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How to cite this thesis
Cultivating Social Learning Spaces at an Urban Johannesburg University Student Residence

by

Najma Agherdien

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Philosophiae Doctor (Educationis)

in the

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

at the

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

Promotor

Professor N Petersen

January 2015
DECLARATION

I declare that this work, which I submit for my postgraduate degree, is my own unaided work and the work of others is appropriately acknowledged and referenced. I further declare that I have not submitted this work or any version of it to another university for assessment purposes.

Signed at: University of Johannesburg
On: __________________________
Name: Najma Agherdien
Signed: ________________________
ABSTRACT

This case study investigated the conceptualisation and implementation of social learning spaces (SLS) in a University of Johannesburg student residence. The literature base I drew on included ideas, concepts and constructs associated with learning communities [where the terms ‘SLS’ and ‘learning communities’ (LCs) are often used interchangeably], Wenger’s communities of practice, the First Year Experience (FYE), university student residence life and transformation in higher education. Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) as provided by Engeström and critical theory served as theoretical frameworks to guide the study. I used CHAT as a theoretical lens and as a tool of analysis. In addition, I used content analysis to analyse the data.

The main findings of this study show that, despite numerous efforts to get them to articulate their concerns, students found voice only in the SLS groups. Their sociocultural and historical backgrounds shaped how they interacted with residence management and prevented them from becoming more active in their own learning. Residence management and students’ lack of addressing matters of concern prevented the optimal development of SLS establishment. The established hegemonic practices of residence management further prevented them from recognising the need for new learning tools, spaces and practices. Major constraints to the development of SLS included the hierarchical and power-laden setting in the university environment, coupled with clearly established roles and responsibilities, and students’ as well as residence advisors’ lack of agency. Specific intervention and conscious creation was needed in establishing SLS. Some students found the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS vague at first and somewhat problematic, but over time, managed to apply what they had learned in these SLS spaces.

I have argued that given a chance and more time, learning communities could enable first year students to cope better with university demands. I propose a change in the cultural context, with its associated policies and practices. The implication for policy is that better alignment of institutional policy and residential policy is essential for the
successful implementation of SLS. The practical implication relates to implementing initiatives aimed at developing student agency and voice.

Much scholarly work is needed in the South African context on the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS. Further research can assist student residences in working actively to address hegemonic practises, develop student agency and voice and transform students’ academic identities.
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- To my husband Nadeem and my children Nabeela, Omar, Rayaan and Iman: your love, support and understanding mean the world to me. I dedicate this thesis to you.

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<td>Academic Development and Support</td>
<td>ADS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Research</td>
<td>AR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of College and University Housing Officers – International - South African Chapter</td>
<td>ACUHO-I-SAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities of practice</td>
<td>CoPs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Historical Activity Theory</td>
<td>CHAT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
<td>HEI</td>
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<tr>
<td>House committee</td>
<td>HK</td>
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<td>First Year Experience</td>
<td>FYE</td>
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<td>Learning Communities</td>
<td>LCs</td>
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<td>Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University</td>
<td>NMMU</td>
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<td>Participatory Action Research</td>
<td>PAR</td>
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<td>Quacquarelli Symonds</td>
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<td>Residence Advisor</td>
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<td>Social Learning Spaces</td>
<td>SLS</td>
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<td>Stellenbosch University</td>
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<td>University of Johannesburg</td>
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CHAPTER 1: PROVIDING A SPACE FOR COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

1.1. INTRODUCTION: LOCATING THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY

This Participatory Action Research case study investigated the conceptualisation and implementation of social learning spaces (SLS) at a University of Johannesburg (UJ) residence to see how these processes evolve and shape the learning environment of students. By reflecting on a pre-study phase in one student residence, I show how I use the lessons learned to help craft interventions towards the establishment of SLS at another student residence, which is the focus of this study. By studying the historical-socio-cultural context in which the SLS have been embedded in the pre-study phase and particularly this case study, I seek to uncover and examine enabling and constraining factors, which may directly or indirectly affect first year students’ transition into university life.

This chapter starts by providing broad theoretical concepts in order to locate the study. The literature that I have consulted includes ideas, concepts and constructs associated with learning communities [where the terms ‘SLS’ and ‘learning communities’ (LCs) are often used interchangeably], Wenger’s communities of practice (CoP), the First Year Experience (FYE), university student residence life and transformation in higher education. I also employ Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a theoretical lens. My main argument is that LCs present opportunities for academic and social development for students. This, to my mind, is incumbent upon students having a critical voice in residence activities and initiatives so that first, a safe ‘space’ for academic and social development and transformation can be nurtured; and second, the student residence discourse and practices facilitate student development. It also implies that student identities (who they are and who they become) are acknowledged, as students engage in the establishment of SLS. For this reason, CHAT was a valuable lens, as it enables a perspective or view that emphasises a holistic approach to development. Student voice as part of a transformation agenda
and student identity are the two main foci I address in this thesis¹, particularly when I discuss how residence space is organised and supported to help students’ transition into university life.

In this chapter I discuss the contextual background to higher education and touch on the debates about inadequate transformation of higher education in South Africa over the past two decades. In this study on SLS, I am particularly interested in the residence learning environment, with reference to how it operates, its associated practices and how students’ voices are incorporated. In this process, I examine factors that facilitate or widen transformation in this context. I then make a case for the motivation of this study (Section 1.2). In the next section, I discuss the notion of learning communities (LCs) – specifically why and how LCs are a viable option for twenty-first century higher education – followed by a brief overview of the theoretical framework that underpins this study. Thereafter, I describe the design of the study with its related methods and analysis, followed by the ethical considerations, envisaged contribution and delimitations. I end this chapter with an outline of the structure of the thesis and then finally a summary of this chapter.

1.2. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH PROBLEM AND MOTIVATION FOR STUDY

The political move to restructure and transform the higher educational landscape has been ongoing since the first South African independent elections in 1994 (Boughey, 2009; CHE, 2000; Chisolm 2008; Moja, 2010; Nzimande, 2012; Soudien, 2010). The move was political in the sense that it aimed to redress past inequalities (CHE, 2000) and included, but was not limited to, formal access to institutions by all eligible citizens irrespective of race, colour or creed. Almost two decades later, South African higher education continues to grapple with issues of access (Boughey, 2009:1), brought about largely by the legacy of apartheid and unequal preparedness of students for the demands of higher education study. One of the aspects students lack in terms of preparedness for higher education is what Morrow (1993:3) called “epistemological access” – access to good academic practices and approaches. A second aspect

¹ In a South African context, the term dissertation is used for Masters and the term thesis for a doctorate.
students lack is related to practices and ways of thinking around how they learn best and how to take responsibility for their own learning. A third aspect that students lack relates to practices and ways of thinking that include reflection on learning, where critical, collaborative and transformative thinking and understanding are valued and framed within a culture of trust and respect. Boughey (2009:8) contends that a university is an institution not where knowledge is taught, but rather, where students are shown “how to make knowledge”. Critical thinking practices thus go beyond academic or content learning. This study centred on collaborative knowledge-making practice, located in students’ living spaces. This space, I contend, requires critical examination, because it is in residence spaces where students’ habits, ideas and relationships are shaped and may determine the quality of their assimilation and incorporation into higher education.

An assumption of this study is that the greater majority of first year students do not have the requisite skills or tools needed to mediate the type of critical, collaborative and transformative learning associated with a university education. Poorly developed academic skills may lead to poor throughput and low success rates. A national study on dropout rates in the South African context (Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007:23) indicated that only 30% of students graduate within five years of study. This seems to underscore the idea that academic skills, as part of epistemological access, are problematic. A second assumption of this study is that providing access to an academic discipline’s practices and ‘ways of being’ for students could result in better throughput rates.

These assumptions are tied to the focus of the study, which is to explore the formation of SLS, which shapes students’ learning environments in the residences. The aim of LCs, as they are conceptualised in the initiatives I report on in this study, is to craft an environment where students find their voices, in other words, where they do not “still their voices to hear the voices of others” (Belenky, McVicker Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1997:37), but where “a powerful sense of their own capacities for knowing” is valued (ibid:38). This includes enabling their acculturation into specific communities. This inquiry traces the crafting and implementation of initiatives toward such an
environment, and in the process warrants a critical examination of the power relations together with associated hegemonic practices (Roth & Lee, 2007), including uncovering the hidden contradictions within the system.

With this in mind, this case study investigated the implementation of SLS at a selected University of Johannesburg (UJ) residence. The underlying assumption and concomitant theoretical framework of this study was that learning is essentially social, that is, we learn best when we learn together (Wenger et al., 2002). In my capacity as a UJ academic development officer, I worked with the students, Residence Warden (RW) and House Committee (informally known as the HK) at Res X and the first year students at another student residence (Res Y) in planning interventions, observing their implementation, assessing the outcomes and, on the basis thereof, refining future interventions. Through this reflective process, I worked collaboratively with the relevant stakeholders to seek to understand how best to implement LCs, but moreover to transform academic practice within this space. The process was designed to be ongoing as opposed to short, stand-alone interventions, which are believed to be ineffective (Greenwood & Levin, 1998:18).

Data for this study was generated in a student residence situated in an area that forms part of an enclosed section of a suburb. Initially, the RW of Res Y requested that I work with the students during the second half of 2012 as their June results were poor. Many students were failing or achieving less than 50% in their first year subjects. It was thus an opportune time to start the process of establishing SLS in a student residence. We (the RW, HK, first year residence students and I) worked collaboratively to create an environment that was supportive and that fostered academic excellence. As sharing is an important part of learning, I hoped that collaborative approaches would enable multiple opportunities for them to engage with various dimensions of university life. These include engaging with a diversity of race groups, dealing with a diversity of learning styles and adjusting to various cultures, all of which are characteristics of SLS at university, and assuming a willingness to question their own beliefs and assumptions. I concur with Weimer (2011:online) who argues:

When students are involved and engaged with the material, directing their learning of it and working on it with others, they are developing important
learning skills. They are learning to ask questions, to find answers, to challenge reasons, to consider alternatives, to evaluate evidence, and to solve problems.

In my view, based on my previous work with students over a number of years, it was this collaborative learning skill that needed nurturing and refinement with students, especially among first year students. As UJ already had many support systems in the first year academic programme and in the university classroom, I chose to focus on the student residences, as there are few interventions in this ‘space’. I was further motivated by the views that learning does not happen only in classrooms, but also in everyday “moment-to-moment living” (McNiff, 2002:18). It thus seemed most feasible to foster LCs in the living spaces and thus combine collective living space with collective learning space.

There is a large body of research that proposes that LCs are particularly valuable for first-year students (Hotchkiss, Moore & Pitts, 2006; Yale, Brinjak & Longwell, 2004). Many universities in the United States of America (USA) have consequently established LCs as part of their FYE programmes (see Tinto, 2012) and have categorised these as a high impact programme (Keup, 2013). High impact programmes are those that have the highest impact on student learning, that is, programmes that positively shape student learning, academic success and retention. However, it seems that very few South African universities have tackled the development and implementation of LCs or if they have, it is not well reported in the literature. At a South African Student Housing Conference that I attended in November 2013, it was confirmed that the literature base on student LCs in university residences in this country is almost non-existent.

Introducing the notion of LCs at UJ is an attempt to develop and implement SLS. It is also an attempt to shape residences into learning spaces as part of “diversity oriented transformation” (Moja, 2010:2). The reason for the focus on transformation relates to South Africa’s history of apartheid where, 20 years into democracy, unequal access to higher education, poor student readiness for university life, racial inequalities and gender discrimination are still affecting student academic success. I thus regarded transformation as an integral element of this study.
1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The main question addressed in this research is:

**How does the establishment and implementation of SLS at a selected UJ residence evolve and shape the learning environment of first year students?**

The research sub-questions (SQ) are:

1. How are SLS conceptualised and implemented in a student residence?
2. What issues enable or constrain students' engagement in SLS?
3. How do social, cultural and historical factors shape the formation of SLS?
4. What are students’ assumptions, perceptions and/or practices within SLS in their residence?

The aim of this study was to explore how SLS at selected UJ residences evolve and shape students’ educational spaces and practices. A secondary aim was to determine how SLS could contribute to the theoretical debate on the transformation of the higher education landscape.

In order to achieve the aims of the study, the following research objectives were set:

1. To critically examine the process of implementing SLS in a student residence.
2. To identify tensions and contradictions, if any, that emerge during the implementation of SLS and how they impact on student engagement.
3. To explore social/cultural and historical factors that shape the formation of SLS.
4. To examine students’ assumptions, perceptions and/or practice within residence SLS.

After some preliminary reading in 2010 before commencing my study, the UJ LCs Committee – of which I am a member – intentionally designed LCs and devised a definition of what constitutes a LC to direct their deliberation at the university and their work with student residences. At that point, not much thought was given to the inclusion of student voice in these deliberations. In hindsight, this omission or exclusion proved to be a major flaw in the first investigation of a UJ residence (which I shall refer to as the pre-study phase of my doctoral research), as no true learning
community can be created without the active involvement and input of all participants. The committee’s definition of a LC that was originally conceptualised is:

...a group of students with a common purpose and a desire to share experiences and to learn together outside the formal curriculum, often without an academic expert or authority figure present.

This definition was derived from the literature on LCs and was constructed on the basis of three guiding principles. First, the committee felt that all first year students should be exposed to some form of learning community outside the formal academic curriculum. Second, the committee wanted to encourage and advance all forms of diversity, be it social, ethnic, psychological or economic. Third, the physical environment of residence students – how intentionally or unintentionally inviting or uninviting it is – was deemed crucial for the success of LCs. The idea of the definition was thus to propose ways in which students could engage informally in collaborative sharing of perspectives, ideas and resources, so that the university experience become one that was conducive to collaborative learning. That is, the focus was aimed at sharing knowledge, making meaning, building relationships and cultivating a sense of belonging. However, not much thought was given initially to the ways in which LCs are conceptualised and implemented. Together with the omission of student voice, this was a major limitation of the committee’s initial thinking and working towards the establishment of LCs in student residences. It was also these mis-steps that prompted me to problematise the notion of LCs and question the process and practices associated with the way they were initially conceptualised and practiced.

1.4. THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES: ARISING FROM THE LITERATURE ON LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

In this thesis I problematise the concept ‘learning communities’ and show how I have progressed to the use of the term ‘social learning spaces’. The literature on student LCs and CoPs were drawn on to come up with a description of how the concept SLS is used in this study. Thus, in this study a working definition of a SLS is: a group of academically underprepared students learning to work together on intentionally
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designed activities to help them navigate academic life. In my view the ideas associated with social learning spaces serve as a precursor to the idea of a learning community in a student residence environment. This working definition may display elements associated with Wenger’s notion of CoPs, such as open dialogue, inviting different levels of participation and creating a rhythm. Elements related to developing private and public community spaces and combining familiarity with excitement were not part of the working definition. I acknowledge that in this chapter I do not provide a comprehensive overview but give some indication of how I conceptualised SLS in this study. I pick up the more detailed threads of the literature in chapter 2.

First, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) communities of practice (CoP) suggest that learning results from engagement in social processes. Through engagement, meaning as well as identity are negotiated and formed. Wenger (1998:95) posits that mutual engagement comprises:

…discovering how to engage, what helps and what hinders; developing mutual relationships; defining identities, establishing who is who, who is good at what, who knows what, who is easy or hard to get along with.

The study that is reported on in this thesis is my investigation into a process which attempted to help students engage collaboratively by not only creating opportunities for learning together, but also providing guidance on how to engage. This was achieved by participation in a number of workshops offered over a semester on the basis of intervention to initiate the process (see Chapter 3 for more detail).

As ‘social beings’, people participate or engage in a particular environment, bringing their past histories and experiences into their interactions. Thus, a historical and social context shapes students’ interactions (Wenger, 1998:47) and in the process, their identities as well (Lave & Wenger, 1991:98). Not only do people learn to work together on some shared activities, but they also learn ways of doing and seeing of that particular community. Hence, in this study I interrogate the social and historical environment of the selected residence and how students report these elements shaped their engagement in somewhat different ways. I also examine how students’ histories affect their engagement in SLS.
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Not everyone will participate at the same level, since groups (the UJ residence group being no exception) are so diverse in terms of socio-economic backgrounds, social skills levels, learning styles and motivation levels. Depending on how far they have mastered ways of doing and seeing, students will move from what is known as “legitimate peripheral participation” to “full participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991:37). These authors argue (ibid.:29):

“Legitimate peripheral participation” provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. This social process, includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills.

The authors suggest a sense of progression from scant participation to full participation over time. It was my hope that the students in the learning communities at the residence, in time, would move from peripheral to full participation. Smith (2003, 2009), however, criticises Lave and Wenger for ignoring the power relations that could constrain full participation. Another possible constraint is the occurrence of competing goals, leading to potential conflict (Roth, 2001:1002). The lenses of critical theory and CHAT are thus useful in helping me identify these shortfalls or limitations and in highlighting tensions inherent in the system of the community of practice of the residence environment.

Another issue could be students’ varied motivations for joining LCs. To make this point, I examine the notion of a “collective”. The new or 21st century culture of learning is characterised by an environment called a “collective” (Thomas & Brown, 2011:52). A collective environment is different to CoPs or a community in the sense that learning in a CoP creates a sense of belonging, while in a collective the idea is to belong so as to learn. The power of this collective, the authors argue, can be attributed to engagement. Students engage in learning “from one another”, and also “with one another” (ibid:52). I argue that both may be at play in this study, that is, my selected sample may be motivated not only to learn to belong, but also to belong so as to learn.
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Thomas and Brown (2011:37-38) contend that the new culture of learning thrives on change and students must be allowed to respond to this changing world naturally through “engagement”. Forming LCs situates students’ learning in a context where change is incorporated and not resisted, where mutual sharing of knowledge leads to enhanced understanding and mutual benefit, and where learning is a “cultural and social process of engaging with the constantly changing world” (ibid:47). Additionally, students learn in a context akin to the workplace. The authors caution against moving away from too much structure towards total freedom. Rather, they recommend striking a balance between the two, resulting in innovation or something different. They add that just by being in the crowd, students tend to benefit. In establishing LCs then, authors such as Wenger (1998) recommend a bit of structure to LCs as opposed to letting the LCs grow in a totally organic way. In this study, I will touch upon the lessons learned during the pre-study phase and show how I changed my way of working from a less structured to a more structured intervention (this PAR case study) over a two-year period.

1.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A SOCIO-CONSTRUCTIVIST, CULTURAL, HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY AND CRITICAL STANCE

To address the research questions, I make use of critical theory and CHAT (Cultural Historical Activity Theory) as appropriate theoretical lenses. CHAT, as a theoretical lens, enables a researcher to look at a research question from the perspective of bringing about desired change (Oswald & Perold, 2011:24; Roth & Lee, 2007:188; Wardekker, 2000:269) as it takes into account the entire context (Engeström, 1987, 1993; Kuutti, 1996). In particular, Engeström’s third-generation CHAT is useful in helping me to identify tensions in the activity, as a heuristic (guide or thinking tool) in the design of the learning activities and as a lens to make sense of my data.

Both CoPs and CHAT have Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory at their base. Social constructivist theory posits that learning happens in collaboration with others and it is the context or culture that determines how that learning is mediated (Vygotsky, 1978). The concept of scaffolding is another important concept in constructivism and
advances that peers, educators or experts need to support students to increase their level of understanding (Vygotsky, 1962). These social collaboration and cultural influences are the foundation of my thinking around the conceptualisation and implementation of LCs. While Wenger’s CoPs (1998) focus on the relations between the beginners and the knowledgeable, CHAT focuses on the emerging tensions in the activity system, highlighting power relations.

Critical theory, on the other hand, does not only seek to increase knowledge, but also enables a critique of the current learning practices and related issues around throughput, access, engagement and cultural integration, amongst others, with the aim of emancipation. Thus, critical theory as espoused by Habermas (1972) has an emancipatory interest, which entails freeing oneself from enslavement and control through awareness. In other words, the focus is on empowerment and transformation, but even more so, on critical reflection. Authors such as Foucault (1983), Habermas (1984), Kincheloe (2008) and Soudien (2010) have examined power relations, so I will use their studies to inform my perspective. These lenses permit me to conceptualise and explore the development of LCs, taking into account the accompanying complexities and existing patriarchal ideologies, while at the same time allowing me to explore power relations and how they shape group interactions.

CHAT is derived from Vygotsky’s ‘mediation’ as a cultural tool into human actions (Engeström, 2001:133). Engeström’s third-generation CHAT essentially foregrounds collective activity and is used as a theoretical framework for this entire study. It is also used as lens to view and make sense of data. CHAT promotes the adoption of a questioning stance (in this case, what is working and what is not and how we can advance more effectively). So, central to this study is the development of LCs through the establishment and implementation of SLS and engaging in action that promotes transformation (Engeström, 1987; Kuuti, 1996), making CHAT a suitable lens. Thus, CHAT’s interest is in development and change (Russell, 2002). See Figure 1.1, which represents Vygotsky’s subject, object and mediating tool “triad” (Engeström, 2001:134).
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Figure 1.1. The Origins of CHAT in Vygotsky’s work

The origins of CHAT as in Vygotsky’s work, as depicted in Figure 1.1, proposes that subjects transform objects into outcomes using tools or artifacts. That is, “any time a person or a group (subject) interacts with tools over time on an object with some shared motive to achieve an outcome, one can analyse their interactions as an activity system” (Russell, 2002:67). The activity is based on a common objective. Engeström (2001:134), however, saw this initial structure as too individualistic. Second-generation CHAT thus brings in the wider community, but is still criticised for being indifferent to cultural diversity. Roth (2012:88) cautions that we cannot understand how subjects work on objects without taking all aspects of the activity into account.

Therefore, third-generation CHAT is concerned with “dialogue, multiple perspectives, and networks of interacting activity systems” (Engeström, 2001:134). The wider community, with its related rules, norms, practices and conventions, impacts on why actors in an activity system do a certain activity and how that activity is going to be done. Furthermore, the activity requires labour or action and is divided amongst all stakeholders. Inherent in this activity are tensions (Engeström, 1987, 2001; Leont’ev, 1974; Roth, 2012) due to the rules and different levels of participation that exist. These tensions eventually drive the desired transformation or change (Barab, Barnett, Yamagata-Lynch, Squire & Keating, 2002:80; Kuuti, 1996; Roth & Lee, 2007:203). Additionally, the cultural and historical perspectives add to our understanding of not just ‘how’ the activity occurs, but also the reasons for the existence of the activity (Capper & Williams, 2004).
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In this study, the residence, or more specifically the House Committee as representative of the university structure and students (Subject), employs study time (Tools), with the idea of creating a co-operative and mutually beneficial learning environment characterised by increased throughput (Object), so that a transformed student learning environment (Outcome) is achieved. In a linked activity system, the researcher, as part of the FYE initiative together with the students, uses workshops and group discussions (tools) to mediate collaborative learning spaces at the residence (object) to achieve a transformed learning environment (outcome). The common object of the linked activity systems is enhanced learning. I enter this space with a critical lens to try to understand how SLS are shaped and how we can make them more effective based on my understanding of what students are telling me and on my observation. It is this common object (enhanced learning) that Roth (2012:92) calls the “activity driving motive” or what CHAT authors such as Leontiev (1981), Engeström (1987), Hardman (2007) and Foot (2002) call object orientedness. Notably, the House Committee assists me in establishing and implementing the LCs, indicating my collaborative approach. Thus, “multi-voicedness” – being the different perspectives, multi-traditional practices and so forth – is taken into account (Engeström, 2001:136). CHAT as evolving theory is depicted in Figure 1.2.
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Notably, although the stakeholders have a common objective, the need for the activity is different. For example, the residence has a need to increase the throughput rate; the LCs Committee on the other hand wants a better overall student experience through implementing SLS; and the students’ need relates to academic success. A whole community – including RW, RAs, HK, LCs Committee, student affairs, the researcher and students – is involved in labour or achieving the outcome. Additionally, this division of labour is riddled with power relations like the hierarchical structure of the residence with its five-pillar model (which includes art and culture, sport, leadership, social and community engagement).

Possible tensions inherent in interactions can relate to the rules, norms and conventions (see Chapter 3 for Res Y context). For example, a certain timeslot known as study time/quiet time – between 19:00 and 20:00 – is used and roll call is taken; if

![Figure 1.2 Adapted CHAT Model](image-url)
students do not attend, they are answerable to the RW who has to enforce rules and
discipline. It is my hope that through CHAT, these tensions and contradictions
(Engeström, 1987) become visible, leading to an identification of the tensions between
the various nodes of the activity system and the mediating factors with respect to the
‘subject’ and the object’ within the community. This allows for a better understanding
of the processes of how LCs optimally develop. The aim is to create a space that is
conducive to effective, collaborative and interdependent student learning. The
tensions can impact negatively on the activity system, possibly leading to failure in the
development of the LCs. Problematising the inherent tensions is essential and merely
introducing interventions will not give a complete picture of how LCs can successfully
enhance academic success.

Each residence has particular values and cultures within which it operates (Rensleigh,
2009:4). CHAT is a useful lens to factor in the cultural and historical contexts within
which the activity system resides. Learning is not just physiological; it is a social and
cultural practice (Capper & Williams, 2004:3). To this end, I compile a profile (of the
culturally and linguistically diverse student group), together with a description of the
residence context and wider university or higher education environment. In examining
such profiles, I hope to make explicit possible tensions that may emerge, as these
individuals respond to tensions quite differently. In addition, a CHAT analysis is not
complete without looking at the history of the activity system, that is, we cannot
consider what is, without considering how it came about (Capper & Williams, 2004:12)
(see Chapter 3, Sections 3.3 and 3.4.3).

A historical factor that can potentially impact on the activity is the notion that Higher
Education Institutions (HEIs) have not managed to appropriately prioritise student
academic success (Pandor, as cited in Van Zyl, 2010:4). Consequently, the
Department of Education has instituted the Teaching Output Grants (TOGs), which
state that the graduation rate must meet set benchmarks or HEIs will face a reduction
in funding (Department of Education, 2004:8). The universities’ motive regarding the
increase in throughput rates may thus be linked to such pressures. A critical theoretical
stance, together with CHAT as theoretical framework, can potentially uncover hidden
tensions that exist or that emerge during this study.
1.6. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The methodological design underpinning this inquiry is a qualitative PAR case study design, located in the critical paradigm. Merriam (2002:8) argues that a case study is “a vehicle for in-depth description and analysis”. The interventions sought a change in the student learning environment at a specific location and a critical, in-depth understanding of how the implementation of LCs at this residence site through the perspectives of various stakeholders made the PAR case study the most suitable design. The idea is not to generalise results, but rather to gain an in-depth insight into how the formation of LCs shape the learning environment in Res Y from the perspective of stakeholders. However, it is hoped that this study can inform the development and deployment of learning communities in the broader UJ context based on abduction, that is, “when generalisations are made from known cases and applied to an actual problem situation by making appropriate comparisons” (Johansson, 2003:10).

The boundaries of this case needed to be identified, as suggested by both Stake (1995) and Yin (2003). The study critically explores an embedded UJ residence, to see how the development of LCs shapes the learning environment of the first year students within it. A description of how the LC intervention was conceptualised and then experienced by the participants is given through employing multiple data collection methods. This case study is described as both descriptive and exploratory (Yin, 2003). It should be noted that it is not within the scope of this study to include all residences, nor is it possible to include all students at the selected residence.

Yin (2009:8) argues that a case study is used when the focus of the study is to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, which is the case for this study. A case study is also used when the behaviour of participants in the study cannot be influenced, and when contextual conditions need to be uncovered because they are believed to be relevant to the phenomenon under study, and when there is no clear distinction between context and boundaries. This study warranted an examination of the context, as I could not aim to influence transformation in the learning environment of residence students, without an understanding of the setting in which the learners are situated. Further, I
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worked collaboratively with students, the RW and the HK to help them effect change in the residence learning environment. Through my association, I provided the impetus for change. This is typical of the duality of the insider role of PAR researchers and involved stepping back as researcher to investigate the phenomenon.

1.6.1. DATA COLLECTION METHODS
My research design determined the chosen methods (Jones & Somekh, 2005:139), which for this study were semi-structured interviews, participant observation, document analysis and a questionnaire. Using multiple methods allowed me to study the case from different angles, thus permitting a much more nuanced view and yielding triangulated results (Johansson, 2003:3). Such multiple data collection methods also helped increase the reliability and validity (Stringer, 2004:13) of the study.

1.6.2. PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLE
This study investigated the establishment of SLS at a UJ residence (Res Y). In this residence, I interviewed students who voluntarily made themselves available to be interviewed regarding a possible implementation of SLS and to reflect on their past study habits and exam results and its impact on their willingness to form a SLS. In line with a critical stance, I chose participants on a voluntary basis and where the participants in part directed the conditions for the intervention.

In my previous work with another residence (Res X) the analysis of the first round of interviews with participants, namely the Residence Manager (RM) and Residence Advisors (RAs), clearly pointed to problems relating to communication issues, power struggles, policy constraints and their perception of student as apathetic, among others. The perception with these stakeholders that there was general student apathy is questionable. This influenced the way in which this study was conceptualised and planned. It also influenced the critical stance adopted in this study. I used the lessons learned from this pre-study to inform the design of the case study. To avoid a top-down approach at Res Y, I started with five semi-structured interviews with nine first year students – four groups of two (dyads) and one individual (upon request). The RW
invited students to make themselves available at a specific time (between 13:00 and 17:00 on 11 August 2012). The RAs assisted in organising available students. I used the interview questions as a guide to explore issues such as satisfaction with current study methods, challenges faced, June results and improvement plan, and academic and social support needed. The interviews served to explore a possible implementation of LCs for 2013, but more importantly, to ensure the active involvement of students in the planning phase.

The 2013 intervention involved the biweekly facilitation of workshops during study time. My role as facilitator was to encourage students, without being prescriptive, to construct meaning through questioning assumptions and to be critical agents of change. Habermas (1972) cautions against indoctrination of both the left and the right, and rather advocates self-reflection to “become aware of personal and social constraints” (Garrison & Archer, 2000:34). The intention was to invite the students to interrogate “their own and each other’s raced, gendered and classed histories” and how these shape their identities (Bozalek et al., 2010:1025). I wanted to encourage students to draw on and strengthen their own agency when engaging in academic activities and designed the learning activities accordingly. The focus was thus on giving student voice.

1.6.3. INTERVIEWS: INDIVIDUALS AND DYADS
Conducting interviews allowed me to get the views of everyone involved as opposed to my understanding alone. In this way, I sought an ‘insider’ perspective. This type of interviewing allows for a multiplicity of voices in one space, permits tensions to emerge in the interview process and is collaborative in nature. In conjunction with the individual interviews, I conducted four dyad interviews (purely for pragmatic reasons). The interpretivist perspective framing this inquiry requires that participant voices be heard, making the interview a suitable method. The benefits of this method are numerous and include the following: it encourages participation; allows participants’ voices or discussion to emerge; and allows participants to talk freely and openly. While

2 The person in charge of the residence was known as the RM at Res X while at Res Y he/she was known as the RW. Both played the same role.
interviews are valuable sources of information, it must be borne in mind that the participants often give their own biased opinions (Remenyi, 2011:3).

1.6.4. PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

As Wittgenstein (2001) theorises, “If you want to know whether a man is religious don’t ask him, observe him”. Through engagement with the participants via dialogue and observation as per facilitation of workshops, I could become part of the participants’ world and gain a better understanding of students’ experiences when engaged in LCs, including the implicit and explicit tensions inherent in the activity system (see research SQ 2 and 3). I was mindful that I was not able to observe all occurrences (Flick, 2009:232).

To this end, I kept field notes guided by an observation schedule for analysis. I compiled the observation schedule from my research questions as well as from concepts emerging from my theoretical framework. The success of this method is dictated by the accuracy of the field notes that were kept (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I audio recorded all group feedback sessions in workshops, and kept handwritten notes on my impressions of the group interactions soon after each workshop (Lofland & Lofland, as cited in Flick, 2009). I do not at any point in the intervention or investigation claim to be neutral, but recognise that I form an integral part of the transformation process.

1.6.5. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

I collected secondary data comprising selected official and unofficial documents (minutes of meetings, residence policy documents and researcher field notes) to enrich the contextual and historical background (see research SQ 1 and 4). Significantly, Flick (2009:259) points out that a document exemplifies a range of realities and is not factual. Hence, I examined selected documents, especially the residence policy and FYE documents. I considered how these documents translated into practice, that is, whether they enabled or constrained practice (see research SQ 2). In addition, my field notes – constituting my reflections on the research process, my impressions, my feelings, etc. – constitute data (Flick, 2009:16) and formed part of the documents analysed.
1.6.6. QUESTIONNAIRE

I used a questionnaire to compile a student profile. I deemed such a profile invaluable in giving a historical, socio-economic and cultural account of who the students were (see research SQ 3). This questionnaire was based on Van Zyl’s (2012) Student Profile Questionnaire (SPQ), which had undergone extensive testing to ensure validity and reliability. The adapted version contained an extra section on residence life to provide a contextualised version suitable for this study. The rationale for compiling a student profile via a questionnaire was to get closer to a socio-cultural, historical perspective of the study sample.

1.6.7. ANALYSING THE DATA USING CONTENT ANALYSIS AND A CHAT LENS

Content Analysis involves moving from codes to categories and finally to themes. An established code refers to small bits of information (Creswell, 2013:184). Gray (2009:455) on the other hand calls codes “shorthand ways of describing the data”. The codes were constructed from the data through my interaction with it in grounded theory mode (Charmaz, 2011:164). To ensure validity, firstly, codes were double checked by my supervisor and secondly, a critical reader further assisted in checking consistency and accuracy of codes. Thirdly, the interviews picked up on underlying issues and fourthly the informal chats with participants helped me to capture the essence of collected data. These four instances assisted in member checking, as is particular to a PAR methodology. See Chapter 4 for a detailed account of the analysis process.

I used CHAT as lens for analysis to make sense of the data. The seven components of third-generation CHAT – subject, tool, object, outcome, rules, community and division of labour – highlighted prevalent aspects in the data at different points. CHAT is “a science that emphasises the emergent nature of mind in activity and acknowledges a central role for interpretation in its explanatory framework” (Cole, 1996:104) thus complementing an interpretivist stance. These codes, together with further line by line coding – where a code refers to “a word or short phrase” that

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3 Van Zyl and I worked in the same unit and we had an informal discussion about his questionnaire. Permission to use and modify the questionnaire was granted informally.
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captures the essence or meaning (Saldaña, 2009:3) – were generated. All collected data, for example interview transcripts, minutes of meetings, field notes, etc., was assigned to a unit, commonly known as a **hermeneutic unit**.

**1.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: DEALING WITH HUMAN PARTICIPANTS**

Ethical issues came strongly to the fore as I dealt with human participants, but even more so because I was researcher as well as facilitator. My dual role dictated that I protect my participants’ rights and privacy and treat them fairly and equitably. Pseudonyms were used for participants and the residence to protect their privacy. Informed consent was sought by informing all participants about the research study, inviting voluntary participation and including both verbal and written consent. Students who did not attend the workshops were not forced to participate and only those who availed themselves for additional interviews were contacted.

Participants were informed first that the implementation of SLS was working towards the establishment of LCs at their respective residences as part of a bigger UJ initiative to help first year students cope with academic life. Second, they were informed that the research was part of my doctoral study and therefore the data collected would be written up in my research report. Third, I indicated that the data would be used to inform the establishment of student LCs at the wider UJ. The students’ needs were therefore foremost in this study and the aim was to generate benefits for them. They were further informed that artefacts produced during the workshops – such as photographs taken of group interactions and recordings of interviews, feedback sessions and conversations – would be used only with their expressed consent. It is noteworthy that there were no marks awarded for the activities and artefacts produced; consequently, students would not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. Last but not least, the Faculty Academic Ethics Committee granted the study ethical clearance (ethical clearance number: 2012054). The clearance process included gaining informed consent and protecting students’ privacy (see Addendum C: the letter of consent). I will pick up on ethical issues in more detail again in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5.
1.8. ENVISAGED ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

In relating the possible contributions of the study I will relate this work on SLS to the larger body of literature and research on LC. The reasons for the differing use of the terms is because the South African context requires different ways of working, doing and being. On a practical level, LCs at universities in the United States of America (USA) have been done somewhat differently to how this study proposed to develop and implement LCs. In the USA, LCs are accredited courses that students enrol for. In the South African context, however, accreditation means funding, creating posts, salaries, etc., which implies scarce resources like time and money. Moreover, I was reluctant to add yet another course, which can be very alienating and overwhelming for first year students, resulting in possible extra “disconnected segments” or “add-on services” (Tinto, 2002:online).

On a more theoretical level, I hoped that this study could contribute to the theoretical debate around transformation, retention rates and the first year experience. It is further hoped that this study could offer an understanding of the process of establishing SLS as a precursor to the development of LC in the South African context. In this respect I will also show the relationship of this work to the international literature on LC and how I have utilised the lenses of Critical Theory, CoPs and CHAT.

1.9. AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into five chapters, each of which is briefly described:

**Chapter 1.** This chapter provides an overview of the study by describing the context of the study, presenting the research question, aims and purpose and introducing the theoretical framework and the literature review. The chapter ends with a description of the design of the study and lastly presents some ethical considerations.

**Chapter 2.** Chapter 2’s focus is on the review of the literature on the first year experience (FYE), transformation in higher education, and a description of residence life with its associated policies and practices. My theoretical framework is made explicit in this chapter but will be touched upon throughout the study. An argument is
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Presented for the transformation of educational practices in HEIs, through the use of social collaborative practices and by allowing students to assume a critical voice.

Chapter 3. This chapter is dedicated to an explication of my research design, which includes the methodological framework, such as data collection methods, sample selection and data analysis. I include the design of the workshops as an intervention that was held to initiate the formation of SLS. A description of participant demographics is presented. Here I attempt to show how CHAT can be used as a heuristic to design learning activities, to identify tensions and as an analytical lens to make sense of data.

Chapter 4. In this chapter, I present the process of working with the data and provide ample examples of raw and worked data to establish an audit trail. In addition, I provide broad themes and patterns.

Chapter 5. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings and the implications of the findings for the conceptualisation and implementation of LCs. I provide a brief discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study.

1.10. SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 1
This study investigated the establishment and implementation of SLS to see how they shape the first year residence environment. In this chapter, I argue for the inclusion of a critical student voice in initiatives, to foster academic and social development and transformation. I also argue that the student residence discourse and practices constrain the development of SLS. I further suggest that student identities be acknowledged as students participate in the establishment of SLS. The main foci addressed are student voice – linked to a transformation agenda – and student identity. A brief contextual background to higher education is presented in this chapter. The notion of learning communities and an overview of the underpinning theoretical framework of this study is given. I propose to address the tensions inherent in the system through a CHAT perspective.
CHAPTER 2: STUDY OF THE LITERATURE: SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1. INTRODUCTION: THE CREATION OF SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES AND ASSOCIATED DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES

In this inquiry, I aimed to investigate how the formation and implementation of social learning spaces (SLS) shape and evolve the learning environment of a student residence. The previous chapter provided the context of the study. This chapter first explores the notion of Learning Communities (LCs) with the intention of locating this study in the broader literature. I discuss how learning communities are conceptualised generally and implemented more specifically at other higher education institutions (HEIs), in particular, in the United States of America (USA) as well as in South Africa. I draw particularly on the literature in the USA context, as LCs are more entrenched in student residence environments than in South Africa, where the literature base is still growing. Although there are many people working in the field of residence life and student affairs in South Africa, there are not many, if any, publications in this regard. In the USA, the practice has been around for about 40 years (from 1970) and the body of knowledge has grown judging from the increasing number of publications on the subject, exemplified by the introduction of the Journal of the Freshman Year Experience in 1989 (Keup, 2013). I conclude this section of the literature study with an explanation of the term SLS and how it relates to the concept of LC as I will use it in this study.

A second central strand of this chapter is the transformative aspect, in particular, the inclusion and promotion of student voice. I am interested in how the work around the implementation of SLS could lead to the transformation of residence spaces for the benefit and/or development of students. The aspect of transformation I am most interested in is student voice. In my experience of higher education, student voice is often conspicuously absent in many institutional initiatives. While many initiatives – such as the FYE initiative – are well intentioned, they do not always consider student voice sufficiently. In my view, the inclusion of all voices, through a partnership with

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4 This study was concluded in 2014 and does therefore not draw on 2014 resources or the “High Impact Practice” literature – a growing body of work on learning communities – but only references it briefly (see Section 2.3).
Chapter 2: Study of the Literature

stakeholders, can facilitate an enabling learning environment for students. In order to provide a nurturing space that can lead to academic and social development, students should have an on-going, active and critical voice in HEI initiatives. The creation of LCs through the establishment of SLS is an example of such an initiative.

Based on my general UJ work with the residences, I argue that the very discourse and practices that are used in the student residences are inhibiting the development of SLS for the students and preventing them from developing a voice. Examples of such discourses and practices relate primarily to aspects such as the naming conventions, like the title ‘Residence Warden’ and the negative connotation it holds. It was thus my assumption that such issues, together with the unequal power these wardens and residence house committee (informally known as the HK) have over students, constrain engagement in SLS. A second assumption was that the establishment of a very rigid two-hour study session, where students are forbidden to talk or discuss work goes against a transformative agenda. In this climate, I questioned how such practices and discourses aligned with the idea of creating SLS. This, among other things, sparked my interest in how to create SLS and the discourses and practices associated with it and how transformation is thought about in such spaces.

In establishing a literature base for this study around the formation of SLS and its potential to boost transformation of the learning environment (how it operates, the practices and giving student voice), I draw primarily on literature in the field of LCs. I draw particularly on how LCs enable learning and transformation in higher education, especially in residence life and the FYE initiative. Included in this chapter is a discussion of CHAT as theoretical lens, which I find highly relevant to the transformation agenda.

I begin this chapter by arguing for the collaborative engagement of students in conceptualising SLS. I draw particularly on Wenger’s communities of practice and learning communities as implemented in higher education institutions to conceptualise SLS. I propose that the higher education environment, or residence space in particular, advocates a transformative approach to learning if successful SLS formation is to be attained.
2.2. LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In distinguishing between the different types of student LCs and Communities of Practice (CoPs) for a higher education context, I draw on social constructivist interpretations of LCs, LCs in higher education, and the development of LCs and CoPs which are mostly from the workplace context. I show how I take elements from each body of literature to inform the conception of SLS as I use the term in this study SLS, as they are applicable to a first year residence in a South African university. My main argument is that LCs present opportunities for students to develop both academically and socially. I use the terms CoPs and LCs to inform the notion of SLS in this study. Although there are differences in the way in which the terms LCs and SLS are used in the literature, I ask the reader's forbearance in my movement between the terms LC and SLS in the next sections. I will draw on elements of CoPs as they are relevant to the theoretical framework and applicable in the setting.

2.2.1. CONCEPTUALISATION OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The term ‘Learning Community’, according to the literature, is used differently in different settings. Two definitions often cited in USA literature are: “groups of people engaged in intellectual interaction for the purpose of learning” (Cross, 1998:4); and “an environment where learners are brought together to share information, to learn from each other, and to create new knowledge” (Kemp, 2010:63). More examples, as cited in Kraska (2008), are: a curriculum designed to support teacher/student relationships over an extended period (Smith & Hunter, 1988); coordinated courses with a structured curriculum (Rasmussen & Skinner, 1999); and learners and educators working in cooperative groups in class (Hess & Mason, 2005). Another example of a LC is a group of underprepared students engaging in a basic skills course (like writing and study skills) related to a specific content module (Tinto, 1999, 2012). These examples serve as conceptual categories for LCs, which I expand on under Section 2.2.2.

Although different definitions exist, constructivist notions of sharing and collaborative interaction and engagement underpin all conceptions of LCs. Thus, at the heart of LCs is Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivism, which posits that knowledge is socially
constructed and meaning is negotiated rather than imposed. In my view, the strength of LCs lies in this underlying constructivist philosophy of how learning takes place.

Partly because of my initial work with LCs in student residences and my continued reading in the field, I posit that LCs have the potential to facilitate collaborative opportunities for student engagement, and in turn, student success and for transforming student identity in a residence environment. Through my work, I have come to realise how learning in student residences is impacted by factors such as university directed initiatives to conceptualise and implement LC in student residences which I see as being introduced through the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS. I concur with Wenger (1998:174) who sees engagement as a threefold process comprising ongoing negotiated meaning, the formation of relationships and the inclusion of historical practices. Additionally, he sees engagement not just as activity, but rather as a matter of “community building, resourcefulness, social energy and emergent knowledgeability” (ibid:237). Thus, engagement is a process requiring much more than simply designing activities for interaction. By implication, the educator or facilitator must consciously consider how students interact, why they interact, with whom they interact and whether the physical space is conducive to collaborative activity. I will pick up these threads of argument in various sections of this review.

First I discuss the synergies and differences between student LCs and CoPs and conclude with a working explanation of SLS that I will utilise in this thesis. At the South African BEtreat workshop, presented in May 2013 in Cape Town, Wenger who together with Lave (1991) first coined the term ‘community of practice’ introduced me to the notion of social learning spaces (SLS). His description of SLS as, “social containers that enable genuine interactions among participants, who can bring to the learning table both their experience of practice and their experience of themselves in that practice” (Wenger, 2009:3) resonated with my understanding of what we were trying to establish in the student residence environment. His reasoning is that SLS are more encompassing of a social learning capability, that is, not as restrictive as a learning community. Participants’ ways of thinking and interaction is underlined by values of the dominant members of the community. Therefore power issues – especially the ones relating to position and hierarchy – are active and become seen
as normal whilst other behaviour is seen as deviant. This resonated well with my work at the student residences. In adopting the more explanatory term SLS I am mindful that this newer term builds on a long history of the author’s work in LC and in CoPs. In adopting the term SLS I am also mindful of the literature on LC where the term is used to capture collaborative working relationships between groups and differs from context to context. I draw on all these histories in this study to inform the literature base.

2.2.2. STUDENT LEARNING COMMUNITIES: COMING TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THE TERM IS USED

There is a considerable amount of literature on LCs and CoPs in which the two concepts are used interchangeably. In this part of the literature review, however, I discuss each one separately to inform my own conception of SLS. Oscar Lenning and Larry Ebbers, leading authorities on higher education and authors of the well-known book, ‘The Powerful Potential of Learning Communities: Improving Education for the Future’ (1999), address LC related issues such as the need for LCs, different types of student LCs and related benefits, etc. These authors describe four generic characteristics of LCs that I argue can also serve as conceptual categories for thinking about different types of LCs. These are:

1. Curricular learning communities comprising students enrolled in two or more courses often across disciplines;
2. Classroom learning that has integrated pedagogical approaches, such as students doing group projects or forming informal study groups;
3. Residential learning communities where students taking common courses live in the same residence and have opportunities to interact academically;
4. Student-type learning communities created to serve the specific needs of particular student groupings, such as underprepared students, historically underrepresented students, honours students, students with disabilities and students with similar academic interests (such as women in maths, science and engineering).

Other forms of learning communities include the traditional learning group – a group of students working on a common task – and the pseudo-group – a group that is told
to collaborate but where members do not trust or know each other (see Whitelaw, de Beer & Henning, 2009). Wheelan (2005:3) argues that grouping students together and asking them to help each other can result in either pseudo-groups or traditional learning groups, where the danger is that there are often no tangible benefits to all students. Instead, some strategic design or planning is required to make such groupings work. In Tinto’s words (2012:2329), “student success does not arise by chance” but requires intentional action and effort. In a higher education context this is most often directed by academic advisors, lecturers, etc.

More recently, universities have adapted all or some of the four types of LCs described earlier to offer a means of academic support that is often linked to either first year seminars or other courses (Tinto, 2012:795). These LCs, Tinto argues, are especially valuable for underprepared students, as the LCs help them to cope with the educational demands of their new educational setting. He recommends that these LCs be linked to credit-bearing courses to ensure learning that is contextualised. One such example at UJ’s Faculty of Education is the educational excursion in which first year students are taken out of their university context for three days to learn to live and work together (De Beer, Petersen & Dunbar-Krige, 2012). The initiative is linked to the introductory course in the first semester of a teacher education programme and focuses on the personal and professional development of the first year student-teacher. This initiative is the focus of a National Research Foundation funded team research project (Petersen, 2010) with four post graduate students. The result of some of the work has been published in a number of national and international publications.

Additionally, the social and academic engagement of LCs promotes persistence and success (Tinto, 2012). My study draws optimally on this perspective of LCs. In this study, the interventions associated with the establishment of SLS towards the promotion/formation of LCs in the student residence were designed intentionally to help students cope with academic life – the pressures and demands of higher education – and by implication, to nurture academic success. Through such engagement, I had multiple opportunities to listen to student voices, which I deem to be integral to initiatives to promote academic success.
2.2.3. DRAWING ON WENGER’S NOTION OF ‘COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE’ TO INFORM SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN A UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG STUDENT RESIDENCE

To enrich my conceptualisation of social learning spaces and learning communities, I drew on Wenger’s notion of Communities of Practice (CoPs). In CoPs, individuals enhance and develop their understanding of practice through collegial sharing or social activity (Wenger, 1998). In drawing on this element of CoPs, I am mindful that this is not all that constitutes a CoP and that CoPs have undergone several changes in the way they are interpreted and are still considered an evolving concept.

The development and participation of CoPs are for the most part informal and organic, though there is dissent in the literature about how much structure a CoP ought to have. I would argue, however, that when working with first year students in a residence environment, intentional guidance and structure is needed initially to ensure that the community stays active and vibrant. After all, higher education is situated in a particular context and has to be intentionally designed (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991), as relationships with others are a significant component of this interaction. In a residence environment, especially, the context determines the kinds of activities that students engage in and the relationships that form, which together affect students’ social and academic engagement.

2.2.3.1. Communities of Practice: Elements and Principles

Although CoPs take many forms, shapes and sizes, there are three generic elements, namely domain, community and practice (Wenger, 1998, 2004). The ‘domain’ refers to the main subject of the CoP. It is the shared topic of interest, area of expertise or purpose for which the community is joined together. The ‘community’ is the group of people who are participating; they must have a shared sense of community and trust, without which the community will not flourish. In addition in a CoP ‘newcomers’ engage with ‘old-timers’ through a process known as ‘legitimate peripheral participation. Periferality according to Lave and Wenger (1991:35) suggests that ‘there are multiple, varied, more-or-less-engaged and inclusive ways of being located in the fields of participation defined by a community’. The ‘practice’ refers to the tools and methods
that the community develops collaboratively to do practical work. It is, however, important to note that the community is not just an interest group, but also a community of practitioners who develop practical knowledge (Wenger, 2004). Wenger (2004:4) argues that simply doing the same tasks does not necessarily constitute a community:

Merely having the same job or the same challenges does not make them into a community. Where are the relevant people? Do they know each other? Do they interact? What is in the way? To what extent are they already forming a community and what will it take to move them to further stages of development?

Wenger (2004) further advises that when practitioners form communities in their domains, it is crucial to aid development by supporting reciprocal interactions. The kind of support includes resources, technological infrastructure, and support teams, explicit roles for members and dedicated time for interaction. In later work on this topic, Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) revised their interpretation of the concepts domain, community and practice, signalling the theory’s evolving nature. The changes are reflected in Table 2.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Original meaning</th>
<th>Revised meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domain</td>
<td>main subject shared area of expertise purpose of the community</td>
<td>common ground separates members from non-members topic and content boundaries and rules of engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>group who participates in the CoP share a sense of community and trust</td>
<td>social structure where learning occurs relationships through interactions relationship building is core</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>practitioners have shared repertoire/practice</td>
<td>shared interest context specific</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the element of the ‘domain’, the new understanding describes it as the common ground that distinguishes members from non-members and determines the topic and content boundaries and rules of engagement. The interpretation of the concept ‘community’ changed to incorporate the social structure, where learning occurs through interactions and relationships with others, making relationship-building core.
Lastly, the meaning of ‘practice’ changed to include the community’s shared interest and was context specific.

