

**An Investigation into the Relationship Between Student Identity and
Academic Literacy at a Private Higher Education Institution**

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

Although academic development programmes have been well researched in the South African context, much of the research has focused on programmes at mainstream public universities and less is known about the programmes run by smaller private institutions. This research aims to identify and discuss themes around student identity and how these themes relate to academic literacy acquisition for students on a one-year bridging course programme at a private university. Gee's (2001) identity framework is used to explore and compare how students on a bridging course were viewed by the institution, and how these students saw themselves. An analysis of data gathered through interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and course-related materials revealed a strong deficit discourse around students on the bridging course. The institution's view of literacy as autonomous, the deficit discourse surrounding the students, and the way these students were positioned in the institution, meant that students, although highly motivated to achieve a degree qualification, had not begun to develop the beginning of either an academic or a vocational identity. The institution did not successfully enable students to view academic practice and discourse as part of their identity, and as a result bridging course students did not adopt the practices and discourses around academic literacy as they were not convinced of their validity and legitimacy. Given that academic literacy is central to success on a degree programme, these students were not adequately prepared for their first year of degree study. The findings from this research show the need for wider research into whether academic development programmes at private institutions are really meeting the needs of the students who enrol onto these programmes.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 Introduction	8
1.2 Background to the study	13
1.2.1 Higher education in South Africa	13
1.2.2 Research site	16
1.2.3 Rationale and aim of the study	18
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW, KEY CONCEPTS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	20
2.1 Literature Review	20
2.1.1. Entering higher education	20
2.1.2 Academic Development Programmes.....	22
2.1.3 Acquiring academic literacy.....	25
2.1.4 The relationship between identity and academic literacy.....	27
2.2 Theoretical Concepts	31
2.2.1 Introduction.....	31
2.2.2 Literacy	31
2.2.2.1 Defining literacy.....	31
2.2.2.2 Autonomous and Ideological models of literacy	32
2.2.3 Academic Literacy	33
2.2.3.1 Defining academic literacy.....	33
2.2.4 Identity.....	36
2.2.4.1 Exploring the concept of identity.....	36
2.3 Analytical Framework	37
2.3.1 Introduction.....	37
2.3.2 Gee’s framework for identity.....	37
2.3.2.1 Introduction.....	37
2.3.2.2 N- Identities	38
2.3.2.3 I- Identities	40
2.3.2.4 D- Identities.....	41
2.3.2.5 A- Identities	41
2.3.3 Using Gee’s Identity Framework to Construct Student Profiles	42
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	45
3.1. Introduction	45
3.2. Research design	45
3.2.1 Research approach	45

3.2.2 The inductive approach	46
3.3 Data collection	47
3.3.1 Introduction.....	47
3.3.2 Sampling.....	48
3.3.3 Data Collection Methods.....	48
3.3.3.1. Questionnaires	48
a) <i>Members of staff</i>	48
b) <i>Student participants</i>	49
3.3.3.2 Student Focus Groups	49
a) <i>Introductory activity</i>	50
b) <i>Group Discussion:</i>	51
3.3.3.3 Interviews with lecturers	52
3.3.3.4 Course materials and Bellevue Academy website	53
3.4 Data analysis methods	53
3.4.1 Coding	53
3.4.2 Discourse analysis.....	54
3.5 Ethical considerations.....	55
3.5.1 Consent from participants	55
3.5.2 Anonymity	56
3.5.3 Data collection methods	56
3.5.4 Dual role as researcher and employee.....	57
CHAPTER 4: PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT IDENTITY AND LITERACY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BELLEVUE ACADEMY	58
4.1 Introduction.....	58
4.2 Bridging course student identity from the perspective of Bellevue Academy	58
4.2.1 Nature (N ₁) Identities	58
4.2.1.1 Age	58
4.2.1.2 Nationality	60
4.2.1.3 Language	61
4.2.2 Nature (N ₂) Identities	62
4.2.2.1 Home environment	62
4.2.2.2 Access to electronic resources	62
4.2.2.3 Digital literacy.....	63
4.2.3 Institution (I) Identities	64
4.2.3.1 Members of a separate faculty	64
4.2.3.2 Rejected by mainstream public universities	65
4.2.4 Discourse (D)-Identities	65
4.2.4.1. Academically weak	65

4.2.4.2. Lacking essential academic skills.....	66
4.2.4.3 Lacking motivation.....	67
4.2.5 Affinity (A) Identities.....	67
4.2.5.1 Student of higher education affinity group.....	68
4.2.5.2 Vocational affinity group.....	69
4.5 Conceptions of literacy at Bellevue Academy: an autonomous model, normative stance, and study skills perspective.....	72
4.5.1 Strong focus on a checklist of technical skills.....	72
4.5.2 Decontextualisation of literacy practices.....	73
4.5.3 A disregard for the power relations surrounding literacy.....	74
CHAPTER 5: STUDENT IDENTITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDENTS....	76
5.1 Introduction.....	76
5.2. Bridging course student identity from the perspective of the students.....	76
5.2.1 Nature (N ₁)-identities.....	76
5.2.1.1. Age.....	76
5.2.1.2. Nationality.....	78
5.2.1.3 Language.....	78
5.2.2 Nature (N ₂) identities.....	79
5.2.2.1. Home environment.....	79
5.2.2.2. Access to electronic resources.....	80
5.2.2.3. Digital literacy.....	81
5.2.3 Institution (I) identities.....	82
5.2.3.1. Members of a separate faculty.....	82
5.2.3.2. Rejected by mainstream public universities.....	83
5.2.4 Discourse (D)-identities:.....	85
5.2.4.1 Academically adequate.....	85
5.2.4.2. Gaps in essential academic skills.....	87
5.2.4.3. Selectively motivated.....	87
5.2.5 Affinity (A)-identities:.....	88
5.2.5.1 Student of higher education affinity group.....	88
5.2.5.2 Vocational affinity group.....	92
5.3 Student identity: Two divergent perspectives.....	93
Student of higher education affinity group.....	95
Table 5.1 Comparisons between Bellevue Academy’s view of student identity and students’ own views.....	95
CHAPTER 6: POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ACQUISITION OF ACADEMIC LITERACY.....	96

6.1 Effects of the conceptions of literacy	96
6.2. Deficit Discourse Around Decontextualised Learners	98
6.3. Lack of Developing Academic and Vocational Identities	100
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION	103
7.1 Introduction	103
7.2 Main findings	103
7.3 The potential role of private higher institutions	105
7.4 Reflections on the study	105
7.5 Conclusion	106
BIBLIOGRAPHY	107
APPENDICES	117
Appendix A: Questionnaire for staff regarding bridging course students	117
Appendix B: Questionnaire for bridging course students	123
Appendix C: Guidelines for focus group activities	126
Appendix D: Questions for interviews with lecturing staff	128
Appendix E: Ethical Clearance from research site	131
Appendix F: Consent forms for staff and student participants	135

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This research took place at the Cape Town campus of a national, private, degree-offering higher education institution. The institution, Bellevue Academy¹, offers a bridging course to students who do not meet the entrance requirements for enrolment onto a degree programme. I started lecturing on the bridging course at Bellevue Academy in 2011, and remained working there until the end of the academic year in 2013. At the time the research took place studying at a private higher education institution was, for most school leavers, not viewed as being as desirable as studying at one of the more well-known public universities. However, as I return to complete the research following relocating to the United Kingdom, the position that private universities occupy in the higher education space has changed dramatically.

The student protests of 2015 have shaken the foundations of the South African higher education landscape, asking major questions about how it has failed to meet the needs of a changing society. The #RhodesMustFall² movement asks questions about knowledge and curriculum, while the #FeesMustFall protest, which erupted after the announcement of a fee increase above inflation, responded to financial issues. As journalist Ranjeni Munusamy wrote at the time, “The issues driving the student anger and rebellion go far beyond the unaffordability of higher education for poor black families. It is having to slot into an education system that emulates the society we live in – a lack of transformation, the perpetuation of inequality and prejudice against the financially weak” (Munusamy, 2015). As the #RhodesMustFall and then #FeesMustFall protests have been felt across the system, the faith of young people and their families in the vision of a quality public higher education is being tested.

¹ Pseudonym given to protect the identity of the institution

² A movement which began on the 9th of March 2015 at the University of Cape Town. Initially calling for the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the campus and then for decolonisation of South African campuses with a particular focus on curriculum

During a recent interview, Wits University's Achille Mbembe (Mbembe & Pienaar, 2016) hypothesised that given the current protest action taking place at the South African public universities, and the unlikelihood that the complex issues surrounding the protests will be resolved quickly, the idea of the growth of private universities will be given legitimacy in the South African context. Mbembe spoke of the global trend towards privatisation of higher education as education is increasingly being viewed as a commodity which can be bought and sold.

At present the private institutions in South Africa are seeking to legitimise their position in the higher education arena. SA Private Higher Education (SAPHE), previously an interest group made up of several private institutions, was formalised as an association in January 2017 in a bid to "build public awareness of and trust in private higher education by addressing myths and misperceptions about the sector, and to ultimately increase access to higher education" (SAPHE, 2017). However, despite the attempts of private universities to become more prominent in the South African tertiary education landscape, concrete data and information relating to this sector still remains vague. Accounts of the number of private higher education institutions operating in South Africa differ, and while regulations around institutions operating in the private sector are clear, the application of these regulations varies and there is a lack of systemic implementation of the regulations.

In addition to the irregularity with which private higher institutions are regulated, and the ambiguity around how many of them are currently (and legitimately) operating in South Africa, insufficient transparent information around quality measures at private universities has led to reservations around the value of some of the courses these institutions offer. A recent article by Havergal (2015) questions the quality and academic standards of some of the private institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. Havergal acknowledges that although private universities may be playing an important role in absorbing the demand from students who are either not accepted into, or do not wish to attend, public universities, the quality of the courses offered by the private universities has led some to question their role in Africa's wider development. Criticisms of private

universities include the limited range of their course offerings, absence of research, their heavy reliance of part-time lecturing staff, and very high tuition fees (Havergal, 2015).

During my time working at Bellevue Academy I lectured several subjects, including the Student Skills course, a year-long compulsory course for all bridging course students. The course was designed to equip students with the academic and life skills which were “vital and critical for all tertiary learners” (Bellevue Academy Student Skills Handbook, 2011:2). It was suggested that these academic and life skills would help students to take responsibility for their learning, reflect on learning processes and guide them towards proficiency in their learning (Bellevue Academy Student Skills Handbook, 2011:2).

