investigates interactions between a student and his/her specific environments the model is appropriate to investigate the experiences of all students regardless of whether they are resident or commuter, black or white, advantaged or disadvantaged. Renn (2003) holds that this model provides theoretical flexibility to study the experience of all types of students regardless of race, gender or age.

The social and historical context of SA plays a role in how educationally disadvantaged students experience HE. The consideration of the macrosystem of these students and of the reciprocal interactions between the exosystems and

mesosystems is therefore important to gain a full understanding of their experiences on a campus where they are the minority. The ecological model allows for the investigation of such interactions and accounts for the particularity of each student's environment. I therefore find the model well suited for application in this study.

2.5 Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development

Bronfenbrenner's (1993, 1994) ecology of human development was first introduced in the 1970's as a reaction to what he believed to be restricted developmental psychology research. The ecological model is derived from the Lewinian theory of psychological fields and focuses on development instead of behaviour, which suggests the addition of the time dimension. Bronfenbrenner (1993, p. 7) provides a formal definition of the general paradigm:

The ecology of human development is the scientific study of progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing, highly complex biopsychological organism – characterised by a distinctive complex of evolving interrelated, dynamic capacities for thought, feeling and action – and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relation between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded.

According to the definition human development is a function of the interactive processes between a person and the environment over a certain time. Four main elements are identifiable namely 1) person, 2) process, 3) context, and 4) time (PPCT). Bronfenbrenner (1993, p. 10) summarises the basic assumptions of the theory as:

- 1) "development is an evolving function of person-environment interaction" and
- 2) "interaction must take place in the immediate, face-to-face setting in which the person exists."

The development of any human being; socially, intellectually, emotionally, and morally, depends on regular, active, mutual interaction with people, objects and symbols within his/her environment over extended periods of time. These interactions are directed in terms of content, form, and power by the characteristics of the developing person, the environment, the time in which the person lives and the

quality of the person who emerges as a result of these processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, 1999).

2.5.1 Person

The 'Person' element relates to the individual, his/her development, and characteristics which influence social interactions (Olivérez, Venegas, & Corwin, 2009). Bronfenbrenner (1993) refers to the qualities of a person that induce or inhibit interaction between the person and other people present in the setting and the physical and symbolic features of the setting as developmentally instigative characteristics. He distinguishes four types of such characteristics namely:

- 1) "personal stimulus characteristics" – these characteristics can invite or discourage reciprocal interpersonal interactions which shape development over time.
- 2) "selective responsivity"– it refers to the different reactions persons have to aspects of the physical and social environment.
- 3) "structuring proclivities" – these denote the choice to engage and persist in progressively complex activities.
- 4) "directive beliefs"– these beliefs relate to the consciousness of the individual relative to the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, pp. 11-13).

The latter three types of characteristics reflect the individuality of a person's reactions and dispositions towards the environment. The four developmentally instigative types do not determine the course of development but rather set the interaction in motion (Bronfenbrenner, 1993).

2.5.2 Process

Bronfenbrenner (1999, p. 1) refers to close, face-to-face, sustained interactions as proximal processes and considers them to be the "primary engines of development." He identifies two broad categories of proximal processes namely 1) social interaction between the developing person and another person, usually an older person, and 2) engagement in progressively more complex activities and tasks. These processes are reciprocal and shaped by the characteristics of a person. A person is not only influenced by his/her context but also influences the context he/she functions in (Olivérez et al., 2009; Renn & Arnold, 2003).

2.5.3 Context

'Context' refers to the ecological environment in which the developing person functions. The ecological environment is based on Lewin's (1935) theory of psychological fields and described as a set of nested structures or systems from the proximal to the distal, similar to that of Russian dolls one within another. The description of each environmental system includes developmentally instigative elements analogous to that of the characteristics of a person (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, 1994).

a) Microsystems

The microsystem is the closest system to the individual in which he/she interacts on a daily basis. For Bronfenbrenner (1993, p. 15) the microsystem is defined as

a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment.

These settings are the location of the proximal processes which influence development. The physical, social and symbolic features of each microsystem influence the interactions between a person and the specific environment. Environments have instigative or inhibitory traits. A physical environment can be stable, can have a clear structure and can instigate interaction, or on the other hand, can be unstable, can have a lack of structure and can inhibit interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). Similarly, the social and symbolic features of a microsystem can be inviting to one person and inhibiting to the next person. Bronfenbrenner (1993, p. 18) defines "ecological niches" as regions within an environment "that are especially favourable or unfavourable to the development of individuals with particular personal characteristics." A specific environment can be a favourable setting for one person to interact in while another person will not experience the same environment favourably.

b) Mesosystems

An individual functions in different settings of which the additive and interactive effects influence the reciprocal processes he/she is involved in. The linkages existing between different smaller systems, which affect a person's development, are defined as the mesosystem (Olivérez et al., 2009). In Bronfenbrenner's (1993, p. 22) conceptualisation

a mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person. Special attention is focused on the synergistic effects created by the interaction of developmentally instigative or inhibitory features and processes present in each setting.

The mesosystem is a set of microsystems that continually interact with each other. Mesosystems are all about being in relationships in ever expanding circles described by some as relationships within the local community (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2007; Swick & Williams, 2006). The values within the separate microsystems interact, overlap at times and could even clash with one another. When the values in different microsystems support one another, the mesosystem is harmonious; if not, the mesosystem is dissonant (Alford, 2000). Beneficial mesosystems with strong, positive connections can offset many negative experiences while high-risk mesosystems characterised by weak or destructive associations between microsystemic contexts have the opposite effect (Killian, 2004).

c) Exosystems

The next system represents one that does not contain the individual but still influences his/her development. Bronfenbrenner (1993, p. 24) describes the exosystem as comprising of

the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives.

The exosystem represents social and political contexts that guide individual development on a day to day basis. These elements affect a person's life although he/she has no control over them (Olivérez et al., 2009).

d) Macrosystems

The macrosystem is the cultural blueprint of any society. It is the combination of ideological and institutional systems that shape a particular culture or subculture (Killian, 2004). Bronfenbrenner (1993, p. 25) defines the macrosystem in line with the Vygotskian construct that the potential development of a person is influenced by the possibilities in a given culture at a particular time in history. The macrosystem consists of

the overarching pattern of micro-, meso- and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other extended social structure, with particular reference to the developmentally instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social exchanges that are embedded in such overarching systems.

The above implies that individual development differs substantially from one macrosystem to the next and the identification of specific social and psychological features of a macrosystem that influence interactions at the microsystem level is important (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, 1994).

2.5.4 Time

a) Chronosystems

Time is presumed in the development of a person as well as in change in an environment. Bronfenbrenner (1995, p. 641) incorporates the time element in the ecological model through the chronosystem as follows:

The individual's own developmental life course is seen as embedded in and powerfully shaped by conditions and events occurring during the historical period through which the person lives...A major factor influencing the course and outcome of human development is the timing of biological and social transitions as they relate to the culturally defined age, role expectations, and opportunities occurring throughout the life course.

All social exchanges, experiences and development are time dependant. The chronosystem considers the cultural and historical changes that shape the contexts, interactions, and relationships of a person within the contexts. The chronosystem also operates at an individual level according to the time of life events of a person in the microsystems (Renn, 2003).

Bronfenbrenner's model explains the influence of the interaction between a person and his/her environment on his/her development and allows for the investigation of these dynamic interactions (Renn & Arnold, 2003). Analysis of these interactions is often applied in studies in HE.

2.6 Application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model in higher education

The interactions of people with their environments over time in a Person-Process-Context-Time (PPCT) model can explain both the processes and outcomes of development, and is useful in HE research (Renn & Arnold, 2003). Scholars have applied the model to different aspects of HE. The following are examples of such studies.

2.6.1 Study on first-generation student success in HE

Bryan and Simmons (2009) examined the experiences of ten first-generation Appalachian Kentucky university students using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. A qualitative research approach was employed and content analysis was used to analyse the data. Many Appalachian students are first-generation and come from lower socio economic environments. Appalachian youth tend to adhere to a cultural norm to remain in their communities despite limited employment opportunities. On entering HE, these students face many challenges. The purpose of this study was to examine the role of family and other levels of influence on the student success of first-generation Appalachian students.

From the content analysis seven main influences were identified namely 1) close knit families and communities, 2) separate identities, 3) knowledge of college procedures, 4) pressure to succeed, 5) returning home, 6) the effect of poverty, and 7) the importance of early intervention programming (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). These themes supported Bronfenbrenner's theory as immediate families, extended communities as well as social issues such as poverty influenced the participants. Bryan and Simmons (2009) suggest that HE institutions should take note of the

multiple layers that influence the experience of students similar to the participants in this study.

2.6.2 Study on identities of mixed-race students in HE

Renn (2003) applied Bronfenbrenner's ecology model of development to investigate the influence of postsecondary environments on multiracial identities in the United States (US). The data reported in this study, in which 38 students were involved, were collected through interviews, focus groups, written response exercises and observations in three predominantly white institutions in the Northeast. She framed her interpretations through grounded theory methodology.

Mixed-race students, whose parents are from two different races, tend to follow non-traditional identity development routes. Renn (2003, p. 398) investigated the PPCT elements of the students and found that

across individual lifespans and the arc of history, each student's unique network of micro-, meso-, and exosystems move like a solar system, with planets, moons, and asteroids exerting interactive gravitational and developmental pulls on the star – the individual – at the center .

She arranged the identities of the mixed-race students in five non-exclusive groups namely 1) a monoracial identity, 2) multiple monoracial identities shifting according to situations, 3) a multiracial identity, 4) an extraracial identity by deconstructing race, and 5) a situational identity. Many of the participants moved between identities, which Renn (2003) explained through permeable boundaries around social and physical spaces as well as the extent to which students felt they belonged to a space.

The study further emphasised the importance of using the analysis of the students' identity development to improve educational policy and practice. She suggested that enhancing curricula to promote identity development, enhancing harmonious mesosystems through congruent messages from all college systems, and using peer culture to promote moving between microsystems could support mixed-race students in developing their identities.

2.6.3 Study on the challenge of access to HE

In their book, 'Urban High School Students and the Challenge of Access' Tierney and Colyar (2009) were concerned with college access for urban high school students in California. They investigated the different routes of five students on their way to college by using cultural biography as a research approach and Bronfenbrenner's model of ecological development as a theoretical framework. The students in this study were living in poverty, attended overcrowded schools, and were the first in their families to attempt further studies. Five stories of college access and choice were told by examining the ecological environments the students functioned in. The proximal processes of the five students within and between the different systems, as described by Bronfenbrenner, provided insight into the individual choices, interpretations of and interactions with the college environment.

Evaluation of the interactions in the systems of the ecological model highlighted the lack of college-oriented networks, the importance of peers, the recognition of the role of the family, the role of counsellors, and the profile of the school the student comes from. Tierney and Colyar (2009) showed that the students' social interactions were influenced by broader social policies, microlevel influences and institutional policies. They concluded that the lives of these urban high school students are complex and their paths to HE similarly intricate.

2.6.4 Study on teaching statistics and research methods to heterogeneous groups in HE

In this study, the BSc Psychology students at the University of Westminster in the United Kingdom (UK) studying statistics and research methods were a heterogeneous group. The group included first-generation students, mature students, students with vocational qualifications and students who gained access to the university through alternative routes. Many of these students had part time jobs. These students found this module difficult and disengaged from learning in this particular module even though they passed other psychology modules. Porter, Snelgar, & Cartwright (2006) conducted a study to identify the students' needs and to determine when interventions would be beneficial.

Porter et al. (2006) carried out surveys to collect data on students' approaches to studying, student expectations and anxiety. They also made use of previous studies on the student body at the University of Westminster and applied Bronfenbrenner's

PPCT model in considering student relationships and the relevance thereof for teaching and learning.

The students' relationships in their microsystems revealed that they had limited opportunities for engagement with staff and other students because of other obligations. The researchers attempted to put support structures in place, which the students could access in their own time in order to promote interactions between the students and staff members. The aim was to provide richer micro- and mesosystems without making potentially conflicting demands on the students. Porter et al. (2006) found that the students belonged to different ecological subsystems and that these subsystems influenced teaching and learning.

2.6.5 Study on college social adjustment of black students in HE

Many black students come from environments that are not conducive to further studies. For these students from lower socioeconomic environments relationships with people who are comfortable with the HE environment are difficult. They tend not to seek new bonds and find it difficult to adjust to the new environment they have to study in (Alford, 2000). Alford (2000) conducted a study to understand the formation of relationships by black commuter students at urban commuter colleges in the North Atlantic region of the US. He found Bronfenbrenner's ecological model useful to understand the problems these students faced in adapting to the new environments. The associations a student developed were investigated by means of qualitative as well as quantitative methods to see whether these relationships supported persistence and retention. He focused on the methods these students applied to balance their mesosystems, which included balancing the relationships the student had in overlapping microsystems with his/her family, school friends, team members and so forth.

Alford (2000) found that these students withdrew from friends who were not attending college and as such eliminated a microsystem. Friendships in the college environment also did not go further than the academic context, which led to the elimination of another possible microsystem. These actions led to impoverished mesosystems, which meant social isolation. Alford (2000) suggested that these findings were helpful to counsellors in supporting such students in building social networks supportive of the HE environment.

2.6.6 Summary

In the five studies described above Bronfenbrenner's ecological model was used to study first-generation student success, identities of mixed-race students, challenges of access, teaching strategies to heterogeneous groups, and social adjustment of black students in HE. In these studies, conducted in the US and UK, both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were applied. Other issues in HE have also been investigated by taking an ecological perspective for example the role of motivation and peer support in student success for ethnic minority students (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005), the influence of students on universities (Dey & Hurtado, 1995) and students' experiences of e-Learning in HE (Ellis & Goodyear, 2010). In SA, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model has been widely employed in studies on issues in basic education (Page, Ebersohn, & Rogan, 2006; Pillay, 2004; Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009) but to a lesser extent in studies concerning HE (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011).

The extensive use of this model both in quantitative and qualitative studies, concerning a range of issues at various types of HE institutions highlights the usefulness of the model in HE. In this qualitative study concerning educationally disadvantaged students at a HWU in SA, I found Bronfenbrenner's ecological model well suited to understand the experiences of these students.

2.7 The ecology of educationally disadvantaged students at HWUs in SA

I describe the Person-Process-Context-Time (PPCT) elements of the ecology of educationally disadvantaged students at HWUs in SA in general to provide a backdrop for the experiences of the participants in this particular study at SU.

2.7.1 Person

In examining student experience of educationally disadvantaged students at HWUs in SA key elements in the person component of the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 1993) include the developmentally instigative characteristics of the student, background and socio-economic status (SES) of the family, being a first-generation student, racial⁵ group status, exposure to different races, language proficiency in either English or Afrikaans, academic preparedness and whether the student comes

⁵ Due to the South African apartheid history "race" remains a critical issue in the South African society and still affects social relations (Thaver, 2006).

from a rural or urban environment (REAP, 2009; Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson & Strauss, 2003; Soudien, 2008). Due to the apartheid legacy most educationally disadvantaged students in SA are black or coloured (Scott, Yeld, & Hendry, 2007), are first-generation students (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011), have a low racial group status (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013; Zuma, 2013), are not proficient in the language of instruction, and are not adequately prepared for HE (Fisher & Scott, 2011; Cross & Johnson, 2008; Sennett et al., 2003; Sikakana, 2010; Soudien, 2008).

These key person elements shape an educationally disadvantaged student's experiences on campus at a HWU as they determine whether he/she will engage in reciprocal interpersonal interactions and persist in progressive complex activities in the campus microsystems.

2.7.2 Process

The student experience is shaped by face-to-face, sustained interpersonal interactions as well as involvement in increasingly complex activities. These processes are reciprocal and dynamic and influenced by the person elements of the student as well as the instigative elements of the ecological environment the student functions in (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). The person elements of educationally disadvantaged students, discussed in section 2.7.1, and the features of the ecological environment, following in section 2.7.3, influence their interpersonal interactions on campus and in turn their student experience.

Race and class differences influence interpersonal interactions as students with little or no previous interracial contact keep interactions in campus microsystems to the minimum, while students from a middle-class background keep a distance from those of a working-class background (Zuma, 2013). Students who are not proficient in the language of instruction are unable to express themselves and disengage from further interactions in the microsystem where they are experiencing this frustration (Cross and Johnson, 2008; Soudien, 2008). Students who perceive themselves as underprepared and less affluent than their fellow students feel inferior and choose to group themselves with students like themselves (Steyn, 2009; Zuma, 2013). Literature on the student experience of educationally disadvantaged students at HWU in SA shows that these students often feel isolated, marginalised, alienated, inferior and afraid (REAP, 2009; Sennett et al., 2003; Soudien, 2008; Steyn, 2009). This reveals that they disengage from interactions in the campus microsystems.

2.7.3 Context

a) Microsystems

The most proximal systems students function in are their microsystems. Microsystems for HE students include those in the academic context such as the classroom and/or the laboratory, the residential context such as the institutional residence or the room/house they live in, and the social context such as the sports field and peer groups (Renn & Arnold, 2003). The physical, social and symbolic features of these microsystems can enhance or inhibit interactions in the system (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). Students react differently in the microsystems, even within the same setting such as a residence, class or laboratory session, depending on their backgrounds and developmental trajectories (Renn & Arnold, 2003). The microsystems of educationally disadvantaged students at HWUs are unique in the sense that they differ from the majority of the students in terms of race, language, SES and cultural background.

1) Academic context: Classrooms/Laboratories

Due to the apartheid legacy of SA most educationally disadvantaged students are black or coloured (Scott, Yeld, & Hendry, 2007). The participation rate of black and coloured students in HE has increased since the demise of apartheid but a racial imbalance is still visible at HWUs (Council on Higher Education, 2009). Consequently, educationally disadvantaged students find themselves in the minority in classrooms/laboratories in terms of race and socio-economic status (Soudien, 2008).

In the academic context students in HE face a traditional curriculum structure inherited a century ago from the Scottish system with little adaptation since then. Current curricula assume certain levels of prior learning of the student cohort, which is not necessarily the case anymore (Scott, 2013). A mismatch exists between the minimum requirements for admission into HE and the level of preparedness to succeed in HE (Fisher & Scott, 2011). This is even more so for educationally disadvantaged students coming from dysfunctional schools (see section 1.3.2). They find themselves in an academic context where they are unprepared for what is expected of them (Council on Higher Education, 2010; Sikakana, 2010; Soudien, 2008). For these students the academic language is either English or Afrikaans, depending on which HWU they enter. For most of these students, this language

represents a second or third language, which adds to an inhibiting context (REAP, 2009; Soudien, 2008; Stephen, Welman, & Jordaan, 2004).

2) Residential context: Institutional residences/Private room or house

Campus residences have particular physical layouts and cultures, especially older Afrikaans residences with long standing traditions and symbolic features. The identity, culture and tradition in these residences are instilled over many years and handed from generation to generation by students who profile the 'traditional' student - white, well-prepared and advantaged (Council on Higher Education, 2010). Organised social, cultural and sporting activities form the core of residence life. Especially in male residences, these activities include initiation practices signifying induction into manhood (Soudien, 2008; Walker, 2005). Although the residence culture of the historically-English medium universities is more informal than at the historically-Afrikaans medium universities it is still distinct and include specific rituals to instil a sense of belonging and participation. Educationally disadvantaged students who enter these residences find themselves in a new and strange environment where they feel alienated and alone (Soudien, 2008; Walker 2005).

Educationally disadvantaged students who do not reside in the institutional residences stay either at home or in private accommodation. At home, students have to share living space with siblings and extended family and have limited space to study. Staying at home also implies being involved in household chores which results in less study time (Ngidi, 2010). The students who reside in private accommodation live off-campus in primarily black or coloured neighbourhoods due to lack of funds. The quality of the private accommodation is not necessarily regulated by the institutional authorities and is sometimes unstable and students often have to move (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011; Ngidi, 2010). The students far from campus are dependent on public transport. Commuting is expensive, takes a lot of time and is dangerous (Ngidi, 2010). Commuting students need to reach their homes before dark and cannot attend any activities on campus late in the afternoon (Ngidi, 2010).

3) Social context: Peer groups/Sports field/Co-curricular activities

Institutional culture comprises four elements namely 1) the institution's history of racial inclusion or exclusion, 2) the numerical representation of race groups, 3) the perceptions and attitudes between race groups and 4) the behaviours of race groups towards each other (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002). These factors shape the social context of students in HE. The institutional culture of many of the HWUs has remained unchanged despite policies of transformation. They essentially have a culture that mostly supports the norms, values and practices of the traditional white student (Soudien, 2008). Similar to the academic and residential context, differences in socio-economic and cultural backgrounds marginalise educationally disadvantaged students. These students tend to group together and have limited interactions with their peers from different backgrounds, norms and values (Zuma, 2013). They struggle to find ecological niches favourable for positive interpersonal interactions in this new social context.

b) Mesosystems

Educationally disadvantaged students' mesosystem at HWUs comprise the interactions between the microsystems of these students in the academic, residential and social context (Alford, 2000). In an adapted version of the ecological model (Figure 2.1), Poch (2005) represents the interactions between the microsystems with double pointed arrows. The interactions of a student in one microsystem, for example the classroom, will influence his/her interactions in another, for example in a peer group. These interactions shape the student's perspectives on his/her student experiences and he/she will react accordingly.

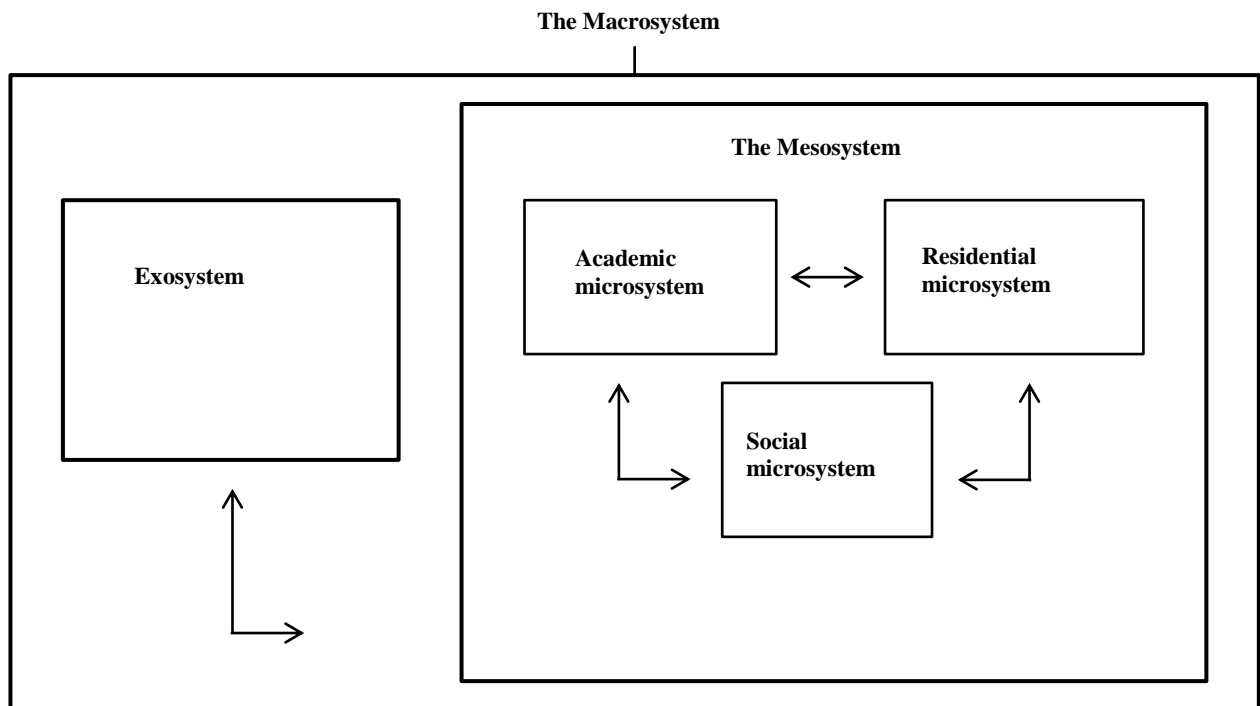


Figure 2.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological model as adapted from Poch (2005).

Educationally disadvantaged students have to overcome considerable sociocultural, academic and linguistic barriers (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013). Since they function in microsystems where their values, norms and practices are not supported (Soudien, 2008; Van Heerden, 1995), they struggle to move fluently from one microsystem to another. These students experience limited interactions in the campus microsystems (Zuma, 2013), which in turn result in impoverished, dissonant mesosystems. These dissonant mesosystems lead them to believe that they are deficient outsiders who do not fit in and they struggle to succeed in their studies (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013; Steyn & Kamper, 2011).

c) Exosystems

Student experiences are influenced by not only what happens in environments where they spend time but also by what occurs in the other settings where they are not directly involved. Events in these environments, the exosystem, affect what happens in the mesosystem (Poch, 2005). Examining components related to the exosystem level provides a way of understanding how broader system level processes shape student experiences at the microsystem level (Olivérez et al., 2009).

As has been indicated, the social and political contexts in the exosystem shape experiences in the more proximal systems. The social and political contexts influencing educationally disadvantaged students are amongst others 1) the

communities they come from (Poch, 2005), 2) the workplaces of their families (Renn & Arnold, 2003), and 3) university policies (Olivérez et al. 2009; Poch, 2005).

1) The communities

Educationally disadvantaged students come from communities often very different to the university community. The communities, some rural and some urban, are mostly townships⁶ where the majority of the people are black or coloured. Few school leavers in these communities enter any form of HE and the unemployment rate in these communities is high (Lester, Menele, Karuri-Sebina, & Kruger, 2009; Letseka & Maile, 2008). Many people in these communities live in poverty (Letseka & Maile, 2008) and are dependent on state financial support. The cultures in these communities are quite unique (Hurst, 2009) and very different to that of a university campus.

2) The workplaces of the families

Renn and Arnold (2003) hold that educational decisions of students are influenced by the economic situation of a family. Global economic conditions influence the South African economy on the macro level, which in turn influences the workplaces of the parents and siblings of educationally disadvantaged students (BUSA, 2012). With the unemployment rate in SA more than 25 percent many family members are unemployed or are only employed in part time jobs (Statistics South Africa, 2012).

3) University policies

Policies implemented in HE form part of the exosystem of a student. Even though they do not involve the student directly they influence a student's experience in the institution (Poch, 2005). Within the context of SA's history universities implement policies to be aligned with the general goals of the nation in terms of equal participation and transformation (Council on Higher Education, 2009). The following are examples of such policies affecting educationally disadvantaged students.

The universities attempt to provide access to educationally disadvantaged students through for example extended degree programmes and bridging programmes (Rollnick, 2010; Scott, 2009b). The universities acknowledge that many students from educationally disadvantaged environments have only limited financial means

⁶ Townships are defined as areas that were designated under apartheid legislation for exclusive occupation by people classified as black, coloured and Indian. Even though this is no longer regulated by legislation, these areas are still called townships (Lester et al., 2009).

and therefore provide financial support through bursaries and loans and have work-study programmes in place to support these students (Stellenbosch University, 2013d; University of Cape Town, 2013; University of Pretoria, 2013).

Universities acknowledge that living on campus enhances student success as students have easy access to university facilities such as computer laboratories and libraries. Living on campus provides an environment conducive to studying and removes the pressure of commuting or staying in unsuitable private accommodation. Policies for residential placements are aligned to provide places in residences for students who would otherwise have struggled with the mentioned challenges (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011). These students include educationally disadvantaged students.

Realising that the role of language is critical to success and transformation in HE all institutions are committed to multilingualism in one form or another (Soudien, 2008). Most of the historically-Afrikaans medium universities have adopted either dual-medium or parallel-medium education and have special programmes in place to support second or third language speakers (Du Plessis, 2006).

The above-mentioned policies form part of the exosystem of educationally disadvantaged students and are established due to SA's history to assist these students in HE.

d) Macrosystem

The macrosystem includes all the other systems and is the source of influence most remote to a person (Poch, 2005). The structure and content of the macrosystem are determined by the culture and history of a society and shape the inner systems (Renn & Arnold, 2003). The South African society, inclusive of its beliefs and values, forms the macrosystem of educationally disadvantaged students in SA. I discuss the South African society in terms of 1) the political philosophy, 2) demographics, 3) the economic environment, 4) the health system and 5) the education system.

1) The political philosophy

A discriminatory political system of apartheid existed in SA before 1994. Policies and legislation excluded black, coloured and Indian people in SA from opportunities and their basic human rights were curtailed. Formal apartheid ended with national elections in 1994 and Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the first president of the

Government of National Unity (Jansen & Taylor, 2003). The agenda of the new government was social and educational reform. Much has changed since then, but the legacy of apartheid still lingers and affects educationally disadvantaged students.

2) Demographics

SA is a diverse country with a population of 51,7 million people from different origins, cultures, languages and religions (Statistics South Africa, 2012). The existing racial inequalities in SA necessitate population groups as a category in describing the macrosystem in SA (Jansen & Taylor, 2003). The population in SA in 2011 was 79,2 percent black, 8,9 percent white, 8,9 percent coloured, and less than 3 percent Indian (Statistics South Africa, 2012).

3) The economic environment

Jansen and Taylor (2003) contend that the post-apartheid government of 1994 inherited one of the most unequal societies in the world. Social and economic discrimination against black South Africans caused income inequalities between different races, which will take many years to eradicate. In 2011, the average annual income for black households was R60 613, R112 172 for coloured households and R365 134 for white households (Statistics South Africa, 2012).

The total unemployment rate in the third semester in 2012 reached 25,5 percent with the highest unemployment rate amongst the black population (Statistics South Africa, 2012). Fifty percent of the South African population live in poverty of which 90 percent are black people. (Leibbrandt, Wegner, & Finn, 2011; Index Mundi, 2013). The economic environment in SA remains challenging with downward growth expectations from 4,2 percent to 3,8 percent for 2013 (BUSA, 2012).

4) The health system

Another current reality in the South African context is that 11 percent of South Africans are HIV-positive, with 17,3 percent of this group aged between 15 and 49 (Index Mundi, 2013, World Health Organization, 2013). HIV/AIDS is a comprehensive threat influencing people from all walks of life. One concrete example of this threat, also further affecting the quality of education, is that educators are dying at about three times the rate of equivalently aged general population without AIDS. Contributing to the severity of the HIV/AIDS threat is the fact that SA's health system is ranked 175th out of 191 member states by the World Health Organization (Olver, Schaay, Sanders, & Kruger, 2011).

5) The education system

One of the main foci of the current government is redress and transformation in education (Republic of South Africa, 1997). Governmental actions were and are still needed to reform regressive practices of racism, sexism, authoritarianism, and inequality from the pre-1994 era. The democratic government has created non-discriminatory school environments where access is gained on criteria other than race and religion. There has been a significant increase in education expenditure on both basic and higher education. However, inequalities between schools remain with 25 percent of primary schools, which previously served white students under apartheid, remaining functional while the remaining 75 percent, which previously served black, coloured and Indian students, are still dysfunctional (Spaull, 2012, 2013).