It would be helpful at this point for me to distinguish how CoPs are different from common, everyday groups. Wenger’s (2004) indicators of CoPs are useful and include:

- Sustained mutual relationships
- Shared ways of doing and seeing
- Information flow and innovation
- On-going conversations and interactions
- Sense of belonging
- Knowing what others know, what they can do and how they can contribute to an enterprise
- Mutually defining identities
- Being able to distinguish the appropriateness of actions and products
- Specific tools, representations and other artefacts
- Local tradition and shared stories
- Own jargon

It is clear from the elements listed that CoPs do not develop overnight, but are cultivated over time to build sustained relationships, for members to have on-going conversations and to develop shared understandings. Moreover, CoPs are situated in a socio-economic, historical and cultural context (Wenger, 1998:79) that shapes their development. A study done by Boud and Middleton (2003:200) found that not all groups who work together will display all indicators of CoPs. The “loose” groups, where people do not bond, did not always have “interpersonal and collegial familiarity”. In the more “tightly” formed groups, however, one of the more significant findings to emerge from their study is that “loosely coupled communities of practice” are ones where the “framing of knowledge” – what knowledge is transferred or not – is weak. The implication for this study is that knowledge sharing is vital for effective SLS establishment.
2.2.3.2. Identity Development in Communities of Practice

Wenger (1998) argues that a CoP involves the negotiation of identity, in the sense that practices warrant thinking about what it means to be a human being. Furthermore, learning includes a transformation of who students are as human beings; that is, it is an experience of identity (Wenger, 1998) and is formed through action, discourses and language (Billet, 2007). Lave and Wenger (1991:98) view identity as a product of participation in activity systems, more than as a result of cognitive processes. For Eckert and Wenger (1994), both personal identities and institutional identities are shaped in this way. However, if a strong sense of identity and meaning is not formed, the learning community is fragile (Boud & Middleton, 2003). Having said that, in the context of this study, it is one of my underlying assumptions that students essentially needed to learn how to act and communicate in the university and residence sites in order to prosper optimally in academic spaces.

Eckert and Wenger (1994) suggest that not only are personal identities shaped in this way, but institutional identities as well. Two examples they cite are the school and the workplace. They argue that living in institutions requires knowing how to act in them. This, I argue, is the same for residence students.

The knowledge required includes what the institution is about, how it works, what it requires of one and one’s peers, what one’s place within it is and can be. As this knowledge is acquired and enacted in practice, it comes to constitute a sense of oneself as a participant in an institution: it becomes part of one’s institutional identity (Eckert & Wenger, 1994:1).

Wenger (1998:145) sees identity as involving the development of a sense of belonging and of negotiating experiences within CoPs. Thus CoP formation involves negotiating identities (ibid:146). James (2007:4041) contends that while Lave and Wenger recognise the importance of identity formation through a focus on individual stories within a CoP, they tend to ignore the fluid context in which people are situated and the ongoing impact the context has on their identities. This is where one main critique of their work on CoPs arises; in the implicit and explicit power relations that constitute the community and the roles of participants within it (Li et al., 2009).
Another strong critique is raised by Boud and Middleton (2003), who write about communities of practice in the workplace setting, and who caution that not all learning organisations have strong features of communities of practice, as some do not build a durable sense of identity and meaning. They also caution that CoPs are complex and are not easily shaped; contrary to what Wenger et al. (2002) advocate. Li, Grimshaw, Nielsen, Judd, Coyte and Graham (2009) agree that CoPs are difficult to develop, attributing the difficulty to the tension between the individuals’ needs versus the needs of the organisation. These are all aspects I need to bear in mind in this study when drawing on this body of literature.

2.2.3.3. Drawing on Wenger’s Principles of Communities of Practice in Designing interventions in the student residence environment

As argued earlier, despite the voluntary and organic nature of CoPs, careful design is still needed to keep the community flourishing. To aid the development of CoPs, Wenger et al. (2002) provide a practical framework comprising seven principles of CoP design, as illustrated in Figure 2.1.
Wenger et al. (2002) highlight the following design principles: First, central to designing for evolution is the promotion of development. Promoting organic growth instead of structured, predetermined plans is also desirable. Second, while an internal understanding of the community is crucial, incorporating an outsider perspective helps members to see new possibilities. Third, participation on many levels ensures that different ways of interaction and engagement are accommodated; expecting anything different is unrealistic. Fourth, capitalise on, and nurture individual relationships, to boost public events (open to all community members) and community relationships. Fifth, communities should guard against determining the expected value beforehand, and rather allow the value to materialise through community engagement. As a result, value is not realised immediately and may only happen after application of the idea. Organisational or workplace discourses also have a controlling role with regard to
knowledge in that the underlying values and norms of a discourse community shape how members think and produce knowledge (Alfred 2002:10). Sixth, although routine is crucial for stability adding a new element introduces exploration which is to the benefit of the CoP. Seventh, each CoP has its own rhythm that keeps it alive; it may be fast at times and slow at others. The key is to find the right rhythm. In considering CoPs, I am mindful that this is the ideal; not all principles apply fully and equally to all LCs.

On the other hand, there are a number of critiques associated with CoPs. Some students see engaging in CoPs as a threat, as they find it risky and uncomfortable. Other constraints include viewing CoPs as exclusive, where new members are not really allowed to join fully; where some relationships overshadow others; where “group-thinking” hampers individual growth; and where change is resisted (see Li et al., 2009). Also Wenger (2004) acknowledges that CoPs are sometimes problematic even debilitating or destructive. interestingly, however, these difficulties are oftentimes beneficial, as the conflict, competition and rebellion can lead to better commitment (Wenger, 1998:77) rather than submissive orthodoxy.

2.2.4. DRAWING ON LEARNING COMMUNITY LITERATURE TO INFORM SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES IN A UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG STUDENT RESIDENCE

The benefits of learning communities for student academic and social development and success are numerous (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999). These include enhanced quality of learning, complex thinking, an increase in not only quantity but also quality of learning, enriched connectedness within social and academic spaces, improved engagement in learning, increased prospects to write and speak, a more complex world view, and a better openness to diverse ideas. In light of all the benefits of LCs, Tinto (2012:2464) advises that institutions ensure that all first year students, especially the academically underprepared students, have opportunities to engage in “learning in community with others”. Fanghanel (2012:8) suggests that universities have a threefold task: to prepare students for the world of work, to acquire discipline knowledge, and, perhaps more importantly, “to engage students with the world’s complexity”. This view informed the workshops that I conducted and was motivated by
my belief that learning communities can aid all of the aforementioned, as Brown (1999:online) succinctly explains:

> It is very easy for us to think that all knowledge is in the head, but when we start to consider the tacit dimension, especially as it relates to practices, we realize how you can know much more than the knowledge you actually have. Much of this knowing is brought forth in action, action through participation, participation with the world, participation with the problem and participation with other people, i.e., practices. A lot of the knowing comes into being through the practices comprising one’s community(s) of practice.

Thus, when participants such as students engage with the world, not alone but with others, or with their communities (in LCs), they come to know. That is, knowing is not just in one’s head; it is enriched or expanded when one shapes it with others. LCs “pedagogy of engagement” promotes the sharing of not only knowledge, but also the experience of gaining that knowledge (Tinto, 2012:1452). Research suggests that the greatest benefit of LCs is a change in attitude and affect, which in turn, results in enhanced learning (Cross, 1998:8).

### 2.2.5. INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES OF UNIVERSITY LEARNING COMMUNITIES

In the American higher education context, LCs are accredited courses that students enrol for. Many USA universities and colleges have incorporated LCs and some institutions go so far as to offer student and academic development support vis-à-vis LCs (Tinto, 2012:1485). One example of such a support structure is the LC Resource Centre at the Washington Centre for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education at Evergreen State College, in which LCs offer development and assessment support. The College of Charleston compiled a report on best practices of LCs at American colleges and universities. Table 2.2 is a summary of some of their LC initiatives and the institutions at which they are offered.

**Table 2.2. USA University Learning Communities Initiative**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description of LC Activities</th>
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<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Dartmouth College**        | Classroom and Residential      | - A writing Program - “intensive writing, independent research, and small group discussion” for first year students  
- Incorporates living learning communities known as “Affinity Programs” |
| **Davidson College**         | Curricular                     | - Known as “Western Tradition” Literature, Philosophy, Art, History, and Theology are the major courses  
- Groups comprise 20 students each |
| **Miami University**         | Student-type                   | - First Year Seminar presents an opportunity to engage in small group learning experience. About 20 members can join |
| **Tufts University**         | Curricular and Student-type    | - Explorations: Credit bearing seminars facilitated by undergraduate peers/students with one faculty member as advisor  
- The aim is to help first year students understand what the university has to offer and provides career advice  
- Perspectives: study of movies as art and culture |
| **University of Richmond**   | Curricular and Residential     | - Four week sessions: preparation academic programme  
- Interdisciplinary Writing Skills (English 100) class  
- Themed Housing units: Global House; Arts Community; Outdoor House; Civic Engagement House |
| **George Mason University**  | Student-type                   | - FYE: students “community based, seminar style learning environment” – over 6 to 7 weeks  
- Activities include: collaboration, participatory learning, problem-centred projects, reading, and writing |
| **University of Michigan**   | Residential and Student-type   | - Living-learning community programmes Non-residential clustered theme |
| **University of New Mexico** | Curricular                     | - Academically-themed learning communities Introductory Studies (nuts and bolts success strategies in English, Math, and College Reading) |
| **University of Oregon**     | Student-type                   | - First Year Interest Groups - transitional skills such as time management, critical thinking, study skills, and personal development  
- 20 per group |
Chapter 2: Study of the Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description of LC Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washington State University</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>- Living-learning experience - two linked general education courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Placed in a residence hall that is academically themed according to a students’ major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Courses include English, Communication, Psychology, Sociology, Fine Arts, and Anthropology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The USA implementation and conceptualisation of LCs, such as those represented here, include a wide array of activities centred on not only academic, discipline-specific knowledge, but also the social and cultural spheres. Students have opportunities to collaboratively find out what university life is about and, in the process, work on their personal development as well. From Table 2.2, there seems to be a heavy emphasis on reading and writing LCs – perhaps a valuable lesson to be learned for a South African context – where many students from different backgrounds come to university unprepared for the demands of academic writing at first year university level. A further observation is that the LC groups are quite small – between 16 and 20 members on average – and the duration of the LC engagement is about a month or two. If one uses a CoP lens then this may be insufficient time for students to move from “legitimate peripheral participation” to “full participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991:37). However, if this is not the intention of the initiative, then it may serve the purpose of an introduction into student life.

Residential LCs, also known as Living Learning Communities (LLC), are quite popular at USA colleges and universities. Moja (2010:6) contends that learning communities in the residences are conducive to academic as well as social development. She suggests that activities that can be included are: inviting guest speakers, viewing movies, excursions, community service, cultural activities, and independent study and research activities. In the SA residence environment – the competitive nature seems to outweigh the educative value of these activities – specifically in the cultural stuff like sangfees. What is particularly noteworthy is that institutions make funding available for these LLCs (ibid:5). In the USA, these LLCs are funded, stand-alone courses, but
in South Africa this is not the case. As is typical in South Africa, without resources nothing can happen. Next, I discuss the South African context.

2.2.6. LEARNING COMMUNITIES AT SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

LCs in the South African context are much less formal than in American settings. LC initiatives are often organised by academic support divisions and are not accredited courses. Very few institutions provide funding for LC initiatives; or partial funding has to be acquired from the FYE initiatives provided for first year students. I attribute this lack of funding to a combination of factors. First, South African HEIs are only now beginning to grapple with these issues. Second, the idea of LCs is new and most HEIs have not yet fully investigated its benefits. A third reason could be economic; South Africa experiences huge funding problems. It is clear that in South Africa HEIs have not yet figured out how to do deal optimally with the issue of LC formation and implementation, since not enough work has been done in the field. My first exposure to how this body of knowledge was being formalised and shared with fellow researchers and practitioners in the South African context was through the Association of College and University Housing Officers – International - South African Chapter (Acuho-I SAC) Conference held in Broederstroom, Johannesburg in November 2013. At this conference, I established that there was almost no established literature base on LC development at South African student residences. In fact, at that stage, only two unpublished Masters Studies on the topic in South Africa had just been submitted.

Next, I examine how LCs are implemented at three South African HEIs, namely the University of Cape Town (UCT), Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) and University of Stellenbosch (SU). According to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2013-14, UCT falls in the top 200 group and SU falls in the 301-350 group. The two universities are known as ‘research universities’, with a strong emphasis on research and with medical schools. In my view, these aforementioned dynamics change the resources available to them as well as the orientation of staff towards LC initiatives.
On the other hand, NMMU and UJ are comprehensive universities (offering both degree and vocational diplomas), much like the institution at which this study was conducted, serving different student demographics and have difficulties with the availability of resources, the kind of students who enrol and the types of qualifications offered. The nature and orientation of the LC initiatives at these institutions are likely to be very different from those at the more research intensive South African institutions such as the UCT and SU.

2.2.6.1. University of Cape Town (UCT)

In a telephonic interview, the Senior Coordinator: Academic Support at UCT (S. Abrahams, personal communication, 7 August, 2012) explained UCTs approach to the formation of LCs. Abrahams describes their approach as a multifaceted, layered approach that goes “beyond the academic”. Soft skills, or what he prefers to call “critical skills”, are built into LC programmes. Examples of activities include boot camps, ‘talks’, invited guest speakers and alumni dinners. The timing of activities is recognised as important, as a survey done with their students revealed that Mondays (the day after the weekend) and Thursdays (start of weekend) are not good days, since students are not in the right frame of mind to work. Activities and workshops are therefore normally presented on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Abrahams (personal communication, 7 August, 2012) further points out that structured or forced interventions or activities are not well received, so voluntary participation is sought. Although much of what they do has been formalised with the Residence Academic Committee, by way of feedback reports, programmes and initiatives, the LC model is not institutional policy. By way of example (see Table 2.3), activities or initiatives associated with the UCT LC model include getting second year students to tutor first year students, the HK sending an invitation to an academic staff member to act as fellow for one academic year (delivering one academic talk per semester), offering workshops on time management and a residence orientation session presented by Student Affairs.

Table 2.3. UCT’s Learning Communities Initiative
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second years volunteer to tutor 1st years</td>
<td>Students must have a minimum of 65% course average in order to qualify to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>become a tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One-on-one sessions with 1st years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Referral system by residence academic support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incentives: T-Shirt, Basic certificate, attend tutor training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Resident Tutor – Post grad students</td>
<td>Students devise own outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection is built into process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One 2 hour session per week with tutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-directed and engaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fellowship</td>
<td>House Com identifies and invites a lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deliver ONE academic talk per semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>at the residences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Wellness</td>
<td>Various activities and workshops, including time management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 participants per workshop (frequency unknown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Academic Orientation</td>
<td>A 90 minute interactive workshop (content unknown) during orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presented by Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UCT’s initiatives involve a good mix of tutoring, workshops and seminars. Like LC initiatives in the USA, UCT also includes the social, cultural and academic elements, which points to a holistic approach. This seems to be in line with Tinto’s (2012:1342) argument that it is not only the extent to which students are allowed to become involved in activities, but more so the “sense of belonging” that results. Thus, the involvement is socially and culturally specific and is given shape by the individual’s values.

2.2.6.2. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU)

NMMU has Living Learning Communities, which include academic programmes and hobbies or personal interests (NMMU, 2014). Students are exposed to activities and
development programmes, where small projects, debates, reports and portfolios serve as evidence of their learning. NMMU sees the benefits of these Living Learning Communities as contributing to leadership skills, promotion of cultural diversity, encouraging volunteering, preparation for future careers, fostering respect (for self and others) and building a sense of citizenship. Unfortunately, I could not find anybody to talk to about these initiatives and was therefore forced to get this information on the university’s web page. Consequently, the information is limited.

2.2.6.3. Stellenbosch University (SU)

US is the first South African university to embark on a Listening, Living and Learning Community also known as the LLL initiative. Most of the universities’ student residences are set up as LLL-houses (Dunn, 2013). To be exact, there are about 18 LLL-houses, which accommodate about 124 students. The three L’s represent Listening (to understand), Living (to demonstrate and negotiate) and Learning (to invite, converse and interact). As part of an unpublished Masters study, the LLL initiative has recently been evaluated in respect of one of the programme outcomes, namely: “increased levels of interaction among students in a LLL house lead to reduced stereotyping and diminished bias” (Dunn, 2013:iv). Dunn’s main finding was that increased levels of interaction among students in the LLL house did not translate into a decline in stereotyping and reduced bias.

Typically, a LLL-house has eight students, of mixed race, gender and field of study, living together and organising 12 conversations throughout the year. The conversations revolve around each house’s particular theme. In addition, students have to do an assignment and write a reflection report on their experience. A senior staff member or academic acts as a mentor and everyone has a say in the management of the house. In my view, this potentially leads to a flatter management structure and in turn to a more democratic atmosphere.

The themes that students engage in are based on the university’s Hope project (Botman, 2011) and the Millennium Development Goals. Themes include creating economic welfare, education (creating a prosperous future), poverty and homelessness, gender equality, seeing the world through each other’s eyes, and
sustainable development. According to Botman (2011), by addressing such global issues, it is hoped that active campus conversation would extend the academic experience to the living space. Additionally, the hope is that the engagement in dialogue with peers, academics and invited speakers (community leaders and others), would cultivate a spirit of collaboration and transformation. Ultimately, the idea is to provide a living environment coupled with an educational programme. My assumption is that this initiative could greatly inform and guide how SLS and LC at other universities are conceptualised and implemented. I do think, though, that each university has its own context and what might work at SU, might not be feasible at UJ or another HEI.

2.3. CONTEXTUALISING THE UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG’S FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE INITIATIVE

The First Year Experience (FYE) initiative is an overarching concept for optimising first year student success. Although not directly related to student residence life, principles and practices in the FYE have implications for student residence life. For this study, the creation and implementation of LCs in residences was part of the FYE initiative and I therefore include a brief overview of the FYE, internationally and locally. I then draw conclusions for the FYE at UJ.

Internationally, and in the USA specifically, the FYE initiative has been an active practice for over 40 years. The working definition offered by Koch and Gardner (cited in Keup, 2013) of the FYE is “an intentional combination of academic and co-curricular efforts within and across postsecondary institutions”. The first FYE Conference was held in 1982 in the USA, and thereafter in the UK in 1986 and in Toronto, Canada in 1988 (ibid.). The American version of the FYE involves ongoing evaluation of initiatives.

The lessons learned from the USA implementation of FYE initiatives are extremely valuable for national and local implementation. According to Keup (2013) – who addressed the UJ Teaching and Learning Conference in 2013 – suggestions for successful FYE practices include linking FYE to retention efforts and beyond; explicitly stating the outcomes of initiatives; using high impact practices (HIPs), of which the
establishment of LCs is an example; doing ongoing evaluation; ensuring accountability; and considering accreditation. She suggests better alignment of initiatives through integrating university initiatives across FYE programmes.

In the South African context, there are few journal publications on the FYE. Where there are conference proceedings, they focus only on the following issues: student retention and success, social and academic integration, extended programmes, skills development, learning experiences and learning support. Three South African universities that have publicised or formalised FYE initiatives are University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University, the FYE – known as the First Year Academy – is the home of residence programmes. The University of Cape Town recently formed a new FYE project with the aim of addressing the issues of high dropout rates and academic failure.

The UJ FYE initiative commenced in 2010. The working definition of the FYE is (Van Zyl, 2012:1):

The FYE has been conceptualized as a holistic initiative which encompasses all aspects of first year student experience in the context of an invitational and equitable institution. It comprises both curricular and extra-curricular initiatives, and is far more than a single event, programme or course. It attempts to establish an ethos and a way of life, through which all first year students will experience the transition into university life.

The first year of university life is crucial to student success (Tinto, 2012:1627). By ‘student success’, Tinto refers to student retention and course completion. He goes on to say that the four conditions necessary for student success are: communicating high expectations; offering ongoing social and academic support; regular assessment and feedback opportunities; and social and academic engagement with other students (ibid:241). Hence, holistic development is required. In my view, UJ’s FYE initiative is a commitment to such development. In a proposal to UJ’s Senate in 2009, principles of the FYE Programme were stated as follows:

1. The FYE is a holistic approach to the total student experience, and is an initiative of the university.
2. The FYE is embedded within the preferred UJ student experience, which begins prior to an application to UJ and ends with alumni status.

3. It is incumbent on the university to ensure that students are provided with enabling learning environments.

4. The FYE is not envisaged as simply assisting students to pass, but as enabling as many as possible to achieve their full potential.

5. The FYE requires the contribution and support of all sectors of the UJ, of both Faculties and Support Divisions.

6. An equitable First Year Experience will be based on the participation of all Faculties in terms of common principles; a common core combines with specific Faculty ethos and needs.

7. The FYE is informed by and grounded in ongoing developmental and evaluative research.

8. The FYE requires commitment from students and support and development by staff.

9. The challenge of first year teaching requires special expertise from the academic staff, who must in turn be assisted in meeting these challenges.

10. All components of the FYE strive, as far as possible, to be fully integrated.

Within this framework, principles 2, 3, 5 and 8 appear to relate to residence life. Therefore, this framework implies that, for example, an enabling environment does not relate only to the formal university environment, but also to residence life where students spend so much of their time.

These FYE principles denote a commitment to inviting success. Here, to interpret the FYE group, success includes Tinto’s (2012:1627) student retention and course completion, but also encompasses satisfaction levels regarding module presentation, increased religious, social and cultural tolerance, and respect for others. The focus is not just on getting students to pass (see principle 4). It embodies a holistic approach, that is, the “total student experience” matters (see principle 1).

However, although comprehensive, I would question the overall support of these principles by students and the manner in which they genuinely incorporate student
participation. As an insider in the UJ for five and a half years, one serious concern for me is that faculties still focus quite heavily on pass rates and measure academic success by looking at test or exam pass rates in isolation from other factors. An example of this took place in a faculty teaching and learning committee, where the topic of academic success featured. One key measure of identifying at-risk students (at risk of dropping out or course failure) was test scores. An intervention attempt involved referring the identified at-risk students to the Academic Development and Support (ADS) division for help with study skills, technological skills and psychological and emotional support. The type and duration of support was meant to be negotiated between the student and ADS. It was not clear how many students actually sought help and whether the referral system made any difference at all. Perhaps other options to establish a real sense of the problem would be to intentionally encourage student voice, instead of putting into effect programmes that could so easily lead to more complications (Smyth, 2012:154). Another option could have been to tap into forums where students already have voice, like the Student Representative Council.

My biggest concern with UJ’s FYE initiative is that no students serve on the FYE Committee. Thus, it is questionable whether students’ commitment (see principle 8) to the FYE ideals and principles has been sought. Perhaps more important to ask is: Have these FYE ideals and principles been negotiated collectively with staff and students? In my experience, the answer to this question is negative. For instance, principle 3 – regarding the provision of ‘enabling learning environments’ for students – requires an understanding of what students consider ‘enabling’, but student voices are conspicuously absent. Notably, on the cards for 2014, a UJ FYE student forum that will meet thrice a year to discuss the FYE processes was planned, which by June 2014 had still not been implemented. In UJ’s Faculty of Education, students are part of focus group interviews in curriculum quality committees and yet problems such as under preparedness and low throughput rates persist.

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5 The name of the faculty has been withheld for ethical reasons as I did not request permission to report on their discussions. I only include it here by way of illustrating my point.
From my perspective, the inclusion of student voice is certainly a step in the right direction. Still, I argue that much more careful thought is needed to make sure that students' views and experiences are authentically voiced and heard. In particular, the power issues that shape student engagement need to be addressed upfront. Here I refer to an awareness of “whose voices are heard and why” and “what are the silences that so often go unnoticed and unrecorded” (Fielding, 2012:online). If staff and students do not reflect on the voices – and the silences – the inclusion of student voice is futile as regards commitment to FYE ideals and principles. On-going engagement with critical student voice is vital. In my work with two residences, over an extended period in the last few years, it has become apparent that student voices are not being heard sufficiently. This directly impacts on the values of the FYE initiative for student success.

2.4. Critical Role of Student Affairs in Student Support and Development

Student affairs is central in the development and support of students. According to Dunn (2013) student affairs professionals are skilled in anticipating how the environment influences students particularly with reference to students' academic and personal needs. The environment, being a fluid space, with technological changes happening at an exponential rate, requires student affairs to keep abreast of all changes, be it technical, social, political or otherwise. The fundamental question is whether student affairs and academic development units within HEI are managing to keep up with the changes. Ozaki and Hornak (2014) argue that in the American context, the students that enter HEI are likely to be students that are not always academically prepared for higher education, hail from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and require more support and development. From my experience in higher education, our South African context is no different. At UJ particularly, I am not aware of any publications on student affairs but this certainly does not imply that work on the ground does not reflect intentionally devised activities that promote student development and support.

In order to foster collaborative integrated initiatives academic staff, academic development units and student affairs need to align their goals and practices (Dunn,
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2013; Keup, 2014; Ozaki and Hornak, 2014). Dunn (2013:54) argues that this is not necessarily the case but that there seems to be a sense of disconnect between the various parties as the “voice of student affairs is not adequately heard”. This is detrimental to the promotion of student success which requires an integration of academic and student services, especially since a greater student need seems to exist for academic development and support (Ozaki and Hornak, 2014). I would argue for an integration of student affairs and student voice to inform student affairs practices so that diverse learning spaces and environments are created.

In the South African context in general, and the UJ context in particular, the need for such a shift is evident in the demographics of the student population. The SQP survey results as administered by Van Zyl (2010) seems to support this view. However, there is a perception that HEIs have not managed to appropriately prioritise student academic success (Pandor, as cited in Van Zyl, 2010:4). I argue that student affairs need to play a much more active and rigorous role in developing students academically, if we are to cater for and keep up with student needs.

2.5. RESIDENCE LIFE AND STUDENT SUCCESS

Evidence of the beneficial role residence life plays in student success exists in the literature (Tinto, 2012). Many American authors have focused on and researched student success (e.g. Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 2003, 2012). Tinto (2012) cites authors such as Pike (1999) and Pike, Schroeder and Berry (1997), who have concluded that students in residences show higher retention rates than day students. Additional benefits of residence life, according to Hill (2004), are the enabling, collaborative sharing of ideas, enhancement of emotional development, and the formation of relationships. All these benefits, in my view, directly and indirectly influence academic success. In a study done by Holdsworth (2006), it was found that residential life led to authentic student experience where ‘authentic’ refers to the typical expected behaviour of students.

Kuh (2008) writes about residence life providing an advantage in terms of engagement to students, where the belief is that better engagement in university life is fundamental to academic success (Kuh, Kinzie & Buckley 2006; Kuh et al., 2005; Tinto, 2012). In
this instance, engagement simply means active involvement in all activities related to university life. Kuh (2008) advises – based on the key finding of the annual National Survey of Student Engagement that he conducted – that student success is essentially due to the effort and participation of the individual student. I disagree with this finding to a certain extent as both individual and collective effort is required. Emphasising the individual responsibility downplays the importance of community where a collaborative and shared responsibility is valued particularly in a South African context where there may be a greater emphasis on community in some cultural and racial groupings. I make this assertion as I am mindful of transporting knowledge generated in one context into another without taking sufficient cognisance of local influences. Kuh, like Tinto (2012), adds that the university needs to intentionally devise activities that engage students. Residence life offers opportunities to get students involved in engaging activities.

Other authors, such as Astin (1993) and Chickering and Reisser (1993), have linked residential life to student persistence and course success. In the South African context, similar statistics were found at UJ. From Figure 2.2, it is apparent that first time entering students in residences do markedly better than students not in residences.
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Figure 2.2. Student Success Rates

At UJ, with the exception of the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture (FADA) and Health Sciences (HSc), residence students had higher rates of course success than day students. On average, students living in residence passed 82% of their courses, while students living outside of residence passed only 74% of their courses. The anecdotal evidence from various faculties points to day students having to bear added responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning and looking after siblings, which impact negatively on the time available for studying. They also spend more time travelling to and from university. In some cases, parents use the students’ bursary money to support the household, resulting in students facing issues such as a lack of money for transport, no funding for books or being hungry. These factors and pressures are less or possibly more easily managed for students living in university residences.

Pascarella and Terenzini’s (2005:2958) project ‘Documenting Effective Educational Practice’ (DEEP) was an attempt to identify best practices for student success. They found that DEEP institutions purposefully linked residence life programmes with FYE.
courses and associated activities to foster educational benefits. Moreover, they recommend that residences promote both academic and social support to embrace a holistic developmental approach. It is important to remember that these linked courses must be aligned. Keup (2013) advises strategies to achieve alignment, including branding, engaging campus advocates, community partnerships and shared ownership and accountability. In the next section, I take the argument for the cultivation of SLS for student success one step further, by addressing the issue of student voice.

2.6. TRANSFORMATION AT SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: HELPING STUDENTS FIND VOICE

Transformation in South African HEIs was ongoing in the period from 1994 to 2004. The first thrust of the transformation agenda concentrated largely on providing formal access to education. What has been more difficult to achieve has been the more intangible access, which Morrow (2009:77) describes as “epistemological access”. Thus, simply providing formal access to university does not lead to transformation of the institution and its associated practices, especially for black students.

Transformation in South African HEIs has, as a result, been an area of concern after the initial issues of access were addressed. In a recent study, Soudien (2010:881) distinguished between three “self-reflections” regarding transformation in higher education since 1994. The first is a focus on policy and equity issues in 1995, the second is a focus on restructuring the higher education system (mergers included) – together with the establishment of the Council on Higher education (CHE) Task Team in 2000 – and the third is a focus on understanding what transformation is and taking position within it (that is, examining the nature of change). This third phase included the establishment of the Ministerial Committee into Transformation and Social Cohesion in Higher Education (MCTHE) in 2008. Soudien (2010:881) further proposes that transformation is both “ideological” (it is about the beliefs and assumptions held) and “structural” (it includes the subjects within and the social forces around HEIs). He argues that to ignore either of the two would result in an incomplete picture of transformation. These ideas are particularly useful in my study as they reflect the
dilemmas faced in student residences. The residence space shapes the ideological beliefs held by all stakeholders as well as the social and cultural practices within it. Creating an enabling, inclusive student-centred environment in student residences could begin to address some of these transformation issues.

This finds resonance in the views of Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande (2010:1), who, in his keynote address to the Stakeholder Summit on Higher Education Transformation, indicated:

...transformation should be understood to be about more than eradicating the purely racial aspects of apartheid, as important as this is. It is essentially about radically changing our society, including our education and training system and all other areas of life to ensure that they can serve the interests of all South Africans in a democratic, equitable and prosperous society. Put differently it is about confronting the deeply interrelated challenges of class, race and gender inequalities...

The minister thus talks about radical change, involving not only racial discrimination, but also class and gender. Thus, the view that transformation is about racial transformation is too narrow (Benatar, 2010). Soudien's (2010) ideological and structural aspects need to be given greater consideration before HEIs can truly claim to be transformed. By implication then, the social conditions that lead to inequality, discrimination and failure are just as important for consideration and represent a more inclusive take on transformation (ibid:894). In the university environment, it is within student residences that social conditions are most visible and it is therefore in the residences that such issues could be considered and addressed.

Recent research has highlighted the need for a more inclusive position on transformation. For example, Soudien (2010:887) reports on a cohort study which found that 40 713 out of 69 636 (or 59%) African students who entered HEIs in 2000 had dropped out by 2003. He further presents the average graduation rate for whites as being twice as high as that of African students. These figures, together with an examination of the experiences of African and white students (Cloete & Bunting 2000:31), show that “equity in access” has not been matched by “equity in outcomes” (Soudien, 2010:886). Thus, Soudien suggests that higher education needs to face up
to the reality that many African students are not succeeding because of social forces – such as racism and discrimination – and that they have a responsibility to bring about change in conditions.

By way of example, anecdotal evidence suggests that complaints from students at UJ and other HEIs in South Africa (see Soudien, 2008) have revealed that some lecturers decide on a grade based on a student’s surname. That is, the assumption is that an African student cannot write and the student therefore gets low marks. To combat practices or suspicions such as these in the UJ environment, it has become optional for students to write their surnames on their assessment sheets; instead, they may simply write their student number.

The sentiments of racism and discrimination are echoed in Education Minister Nzimande’s Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2012:viii):

…the legacy of apartheid lives on in a host of problems related to the poor quality education in many parts of the country, and the socio-economic conditions that young people have to grapple with as they pursue their education and work careers. It is important to analyse these problems, identify the reasons for their persistence and to put in place measures to overcome them.

The call is therefore for a contextualised examination and analyses of the situation. If we ignore the underlying socio-economic challenges and conditions that students face, transformative endeavours may not yield their promise.

That said, it is not surprising that almost two decades after the first democratic elections, the system remains unequal in terms of “readiness for university” based on race and social class (Boughey 2009:3; Bozalek et al., 2010; Morrow, n.d.). As stated in Chapter 1, while equal access was the focus in the first year students after 1994, the emphasis has now shifted to the notion of epistemological access, which refers to access to good academic practices and approaches (Morrow, 1993:3). More recently, the argument by some authors is concerned with developing a deeper understanding of cultural differences and diversity (Report on the Summit of Higher Education, 2010). I argue that through the exploration of diversity, a better understanding of students’
needs could result, which in turn may produce a better academic fit. The transformative aspect in this study means a shift towards a change in practices, that is, transformation of hierarchical ways of working and promoting student voice.

Within UJ residences, student voice and epistemological access are of relevance. LCs can be established in residences, where student voice is promoted and where students learn to work collaboratively, sometimes with a more knowledgeable peer (Vygotsky, 1978). Through this, epistemological access can be created in residences, in a similar manner as in classrooms. As a reminder to the reader, I am not promoting CoPs but will take from CoP literature to inform my understanding of LCs.

2.6.1. PROMOTING STUDENT VOICE AS PART OF A TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA: THE ROLE OF STUDENT RESIDENCES

In his welcome address to students, the Vice Chancellor of UJ, Ihron Rensburg (2013:online), announced that the university presents students with opportunities to ask questions and “find their own voice”. However, student voice is often absent in many institutional initiatives. In some faculties there is an attempt to include student representation on teaching and learning committees. It seems that in the last year or two, there has been progress towards a more collaborative approach where student voice enjoys more prominence.

Generally at UJ, many FYE initiatives are approached from a benevolent perspective, with university committees deciding what is best for students without consulting them sufficiently. The UJ LCs Committee is one such example, where students did not initially have a say in the residence LC implementation and decision-making. This is partly the case because the notion of student voice is a controversial one in a university environment, with its deeply entrenched hierarchical structure and practices. First year students in particular are at the very bottom of the social and academic structure and are most likely to have decisions made for them. There is a body of research to support the view that first year students coming out of school require deliberate and careful scaffolding (Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007; Soudien, 2010; Tinto, 2012). I argue that neglecting student voice in initiatives designed to support their entry and enculturation
into the academic world is bound to lead to resistance and also to the failure and or non-buy in of activities.

Student voice, according to Fielding (2002), calls for a partnership between students and academics regarding teaching and learning, where students talk with educators and not about educators. Further, the silences – what students are not saying – need careful consideration and thought (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Ashby, 2011; Fielding & Rudduck, 2002). I argue that by ignoring student voice in academic matters, democratic ideals and transformation will never be realised. Vella (2002:16) suggests that we should distinguish between a “consultative voice” relating to suggestions and a “deliberative voice” relating to decisions. The academic staff can consult – give students a “consultative voice” – but because of their discipline-specific expertise they will have the final say – thus they have a “deliberative voice”. Students often do not know what they need. Therefore, how exactly to include student voices can be tricky and requires careful consideration. Giving students ‘voice’ should also not be confined to asking students to rate their experience of initiatives such as the FYE Seminar or how they experience a lecturer’s teaching. In the context of the student residences this is equally difficult, as residences fall outside of academic boundaries. A range of difficulties, such as regulation, staff attitudes, training and suitability for the task (fit for purpose), can potentially lead to authoritarian approaches and shut out the development of student voice.

However, the place and nature of student voice cannot be debated without a discussion of the changing role of higher education in South Africa. Higher education is increasingly targeted for its inability to bring about democratic change fast enough. Essentially, Botman (2011:20) contends that research in HEI must be driven by “sceptical minds” if we are to deal with societal challenges. Although useful, the notion of “sceptical minds” may not be sufficient. I agree with Waghid (2010:493) that a “counter hegemonic” education must be provided to bring about democratic change. Closely connected to a counter-hegemonic education is the promotion of transformative practices. For this study, this means that LCs in student residences should enable students to play an active role in questioning power relations, developing student voice and agency, helping students to have opinions and nurturing
a questioning stance. A questioning stance extends knowledge for “questions generally provide the quickest route between ignorance and knowledge” (Weimer, 2002:online). These to my mind are essential for cultivating social learning spaces and firmly establishing LCs in the residence environment.

Essentially, HEIs perform multiple roles and have a social and moral responsibility to face the old and the new challenges. With the challenges in South African HEIs changing in the last twenty years from granting access to ensuring success, particularly for African students, HEIs are thus facing a new challenge: creating a sense of belonging or “being at home” for first year students (Olayiidi, 2009:431). In Fataar’s words (2010:328), HEIs have a responsibility to promote “students’ being and becoming”. For Fataar, who refers specifically to work with student teachers, ‘being’ is the fitting together of the academic and social life, while ‘becoming’ involves moving between the lived spaces of higher education, their teaching practice space and their life spaces. He suggests that through recognition and awareness of students as social and academic beings, universities can help students move from knowing about their discipline to becoming practitioners of their discipline. A “student-voiced approach”, as Smyth (2012:154) calls it, would in my view encourage student being and becoming.

Barnett (2010) takes student being and becoming further. He contends that higher education has a role to play in combining knowing, acting and being. He argues that the move from knowing to doing is central to a sense of being. Essentially, students become when their being is transformed. In other words, the person or being has to experience change. This process of becoming necessitates much more than the accumulation of knowledge; in essence, a sense of ‘being’ is necessary. How one comes to know is part of one’s being (who you are). By implication, HEIs can create opportunities for students to ‘become’, by knowing who students are. One way to achieve this is by allowing the student voice to be heard in student-related matters, including in student residences. I will draw on this argument in my discussion of the UJ’s FYE initiative and the place and function of students’ voices within it.
2.6.2. UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG’S RESPONSE TO TRANSFORMATION

The University of Johannesburg established a Transformation Office in 2011 to address national concerns as a result of its own self-reflection to address the ever-changing culturally-diverse academic environment. A working definition of transformation that guides the institution’s initiatives is: “Transformation at UJ is an ongoing, dynamic and qualitative process to enhance the development of knowledge for responsible citizenship” (University of Johannesburg, 2011:6). This definition was used to guide and develop an action plan (approved on 21 June 2011) to address the following themes (University of Johannesburg, 2011:6):

- Institutional Culture
- Employment Equity
- Transformational Leadership, Governance and Management
- Academic Excellence
- A Student-centred and Caring Institution

The last theme, Student-centred and Caring Institution, is relevant to my research. It has an associated strategic thrust, namely, “Sustained excellence of academic programmes, research and community engagement” (University of Johannesburg, 2011:18). One of the objectives of this theme is to provide an enabling learning environment for out-of-classroom learning – an aspect that is central to my study. Another relevant objective of this thrust is the FYE initiative that aims to help students through the transition from school to higher education. As the working definition suggests, transformation is an ongoing process, so initiatives have no definite end date and involve continual revision and refinement. In Figure 2.3, a few objectives associated with the central thrust of a “student-centred and caring institution” goal are highlighted.

1. Epistemological access: Ensuring that students who gain access to higher education also gain access to academic practices and ways of approaching
academic studies.
2. A First-Year Experience (FYE) in the context of an invitational and equitable institution, which establishes an ethos and a way of life so that all first-year students positively experience the transition from school into university life.
3. Student Orientation that provides a social and academic introduction to being a successful student.
4. Senate-approved “citizenship module” in all undergraduate programmes.
5. Academic ethos prevalent on all UJ campuses.

Figure 2.3. Objectives of the Student-Centred and Caring Institution Theme (Adapted from University of Johannesburg, 2011:13)

The objectives in Figure 2.3 are interlinked and aim to provide students with an enabling, caring and meaningful learning experience. The identified teams responsible for achieving these objectives are Academic Development and Support (ADS) – where I was located – together with Student Affairs and faculties. The Transformation Steering Committee (TSC) – a sub-committee of the Management Executive Committee (MEC) – responsible for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating UJ’s Transformation Agenda identified these teams. This committee comprises Deputy Vice Chancellors, Executive Directors, Campus Directors, Senior Managers, Heads of Units, SRC President and Labour Union Representatives.

The TSC has five functions as outlined in Figure 2.4. The functions involve, amongst others, collaborative engagement and communication with all stakeholders so that awareness, common understanding and ownership may emerge. It appears that a collaborative, inclusive approach is valued.

1. To ensure common understanding and ownership of the concept and goals of transformation amongst all stakeholders at UJ through exchanging ideas, concerns and perceptions. This could include promoting of academic research and the development of a Transformation Agenda.
2. To plan the transformation process that will be inclusive of all stakeholders that need to participate towards reaching transformation goals and objectives. The plan would comply with the broader Higher Education Transformation Agenda.
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3. To facilitate the transformation process in a participative way.
4. To create constant awareness of the transformation process and goals through a communication strategy.
5. To monitor results and the impact of transformation on the performance of UJ as an institution of Higher Education.

Figure 2.4. Five Functions of the TSC

Unfortunately, despite UJs focus on transformation, with its inclusive concomitant action plan, it is my insider’s view that many hegemonic practices remain, indicating a disjuncture between practice and policy. In the context of this study on student residences, it is precisely these practices that need to be interrogated, since they hamper the formation of LC and the cultivation of SLS in student residences and by implication also impact wider institutional transformation. The question that I raise here is: Is the transformation plan adequately critical and focused on social transformation? Another question that I ask is: Is strategic action enough? It is the latter that I wish to address in my discussion on communicative action.

2.6.3. FROM STRATEGIC ACTION TO COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

Critical Theory and the notion of communicative action are vital in fostering a transformative agenda. Communicative action proposes that communication is vital to emancipation, that is, consensus and cooperation are sought rather than “strategic action” where only the institution benefits (Habermas, 1984:86). Mutual understanding, social integration and cultural knowledge are key concepts that need to be considered. Without knowledge of the cultural and social background, it would be nearly impossible to achieve consensus and cooperation. Thus, when devising policies, interaction with stakeholders is imperative as opposed to having a few people in authority decide on the content of such plans and policies.

However, a critique of Habermas’ communicative action is that communication is not exempt from power issues and as such may or may not have the desired outcome of consensus and cooperation (Brookfield, 2005). It seems, then, that Foucault’s (1983) notion of communication is more in line with the residence context, where the power-infused nature of communication is acknowledged. The hierarchical power structures
are one example of an impediment to consensus and cooperation in student residences. Another impediment is the hegemonic practices that are prevalent in some UJ residences.

A Foucauldian account of power states that power is exercised and not owned (Foucault, 1983). Foucault (1983:455) rejected the idea that knowledge and power are interchangeable and that power is something that institutions necessarily use to oppress people. He argues that power is exerted when we draw on knowledge that permits acceptable actions. According to Foucault (1983:256), continuous critique is required where the assumption is that ‘everything is dangerous’ and that power relations are inherent in our everyday activities. Thus, he contends that power is everywhere rather than situated in any one particular institution. The implication for residence life is that student voice is necessary to empower students to interrogate issues of power and hegemony. After all, it is in residences where institutional and cultural practices are shaped.

2.6.4. BEYOND HOPE: TOWARDS ACTION IN STUDENT RESIDENCES
The unique UJ context requires an approach that values the middle ground between agency and structure. Based on my many years of work with students in a university setting, I am of the view that first year students are not at a developmental stage where they can be left to their own devices and where they understand what it means to be in and of a university. Students need an enabling learning environment outside of lecture halls. The investigation reported on in this study constitutes an investigation into attempts to provide this through the establishment of SLS at a selected residence as part of an attempt to create learning communities conducive to formal and informal learning. Issues of power and subordination would naturally be addressed, along with the critical skills required to work collaboratively with fellow students.

Traditionally, most students entering university come from a learning paradigm where the teacher is the expert and students unquestioningly accept everything that the teacher imparts, akin to Freire’s (1970:72) notion of a “banking model” of education. In Freire’s (1970:72) words: "Knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing." Gallego
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(2001:314) calls this phenomenon “an apprenticeship of oppression”. The challenge for university educators, therefore, is that students often do not question hegemonic practices and accept their passive role as recipients of knowledge as natural and acceptable. Consequently, they may resist activities that require active participation and engagement, and experience such attempts as extremely threatening and dissonant. It takes them out of their comfort zones and as such does not bode well for expectations that students would be actively involved in the process of cultivating SLS in residences (Wenger, 1998). On the contrary, students expect others (seniors, HK, researchers, lecturers, etc.) to make decisions on their behalf and present content for passive consumption. I propose that a possible solution to this problem is Freire’s conscientisation that knowledge is not simply deposited by experts into the minds of those who do not know.

Notwithstanding the threatening nature of active engagement, providing students with opportunities for collaboration and engagement in questioning power relations is essential and is part of an attempt to transform the learning environment of students. By ‘learning environment’ I do not refer only to academic activities, but the entire way of seeing and doing things, otherwise known as “new ways of being” (Boughey, 2009:10). In a higher education context this means working together and drawing on each other’s experiences and strengths to inform another’s perspectives. Moreover, trusting each other to enrich perspectives is valued. No longer is learning viewed as an individual activity, but rather one where students engage in activities that allow collaborative construction of knowledge. This, in Boughey’s words, is what is known as “a pedagogy of possibility” (2009:10), which includes preparing students to become agents of change in their future workplaces (Waghid, 2011:7). Such a disruptive undertaking is very challenging and complex, and warrants an examination of the entire context.

In the residence context, the interest is in action that allows for experiences that help students “enter into the fullness of the university experience and to prosper” (SA Ministerial Committee & Soudien, 2008:118). It is part of giving students a quality education; it is about investing in future leaders. It is, after all, students who are going to be the future ethical, political and social leaders of our communities (Waghid,
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2011:5). This investment warrants a commitment to aspects such as higher-order thinking skills, critical thinking and tolerance and respect for diversity. The vision includes Freire’s (1994) notion of a “pedagogy of hope”, which asserts that people must be empowered to improve their existence, and hope is necessary in such an endeavour. For Waghid (2011:7), hope is needed to contest the “violence that pervades society”. Still, it is not enough to have just hope; action is required to “recreate the world” (Freire, 1994:86). Ducan-Andrade (cited in Botman, 2011:16) cautions that one needs to guard against “false hope” which could lead to despair. Promising students that they will be guaranteed a job if they just study hard enough and follow the rules of the university is an example of “false hope”. What this study attempts to do is to encourage the space to kick-start action aimed at change and in a sense “cut the umbilical cord of magic and myth which [bind us] to the world of oppression” (Freire, 1970:175).

In the next section, I expand on the theoretical framework that underpins this study. I explicate the rationale for using Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) which comes from the legacy of the work of Lev Vygotsky, specifically as it has been propounded by successive authors, as a theoretical lens. I propose that CHAT is useful when the aim of a study includes transformation. In this study, CHAT allows me to foreground the complexity of conceptualising the LCs viewed in their entire context of the university environment.

2.7. CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY (CHAT) AS FRAMEWORK

My main reason for choosing cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) as a theoretical framework and as lens for analysis is that it is a body of broad theories focused explicitly on human development (or in the educational sense, on learning) and transformation. Another reason for choosing CHAT is that it is useful when power relations of the activity are to be explored (Engeström, 2012; Roth, 2005), as is a central part of this study. Yet another reason or rather motivation for its use is the focus on tensions and contradictions. In Stetsenko’s words (2008:485), CHAT provides a vision of “what is, how it came to be, how it ought to be, and how all of this can be known”. Otherwise stated, in conceptualising and implementing LCs, CHAT provides
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a vision or frame to make sense of how the LCs came about (historically speaking, how it has become), the thinking around its being and how I will know what it ought to be. Ultimately, it promotes a systemic perspective.

By way of explicating the theory, I provide a brief description of how CHAT itself has undergone and still is undergoing ongoing transformation. Hence, the theory itself is in constant flux, offering what Roth and Lee (2007:191) call “an accommodating framework … rather than a neat set of propositions” and as a theory itself, requires further development (Roth, 2012:101). I thus use CHAT, as Beatty and Feldman (2009:15) have suggested: fitting my context and making sure that I use it consistently throughout my study, and by the same token, granting that there is no right or wrong way.

2.7.1. FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION CHAT: MEDIATED ACTION VS ACTIVITY SYSTEM

Vygotsky’s (1978) Marxist perspective holds that humans develop cultural tools that get passed from generation to generation to mediate transformative activity. Specifically, this is tool mediation and involves a subject acting on an object by means of a psychological or cultural tool, that is, all human action is mediated by artefacts or tools (Vygotsky, 1978). This became known as first-generation CHAT. Notably, the activity is used in the sense of the smallest analytical unit of human development, including practices, sense making and actions (Roth, 2012:90). Vygotsky further argues that learning is a process of internalisation and externalisation (Edwards, 2012:23; Roth 2012), that is, it occurs externally between the subject and others, and thereafter gets internalised.

The limitations of first-generation CHAT, scholars such as Stetsenko (2005), Beatty (2007) and Engeström (1987, 2001) claim, is that the focus is on the individual, making it very difficult to recognise the societal forces that shape activity. Roth (2012:98) suggests that it is precisely these societal relations that impact on all actions in the activity system. To address this shortfall, Leont’ev (1981) proposed an extension of the original work, in what became known as second-generation activity theory, viewing the individual as situated within collective activity. Engeström (2001) suggests that by
locating individuals in an activity system, Leont’ev managed to distinguish between individual action and collective activity, and in turn, managed to move beyond the object of individual action. Figure 2.5 illustrates the components making up the three generations of CHAT.

Figure 2.5 Three Generations of CHAT

As depicted in Figure 2.5, the seven components of second-generation CHAT include the subject (the individual or group), the tool (cultural or psychological), the object (which is the “problem space” at which the activity is aimed and which gets transformed into an outcome), the community (or group which shares the object), the division of labour (those who engage in work) and, lastly, the rules (referring to the norms and conventions that govern the activity) (Engeström, 2001). While tool and mediating artefact are used interchangeably in the literature, and in this study, I acknowledge that this may be problematic, since authors such as Cole (1996) suggest that a mediating artefact is more than a tool, in the sense that it includes people, concepts and material objects. Consequently, the facilitator, HK or any of the other human
actors in this study, it seems, can serve as the subject in one activity and as tool or artefact in another adjoining activity.