However, as a lecturer on the bridging programme I found that even though all students on the programme took the Student Skills course, students often still did not succeed academically. In both 2011 and 2012 there was a very low success rate for students on the bridging programme at the Cape Town campus, with less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of students successfully completing the bridging programme and registering for degree study. This trend was common across all campuses and not exclusive to the research site (Miller ³, personal communication, 2013). It should be acknowledged that there are many environmental factors that could have contributed to students not continuing their studies besides not meeting the requirements to progress to degree study. These factors range from financial issues to family commitments at home. However, in my experience, one major factor that led to students deregistering from their studies, both during and at the end of the academic year, was poor academic performance and failure to pass many of the modules on the bridging programme.

While working with these students, it appeared that a particularly problematic area for students was that during their year on the bridging programme they were required to reach a level of competence relating to practices around academic reading and writing that would allow them to successfully meet the

³ Pseudonym given to protect the identity of the staff member

success criteria for the bridging programme. As a lecturer, I found that although common aspects of reading and writing in an academic context such as research and referencing were included in the Student Skills curriculum, lecturers often complained that students submitted assignments that bore little likeness to a piece of academic writing, neither in content nor in form. Lea and Street (1998:158) state that academic literacy practices, or reading and writing within the disciplines, are the main processes through which students learn in their new areas of study and, as is the norm in tertiary education establishments, Bellevue Academy assesses the majority of student work through the form of essays and projects. In order to complete these assessments successfully there is a required level of academic writing proficiency that students need to master, and this was problematic for most of the students on the course.

While academic reading and writing are a significant part of academic literacy, McKenna (2004:20) states that academic literacy is about more than reading and writing and that it “embodies the very norms of behaviour in higher education, the things that each discipline values, and the behaviours that it does not”. As well as expressing frustration around students’ low capabilities of academic reading and writing, many lecturers felt that bridging course students were not displaying the behaviours that were valued in a higher education setting. Another aspect of the Student Skills curriculum was to teach students generic study skills such as note taking and studying techniques. However, despite this intervention, lecturers frequently experienced and expressed frustration, as they believed students were made aware of what was expected of them in terms of their behaviour regarding lectures, assignments and examinations, and yet still did not adopt these behaviours willingly. A deficit discourse, whereby students were seen to be lacking in attributes which they needed to be successful at university, and whereby difficulties which students faced were attributed to this perceived deficiency, was prevalent in most references to bridging course students. I also noted that some lecturers, other students, and the institution itself through structure and curriculum decisions, seemed to have a very dismissive stance towards students on the bridging programme.

However, I found through my interactions with bridging programme students that there was an inherent sense of determination and positivity in these students. While there were times when students were disengaged and performing below their academic abilities, I found that when offered the chance for development and advancement, most students did not resist the opportunity, as would be expected given the widespread deficit view of this group of students. In my final year working at Bellevue Academy I started a writing centre to provide help students for who were struggling with academic writing. The response to this was very encouraging and many students took the opportunity to spend time working to improve their writing. My knowledge and experiences with Academic Literacies theory, and experiences of helping students in the writing centre led me to question whether the problems lay not with the students themselves, but instead with how academic literacy teaching and learning was being approached by the institution.

It was through the increasing prevalence of lecturers forming notions about the 'type' of learners in their classes, and how these notions were so different from my own, that I wished to explore the deficit discourses surrounding these students and became interested in how student identities are constructed at various levels. I used Gee's (2001) four conceptual perspectives through which identity has been researched, and adapted these perspectives to create an analytical tool using the four perspectives as four lenses with which data could be analysed in order to explore the discourses around student identities. Gee's adapted framework allowed for a description of the 'type of student' a bridging course student was, from the perspective of the institution, and from the perspectives of the students themselves. I sought to explore whether students' constructions of their own identities differed from the way in which they were constructed by the institution, and if so what implications these differences might have for students' chances of acquiring the levels of academic literacy proficiency needed on the bridging course, for the rest of their time at university, and in their future careers.

While it is acknowledged that academic reading and writing practices are central to academic literacy, this study does not involve analysis of texts produced by students, but rather focuses on the perspective from which literacy is perceived by the institution and how this impacts practices relating to the teaching and learning which lead to students' production of texts for assessment purposes.

While I used numerous theoretical concepts to analyse and interpret the data, Street's (1984) autonomous and ideological models of literacy, Lea and Street's (1998) three models of academic writing, and Lillis and Scott's (2007) normative and transformative perspectives of academic literacy facilitated the exploration of the relationship between identity and chances of academic success.

1.2 Background to the study

1.2.1 Higher education in South Africa

In South Africa, despite the high costs, a tertiary education is still believed to be the best way to enhance an individual's employability and earnings potential (Donnelly, 2012). The Council on Higher Education (CHE) argues that achieving a degree is an indication of an individual's ability to complete a "major and challenging undertaking over a multi-year period" (CHE, 2013: 34) and that this considerable academic achievement has a significance not only for a graduate's economic and social prospects, but also for their self-image and confidence.

Given the benefits of possessing a tertiary qualification, both on a personal and societal level, it is unsurprising that the demand for entrance to tertiary education institutions is high. Problematically, the demand for public higher education in South Africa far outweighs the supply. It was reported that in 2010 the University of Johannesburg processed 85 000 applications for the 11 000 first year places available. The situation was similar at other universities; with many universities receiving almost six times more first year applications than the number of places they had available (News24.com, 2012). At the time the research took place private universities were marketing themselves as an

alternative to public universities, with a point of difference being their ability to give students more individualised attention and support than the oversubscribed public universities.

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), commissioned a study to describe the nature of private post-school education in South Africa. One of the key findings from this report was that data relating to the private post-school sector was dispersed and had gaps, duplications, and overlaps, making verification of information across sectors difficult (Blom, 2011: 6). However, as Blom stated in the report, treating the datasets⁴ as separate entities allowed for findings which gave a strong indication of the scope of the private post-school sector.

According to Blom's report (p.33), in 2009 there were 93 higher education institutions that submitted data relating to their student enrolment. Student enrolment ranged from below 100 at one institution to above 14 000 at another. Total student enrolment at private higher education institutions was approximately 70 000. In the same year there were just over 51 000 students enrolled at private further education and training (FET) colleges. In 2010 the ratio of students enrolled at public universities versus those enrolled at private higher education and FET colleges was approximately 8:1 (CHE, 2011). Although the number of students enrolled at public universities still remains significantly higher than at private tertiary institutions, given the supply and demand issues experienced by public universities, as well as the current uncertainty over what the future of public universities will look like, the role of private universities should not be overlooked.

While increasing numbers of private post-school institutions offer a starting point in addressing the supply and demand imbalance of tertiary education access, higher education in South Africa faces another barrier to its aim of producing high numbers of quality graduates. It has been found that many students that

⁴ Datasets included data from the DHET, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), and Umalusi

register for various higher education programmes and courses experience extreme difficulty in completing their studies, and in many cases students do not complete their studies at all (Machika, 2007:120; CHE, 2011, 2013). Of the student cohort that entered the public higher education in 2006⁵, 23% deregistered in the first year of study. Of the remaining students, only 27%, roughly one student in every four, completed their undergraduate curriculum within the intended time (CHE, 2013:43). After 5 years, 48% of the cohort had completed their qualification. Of the remaining 25% of students that stay in education or return after 5 years, it is estimated that 45% will never graduate (CHE, 2013: 45).

Measures such as participation and attrition rate, and graduation in regulation time are indicators of an education system's effectiveness and internal efficiency, and given that the statistics from the 2006 group are similar to those released in previous years, it is clear that the low percentages for these measures continue to act as a barrier to social and economic development, and are key factors in explaining the shortage of high-level skills in South Africa (CHE, 2013:41).

One of the most frequently cited reasons as to why students fail to, or take longer to, master degree requirements is a lack of academic 'preparedness' in terms of both their home and school environments (Scott et al., 2007: 42-3). In South Africa, as in many other developing countries, it is often the case that students entering university do so from positions of extreme inequality, most noticeably in schooling, but also in terms of financial and other resources. Many children attend poorly resourced schools with inadequate infrastructure such as plumbing and electricity. These children also face other barriers to effective learning such as untrained teachers, overcrowded classes, and insufficient learning resources (Herselman, 2003). These conditions impact on the quality of education children in these settings are given access to. The small percentage of children from these under resourced backgrounds that do enter tertiary education are likely to be underprepared and ill-equipped to cope with the substantial demands experienced in a higher education environment.

⁵ Excluding non-contact and private institutions. Includes 3 and 4-year degree, 3-year diploma.

In an attempt to overcome this lack of academic 'preparedness' that some students experience, academic development programmes and courses have been widely used by South African higher education institutions over the last 25 years. The main aim of these interventions is to enable students from disadvantaged academic and socioeconomic backgrounds to develop their literacy, quantitative, and study skills so that they are able to achieve success in a particular course, and ultimately, a higher education qualification (Smith, 2009: 1009). Unfortunately, the results of these well-intended and often costly efforts have often been disappointing, and attrition rates continue to rise despite these interventions (De Klerk, Van Deventer & Van Schalkwyk 2006; Letseka & Maile, 2008).

Considerable research has been done on factors affecting student success, including both students in the first year of mainstream study and students who are enrolled on extended degree programmes. Across these studies it has been found that lecturers frequently give students' lack of academic literacy capabilities as a key factor in the high dropout and low success rates (Lea & Street, 1998; McKenna, 2004; Kapp & Bangeni, 2005; Boughey, 2010). However, in the South African context, the vast majority of the research has been done at public universities. Given that tertiary education at private institutions is becoming a more prevalent choice for many South African school leavers, there is a need for more information relating to private providers of education. The quality of teaching and learning offered by private institutions, as well as the space they occupy and the role they play in the tertiary education arena are important factors, and more investigation around these areas is needed.

1.2.2 Research site

The site for this research project was at a private for-profit higher education institution, Bellevue Academy. Bellevue Academy has been in operation for more than 25 years and was recently bought out by a large global education company. The institution has a main campus in Gauteng and a number of remote sites around South Africa. This research took place at the institution's

Cape Town campus. Bellevue Academy is accredited to offer 20 undergraduate degrees, 3 Honours degrees and 1 Master's degree across six faculties.