The retention rate of learners who entered Grade one twelve years ago in middle class schools is close to 100 percent while for those schools in townships and rural areas the retention rate is only about 38 percent (Kretzmann, 2012). 10,5 percent of the black population and 4,3 percent of the coloured population aged twenty years and older have no schooling compared to 0,6 percent of the white population in that category (Statistics South Africa, 2012).

In HE SA's Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) is 16 percent, which is very low, compared to economically comparable countries. Of the total number of students participating in higher education, only 12 percent are black and a further 12 percent are coloured students (Scott, 2009a).

A policy framework addresses the need for transformation for HE, which gives priority to providing access to HE for people from currently, and previously disadvantaged communities in order to bring about greater measures of equity (Department of Education, 2001). The need to eradicate the unequal participation in higher education also led to the establishment of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). NSFAS (2002) was established to provide financial aid and access to higher education for students who would otherwise not be able to afford to attend university.

The historical trends and events, social forces and cultural expectations in SA provide the backdrop for understanding educationally disadvantaged students' experiences in HE.

2.7.4 Time

a) Chronosystems

The element of time is incorporated in the chronosystem of the ecological model and refers to the particular time in the history of a society as well as the time in an individual's life. Student experiences are therefore influenced by the era they live in. The experiences of students in SA before and after 1994 may be quite different (Council on Higher Education, 2004). Very little currently happens in South Africa without acknowledging the history of our country. Macro- and exosystems are influenced by current government policies, which are shaped by the history of our country, which in turn influence the meso- and microsystems involving the individual.

The chronosystem also operates at an individual level according to the time of life events in the microsystems (Renn, 2003). Major events in a student's life have a profound influence on his/her experiences. Students arrive on campus with unique characteristics shaped by socio-historical events and life experiences accumulated over the course of their lives (Renn & Arnold, 2003). The chronosystem takes into account the cumulative effects of events before attending university, events occurring at university as well as the effects of sociohistorical influences (Renn, 2003).

2.8 Conclusion

The student experience has been widely researched and many theories and models have been developed in an attempt to better understand what happens to students during their undergraduate years. After a broad overview of some of the prominent theories in the field, I motivated the application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model in this study as it accounts for the social and historical context of SA, the specific environments of educationally disadvantaged students and the reciprocal processes between the environments and the students, which influence these students' experiences in HE. I detailed Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and showed that the model is widely applied in different aspects of HE. I concluded this chapter by describing the ecologies of educationally disadvantaged students at HWU in SA. The impact of these ecologies on the student experience is highlighted by the students' narratives in Chapter four and the discussion thereof in Chapter five. The next chapter describes the methodology used in this study in greater depth.

CHAPTER THREE

TELLING STORIES

What matters is that lives do not serve as models; only stories do that. And it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives.

Carolyn Heilbrun

3.1 Introduction

The stories of the SciMathUS (Science and Mathematics at the University of Stellenbosch) students are both inspiring and frustrating. These stories explicate the functioning of educationally disadvantaged students in higher education (HE). In the first part of Chapter three I explain the positioning of the study within the interpretive paradigm and present ethnography and narrative analysis separately. I then show why a combination of ethnography and narrative analysis is relevant to this study. In the second part of the chapter, I detail the research process including the selection of participants, data collection and ethical considerations. I end the second section with a discussion of the data analysis approach and the goodness of the study.

3.2 Research approach

In the initial process of deciding which methodology to use for this research project, I came across Bowl's (2003) book 'Non-traditional entrants to Higher Education'. The book explores the routes to HE and the lives of working class and ethnic minority adults in HE. Bowl's research process allowed the voices of the participants to explain their realities in HE. Her book views widening participation issues from the students' perspective rather than from the perspective of policy makers or educational institutions. Her research made me aware that there are research approaches available to open up the stories of SciMathUS students on the Stellenbosch University (SU) campus to the bigger community. I had searched for such an approach in order to produce the stories of the students involved in such a way that their voices could be heard and their experiences validated. I had searched

for a way of unravelling the complexities of the students' experiences. This 'way' is guided by a research paradigm, which influences how knowledge is studied and interpreted (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

The set of beliefs that guides action is a researcher's paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 19) describe "the net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises" as the paradigm. Epistemology refers to the relationship between the researcher and what will be studied; ontology refers to the nature of the reality that will be studied, while methodology refers to the research process applied in the study (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). The choice of paradigm orientates the intent, motivation and expectations of the research. The interpretive paradigm has as aim the understanding of human experience and relies on the participants' views of the issue being studied (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). According to interpretive epistemology, the researcher is empathetic towards the researched and becomes part of the research (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Knowledge is obtained through the interaction of the researcher with the researched. Interpretive ontology posits that there is no objective reality but rather multiple realities due to varying human experiences. This leads to an interpretive methodology which is interactional, inductive and qualitative (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

The intention of this study is to better understand the experiences of educationally disadvantaged students at SU. As participant researcher, I experienced multiple realities through the students' experiences. Meeting with the students regularly involved me in their lives. I was not merely an objective outsider but an empathetic insider. The interviews I used as data collection method were interactive processes of listening, writing and speaking. Terre Blanche et al. (2006) note that if the researcher believes that the reality to be studied consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world he/she may adopt an interpretive approach. I therefore positioned this study within the interpretive paradigm and developed a research process in the context of this paradigm.

3.3 Research process

While research studies seldom follow a linear path many scholars present the research process in a linear diagrammatic fashion (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). For me the research process

started with the problem. I realised that I wanted to understand more about the experiences of former SciMathUS students on the SU campus. This research followed from that realisation. Figure 3.1 represents the research process of this study. Although the process is represented linearly I moved iteratively between the steps. Changes were made in previous steps as dictated by the process (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

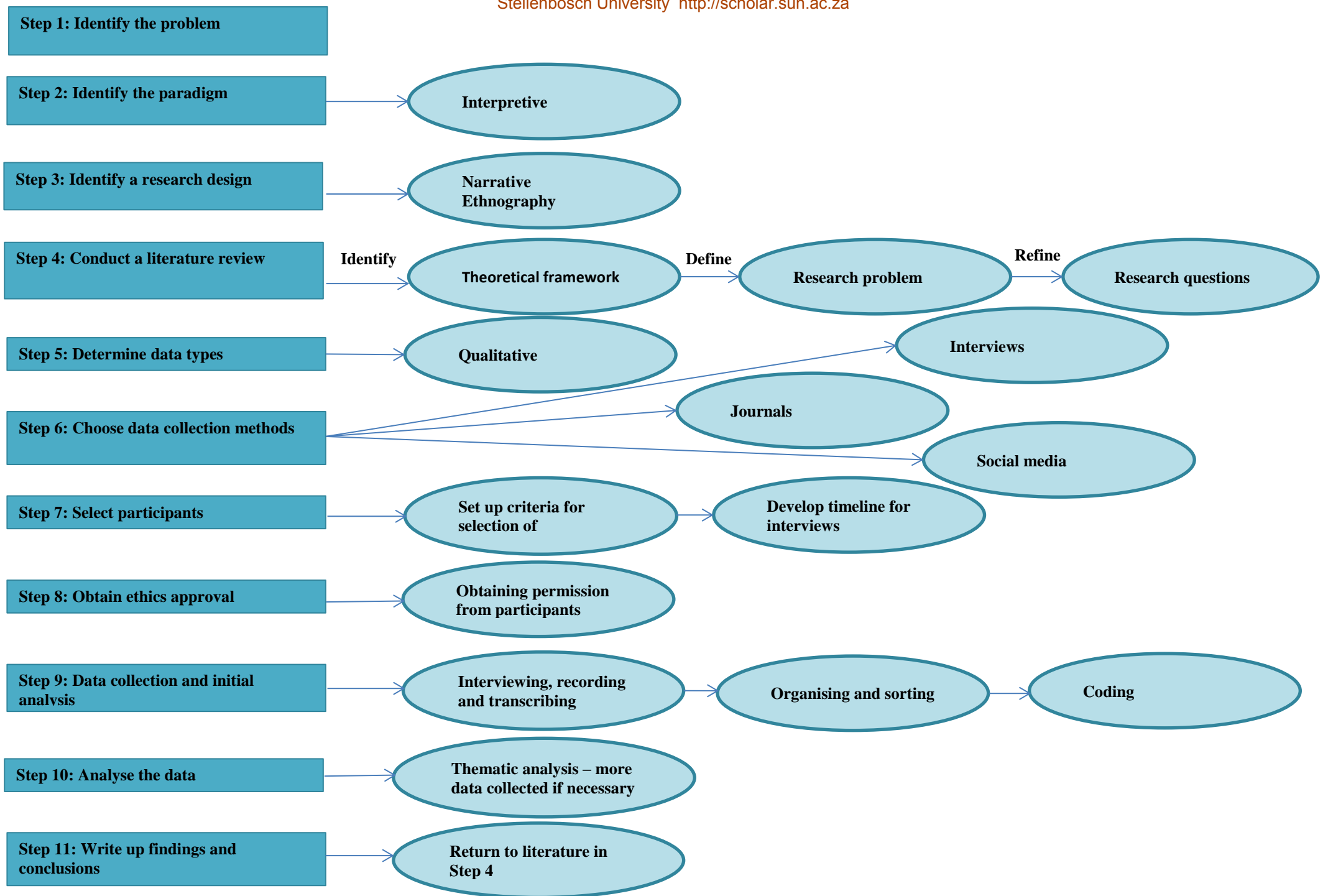


Figure 3.1: A research process adapted from Mackenzie & Knipe (2006).

In order to understand the experiences of the students I chose a qualitative research design within the interpretive paradigm.

3.4 Research design

Qualitative research has as its aim to describe and clarify human experiences and represent a variety of methods that use language data (Polkinghorne, 2005). I present the realities of seven former SciMathUS students' experiences on the SU campus through narrative ethnography, which is a qualitative research approach. Narrative ethnography incorporates social patterns and contexts while focusing on the narrative process to produce socially situated narratives. I discuss ethnography and narrative analysis separately and in general. I then discuss narrative ethnography as a research approach and why I chose to apply the combination of ethnography and narrative analysis.

3.4.1 Ethnography

Ethnography has its epistemological roots in sociology and more specifically in social anthropology. Considering ethnography's anthropological roots, Woods (1986) defined ethnography as a description of the way of life of a group of people referring specifically to what people are, their behaviour, and their interaction. For Gubrium and Holstein (1999) ethnography pointed to the long term observations of groups of people in order to reveal their way of living. The groups of people were mostly small isolated tribal cultures. The description of the people included the unveiling of beliefs, values, perspectives, and motivations from an insider's perspective. This type of research implied long periods of interaction between the group and the researcher depending on the distance between their cultures (Woods, 1986). The researcher often lived in the community with the people and studied them round the clock while sometimes participating in their activities (Hammersley, 2006). Ethnography therefore referred to a practice used in anthropology where people were studied in their natural contexts to understand their culture and ways of living. Except for application in anthropology, ethnography as a research approach has been extended to other disciplines as well.

Whereas ethnography previously mostly described "non-literate", "primitive", "savage" or simply "other" people (Colyar, 2003, p. 61), the approach is currently widely used in educational research (Erickson, 1984; Green, Cashmore, Scott, & Narayanan, 2009; Tedlock, 2003). Scholars note that the use of ethnography as research

approach in HE has certain strengths. It provides insight into students' experience from the inside, rather than from a policy or managerial perspective. It gives voice to the students who are in the minority and have the impression of not being heard (Green et al., 2009). Students in HE can be the unit of analysis in ethnography as they are a "social network forming a corporate entity in which social relations are regulated by custom" (Erickson, 1984, p. 52). A group of students, a school or a family can be described ethnographically.

Ethnographic research is useful to study the everyday realities of students in HE and portrays events in the specific group's social reality. The ethnographer focuses on details of everyday life in various social, cultural and physical contexts, which provide insight into cultural and social change (Hoey, 2011). Several scholars point out that ethnography is not only a way of gathering data but also a term that describes the outcome (Colyar, 2003; Hoey, 2011; Woods, 1986). Thus, it is a process of obtaining the data through building relationships as well as creating a product, the ethnography itself. Through the established relationships the researcher is able to merge into the culture of the group enabling him/her to refine questions and techniques to understand the realities of the group better (Colyar, 2003). To represent the reality of all these layers, thick, rich, highly detailed descriptions are necessary. Ethnography is storytelling - not fictional storytelling, but a story validated by scientific collection and analysis methods - a theoretically informed description (Woods, 1986).

Producing a theoretically informed description ideally requires a certain measure of objectivity as well as empathy, which seems paradoxical (Tedlock, 2003; Wolcott, 1973). As the main research instrument, the ethnographer is closely involved in the research and builds strong relationships with the researched (Erickson, 1984; Wolcott, 1973). Woods (1986, p. 89) finds that "through interactive research one aims to penetrate the experiences of other, empathise with others, become like them, speak and look like them, share with them." The depth of the study is dependent on the established relationships between the ethnographer and the participant(s). Through this process, the ethnographer is affected and changed (Colyar, 2003; Erickson, 1984; Woods, 1986), and it is the partiality and subjectivity of the approach that provides the opportunity to learn new and different things from the people being studied (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; Colyar, 2003). The paradox of being objective and subjective simultaneously plays out in the notion of trustworthiness. Objectivity in qualitative research, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), relates to trustworthiness

which implies credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable research. This is achieved amongst others through prolonged engagement, thick descriptions and triangulation (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). In ethnography that would be to describe the lives of people as accurately as possible by building relationships and becoming involved with them. Ethnography therefore provides insights about people and their social realities from the researcher's perspective.

3.4.2 Narrative analysis

While ethnographers tell stories about the people they study (Bruner, 1986), narratives allow the researched to tell their own story. People from all cultures tell stories, since storytelling is an integral part of the human psyche. Humans acquire the art and craft of storytelling alongside the learning of language in order to represent experiences in narrative form (Fraser, 2004; Riessman, 1993; Thomas, 1993). They understand and present the complexities of human action, chance happenings, human motivation, as well as changing relationships and environments in the world narratively (Holley & Colyar, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1995). The identities of people are linked to their life stories (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008) and change and develop with the people, plots and themes in their stories. People thus tell stories from their own perspective shaped by the social context they function in.

People narrate their stories to themselves and to others by using words. The philosopher, Foucault, highlighted the importance of language and meaning in social science (Besley, 2002), and used the term 'discourse' to describe the way language is used. For him discourse refers to ways of constituting knowledge inclusive of social practices, subjectivity and power relations (Pinkus, 1996). Power relations can, for example, emanate from "practices of exclusion" (Colyar, 2003, p. 53) in tertiary institutions. Narratives of students can reveal these relations by what they tell and by what they do not tell. The subjective, "perspective-ridden" character of narratives renders them valuable to analyse social life (Riessman, 1993, p. 5).

In qualitative research, a narrative as a story with distinct characteristics is used as data, and the term narrative describes the collected body of data in the form of natural discourse or speech (Polkinghorne, 1995). Stories are considered effective as linguistic form through which lived human experiences can be portrayed in a specific time sequence (Holley & Colyar, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1995). Stories summarise past experiences by using verbal clauses in a specific order (Labov, 1972). The ordered

clauses represent events, actions, and happenings in human lives in themes all directed towards a specific goal (Polkinghorne, 1995). The narrative as well as the process involved to produce the narrative are termed narrative analysis

1) The narrative

The narrative defined by images, artefacts or events tells a story (Bold, 2012; Holley & Colyar, 2012). The stories provide order and logic to the human experience and a way of understanding humans' relationship to the world (Holley & Colyar, 2012) in relevant and meaningful ways (Connelly & Candinin, 1990). Narratives can be written in a demonstration or an inductive mode. In a demonstration mode, narrators use data as examples to explain their ideas while in an inductive mode the data tells its own story (Connelly & Candinin, 1990). The narrative is the final product of a collaborative process between the researcher and the participant.

2) The process of narrative analysis

The process of narrative analysis considers the sequence of events, the emphasis of certain elements and the influence of events on each other. It goes beyond the content. It questions intention and language and asks why and how certain incidents are storied (Riessman, 1993; Holley & Colyar, 2012) and why certain details are omitted. The process relates to the arrangement of the language to indicate both the relation between the words and the text as well as between the text and social reality (Holley & Colyar, 2009) to reconstruct a story of an event from the point of view of the person who experienced the event (Connelly & Candinin, 1990). Through the process of narrative analysis a temporally organised whole is produced.

Narrative analysis as being both product and process configures events in order to explain human experience (Polkinghorne, 1995). According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) narrative analysis is concerned with matters in the world, a focus on the personal and the social occurring at specific places or sequences of places. The process of analysis not only depicts how the story represents social life but also how the organisation of events constructs experience. The internal organisation highlights the experiences as well as how the experiences are put together. Narrative analysis examines diverse stories in everyday life (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). Everyday life, however, looks different to different people. Stories should therefore take into consideration the social configuration in which it is told (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). In ethnography the researcher focuses on and describes events in various social, cultural and physical contexts. In narrative analysis the researcher reconstructs

experiences and events to form a participant's story. Stories are inextricably linked to contexts and therefore taking note of stories within specific contexts highlights the intersection between narrative analysis and ethnography.

3.4.3 Narrative ethnography

Ethnography aims at describing the social patterns of a group of people through long-term observations. The ethnographer is a participant observer in the field in order to acquire an understanding of the way of life of a specific group of people. Although the ethnographer is directly involved in the fieldwork and develops relationships with the people, he/she has to report the observations from the stance of an objective scientist. Ethnographers were conflicted about how to keep the 'self' out of their reports. Many ethnographers presented two reports of the same study, namely a standard ethnographic monograph as well as a more personal report of experiences in the field (Tedlock, 1991, 2003; Thornton, 1983). This disjuncture resulted in the emergence of different representations of ethnographic work of which narrative ethnography is an example. Narrative ethnography allows voices from the field and stories in the field to be heard (Gubrium & Holstein, 1999).

Narrative ethnography has since evolved as a research approach that focuses on the narrative process within specific social contexts. The focus is on storied experiences while considering the circumstances and social interactions that shape the stories. The approach enables the combination of epistemological, methodological, procedural and analytic characteristics of narrative analysis and ethnography to understand stories within specific contexts. This combination provides the appropriate tools to analyse and understand stories embedded in specific circumstances as well as in other stories (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008).

The stories are situated within a social context (Colyar, 2003; Hunt, Romero, & Good, 2006) and therefore open up the many extraordinary layers of interaction between the individual and society and how everyday life's contingencies shape an individual's story (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). The presented stories can seem different at different times and places. The time, place and audience determine how and what is told. Narratives should be examined in full social context (Bold, 2012) as narratives are not merely a myriad of descriptions but an interaction between experiences, narrative tools, purpose of the study, the audience and the environment that influences the story (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). Narrative ethnography allows

for the use of personal backgrounds and lived experiences to provide an in-depth view of the lifestyle of a group of people in order to understand the people (Goodall, 2004; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008).

Considering the embeddedness of stories within each other and within different social realities, I found the combination of narrative analysis with ethnography very appropriate in the study of educationally disadvantaged students' experiences on the SU campus. By using the combination of narrative analysis and ethnography, I was able to contextualise the experiences of the participating students while describing their social contexts. Their storied experiences would not be explicit without the consideration of the social context that forms the background to their experiences.

Narrative ethnographies are used to write about "shadowy realms of communication and identity" such as power relations in institutions (Goodall, 2004, p. 187). External conditions such as power relations can structure a narrative, which in turn reveals the structure of a social environment (Senior, 2010). Since the students in this study were part of a minority group on the SU campus, I found narrative ethnography appropriate to reveal "shadowy realms" (Goodall, 2004, p. 187) in the social structures.

I furthermore found narrative ethnography an appropriate methodology to use in conjunction with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model as described in section 2.4. Both narrative ethnography and Bronfenbrenner's model allow for the consideration of the background histories, the day-to-day realities and socio-economic contexts these students lived in. Considering these contexts provided for a better understanding of experiences and analysis of the stories. I focused on the details of the students' experiences within their contexts and the narratives explicate these experiences. This study is therefore a narrative ethnography with the focus on the experiences of seven educationally disadvantaged students at SU.

3.5 Research participants

The focus of qualitative research is to describe and clarify human experiences, in this case the experiences of educationally disadvantaged students at SU. Real people were studied in natural settings (Marshall, 1996) and a series of intense, full, and saturated descriptions of the experience under investigation were collected (Polkinghorne, 2005). The participants in such a study are not necessarily

representative of a population but rather a selection of participants who are able to provide substantially rich accounts of the experiences under investigation. The unit of analysis is the experience of the participant and is selected purposively (Polkinghorne, 2005).

This study focused on student experiences. In order to provide significant accounts of experiences the selection of participants was purposive (Polkinghorne, 2005). Purposive selection is to select participants based on the researcher's judgement and the purpose of the study (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). The concern was not the amount of data to be collected but the richness of the data to ensure a clear understanding of the experiences being studied. Concerning purposive sampling Merriam (2002, p. 12) advises:

To begin with, since you are not interested in 'how much' or 'how often,' random sampling makes little sense. Instead, since qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which most can be learned. This is called a purposive or purposeful sample.

In purposively selecting participants for a study, the researcher has to take account of the individual's characteristics as well as the context of the study (Marshall, 1996). Individuals must be able to reflect on and verbally describe the experiences they had. Seven former SciMathUS students were thus purposively selected to provide accounts from different perspectives about experiences as educationally disadvantaged students at SU. Polkinghorne (2005) notes that by comparing these accounts, researchers can recognise variations and similarities in the experiences of the participants. The use of multiple participants can furthermore serve as a type of triangulation, not to verify a specific perspective but rather having more than one perspective as well as a deeper understanding of the experiences.

In purposive selection, different strategies can be followed. One such strategy would be maximum variation where the participants represent having the most divergent experiences (Polkinghorne, 2005; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Another strategy would be homogeneous sampling where the purpose would be to describe the experiences of a subgroup (Polkinghorne, 2005). In this study, the selection strategy was a combination of the above-mentioned selection strategies. Applying the

homogeneous sampling strategy, I selected participants from a group of students representing a subgroup, namely former SciMathUS students. All the students accessed SU through SciMathUS and were registered students at the university. In order to obtain maximum variation within the subgroup I selected first years and senior students, males and females, students speaking different languages, students from different race groups and of different ages to provide the broadest range of perspectives on experiences on the campus. I selected the sample to answer the research questions based on my practical knowledge of the research area (Marshall, 1996).

An email was sent to the seven possible participants to ask whether they would be willing to take part in the study. The email was not as formal as might be the case in other research studies as I knew the students:

Dear [Student's name]

How are you? I hope you are well and that your studies are successful.

I am writing to you to let you know about a research study I am conducting as part of my MEd dissertation in the Faculty of Education. I am interested in studying the experiences of students at SU. In particular, I am interested in you guys who were in SciMathUS and thereafter entered SU as fulltime students. I am interested in your experiences at SU and would like to chat to you about that. I would like to talk to you about being a participant in this study. It will entail that we meet on a regular basis for the next three to four months.

If you are interested in participating or learning more about this study, please send me an email. We could arrange a date to meet during which I will explain to you everything you need to know. Please send me any questions you might have. You are under no obligation to take part in this study. You will be asked to sign a consent form indicating that you are willing to take part in the study.

I am looking forward to hear from you.

Sincerely
Mrs Lourens



Elza Lourens
Physical Sciences Facilitator SciMathUS / Fisiese Wetenskappe Fasiliteerder SciMathUS
Institute for Mathematics and Science Teaching (IMSTUS)/
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The students responded promptly and the following represents an example of a reply:

Dear Mrs Lourens

I am fine thanks, hope you are fine too?

I am writing my last exam tonight, so tomorrow I will be free.

I will come by the office tomorrow, if you are available, and if you are available, at what time should I come?

Yours sincerely

John

All the students replied and were willing to participate in the study. After the initial email, I arranged an introductory meeting with each student. During that meeting, the students received the information about the study and had the opportunity to ask questions. Each student signed a consent form. Appointments were scheduled according to the students' timetables and we arranged to meet weekly.

The seven students taking part in this study were:

Themba⁷ – 22 years old, he was a tall, handsome Sotho speaking male from Soshanguve. He was the youngest of four children in his family. His parents wanted him to have the best possible education they could afford and sent him to schools outside the township. Themba's father passed away while he was writing matric. His mother was one of the first black women in the South African Police Service. At the time of the study, Themba was in his third year BSc (Earth Science). He dreamed of working on an oil rig. For the past three years, he stayed in one of the male residences on campus.

Thandi – this Capetonian grew up with her mother's sister in Gugulethu. Her biological mother was writing matric at the time of her birth and could not care for her. Throughout her life, she was surrounded by many cousins in the house. Despite the high standards she set for herself, her matric marks did not allow her to enter university. This well-groomed, 24-year-old Xhosa speaking girl studied Human Life

⁷ All names are pseudonyms.

Sciences and stayed in a new university residence where she was head student. At the time of this study she was a fifth year student busy completing her BSc degree.

John – he described himself as inquisitive and driven. This 22-year-old Tsonga male was a soft-spoken introvert who preferred to have two or three good friends rather than a big group of friends. John came from Katlehong, which he described as a dangerous place if one did not know which areas to avoid. He was the first in his family to finish Grade 12. Stellenbosch was a totally new and strange place when he arrived at the University in 2011. He rented a room in a private house and cooked for himself. John dreamed of obtaining a degree in commerce. He was a first year student at the time of this study.

Asanda – she was the sixth born of eight children. Asanda braided her hair in many small braids and loved earrings. She was 22 years old and was born in the Eastern Cape. This Xhosa speaking girl wished to graduate with a degree in Food Science and hoped that her education might end the cycle of poverty her family experienced. She described her year in SciMathUS as one of her best years ever. For the past three years, she stayed in a female residence at the University. Although she experienced many hardships during the past three years, she remained positive and kept on smiling. At the time of this study, she was in her third year BSc.

Adena – she loved watching the students on campus and the alternative ways of dressing. Coming from a Muslim family, Adena wore a traditional scarf. She knew that people stared at her but she did not mind. Adena was 21 years old and came from Mitchell's Plain. She dreams of obtaining a degree. Adena preferred not to stay in a university residence as she felt she would not have enough privacy. She was studying Social Sciences and allowed herself very little free time. She had a work schedule, which she followed to the letter every day. At the time of this study, she was a first year student.

Daniel – being one of the top students in his Grade 12 year did not offer him the benefits top performers normally enjoy. He did not meet the entry requirements for university and had to use alternative access routes. Daniel was 20 years of age and spoke Afrikaans. He was a coloured male from the coastal town, the Strand. Daniel was the first in his family to study at a tertiary institution and was staying in a male residence. His mother studied at a college but dropped out. His grandmother would

prefer him to drop out and search for a job as she did not believe that he would succeed. At the time of this study, Daniel was busy with his first year BSc. He since transferred to BEd and tried to believe that he would complete his degree in education.

Karen – she was a petite coloured girl from Vredendal on the Cape West Coast. She described her family as non-traditional. Both her mother and father were nineteen when she was born. She grew up among her mother's siblings. Her mother was an assistant at a butcher. This 21-year-old Afrikaans speaking girl described herself as a sponge who just wanted to know more. She recalled how she borrowed books from her Biology teacher to read. She was staying in a female residence but preferred to move into private accommodation after a few years. She was majoring in Geology and was a second year student at the time of this study.

During the research, the established relationships between the students and me deepened and allowed me to gather in-depth data. The students trusted me enough to tell me about personal and often uncomfortable experiences. I was able to collect deep rather than wide data (Colyar, 2003) by using data collection methods used in an interpretive paradigm.

3.6 Collecting data

3.6.1 Choosing data types and methods

Data collection methods should fit the chosen paradigm in a research study. Within the interpretive paradigm qualitative data collection methods are preferred by researchers as these methods allow rich and detailed observations of a few cases (Polkinghorne, 2005; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Qualitative data collection methods furthermore enable the researcher to understand phenomena by observing specific phenomena as they occur in specific contexts. The researcher aims at collecting data within a context without disturbing the context. This can be achieved when the researcher is or becomes part of the natural context (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

The participants in this study were all students whom I lectured during their year in SciMathUS. As full time students at the university, I often bumped into them on campus and had informal conversations with them. I was already part of the SU context and had established relationships with the students. This scenario enabled

me to conduct the research in a context where the students were used to having me as part of the natural context. I was able to collect first-hand accounts of the actual experiences of the students, which are favoured within the interpretive paradigm (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Although determining data types, choosing data collection methods and collecting the data are presented linearly in Figure 3.1 the process is more cyclical than linear. This means that a researcher returns to earlier steps in the research process while at the same time moves ahead to later steps (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). I also moved forwards and backwards between determining data types, data collection methods and collecting the data. After I started communicating with the students and conducting the interviews, I realised that I would be able to also use social media and journals. This was a decision I had not planned or determined before I started meeting with the students. The data sources I used therefore were interviews, journals and social media. The data collected from all the sources were used in a complementary manner to construct the narratives.

a) Interviews

In qualitative research the researcher acts as the instrument of observation and data is collected mostly by interviews or observations (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In this study four to five interviews were conducted with each student over a four month period. An interview is a natural form of interacting with a person and provides the opportunity to get to know people well. It allows the researcher to understand how the participants really feel and think (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In order to gain insight into the experiences of the students without limiting their reflections by using specific questions the interviews were unstructured. Whereas structured interviews aim to capture precise data in order to explain phenomena according to predetermined categories, unstructured interviews aim to understand complex experiences without predetermined categories, which may limit the field (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Fontana and Frey (2000) emphasise that gaining trust and establishing rapport are crucial in unstructured interviews. The participants must be assured that they can trust the researcher with very personal information and that the researcher will be empathetic and able to see a situation from the participant's viewpoint. The

relationship I already had with the students enabled the establishment of trust and rapport between the students and me within a short space of time. The students started communicating with me about their experiences on an informal basis outside the scheduled interview appointments. These informal communications opened up the door to make use of social media to collect further data.

Although the interviews were unstructured, I determined topics I wanted to collect data on in order to create a full picture of a student, his/her environment and background, in other words the student's ecology. These topics are often written out by researchers as a protocol the researcher wishes the participant to cover (Polkinghorne, 2005). In order to understand the students' experiences at SU I needed to have an understanding of their 1) childhood, 2) family background, 3) schooling, 4) transition to SciMathUS, 5) experiences during the SciMathUS year, 6) transition to first year, 7) senior years, 8) social integration and 9) academic integration. These topics made it possible to describe and understand the students' micro- and mesosystems. The responses of the students, however, determined the direction of the interviews. Polkinghorne (2005) finds such conversations between the interviewer and interviewee to be give-and-take dialectics in which the interviewer follows the lead provided by the interviewee and guides the conversation in order to gain full understanding of the experiences under study. I strived to earn the students' trust and to establish a rapport between the students and me in order to produce narratives representative of their experiences (Fontana, 2003).