2.7.2. ENGESTRÖM’S THIRD-GENERATION CHAT

First and foremost, Engeström’s (2012:3864-3865) more recent claim states that new objects produced during human activity are sometimes unintended outcomes of several activities. This notion of expanded or expansive learning, as postulated by Engeström (1987, 2001), holds that tensions in two adjoining activity systems lead to transformation. These tensions, also called contestations (Beatty, 2009) or ‘dramatical collision’ (Veresov, 2007), can occur in and/or between any of the CHAT components, thereby impacting on the entire activity system. Engeström (1987:82) separates these contradictions into four distinct categories, namely a primary contradiction within each component of the activity system, secondary contradictions between components of one activity system, tertiary contradictions existing between an object of an activity system and the object of a “culturally more advanced” form of the activity, and quaternary contradictions between the two linked systems. While Roth (2012) concurs that the contradictions drive change, he argues that the primary or inner contradictions cannot be removed, because they are inherent in the actual existence of the component.

To address my second research SQ, “What issues enable or constrain students’ engagement in SLS?” I will pay particular attention to the tensions inherent in an activity system and between the components of the activity systems. For instance, as a lens CHAT enables me to examine the various activity systems such as the FYE initiative where the students (subject) use workshops (tool) to mediate the formation of SLS (object). An adjoining activity system that I examine is the Student Affairs initiative where the House Committee, also known as the “HK” (subject), uses study time (tool) to mediate the fostering of an academic culture. The shared object between the two systems is to shape the learning environment of first year residence students. The outcome envisioned for both activity systems is student academic success.

Second, a third-generation CHAT or systems perspective values object-oriented activity, that is, the focus is on the object and not the tool, and further, the collective
activity situated in a particular community is central. Thus, for Engeström (1999), the unit of analysis is shared activity. The historical aspect of how the activity came to be in its current form is fundamental (Edwards, 2012:23; Engeström, 1987; Roth & Lee, 2007; Stetsenko, 2008). I identify the formation of learning communities as the central object of this study and recognise that historical factors dictate how the tool (workshops and study time) is going to shape the collective experience and usage. I systematically review where students come from, how the residence culture has evolved over a period of time and moulded current practices, and what shape the higher education system has taken over the past two decades, in an endeavour to offer a historical context. Hence, it is not a matter of simply mapping the seven components of the CHAT triangle, but rather to recognise and understand all historical accounts of how each component came into being. Roth (2012:99) explains the significance of a historical account in the following manner:

To understand any action within the system, we need to know the history (biography) of each moment (i.e., subject, object, tools, rules, community, and division of labour); that is, we need to know the personal, institutional, cultural, and theoretical histories that embed every instance and moment we might observe.

I further compiled a biographical questionnaire of the subjects, in order to explore the life histories that they come with (Roth, 2012:99) – based on social class, race and gender, amongst others – that will shape the uptake and experience of the activity.

Third, power relations are easier to identify and recognise in multiple activity systems and this is where third-generation CHAT holds promise (Daniels, 2004:189; Engeström, 2012:3894). HEIs in South Africa, and UJ as an institution together with its residences, have a clear hierarchical structure. By examining the two activity systems – as explicated in the first paragraph of this section – I hope to capture the power struggles that may emerge. Drawing upon Engeström (2009:3953), I am ever mindful that “when categories are imposed on people, they often become iron cages that reduce and rule out possibilities”. Hence, I am consciously aware of activities that are enforced or otherwise. For this reason, I seek to negotiate, as far as possible, the terms and conditions of engagement in the activity, with all subjects.
2.7.3. STETSENKO: TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIVIST STANCE AND CHAT

Central to Stetsenko’s (2008:471) transformative activist stance, actors are involved in “collaborative purposeful transformation of the world”. The purposeful nature implies that it is planned, meaning that we are not talking about random everyday activity here. Their activity is essentially ideological, ethical and value-laden (ibid.). This stance sees humans as having agency to transform their world, actively engaging in what Stetsenko (2008:483) calls a “historical becoming”. For this study, the focus is not on conceptualising and implementing LCs exclusively, but encompasses exploring the wider academic institution and system where the students are located. Further, it recognises students’ ability to actively contribute to a changing society to ensure a more just and equitable experience.

Stetsenko reasons that a CHAT perspective is limited in the sense that it has a Marxist emphasis, that is, an economic stance on development. Her focus is on development, learning and human nature and she criticises socio-cultural theories for their lack of connectedness and integration and for their focus on individual identity and subjectivity. She further claims that the aim should be contribution and not simply participation, one where activity occurs between actors (valuing shared contribution) and their world in pursuit of their goals. For Stetsenko, the ultimate goal is social justice, underscored by a “common humanity” (Stetsenko, 2008:490). The ideal is to actively contribute to the elimination of societal inequalities (Roth & Lee, 2007) often perpetuated in institutions.

2.8. SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2

This chapter presented the argument that the cultivation of SLS towards the creation of LCs, nationally and internationally, is complex, especially in the student residence environment. I have drawn on the literature on learning communities and Wenger’s communities of practice to inform the conceptualisation of SLS for this study. I have argued that collaborative learning enables residences to foster epistemological access and shape an institutional identity. I gave a brief overview of Student Affairs and its critical and changing role in supporting students. As this study was part of the FYE initiative I gave a brief overview of the FYE as an overarching concept, locally as well as internationally. I have then argued for the interrogation of power issues and cultural
practices and have suggested that through student voice, transformation of the residence environment is made possible. I have also suggested that transformation of HEIs and student residences should go beyond hope to encompass active engagement and action. Lastly, I have presented the Cultural Historical Activity Theory theoretical framework of this study and have argued that such a framework allows me to highlight the tensions in activity systems and that through the identification of tensions, change or transformation is made possible.

In the next chapter, I focus on the design of the research study. I explain how the methodological framework and the theoretical framework intersect. I also elucidate how my dual role as researcher intersected with my researcher role and describe how multiple data collection methods were employed.
CHAPTER 3: DESIGNING THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDY

3.1. INTRODUCTION: THE DESIGN LOGIC OF A PAR CASE STUDY
The aim of this study was to investigate the conceptualisation and implementation of social learning spaces (SLS) (as part of the establishment of a student learning community) and how they evolve and shape the learning environment of first year students in a selected residence at an urban university in Johannesburg. I was interested in examining SLS, in relation to the enabling and constraining factors of students’ engagement, social/cultural and historical factors that shape their formation and lastly the perceptions and/or practice within these spaces. This study followed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) way of working (see Section 3.2) within a case study of a residence environment known as Res Y. The nature of the main research question – being a process-oriented one, denoting change – warranted such an action research approach. In the design of this investigation I reflected on a pre-study planning, implementation and evaluation cycle of SLS in another residence. This informed the participatory nature of the action research as I wished to work collaboratively with all stakeholders – students, residence advisors (RAs) and residence warden (RW) – to effect a change in the residence environment (O’Leary, cited in Esau, 2013).

The inquiry is a case study because I wanted to investigate a phenomenon with identifiable boundaries of this case, which is a single residence at an urban South African university. I also looked at the unit of analysis – the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS from the perspective of multiple stakeholders within the case. The design logic incorporated two key elements: it constituted two phases in a PAR inquiry and it was the case of Res Y specifically investigating the process of establishing SLS in a residence environment with first year students. The study itself was shaped by my previous work with Res X, which influenced the conceptualisation and process of working in this study. I will thus revisit this work and the lessons learned to illustrate that in PAR, with real-word applications, studies such as this one emerge from a context that both influences and shapes those following it.
Chapter 3: Research Design

The research design refers to the planning of how the research question is going to be addressed and includes the collection, organisation, analysis and interpretation of data (Merriam, 1998:6). I also find resonance here in the work of Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004) that a research design relates to the methodological requirements of the research question and the data to be collected and analysed. In other words, it relates to the entire research process also known as the study plan (Creswell, 2013). In this section I discuss the theoretical and philosophical framework that acts as an “epistemological tool or device that guides the inquiry and the choice of methods” (Agherdien, 2007:59). Petersen (2007:105-106) captures this intersection between the theoretical and empirical world by affirming:

A research design thus situates the researcher in the empirical world and connects her/him to persons, groups, institutions and bodies of relevant interpretive material in specific sites or social settings. In this situatedness s/he links the empirical world to the theoretical world as s/he knows it.

The case study design situates this study in the empirical world while the theoretical body of knowledge helps me make sense of all inquiry observations and findings. Similarly, the PAR design allowed for action and research outcomes and acted as an equaliser between theory and practice (Dick 1993:online).

This chapter serves to clarify my rationale for the choices that I make in the research design and methodological issues. I explicitly state how I position myself within this research study. I begin with design logic of conceptualising the PAR case study and then proceed to highlight the resultant lessons learned from my work with Res X that informed the research design. I show how I locate myself within the knowledge paradigm and give an account of the workshops as an intervention in Res Y. Next I give a detailed discussion of the processes of data collection and conclude with some ethical considerations that apply to this study.

3.2. THE DESIGN LOGIC OF CONCEPTUALISING THE PAR CASE STUDY OF RES Y: LESSONS LEARNED FROM RES X

As professional development practitioner and First Year Experience (FYE) committee member, I worked with a number of students and other stakeholders in Residence X
Chapter 3: Research Design

in 2010 – in a somewhat participatory mode – by way of planning, implementing and evaluating the establishment of SLS. The results of my work with Res X determined the nature and development of activities towards the development of SLS in Res Y. A PAR approach was particularly suitable since I used the lessons learned from the implementation with Res X, which was prior to doctoral work with Res Y. My own ontological stance in this study warranted that I also work in a participatory mode, adopting a critical stance in this work with Res Y. Thus, in adopting a way of working in Res Y I deliberately chose a PAR case study research design, as it allowed me to address my process oriented research question and reflect on iterative cycles.

For instance, I chose the workshop topics based on lessons learned from my work with Res X. I also learned that issues of power, my way of working, who I selected to interview, the frequency of interviews, etc. had to change. In my beginning work with the student residences (Res X) I started by talking first to the Residence Manager (RM) and the RAs. I was thus predisposed to working in a particular way and inadvertently ignored issues of power and whose voices were being heard. For instance, as a result of starting my deliberations with the RM in Res X, the students were mostly ignored. They did not have much input in choosing their participation or the shaping of LC activities including the cultivation of SLS. Also, the RM’s direction – that the establishment of LCs, including the cultivation of social learning spaces was to coincide with compulsory study sessions, which were governed by strict rules and regulations, such as individual solitary study – rendered the whole process ineffective. Thus, the valuable lessons learned in Res X, enabled me to more consciously design my doctoral study at Res Y.

The findings from my work with Res X were particularly powerful in helping shape the nature of the participation in Res Y and, for example, indicated problems with power concerns inherent in issues such as the researcher’s role and work procedure, students’ and the residence’s daily practices and the need for careful conceptualisation and implementation. More especially, there was a need for a critical lens through which to view the entire context. I had to move from understanding the context to critiquing it. The general assertion (Stake, 1995) or pattern (Yin, 2009) is that an inadequate residence and higher education system constrained the formation,
conceptualisation and implementation of collaborative SLS. See Figure 3.1 for a graphic illustration of how I worked in Res X.
Chapter 3: Research Design

Figure 3.1 Research Design: PAR Case study

- FYE directed initiative
- Worked as Professional Development Practitioner with Res X
- Data collection: Interview - Res X Manager and Res Advisors

Research question:

How does the establishment and implementation of social learning spaces at a selected UJ residence evolve and shape the learning environment of first years?
Chapter 3: Research Design

My work in student residences as professional development practitioner started in Res X in 2010 (as illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 3.1). Already here I worked in a somewhat participatory mode, albeit in a top-down fashion by initiating the establishment of SLS for student learning community development with residence management. My thinking was to get the RM’s perspective on how they viewed the establishment of SLS and to understand how the residence environment worked. This way of working proved to be misguided, as it was not representative of all stakeholders, especially that of student voices. Had I worked with all stakeholders as warranted by a PAR approach, student voices’ may have been more prominent (Esau, 2013).

I completed one full action research cycle up to an evaluation, conducted by audio recorded interviews (both first and second semesters in 2012). The value of having worked with Res X is that I could use the findings to inform the planning and implementation cycles for Res Y. Included in the changes that occurred were my way of working, the introduction of workshops, the choice of workshop topics, sampling issues and my changing role as researcher.

The genesis of this doctoral investigation was thus in 2012, when the RW (the Director of the residence) of Res Y asked me to interview the first year students regarding their June results. I enquired if the residence would allow me the opportunity to work with them in the investigation of the establishment and implementation of SLS as my doctoral study. Due to my dissatisfaction with the RM directed implementation process at Res X, I decided to involve the Res Y students in the planning of the processes. PAR invites such participation with and not for (Denzin, 2008:459; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) or on behalf of participants. The mutual benefits for all participants relate to a collaborative and common understanding of how best to establish and implement SLS. In the next sections in the lessons learned from Res X, I report on how I utilised each of the lessons learned to inform the design of the case study of Res Y.

From the 2011 implementation, at Res X, a number of lessons learned informed the design of the case study at Res Y, as illustrated in Figure 3.2.
The first lesson that I learned from my work with Res X is that students did not necessarily know how to work collaboratively and needed some guidance in this regard. Therefore, in Res Y workshops were negotiated with students and scheduled for every alternate week, which – in Wenger et al.’s (2002:online) words – gave it a particular “rhythm”. This negotiated rhythm ensured that the community of students stayed active, but at the same time, did not consume too much of their time. Also, as study time had always been a solitary effort, and the sessions were scheduled to take place during the study periods, students were not accustomed to a different dynamic where they comfortably seek their peers’ help. Structured sessions were thus needed to initiate collaborative SLS where “community building, resourcefulness, social energy and emergent knowledgeability” (Wenger, 1998:237) were valued. This topic also formed part of the workshop sessions.

A second lesson from Res X was the confusion in the absence of ground rules for collaborative engagement during the implementation phase. Thus, when working with Res Y, I started workshop sessions by introducing possible topics for discussion and establishing ground rules, as these were critical to the formation of SLS. Wenger et al. (2002) explain that the domain involves negotiating the topic, content boundaries and rules of engagement; introducing ground rules was an attempt to foster respectful and collegial relationships. Additionally, I was aware that engagement comprises an on-going negotiated meaning-making process, relationship building, as well as inclusive historical practices (Wenger, 1998:174). The existing competitive culture and practices at the residences (including both Res X and Res Y) constrained the development of SLS. To address this problem at Res Y, I deliberately introduced the topic of *Ubuntu*
(workshop session two as part of Diversity), during which we talked about the value of a common humanity and the absolute power of pooling our resources, perspectives and knowledge.

In Res X, students as well as RAs were not sure how and when to collaborate. The commitment of some students and RAs to collaboration was questioned. An evaluation of the Res X implementation showed a distinct mistrust between management and students. Consequently, a third lesson which fed into my work with Res Y relates to the introduction of sessions in which we explored group conflict and diversity so as to begin establishing a safe space where students could share and collaborate openly. From Res X I learned that the absence of such a ‘safe space’ prevented students from interacting optimally. With the third workshop topic being cooperative and informal learning, I wanted to encourage students to see the value in learning anywhere, anytime, but within a cooperative environment. The issue of trust is pertinent to the community if an enduring, working relationship is to be formed (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 2004).

A fourth lesson – finding a voice – was especially important. I learned in my work with Res X that students complained amongst each other about certain issues without actively working towards solutions or speaking to the relevant people. I acknowledge that merely introducing the topic of ‘voice’ or giving students a platform to find their voices does not necessarily empower students and remove power imbalances. Usher and Edwards (cited in Brookfield, 2005:131) argue that “changing practices do not, then, do away with power but displace it and reconfigure it in different ways”. I concede that this is an ongoing issue and process, one that needs an investment in time and structured and intentional effort. However, in a PAR way of working, I wanted to help students to begin to explore their voice as academic equals with each other and as stakeholders with a say in the running of the study environment in the residence.

A fifth lesson was the serious concern regarding study time, which impacted heavily on how SLS in a LC evolved. In both Res X and Res Y, interviews with students revealed that study time was ineffective due to issues such as extended hours, fines that accompanied non-attendance and the impact on study time from other residence
activities consuming so much of students’ time. Students associated all the aforementioned negativity with SLS and could not really distinguish between study time and these activities. In fact, students viewed study time and activities associated with the establishment of SLS in a LCs as two opposing and mutually exclusive activities that competed for their already limited time. Consequently, to respect their challenge with time constraints, these activities at Res Y, in the form of workshops, were implemented fortnightly, rather than twice a week as was the case at Res X. Another reason for introducing workshops was an attempt to provide a structured environment as opposed to letting the student learning community grow completely organically (lesson 6). It was my hope that structured, intentional integration and less demanding time issues would result in more positive attitudes towards SLS.

Lastly, and probably most importantly, in Res X the implementation of LC and the promotion of SLS was directed from the top down (from residence management) and because of this, was met with resistance from students. Students felt that they were not consulted on matters that affected them directly and that management did not always understand the challenges that they faced on a daily basis. As a result, the student groupings that formed were what Boud and Middleton (2003:200) describe as "loosely coupled" groups and not communities that displayed Wenger's (1998) indicators, such as sustained mutual relationships, shared ways of doing and seeing and a sense of belonging. Consequently, in Res Y, I followed a bottom-up approach where my choice of sampling changed. In the first place Res Y students were directly involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the activities of the SLS initiative. The inclusion of the student voice was deemed invaluable. One of the key lessons I learned was that, in consulting Lave and Wenger's work on CoPs, is that I did not adequately account for the power differentials that constrained participation (Smith, 2003, 2009) when I worked with Res X and I subsequently had to carefully reconsider who directed the establishment and implementation of SLS at Res Y.
3.3. RESIDENCE Y: DESIGNING THE FIELD WORK IN A PAR CASE STUDY

The work with Res X in my capacity as development practitioner had a significant influence on the design of this study. I moved away from the stance of working with the RM and RAs as the entry point in Res X in the establishment of SLS. The results of the work in Res X and the general unhappiness from students with the whole process prompted me to rethink the way in which I went about working in the student residences. Essentially, I came to the conclusion that SLS actually involve the students first as active participants and that it was therefore incumbent upon me to start with the students.

This study thus cannot be seen as a unit of knowledge making separated from the background captured in the work with Res X. This meant a different stance for me as practitioner-researcher and a different mode of working in Res Y. In planning this study, I thus aimed to find a valid, inclusive way of addressing the research questions. The research questions and the main research constructs had to align with the way in which the research process was set to unfold. The central construct of this study with its two-fold purpose found expression in the following research question:

How does the establishment and implementation of SLS at a selected UJ residence evolve and shape the learning environment of first year students?

If one analyses the research question, the active verbs in it speak to issues of process and change. The “How” implies a process, while “evolve and shape” imply changes or shifts, making a PAR model the preferred method of work. I used my experiences from Res X (during the pre-PhD phase) to inform what happened in Res Y (being my bounded case).

In order to address the main research aim, the following research sub-questions were set:

1. How are SLS conceptualised and implemented in a student residence?
2. What issues enable or constrain students’ engagement in SLS?
3. How do social, cultural and historical factors shape the formation of SLS?
4. What are students’ assumptions, perceptions and/or practices within SLS in their residence?

These questions relate directly to my ontological, epistemological and axiological stance as researcher and naturally find expression in a particular research design. I directed the research process – as per the main research question – based on the outcome desired and thus operated from an insider researcher perspective, also known as an emic perspective (Creswell, 2013; Henning et al., 2004; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). By spending prolonged time in the residences and through the presentation of workshops, I wished to address the SQ as stated in this section. Hence, empirical data was gathered from extended engagement with participants in their lived spaces. A CHAT perspective within the case study design allowed me to look at Res Y over time with a particular set of theoretical lenses (Russell, 2009:682).

3.3.1. THE LOGIC OF THE CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN

“Goodness of fit” (Henning et al., 2004:36; Merriam, 2009) between the issues under investigation on the one hand and the most appropriate methods for the design and the theories used on the other, is important. Accordingly, a suitable design for this thesis was sought and found in a PAR case study design. A case study can be described as a “bounded system” or the “what” (Merriam, 2009:40) which is researched within its real-world context (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2003). I draw on the work of both Yin and Stake. I use Yin’s (2003:13) definition of a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. I also used Stake’s (1995:xi) definition of a case study as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case”. Thus, contextual issues and interpreting the complexity of conceptualising and implementing SLS in Res Y were important considerations in making the case study design suitable. The flexible nature of the case study (Creswell, 2013) meant that the case study was the most apt design for this study.

In this study, the “what” or the single case I am looking at is the (learning) community of first year students in a single UJ residence (as a bounded system), paying particular
attention to the authentic context in which students are situated. I specifically examine how the establishment of SLS evolve and shape the residence environment (place) over an extended period (time) within the residence context. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), the purposes of the case study are fourfold: to represent, analyse and interpret the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through an accessible account; to capture the complexity and situatedness of behaviour; to contribute to action and intervention; and to represent reality. My research looks at a specific residence, situated within a unique socioeconomic, historical, cultural residential setting, in order to capture the complexity within the residences of the activity system. The study of the case incorporates an intervention in the form of a number of workshops at the residence for which I am responsible as an advisor. These workshops were initiated to start the process of forming SLS and were conducted based on the feedback received from Res X’s RM, RAs and students.

Case studies can be described as exploratory, explanatory and descriptive (Yin, 2003), depending on the purpose of the inquiry. The purpose of exploratory case studies is to explore phenomena where there is no clear research direction. Explanatory case studies can be useful when causality needs to be proven or to answer ‘why’ questions. Descriptive case studies can be used to explain events in a particular context. Stake (1995) on the other hand distinguishes between the following types of case studies:

- an *intrinsic* case study: understanding why a particular case is important (this is comparable to Yin’s descriptive case study)
- an *instrumental* case study: to obtain a general understanding of a wider phenomenon (Yin’s exploratory and explanatory case studies fall within this category)
- a *collective* case study: multiple cases are studied comparatively (there does not appear to be a parallel in Yin’s categories of case studies)

Because I investigate a particular UJ residence to study how the development of SLS shape the learning environment of first year students, this case study can be described as exploratory or instrumental. Additionally, the study is descriptive because it portrays the conceptualisation of SLS along with a description of student experiences.
move beyond a mere description of the case to a critical examination of the case. In this process, I critically interrogate current and past practices to inform a more democratic transformed environment. An "emerging qualitative approach to inquiry" allowed flexibility (Creswell, 2013:44) in terms of moving from a descriptive to a critical stance.

In designing a qualitative case study certain advantages and disadvantages are encountered. An advantage of a case study is that the researcher can take one instance of a given activity and employ multiple methods to examine it through rich description from the participants’ perspectives (Stark & Torrance, 2005:33). It also allows multiple role-players to shed light on one particular phenomenon or occurrence. This research thus emerges from the general work I do with residences. I use multiple methods of data collection, such as participant observation, interviews (to get to student perspectives) and document analysis, to investigate the case. I will expand on this further in Section 3.6.

One disadvantage is that generalisations cannot be made from a small number of cases to an entire population. However, this is not to say that researchers cannot find instances of their own experiences in a case and then transfer the findings from the case study to their context. To make a practical and theoretical contribution, this study provides insights for the way in which university living spaces at a South African institution are utilised to support student learning and development. The study and dissemination of the knowledge from this study has the potential to effect real changes in the ways residence managers organise and support student transition into university life.

3.3.2. THE LOGIC OF A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH DESIGN

A participatory action research way of working invites participation with and not for or on behalf of participants (Denzin, 2008:459; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Friere’s (1972) belief that educators should engage in dialogue with people in their ‘lived realities’ heavily influenced PAR and this study (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2008:375). As an action researcher, an empirical ontological – “being in the world” (Jones & Somekh, 2005:141) – perspective is assumed, where reality is dependent on the
knower. Hence, engaging in dialogue with participants permits an enriched perspective. Moreover, “true dialogue” is endorsed by PAR and the students become empowered to effect change (Theron, 2011:3). Further, engaging in dialogue is fundamental to this study and intersects with a CHAT theoretical framework, since “multiple perspectives” and “issues of power” are believed to be at play (Roth & Lee, 2007:200). By drawing on students’ experiences, I learn from students and the students have an opportunity to actively work towards shaping their learning environment, in this manner, establishing a relationship of reciprocity. Working in PAR mode was thus seen as the best fit that would allow me to converse with students in their lived realities.

PAR is a process that takes place in cycles, where each cycle progresses to a better understanding as well as accomplishment. That is, advancement is vital, but by advancement I do not necessarily mean a situation that is problem free. On the contrary, each cycle is characterised by new problems and resolutions (Van Wyk, 2006:200). PAR research is social, participatory, practical and collaborative, and aims to transform theory as well as practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005:566). Each PAR cycle comprises three stages: “plan – act – evaluate” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002:41; Zuber-Skerritt, 1992:13). This study, although not completely collaborative, sought the involvement of all stakeholders, in all matters regarding the planning, implementation and evaluation (also known as the “plan – act – evaluate” stages) of the conceptualisation and implementation SLS.

A two-fold aim exists in PAR, namely: action (leading to change) and research (leading to understanding). The one informs the other and results in clarity or “precision” (Dick, 1993:online). The first implementation cycle – during the pre-study phase – was characterised by wanting to understand how to conceptualise and implement SLS, while the second cycle (at Res Y) moved to a more critical stance of wanting to effect change. I sought a change in the form of improvement in SLS in the student residence and an understanding of how the implementation of SLS could best be achieved. My aim to effect change further meant that my initial technicist PAR approach in Res X was not sufficient and necessitated a more emancipatory PAR approach in Res Y. An emancipatory PAR, Esau (2013) argues, is drawn from critical hermeneutics and is
comparable to Habermas’ (1972) Neo-Marxist theories and Freire’s (1972) emancipatory and critical views on education. The implementation phase involved active participation in SLS, with participation being a necessary component of PAR (Greenwood & Levin, 1998:6).

3.4. LOCATING MYSELF WITHIN A PARADIGM OF KNOWLEDGE: EXPLORING ONTOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL, METHODOLOGICAL AND AXIOLOGICAL POSITIONING

In this section I discuss my philosophical and theoretical framework also known as the paradigmatic perspective (Kuhn, 1962) or knowledge claims (Creswell, 2009) before I move onto describing how I used CHAT as a heuristic for linking the theoretical frame with the methodological framework and the methods employed. According to Creswell (2013:15), our beliefs and assumptions inform our theoretical frames that underpin empirical investigations. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000:7) suggest that it is senseless to merely refer to philosophical assumptions without actually using them as touchstones for the empirical research. It is thus crucial as a researcher to make one’s philosophical beliefs and assumptions explicit (Agherdien, Henning & van der Westhuizen, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). In this section I discuss the intersection of the theoretical framework with the methodological framework and research design.

3.4.1. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SELECTED PARADIGMS

Paradigms or knowledge claims entail different beliefs about ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the nature on knowledge), axiology (values and their role in research) and methodology (the research process or action plan) (Creswell, 2013:20). Table 3.1 presents a summary of three of the most commonly used paradigms. I use these in this discussion to ‘situate’ myself as researcher and to show how my stance relates to the others. For the sake of this inquiry I am not exploring the other paradigms, such as the more recent ones like the transformative perspective, postmodernism and disability approaches (Creswell, 2013:23).

Table 3.1. Paradigms Summarised

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positivist</th>
<th>Interpretivist</th>
<th>Critical Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for doing research</th>
<th>To predict and explain</th>
<th>To understand individuals’ experience of the world</th>
<th>To change or transform the world</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ontology – the nature of social reality</strong></td>
<td>Reality exists out there and must be discovered</td>
<td>Multiple realities and free will exist</td>
<td>Reality is ‘out there’ but it changes over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human behaviour is determined by laws, over which we have little control</td>
<td></td>
<td>Behaviour is partly ruled by laws but humans have the ability to change their conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemology – the nature of knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Knowledge can be verified through observation</td>
<td>Knowledge is located in time and context</td>
<td>Knowledge is transformative and emancipatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodology – the plan of action</strong></td>
<td>Scientific, experimentation</td>
<td>Observation and interpretation</td>
<td>Objective/scientific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theory – assumptions and propositions that provide explanations</strong></td>
<td>Deductive approach – test theory</td>
<td>Inductive approach - collect data to build theory</td>
<td>Includes both building and testing theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Categories or theories emerge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Axiology – the values brought to the study</strong></td>
<td>Research is value free</td>
<td>Research is valueladen and biases are present</td>
<td>Diversity of values is central</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Neuman (2000); Pather and Remenyi (2005) and Creswell (2013)

As is evident from Table 3.1, paradigms have their own ways of seeing, doing and being. While an interpretivist stance calls for understanding, a critical stance wants more than that. Specifically, change or emancipation is valued. Moreover, concepts such as diversity, multiple perspectives, context and subjectivity are common to the interpretivist and critical stances, whereas a positivist stance calls for one objective reality, testing, prediction and explanation. In the following section, I describe these three paradigms in greater detail, providing my reasons for situating myself within the critical paradigm.
3.4.2. MOVING AWAY FROM THE POSITIVIST PARADIGM TOWARDS THE INTERPRETIVIST AND CRITICAL PARADIGMS: LOCATING MYSELF AS RESEARCHER

From the 1930s to the 1960’s, positivism was the dominant theoretical paradigm. It has since been described by Williams and May (cited in Gray, 2009:21) as “one of the heroic failures of modern philosophy” and as having “steered the social sciences on a rigorous course of self-destruction”. Positivists are interested in measuring and observing reality out there (Denzin & Lincoln 2008; Gray 2009; Merriam, 2009:8). As Charmaz (2003:8) explains:

Social researchers who adopted the positivist paradigm aimed to discover causal explanations and to make predictions about an external, knowable world. Their beliefs in scientific logic, a unitary method, objectivity, and truth legitimized reducing qualities of human experience to quantifiable variables. Thus, positivist methods assumed an unbiased and passive observer who collected facts but did not participate in creating them, the separation of facts from values, the existence of an external world separate from scientific observers and their methods, and the accumulation of knowledge about this world. Positivism led to a quest for valid instruments, technical procedures, replicable research designs, and verifiable quantitative knowledge.

It seems that prediction and explanation are aims of positivists (Neuman, 2000). Scientific measurement and experimentation is valued. The general concern is with the discovery of truth by means of empirical evidence (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004:17; Johnson & Omwuegbuzi, 2004). As Denzin and Lincoln (2008:20) explain, positivism valued validity, reliability and objectivity and saw their participants as the other who happened to be “alien, foreign and strange”.

Although scientific inquiry, experiments and generalisations are still employed, much research happens in a post-positivist fashion (Gray, 2009:21). Some researchers have, in the words of Denzin and Lincoln (2008:9), a “tolerant view” on positivism, but most see it as “a science that silences too many voices” and thus reject it. This kind of positivistic research is not aligned to the intent of my research which required a different approach. In a sense then, I distanced myself from positivist notions of objectivity, reliability, causality and certainty. In my study multiple voices, subjectivity, cultural sensitivity, the questioning of power issues and equitable practices were
foregrounded. An emancipatory PAR approach meant that I involved students at the outset of the research process for their empowerment and to hear their voices (Esau, 2013:6).

In contrast with the positivist paradigm, the aim of interpretivist research is to make sense of the meanings others have about the world. According to Crotty (1998), we live in a cultural world that gives meaning to our existence. So, as researchers we need to look at the context of our participants and also our own backgrounds and experiences as they shape how we interpret our data. Interpretivists believe that social reality is complex and that interpretation is critical to understanding (Gray, 2009:24). By implication, I can seek to explore the complexity of students’ views, which are diverse, but I cannot predict or control them. The pre-study phase required me to understand the residence context.

Whilst inferences can be made about learning, causation cannot be claimed (Gray, 2009:25). In this study thus, a change in the learning environment of Res Y cannot be directly assigned to my actions in the formation and implementation of SLS. At best, I can explore the implications of the implementation.

I was interested in finding out how participants experienced SLS in their live settings and how social, cultural and historical factors shaped these spaces (see research SQ 3). Through such an exploration of complex social phenomena, I wanted to get a sense of the subjective meanings participants assign to their own experiences and contexts (see research SQ 4). I wanted to grasp the participants’ views of SLS and how they have negotiated these views “socially and historically” (Creswell, 2013:25). This angle of my empirical investigation places my work within the interpretivist paradigm. I understand knowledge to be socially constructed, in line with interpretivism as my epistemological home, and wanted to gain an insider or emic perspective (Creswell, 2013). Like Denzin (2008:438), I contest objectivity and neutrality”. I was interested in asking broad, open-ended questions (e.g. the ‘how’ questions) so that I could understand students’ socially constructed meanings attached to the experience of implementation of SLS in their residence and the practices they accept with it.
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The third main paradigm, namely the critical paradigm, involves more critical forms of research and stems from multiple traditions and embraces various methodologies (Merriam, 2009). Critical theory is also referred to as critical hermeneutics (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). The focus is on critique and how participants construct and interpret reality and this paradigm fits well with interpretive research (Merriam, 2002). Henning et al. (2004) refer to the narratives, experiences and insiders’ voices or emic perspective (Henning et al., 2004). For Denzin and Lincoln (2008:645), a critical pedagogy, which is associated with critical research forms, refers to the “the critical reflexive ways in which cultural agents resist and undermine particular hegemonic ways of understanding”. Brookfield (2005:44) explains that hegemony relates to “the maintenance of political control” or a way that one accepts that which is unjust as normal and in one’s own best interest. Brookfield goes on to say that often, hegemonic practices are self-imposed: “Adults take pride in learning and acting on the beliefs and assumptions that work to enslave them. In learning diligently to live by these assumptions, people become their own jailers.”

Brookfield (2005:viii) refers to critical theory’s three core assumptions regarding the organisation of the world. The first assumption is that societies are characterised by inequality. Second, such inequality is made to seem “normal, natural, and inevitable”, ensuring that the status quo goes unchallenged. The third assumption is that understanding this state of affairs is a necessary preface to changing it. In taking this viewpoint into consideration in the design of this PAR study and the decisions that become part of the interventions within it, I was firstly led by my critical reflections from the work in Res X. My chief concern was that students lacked a questioning stance and accepted practices unquestioningly. These all pointed to hegemony in the residence environment. As the process of establishing SLS was intended to be a process not only for but with students, I was motivated to a more critical stance with Res Y. The critical theoretical paradigm thus influenced my stance as researcher.

In this study, I first attempted to understand how to conceptualise and implement SLS. I thus opted for a more dialogic approach with students and engaged in discussion (during workshops) with them. In particular, topics such as Ubuntu, cooperation and collaboration were meant to interrogate the notion of finding one’s voice. In this way I
hoped to get students to speak openly and frankly about issues of concern in the residences. This was meant to heighten awareness about hegemony and its influence on everyday practices. Students needed to learn to take charge of the process of identifying, exposing or contesting hegemony in the residence environment. The research questions were set to investigate practices that enabled or constrained participation in SLS. This also influenced not only the interventions in the residence, but also the data sources such as the interviews with students.

In a further attempt to uncover enabling and constraining policies and practices and its relation to the conception of SLS, I draw on Habermas’ (1971, in Brookfield, 2005:1155) knowledge construction classified as “technical”, “practical” and “emancipatory” interests. For this study, the practical and emancipatory interests intersect. The concern is with understanding the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS and how these shape the learning environment in residences, but at the same time I am concerned with critically examining enabling and constraining social, cultural and historical factors or practices. Critical theory has an interest in questioning authentic social realities (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000) and helping craft people’s destiny by means of action and critical reflection (Henning et al., 2004:23). The identification of the power issues and how they operated in the residence environment required a critical stance (Guba, 1990). Such a stance compels the consideration of taken for granted practices and power differentials. Ideology and power are central concerns of critical theory. I agree with Esau (2013:8) in his assertion that emancipatory PAR has the potential to serve as a “powerful tool supporting the transformation of our society.” A critical theoretical stance thus intersected the PAR design.

My experiences of top-down practices in my work with Res X sensitised me to the value of a more critical or emancipatory stance in my investigations in Res Y. Thus, I also crossed over to a critical paradigm in designing the study and particularly in addressing research SQ 2, 3 and 4 in terms of identifying possible enablers and constraints, and social, cultural and historical factors, and assumptions, perceptions and practices. In these PAR cycles, which form the basis of this study, I was not seeking to offer emancipatory alternatives, but first to expose hegemonic practices
that constrain participation in SLS, and second to lay the foundation for further work in this respect. I thus used a critical theoretical lens to supplement an interpretivist stance. As Marriage, Paxton-Buursma and Bouck (2004:538) argue, critical theory complements a sociocultural perspective “by adding a disposition or stance of critique”.

Marriage et al. (2004) further contend that the complexity of learning necessitates the probing of power present in learning. In order to understand student experiences of the implementation of SLS, I needed to recognise and interrogate the power issues at play in the SLS. In keeping with an aim to effect change or transformation in the learning environment of first year students in a residence, a critical stance in line with a PAR approach, locating myself partly within this paradigm, was justified. Failure to take a critical stance would have meant that present and future transformational opportunities to work with students in effecting change would have been neglected. This also significantly implies that my PAR case study design was suited to effecting transformation through praxis (Creswell, 2013). The workshop topics thus helped students to think about power imbalances and concerns such as “learning to challenge ideology, contesting hegemony, overcoming alienation, pursuing liberation, reclaiming reason, and practicing democracy” (Brookfield, 2005:65). Otherwise stated, a critical stance meant that I was interested in emancipatory benefits.

3.4.3. CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY AS THEORETICAL LENS: RES Y CASE STUDY

Within the broad interpretivist and critical paradigms, I used Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a theoretical framework. CHAT not only guided the questions that I asked, but also informed the design of this study. The case study was designed in such a way that I drew on lessons learned from a previous pre-study implementation at Res X. I wanted not only to understand how the cultivation of SLS shaped the learning environment of first year students at a university residence, but also to bring to the fore the underlying tensions inherent in this process and in the system of which the residence is a part. These tensions, or what Myers (1997:online) calls “restrictive and alienating conditions”, in the activity system could only be exposed through a CHAT lens and within a PAR approach with its emancipatory intent.
CHAT offers a suitable theoretical framework for this study for a number of reasons, particularly with regard to conceptualising and designing the study as well as a lens for viewing the role of learning activities in the workshops. This section deals with key concepts that were used to design the learning activities to mediate the formation of SLS. I start with an explanation of the seven CHAT components.

One of the seven components of the activity system is the **subject**, which refers to the actors (people, groups or organisations) in the activity system that use tools directed at a certain object. Kaptelinin (2012) sees the subject as having his/her own needs and having to engage in activities for survival through interaction with objects. From a CHAT perspective the collective subject, also called the “active agent”, with its own “aims, interests, memory, and norms” (Lektorsky, 2009:1146), can be identified. While collective subjects may have the same object, individual motives may be different. These are seen as the person/s whose actions researchers seek to understand.

A second CHAT component is the **object**, which is the “the ‘raw material’ or ‘problem’ space’ at which the activity is directed and which is moulded and transformed into outcomes with the help of physical and symbolic, external and internal mediating instruments, including both tools and signs” (Engeström, 1987:79). In other words, it is that which motivates the actions of the subject and upon which the action is lodged. Edwards (2011:3) argues that it is the object that separates activities from one another and in so doing constitutes the “true motive” of the activity. Being so fundamental to the activity system, Engeström (cited in Blackler & Regan, 2009) posits that it is the object that must be followed, expanded and given a voice in the activity system as opposed to the organisation. According to Roth and Lee (2007:198) the object exists twice: first as a material entity and second as a vision or an image (how it exists presently and how it will look in the future).

The **tool or mediating artefact** is a third component of CHAT, referring to the resources used by the subject to act upon the object towards the outcome/s. These tools can be either physical (like a book, computer or software) or symbolic (like language, signs and symbols). For Vygotsky, language represented the most vital tool, as it is through
language that one gets a glimpse of what really matters in society (Edwards, 2011). By implication, examining speech and dialogue gives a good indication of how people experience and perceive their life world and practices within it. Engeström believes that through the development of tools, subjects can infuse new meanings into their activities (Blackler & Regan, 2009).

The *rules* constitute the fourth CHAT component. Rules guide and direct the activity and shape the behaviour of the community. Often, when a new tool is introduced in an activity system, old or existing rules may cause tension and inhibit the use of the new tool (Edwards, 2011). Rules can be explicit or formal (for example policies, procedures, norms and conventions) or implicit (for example unspoken rules or beliefs).

The fifth CHAT component is *communities*, which can be defined as “those individuals, groups, or both who share the same general objects, and are defined by their division of labour and shared norms and expectations” (Barab et al., 2002:78). Generally, the community, together with the subject and others, is involved in collective activity with an interest in the object-oriented activity (Beatty & Feldman, 2009). It is the common, collective object that defines the community (Engeström, 2001). The object transforms through tools, resulting in an outcome (sixth component). Outcomes can also be seen as products (Roth, 2012) or the results of the activity system.

Finally, the *division of labour* makes up the seventh component of third-generation CHAT. Divisions of labour can be organised horizontally (everyone operates on an equal footing) or vertically (hierarchically with inherent power differentials). In my experience, it is often in the way labour is organised that tensions emerge and tool usage could thus either be enabled or constrained by it. I now move on to how I used CHAT as a heuristic to design the case study.

I used Engeström’s third-generation CHAT as heuristic. As researcher I had to become part of the learners’ life world so that an insider perspective could aid me to see what residence culture was all about. I needed to think about the social, historical and cultural frameworks within which my sample operated. As with a study conducted by
Rohleder, Swartz, Bozalek, Carolissen, & Leibowitz, (2008), it was not enough to encourage physical contact; activities had to be designed to aid critical discussions and co-construction of knowledge. This was how the facilitation of workshops was conceived. To this end, Engeström’s third-generation CHAT with its integrated activity systems was employed as a heuristic to help design the learning activities. I have already dealt with CHAT as theoretical frame in great detail in Chapter 2 Section 2.7). Here I unpack how CHAT was useful in highlighting the tensions in the pre-study phase, which lead to the design of particular learning activities to promote social integration in Res Y.

By way of revision, the basic structure of activity theory as depicted in Figure 3.3 proposes that subjects transform objects into outcomes using tools/artefacts. That is, “any time a person or a group (subject) interacts with tools over time on some object with some shared motive to achieve an outcome, one can analyse their interactions as an activity system” (Russell, 2002:67). Hence, as Roth and Lee (2005) articulate, it is about collectively-motivated productive activities and not just being busy – the collective is at the core – and it does not have a clear start and end, but evolves and is complex. In my study, the Res Y students (subject) work on the object (to cultivate or develop SLS) using workshops and collaborative group discussion (tools) in order to transform and shape their learning environment as first year students in Res Y (outcome). This outcome forms part of the transformed or changed system (Roth & Lee, 2007:199), that is, the transformation of the learning environment (outcome) is what is going to transform the activity system. The object of the activity system is production (Engeström, 1999) and the workshops and group discussions therefore functioned as the tool that mediated learning and not as the object of the activity. The outcome that the students, RM, HK and I were hoping to achieve is a transformed environment, where human development is seen as object related (Lee, 2004; Stetsenko, 2005) or what Engeström (2009) calls object-driven activity.
The wider community, with its related rules, norms, practices and conventions, impacts on why certain activity is performed and how that activity is going to be done. The learning activities thus needed to be done in consultation with the community. This is also in line with the PAR methodology. Furthermore, the activity requires labour or action and is divided amongst the community. Inherent in this activity are tensions or contradictions (Engeström, 1987; Leont’ev, 1974) due to the rules and different levels of participation that exist. Tensions can also exist between any of the seven components. These contradictions eventually drive the desired transformation or change (Barab et al., 2002:80; Engeström, 2001; Kuuti, 1996; Roth & Lee, 2007:203).

Engeström (2001:135) contends that the contradictions within an activity system act as a research guide and through resolving contradictions in localised settings transformation of the activity system occurs. Similarly, through resolving conflicts, learning happens and the system changes. Hence, exploring the contradictions in the
participatory activities towards the cultivation of SLS was built in as an important aspect of the present study. Additionally, the cultural and historical perspectives add to our understanding of not just 'how' the activity occurs, but also the reasons for the existence of the activity (Capper & Williams, 2004).

Engeström (1987, 1999) takes activity theory one step further by arguing for connected activity systems, otherwise known as expansive learning. He maintains that the introduction of innovations in one activity system could cause contradictions in another related or embedded activity system that can possibly be a major source of transformation and development. Further, he proposes that individuals sustain the activity’s output, their own production, as well as society’s as a whole, by contributing to at least one activity. This sustainability is possibly due to the idea that individuals are simultaneously attached to multiple, linked activity systems. Thus, in my study for instance, the introduction of SLS could cause contradictions in the overall UJ residence policy with regard to study time. This could cause further contradictions in the particular residence culture affected by this study, their interaction with other residence environments, a dissonance with students’ home cultures or with any other linked activity systems (especially in the wider UJ environment).
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Although the various communities or stakeholders have a common goal (i.e. enhanced learning), the need is different, as illustrated in Figure 3.4. For example, the university (Student Affairs) has a need to increase the throughput rate by creating a learning environment outside of class; Res Y management and the FYE Committee want a better overall student experience through the cultivation of LCs or SLS; and the students have a need for academic success. A whole community – RW, RAs, HK, LCs Committee, Student Affairs, the researcher and students – is involved in labour towards achieving the common outcome of enhanced learning. However, they do so through different and sometimes conflicting activities. Additionally, this division of labour is riddled with power relations like the hierarchical structure of the residence with its five-pillar model (which was mentioned in Section 1.5). All of these tensions already became apparent in the pre-study phase and a CHAT perspective helped me hone in on particular topics for the investigation in Res Y.
These particular workshop topics or themes included group conflict, diversity, making your voice heard, etc. Engeström (2001:32) explains “how practice undergoes the type of change that defines the learning process”. To further guide the learning activities, CHAT’s five principles were used in the following ways (Table 3.2):

### Table 3.2. CHAT Principles Informing Interaction and Ways of Working

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAT Principle</th>
<th>Inform interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The unit of analysis is the collective, tool mediated and object-oriented activity system, understood in relation to other activity systems</td>
<td>A tool has to mediate between the subject and the object. Students may not necessarily know how to interact in SLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity systems are multi-voiced, that is, multiple points of view, traditions and interests exist within communities</td>
<td>Group work is desired to get everyone’s perspective. Perspectives are solicited for a variety of stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity systems are historically shaped and transformed.</td>
<td>The formation of SLS will not happen overnight but will develop over time with tensions possibly directing a move in a particular direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradictions that develop historically within systems as well as between.</td>
<td>Tensions can possibly be attributed to past experiences or interactions and must therefore be examined within context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An activity system undergoes expansive transformations – as contradictions intensifies, some begin to move away from traditional norms</td>
<td>Contradictions may trigger a change in the activity system and lead to an entirely new activity system. Perhaps the formation of SLS needs to be rethought to include an alternative or a different way of conceptualisation. Or we should be prepared to “learn new forms of activity which are not yet there” (Engeström, 2001:138).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to CHAT’s prominent focus on transformation and contradictions, I saw it as a useful lens in the design of the learning activities. Roth and Lee (2007:203) distinguish between four types of contradictions, namely: 1) primary: internal, e.g. some students learn for learning’s sake; 2) secondary: between constituents, e.g. between the students and the residence rules and policies; 3) tertiary: difference in object or motive, e.g. students want to memorise while facilitator aims for learning that endures; and 4) tension between central and peripheral activities, e.g. the HKs are learners themselves but also function as mentors or disciplinarians. Due to the inherent contradictions...
within and between elements of the activity systems, it becomes imperative to analyse issues of power and control, which was the intent of this study.

Sannino, Daniels and Gutierrez (2009) argue for the inclusion of emotion in activity systems. Roth (2009:1004) concurs and contends that emotions play a crucial role in mediating activities, which, if ignored, will lead to an inadequate viewpoint. He maintains that emotions define how people interact with others and what they do – their activities and actions – such that the activity system is affected. Students’ emotional well-being is thus a crucial consideration in this study. I acknowledge that if relationships are strained and if students are forced to engage in activities that have no “positive valence” for them, they will avoid such activities (Roth, 2009:67).

3.4.4. RESIDENCE Y AS RESEARCH SITE: SELECTING THE CASE AND THE SAMPLES WITHIN THE CASE

The best sampling strategy for this study included critical cases and convenience cases (Creswell, 2013). Choosing Res Y as the research site was informed by my work in Res X and the request of the RW at Res Y. The intent of conducting the research or case study was an important consideration (Creswell, 2013) in choosing Res Y. I wanted an in-depth understanding – the hallmark of a good qualitative PAR case study (Creswell, 2013:98) – of a specific residence (the case) to ascertain how the establishment and implementation of SLS shape the learning environment of first year students.

No budget existed for the implementation of SLS and the UJs LCs Committee therefore made a conscious decision to work with residences. This decision was based on the assumption that residence environment provided the optimal conditions for the cultivation of SLS and student learning communities. The specific ‘case’ (Merriam, 1998:64) was selected when the RW approached me to work with Res Y students as she was concerned about their past exam results and wanted to consciously and intentionally assist students. Thus, one of the main reasons for choosing Res Y was that participation had to be on a voluntary basis and Res Y had determined that they wanted to be part of this LC pilot project. Accessibility was thus an important
consideration (Creswell, 2013) in choosing the case. I explained the sample in the case in Section 1.6.6.

3.4.5. EXPLORING THE NOTION OF SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES IN THE RESIDENCE ENVIRONMENT

At the time I began my work with the residences, promoting study time for first year students was the only attempt at promoting an academic culture in the UJ residences. Here, ‘academic culture’ refers to enhancing students’ disciplinary knowledge, encouraging academic debates and discussions, stimulating openness to learning from others, and so forth. However, what occurred during these study time sessions was that students studied on their own, all the time being monitored by RAs to make sure that they did not speak to any of their peers or leave their rooms. The study sessions seemed to be entirely lacking in the social elements of learning. Furthermore, extended hours meant that students had to study from 18:00 to 23:00, with only a short break, which proved to be counterproductive to achieving better academic results.

Linking the workshops – where collaborative sharing and discussion was encouraged – to the discussions and interventions towards establishing SLS, was thus an attempt to get students to a point where we could work with an expanded notion of learning spaces. Based on workshops with Res X, which were refined for this study, the workshops in Res Y were planned to initiate new ideas around the concept of SLS and of an academic culture. The workshops were geared towards getting participants to think by consciously reflecting on how, for instance, collaboration would be done. To illustrate this point, one activity students had to do was to engage in discussions around collaboration so that they could reflect on how they currently interact with others and enact the theory from their respective disciplines. I was guided by Wenger’s (1998:9) idea of focusing on what to take note of, what the expected problems would be and how to possibly deal with those problems. My own departure point, located in my epistemological basis of socio-constructivism that learning is a social practice, enabled me to draw optimally on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) and Wenger’s (2004) CoPs, Vygotsky’s social constructivism (1978), and to utilise Engeström’s CHAT (1997, 2000) as a heuristic in designing the case study. CHAT also facilitated thinking
around the activity system as opposed to looking at individual actions within the case study. I discussed this in greater detail in Sections 2.7 and 3.4.3.

3.5. EMPLOYING QUALITATIVE METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION IN THE PAR CASE STUDY

At one level, this study is can be described as a very common type of research in education, namely basic qualitative research where interpretation is the aim (Merriam, 2009). However, I moved beyond a solely interpretive approach to incorporate a critical stance as dictated by my process and change oriented research question. This research design meant interacting with and studying participants in their natural settings so that meaning making happens from the participants’ own perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008:4). Methodologically, as fitting for a PAR study, I had to employ methods of data collection that allowed student voices to be elicited. Through my interventionist role, I wanted to establish the meaning the creation of SLS had for students as they engaged therein. Thus, ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions were of concern (Yin, 2009:8), as opposed to ‘why’ questions, which calls for a qualitative approach.