Interestingly, Bellevue Academy does not call itself a private university but rather an “institute of higher education”. Bellevue Academy aligns with traditional universities in that it offers degree programmes, but it also aligns with Further Education and Training (FET) colleges and Universities of Technology because many of the programmes they offer, (for example Graphic Design and Travel and Tourism), are subjects that are typically technical or vocational offerings. According to Coleman (2016) vocational institutions, such as universities of technology, were historically regarded as serving the primary function of preparing students for employment, unlike universities which were seen as “sites of scholarly activity associated with the pursuit of abstract, conceptual knowledge for its own sake”. However, the blurring of these boundaries has been acknowledged (Winberg, 2005) and Coleman's (2012) research into how knowledge is recontextualised on particular vocational courses at a university of technology highlights the complexity around how teaching, learning and assessment are characterised in the curricula of these courses. While universities of technology also offer vocational-type qualifications which are typically offered at diploma level or degree level, they are public whereas Bellevue Academy is a private institution, and therefore it occupies an interesting niche in the South African higher education sector.

To be accepted onto a degree programme at Bellevue Academy students must meet the specific entry requirements for their desired programme. Entry requirements are based around a points system with points allocated according to students' results in their Grade 12 final examinations. If students do not meet the entry requirements, either because they did not achieve the minimum number of points or had a subject choice that did not qualify them for degree entry⁶, a bridging programme is offered as an alternative route to degree programme admission.

⁶ Some subjects (e.g. Computer Applications Technology) do not allow for a degree pass in Grade 12)

The bridging programme is offered over a minimum of one year and a maximum of two years and on successfully completing the bridging programme students are able to register for their chosen degree programme. The aim of the bridging programme at Bellevue Academy is to serve as a bridging year between school and university-level education, and its objectives are to “teach students, in a supportive environment, the academic skills, knowledge and attitudes required to succeed in higher education” (Bellevue Academy website, 2012).

1.2.3 Rationale and aim of the study

The value of a higher education qualification for South African students, coupled with the limited availability of places at universities and a high dropout rate (especially in the first year) means that research into factors which could influence students' chances of success is vital. It is hoped that, by building on discoveries from existing research, findings from this study might serve to illuminate the role that both private institutions and extended degree programmes might have in increasing student success rates in the higher education context. Given the current instability in the public universities' domain, it is very likely that many more students will look to private universities as an option for higher education. It is therefore important that these institutions become the sites of research, and that findings from research are used to inform and improve the students' learning experiences at these institutions.

The primary aim of this research project was to investigate the role that conceptions of literacy and of students' identity might have on students' chances of acquiring the levels of academic literacy necessary for success on an extended degree programme at a private tertiary institution. In order to explore the primary research aim, a number of sub-questions guided the study:

- How is literacy conceptualised at Bellevue Academy?
- What is the profile of a typical bridging course student from the view of Bellevue Academy?
- What is the profile of a typical bridging course student from the view of the students themselves?
- How do these two profiles compare?
- What effect might the relationship between the institution's conception of literacy and their views of a typical bridging course student have on students' chances of successful acquisition of academic literacy?
- What effect might the students' self-concepts have on their successful acquisition of academic literacy?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW, KEY CONCEPTS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1. Entering higher education

Over the last two decades, there has been a global escalation in the demand for tertiary education. Increased participation in tertiary education has led to the establishment of a multicultural and multilingual student body in place of one that was, in the past, typically monocultural and monolingual (Boughey, 2000: 281). The global 'widening participation' agenda in higher education promotes inclusion of previously excluded students, and higher education is no longer reserved for a small elite minority (Warren, 2002: 86).

In the South African context, in an attempt to redress inequalities from the Apartheid era, the increased attainability of higher education has been driven by a strong political agenda. Boughey (2000: 281) cautions that, as the student body becomes more diversified, it can no longer be assumed that students entering universities necessarily come from schools and homes that share practices and ideologies with the university they attend and the lecturers that they interact with there. It should also not be assumed that students will successfully learn practices and adopt new identities simply through exposure to the higher education environment (Boughey, 2000; Gourlay, 2009; Kapp & Pym, 2013).

The diversity that characterises first-year classes at many universities is multi-layered and complex, as many students enter higher education not only with extreme differences in academic ability, but also with considerable social, economic and cultural differences (Fraser & Killen 2005). At university these students often have to cope with multiple academic, linguistic and social challenges and this can have a negative impact on their academic progress, especially during a student's first year at university (Kapp & Pym, 2013).

While the first year university experience is widely regarded as an important area of both enquiry and development for students, it is also recognized to be a period of vulnerability for many students who may find the higher education environment unfamiliar and challenging (Gourlay, 2009:181). Students entering university are exposed to new, and often unfamiliar, views and practices as they take on new subjects and experience pedagogies that may differ significantly from those to which the students are accustomed (Boughey, 2010; Fraser and Killen, 2003; Niven, 2005). Scott (2009:1) suggests that for many students in South Africa the first year experience at university is “marred by failure, loss of confidence, and perhaps disillusionment”. Often students who experience academic difficulties in their first year, such as failing courses or passing only narrowly, are discouraged by these negative experiences and end up dropping out in their later undergraduate years (Scott, 2009:5).

The difficulties students experience in their first year of higher education can be attributed to many different factors, from academic struggles to personal and financial complications. In South Africa it is widely argued that the inadequate schooling system is one of the primary causes of students being underprepared for conventional forms of higher education (Slonimsky & Shalem, 2005; Yeld, 2009). Taylor, Muller and Vinjevold (2003: 41, as cited in Van der Berg, 2008: 146) note that results from international evaluation studies suggest that the scores attained by South African learners are “far below what is expected at all levels of the schooling system, both in relation to other countries (including other developing countries) and in relation to the expectations of the South African curriculum”. As well as highlighting poor performance in relation to other countries research has also shown that, although it has been some 20 years since the end of Apartheid, systematic differences between schools serving different parts of the population remain exceedingly large and quality of education differentials are enduring (Van der Berg, 2007: 850; Van der Berg, 2008: 146).

While an inadequate schooling background is one of the primary factors leading to students being disadvantaged at university, there are many other factors such as language and issues around identity that could lead to a student being disadvantaged in a university context (Thesen and Van Pletzen, 2006; Kapp

and Pym, 2013; Boughey and McKenna, 2016). Given the diversity and complexity of the student population entering university, understanding the issues surrounding student disadvantage, support and success as multifaceted and complex is essential if all students are to be given a fair chance at achievement.

In order to support students in their transition from school to university, many higher education institutions have established support interventions and academic development programmes with the goal of improving throughput rates while simultaneously addressing the needs of the so-called 'under-prepared' students (Van Schalkwyk, 2008:2). These interventions have taken a variety of forms including bridging courses as well as extra tutorials and additional courses, usually in English and mathematics. The main aim of these interventions is to enable students from disadvantaged academic and socioeconomic backgrounds to develop their literacy, quantitative, and study skills so that they are able to achieve success in a particular course, and ultimately, a higher education qualification (Smith, 2009: 1009). Unfortunately, the results of these well-intended and often costly interventions are often disappointing (De Klerk, Van Deventer and Van Schalkwyk, 2006).

While there is increasing pressure for higher education institutions to support students with different levels of disadvantage in the learning environment, there are still many institutions that tend to place the problems students face with the students themselves, constructing students' home identities and languages as a problem that has to be fixed through the provision of quick-fix support skills interventions (Haggis 2004; Kapp & Pym, 2013). The history and the nature of academic development programmes in South Africa will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

2.1.2 Academic Development Programmes

De Klerk, Van Deventer and Van Schalkwyk (2006:151) define academic development as a term that is used "in relation to all programmes that aim to render support in an academic context to students (and sometimes prospective students) predominantly from educationally disadvantaged communities

through a variety of interventions”. Over time student support needs have changed, as has the political and economic climate. In response to this, as well as in response to findings and recommendations from academic development and Academic Literacies research, the nature of academic development programmes has progressed as it attempts to adapt to these changes.

In the South African context the changes have been significant enough to allow for researchers such as Boughey (2007a:2) to acknowledge three phases in the history of the South African Academic Development movement. Boughey defines these as the Academic Support phase, the Academic Development phase and the Higher Educational Development phase (Boughey, 2007a:2).

This first phase of academic development provision in South Africa, the Academic Support phase focused on interventions aimed at overcoming the perceived under-preparedness of black students who had previously been excluded from certain higher education establishments. It was believed that these students lacked certain important skills needed for higher education. In order to help these students to “catch up” with other students, initial interventions focused mainly on issues of language proficiency, numeracy and study skills (Boughey, 2007a). Key to early initiatives was a deficit assumption about the students they served in the context of an assurance about the rightness of the practices which characterised the institutions to which they had been admitted (Boughey, 2007a). Issues such as the ideological nature of the university and discipline-specific practices were not viewed from a critical perspective and it was believed that these new students simply needed to be remedially inducted into the academy rather than drawing on the kinds of teaching and learning approaches which make the university’s ways of constructing knowledge accessible to all students (Boughey, 2009a; McKenna, 2012).

Changes to the South African political landscape in the late 1980s brought about an ideological shift that depicted the nature of higher education as socially constructed and therefore contestable (McKenna, 2012). This shift resulted in the beginnings of a critique of the institutional structures, norms and conventions that were designed for a predominantly homogenous student body.

The focus gradually shifted such that reflection on the educational institution itself as barrier to previously excluded student access emerged as a second phase in academic development (Boughey, 2007a).

During the second phase, which Boughey terms the Academic Development phase, it was argued that there needed to be changes at the level of curriculum and teaching methodology if the black majority was to be able to access and succeed at tertiary level in a new political system. This phase led to more integration of academic development practices in the mainstream (De Klerk, Van Deventer and Van Schalkwyk, 2006:152). However, Boughey (2007a) states that the support discourse from the first phase of academic development continued to dominate at most institutions, and therefore attempts to change curricula and teaching strategies to better meet the needs of the students were often resented by academic staff who believed that the problems lay with the students and not with university structures.

The third phase of academic development, Institutional Development, resulted from the need for universities to respond to demands related to globalisation (Boughey, 2007a). An efficiency discourse characterised this phase, as discursive formulations were focused around the need for systematic and institutional efficiency. As a result, Academic Development practitioners began to be perceived as a resource to be drawn on in the quest for overall institutional efficiency (Boughey, 2007a:3).