Timeslots for the interviews were scheduled according to the students' timetables. The interviews were conducted one-to-one in a private office while we had some coffee. Rubin and Rubin (1995) make the point that interviews work best under these circumstances. Towards the last interviews, after a good rapport had been established between the students and me, we sometimes had the interview in a coffee shop or restaurant. With the permission of the students (see section 3.7), the interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards. Changing from oral to written form allows for the to-and-fro reading necessary in the analysis phase. Care should however be taken of losing the way things were said by only using the written form (Polkinghorne, 2005). To ensure that no subtle nuances were lost during the transcriptions I made analytical notes about body language, emotions or intonations directly after each interview as well as while I was listening to the interviews afterwards. This process provided a clear image of the interview as a whole (Terre

Blanche et al., 2006). This clarity provided much insight into how to proceed with the next interview.

Collecting data by means of interviews was an iterative process (Polkinghorne, 2005). Analysis of data started while the interviews were on-going. The data analysis revealed certain events or experiences as explained by a participant previously that I did not have clarity on. When more detail was necessary, this was obtained from the participant in a follow-up meeting. I moved from collecting data, to analysing the data and back until a comprehensive description was obtained.

b) Journals

In addition to the interviews students were asked to keep a journal and I provided each of them with a notebook for the purpose. In research journaling is an accepted data collection method to access rich qualitative data (Hayman et al., 2012; Ortlipp, 2008). I understand journaling as Hayman et al. (2012, p. 27) do as “the process of participants sharing thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences through writing and/or other media.” The students were asked to reflect on the discussions we had during the interviews. I did not specify how they should write in the journals but provided guiding questions related to the discussions we had in the interview to encourage reflections (Hayman et al., 2012). One student mostly wrote cryptic points and I asked him whether he would be willing to elaborate on the short points he made. He did comply with the request which contributed to a better understanding of his experiences. I collected the journals from the students after the four-month period during which the interviews were conducted.

Journaling allows one to dig deep into one’s thoughts and reflect on experiences (Janesick, 1998). In follow up interviews, students mentioned how they remembered aspects of events while journaling that they did not recall during previous interviews. Students also mentioned how keeping a journal helped them to clarify their thoughts about experiences they had. Not all the students wrote the same amount but in all cases the journals enriched and confirmed the data that had been collected during the interviews (Hayman et al., 2012) and as such made provision for triangulation in terms of clarification, reinterpretation and reshaping of the data (Janesick, 1998).

c) Social media

Although not all computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools such as Facebook, YouTube and Flickr have been fully utilised in research these tools have great potential. Facebook is used by individuals to share personal information and stories and to network with other people (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). Mobile phones are also used as method of quick communication between people by using short message systems (SMSs) or cross-platform mobile messaging applications such as Whatsapp or BlackBerry Messenger.

During the research process the students and I started communicating via Facebook and text messages. Through the social media I had quick access to their day-to-day experiences. I was exposed to first hand and real-time updates on experiences in their daily lives throughout the four-month period of data collection as well as thereafter. Being connected to the students through Facebook and text messages strengthened my position as an empathetic insider in accordance with the interpretive epistemology.

3.7 Ethical considerations

This research involved seven former SciMathUS students. Conducting research ethically has as aim to safeguard the dignity, rights and well-being of the students (Stellenbosch University, 2011). I obtained ethics clearance for the study from the Research Ethics Committee (Addendum A) as well as permission to use institutional data from the Senior Director Institutional Research and Planning (Addendum B). In order to adhere to the conditions put forward as part of the ethical clearance the participating students had to complete a consent form (Addendum C).

I held an introductory meeting with each student. During this meeting, I explained the purpose of the study and what their participation would entail. I assured them that they were under no obligation to take part in the study and that they could withdraw at any stage. The students asked all the questions they had and we discussed any uncertainties. I assured them of confidentiality. The collected data would be stored in a secure folder accessible to me and a transcriber who would handle the data with the same confidentiality as I would. The findings of the research would be published in a Masters dissertation but pseudonyms would be used. Finally, I discussed the

consent form with them. All the students indicated that they were willing to take part in the study and each student completed a consent form.

3.8 Analysis of data

The purpose of analysis in qualitative research is to understand different situations from different people's perspective and make meaning thereof. The process of analysis must suit the specific study rather than follow a predetermined recipe (Bold, 2012). The analysis of the data in this study consisted of two parts. The first part was the process of narrative analysis that resulted in the product, the narratives of the students. The second part of the analysis entailed a thematic analysis of the narratives in order to answer the research questions. The two parts did not occur linearly but rather cyclical. During the initial process of narrative analysis, I already identified themes, whereas the thematic analysis aided the production of the narratives. The process was iterative and retrospective - iterative as I started analysing data while still collecting, synthesising and reanalysing the data, and retrospective as I analysed the narratives after I wrote them to elaborate on identified themes (Bold, 2012).

1) Process of narrative analysis

The transcripts of the interviews, journal entries and social media produced much more than relevant narratives. Discussions about current issues on campus, what was served for lunch, weekend plans and development around love lives were part of the interviews but did not form part of the analysis. The purpose of the analysis was to produce narratives that would explain the students' experiences on campus. Terre Blanche et al. (2006) argue that a researcher wants to deliver compelling accounts of phenomena familiar enough for people to realise it is true but unfamiliar enough for people to gain a new perspective on the phenomena studied. In order to deliver these accounts the researcher must be close to the data and interpret it from an empathetic point of view (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). I needed to identify the relevant sections of the data to produce narratives of the students' experiences on campus by focusing on their interactions within their ecological systems (see section 5.2).

To process the interview transcripts I used Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) specifically ATLAS.ti. Using CAQDAS accelerates the coding process and makes it possible for the researcher to look at the relationships in the

data in a more complex way and thus promotes more conceptual and theoretical engagement with the data (Rambaree, 2007). I loaded the transcribed interviews into ATLAS.ti and coded them according to the topics I collected data on during the interviews (see section 3.6.1.a). These topics, used as codes, enabled me to describe the micro- and mesosystems of the students and their interactions within these systems on campus. The descriptions were complemented by the journal entries and social media.

During the analysis process I made notes on descriptions or events I was uncertain of and needed clarity on. I also made a mind map of each participant's experiences according to the codes as well as a diagram of each participant's micro- and mesosystems he/she functioned in in order to assist the production of the narratives (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Each completed narrative was read by the corresponding participant to ensure that the narrative was a valid representation of his/her experiences (Connelly & Candinin, 1990). The narratives of the experiences of the students in these systems revealed recurring themes.

2) Thematic analysis

Throughout the analysis of the transcripts and the writing of the narratives, I identified themes that recurred through all the students' stories. A thematic analysis focuses on the content of the narratives, the events that occur and the experiences of the people in the narratives. By identifying themes in the narratives meanings behind the stories, justification of choices and reasons for actions emerge from the narratives (Bold, 2012). After the initial coding of the transcripts, I started coding the transcripts according to these identified themes. This analysis contributed to the process of producing the narratives and elaborating on identified themes.

I read and re-read the completed narratives of the students. I reviewed the themes and identified subthemes within the identified themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes were defined and named and are described in Chapter five in order to answer the research questions.

3.9 Goodness of the study

The essence of qualitative research is making meaning and not verifying facts (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). Debates about the applicability of terms such as validity and reliability in qualitative research have been on-going. Researchers are not in

agreement about whether these terms are appropriate for qualitative research (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Some scholars hold that agreement amongst researchers is not necessary but rather recognition of criteria to assess the quality and robustness of qualitative research (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Criteria applied to judge research should fit the epistemology and aims of the work. Applying these criteria requires innovation, creativity and transparency (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Therefore, without rejecting the importance of validity and reliability of research, I applied a different lens to judge the quality and robustness my research.

One such lens of assessing the quality and robustness of qualitative research would be to assess the goodness of the research. The concept of goodness presents a means to determine situatedness, trustworthiness and authenticity as well as the idea of being strong in spirit. A strong spirit includes two aspects, namely introspection by the researcher, and improvement in practice and ultimately the world (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). Goodness is an integral part of the research and a dynamic, interactive process that takes place throughout the study. Goodness is shown through 1) the theory that informs the study, 2) the approach applied, 3) the collection of data, 4) the representation of the voices in the study, 5) the interpretation and presentation of the data and 6) the recommendations (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Tobin & Begley, 2004). During the research the researcher is moving back and forth between the design and implementation in order to ensure that goodness is reflected throughout the whole study. Goodness becomes the overarching principle to ensure the quality and robustness of the research (Tobin & Begley, 2004).

I applied the abovementioned six criteria to this study in the following way to demonstrate the goodness of the study and thus the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research:

- 1) The human development ecology theory of Bronfenbrenner informed this study. The theory provided the broad map for the research (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002).
- 2) The qualitative approach and more specifically the research design provided the specific route to follow (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). Narrative ethnography as well as Bronfenbrenner's model enabled the incorporation of the students' background, personal circumstances and the daily contexts they live in. Goodness is shown by

interpreting the experiences of the students on the SU campus in order to improve understanding by applying the research design.

3) The chosen approach informed the choice of data collection. The interviews with the students as well as the journals of the students provided thick, detailed descriptions about their experiences. Arminio and Hultgren (2002) find goodness in such collected data.

4) In the representation of the voices in a study goodness is found when the researcher does not present him/herself as an expert of others' experiences but rather the channel through which the participants' voices are heard (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). In producing the narratives, I understood that as the author of the narratives I communicate my understanding of the participants' experiences, my subjectivity and experiences (Holley & Colyar, 2009). In order to diminish my writer's voice I asked the students to read the narratives to validate the accuracy of my version of their narratives. It provided the students with the opportunity to change or delete sections in their narratives they considered inaccurate.

5) The importance of meaning making lies in the art of interpretation and presentation. To fulfil goodness in interpretation and presentation data analysis should open up text even beyond the participant's own understanding. This type of analysis requires repeated listening and reading of the text and the coding thereof according to themes (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). I repeatedly listened to and read the texts. In interpreting the data, I attempted not only to report on experiences as told to me but rather construct meaningful narratives within the chosen theoretical framework to explicate the daily experiences of these students. In this context goodness is further demonstrated when the researcher provides evidence of trustworthiness which can be achieved, amongst other means, by triangulation (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). The students' journals provided a way of triangulating data as they confirmed and/or elaborated on experiences discussed during the interviews.

6) The purpose of social science research is to improve lives. Goodness requires recommendations of how practice can be transformed through the insight gained in a study (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). Understanding the experiences of educationally disadvantaged students at SU might inform future practices on campus.

Goodness provides a creative and innovative way to judge qualitative research. The research process must demonstrate meaning making through all the elements of the process linked together to offer new understandings and improved practices.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the research approach and the research process I followed. The research design, namely narrative ethnography, was explicated; thereafter I detailed the selection of participants, the data collection and the ethical considerations involved in the study. I concluded the chapter by a discussion on the approach to data analysis adopted for this study and the goodness of the study. Chapter four will present the narratives - the stories of the students.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STORIES

*Your story is enfolded within the world story,
and the world story is wrapped around your private story.*

James Hollis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the participants' stories. The stories are the result of the narrative analysis of the data described in section 3.8 in order to represent the experiences of seven educationally disadvantaged students at a predominantly white, Afrikaans university. Seven stories are presented individually and are numbered as such. The subsections of each story form an integrated unit and are not numbered individually. All the names of people and in some cases the names of residences are pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of the participants. In some cases, the location or profile of a residence contributes to the experience of the student and then the actual name of the residence is used. In Chapter five the stories are discussed within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model.

4.2 The story of Themba's journey

A diverse community

Themba grew up in the township of Soshanguve with his father, mother and three siblings. According to Themba, the township was a diverse community where all 11 national languages of South Africa (SA) were spoken and as a result, he was able to speak all the languages as well.

Themba was the youngest in this Northern-Sotho family. He did not consider his upbringing to be very traditional. His father was more religious than traditional and was not concerned with traditional rituals. He worked at a law firm before passing away in Themba's Grade 12 year. After this, his mother had to keep the family going. He recalled how she sat him down and spoke to him after his father's funeral. "And now that your father is gone, our help is also gone. So you and me, we have to be friends, starting now." Subsequently, Themba and his mother grew very close. She was one of the first black policewomen in the South African Police Service. Both his parents studied at the University of South Africa (UNISA) after they started working.

Themba's parents were concerned about their children's education and together with a few other parents, organised transport to schools outside the township. Both his primary and secondary schools provided good education within a multi-racial environment. Themba, however, was not a hardworking student. He laughed and described himself as "naughty."

In his Grade 12 year, he started working very late. "I started working like the dire minutes, like the dire, dire minutes, like when I saw the exams is here now. It's now or never, which is of course too late. So, the results came back then. Yeah, but then I wasn't happy with my results at all. I was stressed, because I'm thinking what am I going to do now?" At that stage, Themba remembered taking his sick father to the doctor earlier that year where he met a girl who told him about the SciMathUS programme (Science and Mathematics at the University of Stellenbosch) that she was doing at Stellenbosch University (SU). When his Grade 12 marks turned out to be unsatisfactory at the end of 2008, he decided to apply for this bridging programme.

SciMathUS – real hard work

Themba was accepted into the SciMathUS programme in 2009. He did not mind that he would have to study far from home, he was merely thankful for an opportunity to improve his marks and obtain access to university. During the SciMathUS year, he realised that he had not been working before. He therefore started working hard together with his new friends, who motivated each other to improve continuously.

First impressions

Themba had never been to Stellenbosch and arrived in town alone. He recalled that evening, "So, when I got here it was late and everything was closed. I started reading all the signs and I saw that everything was in Afrikaans. Every, every, everything and that was like wow! I thought it would be like bilingual, but then I actually knew that it was really, really an Afrikaans university and everything was just in Afrikaans." He continued, "Well, I had no problem with Afrikaans, so it wasn't a shock or anything. It was just amazing to see, because I knew it was an Afrikaans university, but I thought maybe it had English. So, when I got here, I saw that it was really, really just Afrikaans. I was like, 'well as long as we can read it and understand everything, it's okay...'"

A real university

Although Themba did not apply to any universities during his Grade 12 year, he was certain which institutions he would consider in case he wanted to study. He explained, “The thing is, the universities that I consider as universities are Stellenbosch Univeristy (SU), University of Cape Town (UCT) and University of Pretoria (UP). Then I thought, UCT? I know a lot of people there. UP, I can’t go there, because that’s home. I’ll probably ignore the university there. I didn’t want that. So, Stellenbosch was new. I don’t know anyone here. I don’t know anyone who has ever been here. The only person I know here was that chick who told me about Stellenbosch. So, yeah, I decided that this is where I’m going to stay, meet new people, new everything and I like Stellenbosch. I like the setup and everything.”

After the year at SciMathUS, Themba was convinced he wanted to stay at SU. He heard about experiences some friends had at other universities and was sure that was not what he wanted. He exclaimed, “They had a striking now and I think the school was closed for two weeks. They had a striking, because they say the food that they eat is not nice. Something crazy! So, I don’t want to go there. They’re always striking, those people. I would die. I would die. I don’t want stupid things like that. It’s really stupid. It’s really stupid.”

Home away from home

“I love the boys at res!” Themba admitted. Themba did not initially apply for the male residence he ended up in. He applied for less traditional residences housing both males and females. He received an email informing him that the residences of his choice were full and he had a choice between three of the oldest male residences. He had no knowledge of any of the residences, but knew that some of the SciMathUS students went to Huis Malan⁸. He therefore chose Huis Malan.

Themba arrived at Huis Malan alone one day earlier than all the other first years at the beginning of 2010. “So, I was the first one there. It was just the HK⁹ that was there. So, I walked around, and I saw that Huis Malan is antique. It’s very old school. It was very, very old school. But I liked it. It was cool. I went outside and saw the garden and saw the little bunnies running around. I thought, ‘ah, this is a nice place.’

⁸ Pseudonym for the name of the residence

⁹ House committee

The next day people started moving in and I got to meet my roommate. That was cool as well.”

Soon after the first years had settled in, they were lined up by the house committee. Themba recalled that it was at that moment that the problem started. “So, we lined up and they start talking to us. And this is in Afrikaans now, but I’m like ‘it’s OK; I understand’. So, they’re talking, talking. Then the guy, the HK says is there anyone who doesn’t understand Afrikaans? So, I just raise up my hand, because I want them to alternate between the languages. Because I wouldn’t catch a piece and then I would catch on later. Things like that, so yeah, I raise my hand. Then I looked around and I was the only one with my hand up; the only one with my hand up! I just look down, look down! I was the only black guy as well.”

Themba was amazed. “I was the only black guy! I was like oh my word and I said ‘Nee, Meneer jy kan maar aangaan. Dis alright, ek verstaan.’ (No Sir, you can continue. It’s OK, I understand.) So, yeah, that was amazing. I never knew that it was possible to be the only black person. Like we were 93 if I’m not mistaken and I was the only black person. What?”

Themba had a positive attitude and soon he was at home and felt comfortable amongst his first year friends. He realised that for many of his white, Afrikaans friends, it was a strange experience to have a black student amongst them. He described the experience, “So, it was amazing for them and it was amazing for me and to sit down together as amazed people and talked to one another and make connections and see wow, ‘this is cool guys.’ Colour or no colour; we all got along.”

Themba did however recall two guys in the residence who did not want him there. With his positive attitude he approached them. “I sat them down and said to them, ‘I don’t know why you are acting like this, but it is totally, totally unnecessary, because I haven’t wronged you in any way. There is no reason for you guys to be this way. Is it maybe because of my colour?’ They were like ‘no, it’s not that. We’re just not used to that.’ I was like ‘well, I guess this is the time for you to become used to it.’ So, yeah, I sat them down and they saw the light and now they’re cool,” Themba chuckled.

At the end of 2012, after staying in the residence for three years, Themba decided to move out of Huis Malan. He was very sad about the idea of leaving but decided that he needed to be more focused on his studies. “I cannot afford being distracted so much...I need to work!”

An outsider

“Sometimes when I looked around me I would be the only black person and then I felt like an outsider,” he admitted. Now and then Themba longed for a place where the majority of people were black. He then missed home and could not wait to go home. “It wasn’t really like I want to die or something. I just got tired of speaking English, because I speak English the whole day and I can’t wait to speak my own language. But otherwise it was okay. It was okay, yes.”

He loved being home. He loved Soshanguve, but being amongst his friends occasionally posed difficulties. He explained, “Like I can’t be at home and talk about a teacher or about res or talk about majoring, because then no one is talking about that. Everybody is talking about girls, drinking, like stupid stuff. They’re always speaking about stupid stuff. Like, so, that’s why I don’t like being at home so much.” He continued, “I hate that about my culture. People drop out at grade seven, grade nine, grade ten. Like of my friends, only three of us have passed matric¹⁰; out of like more than 20 guys, I think. Yeah, they just dropped out along the way and some of them failed matric!”

Being social or not?

Themba considered himself to be a social person, but he did not take part in many activities on campus. He admitted, “Socially, I’m very social. So I knew a lot of people from res and then at classes, you started to meet new people and through them I met their friends and through them I met other people. I don’t really like doing much though. I don’t really go out. I only go out like if my friends like force me. I like chilling in my room. I don’t like leaving my room.” Themba did take part in some activities at the residence he stayed in, however, but did not take part in any campus activities. “I think I am just lazy!”

The devastation of six exams, and five re-writes

“That broke me to thousand pieces, because I thought, ‘oh my word I studied for all these subjects and now I have to study again. I don’t have energy anymore, because I want to go home now, I’m tired.’ I had to stay and study the same material all over again. It just killed me.” Themba remembered the terrible feeling when he realised he

¹⁰ Grade 12

had to re-write five of his six subjects he wrote at the end of the first semester of his first year. "I passed the re-writes, yeah. Yeah, but so, it was difficult."

To him, the biggest challenge during his first year was his academic performance. He studied day in and day out and felt in control of his work, but when the examination came, he struggled. "You would probably think that you've got it under control until you get to the exam room and you see, 'oh my word, what's going on here?' So, it's already too late then. You can't ask anybody in the room. So, normally I think 'I'm fine, I understand this, I understand this. I've got everything under control,' then when you get there, different story, different story."

Exactly the same thing happened at the end of the second semester of his first year. He recalled, "Second semester I got five exams, four re-writes. I passed them as well, so. I don't know. I don't know."

Themba preferred to work on his own and did not make use of mentors nor did he approach his lecturers. He was convinced that he would be able to figure out the work on his own; "No, academically I just did it in my room; all by myself, all the time. That's what I did. I didn't really have a study group." His biggest concern was to pass his first year. "I was really scared that I wouldn't pass. I think my biggest highlight was passing first year."

Themba passed most of his first year modules with the exception of three of a total of 11 modules. With such a high pass rate, he felt he still did not need help in his second year. He acknowledged, "I think it's about just being like, 'ah well, I made it first year, so. So, I'll make it again second year; same thing every year.' But then I failed one of the exams and I almost died."

At the end of his third year (2012), his examination did not go according to plan. He had to re-apply to the university and admitted that he was so stressed because his mother fell ill and he was concerned about how they were going to cope financially. Fortunately, he was re-admitted to the university and was determined to focus on his studies during the coming year.

A case for the random assignment of roommates

Themba's roommate in his first year was a male, English speaking coloured student. In his second year, he had a black, Zimbabwean male as roommate and in his third

year, it was a coloured, Afrikaans musician. “My roommate is Taliep Garies. He studies music. I think he is the best in Stellenbosch.”

Themba pondered on how roommates were allocated at the beginning of a student’s first year. “I think first year how they choose is they try to make it as comfortable as possible, because they think that, maybe like, they look at your profile and they check like everything and they see this guy, where he’s from, a township from Soshanguve, ‘I don’t think he’ll be comfortable in a room with a white guy. So, that’s why I’m putting him with someone the same as him.’ I think that’s really how they choose.”

While thinking about the allocation of roommates, he realised that black and coloured students were put together while white students were kept together. He was irritated and upset by the idea and suggested a more random allocation, “I think it should be random; don’t think it should be like planned, I think it should be completely, completely random. Let’s say ‘you in here, you in here, you in here.’ I don’t think it should be based on race or where you come from. That’s how it should be. It must just be random.”

Few ‘kamerpunte’¹¹(room points)

Although Themba participated in some sport activities in the residence he obtained few ‘kamerpunte’ and was one of the last students who had the opportunity to choose a room. He did not really mind, as he was happy with any room. “I am just happy!”

My mother is paying

During Themba’s first year of study, both he and his sister were studying. Because two siblings were studying, he obtained a NSFAS loan. Although he was happy about the loan, he knew that at some stage he would have to pay back the loan and that concerned him. During that year, he was informed by the bursaries office that the NSFAS loan was transferred to the National Skills Fund which was a bursary instead of a loan. He was very relieved. “It was like I didn’t have to pay them back. I don’t have to pay them back, because National Skills Fund takes care of it. Everyone was so happy. Yeah, so, otherwise everything was just okay.”

¹¹ ‘Kamerpunte’ (Room points) is a system used by residences to allocate rooms to students. These points can be earned through academic achievement and social involvement in the residence. The number of points a student collects determines the position he/she obtains on a list according to which the students select rooms for the next year.

Since his second year, he was the only sibling studying and could not obtain a bursary any further. He explained, “So, that’s when my sister’s finished, they stopped giving me the money so. So, last year I didn’t have a bursary, my mother had to pay last year. So, this year as well, so, my mother’s paying. My mother’s still paying, yeah.”

With his mother being the breadwinner, he admitted that occasionally their situation was challenging, “It’s just like now, since my father passed away, my mother kind of struggles on her own. Like she tries and makes stuff, but then financially, it’s kind of challenging for her, being the only parent, having to pay fees here.”

Afrikaans is ‘there’

Since Themba was exposed to Afrikaans during his school years, he was quite comfortable with the language. He acknowledged however, that ‘it’ is there; “In res it’s there, because like say at ‘huisvergadering’ (house meeting) and someone speaks in English then they would be like ‘ah...’ and I would ask myself why am I speaking in English? The most is like Afrikaans. Yeah it’s funny, but like I have no problem with it.”

Some of his black friends complained about Afrikaans on campus. For Themba it was a case of having an open-mind, “Try to learn Afrikaans while you’re here. Are you going to graduate properly and leave Stellenbosch without knowing a word of Afrikaans?” Not all his friends shared his opinion. His girlfriend loved Stellenbosch, but did not like Afrikaans at all.

Reaching for his dream

Themba dreamed of working on an oil rig when he completed his degree in Earth Science. He wanted something different. He is currently in his fourth year and plans to graduate at the end of 2013.

4.3 The story of Thandi’s journey

“I remember when I was in high school, every morning my dad would wake up, make coffee and cook porridge. He would wake early like at four am. My dad would keep the water warm for us to bath. He would talk to us just in passing. I remember he would make comments like, ‘I can’t wait for that day, I can’t wait for that day; I can

picture you walking up that stage graduating. I promise you Thandi, you would truly make me proud. I'd be screaming like a mad boy.'”

Thandi would be the first in her family to graduate with a university degree.

Growing up in ‘Gugs’

Thandi was born in Gugulethu in Cape Town when her mother was writing matric. Her mother's elder sister took care of her and became her ‘mom.’ She considered this ‘mom’ and her husband to be her parents. She grew up with them and their six children. Her biological mother never had other children and stayed within one taxi ride from where Thandi was staying. Her biological father, on the other hand, was married to another woman. From her father's side she had nine siblings that she knew of. He stayed at Fort Beaufort. Regardless of the distance, she was close to him and visited him regularly, but she wished she could have been with him as much as his other children were. She missed him and wished she could share more of her life with him. “At times I wished that he could be there, but because of the distance he really could not be there.” He died two years ago.

She loved the parents she grew up with. Her mom was a tailor, but stopped working when she became ill. She was diagnosed with diabetes and lost one leg because of the illness. Her father was a truck driver but had been pensioned and the family was dependent on pension money. Only one of the older children was working at a pizza restaurant. Thandi remembered financially difficult days at home. “There were days when we would go to bed without food.” The circumstances at home motivated Thandi to work hard and make sure she would be able to further her education after school. She dreamed of going to university. She wanted to be able to support her family.

Thandi started her schooling at Lwazi Primary School, a Xhosa school five minutes from home. Her parents decided to transfer her to an English school in Grade two. She continued in an English secondary school and was one of the top achievers in school. As a top achiever, she often had to cope with friends and family being jealous of her. “When you see that someone else is doing well in the community, instead of supporting or asking for advice, we always want to bring that person down,” Thandi surmised. Despite challenges, she matriculated in 2006 at Rhodes High School.

SciMathUS – a wonderful year

She was ready to start her journey to obtain a degree. She applied to UCT and the University of Western Cape (UWC) to study medicine or physiotherapy. She never heard anything from UCT and was turned down by UWC. She was devastated. As one of the top candidates in her school, she was hoping for more. Thandi heard about SciMathUS through an uncle. Although she had never considered SU as an option for further studies, she realised that this bridging programme might be her only opportunity of accessing higher education (HE). She applied and was accepted at the beginning of 2007. It turned out to be a great year. “It was one of those years that I would always cherish for the rest of my life,” she said.

Stellenbosch – a welcoming and intimidating place

One of the main reasons she had never applied to SU was because of the stigma attached to the university of being Afrikaans. “I had a lot of preconceived ideas about Stellenbosch,” she explained. “I didn’t want anything to do with Afrikaans, because it wasn’t my first language, it wasn’t my second language, it was my third language. Actually my fourth language, so, yeah, that’s the reason I didn’t apply.” She assumed all the lectures and material would be in Afrikaans and only went to Stellenbosch as she had no other option.

Her uncle brought her to Stellenbosch for an interview at SciMathUS and showed her around. “I fell in love with the place, the campus, the Neelsie¹², the library - I was so fascinated!” she confessed. “The library was, you know, it was underground and everything. It was just a welcoming environment. I really enjoyed my experience. I really felt much welcome.”

Feeling welcome reflected one side of Thandi’s experience of the campus environment. She also felt intimidated. She had never been to a white school before. Rhodes High was a mixed school where most of the students were coloured, Indian or black. She recalled a telephone conversation she had with her father at that time. “I was calling my dad and I was like ‘oh my word, it’s just white people here. I hardly see any black people.’” In class she was able to count the number of black students. “I was thinking I’m in the same lecture hall; I’m attending the same classes as advantaged students and that was a challenge for me. I didn’t know what to expect. I didn’t know! I thought I will have to be on my game the whole time. I have to make

¹² The student centre.

sure that I do well and that was a challenge. You know what; you're now with a different group of students compared to your primary school and high school. I just had to raise my bar up a bit." Thandi was overwhelmed...

In love with Protea¹³ residence

"I always passed Protea on my way to church and fell in love with the residence." Thandi chose the residence she applied for by the looks of it. She was ecstatic about staying in a female residence and being responsible for herself. It was a like a dream come true.

On the first day of her first year, at the beginning of 2008, she arrived with her family. They were welcomed by the house committee members who escorted them to Thandi's room. Her roommate was a coloured female. There were less than ten coloured and black students in the residence. It seemed to Thandi that she was the only one who did not know all the other girls. The girls sat together while folding little flowers for the rafts. "I was OK," she explained. "I thought maybe they knew each other from school. I would sit with the other black and coloured students in res. Some white students were very welcoming but they still had their cliques, you know?"

Being a wall flower

Thandi enjoyed participating in the Maties¹⁴ RAG as a first year in Protea. "Jool' (RAG) was great. I took part in almost every activity. It was just when we had to social with the male residences that it was not as welcoming." The first year females of Protea had to socialise with the first year males of a male residence. The females were all dressed up in either yellow or green. When they arrived at the venue where the get-together was happening, 'sokkie' (dance) music was playing. Before long, all the house committee members were dancing with the house committee members of the male residence and most of the white first year girls were asked to dance. "My fellow black and coloured res mates stood against the wall. We didn't have partners. We were just standing on the side and watched everyone dance. We were facing the other white guys who did not dance. They did not want to dance with us. It hurt. I just wanted to walk out of there; you know, just go back to res or go somewhere else. But we were forced to stay for a few hours or so." Thandi recalled the incident as her first experience of racism in Stellenbosch.

¹³ Pseudonym for the name of the residence

¹⁴ Nick name for an SU student

A new culture

“Oh my word I had a lot of adapting to do.” As a Xhosa woman, Thandi was used to abiding to strict rules in her house. “Whether I move out of the house, is working or married; or live on my own, the mother of the house in our culture should be the reference,” she explained. She was used to her mother having the final say in her life and this changed when she moved to Stellenbosch. “Yes, I felt that I had to adapt, because I mean coming from where I come from.... I felt for me to actually be a part of it, I had to adapt to the Stellenbosch culture. You know, do certain things that SU students do; just be part of the Maties team, you know?”