My concern in this PAR case study was with the complexity of process, combined with meaning making in a particular context, and not with making generalisations. Otherwise stated, I was interested in a holistic, in-depth study of the processes within this particular case. The nature of the design meant that I worked closely with a small number of participants, as I sought in-depth insights and interpretations of the process and participants’ engagement within it. The advantage was that I could concentrate on depth and not breadth. Creswell (2013:49) posits that researchers who use qualitative methods (including PAR methods, I would add) need to be prepared to do the following:

- Spend time in the field so that they can get an “insider perspective”. In this study I acted as researcher, facilitator of workshops and participant observer over one semester (14 weeks in an 18-24 month period of involvement in the residence environment).
- Gather vast amounts of data and engage in extensive data analysis. I gathered data by way of a biographical questionnaire and interviews over a two year period. Data analysis was ongoing – five interviews (four dyads and one individual)
conducted at Res Y in 2012 were analysed and used to inform the 2013 implementation.\textsuperscript{6}  

- Engage in research that is evolving and is adaptable in terms of the procedures used. My PAR mode of working allowed such flexibility.

Qualitative research is time-consuming, labour-intensive and requires an open mind, as it evolves as the research progresses. This study required that I spend an extended time with students in their natural settings. A CHAT perspective also warranted prolonged engagement, as contradictions are not minor everyday tensions or problems, but are rather “historically accumulated inner contradictions” Engeström, 2001:137). I now go on to discuss other challenges associated with the PAR case study design in general and that I encountered in this study.

Qualitative research has been criticised for its “soft” approach and is seen as “unscientific”, “exploratory” and “subjective” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008:10). The problem with the qualitative case study design in particular are, first, concerns about the lack of rigour, as the researcher may be careless or may not always work systematically; second, the findings cannot be generalised; and third, it is too time consuming (Creswell, 2013).

In this study, I addressed these shortcomings by doing the following: first, I worked methodically and carefully by keeping all transcripts, audio-recordings, field notes, etc. as evidence to ensure rigour. Second, my promoter kept a vigilant eye on ensuring that I distinguish between the pre-doctoral work at Res X and the doctoral Res Y data. As Creswell (2013:101) states, it is inadvisable to study multiple cases, since this results in a watered down study. Although I had a single case, I found it challenging to separate my pre-Phd work from my case study work, as lessons from the one influenced the other. My solution to this in this thesis was to report fully on the pre-study phase, so that the reader can understand why and how my actions and decisions were conceived.

\textsuperscript{6} At Res X, I conducted three interviews in 2012 (one RM and two RAs) after the 2011 implementation. This evaluation informed the Res Y implementation.
Third, I immersed myself in the residence context and worked closely with participants not only as researcher but also as practitioner. In this way, I had the opportunity to form a trusting relationship with students so that the formation of SLS could be nurtured (Wenger, 1998). Further, I had the opportunity to provide a detailed snapshot of Res Y over a certain period of time, which would not have been possible had I not invested in a lengthy timeframe. My interpretive stance necessitated an investment of time in the everyday culture of students, so that a deep understanding of the case study could be realised. Thus, I understood the need for “prolonged engagement” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:301) with students and saw it as an opportunity rather than a constraint. My view is that the value of changed practices as realised over time can be found in such extensive engagement. This is in line with Roth and Lee’s (2007) argument that activity evolves over lengthy time periods, unlike actions that change over short periods of time.

3.6. ADOPTING MULTIPLE METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION IN A CASE STUDY OF RES Y: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

All methods involve intellectual assumptions and social positioning (Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson & McSpadden., 2011). Associated with this idea is the notion that the theoretical paradigms connect to strategies and to methods of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008:33). In this section I explore the fit between the methods I used to generate data to address the research questions. I start off with an overview of the methods that I used and the rationale for the usage of each method, together with the associated pros and cons or advantages and disadvantages.

Qualitative research uses multiple methods, which typically include interviews, observation and document analysis (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Merriam, 1998). Greenwood and Levin (2007:92) argue that PAR researchers can employ any of the social science methodological tools. Using various methods resulted in what van Wyk (2006:197) calls methodological triangulation. I first looked at residence policy documents during the planning phase and interviewed a few students. I then used participatory observation during the implementation phase, which included the
presentation of workshops as intervention. Thereafter I interviewed students on a voluntary basis and asked students to complete a questionnaire.

Although interviews are very useful in getting “rich accounts”, they are extremely time-consuming (Alvesson, 2011:2). While participants are allowed to talk freely and openly, this does not always happen, as issues of trust come to the fore and participants answer cautiously (ibid:12). Fontana and Frey (1994, 2008) concur by problematising the role of the interviewer and rather call for attention to participant voice and feelings. Alvesson (2011:143) thus advises that interviews be used with care. He suggests that “language cannot really mirror complex reality” and we should therefore not place too much emphasis only on interviews. Therefore, in the study I also made use of observation and document analysis in conjunction with interviews as research tools.

Observation differs from interviews in the following two respects: the action takes place in the natural setting, and the data obtained via observation represent a first-hand account of the topic (Merriam, 2009:117). Together, these two research tools make good data collection methods. Observation does, however, pose problems relating to its intrusive nature and may therefore impact on events. The data collected through observation is also difficult to analyse.

In addition to interviews and observation, document analysis was used to triangulate data, by using “several methods in different combinations” (Fontana & Frey 1994:373). More specifically, document analysis was used to determine the fit between theory and practice. Documents used included minutes of meetings, residence policy documents and throughput statistics. The benefit of this method was that it was less complicated than the other methods employed. Moreover, another benefit was that the documents could be used to give a richer description or account of the inquiry (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Ultimately, my chosen methods were based on my research questions and what methods of data collection would best answer the questions. Figure 3.5 is a graphical
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illustration of how I found a goodness of fit (Henning et al., 2004:36) between the methods and the research SQ (see Section 1.3 for the research sub-questions).

![Figure 3.5. Methods and Associated Sub-Questions (QS)](image)

### 3.6.1. INTERVIEWS AS PRIMARY SOURCE OF DATA COLLECTION

Fontana and Frey (1998:56) propose that unstructured in-depth interviewing – also known as ethnographic interviewing – complements participant observation. The literature distinguishes between two different types of interviewing (Alvesson, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Fontana & Frey, 2008; Henning et al., 2004; Merriam, 1998). First, the structured interview entails giving all participants the same set of questions where the researcher is not free to interrupt (Fontana & Frey, 2008:124). This type of interview did not fit the purpose of my study as I wanted a dialogue with students. I wanted to hear how students perceived the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS and what their assumptions, perceptions and/or practice within these spaces were. Second, the semi-structured interview comprises open-ended questions that allow some latitude for the researcher to probe and to adjust questions based on previous answers. This was more appropriate to my needs, allowing me to direct the line of questioning so that I asked students what I needed to address my research questions. At the same time, the questions were open-ended and allowed students to talk freely about their experiences, understandings and interpretations. Their own interpretations of events were important to this study. CHAT theorists often examine talk (Edwards, 2011), which is what I did in this study.
According to Fontana and Frey (2008:115), interviewing is neither a-historical nor apolitical; rather, interviewing is linked to a specific context. An important consideration of this study is whose voices are heard and who ultimately makes decisions. I wanted to include the student voice to hear what meanings reinforce their experiences and actions. I am mindful that interviewing is not neutral and that issues – such as power relations, dominant voices and confidentiality – could constrain the reliability of interview data. Ultimately, I had the power to direct the interview by probing and steering the conversation. I took care to look at the interview data within the historical and contextual setting of participants. Still, I deem the interview responses a valuable source of data and for this study they are the main data source.

In total, I conducted 11 interviews, varying between 15 and 30 minutes in length. I distinguish between the two types of interviews I used: individual in-depth interviews and group/dyad interviews. In individual interviews, according to Fontana and Frey (1998:49), it is important to consider "rich cases" that represent broader groups or categories. Besides choosing a representative sample, another important consideration is quality (ibid:50). The concern in this case is with interviewing persons with the right experiences and who are willing to share those experiences. In this study, I interviewed students who had experienced the workshops (as catalyst of SLS) and who volunteered to be interviewed. For pragmatic reasons, I conducted some dyad interviews where each participant, in turn, was asked the same questions. This was not so much to get participants to interact with each other – this was the aim of the focus group interviews – but rather to accommodate students who were available for only a short period of time.

The SLS planning at Res Y started in 2012 when the RW asked me to interview students regarding their June results. The 15-30 minute interviews thus formed part of the planning phase. I conducted five semi-structured interviews at Res Y with nine first-year students (see Figure 3.6). I interviewed four dyads – for the practical reason of saving time – and one individual. The individual interview was a request from the

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7 This was somewhat different to Res X’s first implementation where students were not part of the planning phase.
participant, as she did not feel comfortable speaking freely in front of others. The RW extended an invitation to students to avail themselves for interviews at a specific time. Thus, we (the RW and I as researcher) were careful to include participants on a voluntary basis only. An interview guide – a few guiding questions – was used (Fontana & Frey, 2011; Merriam, 2009) such as satisfaction with current study methods, challenges faced, June results and improvement plan, academic and social support needed (see Appendix D). The purpose of the interviews was to actively involve students in the planning phase of the implementation and also to get students’ views on a potential implementation of such spaces for 2012. Additionally, the interviews informed the planning of the workshops, such as the workshop topics, timing, duration and so forth.

Figure 3.6. Res Y PAR Phases

After the first semester (February to June) 2013 workshops, I conducted a second round of interviews with a selection of students. I interviewed six students from Res Y who had participated in the workshops. I also interviewed one RA from Res X, who had voluntarily attended all the workshops at Res X and who volunteered to be interviewed. She was included in the data to broaden the perspective on the SLS processes, that is, her input was sought as she was part of the process right from the start and so she could shed light on what I was doing, and also provide a critical insider perspective which I could not get as researcher.
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All interviews were tape-recorded and three independent persons typed the various transcripts. I checked each transcript by listening to the audio recording – several times in some instances – and comparing it to the typed document. Although the transcripts reflect a conversational tone where the interviewee and I at times interrupted each other, I did not include non-verbal signs like facial expressions and hand gestures, nor were silences and emotions captured. Some of the transcripts are included as addenda and the audio recordings will be kept for at least five years as part of my audit trail. Whilst all activities during the workshops presented were audio-recorded, these were not transcribed. However, I listened to each recording a few times to get a general sense of how students engaged during the workshops.

3.6.2. PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION
As noted by Johnson and Omwuegbuzi (2004:16) it is generally accepted that “observation is not a perfect and direct window into reality”. In other words, what is observed is the researcher’s account of reality and not the absolute truth. Therefore, I acknowledge that observation in this study is limited to my knowledge and understanding (Henning et al., 2004) as well as my interpretation. My role as participant observer was to observe actions during the workshop presentations only – only what was important to address my research question was taken note of. The interviews – which Patton (1990:196) sees as asking questions about that which is not observable – filled the gaps as not everything could be observed.

Delamont (2002) deals with four aspects of gathering observational data: what to observe, how to go about observing, where and when to observe and what needs to be recorded. To address research SQ 3 – How do social, cultural and historical factors shape the formation of SLS? – it was necessary to become part of the interactions within the SLS for a short while to familiarise myself with the culture of the residence students (Henning et al., 2004). What I observed was limited to the following aspects: attendance, participation and communication, punctuality, and engagement. I audio recorded the group discussions and wrote field notes immediately after each workshop. My notes are a combination of observations of what I saw happening and
my impressions of events as they unfolded. I also included field notes that I generated during participant observation.

3.6.3. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS AS SECONDARY SOURCE OF DATA COLLECTION

In order to give an account of the entire activity system and how policy informs practice, documents were included as data for analysis. The benefits of the inclusion of documents are that they are good sources of information since they already exist and are freely available (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002). Another benefit, as suggested by Henning et al. (2004), is that they provide a more holistic picture of the investigation. Documents, according to Somekh and Lewin (2005), give an account of current and changing content and the value thereof.

I included documents that relate directly to the research question (Henning et al., 2004). For this study, I wanted to know how the crafting of SLS shaped the learning environment of first year students in a specific residence. Therefore, I included residence documents, such as policy documents and minutes of meetings. I wanted to examine policies relating to the residences to investigate how the policies and/or practices enabled or constrained the implementation of SLS. The minutes of meetings also alluded to enabling and constraining factors related to SLS formation.

3.6.4. DEMOGRAPHICS OF RES Y STUDENTS: ELICITED THROUGH A STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The inclusion of demographic data came about as a result of lessons learned from the pre-study phase and as a result of other studies conducted with first year students. I sought a more open, critical approach through including biographical data. I was prompted by a need (in PAR mode as researcher) to get closer to a socio-cultural, historical perspective of the population that I was working with. It is my contention that who students are, shapes who they become (their identities), and for this study means that who students are will shape how they engage in SLS. The use of the questionnaire served a very specific purpose, viz. to gather biographical information about the participants. Through the use of a self-administered questionnaire, large amounts of data could be gathered fairly quickly. I wanted to gather data on, amongst others,
student attributes, where they come from (socially, historically and economically) and what shaped their engagement in SLS (in terms of study habits, learning styles and ambitions).

To this end, an amended version of Van Zyl’s (2012) Student Profile Questionnaire (SPQ) was designed; comprising 12 closed questions and one open ended question (see Addendum A). The questions address age, home language, whether they were the first in their families to enter higher education, what their preferred learning styles were and what their study habits were. Van Zyl’s (2012) SPQ has undergone extensive testing (to ensure validity and reliability) and language editing and has been used extensively in the UJ environment. This questionnaire was used as it gave a good sense of UJ students and elicited some information on socio-cultural, historical background. I excluded questions on distance from campus, matric subjects etc. as it was not relevant to the residence environment. The SPQ was useful in the sense that it gave a reasonable understanding of the UJ student and was in line with a CHAT perspective that values a holistic approach.

According to Van Zyl’s (2012) study at UJ, almost 60% of UJ students were identified as first-generation students, 48% studied less than 10 hours per week in the previous year and 41% were worried about money. Another significant statistic in Van Zyl’s study was that only 59% of students were English first language speakers, a real cause for concern as English is the medium of instruction in the university environment and is a major gateway to academic success. These statistics paint a profile of UJ first year students in general, which is likely to be very similar in the residences.

For my study, I divided the questionnaire into four sections, viz. general, academic, family and residence life. The general section related to questions on age and home language. I agree with Jansen (2013:online) that it is the quality of teaching that is core: “The problem is not the language of instruction – it is the quality of teaching, the knowledge of curriculum and the stability of the school”. Literacy issues play a central role in teaching and learning. I therefore included a section on home language in this questionnaire, as in my experience it is not only academic literacy that shapes teaching and learning, but also language. The language debate in South African higher
education has been a contentious one and is marked by a history of poor home language teaching (Alexander, 2003; Jansen, 2013).

The academic category related to faculty of study, reasons for choice of studies, financing of studies, learning styles and number of study hours per week. The learning styles item was added to the SPQ, as I wanted to find out whether students were aware of how they learn optimally and whether they were open to the idea of working with others. This linked directly to the issue of forming SLS, since I was aware that students learn in different ways.

The family section of the SPQ, which I did not add, comprised family support and tertiary qualifications of other family members. A section not in the SPQ is the one on residence life. This was included to ascertain learners’ satisfaction with policies and procedures and general residence culture. I added this question to intentionally give students voice regarding matters that directly affected students’ concern and well-being. Finally, an open question was added, which asked students to give at least two recommendations that they think would benefit the formation and optimal functioning of LCs through SLS in the residences.

While Res Y had about 65 first year students and I anticipated all completing the questionnaire, only 42 students attended one or more of the workshops. Of these, only 29 completed the questionnaire, and only 16 of these completed the open-ended question. I had hoped that more students would have added their voices to future recommendations and the absence of opinion was in some ways indicative of their silence on matters of concern.

In conclusion, the four methods of data collection I chose have both advantages and disadvantages and these are summarised in Table 3.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method &amp; Instrument</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 3.3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Data Collection Methods
### Chapter 3: Research Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>To get very specific information about the need/not for SLS</td>
<td>Questions can be prepared ahead of time, Participants are allowed to talk freely and openly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncover tensions that may hinder development of SLS</td>
<td>Time-intensive, Labour-intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Observation (field notes)</td>
<td>Become part of participants' world, Mediate trusting relationships, Offer support</td>
<td>Go beyond opinion and self-interpretation, Intrusive – may influence events, Difficult to analyse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Document analysis (Minutes of meetings, residence policy documents, academic records, throughput Statistics, etc.)</td>
<td>Enrich the data or inquiry, risk of researcher bias is minimal, Dead data – less complicated</td>
<td>Information can be inaccurate or incomplete, selective or unrepresentative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Questionnaire (based on Van Zyl's (2012) Student Profile Questionnaire)</td>
<td>Gain a better understanding of who participants are, Each participant gets the same set of questions</td>
<td>May represent biased samples, Low response rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Easy and cost effective to administer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, although there are numerous disadvantages associated with the various methods individually, combining those cancels out these disadvantages. Further, a more nuanced view of the unit of analysis is gained through multiple methods.

### 3.7. USING LITERATURE TO INFORM WORKSHOPS AS INTERVENTION

To initiate SLS, I designed workshops that offered opportunities for engagement. The literature on LC, specific parts of CoPs and CHAT were particularly useful in thinking about the topics and ways of engagement. Thus, these bodies of literature served as used as theoretical lenses to guide the entire study – which included the design of workshops – and as analytical lenses to interpret the analysed data.
A total of five sessions were scheduled, with a different theme for each workshop (Table 3.4). The lessons learned from the Res X implementation relate directly to the choice of topics or themes (see Section 3.2). These themes were strategically chosen and were in line with the literature on social learning that states that human development happens first on a social level and then on an individual level (Vygotsky, 1933). The idea was therefore to expose students to situations that allowed them to interact with others, consider multiple perspectives, question their taken for granted beliefs, reflect on their ways of doing and seeing, and last, but not least, make their voices heard. My interpretivist stance meant that multiple realities exist where sense making involves co-construction with others. From this perspective then I argue that these issues had to be addressed to enable the optimal development and implementation of SLS that would otherwise have constrained engagement.

Table 3.4. Workshop Schedule for First Semester, 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mar 13</th>
<th>Apr 10</th>
<th>April 24</th>
<th>May 8</th>
<th>May 22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st session</td>
<td>2nd session</td>
<td>3rd session</td>
<td>4th session</td>
<td>5th session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Collaborative learning &amp; Ground rules + Group Skills</td>
<td>Group Conflict &amp; Diversity &amp; Equity</td>
<td>Cooperative learning and Informal learning</td>
<td>Finding your voice</td>
<td>Your choice?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The aim of the intervention was to get learners to co-construct knowledge by grappling with issues (as reflected in the choice of topics) that were common to their community and that would help them cope with what it means to be in and of a university. Further, I wanted to help students towards transforming the learning environment, enabling them to interact more comfortably with knowledge, with others and with the world. Essentially, I aimed for change within them. Accordingly, the wish was to balance structure and freedom to create something altogether new” (Thomas & Brown, 2011:49), where students consider each other and themselves as “resources” (ibid:25). A PAR methodology values such ongoing development (change) and reflection ‘with’ participants and not ‘on’ participants. I will now turn to more concepts inherent in these theories and relate it to the learning activities.
Although the present study aimed to establish SLS—an environment or place where students can engage collaboratively in practice—Wenger’s notion of CoPs, despite the critique levelled at it and the differences between SLS, LC and CoPs, it still offered some useful insights. Wenger (1998, 2004:2) defines CoPs as “groups of people who share a passion for something that they know how to do, and who interact regularly in order to learn how to do it better”. He argues (ibid.):

> A community of practice is different from a team in that the shared learning and interest of its members are what keep it together. It is defined by knowledge rather than by task, and exists because participation has value to its members. A community of practice’s life cycle is determined by the value it provides to its members, not by an institutional schedule. It does not appear the minute a project is started and does not disappear with the end of a task. It takes a while to come into being and may live long after a project is completed or an official team has disbanded.

Although the workshops were designed with a definite start and end date, they were meant to initiate an ongoing process of further development. Thus, this was only a beginning to the creation of SLS and it meant that other activities would go beyond the duration of the present study. With this in mind, the workshop themes focused on the co-construction of soft skills that would be applicable to all aspects of life, both academic and personal, and so were aimed at guiding interactions above and beyond the scheduled contact. I argue that the formation of SLS in a student residence such as Res Y is a process, and therefore will not happen overnight. Rather, opportunities for collaborative engagement were presented to activate this process. A PAR methodology, with planning cycles to improve a process (Van Wyk, 2006:196), was the best approach to trace the process trajectory, as well as effect change or development.

“Community maintenance” (Wenger, 1998:74) was a key consideration in the design of the workshops. Students had to be reminded throughout the duration of the interventions that like any relationship, the SLS had to be nurtured and refined. The collaborative learning theme ran throughout the duration of the workshops. Issues of trust and respect were central and with time the value of the SLS would evolve (Wenger et al., 2002:online).
3.8. MY ROLE AS KEY RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

My own epistemological, ontological and methodological positioning influenced how I undertook the research and ultimately interpreted the results of the research. I concur with Creswell (2013) that the researcher cannot be separated from the research process. What I bring to the research – my “personal history” – positions this study (ibid:51; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008:8). The flexible nature of qualitative research permits me as researcher to modify my research design to better fit the purpose of the study, and in turn, gives me control over the research process (Henning et al., 2004), including the outcomes of this study. Thus, I am the key research “instrument” (Richardson & St Pierre, 2008:474).

Furthermore, the research process is one that is social and collaborative in nature. In order to “position” myself (Creswell, 2013:20) in this study, I wish to make the following explicit. This thesis represents my interpretation and is thus subjective. A critical lens required that I recognise power relations, and in particular, my power as researcher (Creswell, 2013). Thus, while I was participant observer, my role as researcher still had implications for the way students engaged with me. As ‘expert’ I was still seen as the ‘other’ and it took a while for students to start trusting me and to feel comfortable with me.

Another key concern was that I be mindful of whose ideas or ‘dreams’ I was pursuing: theirs or mine (Freire, 1968/1972). My initial involvement was purely as a result of my interest in forming SLS at UJ and my view on the nature of the social construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1933). I was thus pursuing my own interest and conception of what students need in order to be successful in higher education. My concern is with the process of cultivating SLS to see how they shape and evolve the learning environment of students. By exposing my personal interest in this study and the events that led to this study (see Chapter 1), I hope to make my biases clear.

3.9. ETHICAL ISSUES

Qualitative researchers are faced with many ethical issues, especially during data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013:174). Additionally, ethical considerations are particularly crucial when working with humans, as is the case in this study. Fontana
and Frey (1994:373) suggest that “common sense and moral responsibility” should be employed in respect of “our subjects first, to the study next, and to ourselves last”. My moral obligation in this study is to the first year students in the residences first, UJ second and my PhD last. The well-being of this study’s participants is thus vital. As facilitator of the workshops, my moral obligation as educator becomes especially important and takes precedence over answering my research questions. There was no potential physical or psychological harm anticipated for students but possible value for student learning was foreseen. I strove as far as possible to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure maximum benefit for the students.

During the planning stage of the research, certain ethical considerations were pertinent. My obligation to explain the purpose of the study was taken seriously and was done in the introductory session of the first workshop. As Creswell (2013:174) cautions, the purpose of the study must be conveyed honestly and if the study is of a sensitive nature, at least general description is necessary. Although this study was not of a sensitive nature, sensitive information was discussed during the interviews and thus required that I report by using pseudonyms. Another consideration was that I did not pressurise anyone into signing consent forms. Although students gave verbal consent at the beginning and throughout the study, in line with a PAR methodology which states that all stakeholders are involved throughout the study, I rather left the signing of consent forms (Addendum E) till the last workshop, where students could make an informed decision as to whether to allow me to use the workshop data, and then whether to agree to be interviewed. In line with PAR methodology, where data is collected at different times and is influenced by different factors, I could not do it at the beginning and after some time without checking if participants were still willing to be interviewed. A PAR approach allows such flexibility where students had opportunities to reassess their ways of working (Wessels, 2011:101).

To ensure that I worked ethically, I sought approval from the Faculty Academic Ethics Committee, which subsequently granted approval (Ethical Clearance Number: 2012-054). The study complied with the ethical guidelines given by the committee. This includes gaining informed consent, protecting students’ privacy, and acknowledging the research limitations as regards the methods employed and the findings. During the
writing up of the study, or the reporting of data, I was mindful not to plagiarise and to avoid falsifying information, evidence or data (Creswell, 2013:59). Drafts of this thesis have been submitted to Turnitin, an online tool that checks the similarity to other reported work on the Internet, in periodicals and journals and to other students’ work. Creswell (2013:59) further advises researchers to share data with others via publication, being particularly careful not to duplicate work and to meet compliance criteria. I have published aspects of the study in both international and South African journals, and made sure not to duplicate the thesis verbatim. I also presented my work at two conferences as well as to my doctoral committee. Additionally, I undertook not to report selectively, in other words, both positive and negative results are conveyed.

Interviewing as a data collection method has its own ethical implications. Sometimes, it can be possible to identify individuals within an organisation despite the researcher’s effort to report anonymously. As in this study, it is easy to identify who the RM or the HK are and which residence is referred to, by looking at the description of the context. For this reason, authors such as Alvesson (2011:37) and Charmaz (2011:395) advise that researchers not guarantee participants absolute confidentiality, which I, unfortunately communicated verbally only and not in writing. Interviewing was included, as I wanted a first-hand account from students about their experiences, cultures and histories.

With regard to the issue of data storage, students were informed of audio-recordings which I have stored on my computer and on an external hard drive and aim to keep for a minimum of five years. The same goes for the transcripts, field notes, and all other related documents. Students are welcome to request information at any time and typed written transcripts are available to all participants for member checking and accuracy. Respect for participants as well as for privacy of data is honoured.

3.10. SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 3

This chapter dealt with my research design and methodological considerations. I explained how the lessons learned in the pre-study phase informed the design of my PAR case study. The aim of this study was to investigate how the implementation of SLS in a selected student residence shaped and evolved the learning environment of
first year students, thus necessitating a PAR way of working to denote change or transformation. To situate this study in an epistemological home, I gave an account of third-generation CHAT – as per Engeström’s (1997, 2000) account – as a theoretical framework and the intersection thereof with the methodological one. I forwarded the idea that the tensions inherent in the activity system often lead to the required transformation or change and a contextual/historical account of the activity is thus needed. My argument was that an interpretivist stance, coupled with a critical stance, allowed a good mix to make sense of my data and complemented the CHAT theoretical framework. I tried to explicate the reasoning behind my choice of methodology and included a section on my role as research instrument. In the chapter that follows, I offer a discussion of the analysis of data generated in this inquiry.
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. INTRODUCTION TO DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter serves to outline the data analysis processes that were involved in the generation of the findings reported on in Chapter 5. Primary as well as secondary data were used to investigate how the establishment and implementation of social learning spaces evolve and shape the learning environment of first years at a selected UJ residence. The analysis process involved two phases owing to the nature of the methodology of participatory action research. The first analysis phase commenced immediately before the investigation in Res Y (case study) using data from the pre-study with Res X which informed the design of the case study. In the first analysis phase, is the data from Res Y from the first cycle of my work with the residence. The second analysis phase commenced after the implementation of the workshops aimed at the initiation and creation of SLS in the residence. Data collection and data analysis were done in tandem – as recommended by research scholars such as Merriam, (1998:151, Henning et al, 2004:127) - and not only at the end of the study. This way of working was also in line with a PAR methodology. I worked both inductively and deductively (otherwise known as abductively) with the data. Creswell (2013:300) explains that an abductive logic allows a researcher to go beyond deductive reasoning – which does not accommodate human experiences – and inductive reasoning – which involves the accumulation of observations or generalisations. This approach allowed me to accommodate the complexity of the research process and use the findings from the first phase to optimally inform the next phase. This logic enabled an in-depth examination of the case study reported on in this thesis. See figure 4.1 for a graphic illustration of the analysis processes followed.

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8 Inductive analysis refers to an approach where one looks at the data and then the theory emerges from the data while deductive analysis means that one starts with a theory and move to the data (Patton, 2002: 109). The former is also known as a bottom up approach while the latter is a top down approach. During the 1st reading, started with the data and then derived codes, categories and themes from there. This exemplifies an inductive approach. The second reading of Cycle 2 included the mapping of the data to the CHAT components. This exemplifies a deductive approach.

9 In a South African context, the term dissertation is used for Masters and the term thesis for a PhD. The first
As illustrated in Figure 4.1, analysis started with a first reading of the verbatim interview transcripts from Res X. Thereafter I proceeded with a second reading of the same interview transcripts. This time I moved from researcher assigned codes – small bits of information (Creswell, 2013:184) or “shorthand ways of describing the data (Gray 2009:455) - to preliminary categories and then to a finalisation of categories before constructing the themes. The codes emerged from my interaction with the data, using many of the analysis procedures commonly associated with grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2011:164) and my knowledge of the setting and the literature on SLS, learning communities and communities of practice (CoPs).

Charmaz (2011:167) contends:

Using grounded theory guidelines keep us interacting with our data and nascent theories by involving us in comparative analysis and writing each step along our
research journey as grounded theorists, we interact with the data, compare data with data as we code them, and check our emerging theoretical categories by collecting more data as we construct successively more abstract analyses.

This process of examining the data, first for an overview or global understanding and then for a more in-depth categorisation in line with the process of conducting grounded theory analysis, ensured systematic depth-seeking of the data and a better understanding of the data.

Although this was not a grounded theory study, I used the procedures associated with content analysis as it is generally used in grounded theory modes. Working with these analysis techniques enabled me to work with the data and analyses in phases in assigning codes and constructing preliminary categories and later amalgamating these into themes. A comparison and combination of reading 1 and reading 2 of the data from Res X resulted in what I term the findings of this thesis. I used these findings to inform the design of the case study (Res Y) that this thesis primarily reports on. The analysis of the case study involved qualitative content analysis of the interview transcripts as well as using a CHAT lens to highlight tensions or challenges. Analysis of participant observation field notes was through the CHAT lens to enable contextualisation. The primary data collected via interviews was my main concern as I wanted student voices to be heard and not overshadowed by the collective. Additionally, document analysis was included to confirm findings from the analysis of the interviews and the observations. In the next section, I give an explanation of how data sources were managed and analysed.

4.2. PHASE 1: PRE-STUDY PHASE RES X
The pre-study phase resulted in rich data which informed the design of the case study. In particular, pre-study data directed the manner in which I approached the study and the optimal data sources within a PAR design in the case study. The volume and nature of the data in various phases necessitated careful and systematic management. This outlines how data from the pre-study phase as well as the case study phases were managed.
4.2.1.1. Prior to First Cycle of Action Research at Res X: Minutes of Meeting

The excerpt is taken from a UJ LCs Committee meeting (Figure 4.2). The minute taker was a committee member. By including this data and reflecting on this initial conceptualisation and implementation, I hope to provide a historic trail of how SLS evolved to what it is now at Res Y, which is the main focus of the study.
Learning Communities Committee Minutes – 11 March 2010

Guiding Principles
1. In the first year all students should be exposed to some form of learning community outside the formal curriculum.
2. Learning communities are established to promote and develop aspects of diversity in all its forms (social; ethnic; psychological and economic)
3. In order to establish learning communities we have to examine the extent to which our campuses are intentionally/unintentionally uninviting because the physical environment is crucial for the success of Learning Communities.

Implementation
The pilot phase of the project, which will take place during 2010, will be developed largely in the residences as one strand of Academic Excellence in Residence project.

1. We will identify 1 or 2 groups (of no more than 12 students) in each of the three residences, which are also part of the Academic Excellence in Residences Project. These are Res X, Res XX and Res XXX. In addition, we will also be working on the Soweto campus in the learning common, which is located in the library.
2. We will collaborate with the residence advisors to decide on the implementation process and they will be requested to help to facilitate this.
3. Training will be provided to residence advisors where necessary
4. Links with XXX training programme in the second term will be established and maintained. We hope to be given a slot in her workshops to enable us to provide input on learning communities and begin an ongoing conversation with both staff and students

Residence advisors will:
1. Volunteer to participate, based on interest and willingness to facilitate a learning process
2. Facilitate a weekly learning group to take place in a study time that is convenient to everyone
3. Undergo training if needed
4. Report back every 2 weeks in an hour-long reflection meeting with members of the Learning Communities Committee

Figure 4.2. Excerpt from Learning Communities Committee Meeting
4.2.1.2. First Cycle of Action Research at Res X: Minutes of Meeting

Another excerpt is taken from a meeting held with the RM and RAs at Res X (Figure 4.3). This meeting signalled the start of the first of two implementation cycles at Res X. Although it was agreed in a previous meeting that participation would be voluntary, the RM proceeded to group students according to courses or programmes enrolled for. It was her contention that first year students should not be given too much choice, as they often have a, in the RM’s words, “deficient work ethic”. The inclusion of the minutes indicate the very RM-directed nature of the first implementation and shows that students had very little say in the implementation of SLS.

**Minutes of Meeting – 25 August 2010**

**Student response:**
- Two separate house meetings were held on (16 & 17 August 2010) with students where they were informed about the idea of forming learning communities. Although not entirely voluntary, the sense was that students were very happy about forming LC’s and felt that it was sorely needed.
- All 1st years (100) will be involved in the learning communities. Seniors will join voluntarily.
- RM has already grouped students according to courses enrolled for.
- On 9 Sept 2011, another meeting will be held with students to discuss the way forward.

**Mentoring**

Nine House committee members and three residence advisors will serve as mentors.

Mentors will be available per floor during weekly group sessions.

Venues to be used: Canteen, Library/Balconies/Boardroom/x2 TV rooms

**Support needed from the LCs committee**

Talk to students about the importance of learning communities, possibly at their next meeting (on 9 September at 17:00)

Invite experts from the Industry

Have meetings - every 2nd week - with RM and the rest of her team to discuss progress/needs.

Figure 4.3. Excerpt of Minutes from Meeting with RM and RAs
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

After the first Res X implementation cycle over July to November 2011, I wrote a report for the LCs Committee by way of updating them on the progress of developing SLS at Res X, as they had agreed to be part of the pilot project. At a meeting with all Res X first year students, I remember feeling very despondent that only two students wanted to continue after the second semester. By November 2011, students indicated that they felt overwhelmed by all the residence activities and were resentful of imposed study sessions and the way they were being policed and monitored by RAs. They indicated that what they actually needed was more tutoring or assistance with academic work and they felt that the implementation of SLS was taking away valuable time that they would rather spend on completing assignments or studying for tests. The audio recording of this meeting has not been transcribed. I did, however, listen to the recording at least twice, as students assumptions, perceptions and practices (SQ 4) came strongly to the fore. Listening to the recordings helped me make sense of what went wrong and informed the report I compiled for the LCs Committee. The report was used to confirm the coding process (first and second reading of pre-study phase analysis) and helped in establishing preliminary codes for Res X. Below is an excerpt of the report (Figure 4.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress Report – 12 August 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Res X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the first implementation, I interviewed the Residence Manager and two Residence Advisors to see what was working/not and to re-plan our next implementation cycle (Second Semester 2011) I am planning to have focus group interviews with the students soon. Some of the preliminary findings:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA’s were not sure of their role and expressed a need for more training, Students were resentful of the compulsory sessions and of RA’s telling them what to do. The RA’s therefore requested that I be more visible during these sessions. Compulsory LC sessions and study time will not be implemented in the Second semester. At a House Com meeting I asked students about the continuation of the LC sessions and only two indicated a willingness to continue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.4. Excerpt of Report on Pre-Study Project at Res X

It was at this time that I started working with Res Y, the focus of this investigation and thesis, through the initial request of the RW. The RW as Res Y was concerned about
first year students’ adjustment to university and felt that the introduction of SLS as part of developing a LC was an opportune way to address this. Figure 4.5 provides an excerpt from my diary on this initial contact with the RW, which signals the initiation of Phase 2 of my study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Res Y – July 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The House Warden has asked me to work with her students and introduce social learning spaces in her Residence. I did some focus group sessions with about 10 students to get a sense of what the challenges were and of their satisfaction with their June results. All, except for one student said that they did poorly and really need help with their studies. What stood out was the need for time management skills or workshops, as they are not coping with all the academic/cultural/social activities. They are all eager to start social learning spaces and seem to understand the value thereof for their own academic development and success.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.5. Excerpt from Diary on Initial Contact with Res Y

4.2.1.3. Reflections as AR Practitioner on the Pre-Study Phase

Next, I present some of my reflections during the pre-study phase and include excerpts of my reflections as Action Researcher (AR) practitioner (Figure 4.6). These reflections assisted me in clarifying the process to be followed and illustrate how the pre-study phase informed the design and implementation (SQ 1) of the research reported in this thesis. In addition, I include my reflections on some of the informal conversations that I had with the HK of Res X. The reason for the inclusion is that, in my reading and re-reading of the self-reflective notes on these, I could flag possible tensions (SQ 2) inherent in the residence system and keep these at the forefront of my design of the case of Res Y. Another reason for the inclusion is that I checked these reflections during the coding process and used them to inform the Res Y phase one analysis process.
10 April 2011
RA2 says that Res X students being diploma students feel quite despondent about job prospects. Students know that the degree students will get preference when it comes to job applications. She feels that this is part of the reason why students are very demotivated. She says that these students are here (studying) because they know they are not good enough to enrol for degree programs.

11 May 2011
RA2 is so committed / in touch with student’s concerns. She emphasised the FUN aspect of learning – she says it’s lacking. She would like to use FB, quizzes, competitions, etc. RA2 says that seniors do not like all the fuss about 1st years and feel neglected so she is organising a very elaborate senior seminar and seniors are very excited about this venture. She seems a bit preoccupied with the seminar and more generally with the seniors. She is generally happy with times used and thinks it should be done x2 a week. She also feels (like Res Manager) that outside people should come in– give it more credibility. She recognises the need for social/economic aspects and not just academic. I need 2 follow up with RM re FB.

7 March 2012
My meeting with the Learning Communities Committee went well. I really value their input. They suggest that I go with the UJ\textsuperscript{10} context and not force the organic approach. They believe that the uniqueness of UJ dictates that I rather use a structured, intentional approach where I guide the implementation and not expect the student LCs to develop without intervention.

10 April 2013
I had a really nice chat with Fiffy regarding her interaction with 1st year students. She is really despondent that students are never satisfied with whatever she tries to do for them. She feels that she is not always equipped to deal with student issues, especially the emotional and financial issues that students face. I told her that she is not meant to solve everyone’s problems but that she should refer students to support services like PsyCAD and ADC. However, she points out that she does do that but cannot follow up with individuals to make sure that they actually seek the necessary help.

12 October 2012
The concerns or misgivings raised at the meeting with first year students included the following: preference to study alone, RA role, difference between a learning community and a study group, nothing to talk about with others not sharing same course or qualification, course does not require team work or group work, time issue due to work overload (tests, assignments, projects, etcetera), everyone works at a different pace and progress might be slowed down. At the end of the meeting though, the majority were quite positive and indicated

\textsuperscript{10} In the UJ context, many students are first-generation students, coming from very diverse cultural, social and economic background. Many UJ students come from schools where they were spoon-fed and never learned to use their initiative. Thus, the assumption was that students need guidance and intentional interventions.
a willingness to incorporate the LC sessions into the existing study time slots, once every alternate week. I am super excited!

Figure 4.7. Excerpts from Researcher Diary on Work with Res X

From the excerpts in Figure 4.7, some enablers and constraints can be identified (SQ 2), their existing practices and assumptions (SQ 4) and the social/historical context are all evident in the diary notes.

4.2.2. ANALYSIS OF DATA GENERATED IN THE INTERVIEWS WITH RES X

In this pre-study phase, analysis included working inductively with raw data or in the form of interview transcripts. The reason for choosing the interview transcripts for in-depth analysis is because I wanted to hear from those involved what worked and what did not. I was hoping to use this data to optimally inform the Res Y implementation and not repeat mistakes. The raw data was coded, categorised and organised thematically as it emerged from the data sets (see Addendum G). Phase 1 analysis findings are presented as emergent themes which I used to guide Phase 2 (the design of the case study). I wanted to get to the tensions – as facilitated by a CHAT lens (Engeström, 2001; Roth & Lee, 2007:203) – regarding what enables or constrains social learning spaces at selected residences. Particularly, I was interested in uncovering possible tensions arising from the rules and participation levels which in turn could influence the desired transformation or change (Barab et al., 2002:80; Kuuti, 1996). For detail on a first reading of Res X data where the aim was to gain a global understanding, refer to Addendum I. Addendum J presents a sample of a second reading which was to gain a deeper understanding. I conclude this section by briefly presenting the final themes that informed the design of the case study at Res Y.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1 Categories and Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


4.2.3. RES X FINDINGS INDICATING CONSTRAINTS

Reading 1 and Reading 2 combined resulted in the following three themes: Physical space and practice both need to be transformed; Students’ historical, cultural, socio-political backgrounds shape their interactions; and Residence policies and rules constrain academic activities and the creation of SLS (see Table 4.1). I discuss each of the themes separately in the next chapter. Table 4.2 is a summary of some of the changes that were implemented from the way in which I worked in Res X to the way I worked in Res Y.

### Table 4.2. Changes from Res X to Res Y

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Res X</th>
<th>Res Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome of the activity of establishing LC</td>
<td>Academic success and persistence</td>
<td>Academic success, persistence and transformation of the learning environment in the residences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language problem</td>
<td>No help offered</td>
<td>Students were directed to support services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention (Workshops)</td>
<td>No workshops and students could choose own topics to discuss</td>
<td>5 workshops scheduled with specific discussion topics (informed by data analysis from Phase 1 findings) with Res X and Phase 2 Cycle 1 findings from Res Y (see below for topics).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First, Res Y Cycle 2 significantly changed with regard to the desired outcome of the activity. While academic success and persistence were, and still are core, it was very difficult to establish a causal relationship between student success and the establishment of SLS. It was never my intention to establish such a link as my epistemological stance asserts that knowledge is located in time and context and not verified through observation (Creswell, 2013; Neuman, 2000; Pather & Remenyi, 2005). Instead then, the desired outcome was to assist in the transformation of the learning environment of first year students in the selected residences. My critical stance meant that I focused more on critiquing how participants construct and interpret reality (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000) and how their assumptions and practices (SQ 4)
as well as the residence social/historical/cultural factors (SQ 3) shaped the learning environment.

Second, regarding the language problem identified during the interviews, I contacted the Academic Development Centre as they focus on student development and support. Unfortunately, the Centre could not offer workshops during study time or on weekends due to a shortage of staff. The facilitator did however give me a copy of her scheduled workshops, which I forwarded to the RAs and RM. It was thus left up to students to make use of the service. I am not sure if any of the students actually attended any of the workshops. The same goes for the PsyCAD (Centre for Psychological Services and Career Development) services concerning social and emotional support. This is a general issue at the university as many staff report informing students of the availability of services, but many do not have the structures or capacity to ensure follow up. Additionally, from my experience with students, I do not contend that the workshop option is the best methodology to employ regarding language issues. Integrated approaches, where language and academic writing and discourses are integrated in the core curriculum, seem to be far more effective (Alexander, 2003; Jansen, 2013; McKenna, 2004). Research in the UJ context also seems to support this view.

Third, in Phase 2 second cycle, I acted as workshop facilitator, during which students had opportunities for engagement in group discussions and interactions. The introduction of the workshops was also significant in the sense that during the first cycle, students did not know what to do when given the opportunity to create a SLS. Wenger (personal communication) advises that LCs be given some guidance and that not all LCs grow organically. Thus conceptualisation and implementation (SQ1) were addressed.

Fourth, regarding the limited time for academic activities, students battling to keep up with residence activities, unhappiness with the forced nature of study time, RAs acting as disciplinarians and other power issues, the status quo remained. In my capacity as academic development practitioner, I did not have the latitude to change residence policies and procedures, but was rather hoping to plant the seed for change. What I
managed to do was to change the frequency and timing of LC sessions. The second cycle was characterised by fortnightly interactions and instead of introducing the establishment of LC in the second semester as in Res X, it started in the first semester in Res Y. The significance of the implementation at the beginning of the year is that students have an opportunity to grow together from the beginning, unlike the second semester when they have already established friendships. While this shift from first to second semester seem very superficial and simplistic, I have seen how it made a world of difference to students that their voices were being heard and being taken into account. Enablers and constraints were thus identified which informed future implementation.

Fifth, the roles of students and the RAs were not clear. The RAs needed some guidance and clarity as to what their roles were in the establishment of the SLS; I offered a once-off workshop. Their usual practice had always been a disciplinary one and through the workshop I wanted to join them in transforming that practice. Together with the RAs, we set out to change not only the institutional practice, but also our own, as well as help shape students’ educational practices. Additionally, since students did not really know how to engage collaboratively, I offered workshops to deal with issues such as group conflict, finding your voice, etc. (see Table 3.4 for workshop topics). Through the introduction of these topics, I was hoping to motivate students to take an active role in shaping or transforming their own learning environment and not only to rely on their own agency, but also to see others as resources. In Stetsenko’s (2008:483) words, I wanted students’ development to be “a collaborative achievement or ‘work-in-progress’ so that together they transform their world and themselves in the process”.

Sixth, in the Res Y implementation, I included the Student Profile Questionnaire (SPQ), which I adapted to suit a residence context. I felt this was necessary, as I wanted to find out how students positioned themselves in UJ and the residence in particular (see SQ 4). The data gathered from this questionnaire gave me a better sense of student interests, needs, learning styles and so forth. I argue that these factors (both personal and institutional) inevitably shape how students respond to initiatives or the implementation of SLS in this instance. In hindsight, this SPQ should have been done
before the start of the workshops and not the end, as it could have informed the design of the workshop implementation. However, the value of the SPQ at the end of the workshops is that students get the sense that their feedback is valued and they have an opportunity to critically reflect on their experiences in a safe space which has been created over an extended period.

Last but not least, I realised that something was amiss regarding the implementation of SLS in the residence. In my work with Res X and in interviews conducted with the RM, RAs and the HK, I got the impression that all was well. However, when I spoke to the first year students, they expressed their reluctance to continue with the LC sessions. Some reasons cited were, vagueness of LCs (‘How is it different to a study group?’), role of RAs, no-one else in the study field or discipline to work with, workload and time constraints, preference to work alone, compulsory residence activities, and problematic relationships with RAs. These were some of the constraints to SLS formation.

For the case study then, I decided to speak to the students first instead of speaking to the residence management. A bottom-up approach in Res Y was thus deemed a more effective way of working. In relation to this thesis, we (students, management and I as researcher) had a choice to “break away” through facing the contradictions in the system and transforming our practice or “remain[ing] stuck” (Engeström, 2006:30).

While I acknowledge that policies and rules constrain the academic environment in the residences, I had no power to change policies and my ability to influence residence practices was quite limited. My critical lens necessitated that I break down ignorance and false perceptions and aim to shift to a “more informed consciousness” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:206). In other words, I could but only raise students’ consciousness regarding policies (such as for instance the policy on study time\(^\text{11}\)), power differentials (RAs taking advantage of their seniority and disciplinary role) and developing student voice (voicing opinions and adopting a questioning stance). Hence, the second

---
\(^{11}\) The policy states that first year students should study for a compulsory two hours from Monday to Thursday and the implementation of study time from 18:00 – 23:00 was therefore not in line with policy.
implementation phase at Res Y was characterised by some of the same problems as the first cycle in Res X, despite my adoption of a more inclusive bottom-up process of working in Res Y.

My conclusion after this first phase of analysis of the first cycle was that an enabling environment, where equitable opportunities exist for engagement in learning activities and where students are consulted, is essential if SLS are to be formed successfully. Thus, the repositioning of LC within the residence context required a new conceptualisation (SQ 1), one which I call ‘negotiated spaces’.

4.3. PHASE 2: CASE STUDY OF RES Y
The design of the case study with Res Y was informed by the work from Res X and represented a second phase of the PAR mode of working (see Figure 4.1). The analysis of this phase required that I go beyond a general understanding of the main issues. This phase (Phase 2) comprised three cycles and coincided with the plan – act – evaluate PAR cycles, namely Cycle 1 (initial interviews with nine students), Cycle 2 (workshop implementation) and Cycle 3 (biographical data and interviews with six students and one RA during the evaluation PAR cycle). In this section, I discuss the data analysed in each cycle, starting with the interviews conducted with the 2012 cohort of first year Res Y students. The data includes interview transcripts, participant observation notes and document analysis.

4.3.1. RES Y CYCLE 1: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS USING CONTENT ANALYSIS
The interviews conducted with 4 dyads and 1 individual student from Res Y served as my entry into Res Y and occurred parallel to the Res X implementation. The guiding questions were informed by the findings from the data collected with Res X (as proposed by Merriam, 2009) and related to satisfaction with current study methods, challenges faced and the type of support needed. By following a bottom-up approach, I sought to start with the students’ views and allow their expressed needs and views to shape the content of the workshops in the quest to establish SLS at Res Y.
To prepare data for analysis, I coded each interview transcript as follows: Res Y1_S1 where Res Y1 denoted Interview 1 from Res Y, and S1 and S2 denoted Student 1 and Student 2 respectively. Where individual interviews were conducted, I coded each of the two Res Y4_S and Res Y5_S where Res Y4 denoted Interview 4 and S denoted the sole Student participating in the interview. Table 4.3 lists all the participants in this cycle of interviews.

**Table 4.3. Res Y (Cycle 1) Naming Data to Source: Residence and Participant Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Res Y1_S1</td>
<td>Res Y1: Interview 1 from Residence Y S1: Student 1 S2: Student 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Y1_S2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Y2_S1</td>
<td>Res Y2: Interview 2 from Residence Y S1: Student 1 S2: Student 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Y2_S2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Y3_S1</td>
<td>Res Y3: Interview 3 from Residence Y S1: Student 1 S2: Student 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Y3_S2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Y4_S</td>
<td>Res Y4: Interview 4 from Res Y S: Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Y5_S</td>
<td>Res Y5: Interview 5 from Res Y S: Student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data was captured in a table with the following headings: Study Methods and Exam results, Challenges, and Support Needs. Table 4.4 provides sample verbatim quotes from a selection of participants under these headings.
Table 4.4. Sample of Res Y Cycle 1 Data: Verbatim Quotes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Study methods and Exam results</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Support Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Res Y1_S1</td>
<td>And I’m not really happy with it… So I leave things till the last minute then it just becomes one big bundle and I become disorientated or whatever …my exam results were so bad, like really bad. I don’t know, ‘cause last year I took a gap year. So I was on hold – I don’t know if that affected me- I appreciate study time, but it’s from six till, what, eleven and we have a thirty minute break in between. So, for me example, I need my rest … so it doesn’t really help me that much. Because when you get there you just staring at the book, or probably you are writing notes, but you have no idea what you’re writing about or even have an understanding of what’s going on I’d get there and sometimes you’re so tired you’re just writing notes; just for writing notes, you’re not understanding, you’re not trying to study, you’re just doing it ‘cause it’s study time and you wanna get it over and done with and sleep. …there’s only one senior who’s doing what I’m doing at res. so if I’m struggling with one specific module, and she’s in third year.</td>
<td>‘cause you need time to reflect on your own. But at least in a week it must be twice a week where you’re allowed to study in a group. …like balance in everything of every module or whatever, because I tend to focus on one thing instead of the other. We need some sort of person to motivate us, you know. Because some of us are a bit lazy,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Y1_S2</td>
<td>So I stay in 41 and probably someone that’s doing the same as me stays at 45. It’s not allowed that, I’ve never seen someone walking from 41 to 45-</td>
<td>Yes, it would, obviously, an everyday thing is not going to work, because you get distracted and you need to go over it alone. But once a week would be –would</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Study methods and Exam results</td>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Support Needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have this mentality, you know, that I have to pass my majors, because my major means an extra year for me and those other modules I can pick them up in second year, third year. Study time – I’m just a rebel at heart, and then just doing something at 6 then at 7 and then 8, I just get so bored and then I’m just there. Ja, I think it’s long, I think it’s really long because from 6 till 11, ‘cause they took it down. Like, it was 7, then they took it to 6 o’ clock, because our marks – most of our marks were just not proper. ‘Cause you know you’d sit there, wait for it finish, the study time and then you’re on to whatever you want to do or study</td>
<td>actually work. You just coming to live here, you don’t know what’s going on. I think it would be like, sort of attacking old pass papers, or whatever, stuff like that. Or concentrating on study methods at university level, cause we’re – some of us are from high school, or whatever, like that and we’re still stuck on that high school thing, ‘cause here it’s not really working.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Not really. ‘Cause now last semester I had to like do –like study over night before the exam and that was like straining ‘cause then I’d go to the exam and I’d be sleepy and ja-
It’s just that there’s a whole lot of work, but ja, I think I just need something that will be quicker, a bit quicker so I can get through my work,
But I think now what I’m really gonna improve is the whole studying overnight just before an exam, like that’s not gonna work. So I’ve just decided no more that, it’s not gonna work.