Today many providers of academic development programmes have increasingly become aware of the need for change within mainstream structures such as teaching and assessment practices, and there are some highly successful academic support initiatives currently being offered to students in the higher education sector (McKenna, 2012). However, despite a broad shift in the field of academic development towards a more critical approach to how provision is made for students' academic needs, many institutions still tend to construct students' home identities and languages as a problem that has to be fixed through the provision of quick-fix support skills courses (Boughey, 2007a, 2007b; Boughey, 2010; McKenna 2012). Additionally, the need to counter the stigma associated with special

programmes for black students at historically white institutions has meant that there has often been an avoidance of a direct focus on the sociocultural and psychological aspects of students' transitions into higher education. Ironically this avoidance has led to students finding themselves less able to access the knowledge and practices needed for success in a higher education context (Kapp and Pym, 2013).

One of the main aims of academic development programmes in South Africa has been to improve students' writing practices through a variety of interventions (Bharuthram & McKenna, 2012). The challenges surrounding academic literacy, and in particular, the production of academic texts will be looked at in closer detail in the following section.

2.1.3 Acquiring academic literacy

Students entering university are exposed to new, and often unfamiliar, views and practices as they take on new subjects and experience pedagogies that may differ significantly from those to which the students are accustomed (Bharuthram & McKenna, 2012; Jaffer, 2014; Lea & Street, 1998; Add in references on seminal texts in academic literacy and more recent SA literature McKenna, 2004). At traditional universities, even though multimedia and electronic technologies are beginning to influence university learning and how it is assessed, lectures, seminars and textbooks remain the key forms of knowledge transfer, and it is writing in its various forms that continues to be the way in which students both consolidate and demonstrate their subject knowledge (Hyland, 2009:5).

The emphasis on student writing as a means of assessing knowledge can be problematic when students' writing does not adhere to the expectations of the discourse community because it is not expressed within the powerful structures of academic literacy (McKenna, 2004: 124). Problematically, these powerful structures of academic literacy, or academic discourses, are often seen as 'common sense' by lecturers, but they are seldom made explicit to students (Bharuthram & McKenna, 2012: 581). Ballard and Clanchy (1988) point out that:

“the rules and conventions are nowhere codified or written down, and yet they mediate crucially between the student’s own knowledge and intentions, and the knowledge and potential meanings that exist within the university”. Lecturers and academic writers have already internalised these norms and use them to construct texts, both spoken and written. However, in order for the listeners or readers to interpret these texts, they need to be able to understand and draw on these norms and conventions in interpreting the texts (McKenna, 2004:117). Therefore, for a student to become fully literate in a higher education setting they need to “come to terms with the rituals, norms, values, language and behaviours of the institution” (McKenna, 2004: 117). However, coming to terms with academic discourse is not easy for students. Added to the fact that the norms and conventions of academic discourse are not codified or written down is the fact that dominant discourses are hegemonic, and therefore insiders see the rules and conventions as common-sense. It is therefore normally left to the students to try and make sense of their new surroundings (McKenna, 2004:117). However, cracking the code of academic literacy is one of the biggest challenges students entering university face (McKenna, 2009).

The concept of drawing on texts to construct arguments, as well as the requirement of giving credit to the creators of the texts, is often a new concept for students entering higher education. Bangeni and Kapp’s (2005) study found that students entering university found the academic discourse both constraining and demanding in its many rules, its formality, and its requirement to engage in close analysis and to consider the views of others in producing an argument. Students in the study found the practice and conventions of referencing challenging and unfamiliar. Similarly, Hendricks and Quinn (2000) found that students’ experiences of researching and referencing at school had primarily consisted of replicating the words and thoughts of others, and therefore experienced difficulties at university when they were required to write using their own words and distinguish different voices in writing.

However, failing to follow standard referencing practices and procedures can have serious effects on a student’s chances of success at university. In the context of assessments, failure to conform to the institution’s plagiarism policy could lead not only to failure but, if the student fails to credit the source of their

information correctly, may also result in disciplinary action from the institution (Angelil-Carter, 1995). Lea and Street's (1998) study of students at two London universities found that at both universities there appeared to be an unquestioned assumption that both lecturer and student would share the same interpretation and understanding of what constituted plagiarism. However, their research revealed that this assumption of a shared understanding was problematic. In the study students often expressed anxieties about plagiarism in terms of their own authority as writers. Students were unclear about what actually constituted plagiarism, and were concerned about how to acknowledge the authority of academic texts. For many students the relationship between plagiarism and correct referencing was not transparent and they worried about plagiarising unknowingly and unintentionally (Lea and Street, 1998:167).

As well as being expected to master researching and referencing practices, students are required to read and write critically, to recognize what is deemed as legitimate evidence for an argument and to understand and use the discourses that characterise their particular discipline (Kapp and Bangeni, 2005). According to van Schalkwyk (2010:209), as students are exposed to the academic norms and practices of the university, it is part of their learning experience that, through the words the academic staff use, the texts students engage with, the types of questions asked in assessments, and the way in which responses to assessment questions are evaluated, students are given pointers as to what is expected of them. Van Schalkwyk adds that the extent to which students are successful in correctly interpreting these clues is largely dependent on whether or not the student sees and understands the relevance thereof. Factors that may influence how relevant a student views these academic norms and practices to be are discussed in the following section.

2.1.4 The relationship between identity and academic literacy

Given that the university's most common way of assessing student progress is still through writing it is not surprising that the academic essay and its associated literacies are recognised as privileged and dominant literacies in a higher education environment (Lillis & Scott, 2007). According to McKenna

(2004:123) the use of the written academic literacy norms of higher education is often equated with the ability to think in a higher order and Lillis (2001) describes the academic essay as a tool to be used for a particular way constructing knowledge within the academy. Coleman (2016: 393) asserts that if essay writing is viewed through an Academic Literacies lens it “opens up the capacity to understand the social and cultural values, models and conventions that determine students’ use and creation of such texts”.

Additionally, the discourse of the academy is not neutral. As students attempt to crack the code of academic literacy and adopt the discourses which are required for success in a higher educational context, considerable power resides with the lecturer or assessor, who issues judgment on the level of expertise displayed by the student. When a student submits written work they find themselves in a skewed power relationship, with their written work “a dialogue between unequal participants” as the decision as to what is an appropriate answer is determined by the how the lecturer interprets the discipline (van Schalkwyk, 2010: 205).

Many students, especially weaker students, often find it difficult to recognise the different discipline-specific codes or conventions, especially if they have not previously had exposure to these types of literacies at home or at school (Boughey, 2000). Students are required to adopt the academic discourses of their discipline and of the university, but these discourses have the potential to disregard agency on the part of the many students from diverse backgrounds and with differing abilities and levels of preparedness who seek entry into it (van Schalkwyk, 2010: 204). In addition to this, the cultural literacies that some students bring with them are often devalued as they prove to be at odds with the academic or disciplinary expectations that students encounter at the university. This can lead to the student’s own identity and agency being absent or viewed as incompatible, and therefore insignificant (van Schalkwyk, 2010:205).

In the context of academic writing, there are often mismatches between staff and students’ understanding surrounding assessment requirements (Boughey,

2000; Jaffer, 2014; Lea and Street, 1998). Students who fail to crack the academic literacy code are often labelled as academically weak and poor schooling and language problems are often blamed (Boughey, 2000). If academic literacy is viewed as neutral and value-free, then it is more likely that the difficulties and errors that students experience will be attributed to students' own inadequacies rather than the complex and opaque nature of academic discourse. McKenna (2004) found that lecturers gave students assignments with little or no cognisance of the fact that there were many ways in which the assignments could be interpreted and that a students' prior knowledge, identity, and way of seeing the world could all impact on how the assignment was interpreted. In McKenna's study it was found that students were often confused by being simultaneously instructed to be objective in their assignments, but also to provide their own examples, two instructions which seemed to the students, to be in conflict with one another.

McKenna highlights that the issue of voice in student writing is something which students find extremely problematic as they are often unfamiliar with the authoritative voice of formal academic writing.

As well as trying to give one's opinion through the use of the ideas of others, the language of academic discourse can conflict with the everyday discourses students are familiar with. Instructions such as 'giving an opinion' and 'saying what you think' no longer mean what they used to in discourses outside the university. Students thus find themselves without the "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1977, as cited in McKenna 2004a) favoured by the institution (McKenna, 2004:126).

As well as the possibility that students enter university with a skill set and values that may differ markedly to those privileged by the institution, Canagarajah (2002:30) adds that students come to the academic community already having membership elsewhere. As students already have membership in communities outside of the academic community, they have formed their own identities, and these identities may either hinder or facilitate their participation in the academic community, depending on the extent to which there is congruence

between the different communities' way of doing. Canagarajah warns that if the fact that students come to the academic community already having membership in other communities is ignored, then the fact that students' identities could either help or hinder their participation in the academic community will go unnoticed.

Slonimsky and Shalem (2006) make a similar point to Canagarajah, highlighting that students might struggle to internalise the unfamiliar institutional culture, as they have already internalised certain cultures and behaviours from their past. McKenna (2004b) also found that, because of students' backgrounds, and how these backgrounds had shape students' identities, students sometimes found it difficult to adopt academic literacy practices. Students found academic practice in general to be "confusing, difficult to access and alienating" (McKenna, 2004b: 279).

McKenna (2004a: 126) cautions that if the issues around power, agency, and student identity are ignored when students' acquisition of academic literacy is being considered, then it will not be acknowledged that students not only have to engage with the complex and abstract concepts related to the content of the courses they are studying, but are expected to do so in new and unfamiliar ways.

The idea that the literacy practices privileged by the academy are neutral is often tied to a notion of the student as separated from their history, culture, and language (Boughey and McKenna, 2016). Boughey and McKenna (2015) have termed this discourse the 'decontextualised learner' and have demonstrated its prevalence in a number of institutional settings. This deficit discourse places difficulties experienced by students with the students themselves, given that the student is not viewed as a social being possessing a range of literacy practices which may or may not be valued in the academy. Instead a student's performance a direct result of their levels of motivation, cognition, or language abilities (Boughey and McKenna, 2016).