Out of the ordinary experiences then became part of Thandi’s day-to-day experiences. She remembered a church service they had to attend in the ‘Kruiskerk’ (a church) which she regarded as part of the Afrikaans university culture. The service was held in Afrikaans. She did not understand anything and felt it was a waste of time. The ‘sokkies’ (dances) they had to attend were part of another new culture she had to adapt to. Thandi described another strange experience she had one night. “I was buying something from the vending machine outside the res and this bunch of males was running past our res 100 percent naked! Oh my word, that was disturbing. I literally froze. I froze next to the vending machine and looked the other way. I was the only person outside the res at the time. I don’t know why everyone was indoors. It was daunting. I ran to my room. We don’t do things like that. It’s kind of disrespectful in my culture. It’s rude to do that. It’s disrespectful, you know, but it’s Stellenbosch, you know. For them it was fun. I don’t know, but those were the kinds of things that we wouldn’t do in our culture.”

Wednesday night was ‘student night’. For Thandi the idea of going out in the middle of the week seemed odd. She was allowed to go out on a Saturday evening, but at university she learnt that Stellenbosch students had a social night on Wednesdays. Thandi felt she had to adapt in order not to be left out completely. “Somehow I would go out on some nights if my friends would come along, but not all time.”

Not all the new and strange experiences were daunting. In get-togethers with male residences the ladies of the female residences were presented with flowers by the gentlemen. “So, that was quite nice. In my culture they don’t do that. It’s quite rare that you’d find an African man buy you flowers, even your boyfriend,” Thandi admitted.

The new culture she adapted to, forced Thandi to take stock of who she was and where she was going. She realised that she did not have anybody to look after her and that she needed to take responsibility for her own actions. She recalled how she started thinking about being independent and responsible. “I had control. I had to learn how to control myself. I had to put a stop to things. I had to put my foot down with certain things and take care of myself without my mom or an elder looking over me.”

SU - a ‘top-ten’ institution

As a student at SU, Thandi experienced many different emotions.

Thandi regarded SU to be a top quality tertiary institution. “I know that we are the minority, but it is a good system. I like the quality of the education. I think it’s one of the best; ‘top-ten’!” For that reason, Thandi stayed at SU, despite the unusual and negative experiences. She often felt frustrated about the way the minority groups were handled. “You already know you’re the minority, but it’s like they rub it in your face kind of thing. So, for that reason I don’t feel comfortable, but I would come for the quality of the education, definitely,” she explained.

For Thandi, days on campus were often hectic and stressful. She had a heavy workload which often made her feel flustered and tired. Despite a great amount of academic pressure, she still felt, “Academics is okay. It’s just, I have to plan like how I’m going to go about my studies and the preparation for a test. I’m trying to cover, like spend an hour on each subject daily, so I work hard.”

Thandi regarded herself as being part of the student community. She did however feel she had to compete with students who came from private schools, who had their own cars and had luxurious lifestyles. “I felt it was a bit unfair, but at the same time it also motivated me to work towards becoming a better person so that one day I can also look back and say I’ve worked and I achieved this on my own.” Thandi remained positive.

A difficult module in a foreign language

Biochemistry was a difficult module and to grasp it in a foreign language proved very difficult for Thandi. The module was offered in Afrikaans during her second year. The lecture notes were in Afrikaans and she had to pay to have the notes translated.

Thandi recalled that the lecturers were approachable, but as she did not understand the work, she did not even know what to ask. She felt completely lost. “Fortunately,” she remembered, “the test was multiple choice questions so I could just guess.”

An awkward Biochemistry practical

“I think white people think black people are incompetent.” Thandi remembered a practical she had to do with a white student. “The white student would just do everything.”

An even more awkward situation occurred in a Biochemistry practical. Thandi was placed with an Afrikaans white male. “He was tall and had black hair. I don’t know who he was. We were supposed to work together, but he just sat there. He didn’t do anything. He wasn’t even talking to me. I was so nervous. One of my friends allowed me to work with them.” The next day Thandi was informed that her group had changed. She never saw the student again and never received an explanation on the group changes. “I felt so bad. I just wanted to cry. It was a very awkward situation!”

The forgotten Botmashoogte¹⁵ residence

Thandi’s academic performance did not always go according to plan. She did not meet the requirements to re-enter residence after her first year. “At first I didn’t know how I was going to explain to my parents why I can’t come back to res. At the end of each year you have to take home your stuff but you’ll leave some stuff in the storeroom. I couldn’t leave anything in the storeroom, because I didn’t know whether I would be re-accepted again or not.”

She was re-admitted after attending a summer school at the beginning of her second year. She however still did not have enough ‘kamerpunte’ (room points) to be able to choose in which room she wanted to stay. She remembered how students who had enough ‘kamerpunte’ came to view the room she was staying in. “I was in a single room and I noticed girls walking into my room while I was studying. I didn’t go around choosing rooms, because I knew that I didn’t qualify. So, I was in my room quietly studying and a girl walks in and she’s like ‘Hey, can I check out this room? I want to stay in this room next year.’ I said its fine. I felt real bad, like out of place. Like you know that I didn’t belong here. I really felt isolated and excluded from everyone else. Everyone was so happy.”

¹⁵ The actual name of a residence meaning Botma’s rise

During her stay of three years in Protea, Thandi did not take part in enough events at the residence to earn enough 'kamerpunte'. "I think I was just more focused on my academics than any other thing." As a result, she was never able to choose a room for the following year. She explained how she felt the system exposed her. "It feels like everyone knows you failed to make the requirements. They print out a list and put it on a notice board in front of the res of who qualifies for a room. So, everyone would know, 'oh Thandi's name was not there,' so, it's not nice at all."

During the June holidays of her third year, Thandi's biological father was murdered outside his house. Thandi was shocked and traumatised. It resulted in her failing her third year. Re-application and re-admittance was part of another December holiday. This time she was not re-admitted to her residence again. After many letters and pleas she was offered a place in Botmashoogte, a university residence in Idas Valley. She remembered how the woman at administration indicated to her that no other places were available on the entire campus. While she was still pondering whether to take the place in Idas Valley - which is far from campus - she overheard how a place on campus was offered to a white female student. "I didn't say anything about it then as I was desperate to have a place to stay."

The students in Bothmashoogte were mostly black and coloured. There was one white student who was busy with his PhD. According to Thandi, the students in Botmashoogte sometimes wondered why only black and coloured students were staying in the residence, but they concluded that it must be because Idas Valley was a coloured area. She was convinced that the allocation of students to this residence was not done randomly. It also bothered her that they had to fight for internet, security and washing machines, which were not part of the available resources initially. When something broke, it took weeks to be fixed, while at the residence on the main campus, broken things were fixed within a day or two. She concluded, "It's like, 'oh, let's just leave the minority students here and let them deal with things on their own.'"

Thrown out of a pub

"I do not even want to remember the incident," she said while pondering whether to go into the details of the unpleasant experience. It was a Wednesday evening and she and her boyfriend went to a club in town. Inside the club, people were dancing. Her friend bought them one drink to share and they started dancing. "People were

staring at us. I mean they looked at me as if though I was lost or I was weird, you know. The students would make gestures, like 'where's she from?' That kind of stuff, you know, but they wouldn't say directly to me. They would communicate among themselves and I would pick that up. We felt unwelcome."

Thandi and her friend went to the bathroom. "While still in the bathroom the one security guard, usually African men, the bouncers, he like literally banged up the door and said 'get out, get out!' He said get out. Nobody gave a reason. There was a white guy standing in the passage playing with his phone when we walked in, so I assume he is the one who told the security, cause when we were being chucked out he was no longer there. It wasn't a nice situation at all. We just felt unwelcome and we left."

Stressful days

Thandi worked at the pharmacy in the student centre for 20 hours per week to earn pocket money. This job opportunity came her way as part of a work-study¹⁶ programme to help financially needy students. Her tuition was paid by the financial scheme, NSFAS, support that she regarded as invaluable.

The way NSFAS was administered did however result in major stress for Thandi. She explained how she understood the scheme. "In my final year I have an option of converting the loan to a bursary should I graduate at the end of that year. But should you not perform well by June, like fail a module or two, you have to pay a portion of the money back. In your junior years, however, they stop funding you if you don't pass everything. It actually happened to me." Thandi did not pass all her modules at the end of her second year. This resulted in the termination of her NSFAS funding and by the end of that year she owed the university more than R50 000. "It is so stressful. I realise that once I start working I will have to pay this money back to the university as well as pay back the NSFAS loan. It is very stressful."

¹⁶ "Work-Study Programme gives financially needy and deserving students an opportunity to earn a subsistence income. The aim of this program is to aid students who find themselves under financial strain regarding basic essential needs such as food, books, and as well other necessities" (Stellenbosch University, 2012b)

Shattered dreams

After five years of studying Thandi's final examination did not go well. NSFAS withdrew Thandi's financial support. The amount of money she owed the university further prohibited her from registering at the university to redo her final year before she paid back her debt. She was one year from completing her studies. With no means of paying her debt or of obtaining financial support, she was not sure whether she would be able to reach her dream of graduating in time for her elderly father to experience it.

Thandi is currently employed as a telephonist and hopes to save enough money to pay off the debt at the university so that she may complete her studies. She remains hopeful.

4.4 The story of John's journey

Choices during childhood

John described himself as an inquisitive child. He questioned why things happened as they did. His curiosity occasionally got him into trouble as his parents regarded his many questions as disrespectful. John was born on the 23rd of August 1991 in Katlehong. He was the third child in a family with five siblings. His father was an artisan and worked at a construction site when work was available. John's mother was an informal trader who bought and sold goods to add to the family's income. There were times when there was no income, but John remembered how his father always found ways to provide for the family. To him, his childhood years were "almost perfect."

John's father managed to complete Grade three in school while his mother completed Grade four. John was the first in the family to have completed Grade 12 and continued to HE. He smiled when he admitted that his parents were very proud of him. "I think they feel hopeful that I'm turning things around at home and they know that's what will happen if I continue."

John's schooling started in an average township school, as he described the primary school in Katlehong he attended. The school lacked resources and there were 40 to 50 pupils in a class. Most of the classes were crowded since the failure rate was very high. John recalled that although the school had a small library, it was not used at all.

Despite the circumstances at school, he performed well and enjoyed learning. “I was very focused and I managed to, I did very well and enjoyed school.”

During his secondary school years, John experienced peer pressure to bunk school. His friends wanted him to partake in drinking and gambling activities. Many of his friends dropped out of school. Fortunately for him, his parents did not allow him to drop out and he soon changed his attitude and started working hard. He remembered very passionate and diligent teachers but also those teachers who read the newspaper throughout entire periods. During his secondary school years, John was a keen soccer player. Unfortunately, the training continued after dark and since the area he stayed in was dangerous, he had to stop playing.

John passed Grade 12 in 2009 with good marks. His NSC marks matched the requirements for BSc financial mathematics. He felt optimistic and hopeful about the future.

An ‘open road’ to university?

The year after he finished school, John worked with one of his uncles. He had not applied to any tertiary institution at that time. “My Grade 11 marks were not that satisfactory for me to apply. I was going to get rejected immediately and I was going to waste money to apply using my Grade 11 marks. I also was still unsure if I was going to make it for matric,” he acknowledged. During the first postmatric year, he applied to several universities and was able to pay for the applications with money he saved while he was working. Soon afterwards, he received a letter of acceptance from SU, but unfortunately, it was not plain sailing from then onwards. John still had to write the access tests. He recalled that the test did not go well at all. “The mark was very, very bad.” He did however speak to somebody at the university who informed him that his application was on track and that he would be able to register in January 2011.

John started exploring options of travelling to Stellenbosch in January. He had never been to Stellenbosch before. His parents were not able to accompany him. “At the time at home it didn’t go well financially. They didn’t have enough money, so, I thought ‘okay, let me just go give this a try. I hope I’ll arrive there safe.’” With the money he had saved, he bought a train ticket and some new clothes. “Before departing from home, since I didn’t get accepted for res, they gave me a booklet with a list of private residence that was registered at the university,” John explained. He

organised a place to stay with a man in Tenantville who was also going to collect him at the train station.

John arrived in Stellenbosch one week before the university officially opened. He was ready to register, but it turned out not to be as simple as he had anticipated. "While I was registering myself on the computer system, the system didn't allow me to register because of that mark [the access test mark]." John was sent from port to starboard without any luck. He was losing hope. "I was disappointed and very, very angry. I wanted to go home the very same day." The owner of the house he was staying at convinced him to stay a while longer. During that time he heard about SciMathUS and went to their offices.

SciMathUS throws a lifeline

The programme had started the same day that John arrived at the offices. Some of the candidates for the programme did not turn up and John was accepted into the programme. As his funds were running out, he desperately needed accommodation in a SciMathUS house. He received a place in one of the houses and became friends with some of his fellow students. "We became a family. It was like a second family," he said.

The challenges of a new environment

John chose to study at SU since he was looking for a challenge. He wanted something new, somewhere he could measure himself. "I wanted something different from what I had. I wanted a new experience. I wanted an environment that was going to give me pressure. I wanted to measure my progress against different people and different races. I didn't want to go to WITS¹⁷ or UJ¹⁸, because it's mostly, I'd say it's populated by blacks, and it's still unstable. I have friends, a lot of my friends are there and it's easy to not, I would say, to not do your work, because you have a lot of friends and influence and the peer pressure. It's where I grew up. I wanted to be away from home, so I chose, Stellenbosch was perfect. It fitted a lot of what I was looking for, because I wanted to be away from Johannesburg. I wanted a new province and I also wanted a school that was more white. I wanted to measure my performance against kids or students from Model C¹⁹ schools. I wanted to see how I

¹⁷ University of the Witwatersrand

¹⁸ University of Johannesburg

¹⁹ The term 'former Model C' school is widely used to refer to former whites-only schools.

perform against them. Because as you grow up, where I grew up you worry this kind of kids are smarter than us, because they come from expensive schools and they are, so, I wanted to prove, I wanted to see for myself. So, I came to Stellenbosch out of curiosity. I chose this better place to expose myself to a different and better crowd.”

John was still satisfied with the choice he made. “I learned a lot from other students since it was my first time out of Johannesburg and meeting people from different places, from different backgrounds and different experiences. It taught me a lot about other people and their cultures; how they do things. I also learned a lot about myself. I think it’s not about whether you’re from a school that has resources or a Model C school, it’s about, what I’ve learnt is, it’s about the person or what you really want. It has nothing to do whether you’re rich or white. If you really work, it does pay off. I think that’s one of the things I’ve learnt.”

Orientation week

During that first week before he attempted to register in January 2011, John participated in the orientation week since he did not realise he had a choice. It was a difficult week. “It was a challenge, because I was not expecting the activities that they were doing and I’m not quite good with sport activities. It’s also a problem for me to actually come to the whole new environment and start making friends and joining in. It takes time for me to adjust.”

John had had almost no interaction with white people before that week in Stellenbosch. “The only white interaction I think I remember was when I was working with my uncle. So, that’s when I got used to talk to his boss. I usually said a word or two; that’s it. So, I had no interaction with white people. It was quite an experience. I was also scared yeah. Maybe for some of the other students it was the first time being in a situation where they had to interact or communicate with a black student or lower economic kid. To them, to me also, it was something new. So I was a bit afraid of what I was going to say or how I was going to say it. So it was, I was, I was still afraid.” John kept quiet for most of that orientation period.

The following year, when he started with his first year, he did not participate in the orientation at all.

Choice of lodging

John applied to a university residence after the SciMathUS year and was allocated a place. He decided against taking up the offer. He explained, “I think I was still scared of what to expect. I was not sure what I was going to do, what the experience was going to be like. I felt I was not yet ready for that huge change in terms of at the res the space of privacy is limited. I also wanted to avoid being influenced, because you see with students, you know it tends to be difficult in most cases to act like the way you want to act. So, I’d say like one of the reasons I wanted to avoid influence and one of the reasons was I was not ready for it. I think I need my own private space.”

John went back to the man who provided lodging for him during that first week in Stellenbosch. He rented a room in the man’s house and was happy there. He cooked for himself and had enough privacy.

Financially tough, but fine times!

Although John’s parents did not expect him to go to university, they supported him. “It came as a shock to them that I wanted to go to university, because I think they didn’t expect that any of us, their kids, are going to university,” John acknowledged. Their biggest concern was whether they would be able to afford the tuition fees. “I remember my father saying, if I move to Stellenbosch, he has to start to work more, harder to provide for me since I’m here, because it’s much harder to support me when I’m this side.” John assured them that he would be able to apply for a NSFAS loan that would cover his tuition fees.

John did obtain a NSFAS loan. The financial scheme paid his class fees, his rent and provided R1000 per month for food. He was furthermore hopeful that he might obtain a private bursary the following year.

Johns’s parents supported him financially when they could. He explained, “I now and then, I’ll call them, but before asking them, I check whether they do have funds, okay, like disposable funds that they can give me. They now and then, normally once a month, they give me about 300 or 400, depending on how much they have. So, but I usually told my mom that I’ll only request when I need it, I really need it. So, when I, when I didn’t call or when I don’t make a call and say anything about funds, everything is fine then. They should know everything is fine.”

Although he considered his financial situation as 'fine,' unexpected situations caused stress. When he visited his family during the June holidays, he unexpectedly had to pay his own transport back to Stellenbosch as his parents were struggling financially. "I had to minimise my spending," he confessed, "So; I'd say it is quite tough at the moment."

A diligent student

John registered as a first year at the beginning of 2012 and was studying for a degree in commerce. He was a diligent student. "In most of my classes I sit in the front row, yeah, in the front row! The front row is much, it's much easier to hear everything that is being said. You tend not to miss out and there's less distraction in the front."

The first week in class was stressful. "First week I'd say I was still unsure whether my performance measures against other students. I felt like I needed to, to do more to come to a level where I maintained a standard that other students had. What was difficult was the change, I think, from where I stayed to a place where people speak English." John thought his English was perfect only to realise that his English needed polishing. "I was not used to speaking English. I was forced to speak English now and that was challenging and it was challenging also getting the mark that I wanted to get."

John was very surprised when he actually coped in class. "To my surprise I outperformed some students and I saw that it's not about whether you come from the best school, it's about how committed are you to what you are doing. So, that's where I think my mindset shifted in terms of other people's backgrounds and in terms of what they're studying." John felt that he was going to succeed. He however still did not participate in class. He admitted, "I think I'm still scared, afraid to put my hand up to give the right answer; sometimes the fear of being wrong."

As the workload increased, so did his stress levels. He acknowledged, "I do feel stressed now and then, especially this year. Tests, assignments and maintaining a good mark is stressful sometimes. We are supposed to write tests sometimes twice a week or three times a week and due to limited time, you are forced to sacrifice some aspects in your schedule to keep up. I sometimes feel I am not well prepared yet, but still I have to go and write which in turn makes it difficult to maintain a good academic mark. I sometimes spend most of my time concentrating on my school work but

somehow I feel I am missing out on other aspects of life, because of the imbalance. Balance is very difficult to maintain, that's what causes me stress."

Standing on the side - an outsider

John did not consider himself to be part of the social life on campus. "When I have free time I sleep or maybe have coffee at the Neelsie," he said. "I think it requires a lot of work to be part of the social groups. For me, it takes time to get along with friendships. Especially people where we have more differences; in terms of background, in terms of life, in terms of activities that we do daily, so, it, it, I think that's why; it's not easy for me to move into the social group. I'd say I was not comfortable. It was a new experience to me and I felt like an outsider. Every time you walk and you look around and there's no one but yourself. Sometimes you'd feel you'd get this attention, which you don't deserve, because of your skin colour, because people feel you don't belong here."

He felt that he did not fit in. He explained, "I do activities which most of the students didn't like. I'd say like reading or researching or doing something that has to do with what you want to do in the future. Because, nowadays, most of the students are, most of the youth, they are more into having fun, going clubbing, and I tend to not spend most of my time doing those things. I feel I'm forced to do that, but it's going to take me some time. I need to get used to the place first. Maybe next year will be better for me, but yeah, I think I need to find that comfort first. Socialising is my biggest challenge at the moment."

John was very frustrated. He described himself as feeling "angry" because he struggled to fit in and thought he needed to adapt. "In order to find comfort in this place, you also have to change a bit of who you are, or who you were. You need to start to be more social. Because I think one thing that is important in this place is, is to socialise. And it's one thing I don't do often. I'd say it's kind of difficult to adapt and I sometimes get frustrated. Sometimes I try to socialise, but then also the fear of getting hurt by other people. If I was in a different university it would be different. This is one of the places where race is still not balanced. So, maybe at UJ it would be better and any other place, because most universities are populated by black people and since I'm used to socialising with blacks, it's much easier for me. So, yeah, it would be different."

Although he was not part of the social activities at SU he still considered himself to be a Matie. “I think I’m part of the system since I am a student here. Being a student, being part of this university, enrolling here; I think that’s a big event for me. It’s one of the best universities in Africa, so, I do consider myself as a Matie, yeah.”

Finding independence

The first year as a Matie had passed. John had learnt many lessons and had to adapt to a new way of living. He explained, “Let’s say, where I come from, it’s unusual as a young person to maybe argue with an elder. But here it’s different. Students or younger person is more, he has a right to argue and express their views in terms of whatever or in terms of what he or she thinks. Where I come from, your views, they tend to matter less than the elders’ views. Most of the things are decided for you by the elders. You don’t have a say in what needs to be done or how it should be done. You just follow the procedure, but here I’d say there’s freedom. You’re given a chance to say, are you for this or against this. I’d say how you feel about a specific situation or procedure is taken into consideration, yeah, that’s what I would say. I feel it’s a good thing, but I have to adapt to it, because being used to taking orders, not choosing what’s best for me, it’s something that’s new to me. Acting on my own way in this place, it’s not viewed as disrespectful, so I think, I’ve been trying to adapt to that. I’m still trying to find my independence.”

Part of finding his independence included finding himself. “I’d viewed life as unfair, because looking at what other people have and comparing them to myself. I’ve learned that I can also make the most of myself. What I’ve learned is, where we are is our own responsibility or where we end up after some time.” He also acknowledged, “I think I was looking too much in to socialise. What I noticed is I’m not a social guy and I think I have accepted that I’m not into social thing. That’s one thing I didn’t see in myself before. But I think as you get to learn more about yourself and you get to appreciate what you are, you tend to care less about others.”

Still going his way

John passed his first year with a distinction in Mathematics. He still lives in Tenantville and still prefers his privacy. He is currently busy with his second year BComm Management Sciences.

4.5 The story of Asanda's journey

Asanda's childhood

Asanda was born in a small town close to Umtata in the Eastern Cape. Her father was a hardworking man who had his own taxi business. Her mother had done a hairdressing course and owned her own salon. After the children were born, she moved the salon home in order to be with the children, but eventually abandoned the work in order to raise them. Asanda fondly remembered her childhood days, "It was a rural area, it was nice though. We had a tank behind the house, so, if it rains, we have water. Otherwise, we had to go fetch water from the small rivers around. We had electricity and only needed wood if there was like a ritual and we needed to cook with those big pots outside, but then my father would hire someone to get the wood for us. It was nice."

In Grade four, Asanda went to live with her eldest sister, Alice, who was a lecturer at a Further Education and Training (FET) college in Umtata. Alice had a little boy and between the three of them they had fun. Asanda adored her sister and during the time in Umtata, a special relationship formed between the sisters.

In 2002, the family was forced to move to Cape Town due to taxi feuds. Life then became difficult as both parents were unemployed. Asanda joined her parents in Cape Town after completing Grade six in Umtata. In the small house in Khayelitsha, they were seven people. Asanda pondered on their situation and explained, "My one brother completed his diploma. I can't remember in what. I think something to do with business and commerce. He needs an internship in order to graduate, but can't find anything. So yeah, he's just sitting at home with my sister who dropped out in Grade 11. She's just sitting at home too and has a baby now. She is very lazy!" The eldest sister in Umtata, together with the eldest brother, a train driver in Richards Bay, supported the whole family. "Sometimes my father had a job. I think he was transporting airport stuff with his car. So, the situation wasn't as bad. I remember he even made a big party for me when I turned 13," she continued. Unfortunately, the relief was short-lived and Asanda remembered, "The struggle came back again. The job wasn't there anymore, and I remember I almost didn't write three of my papers at the end of Grade ten." She used bus transport to school and had a week ticket her father had bought her. The ticket had ten clips on it - one clip to go to school and one clip to come back in the afternoon again. With one clip left, Asanda knew she would

not be able to go to school the next week. “I just started crying about that and my friend advised me to go and speak with my class teacher and I did.” Her teacher provided her with money and lunch.

Despite the difficult circumstances, Asanda persevered and passed matric in 2008 at Glendale Secondary School in Mitchell’s Plain.

The road to higher education via SciMathUS

Asanda successfully applied to SciMathUS in 2009 in order to gain access to the university the following year. “I didn’t even know where Stellenbosch was,” she recalled. “At first I felt I was repeating matric, but I realised that this is my chance to improve my Maths and Science marks. It ended up being one of the best years of my life.” After SciMathUS, Asanda applied to SU to study BSc Food Science, knowing that she wanted to improve her life. For her, SU was the key to that better life. She explained, “I asked around about Stellenbosch and like from what I heard, the education was of top, top quality. That was the main thing that actually made me want to stay, you know? Because I wanted like a proper degree, so I stayed because of that as well. And, yeah, I’ve, I’ve considered the fact that it was a white, Afrikaans university. Yeah, everything has a price.”

First days at res

Although Asanda attended the bridging course at the university the previous year and had been around town, she felt very scared when she arrived at the residence for the orientation week at the beginning of her first year. The size of the building was overwhelming and there were so many students and their families. She felt lost. The memories of the first two days in the residence were nothing more than a blur. After being there for only two days, Alice passed away and Asanda’s father had to fetch her from the hostel. The family was still recovering from the death of their little brother the previous year when this tragedy struck them. Asanda was devastated. The family had to go to the Eastern Cape for the funeral and was away for almost ten days.

“I came back the day before the classes started. It was difficult. It was really, really difficult for me. I didn’t really focus on the change from SciMathUS to the university, because I was just, I was just so sad and heartbroken most of the time. I was crying the whole time.” While the other first year students were bonding with one another,

Asanda was burying her sister. Back on campus, she felt alone. She missed the orientation period and knew none of the other first years. She had to attend lectures but did not have time to figure out where the classes were. "I can't remember much about those first days. I couldn't cope and was constantly in my room crying or sleeping, but," she remembered, "my housemother²⁰ and mentor were really sympathetic and supported me a lot. Pam, my housemother, even organised sessions at the university psychologist for me."

Coming back she also had to deal with her roommate. She was a coloured girl who claimed to be scared of this girl coming from a township. Astonished, Asanda recalled how her roommate spread rumors about her, "She was scared I was going to steal from her and every one in res wanted to see this ghetto girl from Khayelitsha. I was just a black girl, you know, I didn't have any, you know, dodgy stuff." The other girls in the residence expected to see a girl clothed in dubious attire and when they realised that Asanda was just a normal girl with a ponytail and earrings, they simply laughed. After the dramatic start, Asanda and her roommate became good friends.

Financial distress – only McFlurries²¹!

"My brother usually sends me money at the end of each month for toiletries and other small stuff. It's usually R300. When I need clothes, I will maybe sacrifice R200 to buy something I want to wear. That means I will be broke for the whole month. I guess I'm used to it now. It bothers me, but what can I do? Sometimes I really need something to wear but I can't exactly ask my brother to buy me clothes, because he's taking care of the rest of the family. After Alice died, he's the only one looking after all of us." Asanda casually recalled how she coped with little cash in her purse and continued, "I have friends at res and sometimes they want to go out for meals or just go out and have fun or whatever. I can't do that, because I have to think of the rest of the month. If I go and spend R100 tonight on pizza night, then it means I'm going to be out of some stuff for the rest of the month."

When her friends in the residence went out to have fun, Asanda often just slept in her room or watched television. In an effort to diminish the effect of having little money, she described herself as follows, "I'm not a very social person, so it doesn't really bother me. Okay, there are times where I am bored or stressed or whatever and wish

²⁰ A housemother or housefather is the principal of a residence in charge of the students

²¹ An ice cream

I could just go out. So yeah, it gets to me at times.” When her friends invited her to join, she brushed them aside, “Nah, I’ll pass.” She had one friend who knew what her circumstances were. “With her I can be myself and I just tell her I can’t afford going out. She doesn’t judge me,” Asanda explained and smiled. “At least this other time we went for ‘McFlurries.’ That I can afford, I mean it’s 20 bucks.”

Hospitalisation stalls progress

It was the beginning of Asanda’s second year. She had high expectations for the year and felt positive about the future. She was on her way to obtaining a degree and felt like a senior student. “Everything went so well until my first semester exams,” she recalled disappointedly.

Asanda had a difficult examination timetable. She had back-to-back Chemistry papers. Despite managing her time as best as she could, she still felt overwhelmed by the amount of work. She decided to make use of the second opportunity for the one Chemistry paper and had a re-write for her Food Science examination. After studying at home with the support of her family, her father brought her back to Stellenbosch two days prior to the first of the two papers she had to write. The next day she started feeling very ill. Her stomach was aching and she was nauseous. “It was terrible,” she recalled, “I slept the whole day. My body was feeling hot and cold simultaneously.” Her housemother, Pam, took her to hospital where she was diagnosed with acute appendicitis. In no time, she was taken to Paarl hospital where she would be operated. With the hospital being full, she sat in a wheelchair until after midnight before being attended to. She was operated the next day; the day she had to write Food Science. While still sleepy and in pain, her first thoughts were, “Oh no! I missed my Food Science rewrite and I am going to miss the Chemistry paper as well.”

When she arrived on campus at the beginning of the third term, Asanda tried to find out whether there was any way of re-writing the examinations. With shock she realised, “I just failed two subjects without even writing them. Now that killed me, because I didn’t fail. I was sick. I didn’t plan to be sick, you know! I came here to write my exams and I fell sick while I was preparing to write my exams.” Asanda had to continue with her second semester knowing that for all intents and purposes she had failed her first semester and that would result in one extra year of study. Unfortunately, that was not the only implication of falling ill.

She worked hard during the second semester to improve the disastrous results of the previous semester, but after starting the year on a positive note, things were going terribly wrong. She ended her relationship with her boyfriend who beat her to such an extent that she could not sit for a week. Adding to the stress and chaos in her life, she received an email informing her that she would not be funded by NSFAS the following year due to her HEMIS credits²² being too low. She was also informed that for the same reason she did not have place in the residence for the following year. Her world was tumbling in.