I think just –you can just do whatever, but as long as you’re just gonna remember why you’re here for, like, ‘cause after all we’re here for education-
I think a group session would be nice. ‘Cause I think sometimes there are things that you don’t understand, that the other person understands. And when she explains it to you, you understand it better, like when the lecturer explains it to you. I think with just working with others is gonna be quite helpful, it’s going to be quite helpful

It’s more informal, so you’re just cool with each other, you’re just relaxed, so ja compared to being in a lecture, so I think it will work.
So ja, I think it’s just a balanced life a way forward. ‘Cause ja, being in your room all the time, because you find that you even sleep more than you study, so don’t help.
But I think sometimes the problem is studying in silence. That one, it kill – for me it kills concentration, because now it’s just silent and it’s just me and my book. Obviously my mind is gonna wander around.

You can’t just get help when you’re in your room, you stressed, you’re crying, you’re telling your mommy, your mommy’s at home. You just need to go out, talk with other people, socialising, telling them your problems so that you can get help.

It’s not easy to forget what your friend told you, ’cause we even use the jokes and all the stuff. Ja, I think time management is really, really important… Because it’s just about time – because I think sometimes as a first year we have lots of time. Because sometimes we have one lecturer and then during the day we’ll be sleepy or I don’t know, just doing something random that is just so unnecessary. So I think time-management will be helpful and writing skills, And for me, for time management. Like I used to, like, being confused and all this stuff. Ja I think you need to go

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Study methods and Exam results</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Support Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|                   |                                |            | there; workshops, writing skills, those -- for avoiding plagiarism because sometimes you will write something that you heard but you don’t know-

Okay, there’s not a problem with being a nerd, … you need to live like a balanced life.

The findings from the first Res Y planning cycle indicated a willingness, on the part of students, to work together. To my mind, this aligned strongly with the notion of
establishing and implementing SLS in the residence. This finding confirmed that students did not see the learning activity as a solitary activity, but rather as a social activity (Lave & Wenger, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger et al., 2002). This is exemplified in the following quotations from participants:

I think they should allow us to like, during study time, meet up with people we know, in the same course as you, discuss some of your majors or subjects that you are finding difficulties in. Yeah, that would really help for me. [Res Y5_S2]

Cause the thing is sometimes it’s better to hear it from the student view when she explains it how she understands it, then it becomes better, ja. In accounting that helped me a lot because I was so gonna fail that module, so gonna fail. [Res Y2_S1]

One finding that was perhaps not so unexpected pertains to the feeling of being totally overwhelmed not only by the workload, but also by the expectation of residence involvement:

Sometimes it’s too much ‘cause we train until 1:00 in the morning, we’ll come back here thinking that we have a 7:30 class the next day …The last time you ate was around 18:00, you are still hungry, you must still sleep and the next day you have to go to lectures…In class you can’t really focus ‘cause your mind is really, really tired. [Res Y5_S2]

‘Cause I can’t tell my younger sister res. is nice, ‘cause I experience lot, like studying and rules, you know. So they must reduce some of the rules and activities. [Res Y5_S1]

Students found that the amount of residence activities hindered their academic work and felt aggrieved that almost all residence activities were compulsory (constraints SQ 2). See exemplar:

Yes, like that – like – also the thing kills us first-year’s go res.’s –at res.’s, the thingy activities, res. activities for first-year’s like it gets – everything, almost everything is compulsory [Res Y3_S]

To make matters worse, most students indicated that the way they were treated by RAs and seniors was undermining to their voice and independence and not helpful at all to make their transition to university life easier:
When you go to the seniors and address the … ‘guys you are making a noise’ it’s like you are being disrespectful or anything like that. So you can’t really go and say that ‘guys you are making noise, can you please keep it down’ they say ‘oh, those nasty first-years’ and everything. [Res Y5_S2]

Finally, despite the challenges students experienced relating to residence life and university life in general, students’ positive attitude towards the formation of SLS was very encouraging (SQ 4). What they had managed to do is to recognise their “relational agency” (Edwards, 2005:172), which refers to the notion that others are resources who could help them in their own learning. Edwards (2005:172) explains:

In CHAT terms relational agency is a capacity to work with others to expand the object that one is working on and trying to transform by recognising and accessing the resources that others bring to bear as they interpret and respond to the object. It is a capacity which involves recognising that another person may be a resource and that work needs to be done to elicit, recognise and negotiate the use of that resource in order to align oneself in joint action on the object.

Edwards (2005) further argues that this relational agency is something that can be developed and this is precisely what I tried to address in the presentation of workshops at Res Y. Notwithstanding this, students’ acknowledgment of insufficient study skills and/or methods, lack of time management skills, and power issues indicated a need for a shift in terms of more structural issues as well as a shift in student identity.

4.3.2. RES Y CYCLE 2: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION
I used an observation schedule during workshop sessions with students. Field notes were started while students engaged in activities and then completed after each workshop. In particular, I observed attendance, participation and communication, punctuality and engagement. The reason why I specifically looked at attendance and punctuality was that I felt that these were good indicators of students’ enthusiasm and commitment to the workshop initiative. How they (students) communicated and engaged gave further insight into how the practice and conceptualisation of SLS need to transform (SQ 1 and 4). Figure 4.8 comprises excerpts of my field notes taken during workshop presentation at Res Y.
Res Y

Workshop 1- 13 March 2013

Attendance: 46 out of 54

They lined up in lines/rows of 4-5 and each person called out her name (by way of roll call) – reminded me of the army. They also accounted for absent peers.

They listened very attentively and participated with interest, enthusiasm and excitement. They were quite excited about choosing their own groups. The activity was for them to come up with a bill of rights (ground rules) for their group interaction. As they did not have pens and paper to write down their responses, most of them used their phones to record each response. They very proudly called out each one’s res name. They liked the idea of recording the feedback session. In each group, there seems to be someone who is willing to take the lead and students seem to know who the strong one is.

At the end of the workshop, I laid down the gauntlet for them to ask a question if ever they do not understand what is being said in class. The majority indicated that they don’t do it for various reasons.

Workshop 2- 10 April

Attendance: 42

Again, everyone greeted and called out names of their peers that were not present.

I started off asking everyone who had ventured asking questions in class, as I had challenged them to do in the previous workshop and only three indicated that they had taken up the gauntlet.

The topic discussed was Group conflict, diversity and equity. Students spoke about their personal experiences and had group discussion the last half an hour. They seemed to enjoy the feedback sessions and liked the idea of audio recordings and photographs.
### Workshop 3- 24 April:
**Attendance:** 45

The topic was cooperative learning and informal learning. They seemed to have loosened up and the discussions were quite noisy. After the workshop the HK walked out with me and assured me that the students will be reprimanded for being so loud. I told her that it was ok and that I wanted them to feel comfortable with me and each other. I wanted an informal setting that was not sombre and passive.

### Workshop 4- 8 May
**Attendance:** 37

Although the formal greeting was not done, everyone curtsied as they entered the venue. I asked two of the students about this ritual and they said it is always done when they enter this particular venue, and that it is just a sign of respect. They were told that this is how it should be done and they simply do it without questioning reasons/rationale.

The topic of “Finding your voice” generated active participation although it was clear that most students were not very vocal about their needs and about what matters to them. The impression I got was that most of them are either passive/takers/not assertive communicators. Some asked questions relating to how it applies to their studies/situations and did not see the link/it was not obvious to them. For example, one student asked if it was ok for her to speak out against Res rules. My response was that yes, it would be ok to do that but to remember that speaking out should be for the collective good of the community. I cautioned them against nitpicking/complaining, but rather to try and communicate effectively, where they assert their voices, without resorting to aggression. I further encouraged them to speak out whenever they were discriminated against. We then talked about being discriminated against as females and one student related a story that happened recently where they were told by the Sports Bureau that they could not play soccer as they were “ladies”.

We ran out of time and students agreed to hand in the handwritten activity when we meet on the 22nd. I asked them to think about a theme for our next /last workshop – something of their choice – that interests/concerns them. The idea was that I want them to take charge/I do not want to be too prescriptive.

### Workshop 5- 22 May
**Attendance:** 29

Students completed questionnaires and some handed in their written assignment. The informal discussion was brief and related to comments about residence life in general and SLS. In hindsight the completion of the questionnaire should have been done at another time as it took up most of the available time.

Figure 4.8. Field Notes of Res Y Observation
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

I then used the seven CHAT components as a lens to interpret my field note data (Figure 4.9).

![Figure 4.9. Field Notes Analysed using CHAT Components](image)

In addition to my researcher and practitioner reflections on the workshop implementation, I also noted my concerns during the initial setting up of the workshops. Figure 4.10 includes two excerpts.

**4 February 2013**

I have been trying for two weeks now to get the RA of Res Y to commit to a date for the HK workshop and SLS implementation. I’m feeling a bit panicky as I know that we cannot start too late in the year (lessons learnt from implementation with Res X). Just found out that it is RAG on 4 February and that extra Computer Skills workshops are scheduled for 4 & 11 February 2013. No wonder RA’s are not getting back to me.

**13 February 2013**

I’m getting very worried, as we still have not set a date for implementation. What to do?

Figure 4.10. Field Notes of Concerns during Implementation
4.3.3. RES Y CYCLE 2: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS
Minutes of meetings, presentation slides and a progress report are included as they give some perspective on how the establishment of SLS evolved and thus give a historical account of how this research inquiry was conceived and conducted (see Figure 4.4 in Section 4.2.1.2). The documents helped me to address all my SQ, especially SQ 1 regarding the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS. Residence policy documents were also included to support the interview data and not as a primary source of data (see Addendum D).

4.3.4. RES Y CYCLE 3: INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED AFTER THE WORKSHOP IMPLEMENTATION
I used the same data management system already described in Section 4.2.1. Table 4.5 provides a list of the participants that were interviewed after the intervention/workshops.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>RA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Res Y_Iman</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Y_Nadia</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Y_Cheryl</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Y_Sophia</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Y_Taz</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res Y_Tamsin</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res X_Fiffy</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I used pseudonyms for the individual students and the RA interviewed in 2013 so as to protect confidentiality and the pseudonyms were used in such a way that it was easy for me to identify the person and not get confused. I found that coding students
as S1, S2, etc. – as was done with Res X – made it difficult for me as researcher to identify students and was too impersonal.

### 4.3.5. PRESENTATION OF THE BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

During the implementation of workshops in Res Y, I asked students to complete a questionnaire (see Addendum A). The purpose of this questionnaire was to gather biographical information, but more importantly, to hear student voices regarding their challenges with respect to being young people in the process of transitioning into university students. This data assisted me to address SQ 3 regarding social/cultural/historical factors. It is my contention that we, as academic and support staff at university, have far too long ignored who our students are and what they bring to the table. Thus, the questionnaire aimed to pay attention to students’ social, economic, financial and cultural positions (SQ 3). This positioning of students was not done in the first Res X implementation cycle (pre-study), which I felt was a serious omission, and can be regarded as a shortcoming of the initial work with the student residences. It is my contention that the pre-study implementation was fraught with problems precisely because students were not treated as individuals with rich life histories and experiences that shaped their interactions with others.

While the inclusion of the biographical data during the second implementation phase signalled a more open approach, only 29 of the 42 student participants from Res Y completed the questionnaire. In my original envisaged project with UJ, I was encouraged to work with one or two groups of twelve. I thus felt that, although there were less than 40 students, I was still in line with the initial agreement. Sixteen of these 29 students completed the open-ended question section of the questionnaire and only six students availed themselves for interviews. In line with the principle of voluntary participation in the ethics process and in keeping with the participatory nature of the research process I did not use any coercion in getting additional students to complete the questionnaire or in consenting to interviews. In the next section I start off by presenting the data from the questionnaire by portraying the information from the closed questions first by way of graphs, before moving on to a summary of the open-ended question responses.
4.3.5.1. Closed Questions: Getting to Know the Students

Students completed an adapted version of the student profile questionnaire (see Section 3.6.4). I used the frequency function in Microsoft Excel to analyse the data and produce graphical illustrations of the data. To give an indication of the student demographics I analysed the questionnaire at the end of the study (a possible flaw, as the demographics could have assisted in designing more appropriate learning activities for Res Y). I made use of bins (or intervals) in Excel to determine the frequency of occurrences, that is, to determine the number of participants who responded to each of the response categories for each question.

Table 4.6 summarises the frequencies (i.e. number of respondents per response category) for the student demographics.

### Table 4.6. Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Language</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Sepedi</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Setswana</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Xhosa</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Sotho</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Zulu</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Xitsonga</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Afrikaans</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. English</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Siswati</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Studying</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Because I really want to</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Because I don’t know what else to do next</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Because my parents or family want me to</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Because I don’t want to start working yet</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

12 The student profile questionnaire included questions on Campus attendance (as we have 4 campuses), Age, Home Language, registered Faculty, Finance, Reason for Studying, Learning Style, Homework or Study Hours, University Attendance of family, Role of Family, Residence Life, Recommendations and lastly willingness to be interviewed.
Table 4.6 indicates that, regarding home language, most students speak Zulu, followed by Setswana, Xhosa, Sepedi and Sotho. Notably only one student speaks English as a home language. Since English is the medium of instruction, this statistic is worrying to say the least. Thankfully, as reported by students, the majority of parents
seem supportive and helpful with regard to their children’s studies. Responses to 
funding of studies indicate that about half of parents (15 out of 29) are paying for their 
children’s studies, while a fifth obtained study loans (6) or have bursaries (5), and just 
one has to work to fund her studies. Two students have a combination of funding in 
the form of loans or bursaries and self-funding.

Responses to questions on homework, university attendance and reasons for studying 
are particularly worrisome. Two thirds of the students (19) studied less than 15-20 
hours a week in their matric year. This statistic points to a possible poor work ethic 
and under-preparedness for higher education. A third of the students (10) are the first 
in their families to attend university. The literature suggests that first generation 
students are particularly at risk of university drop out (Tinto, 1993; Van Zyl, 2010; Van 
Zyl, Gravett & De Bruin, 2012). Some responses pertaining to reasons for studying 
are equally worrying. Half of the students (14) enrolled for studies to improve their 
future job prospects, while only a third of the students (9) are studying because they 
really want to and less than a fifth (4) are studying to learn about things that really 
interest them. This is particularly concerning, as a degree or diploma does not 
necessarily guarantee a job. Two students enrolled simply because they did not know 
what else to do.

Table 4.7 tabulates the data on learning styles. Students were to rate their response 
to each of the eight preferences as follows: A rating of 5 = very much like you; while a 
rating of 1 = not at all like you.

Table 4.7. Rating of Learning Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>1 not at all like you</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 very much like you</th>
<th>Combined 4+5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m alone</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I participate actively</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I talk to others about the work</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I memorise facts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do practical activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see illustrations and presentations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is peace and quiet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>1 not at all like you</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 very much like you</th>
<th>Combined 4+5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is noisy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When I am listening to music.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I can also study best after I have taken a nap after classes since my mind is refreshed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7 indicates that students displayed a range of learning styles. It is significant that three quarters or more of students indicated that they learn by memorising facts (22 out of 29, based on the combination of responses 4 and 5), and when they are alone (24). Ironically, while a preference for working alone was given, a huge proportion of students (26) indicated that they learn when they talk to others about the work. Most students preferred peace and quiet when they study (25) and very few like noise while studying (2). One student indicated (in the open option) that she needed music in the background while studying, while another said that she takes a nap before studying. The implication for this study is that not all students would find the creation of SLS valuable for their learning and might disengage when compelled to work with others. It is encouraging, though, that most students were open to the idea of learning with others.

Figure 4.11. Home Language
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Figure 4.11 significantly illustrates that only one student had English as a home language. As English is the medium of instruction, this finding is quite worrying as research in the South African context has shown that mother tongue instruction is crucial for academic success (Alexander, 2003; Leibowitz, 2013) for academic success.

![Age Pie Chart]

Figure 4.12. Age

Figure 4.12 indicates that the vast majority of students (25 out of 29) were probably fresh from high school, while the four 20 and 21 year olds had probably left school a while back or had been working before starting their first year at university. For black students, possible reasons for delaying their tertiary education may include their having to work first in order to finance their studies. Often, black students also fail a number of years if they are in low-performing schools. These factors therefore affect the age at which they start university. It could also mean that they are repeating their first year.
Figure 4.13 shows that none of the students indicated that they are studying because their families want them to. It is encouraging to see that students are not studying to get away from home or because their families are forcing them to study, or because they do not want to start working yet. For first year students it is normal that only a third (9 out of 29) are studying because they really want to, as many first year students enter university without absolute clarity on a career or field of study. In the South African context, it is normal that nearly half (14) are studying to improve their job opportunities. Herein lies the tension: while first year students do not exactly know what they would like to do, they are forced to make choices regarding future job opportunities. Perhaps this accounts for the lack of commitment as identified by the RM and RAs.
Figure 4.14. University Attendance

Figure 4.14 illustrates that approximately one third of students (10 out of 29) are the first in their families to attend university. A third (10) had many family members attending university and a further four had both parents attending university. So although most students have had some exposure to a family member attending university, the fact that a third of them are first in their families to attend university is important, as the literature shows that first-generation students battle to cope with university life (Tinto, 2012; Van Zyl, 2011).

Figure 4.15. Study Hours per Week
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Figure 4.15 shows that 10 out of 29 students studied 15 hours a week or less in their matric year, four of whom studied less than 5 hours a week. Under a third of students (8) studied the requisite 15 or more hours a week. These statistics are significant in that it indicates the attitude of students towards their studies (Van Zyl 2010; Van Zyl et al., 2012).

**Figure 4.16. Role of Family**

It is very encouraging to see in Figure 4.16 that three quarters of students (22 out of 29) report that their families are very supportive when it comes to their children’s studies. A good support structure could undoubtedly help students in this very difficult transition from school to tertiary education. Close to a fifth of students (5) revealed that their parents put pressure on them to perform, which is not necessarily a negative thing and could serve to motivate students to do well.

The closed questions yielded data that helped me understand who the students were and what some of their challenges might be. The open-ended question section of the questionnaire also yielded rich data in terms of their thoughts on SLS specifically. I was particularly interested in not only the constraints, but rather the positive or beneficial aspects of residence life in general.

**4.3.5.2. Open Question: Recommendations for Optimal Learning**

*Community Formation*
As indicated in the questionnaire (Addendum A), students were asked to respond to Section C, Question 11 about recommendations regarding the benefit and the formation and optimal functioning of SLS in the residences. A few examples of the analysis process are given in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8. A Verbatim Account of Students’ Recommendations Regarding Residence Life and Associated Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbatim Recommendations</th>
<th>Provisional Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less Res Activities [Code]</td>
<td>Res activities are problematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Res Activities [code] - If we didn’t have study time because some of us are not effective during the allocated time. [Code]</td>
<td>Res activities are problematic Study time is problematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More work should be done. We should have more time. [Code]</td>
<td>Timing for interventions is complicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include more academic in the group. [Code] Get speakers from the workforce [code] into which we would like to work.</td>
<td>Academics come first Need for outside assistance expressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forming study groups that is consistent throughout the year. [code] Electronic gadgets should be bought from the beginning of the academic workshop.</td>
<td>Realisation that Social learning spaces are beneficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The formation of group studies at least once a week. [Code] Study time at the res in which a learner would be happy with. [Code]</td>
<td>Realisation that Social learning spaces are beneficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It must be kept in mind that some individuals cannot keep up with res activities, [Code] especially those that appear randomly (without advanced notice). Residences (specifically Res X) should make sure that all activities are well organised [Code] and that nothing should be made compulsory before academics [Code]</td>
<td>Study time is problematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have related activities to different faculties. Allow students to be productive and be involved. [Code]</td>
<td>Res activities are problematic Res activities are problematic Academics come first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping people into their respective faculties. Allowing contact time for different faculties to meet and discuss work. [Code]</td>
<td>Make workshops more exciting/interesting/interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Realisation that Social learning spaces would benefit faculty specific academic work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Get external extra support material and tutorial inside res. [Code] Constantly bring motivational speakers and role models in [Code] who are successful in their field of work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbatim Recommendations</th>
<th>Provisional Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less residence activities. [Code] More or unlimited time to access the labs and the library.</td>
<td>Res activities are problematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It (SLS) helps me to manage my time and constantly achieve positive outcomes. It reminds me of my purpose being where I am. [Code]</td>
<td>Realisation that Social learning spaces are beneficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study groups. Longer sessions.</td>
<td>Realisation that Social learning spaces are beneficial for group study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If less residence activities [Code] could be implemented (more focus on academics).</td>
<td>Res activities are problematic Academics come first</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Much of what students stated in the questionnaire was mentioned in the interviews as well. The recommendations were coded using the same codes as for the interview transcripts. A discussion hereof will follow in the next chapter, Chapter 5.

**4.3.6. READING 1: CONTENT ANALYSIS**

As with the first Cycle, analysis started with the identification of provisional categories, moving to main categories and then themes. Thereafter, I commenced with the use of CHAT and used the seven CHAT elements as a lens for analysis (see Section 4.2.2). Table 4.9 lists the 40 provisional categories identified.

**Table 4.9. Provisional Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Did not see initial value of social learning spaces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The idea behind the formation of an LC was vague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Group work is viewed negatively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Realisation that social learning spaces are beneficial for group study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Realisation that social learning spaces would benefit faculty-specific academic work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Working with others is challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Study skills are a useful tool to mediate learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Need for outside assistance expressed related to study area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Students experience personal/emotional/social problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Families have high expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Students can't admit to having problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>There is a stigma attached to seeking help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Power relations are identified as problematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Issues of trust come to the fore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Res activities are problematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Holistic development is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Not enough focus on academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Study time is problematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Participation in study time should be negotiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Social learning spaces should be negotiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Identifies studying as more than memorisation or cramming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Studies should come first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>All students need help, not just 1st years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Introduce social learning spaces earlier, e.g. during Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Get students to be more comfortable before getting into other topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Students experience numerous challenges when entering University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Help with time management is needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Lack of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Make workshops more exciting/interesting/interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Group work is viewed as being helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Value of Social learning spaces was realised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Venue issues related to social learning spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Students are competitive and do not help each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Timing for interventions is complicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Workshop topics were good but additional ones needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Workshop topics need revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Academic advisors help but help is not sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Application of learning is evident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Students are not disciplined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Res rules affect participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I further reduced the 40 provisional categories to 9 categories. For example, the following categories: 15. Res activities are problematic; 17. Not enough focus on academic; 18. Study time is problematic; 19. Participation in study time should be negotiated 20. Social learning spaces should be negotiated 22. Studies should come first and 40. Res rules affect participation were all categorised as *Residence context and related constraints*. The reasoning behind this is that the categories all pertained to the residence (both explicit and implicit) processes and procedures that make residence life difficult and challenging. The provisional categories *not enough focus on academic* and *academics come first* were included in this category as informal conversations with participants revealed that the focus on res activities led to a negligence of academic activities. Also, the compulsory nature of study time and the way it was implemented (SQ 1) in the residence, constrained the formation of social learning spaces as students were not allowed to engage with others during this time. See Figure 4.17
Figure 4.17. Reading 2: Moving From Main Categories to Themes
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

The main categories were further broken down into four themes, that is, “meaningful patterns, stances of the participants, or concerns” that are possibly “qualitatively distinct from one another” (Given, 2008:463). The main categories Group work is not viewed favourably and LCs must be made clear resulted in a theme called Initial SLS formation was not positive and needed negotiation. The rationale behind this categorisation is that both group work and LCs fall in the category SLS and since both were not viewed in a positive light, the thinking is that both thus need to be revised or renegotiated.

The main categories Residence context and related constraints and Students face challenges resulted in a theme called Limited participation due to rules and difficulties in spaces and practices. Both categories relate to problems within the residence space and its associated practices and were therefore clustered together. The categories Student support must be renegotiated and Student profile of first year students resulted in a theme called Student characteristics that shape SLS. Lastly the categories Workshops as tool need revision and Tool usage aids learning resulted in the theme Key reflective approaches to tool usage aid practices. These two main categories both indicate a need for reflection on tool mediation essential for learning.

I will now attempt to briefly discuss these four themes in relation to my research questions.

The four themes relate directly to the research question that guides this investigation (Section 1.3) namely:

**How does the establishment and implementation of SLS at selected UJ residences evolve and shape the learning environment of first year students?**

The first research SQ on the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS in student residences relates to issues of residential practices. Almost all students interviewed voiced their discontent with the implementation of study time and other residence activities. It became clear that students were confused about the difference between LCs and group work and further could not distinguish between study time and LC sessions. They felt that the notion of SLS had to be made clear. Besides the residence
rules constraining participation, group work was also not viewed favourably. Although I reconceptualised the notion of CoPs and moved to the more inclusive concept of SLS in the Res Y case study, students still alluded to vagueness and uncertainty, which could possibly account for the marginal transformation of student academic practices.

With regard to research SQ 3, the social, cultural and historical factors student characteristics that shaped first year students’ engagement in SLS included personal, emotional and social challenges, students needing help, challenges regarding university entrance, the competitive nature of students, and lack of discipline. That is, the student profile and students’ ways of working (including my way of working as researcher) shaped how the learning environment in the residence was altered. In a provocative talk at UJ, Crain Soudien (2013) – a key scholar on the topic of transformation – argued that we do not take into account the worlds students bring to universities. He went on to say that we are both oblivious to and disrespectful of their experiences. This study attempted to factor in students’ socio-economic, cultural and historic backgrounds and interrogate their impact on the formation of SLS. The data shows that students’ contexts informed, inspired and shaped their beliefs and practices. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5.

To address research SQ 2, about the issues that enable or constrain students’ engagement in SLS, a CHAT lens was used. The identified tensions related to students not having a voice, an inability to act and make decisions about their needs and wants, the uneven power relations that are characteristic of residence life, the identity crisis experienced by students, and more. The dominant ways of being in a university student residence were not completely rejected, but were still a major constraint. Students’ experience of identity (Wenger, 1998), shaped through residence action, discourses and language (Billet, 2007), was one of discontent. As McKenna (2004:269) contends, identities can be seen as “sites of struggle where individuals use their agency to take on certain discourses or to resist them”. It was through difficulties and challenges (or tensions) in the university context that opportunities for transformation presented themselves. Further, through addressing constraints, enablers were identified and included helping students deal with university life,
cultivating an academic identity, collaborative ways of working or sharing opportunities.

Last but not least, students’ assumptions, perceptions and/or practices within SLS in their residences (research SQ 4) related to the need for reflective approaches and practices. Their assumption that their families would be disappointed if they admitted to not coping, proved to be detrimental to their stress levels. Further, the perception that tools are needed to mediate learning and the recognition that current support practices should be renegotiated, shows an emergent maturity and academic or institutional identity. This finding confirms Eckert and Wenger’s (1994) idea that personal identities as well as institutional identities are shaped through collaborative engagement.

4.3.7. USING A CHAT LENS TO EXAMINE DATA

A deductive approach typifies moving from a theory to observations involving testing that theory (Babbie, 2001:34). I used cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) as a lens to capture the context that students were located in and the prevailing culture that shaped the formation of the activity – that being the establishment of SLS – as well as the tensions that arose within the activity system. Wardekker (2000:269) explains the importance of context:

...our knowledge of activity systems is contextual, as opposed to the decontextualized (or rather, seemingly decontextualized) knowledge in the nomological paradigm. However, this contextualization is not limited to the actual context-as-experienced, as in the interpretive paradigm. In CHAT research, the context includes the global, political, and historical aspects of the activity system under study. The way in which we try to change the activity should take account of this.

Studying the establishment of SLS in isolation of context would not have yielded rich data or a complete picture of reality. I was particularly interested in the issues that enabled or constrained students’ engagement, how the social, cultural and historical factors shaped the formation of SLS and what students’ assumptions, perceptions...
and/or practices within those spaces were (see Section 1.3 where the SQ of this study are explained).

Thus, CHAT proved to be useful as a lens to make sense of the collected data in order to address the research questions. After the process of content analysis I utilised CHAT’s seven elements – subject, tool, object, outcome, rules, community and division of labour – to interpret findings. CHAT was useful as a lens for examining the data and for identifying the underlying tensions characteristic of the activity system. Nevertheless, I was mindful of forcing data into neatly defined categories. Like Harris (2006:150) advises, one needs to distinguish between “understanding how some things might fit” and “insisting that everything does fit”.

Figure 4.18 represents the seven components of CHAT as proposed by Engeström (1999, 2011). As I have discussed CHAT at length in Chapters 2 and 3, I will not discuss this perspective here again. See Figure 4.18 for the CHAT lens with its guiding questions and identifying words.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

I thus used the theoretical lens to cast a different view on the same data. This framework was useful in identifying constraints and tensions or challenges in individual participant stories. For each element, I used a guiding question related to the role of the element in the functioning of the activity system to identify words or phrases in the data.

By way of elucidating how I worked with a CHAT lens, I use Iman and Cheryl’s interview transcripts as examples (See Figures 4.20 and 4.21). An audit trail is very important to any research undertaking. Hence, all audio recordings, transcripts, analysis procedures are available. See Figure 4.19 for an example of how I used CHAT to interpret analysis of Iman’s transcript.

For example, in response to the question “Who is the subject/agent engaged in the activity?” I identified words such as university and varsity (including lecturers, researcher, facilitator and students). Iman speaks about the university, lecturers and...
students, all of whom have the ability and or need to act even though they are part of different activity systems. I thus interpret these as utterances alluding to the subject.

In a CHAT sense, the object refers to the objective or “What is the action directed towards?” In this case the objective or action was to establish SLS. I therefore scanned the text or transcripts for evidence of this. For instance, Iman recalls a time when she was required to “work with people which was a bit of an uncomfortable experience for me and it was when I could put my knowledge that was given or provided with into practice. So it became a bit relevant to me”. Thus, anything pertaining to action directed towards the aim of engagement in SLS was interpreted as object.

The guiding question for the tool is, “What is going to mediate/help the learning?” The action words PowerPoint slides for workshop, role play, television, workshop, group work, assignments, tasks, content, textbooks, study skills, etc. were thus interpreted as tools in the activity system. For instance, Iman identifies speaking to others and study skills as useful tools for learning. She also mentions that the content and textbooks alone are not effective tools.

For the rules, the guiding question is, “What are the rules/policies that underpin the activity?” All compulsory residence activities like, ‘sangfees’, ‘sehri’,\(^{13}\) etc. were included here since, as a rule of the residence environment, students were compelled to participate. It was residence policy for students to engage in study time and all references to this were captured. Iman speaks about residence activities and says that “because it becomes so much to the extent whereby it doesn’t even feel like you’re a varsity student anymore”. All references by participants to policies and rules, were interpreted as rules.

For the label division of labour, the guiding question is, “Who does what?” Thus, identifying words are: work, tasks and services. Everyone that was involved in work was added here. For instance, Iman mentioned the role the RAs played in the

\(^{13}\) Both sangfees (Afrikaans word meaning ‘singing festival’) and sehri refer to annual singing competitions held at UJ residences.
residence environment and the power imbalances around the hierarchical structure of the various roles/role-players. Not only do I capture who does what, but also the related tensions that underscore the work done and services offered.

For the community component, the guiding question is, “Who are involved in the activity?” Thus, the identifying words are first year students, seniors, Cloepatras (big sisters), academic advisors, RAs, RM, students, home and family. Everyone that played a part in the activity system, no matter how small, is interpreted as being part of community. Iman specifically mentions home and/or family – even though indirectly involved, they still form part of the *community*. Again, the related tensions form part of this component and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Finally, for the outcome, the guiding question is, “What happened as a result of the SLS, workshops and group discussions?” Thus, the outcome was identified by means of words such as learn, an advantage, helped me, I feel, benefit, etc. Iman explains how she initially doubted the value of SLS as she normally prefers to study on her own, but that her views changed over time, as she was able to apply the knowledge – on collaboration and social engagement learned during the workshops – in her university classroom situation. This signalled to me that the workshops resulted in – or the outcome was – the transfer of knowledge, at least in this instance.

### 4.4. USING CHAT TO IDENTIFY CHALLENGES IN INDIVIDUAL STORIES

Once content analysis was completed, I re-examined the data using CHAT as a lens. I examined the data particularly to identify tensions or contradictions – “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” – between the elements (Engeström, 2001:137). SQ 2 regarding tensions or constraints as well as enablers are addressed through the examination of individual stories. In Chapter 3, I mentioned that the tensions drive the change or transformation sought. Here I wanted to illustrate the tensions between the subject and the other elements of the activity system, as I was keen on discovering how subjects experienced the activity system and the tension that arose in the process. I also aim to capture how the individual actions enable or constrain the movement towards the outcome in the larger activity
system. In this regard, I am led by the work of Langemeyer (2006) who criticises Engeström for attributing the development of changed practice and solutions to contradictions to a collective, and not so much to the subjective. For this reason, I portray each student's individual story so as not to undervalue the subjective in favour of the collective. Langemeyer (2006:online) further points out:

Engeström presupposes that people confront themselves with specific contradictions, and that they gain the motivation to address and solve them, but he underestimates the probability that they only comply with and accommodate themselves to them in order to avoid any conflict. Because Engeström interprets contradictions mainly as dysfunctions between the six aspects of an activity system, failing motivation or internalised constraints do not appear as a possible obstruction for learning.

Langemeyer (2006) argues that Engeström fails to take into account the lack of motivation and the constraints that are internalised that can potentially impede learning. In using CHAT as a lens for interpretation, I was especially mindful of the aforementioned constraints. Students fell onto a continuum: some students were resistant to working with others, while other students, although they preferred to work alone, were still open to collaborating with others, and yet another group of students functioned best when working with peers.

4.4.1. IMAN’S EXPERIENCE: PREFERENCE FOR WORKING INDIVIDUALLY, BUT OPEN TO SLS FORMATION

Iman confessed that she personally preferred working on her own as opposed to learning in a group, but was still very positive about forming SLS. My CHAT coding of Iman’s transcript is presented in Figure 4.20. I present Iman’s story by referring to tensions between the most prominent nodes of the activity system.
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Figure 4.20. Summary of Iman’s Individual Story

4.4.1.1. Tensions Between the Subject and the Object

Iman is not entirely opposed to the formation of SLS (object of activity) but says that she prefers studying on her own. She says:

“I discovered that it could be [useful] in the future, however I still didn’t see how it could be beneficial to me, because as an individual, I happen to be one of those people who don’t like working in groups. I prefer working independently, uhm at my own pace.”

Iman’s comment shows that she had not managed to distinguish between a CoP (as identified using Wenger’s indicators of CoPs)\(^\text{14}\) and group work. By this I am not suggesting that all CoPs present all indicators of CoPs (Boud & Middleton, 2003), but rather that the group will have most of the CoP indicators depending on how well the knowledge is framed. Despite her preference for individual study, she sees the formation of SLS as inevitable (“Definitely working together is a must you cannot say

\(^{14}\) Wenger’s (1998) indicators of CoPs, as mentioned in Section 2.2.3.1, are sustained mutual relationships; shared ways of doing and seeing; information flow and innovation; on-going conversations and interactions; sense of belonging; knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise; mutually defining identities; being able to distinguish the appropriateness of actions and products; specific tools, representations and other artefacts; local tradition and shared stories; and own jargon.
that you’re going to be at varsity and not work with someone at some stage”) and identifies it as having the potential to ease the strain of adjusting to residence life.

Iman comments on university life as being extremely challenging. She notes:

“No one comes to varsity and know that tomorrow I’m gonna have a breakdown or whatever it, it builds up though so when you get there you’re all confused. You all, you afraid, struggling to get out of your shell and struggling to adapt time and progress and you get used to the things you get used to the routine and you need that something that’s gonna move with you, grow with you hmmm as, as you, you know as you’re growing and as you’re experiencing everything.”

It is important to note that the university is part of the community and as such, this verbatim quote could also be interpreted as a tension between the subject (Iman) and the community. Contradictions or tensions sometimes go across two nodes or CHAT elements. She further voices her concern that students do not always understand what lecturers are saying, adding to the complexity of university life.

4.4.1.2. Tensions Between the Subject and the Community

While students are aware of support services and what they have on offer, they are not used optimally. One reason for this is that there is a stigma attached to seeking help, especially from PsyCAD (Centre for Psychological Services and Career Development). Iman says, “…and I know there’s services like PsyCAD, but there’s this stigma attached to that. If you go there, you must have financial problems, or you might be pregnant or you must be having relationship problems…”

Part of Iman’s community is her family. She conveys a tension in this relationship where she will not go to family for support. Her reasoning is that her family will be stressed knowing that she has problems or that she is not coping and she does not want to add to their woes.

“Yes, yes because it would be some form of a disappointment, if not them it would be something that would rather cause a distress at home because now they’re worrying and you don’t, I know I don’t want that. I wouldn’t want to call my mother and be like I’m not coping because I know she’ll be stressed.”
4.4.1.3. Tensions Between the Subject and the Rules

Iman contends that the rules, while good, do lead to a great deal of tension. She states, “It’s just that at some stage it became a bit too much because now I think we can kick into working mode, because it becomes so much to the extent whereby it doesn’t even feel like you’re a varsity student anymore.”

She expresses the concern that the rules detract from the university’s core business, that of academic progress/study (or teaching and learning, my emphasis). She states: “It’s infuriating for some parents to discover that uhm there’s so many different things that you need to participate in because not all parents are the same … no that is not what I sent you to do I’m not paying for that and whatever.”

Regarding the forced nature of study time in the residence environment, she says: “But then on the scale of compelling the students to study, compelling people to study between certain times or whatever uhm you know it could be more of a uhm ehh I don’t know, it could be more of an insightful experience.”

Essentially, Iman feels that study time is ineffective. She proposes that the residence advisor and the university work on getting students comfortable with residence life right from the start, that is, when introducing SLS: “So I think to just I don’t know to work on the conflicts that res activities causes uhm that element is definitely necessary to introduce [SLS] right at the beginning of the year.”

4.4.1.4. Tensions between the Subject and the Division of Labour

While the understanding is that more senior students should help more junior students, this has not been formalised and thus does not take place. Iman feels that students find it difficult to relate to all people and a sense of trust is therefore important. She mentions that as university residence liaison, I should perhaps offer one-on-one sessions for academic as well as psychological and social support. She further suggests that, as academic development practitioner, I should start by getting everyone comfortable with each other before attempting to deal with the workshop topics, as was done during the Phase 2, Cycle 2 workshop implementation. She states:
“...could be more focused on getting people to be more comfortable and be comfortable with the career path they’ve chosen and things like that just, just touching and scraping the surface and as time progresses go into the depth of study skills, conflict resolvement uhmm and things like that, because it is a systematic process.”

The identification of ‘contradictions’ is further evident in Iman noting that RAs are torn between lending a helping hand and being stern disciplinarians. She mentions that at one time, students demanded that RAs choose whose side they were on, the students’ or the university’s side:

“...and there’s sometimes contradictions and their jobs and you know they expect to be stern at times (Najma: ja) because they need to enforce res culture and other thing and then you lose because we had that this year whereby we had a meeting as the first year students, we just thought you know what? You guys need to choose whose side you’re on, when we got here you were like we’re your big sisters, you are our this, you are our that, but as time progresses you’re leaning towards: I’m a senior you need to respect me, you know.”

4.4.2. CHERYL’S EXPERIENCE: SLS NOT A VIABLE OPTION
Cheryl remained quite negative throughout the process and contended that due to the competitive nature of students, the creation of SLS was not viable (see Figure 4.21).
4.4.2.1. Tensions Between the Subject and the Object
Cheryl sees fellow students as competitive and unsupportive. She is not very keen on working with fellow students as she feels that they are there "for their own outcomes.

*Here’s how I see it that uhm, normally the students are just concentrating on their own work wanting to want to ex-, wanting to exceed, succeed ... uhm, they don’t actually worry about others."* The formation of SLS is thus not something that she would pursue eagerly, unless compelled to do so. Her past experiences with peers has been negative and she admits to being very quiet, "because I’m a very quiet person, I normally don’t talk..." Perhaps working with others will take her out of her comfort zone, as it means that she will be forced to converse with others.

4.4.2.2. Tensions Between the Subject and the Community
Cheryl feels that since first year students will become seniors soon – meaning that the rules that apply to first year students will no longer apply to them – peers will not be willing to continue with study time and the implementation of SLS. She says:

*I don’t think it’s gonna work now because uhm, we are on that stage to go to second, uhm, to seniors … from res. So now all these activities, the uhm ...*

Figure 4.21. Analysis of Cheryl’s Transcript Using a CHAT Lens
first year students won’t take part, because I think we gonna get ‘ontheffed’ [exempted from compulsory residence activities] in this week and then we go over as seniors.”

In a sense, she is saying that students only participate in residence activities because they do not have a choice in the matter. This includes initiatives to introduce and promote SLS, although she does not explicitly mention it out of politeness.

4.4.2.3. Tensions Between the Subject and the Rules
Due to the amount of compulsory residence activities, Cheryl is unable to manage her time. She hastens to add that although not compulsory, students do not actually have a choice in the matter of participating in residence activities (implicit rule). The problem with this, she feels, is that their academic work is suffering. She comments:

“It depends, it normally, it depends because, we had one uhm, of these concerts at the beginning of the year … That really helped to meet people, blah, blah … but in the end of the year it’s more like you had more academic work, you have more school work, tests and everything. You can’t really cope to have all that, uhm, cultural … uhm, also, so I’ll say this one that we had now it didn’t help at all because now my academics suffer.”

She does see the value of residence activities, but feels that the implementation is highly problematic.

4.4.2.4. Tensions Between the Subject and the Division of Labour
Throughout Cheryl’s interview she speaks about how competitive and selfish the community of students are and that they are not very forthcoming with assistance. She does not say whether she has actually reached out for help and had a negative experience or whether this is her general impression of the way students operate. She does not really have any issues with the RAs or RM, except to say that the forced nature of activities is not helpful to her and she does not appreciate these.
4.4.3. NADIA’S EXPERIENCE: SLS FORMATION IS ESPECIALLY RELEVANT TO COMMUNICATION MAJORS

Nadia was sceptical about the value of SLS at first, but she managed to apply skills learned during the implementation to her academic life. Regrettably, she attributes the applicability of SLS to her qualification only, that being Communication, and does not really see its relevance beyond that. See Addendum E for her coded transcript.

4.4.3.1. Tensions Between the Subject and the Object

Like Iman, Nadia initially did not see the value of SLS, but was able to apply what she had learned in the workshops to her daily interactions with others. She professes to have learned to speak out (have a voice). She further states that she had learned about others, about their personalities in particular. Nadia reasons that the workshop topics helped her specifically because she is doing a qualification in Communication:

“Uhm, with the topics I don’t know maybe they helped me because I’m doing communications.” She does not see the broader significance of what was covered in the workshops and only relates the benefits to communication skills. She says:

“But then, I feel they were proper, because now you learn uhm communication skills, you know how to speak you gain confidence like that, that’s where you start (Najma: ja). So now I don’t know (Najma: hmm) it was more of an advantage for me”.

4.4.3.2. Tensions Between the Subject and the Community

Nadia did not express any specific tensions between herself and the community. However, she does express her disappointment at the cancellation of contact between students and the “big sisters” (the more senior students and the RAs). She also expresses regret that the interaction between the seniors and first year students is not forthcoming.

4.4.3.3. Tensions Between the Subject and the Rules

Nadia accepts that residence activities are compulsory and views this as just the way things are. The tension, however, is that she finds it hard to get averages above 75% in her various modules because of all the time devoted to residence activities:
“I think it feels or seems impossible to have distinctions all the way, because or maybe it’s because I’m doing so many res activities and then I don’t have time to actually give my all to my studies (Najma: hmm) ‘cause the highest I can reach sometimes is like 71 (Najma: excellent!) or 79 the highest or whatever. I can’t now sometimes, impossible to have an average of 75% ‘cause there’s so many res activities (Najma: hmm hmm) that I have to do.” Although she manages to do well, she recognises the need for more input if she is to improve her marks. She further claims that study time has been extended due to poor results and because of ‘sangfees’. This extended study time was, however, not helpful to Nadia in terms of her personal academic achievements.

4.4.3.4. Tensions Between the Subject and the Division of Labour
Nadia seems to appreciate the help with time management from Academic Advisers, but says that the help from seniors is not forthcoming. She is also quite disappointed that the quality time with ‘big sisters’ have been cancelled:

“And then on Tuesdays from 7 till 9 I think that’s when you have your quality time with your big sister. You speak about anything you wanna talk about. You do anything that you wanna do but now they cancelled that I think this semester and then now there’s just study time and the sangfees.”

4.4.4. TAZ’S EXPERIENCE: FOCUS OF SLS SHOULD BE ON HELPING STUDENTS TO ADJUST TO UNIVERSITY LIFE
Taz felt that the notion of SLS was vague in the beginning and the true meaning thereof only became clear during the last workshop session. She feels that the workshop topics were unpacked superficially and prefers it when students are allowed to speak about topics of their own choice. She recommends that the main focus should be on the topic of adjusting to university life. She could not see the connection between the workshop topics and the idea of adapting to university life.

4.4.4.1. Tensions Between the Subject and the Object
Taz has no problem with the idea of SLS but feels that the focus should be on learning to become a first year student and learning to cope with residence life:
“I must say that the most, the most helpful session was the session where it was open to anyone to say anything (Najma: ja). Cause that’s when I felt as though people spoke from the actual things that they are going through … Cause the topics given didn’t really go ahmm deep into what we’re going through at res or at UJ whatever (Najma: okay). So now I felt as though the time when you posed you know a random question you know like the floor is open (Najma: ja) then when everyone is starting, discussing the pressures of being at res, that you have to keep your marks up (Najma: ja), that you have like, you only realise that when you leave class. You at least, walk in with at least 2 or 3 other people who come from the same class as you (Najma: hmm). So, if you go through anything they’re there, someone is there in the morning for…at your disposal (Najma: ja) so that’s when I think we got down to the real things and it was unfortunate cause it was like, I think it was like the last session when we had this.”

She remembers the time when I challenged students to ask questions in class and appreciated the realness of such a discussion and the relevance to their lives:

“But then it, it felt nice to go like deeper into what we were actually doing (Najma: hmm) it that, like that time when the questions were posed about ahmm another one about the fears that we have asking questions in class.”

She acknowledges that while useful, it will take time to change mind-sets or old habits.

“That, that was also it, it makes you actually wonder why am I so afraid? (Najma: ja) What do I have to lose? (Najma: ja) It’s, it’s actually, it does make a person question everything, but then the changes take, it takes time.”

Taz further acknowledges that while everyone was not keen to attend the workshops, it paid off in the end:

“I feel as, with, with our group not everybody was keen with like not everybody wanted to do it but then, you have to stick with it to see substance. (Najma: hmm) You see the growth as you keep attending.”
Taz believes that students need to see the value in engaging in SLS for them: “It’s sometimes got to do with whether the learners really want it (Najma: hmm) if the first year students really want it, they will utilise it (Najma: ja) because they can see the opportunity that lies within it.”

4.4.4.2. Tensions Between the Subject and the Community

Taz suggest that SLS should be created with the following topics in mind:

“It should be something like let’s say for example if you had roommates (Najma: ja) having to adjust to living with somebody in the same room having to know that you have to keep conversations sometimes you know and you had to respect each other’s areas and boundaries and all that you know (Najma: ja) that kind of thing.”

She says that these are the tensions or issues first year residence students grapple with; these are real issues. She further notes that the residence community was not in a happy space due to residence activities and academic work pressures:

“Wow! This is a very difficult one (Najma: hmm) because you came at a time when tempers are high.”

4.4.4.3. Tensions Between the Subject and the Rules

The tension between the subject and the rules is highlighted in the following statement:

“That’s why sometimes res becomes a drag, ‘cause then you feel as though the purpose for which you are here (Najma: ja) is taken away completely so it, it does get, it does get a bit too much when you think of having to do sports (Najma: hmm) stuff like that. You’d like to be given the option to take a step back…”

Taz further tells of the negative impact residence activities have on the attendance of class and academics in general:

“I myself had to do ‘sehri’ so it’s like 6 months of work (Najma: ja) I had to lose study time (Najma: wow) and towards the end, towards the actual performances it came to a point where we were practicing every single night. I used to practice from 9 o’clock no, not even 9 from 7 until 11 or 10. I used to practice ‘sehri’ and
it didn’t end there. I mean we stop at 10 then carry on with discussions until 11 every single night (Najma: ja) so I lost a lot of time. There was points where we had auditorium sessions and I had to skip classes. So that is actually with some peers even they had auditorium sessions and they had to skip class and go to the auditorium sessions, but apparently the lecturers are fine with it ‘cause they know the res activities. (Najma: ja) It just becomes frustrating when you have a big test coming up.”

Taz feels that lecturers are generally sympathetic towards students as they are aware of all residence activities, but that her academic work does suffer as a result of all activities. She feels that as a first year student, she should get used to managing her time (but that it remains a challenge). She says:

“So now if it’s like that and somebody could actually help your realise how you can squeeze in the 40 hours in between your classes (Najma: ja) and still have time to do … It would be really helpful. ‘Cause now everybody is like time management, time management, time management.”

Taz talks about the general time for study being “from 7 to 11. That’s standard UJ time.” The policy document, however, stipulates that study time is two hours in length. She recommends that students be allowed to engage with one another during study time, but points out that the problem is not so much related to getting together, but is more a question of ill-discipline:

“You should be allowed to go to somebody else’s room as a group (Najma: ja) but then it gets rowdy (Najma: ja) it gets rowdy and like sometimes it’s not about umh a problem of people getting together and all that, but it’s discipline.”

4.4.4.4. Tensions Between the Subject and the Division of Labour

On the question of getting help from the seniors, Taz says: “I think it would be very helpful if I knew who exactly to go to (Najma: yes) who is willing to help me (Najma: ja) exactly, ‘cause now it’s just a bit vague.” She is aware – and as advertised on the notice board in the residence – that the senior students need to assist first year students. However, nothing is formalised so nobody knows what the procedure is for seeking help. She states:
“Yes, I know that there is somebody (Najma: ja) but I just don’t know how to approach them and are they willing to help me? You know something like that. But then ahmm support wise we have like our academic advisers, they’re there for anything that we need stuff like that.”