2.2 Theoretical Concepts

2.2.1 Introduction

In order to explore and discuss issues around student identity, both from the view of the institution and the view of the students themselves, an adapted version of Gee's (2001) framework for identity was used. As Gee's framework for identity forms the basis of the theoretical framework used in this research, it will not be discussed here but will be discussed in detail in the following section. Literacy is a key concept in this research, and in order to explore how literacy is conceptualised at the research site Street's (1984) autonomous and ideological models of literacy; Lea and Street's (1998) three perspectives on academic writing; and Lillis and Scott's (2007) normative and transformative stances are used.

2.2.2 Literacy

2.2.2.1 Defining literacy

Early definitions of literacy were skills-focussed and focussed on a single literacy. Around the 1980s thinking around literacy began to move away from the idea of a single literacy which one either possessed (literate) or did not possess (illiterate). Research around literacy at the time began to focus on understanding what kind of literacy people use in the context of their local and global relations, as well as on identifying the socio-political and cultural factors which structure the use of literacy (Robinson, 2014). An influential body of research around the nature of literacy was the research undertaken by a group of researchers whose research was termed the "New Literacy Studies". This research moved away from a skills-oriented approach to literacy and focussed on the recognition of multiple literacies, not only varying according to time and space but also contested in relations of power (Street, 2003: 77). This more critical view of literacies does not view literacy as only a generic set of technical skills, but also it considers the social dimensions of acquiring and applying literacy. It emphasizes that literacy is not uniform and is shaped by social as well as educational institutions. Significantly, a critical stance on literacy challenges the deficit view of the individual, proposing instead that

constraints on literacy acquisition and application lie not only in the individual, but also in relations and patterns of communication which are structured by society (UNESCO, 2004: 13).

However, despite research advocating for a more critical view of literacy and literacy acquisition the skills-based view of literacy still dominates in many areas. When considering how institutions understand and conceptualise literacy, Street's (1984) autonomous and ideological models of literacy provide a useful framework.

2.2.2.2 Autonomous and Ideological models of literacy

Street's (1984) autonomous and ideological models of literacy are a significant part of the field of academic literacies. By challenging the view that literacy was a singular construct that was independent from the context in which it took place Street highlighted that there are many different literacies and some are constructed as having more value within contexts than others (McKenna and Boughey, 2016:3).

Street's autonomous model of literacy correlates with early definitions of literacy where literacy is viewed as a set of neutral and universal skills to be acquired and ignores the cultural and social realities within which literacy operates. The autonomous model does not take into account that in practice literacy varies between contexts, and it therefore presents a unitary view of literacy. If literacy is viewed autonomously it follows that literacy can be reduced to a set of skills which can be taught explicitly. McKenna (2004:5) explains that the autonomous model constructs literacy as the technical ability to decode and encode text in the same way as the writer or educator, implying that the message of the text was neutral, value free and easily accessible by all. In an educational context, the autonomous model fails to address the relationship between the literacies of educational institutions and the power structures that exist in these institutions.

In opposition to the autonomous model of literacy Street (1984) offered an alternative, the ideological model of literacy. This model rejects the premise

that literacy is simply a technical and neutral skill and proposed that literacy is a social practice and as such it is always embedded in socially constructed views of knowledge. When the ideological perspective on literacy is adopted literacy is no longer seen as a neutral singular entity but rather a dynamic concept that differs across contexts (Street, 2003).

If literacy is seen as a set of social practices embedded across various contexts and situations then literacy is a socially constructed concept and is not an explanation of truths that are free from ideologies, power relations and political influences but instead a set of discourses determined by the context of the situation (McKenna, 2004:8). It follows that, when viewed from the ideological model's perspective, that what counts as literacy is always contested, both in meaning and practice, and therefore particular forms of literacy are privileged above others. The ideological nature of literacies means that they are always rooted in a particular set of beliefs and ideals and the opportunity for literacy to be used as a tool to dominate the viewpoints of others should be recognized (Street, 1984, 2003). If power relations are seen to be pertinent in what is valued as literacy then it stands to reason that some literacies are viewed as more being powerful or having a higher worth than others. According to McKenna (2004:19) dominant literacies are literacies that are used by those who occupy an elevated status in society and as a result these dominant or powerful literacies are unequally distributed along lines of economic privilege and disempowerment. One such powerful literacy is academic literacy.

2.2.3 Academic Literacy

2.2.3.1 Defining academic literacy

Academic literacy is a term which has many aspects and can be viewed from a wide range of perspectives. Academic literacy can be used as a shorthand for academic literacy practices, as a descriptive term which encompasses the types of communication which the academy values above others, with writing currently being the most commonly used form of communicating and assessing in the academy (Thesen, 2016: 423). Related to this meaning of academic literacy is academic literacies as a field of pedagogical work, arising

out of the need to attempt to teach the conventions of academic writing and allow students access to the academy (Thesen, 2016: 423). While students need to be able to demonstrate proficiency in academic literacy practices such as following the rules for argument, providing evidence for assertions they make, defining terms, and using a style appropriate to discussion at university level Van Schalkwyk (2010:203), viewing academic literacy only as a set of decontextualized and transferrable skills can be problematic (McKenna, 2004; Thesen & Van Pletzen, 2006; Lillis and Scott, 2007; Boughey, 2010), and given the current unrest in the South African university system, potentially perilous (Boughey & McKenna, 2016). An overemphasis on the skills involved in academic literacy practices at the expense of the recognition and acknowledgement of the power relations that exist in the social contexts in which the practices take place, aligns with a view of academic literacy which Lea and Street (1998) have termed the study skills model. The study skills model assumes literacy is a set of decontextualized skills which students can learn and then transfer between contexts. As with the early models of academic development, this approach is characterised by a deficit view of students and the focus in this approach to academic literacy is to “fix” problems with students learning by focusing on surface features of language such as spelling and grammar (p.158). Related to the study skills approach is the academic socialization perspective, an approach which focuses on inducting students into the “culture” of the academy. Students are believed to learn through immersion in the practices of the academy, and there is a focus on orientation to learning and interpretation of the learning task. This approach appears to assume that the academy is a relatively homogeneous culture, whose norms and practices have simply to be learnt to provide access to the whole institution (Lea and Street, 1998: 159).

Aligning with the study skills and academic socialization approaches to academic writing (Lea and Street, 1998), Lillis and Scott (2007) describe a stance present in academic literacies research and pedagogy which they termed as “normative”. A normative stance rests on the assumption that the student population is homogenous and that disciplines are stable, and the emphasis is on identifying academic conventions so students might be inducted into ways of knowing and doing in the academy (Lillis and Scott,

2007:14). Lillis and Scott argue that the normative stance is the default position in much practice relating to pedagogy and policy in the academy, and that this stance is necessary in order to participate and allow participation in the current academic environment (p.10). However, they argue that the Academic Literacies approach has also encourages a transformative stance towards writing and literacy. An Academic Literacies (with capital letters) approach is described by Thesen (2016:424 as follows:

...a cluster of tools and methods (and people), an emerging sub-discipline that takes a critical stand on communicative practices (particularly writing) in the changing university. It does not look only at induction to high status academic literacy practices of the day, but looks at practice and how notions of reading and writing are expressed in particular time/place arrangements. Crucially, it is also interested in alternative, more socially just, innovative practices where new forms of hybrid writing can take hold.

The Academic Literacies approach to the researching and teaching of writing and literacy follows on from Lea and Street's (1998) third approach to academic writing, the academic literacies approach. This approach views literacies as social practices and sees student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialization (Lea and Street, 1998: 159). This approach recognises that when students are required to switch practices between one setting and another, and effectively make use of the linguistic features deemed to be appropriate in each particular setting, a student's identity may be challenged by these requirements.

As mentioned, the idea of a transformative stance is central to the Academic Literacies orientation, asking questions around how particular conventions become legitimized, whose epistemological and ideological interests are being served by the current status quo, and whose are being excluded? (Lillis, 2016:9). A transformative stance looks to foreground alternative ways of knowledge making and work to extend the range of semiotic resources which have been legitimized in the academy of the twenty-first century (Lillis et. al, 2016:4). In the context of policies relating to access and increased participation in higher education, Academic Literacies came to be used to challenge the deficit discourse around students and their reading and writing

abilities, and signaled the need for a more critical stance to students' production of meaning making through academic writing (Lillis et. al, 2016:6).

2.2.4 Identity

2.2.4.1 Exploring the concept of identity

A person's identity is a complicated and multi-faceted conception. Identities change, not only over time, but also across contexts. For a student entering the higher education environment, his or her identity is significant. For South African students entering university straight from school, the change from being a 'matric' to being a 'first year' has a significant effect on how that person views him or herself and is viewed by others. For a student who enters university from the world of work, going 'back' and becoming a student would also have a significant effect on that person's identity. However, given the extremely complex nature of the concept of identity (and that the transition to university, whether it be from school, work, home, or travelling) is different for each person, studying and describing identity is a complicated and challenging task.

For the purpose of this research I draw on Gee's understanding of identities as 'ways of being' in the world (Gee 2012: 152). For Gee a person's identity is tied up in the discourses which surround them as a Discourse is a 'socially recognizable identity', a 'way of being' in the world. Gee defines the concept of Discourse in the 2012 edition of his work as follows (p.153):

... composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognized activities

Gee (1996) states that when Discourse is considered to be more than simply language use (what Gee terms discourse - lower case "d), the link between discourse and identity becomes apparent. When an individual engages in a particular discourse community, in order to be viewed as a legitimate member of the community the individual needs to take up (or appear to take up) the

ways of thinking and behaving of that particular community. This will allow and the individual to take up a certain identity in that community.

2.3 Analytical Framework

2.3.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to consider the role that identity might play as students on a bridging course attempt to succeed in a tertiary environment. Given that the data collection and analysis would require two 'pictures' of bridging course students that could be compared and discussed, it was necessary to find a way to view identity that could be used to build two descriptions that were comparable along the same lines. However, given the complexity of the concept of identity, and therefore complications surrounding researching identity, it was necessary to narrow down the aspects of identity that would be researched. Gee (2001:100) found that the wealth of research on identity was incommensurate and approached the issue of identity from different perspectives. Gee grouped these perspectives into 4 different conceptual perspectives: the nature perspective, the discourse perspective, the institutional perspective and the affinity group perspective. I adapted Gee's perspectives and used them as an analytic lens for identity and I found this analytic lens to be well-suited to my aims of creating descriptive identity profiles from two different perspectives as Gee's 4 perspectives provide a way to formulate descriptions around how a person's identity functions in and across contexts (Gee, 2001: 101). Using Gee's adapted framework, it is possible to describe and explore what 'type' of person a student is in a given context, and it is for this reason that this adapted identity framework was suited to the purpose of this research.