Her situation had changed drastically. “I couldn’t cope with my studies in the second semester because of everything that happened. I managed to pass three of the four modules. I had never done so badly in my studies than in the past year.”

She struggled against feelings of despair and hopelessness. In order to be able to continue with her studies in 2012 she had to fill in re-application forms with doctor’s certificates attached to them, but without funding, she did not know how she was going to continue. Stress was part of her being. She owed the university a large sum of money and she had to attend a summer school early in January the following year for which she also needed funding.

Her only hope was her friends at the SciMathUS offices. After the year in SciMathUS, she still visited them regularly. One of the SciMathUS staff members made a few phone calls and explained Asanda’s situation to the administration staff. She was given another chance. The bursary office allowed her back on probation. She obtained place in the residence and they agreed to fund her if she passed everything in the next June examination. Playing with her earring she sighed, “I owe a lot of money; a lot of money. It’s like 70 something. And the NSFAS loan is R54000. So, I just have to pass everything in fourth year and 40% of that amount is going to be a bursary. That’s the stressful thing about it. I have to pass everything. Like, I have to have 100% of my credits. Only then will they consider that 40% bursary. I owe a lot of money. I couldn’t even increase my meal quota. I can’t keep getting more and more debt.”

She passed all her modules in the June 2012 examination. For the moment, there was hope again. She was able to continue with the second semester in 2012, but

²² HEMIS is an acronym for Higher Education Management Information System. One HEMIS credit equals the total number of module credits required in a particular year of study of a programme (Stellenbosch University, 2012c).

looking back at 2011 she exclaimed, “2011 is a year I’d rather forget. It did not work out the way I planned and hoped. Sadly the aftermath of falling ill will always be with me.” She did not then realise how prophetic those words proved to be.

Language issues: Microbiology 354

“I feel very lucky to be here because this is one of the best universities. The quality of the education is of very high standard. What sometimes becomes a problem for me though, is the fact that this is an Afrikaans school. The best professors here are Afrikaans speaking and this makes it hard for them to speak English but some of them really try. I just wish they would shift from that mentality that this is an Afrikaans university.” Asanda’s frustration levels were rising. She had a terrible weekend figuring out Microbiology 354. “I studied, but like I was just stressing so much, that I couldn’t, like nothing went in while I was studying. I just hate the language policy here, seriously! I get that they’re Afrikaans speaking but would it really hurt to at least put the slides in both languages. I find Microbiology very interesting but the lecturer just makes me dislikes it. Everything on WebCT²³ is in Afrikaans as well.”

Asanda was writing a Microbiology 354 test during that week. She felt hopeless seeing that she could not prepare for the test as all her notes were in Afrikaans. The lecturer told them they could make copies from a textbook in the library, which she did. The work she needed to study for the test, however, was only in the Afrikaans notes.

An annoyed Asanda muttered to herself, “I’m hating that class, I’m really hating that class. I can’t afford to fail it.” Microbiology 354 was the only module Asanda failed in 2012.

Language issues: SRC²⁴ meeting

The atmosphere in the dining hall of the male residence was loaded. Nominees for the student representative council were visiting different residences introducing themselves to the student population explaining what they stood for and would do for the students. Asanda and her friends were attending such a meeting during supertime in a male residence. She recalled the event, “This res is hyper Afrikaans and very divided, like racially divided.” One of the nominees delivered his speech in

²³ WebCT is an online learning management system which provides a virtual learning environment.

²⁴ Student Representative Council

Afrikaans. Another nominee was a Venda speaking student who asked whether the speaker could please translate what he had just said in order for the former to ask questions. Angrily Asanda described what followed next, “And then this other guy was like ‘this is an Afrikaans university. I’m not going to speak English for anyone. This is my home and blah, blah, blah.’ He said all of that in Afrikaans. The Venda guy just left. I mean what is the point of just sitting there if you don’t know what the people are saying?” Asanda was disappointed by what she had experienced and pointed out how she felt, “I have experienced this in the Science department as well. If two group members were English and three were Afrikaans they would speak Afrikaans the whole time. We are all here and if we are going to look at the skin colour there’s going to be a problem. I just believe that we share. We are studying together. We are in the same classes, in the same hostel and we are not so low class as you may think or say, you know. So, I think people should just look beyond the skin colour and just work together, because we are going to be together whether you like it or not. You can go to America, people will be mixed. You can go wherever, you know. So, I was just, I was really angry about that.”

Hospitalisation nightmares continue

“Just when I thought I’d put it all behind me and moved on...it came back again! I have low HEMIS credits because of what happened in 2011. I have to appeal to the housemother all over again so that I can be allowed back in res next year. I am so stressed,” Asanda explains, trying to keep her composure. Thinking of how the year started, her big dark eyes filled with tears and she stared in front of her.

She was very discouraged at the beginning of the year having to do so many second year modules again, but she was focused on reaching her dream. “I studied like crazy and passed my tests really well. Exam time came and I was prepared, wrote all of them and passed them all at once, no re-writes whatsoever. I was so proud of myself, and so was everyone else!” She was even thinking of applying for senior residence since she felt she was really doing well. She had hope again until she received that email...

The bad luck of having had an operation during examination returned. She received an email from Pam informing her that she did not qualify for residence the following year. Regardless of the fact that she did well in her June examination of 2012, the total effect of all the HEMIS points still was against her. Despite the fact that she had

re-applied the previous years and was allowed back into the residence, the process had to be repeated again.

Going through the process of re-applying was demoralising and Asanda was losing hope. She realised that she would not be able to cope travelling from home every day if she did not get into residence. Studying at home with many people and little space also proved very difficult. Furthermore, she knew that it would be difficult for her to find an affordable flat and handle the stress of cooking while managing her studies as well. She spoke to the woman who was in charge of the residence application process in search of affirmation that things would work out. The woman's reply was vague, "Maybe," she said. There were long waiting lists and if in January there were cancellations, she would be considered. "I was shaken. I knew I had to start looking for private accommodation but I did not have the money to pay a deposit. I need to get into res...any res!" She became desperate. Then she received another email.

The email from Pam informed her that she regretted informing her that her re-application was unsuccessful. Asanda was defeated. She lost the will to fight any further. She was feeling shattered, wondering whether this struggle would be worth her while. Maybe she should consider dropping out.

Once again, she turned to her lifeline at SciMathUS. One of the staff members phoned Mrs. Gouws at the residence placement office to discuss the matter with her. Within five minutes Asanda received feedback that if she was willing to accept a place in Concordia (a senior residence), there was a place available for her. Asanda was astonished and could not believe her ears. That was exactly what she wanted. She was back on track.

Pregnant - is this the end?

Asanda was heartbroken. Her dark eyes were filled with tears of fear and anger. The resentment she experienced with herself was tearing her up. Asanda had just realised that she was pregnant. "I hate myself so much. I really do. I just feel that I've failed, I've failed myself, I failed my family and just everyone, because it just changes everything. It really changes everything." Was this going to be the end of the road for her after all the challenges that she overcame? Was she not the one who would save

her family from poverty? After obtaining financial assistance as well as accommodation and overcoming many academic challenges she was devastated.

Asanda's baby was born in April 2013. She hoped that her mother would care for her baby while she continued with her studies. Tragedy struck the family when her mother passed away in a terrible bus accident in March 2013. Asanda had to discontinue her studies to look after her baby. She hopes to return to SU to complete her studies in 2014. The future remains uncertain.

4.6 The story of Adena's journey

Childhood memories

Adena remembered very happy moments in their family. "On Fridays I remember my father would come from work and he'd bring this whole container with sweets and stuff. That was like the happiest moments in our lives. We would all just eat sweets or chips and it was all mixed together and we didn't even mind."

Adena and her family have been living in Mitchell's Plain for the past 21 years. She was born in Rylands and soon after her birth, the family moved to Mitchell's Plain. She lived with her parents, an elder brother and two sisters. Her father was a coloured man and her mother from Indian heritage. Adena chose to identify with her Indian heritage, as she disliked the way coloured people often acted. When Adena was born, her mother was a cleaning lady at a library. Since then, her mother had studied through UNISA and completed an honors degree in library science. Her father did not complete school and was working as a truck driver.

All the children attended Aloe Primary School close to their home. The three eldest children attended Aloe High School as well, but her parents moved the younger sister to a private school when they became uncertain about the discipline and quality of education at Aloe High School. Adena recalled that even in her Grade eight year, the teenage pregnancy rate was high. "I was afraid of that kind of thing. We did have a really high rate, but it's just from the community we come from." After completing school her brother chose not to study and is working at a chain store. Adena did not want to follow in his footsteps. "If my brother wants a mini job at Pick n Pay, it's not what I want. I mean you would want to study, because you can see the kind of life you have when you don't study," she explained.

Adena did not have a Mathematics teacher in Grade 10. Her Physical Sciences teacher in Grade 12 was actually a Biology teacher. He also took paternity leave during Adena's Grade 12 year leaving his students unattended. Despite these challenges, she completed Grade 12 in the second position at her school.

An uphill road to tertiary education - SciMathUS

Career guidance tests indicated that Adena should study a degree in humanities, but the availability of bursaries in the sciences influenced her choice. She ended up entering UWC for a biodiversity and conservation biology course. It was not very long before she dropped out, as she was very unhappy. She decided to rewrite Mathematics and Biology on her own in order to apply at SU for a BA degree. After rewriting both the subjects, her average Grade 12 mark was still two percentage points too low. It was at that point, feeling desperate and alone, that she heard about SciMathUS from a friend. The applications for the programme had closed but she still put in an application. She was accepted into the programme in 2010. She needed to improve her Physical Sciences mark in order to obtain access to the university.

Adena had to travel two hours each morning and evening to and from Stellenbosch using public transport. She woke up at four o'clock in the morning just to be on time for her classes at the bridging programme. On top of the long travelling hours, she had to use her own pocket money to pay for the transport since her mother was opposed to her being in the SciMathUS programme. She wanted Adena rather to work and redo Physical Sciences on her own. When Adena's money ran out, she had a problem. She applied to stay in one of the SciMathUS houses, which caused a lot of friction between her and her family.

Adena considered the year in SciMathUS as a necessary obstacle. She often felt agitated, but persevered. She was absolutely focused on what she had set as a goal for herself: she wanted a degree.

SU - a reputable university

After the SciMathUS year, Adena obtained access to SU. She received a bursary of R25 000 as well as place in a residence. She would have preferred going to another university, but stayed at SU because of its academic reputation. "I'm not enjoying it here! I think I would have enjoyed the social activities at another university more. I have a feeling they let you be you. Whereas here, they want you to be who they are.

It is also easier to be around my own. It is easier to communicate and stuff like that.” Regardless of these emotions, Adena chose to stay at SU. She recalled how she came to the decision to remain at SU. “I don’t want problems with people questioning my knowledge or the value of my degree. Like when you say you come from Stellenbosch; I mean it’s a reputable university and it’s a good university. I cannot let white people intimidate me into another university. For me it was not whether I was intimidated or was the only coloured here. I wouldn’t mind, because I know that I needed to study here. So, that’s why I wanted, that’s the main reason that I wanted to stay here.”

SU furthermore provided Adena the opportunity to be free and independent regardless of the fact that the environment was not as welcoming as she wished. She wanted to study far enough from home to be forced to live on her own rather than at her parents’ house. “If I was at a university close by, my mother would tell me that I can travel. I didn’t want her to have any reason to say ‘okay let’s travel.’ Here at Stellenbosch she can’t say that I must travel, so, yeah. I remained at the University and I was looking for a chance to be independent.”

Resolution about not going home

“I don’t go home often,” Adena acknowledged. “I try to go home at least once a month. Last semester I probably went home once in six weeks, because I was very busy. It’s also a bit problematic for me, because when I go home they don’t want me to come back.” Adena’s parents would prefer her to stay at home. “They’re not really understanding that I have to come to Stellenbosch at a certain time, because I have classes the next day. So, it’s, it’s a bit of a struggle. I try to avoid going home. When I go home, I’m going to have to cook and clean. I can’t just quickly eat something and go study, but maybe I’ll have to wash the dishes or sweep or make beds or something like that so, yeah. They give me chores to do and the environment is not very effective for me for learning. My sister works at my table. I don’t have a table to work on and I don’t have the internet all the time and stuff like that which I need.”

Adena preferred to stay in her room in a house in Idas Valley with her two housemates.

Staying in Idas Valley

A place was secured for Adena in a university residence on campus. Living in a residence, however, was not part of her planning. “I wasn’t planning on living in a residence. I like living in Idas Valley. It’s private and I can cook my own food. I don’t have to go to res. I don’t necessarily like a lot of people around me. In res it’s noisy and people are in and out of your room and I don’t like that kind of stuff.” Initially she accepted the place in residence but declined it when she realised that she was not going to receive an increase in her bursary to cover the fees payable for residence. “Maybe I would have accepted the place if they increased the bursary,” she surmised, “but after one year I would’ve moved to Idas Valley. I lived with some friends in res for a week during exams as it is close to the university. I didn’t like it. I’m not comfortable eating someone else’s food and I don’t necessarily like living with girls only. It’s mostly white girls and I don’t know if I would be very comfortable with that. I would want someone to be there, like a black student or a coloured student or an Indian student. At church, it’s only white girls and sometimes I can feel a bit intimidated. Even though I know the language slightly and am slightly acquainted with their culture, I can still feel out of place and uncomfortable. So, I would rather want one of the black girls in the church so that it can make me feel more comfortable.”

Adena searched for a place to stay which did not cost more than R1500 per month. That was the allowance her mother was prepared to pay for her lodging. She ended up staying in Idas Valley in a private home with two housemates and the owner. “They’re master’s students from Rwanda. All of them are male. They’re very interesting and good. They are also very disciplined and studious.” Adena and the other two students were like a small family. They talked about their different cultures and how they experienced SU.

I felt intimidated...

“I have found out that one of my classmates went to Israel and she was an intern at the UN. I was shocked, because they were exposed to things that I haven’t been. I am conscious that I know less because of my educational background,” Adena exclaimed. Interaction with classmates and friends from her cell group²⁵ left her feeling intimidated. She was very aware of the fact that her friends had been in

²⁵ A small group of people from a church that meets on a regular basis.

private or 'top' schools, as she referred to them, while she had been in a school of lower quality.

She further experienced how the differences in terms of backgrounds intimidated her. "In the cell group they talk about things like riding a horse. I've never even touched a horse!" Adena recalled how these experiences inhibited her actions in class. "I think educational wise, maybe being afraid to make a comment or asking a question or something like that. With other things, normal things, I think we are different. They worry about things that I don't worry about. I worry about whether I'm going to have bread next week. I think its intimidation; I think there is a problem of me being conscious that we are not on the same level."

Despite these feelings, Adena remained in the cell group. One of her friends from the cell group visited Adena at her house in Idas Valley. She recalled the experience, "At first I felt uncomfortable. I tidied the house like three times." Adena laughed as she told the story. "I bought chips and sweets and doughnuts and then she didn't eat anything. She just drank her coffee."

Conversations with her friends further led to uncomfortable feelings. "I think it's okay if we're talking about things like God and stuff like that. There's no problem, but once we start deviating like okay, 'what did you do the weekend?' No, I just sat in Stellenbosch the whole day. 'Oh, I went surfing.' And, 'Oh, we went to a berry farm.' So, it just looks like my things, compared to theirs, are very inadequate. I also try avoiding those questions like what did you do during the holidays or during the weekends. I would prefer them to be asked by one of my other friends that are common coloured or something like that. My friends are always in the study centrum. So, we can relate. Not like I went on a cruise or safari or something like that, you know. Also I think it's difficult for them to talk to me about horse riding and stuff, because I don't know anything about it or something like that, so, yeah."

Feeling like an outcast

Adena was a beautiful, brown skinned woman with dark, brown eyes. Her hair was black but one did not often see her hair as she wore a scarf. She realised that she looked different. "In the beginning of the year people stared at me a lot. People like me and my friends would like dress a skirt with tights under. It's part of my personal preferences and I think the culture in Stellenbosch, not that it doesn't allow it, I think it's not very popular amongst the other people."

“In the beginning of the year my friend asked me, ‘okay, so, why don’t you go take part in the ‘vensters’²⁶(show).’ I told her no, because I will be forced to do that or dress like that or I would have to dance with a male and I don’t agree to do that,” she explained. Her way of dressing was related to who she considered herself to be. “It’s who I am and I think the university is mostly for conformity and stuff. The way I am and the way I think, it’s not conforming. So people look at me and think ‘why are you not like the others?’ So, I think that if I had befriended them, okay, you know, I’ll have to do what they do. If I don’t do what they do, they would look at me strangely and automatically I will be disqualified from, you know, taking part.”

“It makes me feel like an outcast,” she admitted, “I think that maybe I would have preferred to go to another university, because I think that the people there are more real. The person as an individual, their values, their preferences are valued and not only what you’re wearing and how you look. Yeah, maybe I would’ve enjoyed it there. They are more open to people, I think that university is quite diverse and they are used to everyone.”

Dominated by academic stress

Adena’s days started early in the morning. “This week has been very stressful. I have so much to complete and so little time. Sometimes I think about quitting but then I remember what my fate would be if I did - a lifetime in a chain store packing other people’s groceries. So I’ve got to work and I’ve got to work hard. That is the only way to escape poverty and limited opportunities.”

She often went to the campus at seven o’ clock in the morning and would only return home at about midnight. She worked the whole day. Good marks could mean a bursary. Not all her classmates regarded their academic performance so highly. She recalled an annoying conversation she overheard in class. “A girl in my philosophy class remarked to her friends that for the semester test she received 40%. She was not even ashamed to tell anyone that she received such a low mark. I was shocked. I received 69% for that same test and chided myself for not receiving 75%. For me, I have to get excellent marks so that I can receive better bursaries. I’m sure that white girl and others like her don’t care about working hard and passing since their parents are paying for their studies. I don’t think that white people understand what it means

²⁶ A show that forms part of the Maties RAG during which a huge mural is made against a building and the first years perform a short drama with dancing in front of the mural.

to work hard and struggle. For me, it is a life and death situation, for them it is a holiday in Stellenbosch characterised by parties and fun.”

Adena did not take part in many social and extra-mural activities. She explained, “I was scared and was worried that I could fail my first year. I needed to put in extra time. In your first year, you’re just so scared, because everyone tells you it’s going to be difficult and stuff. I’m terrified for the exams and tests and stuff like that, because you don’t know what they’re going to ask. You don’t have a feel for the kind of questions the lecturer is going to ask,” Adena continued, “Getting low marks make me worried. I feel anxious and my body goes into fight or flight mode. I feel scared and my mind conjures up images of what my life would be like if I didn’t have a good education.”

Being a Matie or not?

“I feel part of it. I’m going to my classes and writing my tests, and doing the exams and stuff like that. I do feel that I’m part of the academic system. I mean for me I’m here as a student to learn and stuff like that. I think I’m really incorporating myself and stuff like that; even if I was on the periphery or something like that,” she acknowledged. Adena’s sole purpose was to study, become educated and obtain a degree. She considered anything else as unimportant. “I feel that other things don’t really matter for me, because I’m just here for learning. For me I’m not really concerned about taking part in Stellenbosch culture and being a ‘Matie’. For me it doesn’t really matter. Taking part in all those things, it doesn’t really matter to me, because what I’m here for is primarily to get my degree and stuff like that.”

At the beginning of her first year, she also did not participate in the orientation and the Maties RAG. “I didn’t take part, because I already know where everything is and stuff like that. I was also in a PSO²⁷, but I didn’t go to the meetings that they had. In the beginning of the year I wanted to get settled into the place where I was living. So I think, when I came I think they were already into their first week and stuff like that. When I went home that weekend, I think they had a fun run or something in the beginning of the year. So I couldn’t attend those things. I already had plans for other things. Maybe it would’ve been different if I was in a res or something. I would be forced to do it and stuff like that, but I don’t really like the idea of dancing in front of a crowd or something like that.”

²⁷ A private student organisation

Adena moved on the periphery of the Stellenbosch culture but she did not mind. “I am a student at SU but I am not a Matie.”

I make ends meet

The increase in student fees year after year, as well as general price increases were of great concern to Adena. She put a lot of pressure on herself to get good marks in order to obtain more bursaries. “I’ve got the Stellenbosch bursary of R25000 and another small bursary thing that’s for free. That was R3000. That was for the books. They said that it was all they were going to give me. My mother pays for the rent and allowance. So, it’s not that bad. Hopefully next year, I’ll get more funding based on marks. There aren’t so many bursaries for social science students. Most of it is for engineering, engineering, and engineering. Maybe if the University just recognises me, because there have been other art students that after a semester or after a year, the University gave them, like reduced maybe R5000 of their bursary or something. They deduct what they owe. So, maybe that is also possible. I’m making ends meet, yeah.”

Signing up for Facebook

“Today I signed up for Facebook. I added my friends from school and I felt quite sad when I see that most of my friends from school work at shops or restaurants and are not at university or even a local college. I am so lucky to be at university and even more lucky that it is a prestigious university. I am really lucky.”

Signing up for Facebook made Adena feel anxious. “Perhaps I should remove the Stellenbosch University status. I remember when I was at school and spoke about going to school my peers would often smirk at the idea. In my community; that is the coloured community, people don’t often talk about university or striving for a better life.”

I just withdrew...

Many experiences convinced Adena to continue to work on her own, stay on her own and focus just to complete her studies.

She was standing in a queue to make copies. Behind her was a coloured male waiting for his turn at the copier. At a computer close by was a white student. She

remembered, “I finished printing and this white guy just burst in in front of the coloured guy. I interpreted it as racist and thought oh my word how can you do that?”

She explained another frustrating situation. “I wanted to go out with a few friends last night for a drink at a club in town. We couldn’t go since the club is intolerant of non-white students. I feel so frustrated. I know that I will be able to get in because I am a good looking woman, but my friends who are black and male would not be so lucky.”

“One of my best friends that is doing his master’s complained that people suspected him of stealing a laptop in a completely different office simply because he was black,” Adena sighed. “Another friend told me that in her residence a white girl refused to share a room with a coloured girl. White people are very racist.” These experiences were emotional and hurtful. “I rather just withdraw.”

Unhappy but focused

Adena completed her first year at the end of 2012 and passed four modules with distinction. She is unhappy at SU but grateful for the opportunity to be able to obtain a degree. She plans to graduate with distinction so that she would be able to do her honours degree at another university. She is currently in her second year BA Humanities and continues to work hard.

4.7 The story of Daniel’s journey²⁸

The neighbours were ‘tikkoppe’²⁹

Daniel and his family lived with his grandparents in Sir Lowrys Pass Village a predominantly coloured township before they moved into their own home in Rusthof, a neighbourhood in Strand. At that time, Daniel was in Grade four. The house they moved to was small and he and his father renovated their new house over a period of five years. The Rusthof area was dangerous and burglaries occurred often. Daniel described the neighbours across the street as ‘tikkoppe’ who lived in a shack. They attempted to steal Daniel’s bicycle and his father had to cover the stoep with burglar proofing. The house ended up looking like a jail. He explained, “So then we built a stoep and a little veranda, right? And my dad put a kind of fence around the stoep as well. It is almost like the chicken, crossed-, diamond shaped type of thing, but in front

²⁸ The following two students are Afrikaans speaking. Their quotations were translated to English while their original quotations are indicated in italics in brackets.

²⁹ People using a specific kind of drug called ‘tik’

of it, is an iron gate. A sliding iron thing and another gate. Now it looks like a jail.” *(Toe het ons nou 'n stoep gemaak en 'n afdakkie, né? En my pa het so 'n 'fence' om die stoep gesit daarvoor. Dit is amper soos die hoender, daai kruis, diamant tipe ding, maar voor dit is 'n staal hek. 'n Staal skuifding en nog 'n hek. Nou lyk dit soos 'n tronk.)*

Daniel completed Grade 12 in 2010 at a secondary school about 20 minutes' walk from their home. According to him, nobody knew the location of the school. He said the school was “in ‘die gutters’” *(in the gutters)*. His memories of his secondary school years were filled with resentment. The education at the school was far below par. He recalled, “I had like seven different science teachers throughout those last three years. About the last one, people used to say ‘right, he’s a drunk.’ I don't believe in stories like that, so I was like ‘yeah, you’re talking nonsense.’ Then, one day I was busy working and he came over to me, hanging over me, and I could smell the alcohol on his breath.” *(Ek het soos sewe verskillende onderwysers gehad in Natskei vir daai laaste drie jaar. Die laaste een het mense gesê, ‘right, dis 'n dronklap.’ Ek glo nie in stories nie, ek was van ‘ja, julle praat maar net nonsens.’ Toe eenkeer was ek besig om te werk toe kom hang hy oor my, so 'n drank asem hier oor my.)*

The learners in the school were not motivated to excel. Daniel explained, “And when you get this much, don't worry, you only need to get 22 out of a 100 to pass. That was the mindset of the school. It was just to pass. We basically did nothing.” *(En as jy soveel kry in die toets, moenie worry nie, jy hoef net 22 punte te kry uit 'n 100 uit, om dan te slaag. Dit was die gees in die skool. Dit was net om deur te kom. Ons het basies niks gedoen nie.)* Most of Daniel's school friends were working in supermarkets. He was one of the best learners in his Grade 12 group and felt bitter about the outcome of his secondary education. “Because I am basically the best product that this school could possibly deliver. Yeah, and now I'm supposed to be second year, but I'm first year.” *(Want ek is basies een van die beste produkte wat die skool kon gelewer het. Ja, en ek is nou eerste jaar, maar ek is veronderstel om tweede jaar te wees.)*

Daniel was the first in his family able to go to university. His mother and aunt went to university, but did not complete their studies. He recalled how upset his grandmother was when she realised he was going to study rather than work. “My grandma, she raised us. This is the woman I love the most in the whole world. And my grandma,

she is the most negative about the whole university thing out of everybody. This was what she said; ‘your mom didn't make it, your auntie didn't make it, what makes you think you're going to make it? Go work.’” (*My ouma, sy't ons grootgemaak, die vroumens vir wie ek die liefste is in die hele wêreld. My ouma, sy's die mees negatiefste oor die hele universiteit van almal. Dit was haar woorde; 'jou ma het dit nie gemaak nie, jou auntie het dit nie gemaak nie, wat laat jou dink jy gaan dit maak? Gaan werk.'*) Daniel, however, was adamant that he wanted a better future, “Because why, I wanted to get out!” (*Want because, ek wou uitkom!*)

Research led to SciMathUS

Daniel applied at SU to do occupational therapy. For him there was no other choice than Stellenbosch. He laughed when he admitted, “Stellenbosch is always, it's the best. That's what its name means out there. It's the best. Stellenbosch has just always been there, there was never a plan B. Stellenbosch all the way. I never even knew about a technikon.” (*Stellenbosch is altyd, dis die beste. Dis hoe hulle naam daar buitekant is. Dis die beste. Stellenbosch was net altyd, daar was nooit 'n plan B nie. Stellenbosch all the way. Ek het nooit eers geweet van 'n technikon nie.*) Unfortunately, he was not accepted at SU as he did not meet the entry requirements.

He realised he had to improve his Mathematics and Physical Sciences marks and started searching for possible options. He ended up at SciMathUS in 2011 and still remembered how excited he felt about the programme. “That first day, I was flipping excited!” (*Daai eerste dag, ek was flippen excited gewees!*) He continued, “SciMathUS was the best ever. It taught me how to work. I grew.” (*SciMathUS was die beste ooit. Dit het my geleer werk. Ek het gegroei.*)

During the SciMathUS year, he applied at SU again, this time to do BSc. He also applied for a place in a residence and a NSFAS loan. He was accepted to the BSc extended degree programme (EDP) but did not receive place in a residence. He did receive a NSFAS loan.

No mixing

Since Daniel did not receive a place in residence, he had to commute to campus. The previous year in SciMathUS, he had been commuting and he knew how taxing it was. He desperately needed to stay on campus. At the beginning of his first year, he went to the administrative section to ask for a place in a residence. He explained

what happened, “So, my roommate’s roommate didn’t make it to university and then they needed a coloured guy and because I am coloured, just because of that, I got a place.” *(My kamermaat se kamermaat het dit mos nou nie gemaak vir die universiteit nie en toe het hulle ’n bruin outjie nodig gehad en omdat dat ek bruin is, presies vir daai, het ek toe ’n plek gekry.)*

The housefather called him on the same day to inform him that he can move in. Later that day he arrived at the residence wearing a tracksuit pants and an old T-shirt. He did not have the formal clothes the rest of the first years were wearing. He did not even realise he had to have special clothes. “I wasn’t bothered. Not many things bother me!” *(Ek is min gepla, min dinge pla my!)*

Daniel remembered that no first years were allowed to choose their roommates. He observed that coloured students had coloured roommates, white students had white roommates and black students had black roommates. It made sense to him and he reasoned that “There wasn’t a thing like mixing. You’re already in a new place far away from home. You don’t want extra culture shock on top of that. It’s a culture shock that you get exposed to bit by bit. That’s what I believe. The university also does it like that. It’s not all that extra stuff on top of everything as well. Just get used to everything first. You’re not at home anymore. Then you make friends with other cultures and stuff. They keep their door and their side clean. So, if there’s a case of racism, then you know it’s not because of the mixing.” *(Daar was nie so iets soos gemeng nie. Jy’s nou klaar op ’n nuwe plek weg van die huis af. Jy wil nie nog ekstra kultuurskok ook nog hê nie. Dis ’n kultuurskok waarvan jy geleidelik bewus gemaak word. So glo ek. Die universiteit neem dit ook so aan. Nie daai ekstra ‘stuff’ ook op jou nie. Raak eers gewoond. Jy’s nou weg van die huis af. Dan raak bevriend met kulture van ander soorte en ‘stuff’. Hulle maak hulle deur skoon. Hulle vee hulle kant skoon. So, indien daar mos nou ’n geval van rassisme voorkom, dan weet hulle dis nie as gevolg van die vermenging nie.)*

The stigma of being an EDP student

Daniel experienced frustration during his EDP year. It felt like another year in a bridging programme. He explained, “It makes you feel inferior. My buddies, they don’t even want to tell people they’re doing the EDP. You’re here, but not part of it all.” *(Dit laat mens minderwaardig voel. My tjomies, hulle wil nie eers vir die mense sê hulle doen die VGP nie. Jy’s hieso, maar nie deel van hulle nie.)*

Although he experienced academic pressure, he did not feel like a 'real' student. He had a lot of free time and was not motivated at all. Throughout the year he maintained that he was in control of the work. "Don't worry, I got this." he said. At the end of that year, he failed a module and was not allowed to continue with the course. He re-applied to follow a course in education and was admitted. For the first time he was part of a mainstream course. He felt like a real student with many classes and assignments. Although it added to his stress levels, he loved it. "I feel like a real student. I like the feeling of relief when I had to do lots of work and tests." (*Ek voel soos 'n regte student. Ek like die gevoel van verligting as ek klomp werk en toetse moes doen.*)

Part of being an EDP student was the reality that the number of HEMIS points a student could acquire was not enough to gain re-entrance to residence. Regardless of the fact that Daniel had passed all his modules up to then, he received an email from the primarius of the residence informing him that he did not have enough HEMIS points to re-enter the residence the following year. It was a disheartening experience. He had to go through the process of sending emails, visiting the secretary of the Sciences faculty and explaining the situation to the housefather and primarius. He felt frustrated and inferior. Fortunately, he was re-admitted to the residence after he went through the whole administrative process.