4.4.5. FIFFY’S EXPERIENCE: SLS A VIABLE OPTION, BUT DISCIPLINARY ISSUES NEED TO BE SORTED

Although I was not able to get interviews with RAs from Res Y, Fiffy, an RA from Res X, voluntarily availed herself for an interview and attended all workshops held at Res Y. She was particularly concerned with disciplinary issues. The reasons for the inclusion of her voice are numerous. First, although not required, she attended all but one of the workshops and could speak about the workshops from first-hand experience. Second, she provided an outsider’s perspective, which in PAR can be regarded as a critical friend, who could highlight the value of SLS from a different angle. Third, I wanted to foster an inclusive approach by including management and student voices, albeit not from the same residence.

4.4.5.1. TENSIONS BETWEEN THE SUBJECT AND THE OBJECT

Fiffy feels that the idea of SLS was communicated adequately but students still did not see the initial value thereof. She explains:

“Uhm no, I actually don’t think so, because you explained it, the house com explaine it, even the RM came and explained it, but then they were all like ‘no, I don’t wanna do it’ type of thing. It’s that as much as it is ‘I don’t know’. If in their understanding they don’t see the value of it, but then, because I, I, I think because I’ve been here for three years now and then if I had this in first year I think I would probably have had the same mentality as them (Najma: hmm) and only five years later I’d be like huh if I had actually paid attention I could have (Najma: yes) ja. Because as much as it’s like, people don’t turn to see the value of something at the beginning but only see the value of something once it’s over.”

She goes on to say that she recognised the practical value of the workshops to mediate SLS:
“Like at the end of the day I’m thinking like I’m like if I can get one person to just see this the way I see it, maybe they might, like, see the long term value in (Najma: hmm) it’s not only for the first year. Everything you were doing, the workshops ended up like, oh my word, its actually being applied like (Najma: hmm) practical life (Najma: hmm) and practical school work.”

Fiffy thinks that part of the reason why students are resistant to partaking in any activities (social learning workshops and other activities) other than studying, is because of the way university staff stress the importance of studying and managing themselves adequately:

“It was a thing of if you don’t study you gonna fail, if you don’t do this you gonna fail, if you don’t concentrate on school work and go partying all these other things that aren’t relevant to school you gonna fail type of thing. ‘Cause a lot of them are like, all I’ve heard is I’m gonna fail, I’m gonna fail, I’m gonna fail! It’s not like no, you can still do something else and still pass and then when you get to res, they get told of like, no! Time management (Najma: hmm) time management, manage your res activities manage you own life (Najma: hmm) manage everything.”

Another reason for their resistance is due to the pressure of having to pass in order to maintain financial aid:

“They can’t do res activities ‘cause they need to work hard or they gonna lose their scholarship or their bursaries.”

She feels that first year students are not always coping with residence life and relates a specific incident with one student:

“…a first year you know was ehh really stressed to the point of she was like no ways, she actually came to my room, like I don’t know what to do anymore. I really feel like I should quit everything and something of like she hadn’t come up to me and told me like, no one would have picked it up because she was all jolly every single day and (Najma: hmm) she kept on going on like everything is okay.”

Fiffy empathises with students as she acknowledges the difficulty they experience being away from their families: “But like I’m still trying to manage the transition from high school to res (Najma: yes) from not being with my family to being all on my own.”
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She suggests that one way to get students to participate voluntarily in all activities would be to implement initiatives at the beginning of the academic year. She says:

“Okay, uhm I know I was forced we, we forced like if you don’t come down dah dah dah, you gonna get fired, if you don’t come down, and then it shouldn’t be like that it should be, they should, should be willing to go (Najma: hmm) yep as well I do agree if you guys start within the first week of school (Najma: hmm) the first week the school starts and then you do like opening (Najma: hmm) within first week then they start. It’s like a normal thing for them, it’s not like you pop in the, the middle of the month, semester.”

She feels that the immediacy of having to hand in assignments took preference over other activities:

“I feel like it will go smoothly cause with us you came in the middle and everyone is like I’ve got assignments to do and like (Najma: ja) ja, it’s like it’s just an hour? Do you know what I could be doing in that hour? You know just take that hour it will help you in the end, it’s something that will just deviate you from your studies or something like that so ja.”

4.4.5.2. Tensions Between the Subject and the Community

According to Fify, students experience a host of problems and are not adequately supported in their transition to university life. She says:

“So I really think, they really need to focus on res students and our first year students. All first year res students have the highest failure rate, because of the activities their doing they under a lot of pressure, they still trying to transition from high school (Najma: mmm) to university and everything is just overwhelmed (Najma: mm) and then after that it’s just like okay, you can sort yourself.”

She expresses a need for the Academic Development Centre (ADC) to offer better guidance to students: “If someone doesn’t kinda give you an idea or direction of where to go, you just walking into a field (Najma: hmm) and you like okay where do I go right now?” She adds that PsyCAD as well as ADC should give individual attention to students:

“So I don’t know I feel like ADC and PsyCAD need to seriously, like sit down properly not as a group with all the first year students like all the first year students from all the reses but sit down individually with each first year at res.”
Fiffy expressed a need for emotional support and requests the help of PsyCAD as the RAs are not equipped to help students with emotional and psychological issues:

“Where a first year you know here was ehh really stressed to the point of she was like no ways she actually came to my room, like I don’t know what to do anymore. I really feel like I should quit everything and something of like she hadn’t come up to me and told me like, no-one would have picked it up because she was all jolly every single day and (Najma: hmm) she kept on going on like everything is okay, so I think if we could implement ahh a weekly or monthly one-on-one session with PsyCAD.”

Another means of support needed by students, Fiffy feels, relates to writing skills, especially for the Public Relations students. She further suggest that students should be made to work in different groups so as to get them out of their comfort zones:

“They do a lot of things and I know within the beginning of first term a lot of them didn’t do well in their first tests and then they called you in. (Najma: yes yes) I feel like if we have writing skills there and how to properly write an essay or do your assignments, it would be great help for them as well. (Najma: hmmm) So then also like ahh the mixtures of different uhm you know when we were forming the groups (Najma: hmm) I feel like we should actually put them in groups to not to for that you get comfortable within the circle of you study, but actually expand your horizon.”

4.4.5.3. Tensions Between the Subject and the Rules

Fiffy mentions the implicit rule that if students participate in residence activities, preferential treatment results: “…and if you’re doing res, like uhm if you’re doing sports you now have a position of leadership in the res itself. That’s when you get like the A-Ring, the hot side of the rooms.” She elaborates:

“I don’t know what there is that we can offer that would make people wanna partake in every activity and be participative res students. Because as soon as you get … first year students are forced into activities type of thing.”

Another rule – this time a residence policy – is that if students do not pass, they will not be allowed back in the residences the following year: “And everyone is just like no, if you don’t pass first year, you’re gonna get kicked out. So they just like no I need to study, because there’s nothing I can do type of thing.” Consequently, students are not interested in doing any other activities (including activities associated with the
implementation of SLS) that are going to take them away from their studies. These are viewed as separate in the minds of the students.

4.4.5.4. Tensions Between the Subject and the Division of Labour

Although students have requested more tutoring in the residences, getting tutors to assist is problematic. Fiffy explains:

“Uhm we were very unable to get tutors in the beginning of the year ... They put a lot of time and effort into getting those A’s and then when we were asking them, it’s the thing of okay am I gonna get paid? No, you kinda doing that for free. And it’s like, nah, I’d rather not, well I’ll go waste my time on my own studies rather than helping someone else. I feel like the, getting help from here at res, tends to be a little bit more of a mission than going on campus and asking some random stranger in your class.”

Equally difficult for the RAs was the job of getting students to participate in study time sessions and attend workshops and, at times, students had to be fetched from their rooms:

“Okay, with my first year students. Some of them were very stubborn, I don’t wanna lie, some of them were extremely stubborn and then like I, I there is a particular first year where I’ll be like, please come down! And she’ll be like no Fiffy, you always ask me to come down, you never ask the other people to come down.”

For Fiffy, motivating students was her biggest challenge:

“Uhm for me personally it was motivating them (Najma: hmm) to attend the workshops, motivating them to actually do anything like that's not academic related (Najma: ja) ‘cause as much as it is my focus was on their academics (Najma: ja) and what’s going on ja.”

She feels the training received was not adequate to prepare her for her role as academic officer:

“I feel like if, I feel like as a House Coms they should actually do a one-on-one specific like on what your portfolio is about like as the academic officer, this is what I expect you to do, not what happened at the camp, where they like just go then yada yada the entire day for everyone and then eventually when you knock off, you like okay, what is actually going on here? … something else I think if they didn’t group us all, all nine of us would be like ja, this is what you have to do and give us a whole bunch of things to read at the end of the day
we all like really?! I have to go study after this and then you like uhm we didn’t read like anything that worked even all we did was sign documents, okay this is the contract that we have to sign.”

She feels that her portfolio is not fully understood, by herself and others:

“The academic portfolio is huge (Najma: hmm) and people just think, it’s just telling first year students to go study like, no it’s not and then now to deal with F7s\(^{15}\) as res students you know, because … like okay the academic SRCs in our res, when I look at her, dealing with all the academic things, she looks like she’s gonna go crazy.”

Fifty feels that academic officers do not get the necessary information in time so that they are enabled to assist students who get excluded:

“There’s no indication or anything because we don’t get the results of the first semester test or second semester test. Unless we like, tell them to bring them and then, most of them don’t bring them … next thing you just get thrown ohh this students is failing you need to go find out what’s wrong and like what you mean she’s failing? She’s been here for six months and she’s failing? And then I think as well if the university could send us records of student progress hence the ADC thing we worked with them. We would know how well the students do or not.”

The Managing Assessment Marks System (MAMS) or the Blackboard learning management system could be used as early warning mechanisms to inform residences of struggling students.

### 4.4.6. TAMSIN’S EXPERIENCE: PERSONALLY MEANINGFUL INTERACTION AND COLLABORATION IS KEY

Tamsin valued the formation of SLS, but points out a few problems with the implementation thereof. In particular she would prefer smaller group sizes and engagement in topics that are personally meaningful, in a physical environment that is conducive to group interaction.

#### 4.4.6.1. Tensions Between the Subject and the Object

\(^{15}\) An F7 is awarded when a student fails more than 60% of his/her subjects. Such a student is then not allowed to continue with the qualification.
Tamsin reports that she found the workshop topics impersonal and superficial and attributes this to a lack of time:

“Ok uhm, I think when we discuss these things like when we discussed these topics or issues I think something becomes more detailed when it’s more personal (Najma: yes) because you know when you make something personal (Najma: yes) it goes in, it’s more depth. (Najma: yes) So I think because now we were limited in terms of the questions you know you had to answer: how can you do this (Najma: hmm) how can you do it (Najma: hmm) it wasn’t more of a personal thing. (Najma: ok) I think if we make the topics more personal (Najma: yes) then they gonna, the detail is gonna be more. And probably increase the time a bit, because we were limited to time (Najma: ja) and the presentation weren’t detailed as because we had to hurry up.”

She also feels that while students enjoyed the group discussions, presentations were not helpful. She says: “I think the problem was, when we were all gathered in one group (Najma: ok) like when we were all, like when you were informing us, because people didn’t, some people weren’t really attentive throughout the whole session”.

Tamsin suggests that the physical environment or space affects how people interact. She recommends the following:

“Ok, maybe we could change the environment because now ok for instance at res we do everything in here, maybe sometimes we could go outside (Najma: hmm, ok) or we could I think another thing ehmm I think the atmosphere also influences how you, you sort of (Najma: of course) participate (Najma: absolutely) I think maybe if we could alternate or change that as well.”

Essentially, despite the initial teething problems experienced, Tamsin does want the workshops to continue:

“Ja, maybe if we added to I don’t think we should now replace it [the LCs] (Najma: ja) if we adding it then it’s fine but replacing it really won’t … ‘cause now if we gonna focus on the content and everything we still losing the communicating part of it. Yes, the whole group thing, I think that is more important.”
Another tension or problem that Tamsin touches on is the academic versus soft or critical skills nature of the workshops or group discussions (tool). While some students felt that academic or subject content had to be covered during the workshop sessions, Tamsin felt that activities such as writing and thinking do constitute academic learning. She says:

“Uhm, I think that was in a way, ok well obviously it [the workshop] was more broad because it was, it related to outside issues (Najma: hmm) but I really feel, I feel that, it was in a way academic because how you had to think you had to express how you feel (Najma: hmm) or you had to like I think that was (Najma: hmm) it was really academic (Najma: hmm) because you know now you sitting down writing things and you, you thinking things is part of learning (Najma: absolutely) so I don’t think now we should be writing tests.”

4.4.6.2. Tensions Between the Subject and the Community
Tamsin does not mention any issues with the community, except that she feels that students can be very problematic and complain about issues without valid reasons.

4.4.6.3. Tensions Between the Subject and the Rules
Tamsin feels that the time slot for the implementation of SLS was ideal and that students would have complained no matter when the activities were scheduled, as it is really hard to please everyone. She says:

“Honestly I think even if it was, even if there was a different time slot people would still complain. (Najma: ja) Because now, if it was during the day people would say that they have classes, they’ve got tutorials, they’ve got tests and things like that. And if it was during the day (Najma: hmmm) it was gonna be hard to get hold of everybody.”

4.4.6.4. Tensions Between the Subject and the Division of Labour
Tamsin expressed satisfaction with the division of labour and had no problems with the HK, the RM and the rest of the community and their respective duties.
4.4.7. SOPHIA’S EXPERIENCE: SLS WHERE ACADEMICS SHOULD COME FIRST

Sophia was very positive about the opportunity to engage in SLS. She confesses to being able to communicate with lecturers and peers should she require help, and perhaps this could account for her very optimistic outlook on the process of implementing SLS. Like some of the other participants, she expressed a need for assistance with what it means to be a student. She further stresses that academic study should come first.

4.4.7.1. Tensions Between the Subject and the Object

Sophia expresses openness to seeking help from lecturers and peers: “Like if I don’t understand or maybe get help from my fellow colleagues or just I go to them (Najma: hmm) and ask.” She does however acknowledge that not all students are able to do this and suggest the use of online communication: “Like, social networks can help, like if maybe you can’t communicate through your lecturer, like seeing him personally or whatever, (Najma: ja) like maybe through social networks, hmm emails.”

Sophia seemed very positive about the opportunity to interact with others in the residence. She says:

“And then, ja, I think it helped us, because we got to relate and talk, like more used to one another, so that maybe if you have a problem in your studies whatever, you won’t hesitate to go to someone else doing the same course and say, hey I need your help (Najma: ja) you know, whatever, ja. We bonded type of thing.”

She does offer additional topics of discussion that would have benefitted the group more:

“Ja, but I think they were good topics. Maybe if we have to include other topics, it would be like maybe ourselves as girls, maybe lifestyle, and how to conduct ourselves like in a place like university (Najma: yes) and maybe how to like behave, stuff like that, and how to handle pressure.”
Like Taz, Sophia needs help with adjusting to university life and would appreciate support in this regard.

### 4.4.7.2. Tensions Between the Subject and the Community

Sophia suggests that the fortnightly workshops need to increase in frequency to weekly, but admits that students would take exception to such a suggestion. She feels that regular assignments should be given so that the momentum is maintained: “Yes, cause sometimes when to be like, ok Mrs Najma was here, oh well next week she’s not here (Najma: ja) we forget about whatever we talked about (Najma: yes) next time if she comes, I think we should know like each and every Tuesday like she’s there. (Najma: yes) That would work ‘cause people will be like, and give us maybe assignments and be like, so we be like oh I need to do this I need to answer this questions.”

Sophia wants support regarding what it means to be a student or support regarding student identity. She says:

“I think we should be lectured according to that subject, that listen you have to behave like this whatever, because some of the people like freedom is driving them crazy and then you end up like, oh well, if I was at home I wasn’t gonna do this, I wasn’t gonna do this, my mum wouldn’t allow me to do this type of thing, even like how to conduct ourselves and like type of thing … end up getting F7 because they not studying, not because they not studying, but I don’t know like they live they’re thinking, you know what, this whole world is mine. (Najma: ja) They’re doing other things they not supposed to be doing.”

### 4.4.7.3. Tensions Between the Subject and the Rules

Like almost all the other participants, Sophia also had issues with the forced implementation of study times in the residence:

“The thing is concerning, this people have different opinions (Najma: hmm) and then like some of the people will be like, okay you know our study times, you know was like from 7 till 11, and then like maybe that time you just come from class, you tired (Najma: hmm) and whatever. You need to rest and by 7 o’clock if you not in your table, studying you are fined.”
Sophia feels that an academic focus should be made priority, while still recognising the value of engaging in sport, cultural, social activities, etc.

“Ok, I think out of the five pillars, I think academics should come first, (Najma: hmm) because some other people are really struggling when coming to academics and then like on the other hand, you can’t be focusing on only your academics.”

4.4.7.4. Tensions Between the Subject and the Division of Labour

Sophia expresses regret at not having input in certain residence matters. She feels that it is not fair for residence management to impose certain things on students that ultimately lead to students’ detriment:

“You’re fined, I really think like concerning studying like, some of us are active like after midnight (Najma: yes) there are active you can study like whatever (Najma: yes) before then you like uhh like I’m tired now. So it, it depends I think that question needs all of us to be there and be like, ok we decide on this time slot until ja. So I think ja, all of us have to decide and have (Najma: hmm) one conclusion about time.”

She feels that it is a pity that residence management had never given students the opportunity to have SLS before. She says:

“We would bond and discuss and those things like we never got any chance like that until you came (Najma: oh) then whereby we meet and talk (Najma:ja) about our studies and stuff like that so I think it helped us.”

4.5. IDENTIFYING THE FINDINGS OF THIS INQUIRY

The findings of this inquiry resulted from the mini-findings of the pre-study work (with Res X) and the Res Y case study – presented in Table 4.10. I have tried to show how the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS shape and transform the learning environment in a student residence by pointing out enabling and constraining factors that shape student engagement and interaction, and through student voice, how evidence of power differentials comes to the fore and restrains participation in SLS.
**Table 4.10. Main Findings**

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### 4.6 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 4

In this chapter I presented the analysis of the study. I discussed the phased approach to analysis and explained how I read the data twice, first for a general understanding, followed by a second reading in order to gain a deeper understanding. I accounted for how I managed data and discussed my reflection on data as a PAR practitioner. Content analysis was followed by using CHAT as a lens for interpretation.

In Chapter 5, I provide a discussion of the findings and the conclusions drawn.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS: IMPLICATIONS FOR CONCEPTUALISING AND IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES

5.1. INTRODUCTION: MEANING MAKING THROUGH A COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING

This thesis was concerned with investigating how the establishment and implementation of social learning spaces (SLS) at a selected UJ residence evolved and shaped the learning environment of first year residence students. I was particularly interested in how such spaces could be conceptualised and implemented in a student residence. I also aimed to critically examine what issues enabled or constrained students’ engagement in SLS and how students' social, cultural and historical factors shaped the formation of such spaces. Students’ assumptions, perceptions and/or practices in the residence environment were also of significance. These interests were captured in the research question:

**How does the establishment and implementation of SLS at selected UJ residences evolve and shape the learning environment of first year students?**

The research sub-questions were:

1. How are SLS conceptualised and implemented in student residences?
2. What issues enable or constrain students’ engagement in SLS?
3. How do social, cultural and historical factors shape the formation of SLS?
4. What are students’ assumptions, perceptions and/or practices within SLS in their residences?

I adopted a critical theoretical stance, since I was interested in not only exploring the conceptualisation of SLS, but also in the value this would hold for transforming practices in student residences. Importantly, using a critical theoretical lens enabled me to provide broader social meaning (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000:147) in analysing and discussing the data generated within this study. That is, it allowed me to go beyond
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

factors within the specific case study of the one UJ residence context. I took into consideration broader environmental factors in the residence students’ lives in the UJ academic and social environment that had the potential to impact on SLS in the residence environment. Critical theory thus added “a disposition or stance of critique” (Marriage et al., 2004:538). A third-generation CHAT theoretical lens allowed me to identify enabling and constraining factors that impacted on the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS. It furthermore allowed for the identification of tensions in the process of establishing SLS so that levers for change could be identified and if possible facilitated (Barab et al., 2002:80; Engeström, 2001; Kuuti, 1996; Roth & Lee, 2007:203).

This chapter presents a critical discussion of the main themes or findings of this thesis, implications for the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS, the contradictory nature of change, significance of the study, limitations, trustworthiness issues, my own research journey and lastly a conclusion. The theoretical framework of this study (as presented in Chapter 2, as well as throughout this study) will guide the discussion presented in this chapter. I draw particularly on some of the tables and figures presented in Chapter 4.

5.2. SYNTHESISING THE FINDINGS

The pre-study phase (Res X) was used to inform the design of the case study (Res Y) that this thesis reports on. As this is a PAR study, I therefore had to analyse the findings in stages. The preliminary findings were used to inform the second implementation cycle (the start of the doctoral case study).

In order to show how the results of this investigation addressed my research questions, I present the findings in terms of the following headings: Who Students Are: Shaping SLS Interactions and Spaces, Enablers and Constraints to the Formation of SLS at the Student Residence, Towards Negotiated Spaces and Practices, The Value of Tensions as a Transformative Catalyst in the Activity System of the Student Residence and lastly in this way I show how these headings addresses the various SQ of this study. A graphical representation of findings from the two phases is depicted in Figure 5.1. In this chapter, I also discuss the implications, the contradictory nature of change,
significance of the study, limitations of the research and trustworthiness of data, my own research practice and end with concluding remarks.

Figure 5.1. Patterns Across Themes from Phases 1 and 2

5.2.1. WHO STUDENTS ARE: SHAPING SLS INTERACTIONS AND SPACES

Who students are, mainly gleaned from the student profile questionnaire (see Section 4.3.5) will be discussed in this section, paying particular attention to the interplay between the intervention to establish SLS and student identity, epistemological access and finding voice.

5.2.1.1 Developing an academic identity and gaining epistemological access (or not)

The data primarily showed that students’ reasons for studying were focused on job prospects. For most of the students, university attendance was largely a means to an end. A small number of students (5%) even admitted to studying as they did not know what else to do. It seems as though for the majority of these students, there was little interest in forming SLS. While at university, they did not see their involvement in SLS in their end goal of qualifying with a degree. They were mostly concerned with obtaining the qualification and moving on to the workplace. For example, Nadia, being a 21-year-old student and studying on a student loan, was focused on improving her job opportunities. She could not afford to fail as this would lengthen the time period of her obligations. In the previous (matric) year, she studied less than five hours a week.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

For a student at first year university study to succeed, approximately 25 hours or more of study per week is needed to excel (Van Zyl, 2012). If Nadia has not increased her study hours, she may not fully understand what is required of her in terms of effort and time to succeed at university. This may point to a legacy of poor schooling and could possibly mean that Nadia has not developed the attributes required of a conscientious, first year student. In my experience with students, particularly at first year level, this is not unusual. I argue that if this is not explicitly taught at university level – possibly as part of the development of SLS – there is very little chance of succeeding at university level study and thus also of students’ seeing the need for establishing SLS. For a student such as Nadia, the two are not connected. Thus, although students may implicitly or explicitly get this message in their academic programme, it is in their out-of-class space that this becomes imperative. In the context of this study it is in the residence environment that these aspects can best be promoted. As argued by Fataar (2010:328), HEIs have a responsibility to promote “students’ being and becoming”. In this study, initiatives to promote learning in the academic and social lives of the students remained epistemologically in separate zones – there was little or no discernible movement between the lived spaces of higher education, the university classroom and their living spaces, except for the message “you are going to fail”.

Like Nadia, Taz (a first-generation student), Sophia and Tamsin all cited better job opportunities as their main reason for studying. These students’ current social and economic status, as well as what they place value on (here referring to upward social mobility, especially amongst black students), seem to affect how they engage with others and what they prioritise. This is understandable, considering the many sacrifices families make to send students to university. Using a CHAT lens, this finding points to the tensions between the subject-tool-object nodes of the activity system.

Most students are very aware of how much depends on their success at university. In general, however, participants seemed unable to engage in issues of what they needed to know in order to succeed at university level, such as sound academic practices – an example being working collaboratively with others to extend their understanding – and grappling with disciplinary knowledge. Instead, they focused on the content itself. I argue that one of the main reasons for this disposition could be the
failure of schooling to prepare them adequately for higher education. Historically, whilst they may have gained access to university, their epistemological access (Morrow, 1993) – access to good academic practices and approaches – is underdeveloped. This is documented in the South African context and particularly in UJ (Boughey, 2009; CHE, 2013; Petersen, 2007; Van Zyl, 2012). In my view, this is a chief factor in students’ inability and/or unwillingness to engage with the idea of SLS.

From a critical perspective, in reflecting on my assumptions as practitioner researcher, I may also have been naïve in my thinking that the student’s habits and dispositions developed over 12 years of schooling could be shifted through a series of workshops over a 14 week period. The tensions, in activity theory language, within the two worlds of the university classroom and the student residence of the students as subjects in the activity system were simply too hard for them to resolve. Students’ apprenticeship of oppression (Gallego, 2001:314) was too dominant for a short intervention to make a dent.

In addition, the tensions between the subjects and the rules and division of labour in the activity system may also account for the residence warden describing first year students as ‘lazy’. In my view, the residence management’s views of students need to be problematised. I question whether management staff, in making such statements, really knows students and whether they are trained to assist students to develop the habits of minds associated with successful university study. My experience of the hierarchical structures in the residence environment and the strict enforcement of practices that requires students to follow rules and times for studying without interrogating if the students’ study habits are conducive to learning say otherwise.

In further problematising this issue I question whether students are genuinely lazy or whether they, like Nadia, think that since five hours of study per week allowed them university entrance they do not see the need to put in more time and thus more effort. If students do not understand that dedication – in terms of study time and revised methods – is required in being a university student, I question whether they will see the value of their involvement in SLS. Thus, the seeming lack of dedication to studying could denote a disinterest in learning or it could point to a lack of socialisation into the qualities or attributes required at university level. From my investigation it is clear that
the student residence environment generally seems to be failing students in this respect. This is what Morrow (2009:77) alludes to in his notion of a lack of “epistemological access” – an issue that continues to bedevil particularly first-generation and black students. Students may get physical access to the university and the residence environment, but are unable to gain full access to the knowledge and practices of academic study and their own particular disciplines.

In particular, almost all Res Y students that I interviewed were concerned with study methods, time management and residence policies and procedures. For the most part it was the almost exclusive focus on the memorisation of content that was a real cause for concern. For instance, Res Y1_S1 admits to leaving everything to the last minute, Res Y1_S2 concentrates on her majors at the expense of other modules, while Res Y2_S1 and Res Y3_S confirm to the memorisation of textbook material. I argue that practices such as these are largely indicative or reflective of students’ personal epistemological assumptions. Generally, students in this investigation seem to see learning as the memorisation of content (learning which is observable and can be measured). These personal epistemological assumptions are what Baxter Magolda (2004:31) describes as “beliefs about self, learning, classroom instruction, and domain-specific beliefs”. As first year students, who have had 12 years of socialisation in a schooling system, they seem to prefer mastery of content (Scott et al., 2007). Students’ practices can historically be traced to high school, where memorisation of facts in a solitary manner is dominant (Badat, 2009; Clarence, 2011; Fataar, 2010; Van Zyl, 2012). What happens in many South African high schools, particularly schools from which many first-generation students are drawn, is the teacher conveying content in a top-down fashion, and students imbibing that knowledge and giving it back to teachers during summative tests. Students then leave school with practices and assumptions about learning that are at odds with university academic success that requires critical input, interrogation and synthesising arguments.
This meant that workshop topics in the intervention such as rules of engagement and *Ubuntu*, meant to foster collaborative learning in the establishment of SLS are negatively affected. First, none of the students, with the possible exception of Iman, appeared to recognise the need for learning better academic habits. Second, students could not connect the role of SLS with better academic learning, despite my effort to involve them in collaborative learning and social engagement during the workshops. In retrospect, as mentioned earlier, I may have been too ambitious since this is something that students must experience over a period of time. Even my approach may have been misguided, in the sense that I approached epistemological transformation from the perspective of first acquiring learning strategies or skills, whereas Baxter Magolda (2004) perceives such a transformation as a modification towards a more advanced set of epistemological assumptions. Thus, a major finding of this study is that a workshop on study skills and time management – as was requested by almost all participants – would not necessarily be beneficial in terms of a transformed practice. Instead, a reflection on basic assumptions about learning and how we learn (how we come to know) would perhaps be more valuable to start with, before moving to improving students’ learning practices and spaces. My assumption is that students who are exposed to courses where reflection-on-learning is encouraged would possibly have maximum learning benefits.

However, in my experience, even academic staff struggle with this, especially content specialists who do not necessarily have an educational background or post school educational qualifications. Thus, students often do not have opportunities to reflect on their learning assumptions, practices and spaces in educational settings. An exception was Iman – an Education major – who recognised the value of grappling with learning issues when she says:

“According to my understanding studying is not just a matter of you reciting things over and over. It’s a learning process. You can’t just be cramming all the information … but

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16 *Ubuntu* is an African word referring to humanity and compassion. It is a worldview that embraces interaction with others.
most often what happens is you’re trying to get the content into your head, but there’s no learning.”

It appears that her exposure to learning theories (during her courses in Education, where as part of learning to become a leader, a great deal of emphasis is placed on how students learn, the theories that underpin learning and issues of pedagogy) means her orientation to learning is different to other students. She seems to understand that learning is a process and involves students being supported by their peers or expert others to increase their level of understanding in line with the notions of scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) and other proponents of social-cultural views on learning (Engeström, 2001; Roth & Lee, 2007; Stetsenko, 2005).

One example of how the students’ historical context influences their learning is the unequal readiness of previously disadvantaged students for university life. According to one of the many national studies in South Africa, the average graduation of white students is twice as high as that of black students (Scott, et al., 2007; Soudien, 2008). Researchers in this area argue that it is largely due to an unequal “readiness for university” between the student groups (Boughey, 2009:2). If the study sample, being 98% black (only one of the 29 participants was white), conforms to national norms, only one or two of them (5%) would be likely to graduate (CHE, 2013). This certainly does not imply that students have no control over their destinies or that they do not have the agency to change this statistic. As pointed out in Chapter 2, the FYE as an intervention programme aims to support all students in their transition from school to university and in particular to identify ‘at-risk’ students for academic, social and technological support. This is often located in the Academic Development and Support unit of HEIs. However, the efficacy of this intervention within the case investigated is unknown, since there is no follow up by the RW and academic staff and there was no way for me to ascertain the effect hereof on student retention and success at university. Here the tension between two activities systems of the student residence and the university environment/classroom is evident. There appears to be

17 Black includes the designated group, but for African and Coloured students, the success rates are exceptionally poor.
minimal communication about their respective roles in promoting student learning, with students falling between the cracks. Once again this points to “students’ being and becoming”: in the words of Barnett (2010), being neglected. This is a major limitation in this study, but also in terms of how key statistics about students are collated and analysed in a systematic way in the university context, an issue I take up later in this discussion.

The systemic nature of interventions to address shortcomings or challenges that first year students who are underprepared for university study is taken up in a CHE (2013) discussion document on the legacy of schooling and how it impacts on the success rate of first year students. They argue that (CHE, 2013:53):

Persistent failure and attrition on the scale shown in the performance patterns, within a small and select intake, cannot be attributed simply to student deficits or poor teaching, and will not change spontaneously. Moreover, it cannot in any simple way be ascribed primarily to affective or material factors; similar or worse conditions are present in other sub-Saharan African countries without such poor outcomes. Rather, the indications are that the underperformance must be systemic in origin.

This systemic underperformance, located in a legacy of poor schooling, is a complex problem that requires intervention at many levels, especially in the first year of university study. Thus, without intentional, structured intervention in a coordinated and systemic approach on the part of university structures, the status quo will remain; most white students will prosper, while most black students will continue to drop out of university. If underperformance is systemic in origin, initiatives to assist first year students must align with a wider systemic agenda in terms of improving epistemological access if substantial rewards in student success are to be gained. The implications for the implementation of SLS in one or two residence environments is that isolated efforts to establish SLS are not going to succeed if universities do not grasp the nature of the structures that hinder such initiatives. I recommend an approach underpinned by a coordinated university-wide plan. My recommendation, after the work of Niemann (2010), is that the institutional culture must be inclusive and purposefully cultivated by its management structures, so that a more enabling
environment for student development can be fostered. On a very practical level this implies including student representation on residence and UJ committees, better strategic alignment of UJ goals, translating rhetoric about student success, transparency, accountability, cultural diversity, individuality and human dignity, empowerment and capacity building to concrete plans in the residence and not neglecting this space. This discussion has addressed not only how students social/political background have shaped their interaction in SLS, but highlighted enablers and constraints, student assumptions and practices and has also shed light on how SLS should be conceptualised and implemented. I now move on to a discussion of the student’s voice in the residence environment and how it impacted the establishment of SLS.

5.2.2 Navigating the difficulties of finding a voice

An important aspect of finding voice relates to language literacies. In the South African context, language is a tremendous barrier to student engagement at university level. In most universities, the main language of teaching and learning is English. As 97% of students in this study were second language English speakers, I found that they had difficulty expressing themselves verbally in English. During the workshop feedback sessions, most shied away from presenting and the same handful of people in each session would volunteer to present. Some of the factors that seemed to affect the level of participation in the process of establishing SLS are: being a first time university student, a second language English speaker, studying for very many reasons unrelated to learning as such, and having study habits that are not commensurate with successful university study – similar to Van Zyl’s (2010) study. On one level this can be viewed as simplistically as apathy or complacent student behaviour, as was the expressed view of some residence management members, but on another level, it can mean that university and residence management have not adequately socialised students into understanding what becoming a member of an academic community comprises. It is not something many students learn on their own.

Even in the interview process this was evident. One participant, Cheryl, an Afrikaans-speaking student, found it extremely challenging to articulate herself. The implication
for SLS conceptualisation and formation is that more consideration needs to be given to student voice, language barriers and communication barriers if the idea of student voice is to be realised. Here I refer both to students’ literal voice and to the implicit idea of comfort with language and the issue of student voice as agency. According to the literature, a focus on student voice per se is not going to lead to transformation. Arnot and Reay (2007:311) propose a focus on “pedagogic voice” which refers to “power relations which create voices”, that is, voice that is “created by the pedagogies” rather than “voices needed to change pedagogy”. This represents another factor that hampered student engagement in SLS and points to the absence of Morrow’s (1993) epistemological access.

From my perspective as the facilitator of the sessions towards the establishment of SLS, a safe space for engagement and discussion is essential (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Students need to feel comfortable and able to express their needs and engage fully in the discussion. In line with the work of Wenger et al. (2002) and Li et al. (2009), I became aware in this study that balancing the needs of individuals versus the organisation makes the formation of SLS very difficult. Vella (2002:435) refers to a safe context, including the learning activities, the classroom atmosphere, group interactions and learning materials. Thus, the entire learning context needs to be inviting and convey a feeling of being safe. Without this, the workshops and other initiatives in the establishment of SLS would be simply another residence activity that students are compelled to attend. This was not a factor that I had considered sufficiently prior to my interventions in the residence environment towards the establishment of the SLS. I as facilitator, had not paid enough attention to a consideration of “how students interact, why they interact, with whom they interact” (Wenger, 1998:237). My assumption was that students, having gained access to university, would be sufficiently au fait with the language of teaching and learning to engage in the more informal discussions around the establishment of SLS. In reality, the gap between school and university is far wider than I had anticipated.

On another level, from the observations, informal discussions and interview transcripts it became clear that some students were accustomed to suppressing their voices – it was difficult for them to express an opinion or viewpoint. That is, factors such as
student agency, effective communication and anti-hegemony affected engagement. All of these factors are essential in the formation of SLS. Not only was it important for me as facilitator to listen to what was said, but I also had to take careful note of the silences (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Ashby, 2011; Fielding & Rudduck, 2002). Silences often convey whose voices are being prefaced and what information students are willing or not willing to share. That is, power relations are implicit in the silences.

Despite my numerous efforts to get the students to articulate their concerns in a constructive manner, they did not feel confident to challenge authority outside of the small discussion groups with me. This is a significant finding, in the sense that they were able to find their ‘voice’ in the SLS groups, even if not outside the group. Perhaps more time, practice and opportunity for discussion is needed, as students had limited opportunity to apply their learning further. They did not have the confidence in their own agency to move beyond hegemonic practices in the university environment and in the student residence. This is evident in the field notes: “I started off asking everyone who had ventured asking questions in class, as I had challenged them to do in the previous workshop and only three indicated that they had taken up the gauntlet”. Evidence is also found in this extract from my field notes:

“The topic of ‘Finding your voice’ generated active participation although it was clear that most students were not very vocal about their needs and about what matters to them. The impression I got was that most of them are either passive/takers/not assertive communicators. Some asked questions relating to how it applies to their studies/situations and did not see the link/it was not obvious to them. For example, one student asked if it was ok for her to speak up against Res rules.”

Nevertheless, some showed their ‘resistance’ (as it was interpreted by the HK and the RW) by their refusal to participate in certain activities, such as study time, SLS workshop attendance and engagement, or other residence-related activities. The data shows that the reason why students resisted SLS formation and not sangfees for instance, is because the SLS formation required them to move out of their comfort zones and required communication, presentation, problematising the residence culture and developing a voice, all of which are more challenging and perturbing than participating in a singing festival, for example. Students needed to learn these skills to
communicate effectively, but instead resorted to passive resistance, which is an implicit form of exerting power. It also creates safety in numbers. One of the implications for SLS formation is that better communication should be encouraged between students and residence management. Only within a climate of safety and trust can social spaces find fertile ground. However, effective communication is in the words of Wenger (1998), prefaced on the nature of the underlying values of the community of practice which shapes how participants in the community think and interact. Thus, even though he notes that these values are not fixed, they are the result of a particular history and tend to be linked to the values of the dominant members of the community. In the student residence environment these individuals are the RA’s, the senior students and the RW, who do not seem to value student voice and participation – thus the value of compliance with (often unwritten) rules dominates.

Perpetuating hegemonic and age-old practices and lack of training of RAs made the division of labour in the residence environment particularly problematic and created more tensions in the activity system. The RAs themselves, as products of this system, were unable to provide the academic and social support needed by students, as they saw their brief as dealing with disciplinary issues. In this way the RAs as senior students, who by implication have gained epistemological access to the discourse community of the university, were best placed to assist first year students. By adhering solely to their narrowly-defined brief to enforce discipline they lost the opportunity to take on the role of more-experienced peer (or old-timer in the language of CoP). Thus, the very people optimally placed to assist in the establishment of SLS did not seem to grasp the interplay between residence policies and procedures and the value of promoting collaborative learning.

Further, their concentration on student adherence to residence policy, such as silence during study time, meant that students were confused about the expectations of them during SLS sessions. The students were getting conflicting messages about what a SLS constituted. Senior residence management defaulted on their primary task in the residence environment. My role as practitioner researcher meant that I partly would have been the go-between in this respect but this did not materialise as I was restricted by residence rules and ways of working. So too, RAs were subjected to a confining
set of rules imposed by senior residence management. A host of tensions between the various levels of community and the division of labour within it existed. One such example is not addressing the confusion created by rules that govern activities including the division of labour (how it is divided or assigned). However, students were not entirely voiceless in this respect: at one point RAs received an ultimatum from students to choose between them and management. This ‘us versus them’ divide is indicative of how the residence rules determine power relations and work distribution (Engeström, 1987, 2001). Ultimately though, what I found in this investigation is that students’ contestation of other policies and practices, such as solitary and extended study time, expected participation in residence activities, etc. inadvertently led to student stress and anxiety, and may have negatively impacted academic results.

In addition, the residence RAs perpetuated practices that were not equitable and welcoming of a questioning stance. Eckert and Wenger (1994:2) argue that student institutional identity construction happens in the “day-to-day practice of learning to live within an institution”. Thus, if the practice is such that students are undermined, the practice itself is not conducive to agentic action. SLS requires a group of individuals to have “genuine interactions” in which they offer “experience of practice and their experience of themselves in that practice” (Wenger, 2009:3). These constructs refer to spaces where learners refine and expand their experience of practice through mutual engagement. This in essence requires a nurturing environment where students are encouraged to assume and nurture an identity of a well-rounded student, where students share their experiences and where socially negotiated learning occurs (Vygotsky, 1978). This was not possible in the context of the residence environment during this investigation where the students’ institutional identity became that of ‘follower of prescribed rules’, instead of collaborative peer (Johnson & Johnson, 2008).

These examples of student attributes, institutional culture and student voice (literal and pedagogic voice), amongst others allude to a mismatch between the workshop topics and what students actually needed to address. This, on the other hand could be attributed to a misjudgement on my part as facilitator. Taz, a student participant, for example, felt that workshop topics should revolve around grappling with residence life, in particular, getting along with a complete stranger and the pressures of being at
residence. Iman also pointed to topics focusing on the value of starting conversations about residence life. She expressed the view that SLS engagement should initially start with topics that are “more focused on getting people to be more comfortable”. On the other hand, the only way in which this came to the fore was through working in PAR mode in iterative cycles. In a PAR sense, it is often a case of going back before progressing; this is what characterises the success of PAR (Zuber-Skerrit, 1992) as methodology. It was only by establishing a rapport with students through the initial workshops that they felt comfortable with me to express their needs. Through the workshops, students managed to find voice. However, in tight time frames, such as the ones for this study, it is not always possible to go back and forth and implement the requisite changes; my involvement as researcher and participant ended before further cycles could be implemented or sustainability could be built in the residence environment. It is also one of the drawbacks of PAR (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006); with more time the activities in the establishment of SLS may have been more productive and valuable for the students.

Although getting students comfortable with university life was implicit in the formation and implementation of SLS, we (all stakeholders, including myself as AR practitioner) neglected to create the necessary conditions for students to engage optimally in SLS. The inequality of education students receive (CHE, 2010:6; Scott et al., 2007:42-43) accounts for the underprepared, institutional and academic identity displayed by students. For example, Fiffy, a Res X RA, expressed frustration at having to beg students to participate in residence activities, including those associated with SLS. She describes first year students as being more interested in parties than in their academic progress and development. This finding could point to a RA who has possibly forgotten what it was like to be a first year student living away from home for the first time, or it could point to skewed student priorities in terms of balancing academic studies and university responsibilities. My sense (confirmed by the data) is that it is a bit of both. The major problem was that university residence management and students took up polarised ‘positions’ and did not establish communication channels to enable them to meet in the middle and possibly compromise. This is one of the main findings of this study: neither residence management nor students discussed matters of concern to sufficiently enable SLS to take hold. Unfortunately,
this tension remained throughout the investigation despite my attempts to mediate a 'meeting-in-the-middle'.

The residence RA, Fiffy, was not entirely without an understanding of the students’ position at university. She also believed that students are not being encouraged to excel; instead the practice is that academic and residence staff bombard students with messages of failure. This is encapsulated in the quote from one of the RAs who reported the following: “It was a thing of if you don’t study you gonna fail, if you don’t do this you gonna fail … all I’ve heard is I’m gonna fail, I’m gonna fail, I’m gonna fail!” The endemic nature of hegemony is aptly illustrated by this example; RAs themselves had internalised this idea from their first years as students and by repeating it to the first years further entrenched the message of adhering to rules in order to avoid failure. According to the literature (see Van Zyl, 2012), indicators of student success include but are not limited to recognising human differences, espousing democratic values, encouraging collaborative problem solving by diverse groups, harnessing information literacy and having a clear sense of identity (Kuh et al., 2006:6). For students who are already facing many obstacles to success at university, inundation with negative messages that they are not coping can be disabling. It seems as if first year students have already internalised the message that if they do not study all the time, in the modes required by the RAs and the RW, they will fail. As this is tied to the implicit message students get about failure leading to a loss of placement in the residence, participating in activities associated with the establishment of SLS therefore takes second place. This in any case takes their time away from studying, which increases the risk of failure; students are caught in a non-productive cycle of time, stress, anxiety and powerlessness. Here tensions in one part of the activity system clashed with tensions in another part of the activity system – with the students as victims.

In my view, how students are socialised to think about, and the implicit and explicit messages they receive about failure at HEIs, does not encourage them to consider the process and continuous struggle involved in achieving success. Additionally, in the UJ context, the Vice Chancellor’s (Rensburg, 2013:online) promise of creating opportunities for students to ask questions and “find their own voice” becomes unattainable. The implication is that a flexible approach that values student voice and
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which includes the pursuit of creating safe spaces for such engagement is a recommendation. This would include questioning the role of university management, lecturers and support staff in student learning – what are we doing or not doing – herewith shifting the exclusive focus away from what the student is not doing. To be exact, I suggest a shift from a practice of blaming the student towards institutional and practitioner accountability.

Gaining support from family was an added challenge that students faced. Many students had placed financial strain on their families in order to keep them at university. They were thus under severe pressure to perform well academically. Many students – a third of students in this study – are the first in their families to attend university. Consequently, these students often hold in their hands and study the promise of social mobility for whole families and students therefore cannot afford to disappoint their families or cause any stress by admitting that they are not coping.

This is evident in Iman’s statement:

*It would be some form of a disappointment … it would be something that would rather cause a distress at home because now they’re worrying and you don’t, I know I don’t want that. I wouldn’t want to call my mother and be like I’m not coping, because I know she’ll be stressed.*

Both Nadia and Sophia admitted that despite their families being supportive, their families were not involved in their studies. By ‘family involvement’ I mean financial and social support (Van Zyl, 2012:19). Thus the need to succeed academically had to be balanced with the involvement in other residence activities and if students felt that these activities consumed too much of their time they would not participate. SLS were one such initiative. Students did not see it as a part of studying and learning integration, but as a burden or add-on, hence their disengagement. The implementation of SLS was not a priority. On the contrary, it was something that students perceived as a distraction from or even a threat to their studies. Using an activity theory lens, a contradiction in this set of findings is evident: on the one hand students reported that they benefitted through finding their voices in the workshops (as part of the SLS) but on the other hand they also saw the workshop activities taking them away from their study time. Overall, the dominance of the overall message: a) lack of studying leads to b) failure, which leads to c) losing a space in the residence
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directed students thinking and thus activities associated with SLS were regarded as secondary. Such were the practices, assumptions and attitudes within the SLS (SQ4)

A last issue was that of misalignment between the learning and socialisation practices of residence students and management. With the exception of one RA, residence management seemed to be out of touch with the new generation of students, the so-called ‘Generation Y’ students, who live their lives, find their voices and express their views through social media. RA2 recommended that the internet and computer access problem in the residence environment be addressed, so that learning could be made fun, since students “are into fun”. She felt that existing practices – such as students already using Facebook – should be considered in the promotion of SLS. The suggestion is therefore for the online implementation of activities to better engage students. However, the rest of the RAs, HK and RM did not share this sentiment and felt that the face-to-face issues should be addressed first before moving to an online space. This finding could point to residence management being too steeped in their established practices to recognise the need for new learning tools, spaces and practices. Thus, while academic staff in the university is being encouraged to integrate technology in their teaching - with all first year students using handheld devices - this did not seem to extend to the residence environment. A seamless movement between the formal university classroom and the living student spaces was not in place. This points to a definite tension between the activity system of the wider UJ academic environment where technology is an integral part of all first and second year courses and the activity system of the student residence with students getting conflicting messages about tool-mediated learning. The use of WhatsApp as an inexpensive mobile phone-based networking and discussion tool was perhaps something that I could have explored, but did not consider at the time of study.

To conclude this section, I propose a systemic approach to transforming spaces and practices. Issues such as unfair practices, deficient student identities and unequal distribution of power are not going to change if not tackled by the institution as a whole. Isolated, fragmented and nonaligned efforts may in fact exacerbate constraints, instead of enabling transformation. I suggest that Nussbaum’s (1997) cultivating humanity is needed, that is, an emphasis on critical examination of one’s own beliefs
and traditions, awareness of connections to others and empathic attitudes is essential. Here, when I use the word 'own', I refer to students, residence management and the institution itself. To think that a culture of humanity will lead to real change is perhaps idealistic and naïve, yet every effort in that direction could potentially provide a more enabling SLS for students. Similarly, promoting student voice on its own is not going to effect change. In my view, what is missing is an awareness of hegemony and the promotion of social justice or what Spivak (2014) calls democratic justice. The next section deals specifically with enablers and constraints that shaped SLS formation and conceptualisation.

5.2.2. ENABLERS AND CONSTRAINTS TO THE FORMATION OF SLS AT THE STUDENT RESIDENCE

Life at student residences is characterised by enablers as well as constraints. International studies conducted by Astin (1993), Chickering and Reisser (1993), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005:2958), Holdsworth (2006) and others show that in general, students in residences do better than day students. In the South African context, this is not necessarily the case, or if so, it is not well documented. In one of the few South African studies on student residences, Dunn (2013) cites American research findings which point to specific benefits of students living in residences. These benefits include having an added advantage due to increased interaction with faculty and fellow students and participation in extracurricular events. She uses this as a base to make a case for the LLL initiative at Stellenbosch University (see Section 2.2.6.3). However, the interventions and extended opportunities for interaction do not always enable learning and can sometimes constrain or even exacerbate problems. Unexpectedly, Dunn’s study (2013) found that increased interaction between students did not necessarily lead to a decrease in stereotyping and bias in the LLLC. Creating the physical space for students to interact does not inevitably lead to the formation of a community. Careful consideration of the conditions for the formation of effective and change-inducing SLS is thus required.

However, there is an argument that given the right conditions, SLS formation could be beneficial. A conclusion I draw from the interviews, together with informal discussions
with students, is that more students perceived the creation of SLS as an enabler of learning. Res Y_S1 testifies to this:

“'Cause when you're studying in a group there's more interaction and for me in the lecture I have – sometimes I walk out of a lecture and I have no clue what he was talking about. Because it's better when it's on a one-on-one basis, you have much more better understanding. And in the process of group work when you're explaining something to someone, in the process you also learn what's going on.”

However, despite this advantage, it was almost impossible to implement optimally in a residence system that was unable to provide the platform for the supportive, trusting, caring relationships needed to foster safe spaces for collaborative learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In my experience with the residence students, a safe space, as explained in chapter 2, is a space where students can make their voices heard and where flattened power relations occur. RA2’s view was, “It also helps doing it [learning and interacting] with people you are comfortable with”. It appears that there were differing views about what kind of structure and support were needed. Some RAs viewed the structure that they created as enabling, but in fact was experienced by students as constraining. Similarly, as researcher, what students described as enabling was in my view constraining. Thus, tensions exist between the subject – tool nodes in the activity system which are precursors to learning in the residence environment.

It appears that better communication and respect for differing views are needed to create the optimal conditions for the SLS to be effective. It is one of my main conclusions in the previous section. I address these issues in the next sections by discussing the impact of competing activities in the residence environment and the tension between residence-mandated authority and student voice on the establishment and implementation of SLS.

The complexity of competing activities in the residence environment seemed to pose a major constraint. Differing views existed regarding the compulsory residence activities. Res Y_S felt that residence activities constrained academic life. She says:
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“Also the thing kills us first years … res activities for first years like it gets – everything, almost everything is compulsory. So sometimes you sacrifice your study time … they’ll be like ‘we all have studies, so guys do it for your res.’ So I think that’s what we’re struggling with. ‘Cause we thought when we came to res, it was just a place to sleep and study, but now there’s activities, we don’t know where they’re coming from.”