2.3.2 Gee's framework for identity

2.3.2.1 Introduction

Gee's identity framework is comprised of 4 perspectives relating to what it means to be a "certain kind of person". These 4 perspectives are: the Nature perspective, the Institutional perspective, the Discursive perspective, and the

Affinity perspective (Gee, 2001: 100). Although the 4 perspectives are presented separately, Gee notes that the perspectives are not separate from each other and interrelate in complex and important ways in theory and practice. It is significant that, rather than being viewed as discrete categories, the perspectives should be viewed as ways to focus our attention on different aspects of how identities are formed and sustained (Gee, 2001: 101). A summary of these 4 perspectives is presented in Table 2.1

2.3.2.2 N- Identities

The first perspective from which to view identity is the nature-perspective. The nature-perspective or N-identities refer to a state that one is in. Because the source of the state, or the power that determines the state, are forces in nature one does not have any control over one's N-identities (Gee, 2001: 101). Examples of N-identities would be one's age, physical characteristics or ethnicity. For N-identities to have a significant effect on one's identity they need to be recognized by oneself or others as meaningful in the sense that they constitute (at least in part) the "kind of person" one is (Gee, 2001: 102). So for example, one's hair colour may be part of one person's N-identity but may be almost irrelevant to another person's N-identity.

As Gee's notion of N-identities refers to states one is in as a result of forces in nature, the implication is that N-identities are biologically determined. However, I felt that in addition to identities which are determined by nature, it was also important to be able to explore identities which were a result of the initially uncontrollable forces of one's social and economic situation. For the purpose of this research I extend Gee's notion of N-identities to include a second category: N-identities that result from social and economic forces. For differentiation purposes I will refer to N-identities that are biologically determined as N₁-identities, and those that are socially and economically structured as N₂-identities. N₁-identities and N₂-identities correspond in that one is predisposed to certain N₂-identities as a result of one's parents and upbringing.

However, unlike N_1 -identities, which one has almost no control over, one may be able to have some degree of control over N_2 -identities. Therefore, the power to influence the characteristics that are potential N_2 -identities lies more with the individual than with nature. An example to illustrate the difference between N_1 and N_2 -identities would be being one of five children (a potential N_1 -identity) living in a two-bedroomed house (one potential N_2 -identity) as opposed to living in a six-bedroomed house (another potential N_2 -identity). While an individual has no control over the number of siblings he or she has, the individual might eventually have more control over his or her living situation.

While there were many possibilities for N_2 -identities that might be relevant to the identity of a typical bridging course student, I chose three N_2 -identities that were likely to relate to aspects of a student's life connected to academics and careers. The three N_2 -identities that I included were: the home environment, access to digital resources, and digital literacy. The home environment broadly relates to the nature of the accommodation where a student resides during term time and the level of access that a student has to a quiet study area. Access to digital resources relates to a student's access to a computer or similar digital device as well as to the Internet. Access to these particular two resources was viewed as being critical to a student being able to complete their coursework, such as assignments and presentations, and prepare adequately for examinations.

However, as well as needing access to physical digital resources such as computers and the Internet, in order to successfully produce and submit assignments, students need to have an adequate level of digital literacy. To successfully research and complete an assignment on a given topic students would need to be able to navigate the Internet for credible sources of information, produce their assignments in an electronic format, and electronically generate a plagiarism check (presented as a percentage score) using an online programme called Turnitin. If a student's plagiarism score was above 10% then the student would need to edit the assignment and rework it until a submission through Turnitin produced a score less than 10%. This often

required multiple submissions and therefore both a good understanding of the programme as well as a significant amount of time online.

I felt the inclusion of digital literacy may be particularly relevant as an N₂-Identity to the students who took part in the research as in South Africa there is a strong correlation between the amount of exposure one has had to digital technologies such as computers and the Internet, and one's socio-economic background. Many under-resourced areas and schools in South Africa have little or no digital infrastructure. However, even when digital facilities are introduced in these contexts it does not necessarily result in a lessening of the digital divide. Isaacs (2007) found that the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in rural settings was often unsuccessful. Barriers such as extremely high Internet tariffs, high maintenance and repair costs, vandalism and theft, and a lack of expertise in how digital resources can be integrated into the current curriculum all contribute to a disappointing level of success in ICT projects for education in poorly-resourced areas.

An important property of N-identities is that they become significant as identities through the work of the other perspectives on identity (Gee, 2001: 102). For example, for a student returning to study in their 50s, their age (an N₁-identity) may be significant if the university labels that student a 'mature' student and treats mature students differently to students who went straight to study after completing high school. If the student in her 50s was treated differently to other students and was cast as a certain 'type' of person because of her age, then her age would become a significant part of her identity through the work of the institutional or I-identity.

2.3.2.3 I- Identities

The institutional perspective, or I-identities, is the second perspective on identity. I-identities are positions that are endorsed by authorities within institutions. Authorizations such as laws, rules, traditions or principles are the processes through which the power of I-identities works (Gee, 2001: 102). Gee emphasizes that I-identities can be put on a continuum in terms of how actively or passively someone who is positioned fills their role. Depending on the person an I-identity may be seen as a calling or as an imposition (Gee,

2001: 103). For the woman in her 50s that returns to study, the I-identity of 'mature' student may be something that the woman embraces and is proud of, or it may be an unwelcome label that the woman feels is disrespectful or discriminatory.

2.3.2.4 D- Identities

The third perspective with which to view identity is the discursive perspective or D-identities. D-identities are individual traits that are recognized in the discourse or dialogue of or with "rational" individuals (Gee, 2001: 103). By "rational" individuals Gee is referring to individuals who are able to engage freely in discourse about someone and are not forced by an institution or authority to describe someone in a certain way (Gee, 2001: 103). Like I-identities, D-identities are on a continuum of how active or passive a person is in "recruiting" the D-identities others ascribe to them. D-identities can be viewed on the continuum that ranges from "ascription" to "achievement or accomplishment" (Gee, 2001: 104). The 'mature' student may be described by her classmates as 'admirable' for her decision to return to study. However, if the student was forced to return to study in order to gain more highly paid employment so that she could support her family financially she may not recruit the D-identity of 'admirable'. If this was the case the woman may view the label of 'admirable' more as an ascription than as an achievement.

2.3.2.5 A- Identities

The fourth and final perspective from which identity can be viewed is the affinity perspective or A-identities. A-identities are the experiences shared in a set of distinctive practices of affinity groups (Gee, 2001:105). Gee defines an affinity group as a group made up of people who share allegiance to, access to, and participation in specific practices that provide each of the group's members the necessary experiences to identify them as members of the group. It is thus "distinctive social practices that create and sustain group affiliations" (Gee, 2001: 105) that characterize one as member of an affinity group. Another important aspect of affinity groups is that one cannot be forced to join an affinity group. While a person can be coerced into engaging in certain practices, the experiences connected to these practices do not

become part of a one's A-identity unless they contribute to the 'kind' of person one is (Gee, 2001: 106). Returning to the example of the 'mature' student, let us consider the possibility that when she starts university she signs up for an 'Introduction to Tertiary Studies' group. Although she may attend introductory lectures and workshops with other first year students, if she does not then see these practices as constituting the 'type' of person she is then she will not be part of this affinity group and 'beginner student' will not be part of her A-identity.

	Process	Power	Source of power
Nature₁-identity A state	<u>developed from</u>	<u>forces</u>	<u>in</u> nature
Nature₂-identity A state	<u>developed from</u>	<u>forces</u>	<u>in</u> society and economy
Institution-identity A position	<u>authorized by</u>	<u>authorities</u>	<u>within</u> institutions
Discourse-identity An individual trait	<u>recognized in</u>	<u>the</u> discourse / dialogue	<u>of/with</u> "rational" individuals
Affinity-identity Experiences	<u>shared in</u>	<u>the</u> practice	<u>of</u> "affinity groups"

Table 2.1: Four ways to view identity- adapted from Gee (2001: 100)

2.3.3 Using Gee's Adapted Identity Framework to Construct Student Profiles

Gee's framework on identity was as it provides a way not only to describe how students see themselves and are seen by others (the institution where they are studying in the case of this particular research) but also provides a way of describing how different aspects of students' identities (N-I-D-A Identities) are foregrounded, rejected, or negotiated, specifically in an academic context. Figure 2.1 outlines the identities focussed on in this research.

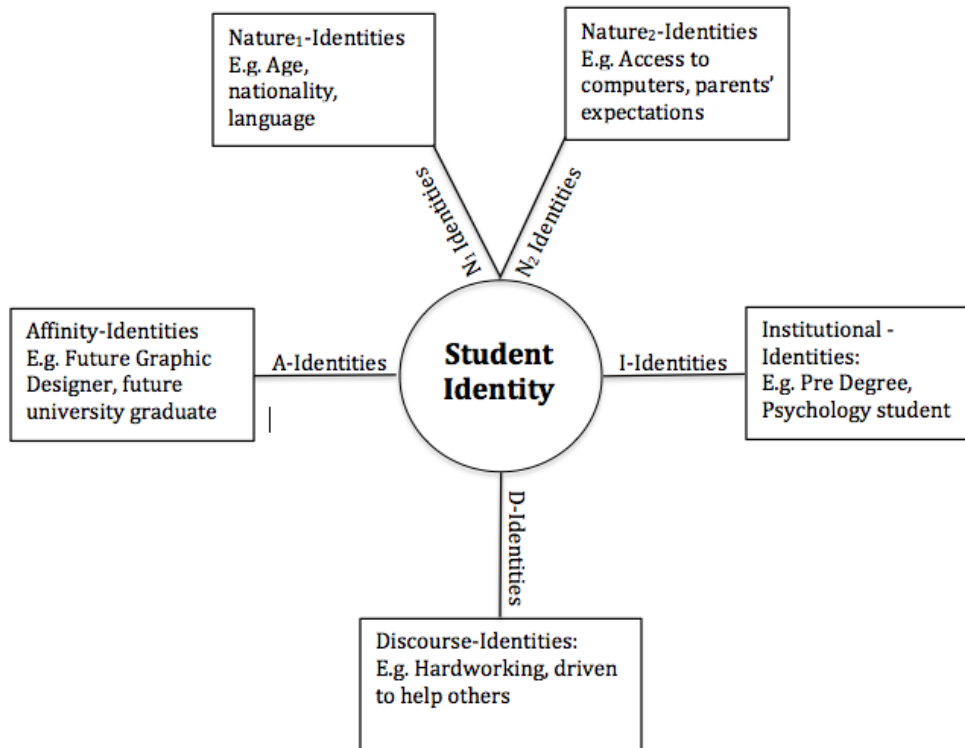


Figure 2.1: Gee's adapted identity framework applied to student identity

In the context of this research Gee's 4 perspectives on identity were used to create a representation of what 'type of person' a bridging course student is in an academic context. Two profiles of a 'typical' bridging course student were developed using Gee's 4 strands of identity. The first profile described what 'type' of person a 'typical' bridging course student is from the perspective of the educational institution that the students attend. The second profile described what 'type' of person a 'typical' bridging course student is from the perspective of the students themselves. The rationale for comparing the identity of 'bridging course student' from these two perspectives was to explore the similarities and differences between the way bridging course students are seen by the institution and the way they see themselves. In highlighting these similarities and differences it was hoped that by gaining an insight into issues surrounding student identity, the relationship between identity and successful academic literacy acquisition might be made more clear.