I don't care about 'kamerpunte'

At the end of his first year, Daniel had very few 'kamerpunte' (room points). He acquired few room points for his academic performance as he was in the EDP programme. Furthermore, he did not participate in many activities in the residence. According to him, he did not feel like participating. He said, "I don't worry about that type of thing." (*Ek worry nie oor daai nie.*) Many of the activities were too expensive and did not interest him. "It's too much effort, time and money," (*Daai is te veel moeite, tyd en geld,*) he explained.

Both Daniel and his roommmate ended up having very little 'kamerpunte' and were almost last to choose a room for the following year. Daniel was also concerned about his studies and was hesitant to indicate that he was definitely coming back. They ended up in a room in a noisy section where mostly first years stayed. He stated, "I am happy, no reason to be sad." (*Ek is gelukkig, no reason to be sad.*)

I live on the cake-line!

“Yeah, I’ve never been someone to ask for pocket money, even like, since school. I don’t do it, because I know money can be better spent than on chips and sweets. Yeah, so I never asked my parents. But yes, if I really needed something, like airtime to call my mom, then she pays the money into my account. Yeah, that’s it. But the money I make with ‘deurdiens’³⁰ (door service), is mine. I bought me some speakers with it. Got it from Cash Crusaders for R80. It’s awesome. I made about R700 in the second term by doing ‘deurdiens.’” *(Ja, maar ek is nooit iemand wat sakgeld gevra het nie, like van skool af. Ek doen nie dit nie, want ek weet geld kan beter bestee word as op chips en lekkers. Ja, so, ek het nooit my ma-hulle gevra nie. Maar ja, as ek iets regtig nodig gehad het, soos, ek makeer airtime anders kan ek nie my ma bel nie, dan sit sy net geld in my rekening. Ja, daais al. Maar daai deurdiens geld is myne. Ek het vir my ‘speakers’ gekoop daarvan. By Cash Crusaders gekry vir R80. Dis awesome. Ek skat ek het so R700 die tweede kwartaal gemaak met deurdiens.)*

Daniel’s tuition fees were covered by the NSFAS loan. Cash for daily needs however, was a problem. He realised that he had a lot of spare time and that all the first years had to do ‘deurdiens’. He offered to do ‘deurdiens’ shifts for first years for payment. Daniel also heard that one of the senior students needed someone to collect money in a shuttle he was operating as a service to students on Friday and Saturday evenings. Daniel offered to collect the money and was paid for that as well. With the money he earned he was able to pay for extras he needed. He described his financial situation, “I’ve always lived on the breadline, but now I live on the cake-line.” *(Ek het altyd op die broodlyn gelewe, maar nou lewe ek op die koeklyn.)* A portion of the money he made was used to pay medical bills.

By the time he had to apply for a NSFAS loan for the following year, he was uncertain whether he should. “What if I don’t make it?” *(Wat as ek dit nie maak nie?)* This question was his reason for stalling the application. At the end of his first academic year, he was not able to get his marks, as he still owed R5954.24 to the university.

³⁰ In the residences, first years are expected to sit at the front door for a period of time to call residents whenever they receive visitors. The time period was usually in the evening for two to three hours.

Trips to Tygerberg hospital

Soon after Daniel started the bridging programme, his left eye started giving him problems. “Anyway, that first day of classes, I don’t know how early I woke up that day. I took a taxi, two trains and another taxi and I was two minutes late. At that moment, it hit me. On literally each word, I would see a kind of small dot. It bothered me a lot, but I ignored it, because I assumed it was because of the stress. Exactly a month after that, it just started getting bigger. So I went to the doctor and he had a look. He referred me to the guy who makes the glasses, then they tried to see what’s wrong, but the woman couldn’t see anything. They can’t do anything about it. Now it’s becoming annoying, because I can’t perceive depth so well. So I can’t walk straight. Sometimes I would just get dizzy.” *(Anyway, daardie heel eerste dag van klas, ek weet nie hoe vroeg ek opgestaan het daardie dag nie. Ek het ’n taxi gevat, twee treine, nog ’n taxi en ek was twee minute laat. Dis toe dat daai ding in klap. Letterlik elke woord sien ek daar’s so ’n klein kolletjie. Dit het my so gepla. Ek het dit afgegee aan die stres. Presies ’n maand na daardie het die ding net groter geraak. Toe gaan ek dokter toe en hy’t gekyk. Hy het my verwys na die ou wat die brille gemaak het. Toe het hulle nou probeer kyk, maar daai vrou kon niks gesien het nie. Hulle kan niks daaraan doen nie. Dit raak nou irriterend, want ek kan nie diepte reg percept nie. So, ek kan nie straight loop nie. Somtyds raak ek net lighoofdig.)*

Daniel had to go to Tygerberg hospital once a month to see a doctor. On the days he had a doctor’s appointment he awoke at four o’clock to take the train. It took him a full day in trains, waiting rooms and consultation rooms. After such a busy day, he was exhausted and slept for extended periods. Each such day cost him a full day’s classes and tutorials. He tried to come to terms with the fact that the illness is incurable and since the illness is stress related, he worked hard at managing his stress levels.

Stressful academic schedule takes its toll

Daniel was experiencing stress because of his academic schedule. He was concerned about his health, not only about the effect of stress on his eye, but also on his overall health. He was feeling tired most of the time and just wanted to sleep. “Yeah, if I go to res and just lie down for two minutes, then I’m gone. Afterwards, I wouldn’t feel like I just took a two hour powernap. Then I’m just like ‘take it easy. I have a lot of work, so maybe it’s just a little too much work.’ Or maybe it’s all just too

much and I can't catch up." (*Ja, as ek nou koshuis toe gaan en ek lê net twee minute, dan is ek weg. Ja, dan voel ek nie eers ek het nou twee ure 'gepowernap' nie. Ek probeer nou net, like, 'vat dit kalm. My werk is baie, so dalk is dit net bietjie te baie.' Of miskien is dit alles net bietjie te veel en ek kan nie bykom nie.*)

After admitting how he felt he laughed and maintained, "But it's all OK this weekend I'm going to sleep and sleep!" (*Maar daai is OK, die naweek gaan ek net slaap en slaap!*)

Noisy weekends at home

His family missed him and wanted him home for a weekend. It was, however, difficult for Daniel to study at home. "There isn't any space," (*Daar's nie plek nie,*) he said and continued, "It's always noisy. There are children across the street or down the street that come play on our lawn. Our house is the only one with a little piece of grass in front of it. I don't even know where they come from, but all these young boys come wrestle and play rugby or cricket and make a noise. I get so angry! Then I'm sitting there, trying to study, and I'm thinking, 'whatever.'" (*Daar's heelyd geraas. Daar's kleintjies oorkant die pad of af in pad wat op ons gras kom speel. Ons is die enigste huis wat voor 'n stukkie gras het. En nou kom laaities van ek weet nie waar nie om hier te kom wrestle en rugby speel en krieket speel en raas. Ek vererg my! Dan sit ek net daar en probeer leer en dink, 'whatever'.)*

White people are the dirtiest people you can find... (*Wit mense is die vuilste mense wat jy kry...*)

Daniel had no idea what it meant when his father said white people are dirty. His father explained what he meant. Daniel recalled, "I didn't know what that meant. Then my dad explained it to me. My dad, who doesn't have matric, has been working in construction since I can remember. He built roofs. Yeah, the roof, the most complicated part, he did that. Ever since I can remember, he worked for a boss. Now he would tell me that one moment, the white man would be friendly and talkative, but the moment he sees you outside and you would meet him when he's with his friends, he won't even look at you. He'll work with you, but he'll never let you rise above him. It could even be over, but still, a coloured man doesn't progress higher than a specific point. I kind of understand it, that skin colour is still important in the workplace. It's just one of those things..." (*Ek het nog self nie 'n idee wat dit beteken nie. Toe het my pa dit vir my verduidelik. My pa, hy het nie matriek nie, hy is al sedert*

ek kan onthou in die boubedryf. Hy het dakke gebou. Ja, die dak, die mees ingewikkeldste ding het hy gedoen, self. Nog van al die jare af werk hy vir 'n baas. Nou toe sê hy vir my die wit man sal nou saam met jou gesellig wees, maar dan kom dit daar buite waar hy nou vir jou sien, jy hom nou ontmoet voor sy vriende, dan sal hy nie eers na jou kyk nie. Hy sal saam met jou werk, maar hy sal nooit toelaat dat jy bo hom kom nie. Dit kan al verby wees, maar dis nog steeds 'n bruin mens kom nie hoër as daardie nie. Ek verstaan dit soort van, daai ding van as dit by die werk kom is die vel nog steeds daar. Dis maar een van daai dinge...)

Daniel wished he did not have such an experience, but he had. "But then I got to res and all the seniors were like 'you have to learn how to greet us.' And I'm like 'OK, that's not a huge thing to ask of us.' And then you greet them at the res and you see the same person at the tennis courts and he would just look at me. It went on like that for months. Even now, he looks the other way, even if I say 'hey' to him, then he just keeps on walking. So I think that's what he means in terms of being dirty. Initially I didn't want to believe it was true. Then I'd think by myself, 'wow, this community still has a long way to go.' Two generations need to pass before we cannot only forget about our past, but accept it." *(Maar nou toe ek by die koshuis kom is almal die seniors mos nou van 'julle moet leer om te groet.' En ek's van, 'OK, dis nie 'n groot ding om van ons te vra nie.' En dan groet jy daai persoon by die koshuis en dan sien jy daai selfde persoon tussen die tennisbane, dan sal hy my aankyk. En dan so het dit aangegaan vir maande. Nog steeds kyk hy net ander pad, selfs as ek vir die ou sê 'hey,' dan sal hy net aanloop. So, ek dink daai is wat hy bedoel in terme van vuil wees. Aanvanklik wou ek nie gehad het dit moet waar wees nie. Dan dink ek by myself, 'wow, ons het nog 'n lang pad as 'n gemeenskap om te travel.' Twee generasies moet uitsterwe voor ons nie net kan vergeet van die verlede nie, maar dit aanvaar.)*

Matie community?

Daniel did not know whether he belonged to the Matie community or not because he did not know what it entailed. "Seeing that I'm in Matieland, I'm studying here, I am a Matie. I don't know what it means to be a Matie." *(Siende dat ek in Matieland is, ek leer hier, is ek 'n Matie. Ek weet nie wat dit beteken om 'n Matie te wees nie.)* He considered himself a spectator rather than a participant. "I don't do communities. It's just a personal thing, like, I'm more of a spectator. I don't participate, I sit here and watch and that's how I learn. Yeah, that's it!" *(Ek doen nie gemeenskappe nie. Dis*

net 'n persoonlike ding, like, ek is meer van 'n toeskouer. Ek neem nie deel nie, ek sit hier en kyk en dis hoe ek leer. Ja, dis daai!)

On track to reach his dream

He is continuing his studies and is dreaming of becoming a teacher and building his own school, a good school. Daniel is currently a first year BEd student and still lives in the male residence with a coloured roommate.

4.8 The story of Karen's journey

A wrong choice

Karen grew up in the township in Vredendal. Both her parents were 19 when she was born. As a result, she grew up among her mother's brothers and sisters in her grandparents' house. After Karen was born, her mother had to work and never had the opportunity to study. Karen seldom saw her father and did not have any relationship with him.

Karen attended a Catholic primary school, which she considered a good school. During her Grade seven year, she was head girl of the school. She had a choice between three secondary schools. She explained, "I could have gone to the so-called Model C school, or I could have gone to the secondary³¹ school, or to the Catholic, like a private school, for girls. Then I chose to go with my friends, because I was scared to go to a new, unknown school. And I usually say I believe that everything happens for a reason, but that was the wrong decision for me." (*Ek kon na die sogenaamde model C skool toe gegaan het of ek kon na die sekondêre skool toe gegaan het of ek kon na 'n Katolieke, soos 'like' 'n privaat meisieskool toe gegaan het. En toe kies ek om saam met my vriendinne te gaan, want ek was te bang gewees om na 'n vreemde plek toe te gaan. En ek kan sê ek glo alles gebeur vir 'n rede, maar dit was die verkeerde keuse vir my gewees.*) Although the school had enough resources, they were not used by the teachers. Karen described how the teachers would often just read the work from the text book. In her Grade 12 year her two best friends fell pregnant. Very few of the learners in the school attempted to continue studying after school. "To give you an idea of what our marks looked like, I think I got 29% for Physical Sciences. That is basically what everyone's marks looked like. Not many went on to study further. No, you either go to college or go

³¹ The term 'secondary school' was used to refer to former non-white schools.

work. Everybody still thinks that a college and a university is the same thing.” (*Om jou ’n idee te gaan van ons punte, ek dink ek het 29% gekry vir Fisiese Wetenskap. Dit is hoe almal se punte gelyk het in my klas basies. Nie baie het verder geswot nie. Nee, jy gaan kollege toe of werk. Almal dink nog steeds ’n kollege en ’n universiteit is dieselfde ding.*)

Karen was convinced she wanted to further her education, but her Grade 12 marks failed her. She applied at one university to do a BA course, but she knew that it was not what she really wanted to do. Her dream was to study Sciences at Stellenbosch. Some of her friends told her that they had applied at SciMathUS and she decided to do the same and hoped for the best.

I just wanted to go home

Karen was accepted to the bridging programme in 2010. For the first three months, she was stressed and just wanted to go home. She did however realise that SciMathUS was her only chance to enter SU. In the end, she was glad she did the bridging programme. “Everything I learned about Physical Sciences, I learned from SciMathUS. I stood a chance to get accepted into Stellenbosch. I was happy!” (*Alles wat ek geleer het omtrent Fisiese Wetenskappe het ek in SciMathUS geleer. Ek het ’n kans gestaan om in te kom by Stellenbosch. Ek was bly!*)

Nothing less than Stellenbosch

Karen was not planning to settle for anything less than Stellenbosch. She recalled, “I’m the first one in our family to go to university. My goal was Stellenbosch. Yes, I wouldn’t have settled for anything else. I don’t know. I come from a very Afrikaans town and background; I don’t speak much English. Even in my English class we spoke Afrikaans, So I was a little bit scared of English. I considered UCT, but then I thought, no. When I did a bit of research on Stellenbosch, I liked what I saw and learned that it had a good reputation. So then I thought if I want to go study, I at least want to go study at the best. So yeah, that’s why I chose Stellenbosch.” (*Ek’s die eerste een in ons familie wat universiteit toe kom. My doel was Stellenbosch. Ja, ek sou nie ‘gesettle’ het vir enige iets anders nie. Ek weet nie. Ek kom uit ’n baie Afrikaanse dorpie en agtergrond; praat nie baie Engels nie. Selfs in my Engelse klas het ons Afrikaans gepraat, so ek was ’n bietjie bang gewees vir Engels. Ek het UCT oorweeg, maar toe dink ek nee. Ek het ’n bietjie navorsing gedoen oor Stellenbosch en ek het gehou van hoe dit lyk en ook Stellenbosch het ’n goeie reputasie gehad.*)

Toe dink ek weer as ek wil gaan swot wil ek darem by die beste gaan swot. So, ja dis hoekom Stellenbosch.)

After the SciMathUS year, Karen applied to study Geology at SU. She was accepted for the course in 2011, obtained a NSFAS loan and was allocated a place in a women's residence. It seemed like her life was on track.

Challenging studies

Karen was passionate about her career choice. She loved what she was doing. She affirmed, "But all that I can say is that I can't see myself studying anything else. I get a smile on my face when I see a rock. Geology is for me and I will make a success of my studies, even if others may doubt me." (*Maar al wat ek kan sê, is dat ek my nie enige iets anders kan sien swot nie. Ek kry 'n 'smile' op my gesig as ek 'n klip sien. Geologie is vir my en ek sal 'n sukses hiervan maak, al twyfel ander!*) Despite her love for the course, stress was taking its toll.

Karen was very petite. She continuously experienced headaches, which she ascribed to stress. "See, I used to get a lot of migraines, but I kind of outgrew them. Nowadays I get spike pains again. Sometimes it feels like I get some kind of attack and then it goes away and comes back again. I usually am very stressed, then like yesterday I felt it in my ear and in my one eye. So I need to go see someone, but up to now I've only been to the pharmacy. Like pain medication does not help at all and sleeping pills have no effect. So I think it's a little bit bad," (*Kyk, ek het baie migraines gekry, maar toe het ek dit soort van ontgroeï. Nou kry ek weer baie 'spike' pyn. Dit voel somtyds of ek 'n 'attack' kry en dan gaan dit weer weg en dan kom dit weer terug. Ek is gewoonlik baie gespanne en dan soos gister het dit in my oor in en in die een oog in gekom. So, ek moet iemand gaan sien, maar sover het ek nog net apteek toe gegaan. Soos pynpille help glad nie en slaappille maak niks aan my nie. So, ek dink dis 'n bietjie 'bad',*) she explained and continued, "the whole of the first week of class I had these pains. The second week I was sick for the entire week. I had the flu. I'm still trying to catch up what I missed then, but the work just keeps getting more." (*die hele eerste week van klas het ek die heel week pyn gehad. Die tweede week was ek heel week siek. Ek het heel week griep gehad. Ek probeer nog 'opcatch' op daai werk, maar die werk raak net al meer.*)

Karen was struggling to cope with the pressure of the academic workload. During the second year, she had to redo some first year modules, which added to her workload. At one stage, she considered postponing some modules. "I don't know when I'm going to find time for all the studying. So I was thinking I should maybe postpone Physics." (*Ek weet nie waar ek gaan tyd kry vir al die swot nie. So, ek het gedink miskien moet ek maar Fisika uitstel.*) Some nights she worked through the night just to keep up with the pace. "One night I pulled an all-nighter, I literally worked a night to get it done and it I still didn't get it right." (*Ek het een aand deurnag, letterlik 'n aand gewerk om dit klaar te kry en toe kry ek dit nog steeds nie reg nie.*) She was starting to feel dispirited.

She furthermore realised that in order to be able to continue her studies, she had to pass certain modules. "If I don't pass Geology, I can't continue my studies next year." (*As ek nie Geologie slaag nie, kan ek nie volgende jaar voortgaan nie.*) Her pass rate also influenced her NSAFS loan. She had to pass a number of modules for the loan to be extended to the following year. She was very concerned and admitted, "All this studying is challenging!" (*Die swottings is 'challenging'!*)

Residence nightmares

The first year in the women's residence was a nightmare for Karen. The section she stayed in contributed to the fact that she hated the experience. She remembered, "They are a group of friends that all aimed to get into the same section. They also are, I'd have to say, very social. And if you want to be friends with them, you kind of need to conform and be like them and do what they do and I don't do that. They let you feel like an outsider. It didn't bother me, like I wouldn't throw away my morals to fit into a group. That kind of sucked!" (*Hulle is 'n groep vriende wat almal vir een seksie geskiet het. Hulle is baie sosiaal, kan ek maar sê. En as jy wil vriende met hulle wees, moet jy soort van 'conform' en soos hulle wees en ek doen nie dit nie. Hulle laat voel jou soos 'n 'outsider'. Dit het my nie gepla nie, soos ek sal nie my 'morals' en my goed weggooi om te pas by die groep nie. Dit het 'gesuck' nogals!*) She continued, "Our group that year also had a lot of girls that didn't want to make friends outside their cliques that they made at the beginning; like little groups. It's either, status, culture or race." (*Ons jaargroep is ook van die wat nie baie meng nie. Hul het aan die begin so half klieks gemaak; soos groepies. Dis either status, 'culture' of ras.*)

First years were allocated roommates with similar interests and personalities. Unfortunately, Karen's original roommate at the beginning of her first year did not turn up. She was put in a room with another coloured girl whose roommate also did not turn up. The combination did not work well. "You have to fill in a form saying what you would like in a roommate. But my roommate didn't pitch and last year's roommate's roommate didn't pitch either and then they placed us together randomly. She had lots of friends and there were people in our room constantly. I just wanted peace and quiet." (*Jy moet 'n vorm invul wat sê wat jy soek in 'n kamermaat, maar my kamermaat het nie opgedaag nie en verlede jaar se kamermaat se kamermaat het nie opgedaag nie en toe plaas hulle net vir ons 'randomly' bymekaar. Sy't baie vriende gehad en daar was gedurig mense in ons kamer. Ek wou net rustigheid hê.*)

Karen explained why she specifically was allocated a coloured roommate. "They usually place you according to race." (*Gewoonlik sit hulle vir jou by ras in die koshuis.*) She considered this as a step backwards. "I thought it was kind of like a move backwards. The res and campus focuses on transformation and moving forward all the time. But last year, or the year before, there was a case where a girl literally, it was a white girl paired with a coloured girl, and she just refused to sleep in the same room as the girl. When the res was empty during RAG, she slept in an empty room, because she refused. And after that time, they decided to avoid this; now they rather place you according to race." (*Ek het gedink dis amper soos agteruitgaan tipe ding. Die koshuis en die kampus is die hele tyd van transformasie en vorentoe beweeg. Maar verlede jaar of die vorige jaar was daar 'n geval gewees waar 'n meisie letterlik, dit was 'n wit meisie wat met 'n bruin meisie gepaar is, en sy het geweier om saam met die meisie te slaap in die kamer. Toe die koshuis leeg was tydens jool, het sy in 'n leë kamer gaan slaap, want sy het geweier. En na daai tyd het hulle besluit om dit te vermy; nou's dit liewer ras.*)

A traumatic social event

Many of the events in the residence involved socialising with male residences and drinking events. She did not find that appealing and more often than not, did not participate.

One of the social events Karen had to attend in her first year involved such a social with a male residence. Her eyes shone with tears as she described the event, "Now you're standing in the front row, facing each other. Then the HK says 'socialise now.'

The guy walks past you towards some white girl behind you and they leave you. The guys actually have to go get a girl. Then all of us coloured girls are just standing there, and there was one Indian girl, and nobody comes to us. It wasn't nice. It's not a good experience. There would always be two, maybe three coloured guys, then our whole big group of coloured girls would go sit with those three guys. Because they would actually be the only people, those three guys, that would actually try to accommodate us." (*Jy staan nou voor in die ry en moet dan voor mekaar staan. Dan gaan die HK sê 'skakel nou.' Die ou loop verby jou na iemand toe wat agter jou staan wat wit is en dan los hulle jou. Die ouens moet 'actually' een meisie gaan haal. Dan staan al ons kleurling meisies, en daar was een meisie wat 'Indian' was, en niemand gaan na ons toe nie. Dit was nie lekker gewees nie. Dis nie 'n goeie 'experience' nie. Daar sal altyd twee, miskien drie kleurling ouens wees, dan gaan ons hele groot groep kleurling meisies net by daai drie ouens gaan sit. Want dis 'actually' die enigste mense, daai drie ouens, wat 'actually' moeite doen met ons.*)

Karen acknowledged further, "That's why, often when there are 'skakels'³², I wouldn't see any coloured girls go along. Because we all have that experience. It's true. You just can't win. I could be in the same class as that person and he would still walk past me towards someone he doesn't know." (*Dis hoekom, baie keer as daar skakels is, sal ek sien, die kleurlingmeisies sal nooit gaan nie. Want almal het daai 'experience.'* *Dit is so. Julle kan nie wen nie. Ek kan met daai persoon in 'n klas wees, dan gaan hy nog steeds verby my loop en na iemand toe gaan wat hy nie ken nie.*) The two years in the residence left Karen feeling depressed and isolated.

Mentoring sessions

In the residences, mentors were available to the first years. Small groups of girls had meetings with one mentor. "All the first years had one specific mentor in a section. But it was more like, they spoke about everything except how they really were doing. I didn't actually fit in, or feel like I fit in. So I would sit there and listen to everybody while I would just wait for time to pass," (*Al die eerstejaars het een spesifieke mentor in 'n seksie gehad. Maar dit was meer van, as jy by die mentor gekom het, het hulle oor alles gepraat behalwe van hoe dit regtig met jou gaan. Ek het nie eintlik in gepas of gevoel ek pas in nie. Dan sit ek maar net daar en luister na almal en dan wag ek maar vir die tyd om om te gaan,*) Karen explained.

³² A social event with a male residence

“Many of the people have very strong personalities. Sometimes they would force their opinions on the rest of us. I am a very relaxed, quiet person. A lot of the kids, especially the Magriet³³ girls, were head girls, or they excelled in sport or class. So many of them get into that res with strong personalities. They would steamroller you. Yeah they don’t take you into account. Yes, in that regard I think I, it was a bit difficult for me to adapt.” (*Baie van die mense het baie sterk persoonlikhede. Hulle druk somtyds hulle opinies op jou af. Ek is ’n baie rustige, stil mens. Baie van die kinders, veral Magriet meisies, was baie hoofdogters gewees of uitgeblink in sport of akademie. So baie kom in daai koshuis in met baie sterk ‘personalities’ en so. Hulle ‘steamroller’ jou. Ja, hulle neem jou nie in ag nie. Ja, so op daai opsig dink ek het ek, was dit vir my bietjie moeilik gewees om aan te pas.*) Karen did not find these meetings helpful.

I didn’t apply for residence again

Karen had a white roommate in her second year. “My roommate of this year actually was white, but it wasn’t because she was white. I saw for myself that the girls in the res didn’t socialise with her. She’s a bit different. So she’s a bit of a loner.” (*My kamermaat van hierdie jaar is ‘actually’ wit, maar dit is nie dat sy wit is nie. Ek het gesien selfs die wit meisies in die koshuis meng nie met haar nie. Sy is bietjie anders. So, sy’s bietjie ’n ‘loner’.*)

At the end of her first year Karen did not choose a roommate or a specific room. She never filled in any forms to indicate her ‘kamerpunte’ (room points). She was not planning to come back to the residence after her first year. Her plans did not work out and she had no other choice than to stay in the residence for another year. “So I asked if I could return and they just randomly placed me with her.” (*Ek het maar gevra of ek kan terugkom en toe sit hulle my maar net ‘randomly’ saam met haar.*)

More divided than ever

As part of her Geology course, Karen had to go on a fieldtrip to the West Coast. “I realise now that next week is a holiday week and then I won’t have any time to catch up on my work, since I’m going on a field trip.” (*Ek besef nou dat volgende week is vakansie en dan daai week het ek glad nie tyd om my werk op te ‘catch’ nie, want ek gaan mos nou op die ‘fieldtrip’.*) The trip entailed camping and doing practical work in

³³ Pseudonym for the name of the residence

the field. Karen had to get hold of camping equipment and hiking boots. She was concerned about the cost of everything she had to buy as well as the fact that she would not be able to catch up on her academic work. She said, “So, I don’t know when I’ll be able to make time for everything. I have some of the things. It’s basically clothes and stuff. Much of it we get from the department. Yeah, so I basically only need clothes, money, food and then yes, a sleeping bag and so on.” (*So, ek weet nie waar ek gaan tyd maak vir alles nie. Ek het van die goed. Dis ‘basically’ klere en goed. Baie van die goed kry ons by die departement. Ja, so ek het ‘basically’ net klere, geld, kos en dan ja, slaapsak en so aan nodig.*) Although she felt concerned and stressed, she assured herself, “Everything’s cool.” (*Dit is alles cool.*)

The fieldtrip went well and she enjoyed the hands on work. There was a problem though. Karen explained that the idea of the fieldtrip was also to build relationships among the students. She experienced just the opposite. “We didn’t bond. Before the fieldtrip, the whole idea was that we could bond. The fieldtrip actually divided us more, because during the camp, there were many cliques and the guys drank a lot. Some of them also do drugs. So, I can’t learn or work with people like that, because it’s not what I am like.” (*Ons het nie gebond nie. Die hele idee was, dat voor die ‘fieldtrip’, dat ons kan bond. Die ‘fieldtrip’ het ons actually meer ‘divided’ gemaak, want op die kamp was daar baie kliks en baie ouens drink verskriklik baie. Sommige gebruik dwelms ook. So, ek kan nie, ek kan nie met sulke mense leer nie, want dit is nie hoe ek is nie.*) She was disillusioned after the trip.

Karen remembered that their Geology class started a social club where the students could get to know each other. “They had like two or three social events. But then it’s a certain group of students who are friends already and they normally do things they like. Not always in consideration of what other people might like.” (*Hulle het soos twee, drie ‘social events’ gehou. Maar dan is dit ‘n sekere groepie wat al klaar vriende is en hulle doen ‘normally’ goed wat hulle van hou. Nie altyd in ‘consideration’ van wat die ander mense van hou nie.*)

Although Karen loved the Stellenbosch setting, she did not take part in the activities on campus and does not feel part of the SU community. “But I don’t know, it’s not for me. I think I spoke to a friend of mine about it the other week, like we have to be more social, but it’s difficult. People will speak to you in class today, then when he sees you on campus, he simply ignores you. I hate it so much and don’t like the way

people are treating me. It would be the white students in the class that treat me like that or yes, even in the res.” (*Maar, ek weet nie, dis nie vir my nie. Ek dink ek en my vriendin het nou die week daaroor gepraat, soos ons moet meer sosiaal wees, maar dis moeilik. Mense sal vandag met jou in klas praat, dan sal hy jou op kampus sien en jou net ignoreer. Ek haat dit verskriklik en hou nie van hoe die mense my behandel nie. Dit sal die wit studente wees in die klas wat dit met my doen of ja, selfs in die koshuis ook.*)

Struggling to see

Karen discovered that some of the headaches she was having was because she needed glasses. She had her eyes tested and spectacles were prescribed for her. The problem was that her biological father had to pay for the glasses. She explained, “My dad needs to pay for it. And I don't know, he always has some kind of problem. He needs money. We need a small sum and my mom is the breadwinner and with her job, she doesn't actually have medical aid.” (*My pa moet betaal vir dit. En ek weet nie, hy het altyd 'n probleem. Hy het 'n tekort aan geld. Ons kort 'n klein bedrag en my ma is die enigste broodwinner en met haar 'job' het sy nie eintlik medies nie.*) Karen desperately needed the glasses as her headaches and poor eyesight influenced her studies. She just had to wait until her father could gather the money.