Other students, however, recognised the need for a holistic education and well balanced university life and see the value of other residence activities for their own development.

Iman alludes to the importance of balancing residence activities and academics and says: “I thought it was good to create a balance uhmmm it doesn’t help just to come here and just be focused on academics you know, you’re a person you need to unwind that untapped potential”. Sophia says that academics should come first but “you can’t be focusing on only your academics”. The nature of the residence activities, however, constrained the academic practice and caused conflict with their engagement specifically in SLS. Interviewees reported that the cultural, social, leadership, sport and community engagement activities were good opportunities that enabled relationship building and a sense of connection and residence culture. This is a clear indication that some students have a more sophisticated understanding of what an institutional identity as university student constitutes than others. They are in the words of Eckhart and Wenger (1994:1) determining who they are, “what the institution is about, how it works, what it requires of one and one’s peers, what one’s place within it is and can be”. As these authors remind us “this knowledge can only be acquired and enacted in practice” – thus students can only learn this while they are students. Yet, students found the frequency of activities and investment of time in these quite daunting. Therefore, it seems that the five-pillar model (social, sport, art and culture, leadership and community engagement) was both an enabling and a constraining factor in the establishment of SLS. I suggest better alignment between such initiatives to ensure that students do not experience what could possibly be valuable initiatives – such as the formation of SLS – as a source of frustration and discontent. What turned out to be a major constraining factor was that students do not question the compulsory nature of these residence activities. This could relate to students’ lack of agency,
discussed earlier in this chapter, where practices become institutionalised in a residence environment and are no longer questioned, especially by first year students who are still new to university.

An additional constraining issue that shaped the learning environment in the residences was the division of labour which created a tension between residence mandated authority and student voice or agency. During the pre-study phase, Fify, Res X_R, Res X_HK, Res X_RA1 and Res X_RA2 expressed the view that students were perceived as resistant to being told what to do and this constrained working relationships. This resistance was in the form of students’ refusal to participate in activities and not speaking up against activities. This finding is evident in RA2’s words: “I was supposed to tell them, people you’re supposed to study. So most of them have that attitude of ‘you can’t tell me what to do’ … So with them it’s difficult to get them to do stuff.” This is indicative of the way in which the division of labour is organised in the activity system which can either be horizontally, (where everyone operates on an equal footing) or it can be vertically (hierarchically with inherent power differentials) (Engeström, 2001). In this residence, with its vertical (organisation of) the division of labour many tensions emerged. Students’ refusal to participate in residence activities could be attributed to greater agency on the part of some students, which found expression in a form of silent resistance. Their refusal to speak up was, to my mind, also resistance to the overt management and discipline practices and was possibly the only way students knew how to show resistance. RAs on the other hand felt that they were simply carrying out the RW’s orders, which in turn points to the RAs’ lack of agency. It appears that not only students lack agency, but also the RAs, who are, of course, themselves students, albeit more senior students. This finding points to a very hierarchical and power-laden setting, in the university environment with clearly established roles and responsibilities. The organisation of the division of labour thus constrained tool use (Engeström, 1987, 2001), namely the activities towards establishing SLS in this setting.

The intersection of a lack of communication and the presence of hierarchical power differentials served as a further constraint to the development of SLS. It was apparent that the implementation of SLS required an improvement in communication between
students and RAs and between RAs and researcher (even within the PAR methodology) and elements of tensions were becoming apparent. Res X RM contended that the SLS implementation was going smoothly and felt that perhaps students just needed more tutors to assist with academic support:

“…it [LCs] had a good impact because now they were actually able to say that to the groups that they did not understand such a thing and then it was explained and whoever knew something better than the other learners would say something and they’d discuss them and by that they were learning and were actually able to pass better compared to when – when they were studying alone, you know. And – uhm when I spoke to some of the first year’s now, wanting to find out, in terms of the academic program and the learning communities … what was missing. They just said that they only needed now tutors, in terms of all their subjects that they had problems with.”

It appears that this RM interpreted the students’ expression of their need for tutoring as a sign that students had voice and that the initiative to establish SLS was successful. However, RAs and students gave an entirely different account of their experiences. The issues mentioned in this chapter (see section 5.2), such as power differentials, compulsory residence activities, etc., signalled that things were not going as smoothly as the RM believed and the miscommunication between the RM, RAs and students possibly account for this. It could also point to the RM simply viewing things through her own lens, and seeing this as self-explanatory or normal, befitting her status as one of the dominant members of the community (see Wenger, 1998) without sufficiently engaging with and listening to first year residence students. Another area in need of better communication is between students and the researcher regarding the implementation of SLS. Students did not know how to interact during the group discussions and RAs on the other hand did not know exactly what their role entailed. As researcher and practitioner, reflection on theory/practice integration should have occurred much earlier, and not only at the end, through engaging conversations with students. I thus question whether I assumed too much and whether I did not pose the right questions in the first two cycles. On the other hand I had very little power in the activity system and was subject to the conditions set by the RW. Also, despite my best efforts to include the RAs in the workshops, they kept to their roles as enforcers of discipline and mostly took student attendance. Their inability to explicate their roles in the process beyond that of disciplinarian and engage separately
with me and the students in the workshops was an indicator that they identified strongly with the regulatory and compliance framework operating in the residence. This is typical of environments where hegemony is entrenched and resonates with Brookfield’s (2005:44) claim that “Adults take pride in learning and acting on the beliefs and assumptions that work to enslave them. In learning diligently to live by these assumptions, people become their own jailers.”

**5.2.3. TOWARDS NEGOTIATED SPACES AND PRACTICES: INVOLVING MULTIPLE ROLE PLAYERS IN STUDENT RESIDENCE LIFE**

In this section I specifically address SQ 4 but also touch on the other sub-questions. Institutional culture often does not allow students to live in each other’s spaces (negotiated, collaborative spaces and practices). Instead, individualistic practices and approaches abound. As this case study has shown, institutional as well as expansive transformed spaces and practices are desirable as optimal conditions to foster SLS formation. Interview data from Iman, Cheryl and others attests to the need for a transformed space and practice in the UJ residences, and possibly to a transformed institutional and wider HEI landscape. One example hereof is the students’ mention of the prevalence of competition rather than collaborative, mutually-beneficial working relationships among students. Cheryl, throughout her interview, alludes to the competitive nature of students, how students often selfishly promote their own progression, sometimes at the expense of others. She seemed quite bothered by this and questioned how this attitude worked in the quest to establish SLS.

I attribute this finding to the conflicting nature of what students learned at school and in the university classroom versus what I tried to convey in the workshops regarding collaborative goals, *Ubuntu* and striving for a common humanity (SQ 3). The competitive spirit, so often encouraged at both school and in many university classrooms, means students internalise this ethic and cooperation is not prioritised. In my view, discussions with students need to be initiated in order to problematise the value of competition versus cooperation at institutional level, as well as at academic and support faculty levels. However, there does seem to be a double message in UJ’s drive to be in the top Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings which is accompanied by a push for increased research output and alliances with top
international universities, which filters down through faculties to students. At the time, as a UJ staff member, I witnessed how students unconsciously imbibed the messages of competition with others for success and status, especially where UJ residences compete with each other and with other university student residences. Thus on the one hand, we talked a language of cooperation in SLS, but on the hand students get both implicit and explicit messages that competition is something worth pursuing.

Incorporating ontological considerations in SLS formation involves viewing learning as not only being in students’ heads or minds, but encompasses the integration of knowing, acting and being located in an array of practices (Dall’ Alba & Barnacle, 2007:683). Hence, who students are and who they become shape how they ultimately interact with others. The issue of personal gain versus collective gain seems to be paramount in students’ minds. Cheryl suggests that a more prominent focus on Ubuntu as a workshop topic could perhaps help students work towards the collective good of the residence community, and move them away from a predominantly individualistic focus. In other words, she identifies the pursuit of collaboration as an enabler of SLS. To this end, Iman’s suggestion is that the initial focus of the workshops should be on “getting people to be more comfortable” and pointing out where students can find support services. Students, through the process of PAR, have gained voice; Iman’s and others’ views are an indication of what they think should be foregrounded in establishing SLS. Although this did not extend to outside the small grouping of the workshops, I argue that this should not necessarily be considered a failure of this study as it did establish the beginnings of social learning spaces with these students. However, as facilitator my concern is what happens when I leave. In PAR literature (see Whitehead & McNiff, 2007, ZuberSkerrit, 1992) successful interventions are measured against sustainability in the system. Based on the findings of this study I doubt whether sustainability has been achieved.

Most importantly, the confusion about roles in the residence environment was extremely problematic for SLS formation. Fiffy, from her position as student and RA (disciplinarian), speaks volumes about the challenge of getting tutors or senior students to assist the first year students. They were not prepared to take on the role of more experienced peer (Vygotsky, 1978) as envisioned by me and the first year
students in the workshops on SLS. Drawing from the literature on CoPs I would postulate that RAs and senior students, having once been newcomers (first years) who have had to go through a similar process of legitimate peripheral participation in the residence community are now considered to be the old-timers in this community (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The values and ways of doing that they have learned to identify with are not necessarily the drivers of change in this community. Thus, they see no reason to change the way things are; their roles are as enforcers of discipline and a culture of compliance. The residence environment is to my mind a classic example of a static learning community where there is little or no space to question rules, or change “perspectives and locations” as actors (Lave & Wenger, 1991:95). This confusion about roles was partly to blame for the lack of communication and cooperation in the formation of SLS in the activity system of the student residence. It was also to blame for the tensions that arose within the system. For instance, the rules mediate the subject learning within the community; likewise the division of labour mediates the object of establishing social learning spaces within the community. A truly transformative activist stance, where subjects or actors are involved in “collaborative purposeful transformation of the world” (Stetsenko, 2008:471), seems to be missing. This I argue needs to be deliberately created in the residence environment. It implies clarifying roles and then working with a clear agenda towards purposeful, collaborative engagement.

This study has shown that as noble as the intention of policy decisions at management level are, without the attention to the peculiarities and life-worlds of students in the residence, there is little interrogation and little real ownership of initiatives. Intervention from Student Affairs into student residence life and the practices and processes within is vital, especially since its purpose in a university (internationally and nationally) is to support all student related aspects of university life. In South Africa generally, Student Affairs divisions are responsible for the development and support of students in respect of student residences, student health, student governance etc. While I propose a shift towards transformative practices, I acknowledge that residence managers will not shift independently and Student Affairs intervention is needed. This shift, I argue, cannot be directed but has to be negotiated and mediated. The institutional history of each residence reflects a value system that permeates practices and rules within it. I
question in the discussion why the value system has not changed. This tension in the division of labour negatively impacted the implementation of SLS in the student residence.

From a student perspective, Iman’s reference to the RAs being challenged by the first year students to “choose whose side you’re on” is indicative of the kinds of tensions that exist in the activity system. This is a point I will pick up on later in the discussion. Iman in her interview views the RAs’ role as having to “enforce res culture”. By this she means abiding by established rules. She acknowledges that this requires a firm attitude, but expresses the view that their role should be facilitative rather than punitive. Most telling is that she doesn’t question where the rules arise, just the way in which they are enforced, illustrating that hegemony (Brookfield, 2005) and power relations are inherent in our everyday activities (Foucault, 1983). Her interview data, in particular, questions the role of RAs in the residence, but she is not able to articulate, based on her needs, a different role for them.

Despite having the position of RA, not all of these students were able to act as mediators of learning. The position is assigned based on seniority attached to a particular role, such as enforcing discipline. Thus the view of learning I was promoting with students was at odds with the view of learning held by the RAs. I favoured collaborative engagement drawing on Vygotsky’s (1978) view (that we learn best with others) while the RAs seemed to subscribe to an individualistic or ‘banking model’ (Freire, 1970:72), view of learning. In my researcher field notes I observed Res Y RAs getting upset with students for engaging actively with discussions in the workshops. This implies that RAs saw students’ active engagement and making their voices heard as impudent and audacious. They too need to be reminded that celebrating student agency and voice is required to optimise student learning and SLS formation. The intentions of the workshop towards establishing SLS thus did not meet with the overarching residence culture. I thus question to what extent there was real interest from the residence management in investing in the establishment of social learning spaces and how much was simply to comply with a directive from Student Affairs to do so. I also question how this relates to the UJ culture as exemplified in the values that the institution talks about: student participation, academic excellence and
empowerment. Some critical questions I would ask include: Who drives the UJ values? How do the residence environments internalise these? Perhaps Soudien (2013) is right in saying that we are not clear enough about what needs to be transformed. There was a general ambivalence among some of the students about how the residence environment was organised and how it affected their identity and development as students. While most of the first year students seemed perturbed about the forced nature of study time as well as compulsory participation in cultural and social events, they still saw the value of getting a well-rounded, holistic education. This highlights how important it is to look beyond the surface impressions in the data of students as disinterested and uninvolved. They recognise that to get ahead in society other areas of personal development are also required. To my mind it is indicative of a more sophisticated view of life and the role of academic study to their lives than the residence managers give them credit for.

Thus, although first year students perhaps have not gained full epistemological access they show sophisticated thinking in recognising that a holistic education also allows access to success in life. There were, however, a few exceptions. For instance, Taz (an 18 year old, Economics and Financial Science student, a bursary holder, studying to improve her job opportunities and who studied 10-15 hours per week in the previous year) felt that the residence activities sometimes made her feel as if her purpose for being at university had been compromised. She resented being forced to focus on social and cultural activities at the expense of her academic studies. This is understandable given her work ethic and financial constraints. Iman also articulated a feeling of despair at her identity as a varsity student being negatively impacted on. These students thus seemed to be questioning the mixed messages they were getting about being a successful university student. In part the responsibility should be laid at the doors of Residence management for not listening to students about the pressures facing them. On another level it could also be laid at my door, as participant researcher. I ask myself if I spent sufficient time on preliminary work to understand the residence culture and whether I should have taken on a more assertive role in the process of this study. The latter are the dilemmas facing participatory action researchers in real life settings (see Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002; Zuber-Skerritt, 1992).
That students are not allowed to critique residence activities and its impact on their academic success makes a travesty of the university’s quest to prepare future critical thinking graduates. In the UJ context, if the vision of the Vice Chancellor to teach students to question and speak up is to be realised, then residence policies and practices must align with the institution’s educational purposes and objectives. This is an issue that Kuh et al. (2005:261) take up, when they argue that student success requires a culture that values educational achievement (ibid:273). UJ champions student success, but since policies, practices and values, especially in the residence environment – such as leadership, excellence, respect for one another, agency, student voice and communication – are misaligned with this goal, transformation of practices cannot be attained or if attained at all, will not be sustained. Furthermore, the discriminatory measures against first year students to get them to conform to residence practices, while minimising student voice and ignoring power hierarchies, represent a mismatch with a progressive position. I would argue that a change in residence culture is required if sustained transformation is to be attained.

The notion of “sensing restlessness”, as posited by Kuh et al. (2005:275), refers to a need to have a reflective practice where constant improvement seeking is valued. Such a viewpoint is in line with a CHAT perspective that values transformation driven by contradictions (Barab et al., 2002; Engeström, 2001; Roth & Lee, 2007). The findings of this study testifies to a need for openness to revising workshops, renegotiating what support is offered and by whom, and the use of appropriate tools for learning (SQ 1). For example, regarding the workshops, or more specifically, the topics addressed, the reflectivity it encouraged enabled both participants and me as facilitator to suggest change in the selection and focus of topics. This is the power of reflection and change within a PAR methodology, which could be used to greater effect in establishing SLS in the residence environment in future cycles. Thus important points for reflection are: Who reflects, with whom and in what fashion? How does the separation in the activity system between the various hierarchical layers devalue the reflective process and the learning from it? What would have been the ideal so that role players could learn from the reflections without being naïve?
5.2.4. THE VALUE OF TENSIONS AS A TRANSFORMATIVE CATALYST IN THE ACTIVITY SYSTEM OF THE STUDENT RESIDENCE

The value of tensions in an activity system relate to its transformational nature. Thus, transformation or change is cultivated by means of contradictions or tensions in an activity (SQ 2). Using a CHAT theoretical lens as a thinking tool enabled me to see the factorised players at play in the activity system of the student residence. From this view, it could be argued that my involvement in the activity system with all interventions to establish SLS greatly challenged all the components of the status quo of the system. *Rules* such as the established rules (both explicit and inexplicit) that study time was a solitary activity performed in silence were described. Positions of power within the *division of labour* in the community were challenged as some students gained voice or engaged in a form of passive resistance. Looking at and my moving between the activity system of UJ and the activity system of the student residence, the disequilibrium resulted. This resulted in some individuals mostly first year students, (but also some RAs and senior students) experiencing discomfort as their existing views of reality and their personal roles were challenged.

Thus by gazing on the student residence (Res Y) as an activity system it appears that all the heuristic elements of an activity system (Engeström, 2001) namely, the history of the acting *subjects* and of the *community*, the *tools* (and signs), the *rules*, the *division of labour* and *community*, the *subject* of the activity towards the *object* were both affected and in turn affected the establishment of SLS.

According to Engeström (2006:29):

> Breaking away may now be tentatively defined as resolving or escaping a contradictory situation by means of constructing mediating artefacts that enable the subjects to master their own actions in a qualitatively new way...when you break away, you also break something, a constraining rule, a limiting boundary or constraining relationship.

Ultimately in the residence environment, there was not much leverage to break away, although some (two or three) students formed their own LCs outside of the residences (prior to the intervention). It appears that SLS formation can occur organically in some
instances (as in Wenger’s earlier literature), but for the most part needs some intervention and deliberate creation. Importantly, the findings in this study point to contradictions leading to further tensions or contradictions and not necessarily change or transformation, that is, “escaping of a contradictory situation” (Engeström, 2006:29). As Langemeyer (2006:online) argues, “To find a ‘solution’ often means confronting new contradictions. Thus, the process of change is likely to be contradictory itself”. The tensions in the present study are numerous and located at and between the various nodes of the activity system. In this section, I discuss some of the tensions (SQ 2) and how, in some instances, they contribute to a changed practice and/or perspective and in others not. I also show how they, in some cases, pointed to new contradictions.

5.2.4.1. Subject-Tool-Object Tensions

Primarily, what emerged from the findings of the individual stories constructed from the interview data is that students (subjects) found the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS (object) vague at first and sometimes even problematic. The reasons for these were addressed in part in the discussion in section 5.2.2. The majority of Res Y first year students (subjects) did not see the immediate value of the tool (workshops and discussions) in forming SLS (object) to transform the learning environment (outcome). I find some comfort in the work of Wenger’s (2002) who claims that value is often not realised immediately and in some cases may only occur sometime after the application of the idea. It also resonates with the higher education literature, as for most of the students there was little expressed benefit at the beginning. However, in some cases there was more reflectivity and greater agency, accompanied by an expression of student-directed needs. In PAR methodology this points to success (however limited): development occurs over time with reflection and support. This finding is also confirmed by Wenger’s (1998) argument that LCs develop over time. Another study that confirmed this argument is Petersen and Merckel's (2013) one where they found that the realisation of value in learning new ways of operating at university is often delayed and must be accompanied by support.
Fortunately, some students came to see the worth of SLS for academic, personal and social development and could apply the SLS principles to their daily academic activities. Evidence of the enabling nature of the tension is found in Iman’s words, when she relates how she began to change her view of group work and applied what she had learned in the implementation phase of the SLS workshops sessions (tool) when she was required to do a group assignment:

“I still didn’t see how it could be beneficial to me because as an individual, I happen to be one of those people who don’t like working in groups. I prefer working independently … but then later as we reviewed more assignments and tasks to do we were then mandated to work with people which was a bit of an uncomfortable experience for me and it was when I could put my knowledge that was given or provided with into practice.”

This verbatim quote is indicative of her developing reflective stance. The findings indicate that students appear to be on a continuum, with some farther along in terms of epistemological access and growing academic thinking than others, and thus the tensions affect them differently. Nadia also alluded to the enabling nature of the workshop activities in learning to establish SLS when she says: “It [SLS workshops] taught me a lot about speaking out and different personalities that we have … in terms of having confidence as well; [to] be able to speak in class.” In these two students, the tensions did not impede their learning and functioning in the academic environment. Both Nadia and Iman were mature students (21 year olds) who are perhaps more focussed on their studies and achieving academic success.

The shifts in participant stories from vagueness to realisation of value are quite significant and occurred over an extended period, resonating with Stetsenko’s (2008:483) “historical becoming”, which refers to one’s being (including identity) developing over stretches or periods. I would add that the shift was located in students’ cultural and social contexts (Engeström, 1987; Wenger, 1998:79), that is, the life histories that they brought with them to university (Roth, 2012:99) which shaped their interaction (see Section 5.2.1). For example, the student profile survey results showed that students did not have a clear understanding of the requirements of time and input normally associated with university studies, nor perhaps the intrinsic motivation for pursuing studies. As I have already argued, these findings could partly account for the
so-called disinterest of students or may simply point to students having misunderstood the requirements to gain epistemological access (Morrow, 2007) as first year students to higher education. That we (residence management and university academic staff) as custodians of the students did not do more to ameliorate this situation is sobering; I am also mindful of the part I played (or not) as PAR researcher in this process.

Some students (Iman, Nadia, Taz, Tamzin, Sophia and Fiffy) displayed peripheral participation or social engagement (Wenger, 1998), as explained in Section 1.4. With the exception of Cheryl, I argue that given a chance and perhaps more time, learning communities (with workshops as intervention) could enable first year students to cope better with university demands (Tinto, 2012:location 795). This finding is evident in Nadia’s words: “I feel they [workshop topics] were proper, because now you learn communication skills, you know how to speak, you gain confidence like that, that’s where you start.” Other students expressed similar sentiments as is evident in Sophia’s words:

“Ja I think it [SLS workshops] helped us because we got to relate and talk, like more used to one another so that maybe if you have a problem in your studies whatever, you won’t hesitate to go to someone else doing the same course and say hey I need your help … We bonded type of thing.”

The potential for cultivating SLS lies in these students recognising what they need, where they get the knowledge from and how they become active agents in their own learning. This in my view is a beginning point to where they are enabled to move toward full participation in SLS. This is not something that can be imposed on students through specific interventions or tools alone but requires appropriate tools in combination with sufficient time, a nurturing/enabling environment and openness to disagreement or contestations.

On the other hand, the investigation also revealed practices contrary to establishing a real LC (SQ 4). For example, Cheryl showed signs of being part of a pseudo group (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Wheelan, 2005) – a group that is ordered to collaborate, but where members do not trust each other (see Cheryl’s transcript, Addendum F). A pseudo group, being a dysfunctional form of a /SLS, can potentially do more harm
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than good (Wenger, 2004). Further, if the community does not have a shared sense of community and trust, it will not flourish (Wenger, 1998, 2004). Thus, in conceptualising SLS, it is important to note the lack of trust amongst community members as a constraint in implementation efforts. Where this becomes murky is in trying to sort out where the tensions originated in the residence politics interfering with the intervention. The value of the intervention may have become conflated with student irritation at residence politics. It also leaves me in somewhat of a quandary in evaluating the success of the interventions; students may simply have complied with the interventions towards establishing SLS to keep the peace.

5.2.4.2. Tensions associated with Community

In terms of the tensions between the subject and the community, it is evident that students had issues with ‘community’ support in terms of academic assistance and adjustment to university life. Iman expressed a fear of going to her family for help, as they had high expectations of her and she was afraid of disappointing them by informing them that she was not coping academically. In turn, she put pressure on herself to succeed academically. She therefore wanted the RAs to play a more supportive role in assisting her in coping at university. The knock on effect of under preparedness for university life in turn creates more tensions. However, RAs were not in a position to assist. Established rules and division of labour in the community and in the wider activity system was so entrenched; even when things did not work, they were simply repeated in the residence environment from one year to the next. From my informal discussions with the RAs, it seemed that they themselves were so overwhelmed with maintaining discipline, helping seniors and coping with their own studies that they were not quite sure how to be supportive towards first year students. Perhaps one solution lies in integrating FYE initiatives into coursework - like the faculty of education at UJ has done. See for example De Beer, Petersen & Dunbar-Krige, (2012). This way the initiative has an epistemological home, which helps to create cohesion and integration with other curriculum components. The nature of the rules within the community created further tensions between other actors in the activity system – for example other possible roles were not even considered for the RAs. The value of this study is that it made these explicit. In this sense it is a contribution on a practical and policy-related level within the UJ environment.
Furthermore, tensions in the community were exacerbated by the lack of support from seniors. Although ideally placed to assist first year students, they did not. This was largely as a result of a lack of communication between the occupants of the environment. When Fiffy (an RA) tried to initiate it, she was told by the senior students that if they were not going to get paid they would not assist. For example, Fiffy says:

“…when we were asking them, it’s the thing of okay, am I gonna get paid? No you kinda doing that for free. And it’s like nah, I’d rather not, well I’ll go waste my time on my own studies rather than helping someone else.”

It seems that despite being seniors they have not learned how to be part of a learning community themselves. I question whether they have really gained epistemological access to the academic community and its practices? The sense of togetherness and community we tried to create in the residence environment thus failed partly because it did not incorporate the other more senior students. Establishing SLS in student residences is not only about creating academic and social LCs among first year students, but should ideally involve all residence occupants and managers. Unfortunately, within the strict timeframe of the FYE project and the parameters set by the residence warden for my work with the students, I was confined to working with the first year students only.

The tensions in the community affected students in different ways. For Sophia, who specifically needed guidance and support with regard to cultivating a student identity, this directly impacted her enculturation into university. Her expectations were that the residence staff would take over her parents’ role of giving advice and managing her time for her. As a first year student, she was unaccustomed to freedom and managing her time effectively. Her fear was that she and other students like her would abuse their privileges and fall behind with their academic work. For such students, the situation is precarious; they mostly drop out or fail. She and other students like her were already struggling with establishing a successful student identity and their response to my efforts to work with them in SLS formation was within this frame: it was just another activity that took them away from the little time they had for studying or for social activities. They were not able to engage. Using the lens of CHAT, it was
clear that the tensions between the subject and the community, together with their divergent motives, which Roth and Lee (2007) claim are often a source of tension, constrained SLS interaction towards SLS even further.

Additionally, while students at the residences engaged in the same tasks (those of working towards acquiring degrees and diplomas, or as the student profile revealed, working towards improved job prospects), this did not necessarily constitute a community (Wenger, 2004). To enable community formation, students must have opportunities for mutual interactions where everyone will benefit (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The formation of SLS can be facilitated by making the necessary resources available, such as technological infrastructure, support teams, clarifying explicit member roles and ensuring dedicated time for collaboration. It is possible that by fostering a community that is more supportive, where everyone’s roles are made explicit, SLS formation will be enhanced. However, even when all or most of these resources are available, community formation, as per Wenger’s notions of CoPs, is not guaranteed. What has thus emerged from this investigation is that SLS formation is complex and can definitely not be viewed as a quick fix for student academic success (SQ 1). It is part of an integrated suite of activities.

Wenger (1998) suggests three practices that lead to coherent communities: mutual engagement (where meaning is negotiated), a joint enterprise (involving negotiated responses and interpretations) and a shared repertoire (shared ways of doing things). In the study using PAR methodology and introducing the workshops, I hoped to create a partnership with residence management. The participant observations as well as student interviews indicated strained relationships, where some voices overshadowed others, where collegiality was not always practiced and where a common understanding of residence expectations and practices was absent. The impact of this on SLS in relation to community tensions is that strained relationships prevented a shared repertoire where negotiated meaning was valued. Instead, students’ silenced voices led to imposed meaning and artificial exchanges. I see this as a platform for future learning provided it is taken forward from this base without assigning blame and with an openness by authorities to cultivate what is required.
5.2.4.3. Rules-Related Tensions

An examination of tensions showed them to be related to all types of rules in the residence environment activity system and revealed that power was the foundation of many of the problematic issues. Implicit and expressed rules in the residence environment, in my view, were primarily responsible for constraining the formation of SLS. For example, from my interviews and informal chats with students, it was evident that students were well aware that the commonly accepted residence practice (an implicit rule) was that students’ participation in activities would secure their place in the residence the following year. Securing a place at residence was particularly important for poor students who wanted safe, affordable, subsidised housing. This meant that this ‘rule’, however implicit, virtually coerced students into ‘toeing the line’ and making choices between other residence activities, such as participating in the sangfees and the workshops to establish SLS.

Another implicit rule related to the ambiguities implied in the privileges afforded to students in terms of room selection (see Fiffy’s transcript, Addendum G). Participation in residence activities led to increased opportunities for getting desired rooms, thus being an enabler of participation in residence activities. However, residence rules also specifically constrained engagement in academic activities (SQ 2). For example, students were required to show their allegiance through participation in particular residence activities, often to the detriment of everything else, especially academic work. As a result, some students only participated in residence and SLS activities so that they could be seen to be involved and thus secure future block placement. This could account for the peripheral SLS formation and in one instance the pseudo community as proposed by Wheelan (2005) and Whitelaw, de Beer and Henning (2009). In a next cycle, it is possible that students could abandon the SLS work, as they would have secured their place in residence as second year students and would no longer need to show their involvement in residence activities.

A third example was with respect to residence-mandated competitions and events with a social or cultural focus. Through these activities, UJ student residences gained recognition and honour. In my view, this serves as an enabler of a sense of community and belonging for the residence and to a certain degree for the students. However,
students are often expected to skip classes so that they could continue practising, thereby constraining their academics success (coursework). What is very surprising for me is that university lecturers, in an effort to accommodate the residences, would allow students to skip classes (Taz testifies to this in her interview) thereby colluding in practices that can lead to student failure. It is not surprising that students do not interrogate these hegemonic practices, but simply accept these practices as the-way-things-have-always-been-done in the residence – they do not know any better. This, in my view, is highly problematic. Students are getting conflicting messages and their success at university is compromised. These kinds of practices do not allow students to develop agency and also leads to disgruntlement and frustration. My critical voice begs questions such as: Is there a shared view of what enculturation of students into academia entails? Are there tensions in the activity system of the university? What messages are implicitly sent by the UJ top management in celebrating the achievements without fully understanding the costs to students that it encompasses? It is thus no surprise that SLS formation was compromised. What is required is consensus and cooperation (Habermas, 1984:86) so that students as well as the institution benefit. Hence, reciprocal relationships, characterised by mutual respect and common goals, are needed. While admirable it comes at a cost. Thus, although there is student support particularly at first year level with intensive programmes for academic support via for instance tutors etc., if it doesn’t fully incorporate the residences then to question whether this is possible in the climate of competition currently being pursued by UJ.

The historical aspect of how the residence environment and interactions within this activity system came to be in its current form is fundamental to promoting the formation of SLS (Edwards, 2012:23; Engeström, 1987; Roth & Lee, 2007; Stetsenko, 2008). Historically, perhaps due to the practices in the former ‘mother’ institutions, RAs - developed over many years - have been required to be disciplinarians, where they police students and report non-cooperation and noncompliance with rules to the RM so that students could be dealt with appropriately (normally in the form of warnings and fines). Thus, RAs acted chiefly as disciplinarians and this further compromised students’ efforts to fit in with academic study and residence life. Even when it became evident that a changing role was necessary – academic support, tutoring and
mentoring was sorely needed – RAs found it difficult to shift roles. This shift should also be mediated as they cannot shift roles on their own. They are now the old-timers in the system (Lave & Wenger, 1991) perpetuating practices. The implications of changing roles relates to learning new skills, losing power and prestige, and possibly losing authority – all powerful reasons to keep the status quo.

As part of my researcher notes in line with a PAR methodology, I was able to observe and understand the difficulty first year residence students experienced at the RAs inability to shift roles. For instance, Iman mentioned that things ‘came to a head’ when first year students challenged RAs to choose between them and management. This could be indicative of students developing agency or it could signal a number of responses to the initial workshops towards establishing SLS in the residence. One was that students were developing agency and had learned to speak up or simply that they had had enough and were rebelling. Unfortunately, it seems from my informal discussions with students that no useful solutions were found which could mean that such a practice will keep repeating year after year (SQ 3).

This lead to the creation of ‘them’ and ‘us’ relationships in the residence environment and was another major tension that constrained interactions, and, which in turn, impacted negatively on SLS formation. These relationships, stemming from historical practices to establish positions of power and seniority, were so entrenched that they were practiced without a thought to the divisions they caused. In turn, first year students submitted to these in an effort to fit in or because the practices had become normalised in the residence. This is established hegemony (Giroux, 1998) and unless addressed impacts negatively on the residence environment. Two examples illustrate the established hegemony: one student related her experience as a first year student having to step out of a lift to allow RAs to use the lift first, irrespective of who was in the lift first and irrespective of whether the student had an urgent appointment. Another was about an initiation practice where RAs ordered first year students to stand under a cold fountain in the early hours of the morning and first year students were too afraid to complain, so they simply endured it. This finding points to a South African history of oppression and abuse because of silence and hegemony which we cannot afford to repeat (SQ 3). I argue that the policies may be fair and just and may uphold the values
of the country’s constitution, but it is in what happens on the ground that one will see manifestation of the values of the constitution.

CHAT theorists, such as Engeström (2012:3894) and Daniels (2004:189), posit that power relations are identifiable and recognisable between multiple nodes of one activity system and between multiple activity systems. Students (subjects) are thus part of multiple activity systems (students as actors in residence activities, students as actors in academic programmes, students as first time entering students, whose families and communities depend on them for social mobility, students who are bursary holders and scholarship recipients, etc.). Tensions arise when one activity monopolises students’ time and daily functioning (such as study time) at the expense of other, slightly less or equally essential activities (such as participation in SLS) in an activity system. Tensions also arise between the FYE pilot project (this study) to cultivate and implement SLS (object) through workshops or group discussions (tool) as it is in direct competition with the Student Affairs initiative to facilitate academic excellence in student residences (through using study time as a tool). Essentially, students were torn between using the time to study (so as to meet the goal of Student Affairs) and engaging in workshops (to mediate the formation of SLS); students become the victims of the contradictions within this process. Such a contradiction is what Engeström (2001:135) call as quaternary contradiction between two linked systems.

There needs to be better alignment between various essential activity systems of which students are a part. This will assist in making an already tense transition to university easier for students. At all times students’ needs (especially first year students’ needs) should be prioritised. In future work, I recommend that the FYE coordinator, Student Affairs (including residence management) and students set up a committee to monitor who is doing what, so as to bring these various initiatives together. As Keup (2001:25) has suggested, effective change efforts result from planning of initiatives that are “open, participative, aligned with campus culture and goals and long-term”.
5.3. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONCEPTUALISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SLS

The findings of this study result from an attempt to investigate how the establishment and implementation of SLS evolved and shaped the learning environment of a student residence. The combined findings of the pre-study phase and the findings that emerged after the implementation phase analysis, point to an intersection of the data sets.

An overarching theme that emerged across the identified themes is the importance of student identity in making the transition from school to university. In this respect, I find the work of Wenger (1998) and Baxter Magolda (2004) useful to guide my thinking. These authors assert that the formation of student identity includes a shift in students’ epistemological assumptions (beliefs about self, learning, classroom instruction and domain-specific beliefs). Baxter Magolda (2004:31) contends that “epistemological transformation is a shift to a more complex set of epistemological assumptions rather than the acquisition of particular learning strategies or skills”.

This study has shown that since students have not sufficiently shifted to more complex assumptions about themselves and their learning, the formation of SLS was impacted in negative ways. Students preferred to concentrate on a form of studying which centres on reading and memorising the subject content, rather than making meaning collaboratively. Students also attributed their inability to excel academically to a lack of study skills, writing skills and time management skills, all of which are technical skills. Almost all the data point to students’ lack of metacognitive thinking about their epistemological assumptions, learning styles and successful transition from school to university. Students give very little thought (or perhaps have not learned how to think about) how learning takes place and how they learn best. Thus, they have not made the epistemological shift required to succeed in higher education. Iman is the exception in this regard. Her epistemological assumption that “studying is not just a matter of you reciting things over and over, it’s a learning process” is evidence that she has managed to shift to more complex assumptions about learning. This is probably a result of her being an Education student and therefore being exposed to learning theories in her study programme. This may also account for her being able to
apply what she had learned during the workshops in her collaborative assignment that she had to do as part of her (course) learning activities. The challenge is how to move all students towards the appropriate epistemological shifts required for them to succeed as university students. A further issue is how this should be facilitated and who should take responsibility for this.

Regarding student and residence practices it was apparent that context was key to the formation of SLS. The historical, cultural and social backgrounds of both students as subjects and residences as learning spaces determined how SLS formation evolved. Because of the cultural and social practices at Res Y, students were obligated to focus on established and, in my view, technicist practices that were in line with the five-pillar model, often to the detriment of cultivating a SLS or an academic space. The historical nature of students' previous academic practices and how they have been schooled to be passive recipients of knowledge determined how they perceived learning. It is a real pity that the first few months of university education did not sufficiently address this gap in student learning. Again, it is unclear to me if there is a conscientious plan on the part of the academic units and structures to deliberately inculcate these habits of mind in students.

The formation of SLS was thus seen by students as an unwelcome interruption to their learning and residence activities. Fortunately, most students were willing to engage (even if only minimally) in the aspect of collaborative learning that was introduced in the residence space. This engagement was challenging for students, since it meant that they were taken out of their comfort zones of passive knowledge consumption to a space where they had to actively engage in learning. It was only after an extended period of work in the initiative to establish SLS that some students began to see the value of SLS. Unfortunately, I have witnessed that the shift was not significant enough and that much remains to be done to get more students to make permanent shifts toward active, collaborative learning spaces and practices.

While acknowledging that spaces and practices need a transformative approach, I assert that all stakeholders also needed to be clear about which aspects required transformation (Soudien, 2010). It emerged that the residence rules, together with an
associated residence policy-practice divide, need serious revision. Further, cultivating equitable relationships entails re-examining the division of labour, so that the power imbalances and inequities that constrain participation and engagement are addressed. Last but not least, community building was seen as crucial in the formation of SLS, where a community entails reciprocal relationships that harness shared ways of seeing, doing and being. A detailed programme towards this end is necessary for optimal SLS establishment.

5.4. THE CONTRADICTORY NATURE OF CHANGE
This study was conducted to see how the creation and implementation of SLS shaped the learning environment of first year residence students. The changes that resulted from the pre-study implementation proved to be extremely valuable in terms of making informed choices regarding the design of the case study. PAR as methodology was particularly useful in identifying constraints and then moving forward and effecting the necessary changes. However, the case study findings suggest that certain institutional constraints remained. Instead of seeing this manifestation as failure or lack of development, I suggest that an open mind to constant change is required. I argue that the process of change itself remained highly conflicted; it required a need to go beyond daily tasks and activities; to a change in culture – changing the way things are done – in the residences in particular, but also in the wider institutional culture. If residences as physical spaces can foster an attachment (become home to its residents), the university and what it has to offer will potentially become part of student identity (Kuh et al., 2005:283). Essentially, student residences could become the hubs of student or academic success and distinction. In part, it requires a mindset that values constant change – where change is seen as contradictory but necessary.

5.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS
From my perspective, the conceptualisation and/or implementation of SLS was extremely difficult and contentious. It was not a mere matter of creating spaces for collaborative learning, but entailed a change in residence culture, a change in epistemological assumptions and a change in policies and procedures that were often out of my control as employee, participant and researcher. From the findings of this study, it became quite evident that even after our interactions, students did not
understand what SLS were and could not distinguish between study groups, LCs and group work. This may partly be due to my inability to make this more explicit for students. Late in the progression of this study, I attended a workshop presented by Ettienne Wenger (who coined the phrase CoPs). At this workshop, Wenger expressed a move from CoPs to SLS and attributed the move to the more inclusive nature of the SLS concept. The SLS concept resonated well with my work with Res Y at that point and I had to conceptually make this move as well. This shift impacted on the study in the sense that I looked not only for evidence of collaborative engagement but also at wider institutional, residential and individual social and/or cultural practices impacting students learning.

One of the fundamental bases of establishing SLS is the financial backing of the university and a firm commitment of resources. Thus, securing leadership backing could serve as a powerful resource to promote a sustainable effort in terms of integration with other university-led initiatives (Keup, 2013). Additionally, funding is needed to appoint a facilitator and/or tutors to facilitate workshops and work with students at a time convenient to them. For this study, facilitation of workshops happened at night – during study time – which could be a real challenge for future implementation. The reason being that it is very challenging to get senior students to commit to assist first years without remuneration and similarly, it is challenging to get the Academic Development and Support Unit to support students after hours. Getting students to commit to a time during the day is quite a challenge as well, as the curriculum allows little flexibility. Thus, more thought has to go into how best this agenda can be promoted using existing structures and practices without it negatively impacting student time.

With reference to policy implications, an alignment of institutional policy and residential policy is essential for the successful implementation of SLS in the student residences. I would suggest an integration of common approaches and outcomes so that there is a deliberate shift from operating in disconnected segments and silos. I further suggest a sharing of data between Student Affairs, FYE, Residence Managers and Faculty, so that a common understanding of students needs and the processes towards addressing them are created. The findings point to a misalignment of what students
need and what support and intervention is provided. The findings of this study should be interrogated at residence level by students, HK and RM, but also require the input of Student Affairs, institutional, management and policy reviewers. On a practical level, I recommend that initiatives aimed at developing student agency and student voice are a priority in student residences and in the wider UJ context. Additionally, finding out who students are and who could speak for students, perhaps the SRC and/or RAs, could yield agents for transformation and SLS formation. Also, rethinking the role of RAs and HK, so that they take on more facilitative and less authoritarian roles, is required and is the responsibility of management. Perhaps flattening the power differentials would help foster a safe space where students feel free to express and celebrate difference. This would entail positioning RAs as mentors and leaving the disciplinary issues to the RW and/or HK.

5.6. LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH
Wenger (2004) proposes that we ask the questions what is in the way of forming SLS and if already formed, how can they be further developed to the next level of development? I suggest that the ‘peripheral’ SLS formed need more time for development. Perhaps an extended period of at least one to two years is needed to see substantial progression. Due to time constraints of the project life-cycle, I was not able to continue working with the residences. These constraints also meant that I could not interview the Director of Student Affairs, RAs and the RW to gain a more comprehensive account of the SLS implementation further down the line. Another reason for my withdrawal from the residence is that I moved to another institution and my work as practitioner with these residences ended.

Further, this thesis aimed to see how the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS shaped and evolved the learning environment of one particular residence (Res Y as case study). It therefore reports only on this particular case; it does not give an extensive review of the implementation of SLS in all UJ student residences. However, I have given an in-depth, ‘rich’ description of the one UJ residence context and trust that through this, researchers and readers can judge to what extent the findings from this case can be transferred to their own contexts (Merriam, 1998).
Another limitation of this study is that no official handover to the RM and RAs was done due to lack of capacity to do this, hence sustainability is an issue. My concern is that without someone to drive the process, especially considering that peripheral LCs were formed, students will cease to actively engage in SLS formation. The complexity of conceptualising and implementing SLS resides in the finding that the cultural context, with its associated policies and practices, needs transformation. I realise that this is not something that will happen overnight, placing the continued SLS formation at risk and thus impacting on sustainability of an SLS implementation.

5.7. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF DATA: VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

In this section I wish to reflect on how the trustworthiness or “truth value … of a claim to knowledge” (Whitehead & McNiff, 2007:171) was achieved throughout the writing of this thesis. Like Petersen (2007:256) I present this in the last chapter, rather than in the methodology chapter, as “…at this stage of the thesis, the trustworthiness of the study has already been established and that what is required is a reflection on the warrantability of this claim for the reader”. My focus is on whether the claims that I have made are believable and valid. Greenwood and Levin (2000) prefer the term credibility to validity and distinguish between internal credibility (credible to the group that evaluates it) and external credibility (convincing the reader that the results are believable).

In Chapter 1, I provided a description of how the study was conceptualised through sketching the context of the study, the theoretical framework used and the research design followed. As part of establishing external credibility, I made my biases as professional development practitioner and researcher explicit. The reader is then able to establish where the study was located and what motivated the study. My focus was on assisting participants “to engage in action” as individuals and as community members to facilitate change. I wanted to create “…an expanded awareness not only of themselves, but also of their social milieu as a consequence of taking part in the research” (Given, 2008:44). My PAR mode of working was justified.

To ensure both validity and reliability, I provide the theoretical underpinning of the study and make my assumptions clear in Chapter 2. I locate this study in the broader
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

literature on CoPs and LCs as implemented in higher education and make clear how my own conception of SLS was formed. Through tracing my argument, I wish to establish credibility of the study findings. Additionally, I show how the theoretical lens used and the methodological framework (in Chapter 3) intersect and enhance the logic of this thesis.

In Chapter 3, I take the reader through the design of the study, in the hope of establishing my way of working and how I wished to collect data to address my research question. In particular, I explain how my PAR approach was warranted by my process-oriented research question. My multi-method focus (Flick, 1998:229) is an attempt at gaining a rich understanding and adds to the validity of this study. I tried to use the feedback received after presenting this study at two conferences and through discussions with the Santrust doctoral support group, to establish credibility. I make the boundaries of this case study clear and state the two-fold design logic. I further locate this study in an ‘epistemological home’ and explicate my role as research instrument.

In Chapter 4, I provide a clear audit trail (Merriam, 2008) and explicitly state the processes involved in data collection and analysis. I try to offer, in detail, the inferences I drew and presented as results of this study. I further provide in-depth descriptions of the steps I followed during data analysis to facilitate the credibility of the findings (Patton, 1990). In doing so, I attempt to make procedures explicit so that other researchers who wish to replicate this study, can do so reliably. Another intent was to provide participants’ expressions and my “interpretations of them” (Given, 2008:138). Henning et al.’s (2004:147) trio of trustworthiness comprise “good craftsmanship, honest communication and action”. Through ensuring accuracy and precision, sound argumentation of my philosophical stance, honest communication of data and ethical behaviour and action, I aimed to enhance the validity of this study. In my interactions with participants, the aim was always to assist transformation and to enable development. In so doing, I hoped to enhance internal credibility, in line with a transformational or critical stance.
In the final chapter, I discuss the findings in terms of implications for practice, policy and research which is deemed necessary for validity issues (Petersen, 2007). The credibility for the group as well as for the wider research community is made clear. I discuss my own role as researcher (Section 5.8) and my employment of the theoretical framework.

5.8. OWN RESEARCH PRACTICE
My roles as researcher and practitioner were very hard to keep separate. My work as practitioner intersected with the researcher role and informed the design of this study. As a qualitative researcher I wanted to lay emphasis on the researcher/study relationship and situational limitations that affect the study (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Additionally, Soudien (2010:881) cautions:

…actors in the South African higher education system, and particularly those with the responsibility for leading it, need to be clear about the arguments in the transformation debate and in particular about how these get at what is actually happening within it, and to be consciously and self-critically aware of their own positions within it and in relation to these developments.

Thus, my own positioning, as early researcher and practitioner, needed critical self-reflection on what it is that needed transformation. I needed to engage in reflexive practice or what Lincoln and Guba (2000:183) call “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher”. Although I learned from the pre-study phase that transformation was needed, I had to be clear about what exactly needed to change. In order to do this, I had to identify enabling and constraining factors in the cultivation of SLS and my own position within it. Perhaps more importantly, not only did I need a different approach, but so too a changed practice. I was careful to view the context as a fluid space that needed re-imagining and reconceptualisation.

The use of CHAT coupled with critical theory as framework proved to be equally challenging. What helped was the notion that CHAT as a theory is in constant flux, Moreover, CHAT is “an accommodating framework … rather than a neat set of propositions” (Roth & Lee, 2007:191). I had to make sure that I used the theory consistently though, and this is where my promoter’s expert guidance helped. I also had to make sure that, as Baxter Magolda (2004:36) had done, I “place participants’
stories in the foreground” and move “my theoretical frameworks to the background”. It was challenging to do this, as it seemed much easier to fit the data to the theory; but keeping participants stories uppermost in my mind helped. My PAR mode of working and critical theoretical lens also allowed me to question my “assumed power” as researcher over the research participants of this study (Davis, 2008:141).

Using PAR as research design was a cause of disagreement throughout the initial part of the study. While I argued the rationale for a PAR design (see Chapter 3), two members of my doctoral committee felt that PAR was not suitable since I did not have all participants’ full involvement in all phases, viz. plan – implement – evaluate, and therefore could not claim a true PAR study. However, I acknowledge that my reading of the literature in this field and my supervisor’s experience in PAR projects held sway. Although PAR emphasises that participation of all stakeholders is preferable, it does not imply that all stakeholders will be involved equally or fully in all stages of the PAR project. I continued working in PAR mode as my research question and transformation agenda warranted such a way of working.

5.9. CONCLUSION

In this study, the aim was to investigate the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS in one UJ student residence. I further aimed to critically examine what the enabling or constraining issues of student engagement in SLS were. Students’ social, cultural and historical factors shaped the formation of such spaces and were of particular concern. Also of concern were students’ assumptions, perceptions and practices in the residence environment.

This study has shown that despite numerous efforts to get students to articulate their concerns, they still lacked the confidence to challenge authority outside of the small discussion groups with me. Their socio-cultural and historical backgrounds prevented them from becoming more active in their own learning and in the way they interacted with residence management. Thus, they found voice only in the SLS groups. However, neither residence management nor students sufficiently discussed matters of concern to enable SLS to take hold. Residence management appeared to be too steeped in
their established practices to recognise the need for new learning tools, spaces and practices.

Students’ resistance was in the form of their refusal to participate in activities and not speaking up. It further appears that not only do students lack agency, but so too do the RAs. The hierarchical and power-laden setting in the university environment, coupled with clearly established roles and responsibilities, was a major constraint to the development of SLS.

While SLS formation can occur organically in some instances, for the most part, deliberate intervention and conscious creation are needed. Some students found the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS vague at first and sometimes even problematic, but significantly, over time, others managed to apply what they had learned in these SLS spaces. These students recognised the value thereof to transform their learning environment. Noticeably, the majority of students in this study had misunderstood the requirements to gain epistemological access to higher education. I have argued that given a chance and more time, SLS could enable first year students to form LCs to help them cope better with university demands. What is required is a change in the cultural context, with its associated policies and practices.

This thesis has shown that contradictions lead to further contradictions and not necessarily change or transformation. In the South African context, much scholarly work is needed on the conceptualisation and implementation of SLS and LCs. My sense is that such scholarship can assist student residences in working cooperatively to address hegemonic practices, develop student agency and voice, and last but not least, transform students’ academic identities.
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ADDENDUM A: STUDENT PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire comprises **12** items/questions that will help us understand your needs better and forms part of a PhD study conducted amongst first year students at a selected residence at the University of Johannesburg. The information will be treated as strictly confidential and no individual will be identified at any stage.

**GENERAL**

1. How old are you?

2. What is your Home Language?

**SECTION A – ACADEMIC**

3. In which faculty is your degree/diploma located. Place a cross in the relevant box.

|------------------------------------|---------------|------------|

4. How will your studies be financed during this year?

a. My parents/family will pay for my studies.

b. I will use a loan (Bank, TEFSA etc.).

c. I have a bursary.

d. I will work to pay for my own studies.

e. A combination of the answers given above
Cultivating Social Learning Spaces at an Urban Johannesburg University Student Residence

5. Choose from the following list the reason that would best describe why you are studying for a degree/diploma? Circle the most appropriate answer.

a. Because I really want to.

b. Because I don't know what else to do next.

c. Because my parents or family want me to.

d. Because I don't want to start working yet.

e. To improve my future job opportunities.

f. To get away from home.

g. To learn about things that really interests me.

h. Other reasons.