In addition to the 2 identity profiles, the way in which literacy was conceptualised at Bellevue Academy was also explored. The following

diagram represents an overview of the analytical framework that was used for this research:

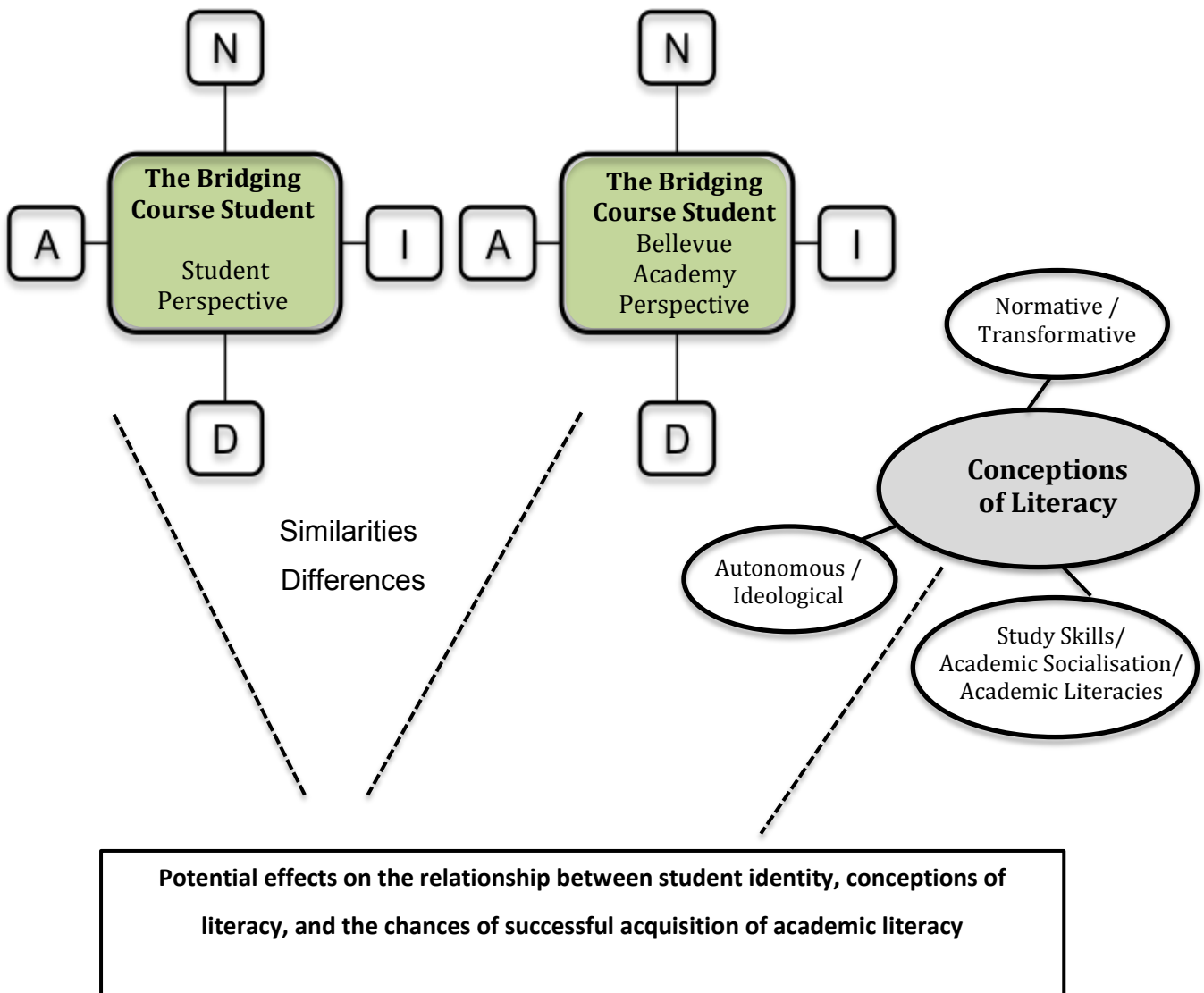


Figure 2.2: Analytical Framework Overview

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

In this study I aimed to explore how conceptions of literacy and discourses around student identity might influence a group of bridging course students' chances of successfully developing academic literacy proficiencies in their first year at a private higher education institution. The study made use of a broadly social constructivist approach. According to Creswell (2003:8) this approach allows the researcher to seek understanding of the participants' world as they develop subjective meanings of their experiences, and allows meaning to be made through different constructs.

3.2. Research design

3.2.1 Research approach

This study sought to obtain an understanding of a particular phenomenon by primarily making use of a qualitative method of enquiry. According to Creswell (2003:9) the use of a qualitative approach encourages understanding through social interaction with others as the researcher generates meaning from the data collected in the field and seeks to understand the situation by visiting the context and gathering information personally. Given that I was a lecturer at the institution where the research took place and the objective of this study was to explore and describe a situation in an educational setting in order to gain a greater understanding of relations within the setting, a qualitative research approach was well suited to the study. Another factor that made a qualitative design appropriate for this study was that the aim of the study was to explore and describe the relationship between identity and academic literacy acquisition and this was done in a descriptive rather than a quantifiable manner.

However, while the research was primarily conducted using a qualitative approach, there were some aspects of the research which were quantitative in nature. Thomas (2003) describes quantitative research methods as methods which focus on numerical data such as measurements and amounts. At times in the research quantitative data was needed. For example, questionnaires were

administered to students, lecturers and student advisors⁷. The questions were categorised to provide data on Gee's 4 strands of identity and the responses to these questions were counted.

3.2.2 The inductive approach

Once identity profiles had been created I needed to describe the similarities and differences between the two profiles in order to understand what the implications of this comparison might be. In order to describe themes that emerged from the comparison of the two identity profiles, which could then be related to the relevant theory, I used an inductive approach when analysing my data. According to Thomas (2006:239), the main function of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in the raw data. Thomas (2006: 240) suggests that the inductive approach allows the researcher to:

“(a) ... condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief summary format, (b) to establish clear links between the research objectives and summary findings derived from the raw data and to ensure that these are both transparent and defensible, and (c) to develop a model/theory about underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the raw data.”

I used the inductive approach to bring to light recurring patterns and themes in the two perspectives on the student identity profiles as well as themes around how literacy was viewed at Bellevue Academy. The themes which were further explored were constrained by my research questions and objectives.

For example a strong sales and marketing discourse pervaded the data, with the institution projecting the view that they were selling education to their customers. Students were under the impression that the cost of the course was directly proportional to the quality of the course offering. However, although the

⁷ Student advisors are involved in student recruitment and registration. They work on a commission basis and students do not regularly meet with their advisors once they have been registered

concept of education as a commodity is important, especially in describing the potential impact of private higher education providers, this concept did not relate directly to the exploration of the relationship between student identity and academic literacy acquisition so was not explored in great detail. Once themes had been identified and described, I interpreted these themes using a range of theoretical evidence.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Introduction

In order to begin to explore how literacy and bridging course students are conceptualised I needed to gather data that would offer insights from the perspective of the institution as well as from the students themselves. In order to obtain data from the perspective of Bellevue Academy I collected data from questionnaires completed by lecturers and student advisors, interviews with lecturers, and texts such as the institution's website and the Study Skills course handbook. To collect data relating to how students viewed themselves and literacy I made use of questionnaires and focus groups.

I attempted to gather a wide range of data, including personal accounts such as interviews and focus groups, and textual accounts such as publications from the institution, so that I might create a more holistic and inclusive view of literacy and student identity. I then used the data to describe how literacy was conceptualised and to create bridging course student identity profiles from both the perspective of the institution and from the students themselves. Gee's adapted framework was helpful in enabling me to create a view of student identity from two broadly comparable perspectives and to categorise data, allowing for readings to identify key themes to emerge.

Although the ways in which literacy is conceptualised and the ways in which students are viewed are considered separately, data collection to attempt to answer these questions was done simultaneously. Literacy and identity are intertwined, and while some data collection methods were designed to provide

more data on either literacy or identity, I did not restrict particular methods to collecting data on literacy or identity.

3.3.2 Sampling

The staff members who participated in this research were teaching staff who lectured on the bridging programme in 2012 and/or 2013 as well as student advisors. Although other teaching staff could have been included as representatives of the institution's view, I chose to include staff who lectured bridging course students as these staff would know the students the best. I included student advisors as it is the student advisors who recruit and enrol students onto courses. Although the student advisors do not have a lot of interaction with students once they have been enrolled, as their focus shifts to recruiting new students, I included them in the research as I believed that their influence on the start of the students' journey at the institution was important.

As I lectured a compulsory module for bridging course students I was able to offer participation in the research to the whole cohort of bridging students. Participation was on a voluntary basis and the response to my request was positive, with 27 students offering to take part in the research which involved completion of a questionnaire and participation in a focus group activity. Students were not paid for their participation but refreshments were provided at the focus group sessions as a means of thanking students for their time and contribution to the research.