I don't actually worry

“I don't actually worry about money. Like at home, I never actually had an allowance, because I don't actually worry. So I'm all right.” (*Ek 'worry' nie eintlik oor geld nie. Soos by die huis, ek het nooit eintlik 'n 'allowance' gehad nie, want ek 'worry' nie eintlik nie. So, ek's 'all right!'*) Karen asserted that she needed little money. Her mother provided her pocket money. She said, “It's just like for some things. If say, maybe in res I have to pay for something, or when I go out for a meal with my friends. It never lasts long. Yeah, sometimes I don't have any money and I have to wait and then she sends me some money again. I'm never like, completely broke, but it's just very little, and since I eat my meals at res, I don't actually worry.” (*Dis net soos vir iets, as miskien in die koshuis moet geld gee of as ek wil gaan uiteet saam met vriende. Dit hou nie lank nie. Ja, en dan somtyds is ek sonder geld en dan moet ek wag en dan stuur sy weer vir my geld. Ek is nooit soos 'completely' sonder geld nie, maar dit is net baie min en omdat ek by die koshuis eet, 'worry' ek nie eintlik nie.*)

Karen's studies were funded by NSFAS. The financial scheme paid her tuition, lodging, food and books. She just had to make sure she passed her modules in order to keep the loan. She explained how she understood the NSFAS loan. "If you pass say a certain percentage of your modules, then that percentage gets converted into a bursary and the rest you have to pay back. If you don't pass, they give you another chance. You can still like prove yourself if you improve your marks, they help you, if you discontinue your studies, then you have to give the money back." (*As jy miskien 'n sekere persentasie van jou modules slaag dan, daai persentasie word omgeskakel in 'n beurs en die res moet jy dan terugbetaal. As jy nie deurkom nie, hulle gee jou nog 'n kans. Jy kan nog soos jou bewys deur as jy verbeter, dan help hulle jou, maar as jy opskop, dan moet jy alles vir hulle teruggee.*)

An uncertain future

Karen did not pass all her modules at the end of her first year. She was provisionally funded by NSFAS on condition she passed all the modules during her second year. Her second year proved to be very challenging and although she passed seven of the twelve modules she studied, she was not funded again to register for her third year. She had no back-up funds or anybody who could help her. She could not continue with her third year in 2013.

Karen is currently at home in Vredendal. She hopes that somehow she would be able to acquire funds to continue her studies in 2014.

4.8 Conclusion

The narratives of the seven participants' in this study were presented in this chapter. The stories revealed the experiences of the students over the varying durations of their undergraduate studies. Some had been exposed to the environment for only one post-SciMathUS year, while others for five years. For each of the participants their experiences appeared to be real and their perceptions of them shaped their daily living on the SU campus. The next chapter details the analysis and discussion of the stories within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model.

CHAPTER FIVE UNCOVERING STORIES

*To live the full life one must have the courage to bear
responsibility of the needs of others...*

Aung San Suu Kyi

5.1 Introduction

The higher education (HE) student population has diversified because of a world-wide impetus to increase participation in HE for disadvantaged, non-traditional students. In order to increase access to HE for historically disadvantaged population groups alternative access routes exist of which the SciMathUS Bridging Programme (Science and Mathematics at the University of Stellenbosch) in this study is but an example. The educationally disadvantaged students entering Stellenbosch University (SU) via SciMathUS form part of this diversified population of students.

HE institutions have been successful in providing access to many non-traditional students, but less successful in attaining equity in graduate output (Petersen, Louw, & Dumont, 2009). Educationally disadvantaged students, being part of this group of non-traditional students, have obtained access to HE but are struggling to succeed. They face many challenges during their undergraduate years and struggle to become part of the academic practice.

Seven former SciMathUS students narrated their experiences at SU, a historically white university (HWU), which was still predominantly white and Afrikaans speaking at the time of the study. Their stories revealed unique experiences, which are discussed in this chapter within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (discussed in Chapter two) in an attempt to answer the research questions:

- What are the major challenges that educationally disadvantaged students face in a predominantly white, Afrikaans university?
- What do their stories reveal about their functioning within the university?

I discuss the findings from the narratives. This is followed by the limitations, conclusions and implications of the study and the chapter ends with recommendations for further research and practice.

5.2 Findings from the students' narratives

The analysis of the data involved two processes (discussed in section 3.8) namely 1) the process of narrative analysis and 2) a thematic analysis of the narratives. The narratives, as presented in Chapter four, were the result of the process of narrative analysis. The findings presented in this section are the result of the thematic analysis of the narratives. In section 5.2.1, I present the ecology of educationally disadvantaged students at SU in order to explicate the themes in section 5.2.2 from an ecological perspective. I drew on data from the narratives in Chapter four, the interview data, the journals as well as conversations I had with the students via social media to provide a complete picture of the students' ecologies. The voices of the students support the findings.

5.2.1 The ecology of educationally disadvantaged students at SU

I describe the ecology of educationally disadvantaged students at SU in terms of the person-process-context-time (PPCT) elements of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model.

a) Person

The person elements of the educationally disadvantaged students in this study influenced their interpersonal interactions and resulting student experiences at SU.

1) Developmentally instigative characteristics of the students

Themba

Themba described himself as a social person. "Socially, I'm very social. So I knew a lot of people from res..."

Thandi

Coming from a culture where her mother had the final say about her whereabouts, Thandi was dependent and not used to taking responsibility for herself. "The mother of the house in our culture should be the reference."

John

John was inquisitive and motivated, but preferred to be on his own as he found that "it's not easy for me to move into the social group."

Asanda

Asanda was a motivated girl who persevered despite difficult circumstances. "I studied like crazy and passed my tests really well." Coping with an institutional

culture where being social was important in itself posed challenges; she described herself as “a not very social person, so it doesn’t bother me.”

Adena

Adena was strong-willed and determined to make a success of her studies despite challenges. She exclaimed, “So I’ve got to work and I’ve got to work hard. That is the only way to escape poverty and limited opportunities.”

Daniel

Daniel was motivated to succeed in HE despite his families doubt, because “I wanted to get out!”

Karen

Karen was a shy girl who preferred “peace and quiet.”

The developmentally instigative characteristics of the students influenced their interactions in the campus micro- and mesosystems.

2) Background and socio-economic status (SES) of the family

Themba, Thandi, John and Asanda lived in townships – Soshanguve, Gugulethu, Katlehong, Khayelitsha – where mostly black people lived, while Daniel, Karen and Adena came from areas – Rusthof, Vredendal, Mitchell’s Plain – where mostly coloured people lived.

Thandi, John and Asanda’s parents were unemployed and they struggled financially. Thandi said, “There were days when we would go to bed without food” and John, “at the time at home it didn’t go well financially”. Since Themba’s father passed away, his mother was the sole breadwinner and they sometimes struggled financially. He mentioned, “It’s kind of challenging for her, being the only parent, having to pay fees here.” Similar to Themba’s mother, Karen’s mother was the only breadwinner as her father was not part of her life. They were use to not having much money and they made ends meet. “I never actually had an allowance.” Daniel’s parents were both working but they struggled financially. Daniel seldom asked them for pocket money, as he knew “money can be better spent than on chips and sweets.” Adena’s parents were both employed, but growing up she remembered, “We didn’t have a lot of money, but I didn’t, I didn’t think that there was anything wrong, because I was taught that it was how it’s supposed to be.”

3) Being a first-generation student

Themba's parents, as well as Adena's mother, studied at UNISA after they started working. All the other students were first-generation students. Their parents and families were not able to provide them with knowledge about what to expect at university.

4) Language proficiency in either English or Afrikaans

Afrikaans was Daniel and Karen's home language, Adena's second language and a third language to Themba, Asanda, and John. To Thandi Afrikaans was a fourth language. English was Adena's home language and a second language to all the other students. Except for Daniel and Karen, the students entered a university where they mostly had to communicate in their second or third languages.

5) Rural or urban environment

Themba, Thandi, John, Asanda, Daniel and Adena lived in urban environments, while Karen came from a rural area. These environments differed hugely from what they encountered in Stellenbosch.

6) Academic preparedness

Themba's parents sent him to schools outside of their township which could better prepare him for university. The rest of the students attended schools in their townships, which they felt did not prepare them for HE. Thandi mentioned,

I'm attending the same classes as advantaged students... I felt it was a bit unfair, but at the same time it also motivated me to work towards becoming a better person so that one day I can also look back and say I've worked and I achieved this on my own... I just had to raise my bar up a bit.

John said, "where I grew up you worry this kind of kids are smarter than us, because they come from expensive schools...I felt like I needed to, to do more to come to a level where I maintained a standard that other students had." Daniel described his secondary school as being "in 'die gutters'" (in the gutters) and "the mindset of the school...was just to pass. We basically did nothing."

7) Racial group status

Themba, Thandi, John and Asanda were black students, Daniel and Karen were coloured students and Adena was from a coloured-Indian origin. In the SU context

where 65,5% of the total student cohort were white (Eygelaar, 2013) they were part of minority groups.

The students perceived 'white' to have a higher status than 'black' did. John said, "I didn't want to go to WITS or UJ, because it's mostly, I'd say it's populated by blacks, and it's still unstable." Themba had a similar perception. "They're [his friends] always striking, those people. I would die. I would die. I don't want stupid things like that. It's really stupid. It's really stupid." This perception was supported by messages they received from fellow white students as Thandi explained, "I think white people think black people are incompetent... The white student would just do everything"

8) Exposure to different races

Themba was exposed to different races in the multiracial schools he attended. Thandi, John and Asanda had very little exposure to white people before they came to Stellenbosch. Thandi remembered how she felt when she arrived at SU, "oh my word, it's just white people here" and John recalled, "So, I had no interaction with white people. It was quite an experience. I was also scared yeah." Daniel, Karen and Adena had limited exposure to different races and chose to function within their own racial groups as Karen explained, "I could have gone to the secondary school, or to the Catholic, like a private school, for girls. Then I chose to go with my friends, because I was scared to go to a new, unknown school." Adena revealed her limited exposure, "I was not exposed to a lot of white people...all of my teachers were coloured."

b) Process

The student experience, according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, depended on the reciprocal and dynamic processes in which the students were involved. The person elements, discussed in 5.2.1.a, as well as the physical, social and symbolic features of the ecological environment, following in 5.2.1.c, shaped these processes. The seven students in this study entered SU with perceptions about themselves as well as preconceived ideas about the university environment. They perceived themselves as inferior and underprepared and the features of the microsystems did not encourage increasingly complex interactions between the students and their peer groups in the academic, residential or social microsystems.

In the academic microsystems the students refrained from interactions as they felt uncertain about themselves and were afraid of being humiliated. John reflected on his limited interactions in the classroom, “I think I’m still scared, afraid to put my hand up to give the right answer; sometimes the fear of being wrong.” Adena acknowledged the same fear, “I think educational wise, maybe being afraid to make a comment or asking a question or something like that.”

The students experienced the academic contexts as inhibiting and although they were struggling academically, they chose to function on their own instead of seeking assistance from mentors, lecturers or peers. Themba felt, “No, academically I just did it in my room; all by myself, all the time. That’s what I did. I didn’t really have a study group.” Despite experiencing her studies as challenging, Thandi convinced herself, “Academics is okay. It’s just, I have to plan like how I’m going to go about my studies. I’m trying to cover, like spend an hour on each subject daily, so I work hard.” Daniel brushed any concerns about his studies away, “Don’t worry, I got this.”

The language barrier limited some students’ interactions in the academic contexts and negatively influenced their student experiences. The Microbiology 354 class posed challenging to Asanda as the lecturer spoke mostly Afrikaans. She shared her frustration, “I’m hating that class, I’m really hating that class. I can’t afford to fail it. I’m thinking of speaking to him [the lecturer].” Asanda did not contact the lecturer and Microbiology 354 was the only module she failed in 2012.

The five students residing in university residences experienced similar inhibiting traits in their residential microsystems as in the academic microsystems that limited their interactions. None of the five students participated in enough residence activities to gain sufficient ‘room points’ to choose a room for the following year. Their reaction to this revealed how they chose to function within these inhibiting microsystems. They all brushed the fact aside by saying that they ‘did not want to choose a room’, ‘were not socially inclined’ and therefore did not care to participate in activities or ‘did not care’ about any of ‘it’.

John and Adena’s residential microsystems were exceptions as they purposefully chose settings where they felt at home. Their residential microsystems formed ecological niches favourable for interactions of their choice and led to positive experiences. John explained, “In terms of at the res the space of privacy is limited

and I also wanted to avoid being influenced... I was not ready for it. I think I need my own private space” and Adena explained her choice,

I like living in Idas Valley. We are a good small family, because it's only a few of us...It's private and I can cook my own food. I don't necessarily like a lot of people around me. In res it's noisy and people are in and out of your room and I don't like that kind of stuff.

The social context left the students with similar perceptions. Karen's interactions with her peers were limited, as she perceived them to be inconsiderate to the needs of all the students attending the social events.

They had like two or three social events. But then it's a certain group of students who are friends already and they normally do things they like. Not always in consideration of what other people might like.

John limited his interactions in the social context as he struggled to adapt to the new environment.

For me, it takes time to get along with friendships. Especially people where we have more differences; in terms of background, in terms of life, in terms of activities that we do daily, so, it, it, I think that's why; it's not easy for me to move into the social group.

Adena preferred her “common coloured” friends as she could relate to them and although Themba described himself as a social person he chose to ‘chill’ in his room. Their interactions with peers in the social context were limited and became even less after having had certain negative experiences. Karen experienced how students of different race groups remained in separate groups on a field trip that had as aim the integration of the group.

We didn't bond. Before the fieldtrip, the whole idea was that we could bond. The fieldtrip actually divided us more, because during the camp there were many cliques and the guys drank a lot. Some of them also do drugs. So, I can't learn or work with people like that, because it's not what I am like.

The on campus microsystems were locations where the interactions were limited and inhibited, characterised by a lack of rewarding relationships, and/or the presence of destructive interactions. Such microsystems are coined 'high-risk microsystems' (Killian, 2004). The pattern of activities and interpersonal relations in the above-mentioned face-to-face settings were mostly unfavorable interactions and experiences, and did not result in 'ecological niches' for the students. These microsystems subsequently led to high-risk and dissonant mesosystems because of weak and destructive associations between the microsystems. Few strong, positive connections between the on campus microsystems existed to offset the negative interactions.

c) Context

The micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems of the educationally disadvantaged students' environments provided the settings for their student experiences.

1) Microsystem

1.1) Academic context: Classrooms/Laboratories

In the microsystems in the academic context, the students in this study formed part of a diverse group of students, their peer group, inclusive of different races and languages who had attended schools ranging from privileged private and former Model C schools to township schools. The socio-economic circumstances of their peer group varied from affluent to poor. Educationally disadvantaged students were in the minority. Themba revealed how he felt about being part of the minority. "Sometimes when I looked around me I would be the only black person and then I felt like an outsider". The seven students were acutely aware of their SES status and level of preparedness.

Thandi, John and Asanda struggled with the language of instruction in some of their classes. Thandi explained her frustration,

When I got to first year there was an option for every subject, there was an Afrikaans class and an English class. But then, when you got to second year it was in both languages, Afrikaans and English. But some lecturers would be 90 percent Afrikaans and only 10 percent English. They really did not balance it well. When you get home, you

still have to translate the work, translate it into English. It takes a lot of effort and time.

John recalled, "I was not used to speaking English. I was forced to speak English now and that was challenging." Asanda disliked Microbiology because of the challenges she faced with the language.

What sometimes becomes a problem for me though, is the fact that this is an Afrikaans school. The best professors here are Afrikaans speaking and this makes it hard for them to speak English but some of them really try. I just wish they would shift from that mentality that this is an Afrikaans university. I just hate the language policy here, seriously! I get that they're Afrikaans speaking but would it really hurt to at least put the slides in both languages. I find very interesting but the lecturer just makes me dislikes it. Everything on WebCT is in Afrikaans as well.

1.2) Residential context: Institutional residences/Private room or house

Five of the students in the study, Themba, Thandi, Asanda, Daniel and Karen, entered university residences with unique traditions and practices that were unfamiliar and strange to them. During the orientation period, they had to participate in practices such as 'sokkies' (dances) and 'skakels' (socials) which left them alienated. Asanda explained her experience at such a social event.

My fellow black and coloured res mates stood against the wall. We didn't have partners. We were just standing on the side and watched everyone dance. We were facing the other white guys who did not dance. They did not want to dance with us. It hurt. I just wanted to walk out of there; you know, just go back to res or go somewhere else. But we were forced to stay for a few hours or so.

Karen had a similar experience.

Now you're standing in the front row, facing each other. Then the HK says 'socialise now.' The guy walks past you towards some white girl behind you and they leave you. The guys actually have to go get a girl. Then all of us coloured girls are just standing there, and there

was one Indian girl, and nobody comes to us. It wasn't nice. It's not a good experience.

Many of the other traditions were similarly inhibiting and the students had no wish to participate. Daniel felt, "it's too much effort, time and money" and Asanda remembered, "we had sessions in the Kruiskerk as well, we had to attend a church service and the service was just in Afrikaans and honestly I felt that it was a waste of time."

In their respective residences, the five students formed part of a peer group who were selected according to the five categories of residence placement (following in section 5.2.1. c – 3.3). Many of their peer group were top achievers from former Model C schools, leaders in their schools and/or exceptional sport people. The level of inequality between the students was evident as Karen highlighted, "A lot of the kids were head girls, or they excelled in sport or class. So many of them get into that res with strong personalities."

The perception of inequality between the students was further highlighted by the fact that room allocations were not random, but was perceived to be done based on race. Black and coloured students were placed together and only in exceptional cases were they placed with white students as happened to Karen. She was placed with a white female with whom, according to Karen, "I saw for myself that the girls in the res didn't socialise with her." Karen revealed her perception on the allocation of roommates.

I thought it was kind of like a move backwards. The res [residence] and campus focus on transformation and moving forward all the time. But last year, or the year before, there was a case where a girl literally, it was a white girl paired with a coloured girl, and she just refused to sleep in the same room as the girl. When the res was empty during RAG, she slept in an empty room, because she refused. And after that time, they decided to avoid this; now they rather place you according to race.

Adena and John had the opportunity to enter university residences, but opted not to. Both chose private lodging in primarily black or coloured neighbourhoods. They explained by noting "it's mostly white girls and I don't know if I would be very

comfortable with that” and “I felt I was not yet ready for that huge change in terms of at the res the space of privacy is limited.” Their residential microsystems comprised of small groups of black or coloured students. The houses provided privacy and there were no expectations of them of being ‘part’ of a house culture. Adena and John responded selectively, a developmentally instigative characteristic, by deliberately choosing not to enter an institutional residence but rather a residential microsystem similar to what they were used to in their communities.

1.3) Social context: Peer groups/Sports field/Co-curricular activities

The social context, experienced by the educationally disadvantaged students, was shaped by the perception of the students about SU being a “white, Afrikaans university,” knowing that black, coloured and Indian students were the minority, the perceptions of the students about the white majority and the behaviour of white students towards them. Thandi shared her perceptions.

I had a lot of preconceived ideas about Stellenbosch...I didn't want anything to do with Afrikaans...You already know you're the minority, but it's like they rub it in your face kind of thing. So, for that reason I don't feel comfortable...

Daniel described his experience of how a white student behaved towards him.

But then I got to res and all the seniors were like ‘you have to learn how to greet us.’ And I'm like ‘OK, that's not a huge thing to ask of us.’ And then you greet them at the res and you see the same person at the tennis courts and he would just look at me. It went on like that for months. Even now, he looks the other way, even if I say ‘hey’ to him, then he just keeps on walking.

Adena withdrew from social interactions because of previous experiences she had.

One of my best friends that is doing his master's complained that people suspected him of stealing a laptop in a completely different office simply because he was black...Another friend told me that in her residence a white girl refused to share a room with a coloured girl. White people are very racist. I rather just withdraw.

The physical, social and symbolic features of the students' campus microsystems inhibited their interpersonal interactions and did not instigate them to become more involved in academic, residential or social activities. These limited interactions in the microsystems shaped their campus mesosystems and their student experiences.

2) Mesosystem

The interactions between the microsystems formed the campus mesosystem, which was shaped by the complementary messages the students received in the different microsystems. In the academic, residential as well as social microsystems the messages the students received reinforced their perceptions of being 'different' to the 'traditional' student and that they did not belong. Adena explained her perceptions of being 'different'.

I have found out that one of my classmates went to Israel and she was an intern at the UN. I was shocked, because they were exposed to things that I haven't been. I am conscious that I know less because of my educational background...In the cell group they talk about things like riding a horse. I've never even touched a horse!...I think we are different. They worry about things that I don't worry about. I worry about whether I'm going to have bread next week. I think its intimidation; I think there is a problem of me being conscious that we are not on the same level.

She explained her perception of the requirements 'to belong'.

In the beginning of the year my friend asked me, 'okay, so, why don't you go take part in the 'vensters'(show).' I told her no, because I will be forced to do that or dress like that or I would have to dance with a male and I don't agree to do that. It's who I am and I think the university is mostly for conformity and stuff. The way I am and the way I think, it's not conforming. So people look at me and think 'why are you not like the others?' So, I think that if I had befriended them, okay, you know, I'll have to do what they do. If I don't do what they do, they would look at me strangely and automatically I will be disqualified from, you know, taking part.

Karen had a similar perception.

They are a group of friends that all aimed to get into the same section. They also are, I'd have to say, very social. And if you want to be friends with them, you kind of need to conform and be like them and do what they do and I don't do that. They let you feel like an outsider.

The additive and interactive effects in the students' campus mesosystems influenced their student experiences and the way they functioned at SU.

3) Exosystem

The social and political contexts in the students' exosystems namely 1) the communities they come from, 2) the workplaces of their families, and 3) SU policies influenced their student experiences.

3.1) The communities

The students in this study came from communities very different to the university community. The university is situated in the historical town of Stellenbosch. Although the town has become deracialised and amalgamated with historically black and coloured nodes since 1994 (Swilling, Sebitosi, & Loots, 2012), the town center is still mainly white and racism is still evident. The students were living amongst people of similar races and were not often exposed to white people as they were on campus at SU. Asanda reflected on the differences, "The environment, jô! That was a big change, because I'm from a township. A township is always busy, always noisy and there's just always this vibe there. And here it's, it's peaceful if I can say and it's quiet."

Most of the students' friends had different aspirations than them and few of their friends entered HE. Themba expressed his frustrations with his friends.

I hate that about my culture. People drop out at grade seven, grade nine, grade ten. Like of my friends, only three of us have passed matric; out of like more than 20 guys, I think. Yeah, they just dropped out along the way and some of them failed matric!

Adena reflected on her friends' situations.

Today I signed up for Facebook. I added my friends from school and I felt quite sad when I see that most of my friends from school work at shops or restaurants and are not at university or even a local college. I am so lucky to be at university and even more lucky that it is a prestigious university. I am really lucky.

Often the communities were not supportive of those who took the road less travelled as Thandi experienced. "When you see that someone else is doing well in the community, instead of supporting or asking for advice, we always want to bring that person down."

Although the students were not residing in these communities permanently any more, they were influenced by the social and political forces of these communities.

3.2) The workplaces of the families

The workplaces of the students' families were influenced by the economic situation in SA, which in turn influenced the students' decisions and choices. John's father was an artisan and only worked occasionally. This implied that John was completely dependent on his NSFAS loan to cover all his expenses inclusive of money for daily needs. After a visit to his parents in Katsieng they did not have money to pay for his transport back to SU and he had to pay for it himself which implied, "I had to minimise my spending [back at SU]. So, I'd say it is quite tough at the moment." Going home therefore became a rare luxury and he saw his family maybe once a year.

Both Thandi and Karen lost NSFAS support due to not meeting the requirements of the loan scheme at the end of 2012. In order to re-register at SU they had to pay the registrations fees themselves. Thandi's parents, being unemployed and dependent on pension money, and Karen's mother, being a single parent, could not support their children and both Thandi and Karen had to terminate their studies. They are both exploring options to acquire funds in order to return to SU in 2014. Thandi is working at a call centre and in a 'Whatsapp' conversation said, "I'm OK...nothing much on my side just work work work and applying for financial support and better jobs."

The economic situation in SA determines whether parents have work or earn a sufficient income to support the family, which in turn directs the students' decisions.

3.3) University policies and initiatives

SU is conscious of providing 'access for success' to educationally disadvantaged students as reflected in the statement made by the rector, Prof Russel Botman (Stellenbosch University, 2013c, p. 1), "We can only feel satisfied that there is fair access when the daughter of the farm worker has the same future opportunities as the son of the farmer." Policies and initiatives are in place to provide access and residence, as well as academic, financial, and language support to these students (Stellenbosch University, 2013b). Policies also focus on the transformation of an institutional culture that welcomes "a diversity of people and ideas" (Stellenbosch University, 2007, p. 2). At SU access is provided to educationally disadvantaged students through the SciMathUS Bridging Programme and the extended degree programmes (EDPs) (Stellenbosch University, 2013b).

The SU residential placement policy up to 2012 allowed five placement categories namely 1) academic excellence – placement on a basis of the Grade 11 final exam results, 2) preference - coloured, black and Indian students as well as students with severe disabilities, 3) vice-rector - based on outstanding performance in sport (national and in exceptional cases, provincial), 4) the residence management of each residence may make 10 placements and 5) random - a small percentage of students not selected on academic merit (Stellenbosch University, 2012a). The University acknowledged that students in the 'preference' category may be exposed to greater academic and social risks than other students and therefore should receive preference in the allocation and retention of residence accommodation (Stellenbosch University, 2012c). Educationally disadvantaged students could benefit from this category to acquire residence placement.

SU acknowledges the importance of providing students with opportunities to succeed in their studies and has initiatives to ensure student success. These initiatives include the new AmaMaties cluster hub; the First-year Academy; the first-generation camp; and the annual welcoming programme for newcomer students. The AmaMaties cluster hub is a space where residence and private (PSO) students interact and share academic and social lives. The First-year Academy (FYA) combines a wide array of measures to assist newcomer students to overcome potential challenges including amongst others early assessment and tutor and mentorship programmes. The first generation camp has as aim to prepare this group of students for the personal and academic challenges they might face at university. The annual

welcoming programme for first-year students provides a range of activities to introduce the students to the total university experience (Centre for Teaching and Learning, 2013). These initiatives are focused on welcoming and assisting students from all strands of life, including educationally disadvantaged students.

Financial support to educationally disadvantaged students includes the National Student Financial Aid Scheme of South Africa (NSFAS), recruitment bursaries, and a work-study programme (see footnote 11). The NSFAS financial scheme is allocated based on financial neediness and merit, on the condition that students take a full academic load for each year and pass at least two-thirds of their credits. A student is financially needy if the family does not qualify for a loan at a bank and/or cannot contribute sufficiently to the student's study costs. The allocated amount varies from R2000 – R57000 per year according to the financial need and may only be used for tuition fees, accommodation (on campus or private), meals and textbooks. A reward mechanism is in place according to which loan amounts are converted into bursaries. Repayment guidelines also exist (Stellenbosch University, 2013a).

Recruitment bursaries of R35000 per year for the normal duration of a degree programme are awarded to black, coloured and Indian students with the best possible potential to succeed in HE. A residence placement is included in this offer but the bursary does not cover the cost thereof (Centre for Prospective Students, 2013).

The work-study programme aims to support financially needy students by providing them opportunities to earn an income on campus to support themselves with regard to basic needs such as food, books, and other necessities (Stellenbosch University, 2012b).

As part of the transformation process at SU, language practices are in place to support students who are not Afrikaans speaking. According to the 2002 Language Plan of SU, incorporating decisions made in September 2010, parallel as well as double medium offerings at undergraduate level were to be available where academically possible, justifiable and affordable. The plan did however mention the strong support of Afrikaans as the default language for undergraduate teaching and learning (Stellenbosch University, 2010).

Support for non-Afrikaans speaking students was provided in departments by teaching assistants, tutors and mentors, as well as by means of intensive language

proficiency courses and other forms of support presented by the Language Centre (Stellenbosch University, 2010).

The university is committed to maintain and enhance multicultural activities and diversity literacy amongst students, the promotion of student dialogue and the strengthening of student structures in order to transform the institutional culture (Stellenbosch University, 2007). This is evident in initiatives such as the listening, living and learning (LLL) houses as well as the clustering of residences and private wards. The LLL houses have as focus the identification and adjustment of students' perceptions of 'the other' through a process of experiential learning while the clusters aim to integrate and support first year students by means of mentor groups amongst other things (Centre for Student Communities, 2013).

Through the abovementioned policies and initiatives SU attempts to provide an environment ensuring student success for all students, including educationally disadvantaged students, on campus.

4) Macrosystem

The history of SA shaped the diverse South African society as well as the beliefs and values of each group in the society. The structure and content of this society shape the students' systems that are more proximal including the student him/herself.

4.1) The political philosophy

The 1994 national elections ended formal apartheid in SA. At that time, the age of participants in this study ranged from two to six years old. Although they were not born into a free and democratic South Africa, they grew up in a society where reform and equal rights were foregrounded. However, the legacy of apartheid was profound and influenced them in every system where they functioned as discussed in section 5.2.1.

4.2) Demographics

Themba, Thandi, John and Asanda formed part of the 79,2 percent black people in SA, while Daniel and Karen formed part of the 8,9 percent of coloured people. Adena, who chose to relate to the Indian race, formed part of the 3 percent of Indian people in SA.

4.3) The economic environment

The unequal post-apartheid society in SA still result in many black and coloured people struggling financially or being unemployed. The students' parents were also influenced by this reality.

4.4) The health system

The poor health system in SA affects the students who are dependent on public health facilities. Daniel described his experience with the public health system, as he had to visit a public hospital once a month due to an eye virus.

Then you get there at seven and the whole world is there before you. And then you have to wait. It's a very long wait. Its not something you wish upon anyone. Waiting...its just, you just sit there. You see how your cell phone's battery gets flat and you wonder what you are going to do when the cell phone dies? And you wait...and wait...and wait. The elderly is helped, then the jails, and then people from I don't know where, they came with trucks and buses. They are helped before you, even if you are there before them. You just have to wait. You are there for seven hours. Only at four o' clock you are done. When I get home, I'm exhausted, I just sleep! And there is nothing they can do for me. I will just have to except it.

4.5) The education system

Although the education system in SA has been transformed, the system has not succeeded in preparing the students in this study for HE. The students had to gain access to SU through the SciMathUS Bridging Programme and felt inferior to fellow students in terms of academic preparedness.

d) Time

1) Chronosystems

The time element operates in terms of the specific historical time in the society, but also at a specific time in a student's life. Time related events shaped the students' experiences as happened to Asanda when her sister passed away two days after she started her first year at SU. While other students took part in the orientation week, she had to bury her sister in Transkei.

I came back the day before the classes started. It was difficult. It was really, really difficult for me. I didn't really focus on the change from SciMathUS to the university, because I was just, I was just so sad and heartbroken most of the time. I was crying the whole time. I can't remember much about those first days. I couldn't cope and was constantly in my room crying or sleeping, but my housemother and mentor were really sympathetic and supported me a lot. Pam, my housemother, even organised sessions at the university psychologist for me.