6. How would you rate your learning style? You can choose a combination of styles
Please note:
A rating of "5" = very much like you; A rating of "1" = not at all like you.

I learn best when:

a. I'm alone

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
---|---|---|---|---|

b. I participate actively

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
---|---|---|---|---|

c. I talk to others about the work

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
---|---|---|---|---|

d. I memorise facts

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
---|---|---|---|---|

e. I do practical activities

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
f. I see illustrations and presentations  
   
   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |


g. There is peace and quiet  
   
   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

h. It is noisy  
   
   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

   Other  
   (Specify)

   ____________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________

7. Thinking back to last year (or the last time you studied full time), how many hours per week did you spend on homework and studying?  

a. Less than 5 hours per week.  

b. Between 5 and 10 hours per week.  

c. Between 10 and 15 hours per week.  

d. Between 15 and 20 hours per week.  

e. More than 20 hours per week.  

SECTION B - Family  

8. Which statement best describes you?  

a. I am the first member of my family to attend university.  

b. Only one of my parents attended university.  

c. Both my parents attended university.  

d. My parents did not attend university but one or more of my brothers or sisters did.  

e. Many members of my family (including my parents) have attended university.
9. How would you describe the role of your family in your academic career?
   a. They are very supportive and helpful.
   b. They don’t care what happens with my studies.
   c. They have forced me into studying for this degree.
   d. They put pressure on me to perform well.
   e. They show some interest but are not really involved.

SECTION C - Residence life

10. Do you agree with the following statements regarding residence life?
Motive your answer.

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<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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<tr>
<td>10.1. Success in residences means cooperation, consideration, compromise, and respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.2. Residence life allows me to remain connected to my peers outside of the classroom.</td>
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<td>10.3. I am aware of policies and procedures in the Res.</td>
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<td>10.4 Res policies and procedures aids my studies and daily living</td>
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<td>10.5. Reasonable opportunities to develop academic, sport, culture and leadership exist at the Res</td>
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11. Please give at least two recommendations that you think would benefit the formation and optimal functioning of LCs in the residences.

1. 
2. 
12. My name and contact details are: 
___________________________________________ (Complete only if you would like to avail yourself for an individual interview) 
---------Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire---------
**ADDENDUM B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE**

**ETHICS CLEARANCE**

Dear N Agherdien,

Ethical Clearance Number: 2012-054

Re: Cultivating Learning Communities for Transformation at selected University of Johannesburg residences – A Case Study

The FAEC has decided to

- [x] Approve the proposal
- [ ] Provisionally approve the proposal with recommended changes
- [ ] Recommend revision and resubmission of the proposal

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Prof Geoffrey Lautenbach
Chair: FACULTY ACADEMIC ETHICS COMMITTEE

6 November 2012
ADDENDUM C: LETTER OF CONSENT

University of Johannesburg
Faculty of Education
Education Studies
P.O. Box 524
Auckland Park
2006
15 March 2012

Consent to participate in the creation of learning communities in the residences

Dear student

The purpose of the study is to explore how the formation of learning communities shapes the learning environment at a selected residence. You will be required to attend workshops once every second week during study time. The workshops will be aimed at harnessing collaboration skills as well as fostering an environment that invites diversity, equity and a critical, open mind. I will contact some of you to participate in interviews (which will last between 60 – 90 minutes).

Your co-operation is voluntary and will be greatly appreciated. All information provided by you will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used in the research report, unless permission is granted otherwise. All interviews will be audio recorded.

Please sign this letter to indicate your willingness to participate in this research project. Feel free to contact the researcher should you require additional information: NajmaAgherdien- Researcher (Tel: 011 559 3525 or Email: najmaa@uj.ac.za)

Thank you and best wishes.

Najma Agherdien

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<th>Surname &amp; Name</th>
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<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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ADDENDUM D: RESIDENCE POLICY
HOUSE WARDENS AT UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG STUDENT RESIDENCES AND DAY HOUSES

1. PREAMBLE
This policy provides for the eligibility criteria, appointments process, functions and term of office and related matters of House Wardens at all student residences and day houses under the full control of the University of Johannesburg.

2. PURPOSE
The purpose of the policy is to provide guidelines for the functioning of House Wardens in residences and to provide criteria for eligibility for the appointment of house wardens, the applications and appointment processes.

3. SCOPE
This policy applies to all Residence Management and Students in Student Accommodation and Residence Life.

4. REVIEW OF POLICY
The review of this policy will be conducted in accordance with the approved University Policy on Policy Development and takes place in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

5. DEFINITION
The house warden replaces the house parents and residence managers. He/she is responsible for the wellbeing of the students resident in the residence concerned, or, in the case of day houses, for the wellbeing of the students who are members of the day house concerned and is responsible for holistic development of the students.

6. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
In order to qualify for appointment as a House Warden, an individual must comply with the following criteria:

   6.1 He/she must have academic standing in the University of Johannesburg community, either because he/she is an academic member of staff or, if not, holds at least a masters qualification or equivalent.

   6.2 He/she must be a mature person with experience of dealing with University students.

   6.3 He/she must be in the employ of the University of Johannesburg, and her/his employment circumstances must be such that she/he is able to devote a lot of time and energy to the affairs of the residence or day house concerned.

7. FUNCTIONS OF A HOUSE WARDEN
A House Warden has the following functions:

   7.1 He/she is responsible, on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor and the Executive Director: Student Affairs, for the wellbeing of the students resident in the residence concerned, or, in the case of day houses, for the wellbeing of the students who are members of the day house concerned.
7.2 He/she ensures that the holistic development of the students concerned in preparation for the world of work and of responsible citizenship, is promoted, by a constant focus on academic performance and the promotion of a culture of learning: The academic focus and culture of learning is supported by the five pillar model of holistic student development, namely:

(i) Participation in cultural activities and the promotion of tolerance and appreciation of diversity in the residence or day house concerned;
(ii) participation in sporting activities;
(iii) participation in community engagement activities;
(iv) the creation of opportunities for the development of leadership qualities in each student.
(v) Creation of a vibrant social life and of cultural cohesion and respect for diversity.

7.3 He/she ensures that governance arrangements and committee structures in the residence or day house concerned function well and serve to foster healthy relationships between the students.

7.4 He/she enforces discipline in the residence or day house concerned, and ensures that the rules and regulations governing student conduct and student accommodation are adhered to.

7.5 He/she liaises with the parents and/or guardians and/or of the students for which he/she is responsible in respect of all matters that concern the welfare of such student.

7.6 Attendance of house activities and activities organized by the Student Affairs Division.

8. APPLICATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS PROCESS

8.1 Whenever a vacancy for a House Warden occurs, such vacancy shall be advertised by the University in accordance with normal procedure.

8.2 Applicants apply for the position in accordance with the process described in the advertisement and in accordance with the process prescribed in the Human Resources Division.

8.3 A Shortlisting Committee determines a shortlist of candidates of no more than three. This Committee is comprised as follows: (i) Special Adviser to the Vice-Chancellor (Chairperson)

(ii) One other member of the Management Executive Committee
(iii) Executive Director: Student Affairs
(iv) Executive Director: Human Resources or her/his nominee
(v) Director: Student Accommodation and Residences
(vi) The Chairperson of the House Committee of the residence or day house concerned.

8.4 The shortlisted candidates are interviewed by a Selection Committee comprising the following:

(i) Special Adviser to the Vice-Chancellor (Chairperson)
(ii) One other member of the Management Executive Committee
(iii) Executive Director: Student Affairs
(iv) Executive Director: Human Resources or her/his nominee
(v) Director: Student Accommodation and Residences
(vi) A current House Warden nominated by the Executive Director (vii) The President of the campus SRC where the residence is situated, or her/his nominee
(viii) The Chairperson of the House Committee of the residence or day house concerned
(ix) A representative of at least two of the recognized labour unions, who shall have observer status and no voting rights.

8.5
After all of the candidates have been interviewed, the Selection Committee decides by means of majority vote who their preferred candidate is.

8.6
The result of the interview process is provided to the Management Executive Committee by the Special Adviser to the Vice-Chancellor. On the basis of the information provided, the MEC decides to whom an offer of employment as House Warden should be made.

4.7 A House Warden is appointed on a fixed-term contract for a period of three to five years, as determined by the MEC. Depending on individual circumstances, the offer of employment as a House Warden may include university accommodation, on terms agreed upon between the university and the individual concerned.

9. TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

9.1
Residence Life Officers will continue to function as such until their contracts expire. The vacancies that occur thus will be filled by House Wardens in accordance with the provisions of this Policy.

9.2
Residence Managers will continue to function as such, until a Residence Manager resigns or his/her services are terminated, or he/she is redeployed elsewhere in the institution on the basis of operational requirements. House Wardens will be appointed for residences currently managed by Residence Managers.

9.3
Newly appointed House Wardens will assist Residence Managers at other campuses with the promotion of a culture of learning, academic excellence, and the development of leadership qualities of students within their residence.

9.4
Should there be a need for the rotation of Residence Managers and House Wardens they may be rotated among the residences, should operational requirements make this necessary.
## ADDENDUM E: NADIA’S CODED TRANSCRIPT

| Subject |  
|---|---|
| | S |

| Object |  
|---|---|
| | O |
| Identifying words: | taught, learnt, LCs, |
| Ok, for the first few sessions uhm I was like | what are we doing here? And stuff like that (Najma-ok) but then as time went by, it taught me a lot about speaking out and different personalities that we have ja in terms of having confidence as well; be able to speak in class yes. |

| Tool/Artefact |  
|---|---|
| | T |
| Identifying words: | Powerpoint, Role play, television |
| I think we should be, more interesting, more something like power points I don’t know, you know cause somehow people get bored (Najma-hmm) cause you speaking there, other people are chatting, some people are making jokes you know (Najma- hmm). So I don’t know something that’s gonna be, attract us more probably use television there, show us a clip of you know this is know something more active and stuff and probably role play as well (Najma- ok) something that can be (Najma- ja) yes. |
### Rules

**identifying words:** study time, res activities, sangfees, sehri,

... then at 7 it’s *study time* (Najma- hmm). Yes cause there was a point in time, when we had this session and then I had an assignment to complete (Najma- hmm) people were writing the following day (Najma-hmm) and then we had to go play netball we had to go you know. But then it comes with the territory of staying at res so (Najma-ok) you can’t complain about it or anything.

I wouldn’t say that there’s a problem with it, cause I’m **balancing my studies** while with the whole presentation thing so...

I think it feels or seems impossible to have distinctions all the way, because or maybe it’s because I’m doing so many **res activities** and then I don’t have time to actually give my all to my studies (Najma- hmm) cause the highest I can reach sometimes is like 71 (Najma- excellent!) or 79 the highest or whatever. I can’t now sometimes, impossible to

have an average of 75% cause there’s so many **res activities** (Najma- hmm hmm) that I have to do (Najma-hmm) yes.

and then this semester they **extended study time**

Because of the sangfees yeah because of sangfees and apparently because of the results, I don’t know “laughs”. So now I don’t know because it was like till 12 because of sangfees but then before sangfees began it was 6 till 11
| Division of Labour | Cause our cleopatra's, our academic advisers they show you that they even draw up a timetable for you that during this time, you can do this and that and during this time you can do this. And that and that maybe cut out chilling with friends. You'll do that later or whatever. The board that we have there is active cause there's a list there of all the senior degrees and first years are supposed to look there (Najma-ooh) to see corresponding degrees and then you go to that person or whatever, but that hasn't been active or I don't know what's happening, I don't know the procedure. And then on Tuesdays from 7 till 9 I think that's when you have your quality time with your big sister. You speak about anything you wanna talk about. You do anything that you wanna do but now they cancelled that I think this semester and then now there's just study time and the sangfees. |
| Community | Outcome |
| Identifying words: work, tasks, | Uhm, with the topics I don't know maybe they helped me because I'm doing communications. But then, I feel they were proper, because now you learn uhm communication skills, you know how to speak you gain confidence like that, that's where you start (Najma-ja). So now I don't know (Najmahmm) it was more of an advantage for me. |
| Identifying words: first years, seniors, Cloepatras, academic advisors, res advisors (RAs), Res Manager (RM) | |
| Identifying words: learn, advantage, helped me, I feel, | |
ADDENDUM F: CHERYL’S TRANSCRIPT

Interview: Cheryl

Najma: Okay, thank you so much for coming I, I really just uhm, want us to reflect on, on the workshops and uhm, in your opinion what worked, what didn’t? What for you, uhm was significant or what for you was a problem? Uhm, if you think back on the five workshops that we had.

Cheryl: Two that I can remember... was uhm, the time management... and the uhm, the team work that if say... ...for instance we do the same course we should go together, we should get together and talk about it...uhm, the work that we struggle with... hmm, uhm, that didn’t uhm, I didn’t uhm, how can I say? didn’t take that, I didn’t do that as to help me. Like uhm, me and a close friend that’s doing the same course, we usually get together but there’s a whole team. I don’t think that it’s gonna work with stuff, because... normally uhm, people don’t wanna help each other.

Najma: Oh.

Cheryl: Uhm, they, they normally wanna do just better than you, they don’t want to see that you succeed. It’s more like...

Najma: They are all competitive?

Cheryl: Ja...

Najma: Mmm.

Cheryl: ...together and a jealousy thing so normally just me and this one friend work

Najma: Ok, so you’ve got somebody, is, is this person in the res or is it

Cheryl: In the res.

Najma: In the res, ok.

Cheryl: Yes, but...

Najma: Okay so for you...

Cheryl: It’s fine...

Najma: ...just working with one other person that, that

Cheryl: Yes.

Najma: works for you...

Cheryl: Yes, but not the whole team.

Najma: Okay.

Cheryl: And the time...managing, uhm...I still can’t manage my time there’s just
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a lot of things to do that... and I can’t cope normally. For instance...those two last weeks that we had uhh, concert practice and stuff, we didn’t actually get uhm, time to study or we were practicing, basically six hours... When we come from school till twelve o’clock that night, so that’s very hectic...

Najma: Compulsory?
Cheryl: I won’t say it’s compulsory but they make it seem as it’s, if it is compulsory.
Najma: So in actual fact you don’t really have a choice.
Cheryl: Ja.

Najma: But, but is it something worthwhile? Is it something that you can learn from? Do you think, is it or would you prefer to, you know concentrate on the academic side but, or do you see value in, in you know all these other activities, the cultural, the social and all and all of that? What do you think it takes you away from?
Cheryl: Uhm...
Najma: Your academics?

Cheryl: It depends, it normally, it depends because, we had one uhm, of this concerts at the beginning of the year... That really helped to meet people, blah, blah...but in the end of the year it’s more like you had more academic work, you have more school work, tests and everything. You can’t really cope to have all that, uhm, cultural... uhm, also, so I’ll say this one that we had now it didn’t help at all because now my academics suffer, because of attendancy and that.

Najma: Mmm, uhm, I know when I was there the other night some people are not participating. Do you sort of have a choice as to whether you want to in one or the other?
Cheryl: No, the other people that weren’t there...they participated in sehri.

Najma: In sehri ja.
Cheryl: in it. Yes, so all the other’s that didn’t, took part in sehri. You must take part
Najma: Oh, so if they didn’t the first time you’ve got to do it now?
Cheryl: No, but sehri is like more of a uhm, singing competition. They just choose people that can sing.

Najma: Ooh ... okay so it wasn’t for everybody...
Cheryl: No.

Najma: Okay, thanks, and, and with this one, the second one?
Cheryl: It’s for all first years.
Najma: Okay...so it’s open to everybody. Uhm, just coming back, back to learning communities, it’s something we talked about making your voice heard. Uhm, you know uhm, we talked about Ubuntu too, caring for other people. Uhh, not just worrying about how you
do, but, but worrying about...caring about how others do as well. Did, did that somehow filter through?

Cheryl: No.

Najma: And not just with you but I’m talking the, the group in, in general? Uhm, is it something that, that actually made a difference or not? Or is, is - some of the comments that I got was that uhm, some of the, those topics that we did were, we did too superficially, because there wasn’t enough time to really go into depth. Do you think there’s a place for that if, if we maybe, you know spend more time on it?

Cheryl: Uh, on Ubuntu?

Najma: Ja, Ubuntu and......making your voice heard, cause a lot of people tend to be afraid to open up and, and to talk and to... ask questions.

Cheryl: Uh, basically the, the, the part of, uhm, voicing, uhm, your, your, uhh, how do you say it?

Najma: Uh, making your...

Cheryl: Making your voice heard...making your voice heard, ja. Uhm, that helped me because uhm, I started to ask questions in class. So basically...

Najma: Oh good!

Cheryl: that helped me. Uhm and the Ubuntu part, I don’t know......Here’s how I see it that uhm, normally the students are just concentrating on their own work wanting to want to ex-, wanting to exceed, succeed...uhm, they don’t actually worry about others, so I think if we spend more time on that it, it could work.

Najma: Ja, uh, uhm, and would you say that like with the others, uhm, because you know the others very well, or some of them very well. Would it, uh, or did it help in any way to, you know, to get the group discussions going. Uhm, do you think that is the way to go, having group discussions. Would...does that really encourage people to work together?

Cheryl: Yes.

Najma: Or is it a personal preference? I don’t know.

Cheryl: If we now come together as a whole, all the first years, it will help but, agh, I don’t think it’s gonna work now because uhm, we are on that stage to go to second, uhm, to seniors... ...from res. So now all these activities, the uhm...the first years won’t take part, because I think we gonna get ontheffed in this week and then we go over as seniors. Then, uhm...

Najma: Oh!

Cheryl: because then we go over as seniors. So then we have a right to say no in anything. So I think basically if you are, you will say no to this activities and everything. ...but it would have helped uhm, if we come together and just discussed. So that Ubuntu grows in our group work.

Najma: Ja, uhm, and, and, and, concerning the timing, do you think maybe it would have helped if we had done this a bit sooner?
Cheryl: I do, ja.

Najma: Because ja... Because by the time I got there some people already had 1uhm, you know sort of people that they’re working with. So, and in some cases it, it wasn’t even people in the residence itself. It was other people that was maybe sharing the course with you. Do you think it would help if, because like you say in the beginning it was nice because then you get to meet other people. Now you sort of...already have your preferences as to who you want to work with. So you’re not kind of open to the idea of working with other people.

Cheryl: Ja.

Najma: So, maybe doing it a bit sooner, you think?

Cheryl: Yes, a bit sooner so then everyone...can study. So then everyone, ja, because now people made up their mind already, ja... so, I don’t think it can make a big change still, because what will make the change now if, uhm, if they must work with me...they could have done that out of their own will you understand?

Najma: Talking about doing it out of your own will, do you think it did, uuhhm, I know as a group it was decided, yes we’re going to do this. Uhm, but I don’t know how it was filtered through to, to the first years. Were you told that this is something that you have to do? Or was it sort of seen as a, as a voluntary thing?

Cheryl: It’s, firstly they said that uhm, we should go and then after that uhm, they said that it’s not actually voluntary, but uhm, 1concerning the rest if there’s something happening at the res and it’s for first years, it’s like a thing you should go. You don’t have a say to say no or whatsoever, because it’s also affecting like your uhm, it’s also affecting if you come back next year..

Najma: Okay.

Cheryl: uhm, if you come back next year there’s like scores. Your attendancy...

Najma: Okay.

Cheryl: how did you work... as a first year... So then they count up all those things. If you come next, uhm, next year back.

Najma: Okay, so, so even though it’s, it’s voluntary, it sort off uhh, puts you in a bad light if you don’t do it... kind of thing because it’s, it affects your score at the end of the day. Okay, uhm, concerning policies and so forth are you, you, uhm, familiar with all the policies?

Cheryl: Yes.

Najma: Cause I, I believe everybody said it’s you know policy so all over and so forth. Do you think that uhm, some of the policies may be constrain you, your participation in more academic stuff? Because policy says you must take part in cultural, social and all of that. So do you think it, does it help you or does it, does, does it count against you, concerning your academic, does it help in any way?

Cheryl: Uhm, I’ll say it doesn’t help now at the moment, but it will help you in the future. It will help because uhm, in the beginning of the year it wasn’t so though...because we didn’t have a lot of
school work in, so it was okay uhm, we should take part in this cultural activities and all those activities that there is... Uhm, has and but it does help in a way...It also uhm, learns you that, teaches you how to manage your time and, but it push you a lot...and you work under pressure, it pushes you a lot...so ja. and it will have an advantage, there is an advantage to your future career also.

Najma: Mmm, , uhm, would you say that anything, if anything, has anything changed uhm, post, the workshops or after, having experienced the workshops. Is there anything in the way you’re conducting yourself or you’re handling the academic side? Has it impacted in any way on, on your academics?

Cheryl: Uhm, the program uhm, when you were talking about. hearing your voice, It did really touch, touched me...because I’m a very quiet person, I normally don’t talk... so after that I just like, if there’s questions asked...that the lecturer asks, I answer, so ja.

Najma: So in that way...

Cheryl: That way it helped, ja.

Najma: it did help? Okay, and then uhm, maybe just one or two other questions, uhm. What other topics would you suggest we include like for, for next year’s implementation? Is there anything else that you feel was missing, that should have been included that really would have helped you to form a learning community, or to form that bond with others where you can ask questions? Where you can learn together, where you can share?

Cheryl: I think uhm, Ubuntu must just be in, must just be uhm, extended the uhm, explanation of Ubuntu must just be extended or the, it must just be more elaborated in a sense of uhm, that, aah, students must see how they will work together or, uhm, for instance if they get a project...they must, they must work together not in a sense of jealousy or... they must really be open hearted to help each other.

Najma: Mmm, so you really think that, that, that could be extended a bit more...

Cheryl: Yes.

Najma: we’ll build on it a bit more, do you think that that’s maybe the main problem why people are not working together?

Cheryl: Ja...

Najma: Or...

Cheryl: helping each other, ja... because I think they’re just, people uhm, students are just here for their own outcome, they don’t really want to help others, so I think if, if, uhm, the other intention is good...then they’ll understand or they’ll change their mindset... about Ubuntu.

Najma: Okay, thank you so much Cheryl, I think that that brings it to a close unless there’s anything else that you want to add, any comment, anything you want to say?

Cheryl: No, it’s okay.

Najma: Okay, thank you very much. I really do appreciate your time.

Cheryl: It’s a pleasure.
ADDENDUM G: FIFFY’S TRANSCRIPT

Najma: Thank you very much for... agreeing to speak to me, I know you’re very busy.
Fiffy: *laughs* No, it's okay.
Najma: Uhm I just basically want to talk about the workshops that I did in the first semester. Just your impression… because you, I think you went to all of them? Fiffy: Except one, I missed one.
Najma: Okay, so just your impression, I know we had lots of…. uhm
Fiffy: Commotion, *laughs*
Najma: *laughs* Ja commotion, and problems with venues and things like that and also problems with actually trying to get these people to… Fiffy: Ja.
Najma: So, what in your opinion worked? And what didn’t? And what do you think we should improve?
Fiffy: Uhm, okay, from our side, what I would say to improve is the discipline issue. Uhm okay, I think, it should be stated that, okay, it should be a requirement in the beginning of the year, that if you don't attend these workshops as like it will affect your res points or something like that. If you can bring the issue of res points back like the way it works in Res Y like people take res points seriously.
Najma: Oh so you don’t? The students…
Fiffy: No we don’t ja! Like for us here it's a matter of, if you’re a senior, as soon as you leave first year, you automatically get a second room and if you’re doing res, like Uhm if you’re doing sports you now have a position of leadership in the res itself. That’s when you get like the A-Ring, the hot side of the rooms like type of thing (Najma- ooh) yeah! And that's where it ends, I think if we really started to implement the point system here at res, it will get a lot of people to participate in this whole workshops thing (Najma- hmmm) and then on the workshops themselves. They were great Uhm I learnt a lot myself, personally Uhm even though like third year you know. I wish we had them in first year, they could've helped us like working, like you know working with people and what to expect in the future and what to do when this kind of situation gets thrown at you and this type of thing and then I think, with these first
years. They didn’t see the value of it as yet because they’re still trying to like and everyone is just like no, if you don’t pass first year, you’re gonna get kicked out. So they just like no I need to study, because there’s nothing I can do type of thing. But I think they’re gonna remember these workshops hopefully and then learn, like I know some of them learnt some things from them and some of them really appreciated you coming to the like, to help them out with the workshops and things and then ja.

Najma: Ja, ja.

Fiffy: Can I say something about the whole girl’s point system thing? It wouldn’t work with us ja, because I’m with, the Res Y res’s, most of them, well the rooms are sharing rooms unlike with us. We only have like how many? How many rooms? 24 on each floor. That’s not really a lot, whereas with Res Y they have a lot of double rooms and only a few single rooms, hence the point system only works for them cause obviously if I don’t wanna share, I’ll work for those points to have my own single room but for us it’s like ugh next year I’ll have my own single room. Cause the sharing room is only for the first years.

Najma: So, is that the only incentive then?

Fiffy: Like basically it is...like..

Najma: Getting a better room?

Fiffy: Ja, that side it is, it’s getting a better room, like this side I don’t know what there is that we can offer that would make people wanna partake in every activity and be participative res students. Because as soon as you get, first years are forced into activities type of thing.

Najma: Ja, ja I picked that up, that was quite a problem as well, a lot of them felt you know, they’re being forced to do a whole lot of stuff, they’re actually not coping with the academic side because of all the other things that they need to do. Some appreciate the fact that Uhm, you know the res gets them involved in cultural, social and a more holistic approach...and some of them see the value in that, and others most of them see it as a waste of time. They see it as time taken away from their studies.

Fiffy: Ja and that’s their thing Uhm I’ve learnt, I didn’t know like, this side it works as much to tutor thing (Najma- hmm). Uhm we were very unable to get tutors in the
beginning of the year, cause of fine we’re going to people who obviously have the highest marks and then, we ask them are you able to help out? That type of thing. And then as much as it is when you’re thinking of someone who is always getting distinctions in their course. They put a lot of time and effort into getting those A’s and then when we were asking them, it’s the thing of okay am I gonna get paid? No you kinda doing that for free. And its like nah, I’d rather not, well I’ll go waste my time on my own studies rather than helping someone else (Najma- ja,ja) I feel like the, getting help from here at res, tends to be a little bit more of a mission than going on campus and asking some random stranger in your class (Najma-mmm). So, I think they need to somehow get like, tutor programmes into res like that actually work actually pay the tutors cause that’s the only way they’re gonna help out (Najma- mm). If there is something beneficial for them at the end cause like me helping, a first year, like if I’m not required to do it like as a house com (Najma-mmm) just ordinary like I’ll be like okay you know I’m gonna help you, there’s nothing like it’s gonna be like okay, we seriously sitting doing something else than spending 2 hours with this person when and in the end, somebody needs the help, but then you just thinking of oh my word type of thing. So I really think, they really need to focus on res students and our first years. All first year res students have the highest failure rate, because of the activities their doing they under a lot of pressure, they still trying to transition from high school (Najma-mmm) to University and everything is just overwhelmed (Najma- mm) and then after that it’s just like okay, you can sort yourself and then… Najma: Ja Fiffy: So… Najma: Uhm I mean eh, eh, part of the reason is to help them transition (Fiffy-hmm) you know from, from high school. Fiffy: Then they don’t see like, I don’t, okay, with my first years. Some of them were very stubborn I don’t wanna lie, some of them were extremely stubborn and then like I, I there is a particular first year where I’ll be like, please come down! And she’ll be like no kgoshigadi Fiffy, you always ask me to come down, you never ask the other people to come down. Like at the end of the day I’m thinking like I’m like if I can get one person to just see this the way I see it, maybe they might, like, see the long term value in (Najma-hmm) it’s not only for the first year. Everything you were doing, the
workshops ended up like, ohh my word, its actually being applied like (Najma- hmm) practical life (Najma- hmm) and practical school work, …[interruption] …so..Uhm so like, ooh what was I saying?*laughs*

Najma: Ja, you were saying like ehh, it’s when you… do the activities?
Fiffy: Ja, like…

Najma: You can get back and…
Fiffy: Ja, you can actually apply it, to real life thing so..

Najma: Okay! Some of the other students, the other ehh ladies that I worked with, some of these students, they saw the, maybe just in the beginning (Fiffy- ja) they didn’t realise the value of it. But when they actually did the group activities in class and things like that (Fiffy- ja). That’s when you know it sinks in and only after the second workshop they sort of….

Fiffy: Caught off as to what was happening.
Najma: So, so do you think, that, that maybe like from my side I mean, I, I, I somehow did not get the message across as to, what exactly this was about. I think that was part of the problem.
Fiffy: Uhm no, I actually don’t think so, because you explained it, the house com explained it, even the Matron came and explained it, but then they were all like no. I don’t wanna do it type of thing. Its that as much as it is, I don’t know, if in their understanding they don’t see the value of it, but then, because I , I, I think because I’ve been here for three years now and then if I had this in first year I think I would probably have had the same mentality as them (Najma- hmm) and only 5 years later I’d be like huh if I had actually paid attention I could have (Najma- yes) ja. Because as much as it is like, people don’t tend to see the value of something at the beginning but only see the value of something once it’s over (Najma- hmm). So I really think don’t know like we, sat them down, like do you understand? Yes, yes we understand, so I’m not sure if it was that yes, yes we understand can we just move on or just like…
Najma: Ja and my, the impression I got and please correct me if I’m wrong is that a lot of them are focused on the content, they sort of wanted help with that and I can understand that Uhm, that is needed as well. But Uhm it was a case of you know your workshops or attending workshops is taking us away from our study time, away from
the content. That is, I’ve got a test, I’ve got an exam and I’ve got an assignment, they kept on saying that.

Fiffy: Ja, Uhm you know it’s, it comes back down to make many excuses for something but then I feel like they weren’t whole heartedly into it. And then if they were, maybe they could’ve attended it maybe, they could have seen, cause I’ve seen because like I think starting with, they were doing workshops with Uhm with the

University, it was a thing of if you don’t study you gonna fail, if you don’t do this you gonna fail, if you don’t concentrate on school work and go partying all these other things that aren’t relevant to school you gonna fail type of thing. Cause a lot of them are like all I’ve heard is I’m gonna fail, I’m gonna fail, I’m gonna fail! It’s not like no, you can still do something else and still pass and then when you get to res, they get told of like, no! Time management (Najma- hmm) time management, manage your res activities manage you own life (Najma-hmm) manage everything. But like I’m still trying to manage the transition from high school to res (Najma- yes) from not being with my family to being all on my own. And everything and ja, I also think we need a res psychiatrist or something like that. I, I *laughs* I personally feel it would help out because ahhm when the RA’s were doing their training they were kinda trained to kinda pick up on the situations but then for me personally I feel like because its not, they feel like they normal feel and then they also focusing on their own thing, they weren’t able to pick up such situations. Where a first year you know year was ehh really stressed to the point of she was like no ways she actually came to my room, like I don’t know what to do anymore. I really feel like I should quit everything and something of like she hadn’t come up to me and told me like, no one would have picked it up because she was all jolly every single day and (Najma-hmm) she kept on going on like everything is okay so I think if we could implement ahh a weekly or monthly one-on one session with PSYCAd or (Najma- PSYCAd) ja. Something were they actually have to attend ad then they get evaluated and where. Someone can actually see if they really are coping or not because we are students and for that situation it, some situations get very depressing (Najma-hmm) and also you thinking if you listening to this child’s background and then they’re telling you everything that they’ve gone through and everything it took to get to res to University and then, they can’t do
res activities cause they need to work hard or they gonna lose their scholarship or their bursaries (Najma- ja). You starting to think about it, also affects you mentally cause it’s like wow okay this person is going through so much(Najma- ja) and then you like whoow and then it kinda diverts you from your own self and then you dealing with them and then everything so.. I, if that could also be done (Najma-ja) like, I feel like all these activities (Najma- ja) you know, activities is not the word, like psycad (Najma- support structure) ja they should really try play a role like a hectic role like the University should try and make them play a role in first year lives type of thing, where they actually like, the academic development centre. I started going to that Uhmm the beginning of this semester (Najma- hmm) and (Najma- ja) if I had that in the beginning of first year. Everything that they taught me now, that it would’ve made life so easy. Najma: And yet I mean it is available.

Fiffy: But people don’t think about it and that’s the worst part is like you saw the posters and everything (Najma- ja) but you just oblivious to everything so it’s like ooh okay academic ooh okay moving on and then everyone reads the party poster uhh there’s a party okay, did you hear about the party (Najma- ja) but when it comes to academics and stuff like people aren’t serious about it. So I feel like if they’ve actually be like no, first years have to come sit down and be like 123,123 because once you get to second year, you get used to first year tendencies and they continue with you to second year and then they continue to your third year and then honours and everything. So I think if they start like the academic development centre, they start having one-on-one workshops with the first years as the day they arrive. School starts they get evaluated every week, they get everything done. I think they would understand the work much better and then cause, people can study smart and not hard but then at the end of the day if someone doesn’t kinda give you an idea or direction of where to go, you just walking into a field (Najma-hmm) and you like okay where do I go right now?

Najma: Ja, ah ah I mean the time management, is the thing that came up, time and time again with ehh the other student, that I also interview and, and one particular student said that you get told all the time to manage your time but you don’t know how, to do it.
Fiffy: Ja, that’s something like, that’s something that ADC also told me because fine! Okay you think you, you like that’s the... okay, an issue is we can all think up all these things on yourself but if you don’t implement them at the end of the day it really just affects you negatively. So I feel like with the ADC because you, they always, you always being monitored I know in the workplace you still get monitored (Najma-hmm) that type of thing but then I feel like here, you’ve got that something that gives you a push to work harder like every single day. Okay no, I need to follow my timetable and at this specific time Uhm I need to study (Najma-hmm) and then you do the timetable like around you not, around someone else’s time or whatever and then it should work perfectly for you, because you’re the one that designed it for yourself (Najma-hmm) and all that they could suggest here and there, like don’t you think this if you tried it this way it would work better or not type of thing (Najma-hmm hmm) and then if sit down and take those suggestions it really helps. So i don’t know I feel like ADC and PSYCad need to seriously, like sit down properly not as a group with all the first years like al the first years from all the res’s but sit down individually with each first year at res and be like fine this is what’s going on, this is what you should expect. Workload in first year is this much, the second year is like everything else and then third year is like triple the amount so (Najma-hmm). I feel like if you know, if they start from a very early age, from first year... Najma: From right at the beginning, when they start. Fiffy: Ja, by the time they in third year like they’ve got a hold on everything and they can like sommer transition into everything properly. Najma: Hmm, Uhm I, I, we started I can’t remember exactly the exact date. I think it was sometime in March or April, is it April? That we started the workshops? Fiffy: Ja April Najma: It was April, Uhm some people have suggested that we maybe start earlier. Fiffy: Ja because... Najma: Because, in first year they’re very open to ideas. Fiffy: Cause that’s one thing that, okay Uhm I know I was forced we, we forced like if you don’t comedown dah dah dah, you gonna get fired, if you don’t come down, and then it shouldn’t be like that it should be, they should, should be willing to go (Najma-hmm) yep as well I do agree if you guys start within the first week of school (Najma-
hmm) the first week the school starts and then you do like opening (Najma- hmm) within first week then they start. It’s like a normal thing for them, it’s not like you pop in the, the middle of the month, semester. Najma: And, you adding to a very busy schedule.

Fiffy: So if it’s like, from the beginning and then just goes continuously, continuously and then they’ll b like okay fine, wow okay, no let’s go and then the workshops will go smoothly. I feel like it will go smoothly cause with us you came in the middle and everyone is like I’ve got assignments to do and like (Najma- ja) ja, it’s like it’s just an hour? Do you know what I could be doing in that hour? You know just take that hour it will help you in the end, it’s something that will just deviate you from your studies or something like that so ja.

Najma: Uhm and then just to talk about the actual topics we did group conflict (Najma-hmm) ehh manage, ehh part of it was just managing your time and ability you know caring for the next person making your voice heard ehmm and all of that. Ehh we spoke about time management how do you think that should be worked in and what else do you think (Fiffy-hmm) would be of value to the students.

Fiffy: Eeh Uhm writing skills.

Najma: Writing skills?

Fiffy: Yes and stress management and what else? Everything else was okay and it was great but writing skills like fine, I know with the PR students, they’re the ones that I worked with most because, they were a little bit more than everyone else so it was easier to handle with them like, they do a lot of assignments (Najma-hmm hmm). They do a lot of things and I know within the beginning of first term a lot of them didn’t do well in their first tests and then they called you in (Najma- yes yes) I feel like if we have writing skills there and how to properly write an essay or do your assignments. It would be great help for them as well (Najma- hmmm) so then also like ahh the mixtures of different Uhm you know when we were forming the groups (Najma- hmm) I feel like we should actually put them in groups to not to for that you get comfortable within the circle of you study but actually expand your horizon that type of thing because, if I was paired with someone who is doing jewellery and then
I’m a PR student. I didn’t even know there was jewellery until the first years were like no. I’m doing jewellery, she’s like right here I’m like wait, I’ve been here for how long? I’ve never known there was a jewellery course type of thing here at Bunting so it’s like, no its actually interesting and I’, thinking okay what do you do? Do you just stick things together? And they like no its quiet complex and I’m like ohh okay so for me personally I love learning what other people are doing and then as much as I do accounting, I still wanna know if someone had to sit down, sit me down. I’m in a room with someone whose doing PR I’ll be like I won’t be thinking is that someone who stands in front of the TV and lies to the entire world about their company. I’ll be like it’s actually, there’s a lot involved with that so I feel like if we put them in groups, okay like in the house consister will be like okay this person, this person in a group and then they work there. Every single 2 weeks or something it rotates so you don’t get comfortable (Najma-yes) and then you get to work with people, that different type of characters because we put them like we allow them to choose their own groups. So they all going to their friends (Najma-yes) cause they already knew okay, I’m very close with this person so if we put them in those different type of groups like there was this one first year was angry at most of the times and then the other first year was very quiet. So if we put them together the one would actually come down and the one would’ve realised their voice that type of thing. So I feel if we sit down and just it’s like okay no I feel you should sit down with this type of person just also put them according to character and personally they would have really made a different as well.

Najma: Okay no, I appreciate that comment, but I also think it can, can go the other way.

Fiffy: Ja that’s what I was thinking, ja because *mumbles*

Najma: Resistance, like I don’t really want to work with her, but in any case. We can try a different things i mean nothing is still if you see nothing is working you can try other things Uhm. I think to end off Uhm, just what were the main challenges, because you got to them to come. What were the main challenges for you?

Fiffy: Uhm for me personally it was motivating them (Najma- hmm) to attend the workshops, motivating them to actually do anything like that’s not academic related (Najma-ja) cause as much as it is my focus was on their academics (Najma- ja) and
what’s going on ja. I feel like if, I feel like as a House Coms they should actually do a
one-on-one specific like on what your portfolio is about like as the academic officer,
this is what I expect you to do, not what happened at the camp, where they like just
go then yada ya[jmda yada the entire day for everyone and then eventually when you
knock off, you like okay, what is actually going on here?
Najma: This is the camp with the student affairs that you did?
Fiffy: Ja, that we did, like at 9 o’clock we were all like we woke up so early in the
morning just to listen to these guys say nothing. Cause I wasn’t understanding
anything it was just like okay my attention span is not that long (Najma-hmmm). So I
think if they actually if at camp they actually sat us down okay as academic officers
alone (Najma- hmm) with no other ehh portfolios around (Najma-ja) and then we sat
down and be like okay this is what I expected you to do to kinda like help us and give
us ideas as to what to do like share what other res’s do that actually works for them.
Cause as much as it is what works for them, could work for us but what could work for
them could not work for us.
Najma: Hmm because everyone take is different but you can still learn.
Fiffy: Ja from someone, something else I think if they didn’t group us all, all 9 of us
would be like ja, this is what you have to do and give us a whole bunch of things to
read at the end of the day we all like really?! I have to go study after this and then you
like Uhmm we didn’t read like anything that worked even all we did was sign documents,
okay this is the contract that we have to sign (Najma- laughs) okay na, I’m not reading
that so I think if they sat us down individually in our portfolios and then literally told us
what the University expects from us (Najma-hmm) and then we told them like as no
past experience can obviously before you can make it as a house com, you have to
have lived in a res, so you know personally what your res could need (Najma- ja ja) or
what could help. So I feel like if they sat us down and then individually we told them
had like a one-on one with whoever is in charge of academics we’ll be like I truly
believe this and this. Because the academic portfolio is huge (Najma-hmm) and people
just think, it’s just telling first years to go study like, no it’s not and then now to deal
with F7’s as res students you know, because... Najma: Is that part of the portfolio?
Fiffy: Uhm what happened with the F7’s the ladies in F7’s it was just of when recently, okay Uhm I only know of 2 students Matron only mentioned 2 students who got F7’s so the white student from the beginning of the year there were issues with her and then, we tried helping her she didn’t want the help, we tried getting her friends to help her. I don’t know how that went on and then she just became blocked, and then all of a sudden she was happy and we all thought okay, guess she’s taking the help (Najma-ja) and then when her results came back she was so in denial of the fact that she had failed. So she’s like no I don’t fail, no I didn’t get an F7 were like my dear like (Najma-shame) what’s going on? She just did not wanna open so... Najma: Is she still here? Fiffy: She left res, because, she’s academically excluded and she didn’t appeal at, like for anything.

Najma: Ja, I’m asking cause I know you can appeal.
Fiffy: Ja, so I think if we, if how do you put it? Uhm it okay fine, like okay the academic SRC’s in our res, when I look at her, dealing with all the academic things. She looks like she’s gonna go crazy (Najma- hmm) because (Najma- laughs) so it’s like Uhm it’s the thing of, cause she’s dealing with day students and res students. I think like if they allowed us in a way just input be like hey, this is what really happened with her, maybe it could’ve helped her (Najma- ja) type of thing but, as well it could also help us because next thing you just get thrown ohh this students is failing you need to go find out what’s wrong and like what you mean she’s failing?
She’s been here for six months and she’s failing? And then I think as well if the University could send us records of student progress hence the ADC thing we worked with them. We would know how well the students do or not so well the student is doing so ja.

Najma: So, you only find out like at the end, in June winter?
Fiffy: Ja, in June, only when the results come out we find out how they were doing in school.

Najma: And throughout? There’s nothing?
Fiffy: There’s no indication or anything because we don’t get the results of the first semester test or second semester test. Unless we like, tell them to bring them an then, most of them don’t bring them. I think there’s only one student that came and be like
okay this is my first semester test and this is my second semester test and then she was coping. So it's like (Najma- ja) okay you don’t need help just come and talk to who and who if you need help and then ja.

Najma: Ok, alright thank you so much I, I know you need to study but if there’s anything else, if you think of anything..

Fiffy: I’ll email it.

Najma: Please put it in writing or email it, to me, whatever comes to mind. If you think afterward I should’ve told you this or whatever, please send it to me. Fiffy: Will do.

Najma: I appreciate your time Fiffy: Ja.

Najma: And all the best.

Fiffy: Thank you and you too.
ADDENDUM H: Management of Res X Data

Data management began with the transcription of interviews conducted with the residence manager (RM), 2 residence advisors (RAs) and the new House committee (HK) at Res X. Data were transcribed by an assistant and I listened to the audio recorded interviews several times, and checked the typed transcripts for accuracy. The data generated through interviews were prepared for coding as part of this process and for establishing an audit trail. As part of establishing an audit trail, one set of naming codes were utilised to identify data sets to their source in preparation for data analysis.

Res X Example of Naming Data to Source: Residence and Participant Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Study Residence: Res X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residence Manager = RM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence Advisor = RA Each RA = RA1, RA2, RA3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Committee (informally known as HK)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, for instance, when using data generated from a residence advisor for Residence X, I use the code Res X_RA. Each RA was given a number as per order of interview. The first RA interviewed was coded Res X_RA1, the second is Res X_RA2, etc. To distinguish between members of the HK focus group, I assigned numbers to each member. For example, member one was Res X_HK1 and the next Res X_HK2, and so forth.

In order to keep track of the various data sources, I used a second level of classification indicating the naming of codes from and including other relevant detail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-study: Participants</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Type of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Res X_RM1</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Semi-structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res X_RA1</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Semi-structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res X_RA2</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Semi-structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res X_HK1</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Res X_HK2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from the interviews conducted, other secondary data that informed the pre-study phase findings include the presentation done at the RA training workshop, reflection notes and minutes of meetings. My first contact with the RAs was during their training session organised by Student Affairs. At this workshop, a colleague and I co-presented a session entitled “Learning Communities @ UJ”. The aim...
was to get RAs to volunteer to facilitate the formation of SLS. The following two slides are taken from the presentation:

**PowerPoint Presentation to RAs as Organised by Student Affairs**

The emphasis of the presentation was to highlight the need for the creation of SLS in the residences, present the objectives of the pilot project and appeal to the RAs to help with facilitating the process. To our dismay, most of the RAs present were not willing to assist without remuneration. Since there was no budget for this pilot study, we were not in a position to offer any kind of remuneration. As a result, only Res X and one other residence on another UJ campus volunteered to become part of the pilot project. After the presentation and the subsequent first meeting with the RM and RAs of Res X, my work with this residence signified the **start of the pilot**. This work also served as **project pre-study phase**, which led to the design of the case study of Res Y. My involvement at this stage was as academic development practitioner.
Addendum I: Res X Reading 1: Getting a Global Understanding

I first read the four interview transcripts to get a general understanding of what the issues were from the participants’ perspectives. The objective was to get to a global understanding of the challenges or tensions and possibilities, and what to improve in the next cycle, making a PAR way of working particularly suitable. In Reading 1, therefore, I did not analyse the interviews in as much depth as in the Reading 2, because I wanted to get to the enabling and constraining factors before commencing with future implementation cycles of SLS. During the first reading, I concentrated only on initial coding and then broad generalisations (emergent themes) of the data, so that I could continue with the second implementation cycle in an informed way. Due to time constraints with regard to moving to the implementation cycle at Res Y then, themes were treated tentatively, which facilitated an openness to change. A second, more intense reading resulted in re-examining the codes, abstracting them into categories, and then finally resulting in themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive phrase: Students are in need of support to contend with residence and academic life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students did not know how to work collaboratively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Students battled to keep up with residence activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social and emotional support needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. No commitment from students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Language problem meant that help was needed with reading, understanding, and writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Unwilling to start new groups as informal social learning spaces already exist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Limited time for academic activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Descriptive phrase: Discourse of power shapes everyday engagement

8. RAs acted as disciplinarians and were not helpful in terms of academics
9. Power issues hamper engagement
10. Unhappiness with the forced nature of study time
RAs need additional training

An example of how I initially coded and categorised the verbatim interview data is presented here

Res X_RA1: Exemplar 1 Provisional category: Unwilling to start new groups as informal social learning spaces already exist
Okay. Well last year the implementation of it was a little late [code] when people had already had their academic schedules and stuff like that. So implementing something new was difficult [code] because they had already had their set way [code] of when they study, the time they study and who they’re already studying with and also securing a venue for everybody to be there at the same time.

Res X_RA1: Exemplar 2 Provisional category: No commitment from students
Yes, it would be again. So now with these first-year’s we have a set study time and we have a set venue for them, which is there by the canteen. Again the problem is attendance [code] with the first-years and we can’t spend time running after people [code] for them to study because studying is not about res. points or whatever it’s for the individual. You’re supposed to be studying; it’s not about the house-com, it’s not about the RA’s, it’s not about what we’re – we try our best to get them there, but then there’s only so much that we can do. But when they do get there, not all of them are actually studying [code]. They take their laptops there and they’re not studying. They’re watching movies or doing something else, they are not studying [code]. So again the problem is now you can’t keep on checking on every single…
Res X_RA1: Exemplar 3 Provisional category: RAs need additional training

And then another thing with the RA's/tutors is that they don’t really – they’ve had – they’ve had their training and stuff but I don’t think they know exactly what it is they’re supposed to do [code]. And the – they don’t know what approach they’re supposed to [code] – to take.

Like, ‘am I supposed to teach you the chapter you don’t understand, am I supposed to – is the RA themselves supposed to find questions for them to do [code] and then get the memo and then they do the questions and then have a discussion with them’. What is it they are actually supposed to do? [code] Because the training is – I think it discusses the methodology and the terms and this and this and this...

Res X_RA1: Exemplar 4: Language problem meant that help was needed with reading, understanding, and writing

From their side I think it’s understanding the medium of communication, English. ‘Cause I think it’s really a problem for some students that didn’t do English as a first language [code].

So I think also understanding and how do you make understand.

Res X_RM: Exemplar 1: Students are resistant to working with others outside of their own choice

Uhm, we realised that people already have study partners where they discuss stuff related to their course. But in terms of having other people that they’re not used to they didn’t really take it well. [code]

Res X_HK4: Exemplar 1: Unhappiness with the forced nature of study time

Let’s just clear one thing, with the learning communities. Is it now like a forced thing [code] even now with the other house com campuses I’ve picked up that they all seem to think like it’s a forced thing for the first year students to go and study [code], now I want to understand is it like does a person have to study or is it like an optional thing like go …if you don’t want to study, you don’t have e to study...
Addendum J: Res X Reading 2: Towards a Deeper Understanding through Content Analysis

The 11 categories derived from the first reading (were incorporated into the second reading and modified to be more inclusive. For example, Reading 1’s Category 10: ‘Unhappiness with the forced nature of study time’ was changed to Reading 2’s Category 13: ‘Dissatisfaction with study time’. Another category, Reading 1’s Category 8: ‘RAs acted as disciplinarians and was not helpful in terms of academics’ changed to Reading 2’s Category 14: ‘Tutors and/or RAs need to assist with academic work’. Where I added categories, the interview transcripts were reread according to the new coding structure. The second reading resulted in 35 provisional categories:

Provisional Categories Resulting from the Second Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Study time is problematic</th>
<th>2. RAs role in Social learning spaces is not clear</th>
<th>3. Language of instruction being English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Learning should be made fun dissatisfaction with study time</td>
<td>5. Study time was ineffective</td>
<td>6. Problems with academic work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. RAs monitor behaviour/discipline</td>
<td>8. Ill-discipline and resistance to study time</td>
<td>9. Power issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Tutors &amp; or RAs need to assist with academic work</td>
<td>11. RAs are not coping</td>
<td>12. Outside assistance from support services is needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Do not have student buy-in</td>
<td>17. A competitive spirit exists</td>
<td>18. Understanding of process was problematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. SLS not fully implemented</td>
<td>20. Group dynamics</td>
<td>21. The issue of trust is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Internet &amp; computer access is needed</td>
<td>23. Financial and social problems</td>
<td>24. Communication needs to improve</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To get to a level of abstraction, I further abstracted the provisional categories to six main categories, namely, Student disciplinary issues, Structure of study time, Power imbalances are problematic, Residence rules and/or policies do not relate into practice, Current academic practice in need of change and Social learning space implementation is problematic.

**From Provisional Categories to Main Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Categories</th>
<th>Provisional Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Student disciplinary issues hamper engagement</td>
<td>5, 11, 13, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Structure of study time is a constraint</td>
<td>1, 2, 5, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Power imbalances are problematic for the creation of SLS</td>
<td>6, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Residence rules and/or policies do not relate into practice</td>
<td>4, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Current academic practice in need of change</td>
<td>3, 7, 10, 19, 20, 23, 28, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. SLS implementation is problematic</td>
<td>15–18, 21, 25, 26, 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Other</td>
<td>9, 22, 24, 31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>