Thandi's biological father was murdered in the middle of her third academic year and the tragedy resulted in her failing that year.

And it was horrible, because every day, I think for like a month every day, after class, I came back and I cried. Everything was bad. I went to class like normal, but I was there physically, but emotionally and spiritually, I wasn't there. Hence the poor academic performance as well. I managed to pass one module. It went bad. It didn't go well at all. I cried every single day I think for like a whole month. And then I would cry on a regular basis every two or three days if it's really hard.

The reciprocal and dynamic processes between the students and the campus environment revealed the challenges they faced and how they functioned on campus at SU. The seven students had unique experiences on campus, they did not all face exactly the same challenges and reacted uniquely to these challenges, but recurring themes in their experiences are evident.

5.2.2 Themes from the narratives

The ecology of the seven educationally disadvantaged students at SU provided the backdrop for the recurring themes in the students' narratives. Five themes that related to two main themes stood out namely a) academic challenges, b) financial challenges, c) social challenges, d) linguistic challenges, and e) negotiating SU systems. These five themes culminated in two main themes that illuminate how the students functioned on the campus at SU namely A) functioning on the periphery and B) stress.

a) Academic challenges

For the participants in this study SU symbolised quality education and they described the university with superlatives such as ‘real’, ‘top-ten’, ‘a challenge’, ‘top quality’, ‘reputable’, and ‘the best’. For all of them, except Thandi, SU was a first choice HE institution. SU represented a ‘way out of poverty’ and a route to a credible degree, which could not be challenged as Adena explained, “I don’t want problems with people questioning my knowledge or the value of my degree.” Although it was not Thandi’s first choice she remained at SU since she desired the best education she could acquire. The students realised that they were entering a predominantly white, Afrikaans university but it appears as if they conflated the ‘white, Afrikaans university’ with quality education (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013) and would rather face challenges at such a university than acquire a lesser education. As Asanda mentioned, “Yeah, everything has a price!”

All the students except Themba were aware of the fact that they came from weaker schools and were less prepared for HE than their class mates. They also perceived their class and cultural backgrounds as of a lower status than that of the white students. This self-perception led them to be “afraid to make a comment or asking a question”, “afraid to put my hand up” and to a “fear of being wrong.” They were silenced in their classes (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013) as their limited interactions in the academic microsystems confirmed.

All seven students experienced overwhelming amounts of work and struggled to cope with the academic pressure as indicated by their descriptions of their academic experiences as: ‘hectic’, ‘unsure’, ‘challenging’, ‘stressful’, ‘frustration’, ‘chaos’ and ‘quitting’. These descriptions confirm what is found in literature about the academic experiences of educationally disadvantaged students (Petersen et al., 2009). They feel underprepared and struggle with the academic workload.

Despite these emotions, the students maintained that they “got everything under control” and “academics is okay; it’s just, I have to plan.” They believed that they must just ‘work hard’ and then they will be ‘fine’. None of the students sought help from mentors or staff members. In conversations with the students after they wrote a test or an examination they often maintained that it went well and were shocked when they failed. Badenhorst and Kapp (2013), as well as Case and Marshall (2008), wrote about the same tendency for disadvantaged medical and engineering students

at UCT who also maintained that there was no problem despite evidence to the contrary.

Despite the 'need' to be at SU, the students struggled because of their self-perception and the academic pressure. Educationally disadvantaged students have to overcome academic "chasms" (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013, p. 10) and this is exactly what the seven students in this study experienced.

b) Financial challenges

Although the seven students did not have the same SES status they all experienced financial challenges which influenced their functioning on campus. All the students except Themba were financially supported by either NSFAS or another bursary-loan scheme of the university. Themba's mother was paying his tuition and that concerned him, as he knew she was struggling. The funding the other students received were not sufficient to cover all the fees inclusive of textbooks, printing and internet credits, and living expenses. This resulted in outstanding fees, which in turn resulted in the students' results being withheld. Not being able to access their marks like all the other students reinforced their perception about being 'different'. Daniel reflected on the experience, "I felt poor and very disappointed as none of the lecturers I asked to help me [to access the marks] even replied to my emails."

The students supported by NSFAS acknowledged the value of the financial support, but realised that if they did not meet the yearly requirements of the scheme they would lose the support and would have no financial back up. Four students, Themba, Thandi, Asanda and Karen did not meet the requirements at some stage during their studies. They had to re-apply for further funding. Themba and Asanda were granted funding, but for Thandi and Karen it was the end of their HE studies as they did not receive further funding and had nobody to support them financially.

For the five students in the residences limited funds implied less participation in residence activities and inability to buy the merchandise, such as residence T-shirts, sold in the residences as part of the residence culture. As described in the residence microsystem the students brushed this reality aside by holding an 'I don't care' attitude. For Adena and John, living in private accommodation, limited funds exacerbated their limited interactions on campus. The reality of being financially constrained affected the students' interactions within the campus microsystems and directed the way they functioned on campus.

Lack of finances constituted a challenge in terms of the necessary resources to participate in the academic practice but also contributed to inferiority when the students compared themselves to more affluent students (Steyn, 2009).

c) Social challenges

On campus at SU, the students had to negotiate tension and ambivalence related to values, attitudes, beliefs and everyday behavioural norms (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013; Van Heerden, 1995). The values instilled in the students were different to what they were experiencing at SU. John, for example, mentioned how difficult it was for him to speak out as he was raised to respect elder people and remain quiet. Thandi and Asanda were used to following the lead of their parents and were seldom allowed to make decisions on their own. Their parents were their reference point and directed their decisions. At SU, they were alone and had to take responsibility for their own decisions. They were expected to function independently and to express their own views. Thandi said, "I had to learn how to control myself" while John surmised, "acting on my own way in this place, it's not viewed as disrespectful, so I think, I've been trying to adapt to that. I'm still trying to find my independence."

The 'Matie' culture perceived by the students in this study included the use of alcohol, attending dances and going out on weeknights. The students realised that to be part of this culture they had to participate in the activities and 'fit in'. "In order to find comfort in this place, you also have to change a bit of who you are, or who you were. You need to start to be more social." This posed challenging, as this culture did not support the same values and norms they were use to. Reflecting on an event Thandi said, "We don't do things like that. It's kind of disrespectful in my culture. It's rude to do that. It's disrespectful, you know, but it's Stellenbosch, you know." The students had to re-evaluate their values and norms. They had to choose between 'conforming' and 'not-conforming'. John acknowledged that he tried very hard to 'fit in' but realised, "I think I was looking too much in to socialise. What I noticed is I'm not a social guy and I think I have accepted that I'm not into social thing." He resolved to be "an outsider". Some of the other students attempted to join in occasionally. "Somehow I would go out on some nights if my friends would come along, but not all time." The limited interpersonal interactions in the residential and social microsystems revealed that although the students occasionally attempted to 'fit in', they mostly did not participate in non-academic activities.

Part of the institutional culture is the attitude peers have towards each other. Incidences of racism perceived and experienced by the students portrayed attitudes of some white students towards the students. Themba experienced that two fellow first years “didn’t want me to be there”, Adena’s friend was accused of stealing because he was black, Karen was skipped in a queue because she was coloured, Daniel was not greeted by a white student from the same residence, and Thandi and her friend were thrown from a pub. When Thandi was allocated a place in the Botmashoogte residence in Idas Valley, she perceived it to be on racial grounds. These incidences reinforced the perception the students had of ‘not belonging here’.

The social context at SU, and other HWUs, are still directed by the norms and values of the dominant culture and as a result institutional and cultural racism exist (Steyn & Kamper, 2011). The absence of associational life emphasised the degree of misfit the students experienced. The students’ perceptions of this degree of misfit influenced their functioning on campus at SU.

d) Linguistic challenges

One of the main reasons Thandi did not apply to SU initially was due to her perception that SU was only Afrikaans. Themba appropriately described his first impressions when he arrived in Stellenbosch, “I knew it was an Afrikaans university, but I thought maybe it had English. So, when I got here, I saw that it was really, really just Afrikaans!” Although Themba understood Afrikaans, he acknowledged “‘it’ is there.” The predominantly Afrikaans context posed challenging to Thandi, Asanda, and John. They struggled in the academic context since even when double medium classes were offered they experienced that some lecturers were reluctant to speak English. John even found communicating in English challenging. These students experienced, as found in research (Cross & Johnson, 2008; Steyn & Kamper, 2011; Van Heerden, 1995), that their insufficient language skills contributed to their academic difficulties.

Not only in the academic context did the language barrier influence the students’ interactions, but also in the social context (Croos & Johnson, 2008; Soudien, 2008). Interactions in the social context included a compulsory attendance of an Afrikaans church service during an orientation week and a Student Representative Council (SRC) meeting where a speaker refused to speak in English or translate his speech

to English. Asanda expressed her frustration with the language issue and portrayed the message educationally disadvantaged students often receive, 'you are different'.

We are studying together. We are in the same classes, in the same hostel and we are not so low class as you may think or say, you know. So, I think people should just look beyond the skin colour and just work together, because we are going to be together whether you like it or not.

Lack of linguistic resources frustrated the students as they struggled academically to express themselves and to communicate with their peers and lecturers (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013; Steyn, 2009; Steyn & Kamper, 2011, Van Heerden 1995). These struggles led to limited interactions and consequently limited integration into the academic practice (Cross & Johnson, 2008; Soudien, 2008).

e) Negotiating SU systems

The experiences the students had with administrative systems intensified their perceptions of 'not belonging' to SU. Being an EDP student already made Daniel feel inferior and to top that emotion he had to go through the whole re-application process for re-admittance to residence even though he had passed all the required modules. Being an EDP student he could not achieve the required HEMIS points and the administrative system, according to Daniel, did not allow for that exception. The student had to experience the whole re-admittance process from receiving emails from the primarius and housefather/mother of the residence informing him/her that he/she was not allocated a place in the residence for the following year to writing letters to re-apply and visiting the secretary of the faculty. It was a disheartening experience.

Due to acute appendicitis, Asanda missed two tests during a June examination in her second year. The result of missing a part of the examination was the suspension of NSFAS support as well as not being allocated a place in the residence for the following year. The system again did not allow for exceptions. Only after intervention from SciMathUS staff was she provisionally funded again and received placement in the residence. Exactly the same thing happened when she had to apply for residence placement at the end of her third year. The missing examinations still resulted in too few HEMIS points, even though she passed all her modules in her third year, and again she had to re-apply. Although she explained her situation at the administrative

office, they did not offer much assistance. Again, after one phone call from SciMathUS staff she received placement in a senior residence.

Thandi's experience with the administrative system when she applied for placement in a residence made her feel as if "they rub it [her ethnic status] in your face kind of thing." According to the system, the only place left was in Botmashoogte, the off-campus residence in a historically, coloured neighbourhood, while she overheard how a white, female student was offered a place in an on-campus, traditional residence. These three examples strengthened the students' perceptions of being outsiders and confirmed the experience of educationally disadvantaged students elsewhere (Council on Higher Education, 2010; Cross & Johnson, 2008).

These five themes revealed the major challenges that these students had to negotiate at SU and provide the answer to the first research question. The students' limited reciprocal and dynamic interactions, as discussed in section 5.2.1, revealed how they handled these challenges and functioned on the campus. The next two themes explicate their functioning on the campus at SU.

A) Functioning on the periphery

The challenges - academic, financial, social, linguistic, and negotiating SU systems - the students faced on campus on a daily basis led to limited face-to-face interactions in the various on-campus microsystems and linked mesosystems. Their experiences in these systems repeatedly confirmed their perception of being 'outsiders'. In reaction to their perceptions, the students chose to disengage in the different contexts (Corss & Johnson, 2008; Petersen et al., 2009). They did not participate in organised or impromptu activities on campus but rather "chilled" in their rooms, or "withdrew". This reaction supports Bronfenbrenner's theory that development, in this case the student experience, is a function of the interactive processes between a person and the environment over a certain time. The interactive processes between the students and the campus environment resulted in them functioning on the periphery.

The students functioned on the periphery of the university and 'of being a student'. 'Being a student' according to Morrow (2009) means that universities provide an institutional home for academic practices and access to these practices for all students. These practices include all aspects of the student experience as discussed in section 2.2. The integration of educationally disadvantaged students into the

academic practice imply a mediated transition considering their backgrounds and past teaching and learning experiences and to promote a sense of belonging to the institution through the transformation of the campus contexts (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013). The students in this study were constrained from becoming part of the academic practice as dominant discourses and power relations were evident. They were silenced and experienced the burden to assimilate (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013). Although they were 'Maties', they were outsiders and functioned as such.

B) Stress

The students were acutely aware of their 'deficit position' on the campus at SU. They were not part of the majority group, some of them struggled linguistically; they were financially constrained and were overwhelmed by the academic pressure. These challenges contributed to intense emotions of stress.

All the students, except Themba, had to overcome academic challenges due to their school legacy, and this caused them continuous concern about succeeding academically. Although Themba was in better schools than other educationally disadvantaged students were, his community context was not conducive for academic performance and he did not work hard in order to be prepared for HE. Except for the fear of failing, the students were aware of the fact that they had to meet certain academic requirements to retain financial support (Petersen et al., 2009). The residential students also had to acquire enough HEMIS points to retain residence placement. These factors contributed to the stress and tension the students experienced.

During the time of their studies, Themba, Asanda, Thandi, Daniel, and Karen were confronted with re-application processes for re-registration, for funding, and/or residence placement. These processes caused the students high levels of stress. They just hoped that they would be able to come back, have financial support and a place to stay.

The students in this study were merged into a social context where they were exposed to different races and cultures very different to their own. The interactions in the 'different' social context caused tension and stress to the students (Bojuwoye, 2002; Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013; Jones et al., 2002). Zuma (2013) confirmed that students from township backgrounds with limited interracial exposure and economic scarcity experienced such interactions stressful. Due to the stress levels the students

experienced, they chose to limit further interactions in the social contexts and that reinforced their functioning on the periphery of campus life.

The financial position of the students caused them to stress as well. Except for concern about funding for tuition the students were concerned about funds for daily living expenses as Adena highlighted, "I worry about whether I'm going to have bread next week." Despite the continuous consciousness of the lack of financial resources, the students brushed the fact aside by maintaining that they were 'fine'. This reaction highlighted their functioning on the periphery. All challenges were handled by mimicking that everything was 'fine' and they survived by not interacting and keeping to themselves. Lack of financial resources was a challenge that contributed to feelings of inferiority and isolation and caused the students to suffer high levels of stress (Bojuwoye, 2002; REAP, 2009).

The high stress levels the students were suffering from were evident in comments about their health. Karen experienced continuous headaches while stress impaired Daniel's vision. Daniel, Thandi and Themba complained of being extremely tired and ascribed the tiredness to high stress levels.

Although each of the students in this study had unique experiences at SU, analysis of their interactions in their micro- and mesosystems revealed that they were functioning on the periphery of the institution and experienced high levels of stress.

5.3 Limitations of the study

This study is simultaneously limited and strengthened by the qualitative nature thereof. Through the qualitative nature of the research, identities and faces were given to the participants. Each story focused attention on unique experiences and drew the reader, as well as me, the researcher, into each story. It is however, the strength of the qualitative approach to research that also limits the study. The specificity of the research implies that the findings cannot be generalised to all HE institutions (Bogdan & Knopp, 1998).

The data used in this study were the students' reflections on their experiences during the interviews, in their journals and via social media. This may limit the study since people have incomplete access to their experiences and the capacity to recollect their experiences is limited. The students reported their experiences as they perceived and remembered them filtered through racial, social class and language

lenses. These reports are perceptions and not necessarily mirrored reflections of the experiences (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Linked to the qualitative nature of the research is the limited number of participants (Riessman, 1993). A small sample size allowed for in-depth interviews and building of strong personal relationships. The small number of participants does however limit the usefulness of the data (Renn, 2003) in studying the functioning of educationally disadvantaged students in general in HE and at HWUs specifically.

The choice of the participants may pose a further limitation as all the students entered the university through the SciMathUS Bridging Programme. The perceptions of educationally disadvantaged students who access the university directly may be different to that of these participants (Jones et al., 2002). Furthermore, no commuter students formed part of the study. The perspective of an educationally disadvantaged student, who has to function in two different mesosystems on a daily basis, is not presented as part of the study and would have added an insightful perspective.

Another limitation to the study is my subjectivity (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; Bryan & Simmons, 2009). As a SciMathUS facilitator, I have been involved with these educationally disadvantaged students for the past twelve years. During this time, I heard about multitudes of challenges they had to overcome in order to graduate. The line between researcher and friend became very thin. In certain cases, it was impossible not to give advice or encouragement. Often we laughed together or were shocked together about certain realities. Mindful of my close relationships with the students I needed to narrate the stories critically (Connelly & Candinin, 1990) to present their reality and not my perception of their reality.

5.4 Conclusions and implications

Themba, Thandi, Asanda, John, Adena, Daniel and Karen were positioned inside a macrosystem, consisting of social, economic and political forces that operated in relation to one another, and an exosystem including the communities they came from, the current economic state in the country and the SU policies and initiatives, that provided the backdrop to their student experiences. They entered SU at a time in SA's history that offered them 'the-sky-is-the-limit' opportunities in HE. However, the narratives of the students portrayed different stories. These students experienced academic, financial, linguistic, social and system challenges that left them alienated and marginalised.

Their experiences caused them to suffer high levels of stress and directed them to function on the periphery of university life. They were struggling to succeed in HE and since the start of this study in January 2012 three of the seven participants departed from SU without graduating. These student experiences support research worldwide that has found that educationally disadvantaged students struggle to succeed in HE due to the many challenges they have to overcome (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013; Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Jones et al., 2002; Petersen et al., 2009; Steyn & Kamper, 2011). This study has theoretical, substantive and practical implications for HE, and SU particularly.

5.4.1 Theoretical implications

The notion of student experience as described in section 2.2 is comprehensive and includes the academic and social aspects of student life as well as support and monitoring of students. In understanding the experiences of educationally disadvantaged students at a predominantly white, Afrikaans university, it is crucial to recognise that students in general belong to different ecological subsystems, which affect their student experiences (Porter et al., 2006). The cultural and physical contexts within which students are required to manage their academic demands influence their student experiences (Council on Higher Education, 2010) and to understand these experiences implies understanding the systems and subsystems of each student and his/her interactions within these systems (Poch, 2005).

The experiences of the seven students revealed that they experienced the campus micro- and mesosystems as threatening and alienating environments. The current support and monitoring structures in the campus systems failed to provide sufficient support to integrate them into these systems and to invite them to become part of the academic practice and as such ensure their success. They needed a different type and level of support and monitoring.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model succeeded in revealing the limited interactions of the students in the different micro- and mesosystems and how they chose to disengage and function on the periphery of the University. The model however did not reveal which interventions would have supported the students effectively. What is needed is to understand which types and levels of support and monitoring are necessary to enable these students to succeed. Theory or expansion of existing

theory that could start to propose ways of filling the gaps in current approaches is needed.

5.4.2 Substantive implications

a) Disjuncture between SU policies and student experiences

Despite the policies and initiatives SU has in place to support educationally disadvantaged students to become part of the academic practice, the experiences of the students led them to believe otherwise. They entered SU expecting to be successful as they gained access, received funding and were granted accommodation in residences. However, they did not experience the benefits of these policies and initiatives at grassroots level. A disjuncture existed between their micro-and mesosystems and the exosystems they functioned in.

In the academic system, they perceived themselves as inferior and underprepared and were not confident enough to engage with peers, mentors and staff members. The available academic support did not reach the students. Language policies promise support to non-Afrikaans speaking students but the reality was that some lecturers were not willing to accommodate these students' needs. Some modules were only presented in Afrikaans with limited English notes or support material. In the social context, the students experienced marginalisation as some Afrikaans students still refused to accommodate non-Afrikaans speaking students.

SU policies provide residence placement for educationally disadvantaged students. In the residences, these students however experienced alienation and marginalisation, as they had to interact with students with excellent academic and/or sport records from privileged schools. They found the traditions, symbols and customs in the residences unaccommodating and excluding. Although they experienced support on an individual level from a housemother or a peer they generally felt marginalised.

Although the administrative systems of the SU are expected to support the transformation goals of the university these students experienced the contrary. The interaction with staff members in administrative capacities and the functioning of administrative systems led the students to conclude that they did not belong to SU. They were continuously confronted with their minority status and felt like outsiders.

In the social context, the students had similar experiences. The social context was still directed by the culture of the majority group on campus.

Supporting findings by Soudien (2008), Cross and Johnson (2008), and the Council on Higher Education (2009), these student experiences indicated a disjuncture between the SU policies and initiatives and what the students experienced in reality. It seems as if a gap exists between the letter of the policy and the institutional will and capacity in terms of human and financial resources to implement the policies and initiatives effectively.

b) Micro- and mesosystemic level changes

The analysis of these educationally disadvantaged students' systems and their interactions in the systems according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, revealed that they perceived themselves as outsiders and that they did not belong in the SU system. Allowing educationally disadvantaged students to enter HE without reviewing educational structures and practices practically nullify attempts of equity and demoralise thousands of students (Fisher & Scott, 2011; Soudien, 2008). Micro- and mesosystemic level changes are necessary for them to be able to become part of the academic practice at SU.

Kuh (2009, p. 698) notes that engaging educationally disadvantaged students in educationally purposeful activities "helps to level the playing field" and increases their chances of attaining their educational and personal objectives. Berger and Milem (1999) agree that increased interaction of educationally disadvantaged students with peers and faculty, as well as involvement in organised activities can result in more positive student experiences and a higher possibility that the students would complete their studies. Changes in the academic, residential as well as social context at SU are necessary to allow these students to integrate and to be able to become part of the academic practice. In the academic context a changed curriculum that meet the needs of the majority intake and changed teaching and learning strategies that suit the realities of talented but not traditionally well-prepared students (Scott, 2009b) are needed. In the social and residential contexts supportive environments based on an educational approach towards student activities inclusive of different values, beliefs and practices are needed (Soudien, 2008).

5.4.3 Practical implications

The narratives of these students provide insight on how these students experienced the current campus contexts. The reality of the experiences of these educationally disadvantaged students was that they faced many challenges and did not become part of the academic practice. Access without the appropriate support is not opportunity (Fraser & Killen, 2005; REAP, 2009) and to be able to provide similar opportunities to the farmer's son as well as the farmworker's daughter (Stellenbosch University, 2013c) systemic changes are needed down to grassroots levels. The findings in this study, as found in other studies (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013; Jones et al., 2002) highlighted insensitive behaviour of administrators, faculty and fellow-students that negated the institution's espoused commitment to transformation.

The students in this study considered SU as an excellent HE institution where they would reach their dreams of becoming graduates with 'proper' degrees. Unfortunately, their narratives revealed that they had to overcome many barriers to reach that dream and for some the barriers became too overwhelming. Of the seven students in this study, four are still studying and deserve to become part of the academic practice. Reconsidering current practices around teaching and learning, language, admission, re-admission, financial support, tutoring and mentoring, and social life, particularly in residences, is needed.

5.5. Recommendations for further research and practice

5.5.1 Research

During the study, I was aware of the cultural and background differences between the students and myself, as many lecturers especially at a HWU, experience. I suggest that research should examine the role of culture in classroom practices. I realise that this is not a trivial issue, as Leibowitz (2009) indicates, but as the student population diversifies, the issue is becoming more and more important. Tierney and Jun (2001, p. 209) note, "education in culture is not a simple process of teaching neutral facts and figures to a faceless population; it is an interactive process of individual identity development and the creation of community." Research should assist practitioners in finding the best ways to create such a community where all students are able to develop their identity.

Further research should analyse the functioning of other subgroups of students within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model in HE. Such an analysis could provide insightful perspectives on the challenges that other subgroups encounter in HE. Comparing the functioning of well-prepared, affluent students who fit into the institutional culture, for example, with the functioning of educationally disadvantaged students may highlight challenges that both groups encounter. This may be of interest to practitioners and policy makers in HE in terms of what a HE institution that is 'home' to all students looks like.

In discussions with peers and colleagues about this study, I often received comments such as 'insightful', 'important' and 'useful'. I was however astonished to come across several studies, nationally and internationally, dated much earlier as well as very recent. These studies also note the struggles and challenges of educationally disadvantaged students especially when they are in the minority (Alford, 2000; Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013; Colyar, 2003; Council on Higher Education, 2010; Jones et al., 2010; Melendez, 2008; Soudien, 2008; Steyn, 2009; Steyn & Kamper, 2011). Recommendations have been made about possible actions to support these students, but the current reality shows that they still struggle. Attempts are made to provide access to educationally disadvantaged students, and support structures are in place to support these students, but the 'support' and 'the students' do not meet. Few of the students in this study indicated the use of available support structures on campus. It seems as if a gap exists between the student and the available support. Future research should explore the extent of such support and which institutional changes can be made in order to link the students to support structures.

5.5.2 Practice

The findings of this study indicate that the participants, educationally disadvantaged students, were not successfully accommodated by the university systems. A number of implications for practice are suggested by the results of this study and supported by literature. Practitioners, administrative staff and peer groups need to be cognisant of the transformation goals of the university in academic, social and residential contexts and need to be equipped sufficiently to participate in the transformations processes (Soudien, 2008). Practitioners should understand how the academic needs of these students differ to those of other students and incorporate diverse

teaching and learning styles to support these students (Fisher & Scott, 2011 ;Scott, 2009b).

Residence heads, house committee members and all residents need to be cognisant of the diversity of the group of students in the residences and be equipped to transform the culture of the residence to such an extent that all the students are able to find a 'home' in the residences. The same applies to the social context where all students need to be accommodated in the culture and type of activities offered on the campus (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013; Soudien, 2008). The implementation of language policies by practitioners need to confirm an attitude of 'including all' rather than an attitude of 'adapt or die' (Soudien, 2008; Steyn, 2009). Financial constraints further limited these students of becoming part of university life and contributed to much of their stress. Sufficient financial support is needed so that they do not need to be concerned about daily expenses (Steyn, 2009).

5.6 A final word

After I completed the narratives of the students, I asked them to read their individual stories to ensure that I validated their experiences. Without exception, they agreed enthusiastically and read the stories with great expectations. While reading, their faces fell and some had tears streaming from their eyes. After they read their stories, they sat for a few seconds without saying a word and I experienced a sense of 'is that really my story?' On my question 'how they felt?' one student's response reflected all the students' emotions, "it's not how I wanted my life to sound like, I guess..."

Despite facing many challenges, being stressed and feeling like outsiders these students still wanted to be at SU. They dreamed of graduating with a "proper degree". During the June 2013 examination Adena commented on her facebook page,

I feel so privileged to be studying at one of the top universities in SA. With the high unemployment rate among youth as well as overall, I think that students that are currently under pressure with exams should find joy and happiness in the fact that they are so privileged to experience such a thing as exam stress. Yes, studying requires a substantial amount of hard work, discipline and dedication but at the

end of the day we need to count our blessings and thank God for this amazing opportunity which has not been granted to many.

As an institution, SU has the responsibility to provide epistemological access to these students to enable them to graduate.

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7. Addenda

7.1 Addendum A: Letter of Ethics Clearance



UNIVERSITEIT-STELLENBOSCH-UNIVERSITY
Jou kennisvennoot - your knowledge partner

18 September 2012

Tel.: 021 - 808-8003
Enquiries: Mr. Winston A Beukes
Email: wabeukes@sun.ac.za

Reference No. DESC LOURENS/2012

Ms E Lourens
Dept Curriculum Studies

Dear Ms Lourens

LETTER OF ETHICS CLEARANCE

With regard to your application, I would like to inform you that the project "*Understanding the Experiences of Educationally Disadvantaged Students at Stellenbosch University*" has been approved on the following proviso's:

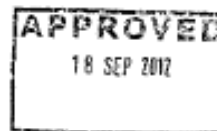
1. The researcher will remain within the procedures and protocols indicated in the proposal, particularly in terms of any undertakings made in terms of the confidentiality of the information gathered.
2. The research will again be submitted for ethical clearance if there is any substantial departure from the existing proposal.
3. The researcher will remain within the parameters of any applicable national legislation, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of research.
4. The researcher will consider and implement the foregoing suggestions to lower the ethical risk associated with the research.
5. This ethics clearance is valid for one year from 18/09/2012 until 17/09/2013

We wish you success with your research activities.

Best regards


MR WA Beukes

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanlore)
Registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC): REC-080411-032



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7.2 Addendum B: Letter of permission to use institutional data



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19 September 2012

Mev. E. Lourens
Instituut vir Wiskunde- en Wetenskaponderwys
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Universiteit Stellenbosch

Geagte mev. Lourens,

Insake navorsingsprojek: Understanding the Experiences of Educationally Disadvantaged Students at Stellenbosch University

Hiermee word institusionele toestemming verleen dat inligting ingesamel mag word van (voormalige) Universiteit Stellenbosch studente by wyse van vraelyste en semi- gestruktureerde onderhoude vir die doel van bogenoemde navorsingsprojek. Verder word daar ook toestemming verleen dat die navorser toegang mag kry tot die institusionele data van die betrokke (voormalige) studente vir die doel van die bogenoemde navorsingsprojek.

Hierdie toestemming is onderhewig aan die vereistes dat die (voormalige) studente op 'n vrywillige basis sal deelneem, dat persoonlike besonderhede van die betrokke deelnemers ten alle tye beskerm word, en dat die deelnemers anoniem moet bly.



Jan Botha
Senior Direkteur Institusionele Navorsing en Beplanning



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STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

“Understanding the Experiences of Educationally Disadvantaged Students at Stellenbosch University”

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Elza Lourens, from the Department of Curriculum Studies at Stellenbosch University. The results of this study will contribute to a master’s dissertation in education. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you were in SciMathUS and are currently still studying at Stellenbosch University (SU).

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The general goal of this study is to investigate the experiences of former SciMathUS students, mostly educationally disadvantaged students, at SU, a predominantly white, Afrikaans higher education institution.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

Meet with Elza Lourens once a week for the next three to four months for an interview of approximately 40 minutes at the GG Cilliers building.

Keep a journal for the next four months on themes agreed on between you and Elza Lourens.

3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

I propose that the findings of the study may be useful to:

- the SciMathUS programme with an interest in improving/adjusting the programme in order to affirm the students’ different cultures.
- SU with an interest in opening up conversations on possibilities of adjustment in practices with the aim of affirming differences in students’ cultures.

4. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will receive no payment for your participation to the study.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of keeping all collected data in a secure folder. If you allow the recording of the interviews you will have access to all interview data in order to review the data. Except for Elza Lourens the data will only be accessible to a transcriber and proof reader whom will handle the data with the same confidentiality as she will.

The findings of the research will be published in a Master's dissertation but your name will not be used. In presenting your data a different name which you may choose will be used.

6. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me by Elza Lourens in Afrikaans and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study.

Name of Subject/Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to [participant's name]. He was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in Afrikaans.

Signature of Investigator

Date