3.3.3 Data Collection Methods

3.3.3.1. Questionnaires

a) Members of staff

Staff questionnaires (Appendix A) were given to all applicable lecturers and to all the student advisors. Five lecturing staff and ten student advisors took part in the research. The questionnaire asked respondents to answer a series of questions relating to their perception of a 'typical' bridging course student. Although responses to the questionnaires were counted, the questions were

designed to gather staff attitudes and perceptions rather than quantitative 'census-like' data. Questions in the staff questionnaire were designed predominantly to gather data on the institution's view of the typical bridging course student's identity, although there was scope for aspects of literacy to be raised.

b) Student participants

The 27 students who consented to being participants were asked to complete a written questionnaire (Appendix B). The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions, 7 of which were open-ended and 11 of which were closed. Questionnaires were designed with the purpose of gathering information about students that related predominantly to their Nature or N-identities. The questionnaire covered student characteristics such as age, nationality and living situation. In order to build a general profile of students' N₁ and N₂ - identities questionnaires were a suitable data collection method as the elements that construct N₁ and N₂ – identities, such as age, nationality and living situation, are generally concise and did not require extensive further explanation from students.

Questionnaires were also a suitable data collection method for gathering information relating to students' N-identities as they provided a way for students to offer personal demographic information that they may not have been comfortable sharing with other students in the group. As the questionnaires were anonymous and students completed them individually, students did not need to make their N-identity characteristics known to other students.

3.3.3.2 Student Focus Groups

Kitzinger (1995: 299) defines a focus group as a form of group interview that capitalizes on communication between research participants in order to generate data. Focus groups were selected as a data collection method for gathering information relating primarily to students' Institution, Discourse and Affinity-identities (although given the open nature of focus groups, Nature-identity as well as discussions around literacy were also likely to occur). Focus groups were also used to explore students' perceptions of literacy.

According to Kitzinger (1995:299) group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less accessible in one-on-one interviews, and group discussion is particularly appropriate when the aim of the research is to encourage research participants to explore issues of importance to them, in their own vocabulary, generating their own questions and pursuing their own priorities.

I aimed to have around 10 students in each focus group and so offered students three timeslots in which they could attend a group. The rationale for this was that this number was large enough to allow for group discussion but was also small enough to allow students to feel comfortable and for all students to be given the chance to contribute to the conversations. The focus groups were held at in a tutorial room at Bellevue Academy on afternoons when no bridging course lectures were being run. Each group had a mix of students from different courses (Psychology, Graphic Design and Commerce). The first focus group had 9 participants, the second had 10 and the third group had 8. The focus groups were designed to take around 2 hours to complete. All three focus groups were comprised of two parts: a group introductory activity followed by a group discussion.

a) *Introductory activity*

The main aim of the focus groups was to collect data around the identities (predominantly institution, discourse and affinity identities) of bridging course students from the view of the students themselves, as well as to begin to elicit students' understandings of literacy and literacy practices. The focus groups began with an introductory activity. I took the role of facilitator and the activity was audio recorded. The introductory activity involved students collaboratively creating an "ideal" student. A free online animated avatar-creation programme was used to design the student and the image of the character was projected onto a whiteboard in the classroom and to be used as a starting point for conversations around behaviours and traits that students associated with a university student. The programme provides the user with choices for a character's physical features such as skin colour and tone, gender, hair colour and style, facial features such as eye colour, and clothing and a decision is

made for each feature until the character is complete. In the focus group activity, I asked students to decide on which features they best thought suited their “ideal” student. When students disagreed on certain choices for features, a vote was taken to decide on which option would be selected. Once the character was complete he/she was given a name. Although my research did not focus on the physical appearances of the students themselves I used this activity to initiate a discussion around the institutional, discourse and affinity identities of an “ideal” university student. I did this to lay the foundations for students to be able to talk about themselves in the subsequent activity, which I hoped they might do more freely if they had spoken about someone fictional in the same terms. I also wanted to see whether students were able to verbalise the practices and ways of thinking which were needed to succeed in a higher education institution. Students in all three of the focus groups appeared to enjoy the design activity and were very possessive over “their” student. In all three groups students referred back to their designed character throughout the focus group. Some students continued to mention their character in later lectures too.

Once the physical appearance of the character had been chosen and the character had been named a discussion on the “ideal” student was initiated. I lead this discussion by asking questions mainly relating to the D-and A-identities of the student. The complete list of the questions can be found in Appendix C. Questions ranged from general descriptions of the student to more specific such as who the student lived with to what their room looked like. Issues of academic practice were also discussed such as describing the student’s actions from the time he/she received an assignment to the time the assignment was submitted. While I used the questions to provide a direction for the activity, students were encouraged to discuss their choices and this often lead to animated and passionate debates and elaborations as students came to a consensus on characteristics of their “ideal” student.

b) Group Discussion:

Once the introductory activity was complete students were given the opportunity to reflect on their own characteristics and academic practices. The questions which I used to guide this discussion can be found in Appendix C.

The questions were used as a guideline but again student answers often lead to other relevant topics being discussed. Students were also given the chance to bring their own questions to the discussion and these were then used as further discussion points in the group.

I was conscious that my position as a lecturer might influence students' responses. So while I introduced topics which were key to gathering data in line with the research aims, where possible, students were encouraged to choose what matters to elaborate on and had the chance to raise issues which I may not have suggested as a key topic for the focus groups. Angéilil-Carter's (1997) analysis into the use of interviews shows how the power shifts when the subject has control over the subject matter. It was important that students felt in control of the group discussion, as I wanted them to be honest about their responses and not to say what they thought I, as a lecturer, might want to hear. Some students were initially reserved in speaking about themselves but overall the atmosphere in the focus groups was informal and relaxed. Although my relationship with the students was a potential for bias I believe that in the focus groups it led to students being open and honest about their opinions as they knew my lectures to be more informal and less strict than some of their other lectures, and were always fairly relaxed and open in their interactions with me.

The main aim of the group discussion was to allow students to discuss their own academic practices and reflect on how these practices corresponded to their identities as students. The focus group discussion was designed for students to consider and verbalise how they see themselves in relation to the academic institution and to encourage discussion and elaboration on issues of corresponding or conflicting identities.

3.3.3.3 Interviews with lecturers

In-depth one-to-one interviews lasting around 30 minutes each were conducted with two lecturers. Both lecturers lectured students on the bridging programme. One lecturer had been lecturing students on the programme for many years and lectured Bridging English, a module which was compulsory for all bridging course students. The other lecturer lectured on the Graphic

Design course and had started working at the research site the year before after leaving her job in industry. The aim of these interviews was to gather more detailed data about perceptions of bridging course students. Another aim of these interviews was to ascertain lecturer views on students' literacy practices and how these might influence students' academic performance. The questions used in these interviews can be found in Appendix D.

3.3.3.4 Course materials and Bellevue Academy website

Data from staff questionnaires and lecturer interviews was useful in creating an identity profile for a typical bridging course student as well as exploring how literacy was viewed from the perspective of the institution. However, in order to explore how literacy was conceptualised as well as to describe bridging students' identities from a wider institutional perspective than the remote site where the research took place, I collected data from content relating to the bridging course on the institution's website as well as content from course materials used on the bridging course. As I was interested in how conceptions of literacy as well as perspectives on student identity might relate to academic literacy acquisition I limited my analysis of course materials to those related to academic literacy practices and looked at the Student Skills course outline and information on bridging course subjects from the Bellevue Academy website.

3.4 Data analysis methods

3.4.1 Thematic Analysis

By making use of Gee's adapted framework I already had predetermined categories to guide much of my data analysis relating to describing bridging student identities. When designing my analytical framework, I allocated subcategories to each of the N, I, D and A-identities. These subcategories were needed to structure the data collection tools and to help to direct analysis. The N, I, D and A-identity subcategories were used as labels to group the data.

Part of the initial analysis of the responses to the questionnaires from staff and students was purely quantitative. I had designed the questionnaires so that

responses to certain questions could be tallied for comparison. Most of these questions were closed questions. Where open questions produced many varied responses, coding allowed for the responses to be grouped into similar responses, and this allowed for them to be counted. When considering the data gathered through the focus groups and through the interviews with staff I categorised the data using the N, I, D and A categories, as well as a category for data relating to views on literacy. Once the data had been broadly grouped I was then able to examine each category in more detail.

A table of comparison was used to compare the two bridging course student identity profiles, one profile described from the perspective of the institution, and the other from the perspective of the students themselves. The two profiles were analysed for commonalities and differences across each of the four identity perspectives and this information was summarised in a table of comparison. Common themes were then drawn from the comparisons of the two profiles. When analysing the data to explore how literacy was viewed I linked the patterns in the data relating to literacy with definitions of the autonomous and ideological models as well as and normative and transformative views on literacy.

3.4.2 Discourse analysis

While the analysis of the website and course materials did involve a textual analysis, a formal discourse analysis method was not used. Instead a thematic analysis was done to surface themes around literacy and the four strands of student identity. The same analysis method was used for the staff interviews and the focus group activities.

When analysing the data for emerging themes, while a formal discourse analysis method was not used, my previous exposure to the critical discourse analysis (CDA) method played a role in the analysis of this data. CDA is based on the notion that it is through social practices that existing social relations, which serve the interests of certain dominant groups, are reproduced or contested (Janks, 1997:329). Underlying CDA is the

notion that discourse can be seen as an opaque power object. The aim of CDA is to make this opaque power object more transparent in order to uncover the structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control that are immersed in the discourse (Wodak, 1995, as cited in Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000: 448).

When analysing how literacy and student identities were being constructed through written text and through spoken language I made use of some elements of critical discourse analysis.

3.5 Ethical considerations

According to Dörnyei (2007:63), “social research- including research in education- concerns people’s lives in the social world and therefore it inevitably involves ethical issues”. As well as the ethical clearances that were needed for this research it was important to me that students felt comfortable and secure during the research process. Given that I was in a position of power due to my role as a lecturer at the institution I endeavored to make sure that students knew that their anonymity was a primary priority in my research and that in no way would participation in my research have any foreseeable negative effects on anyone that elected to take part in the study.

The main ethical issues that were important for this study were: consent from participants, anonymity, and issues surrounding my role as both researcher and an employee at the research site.

3.5.1 Consent from participants

I requested ethical clearance from the institution and this was granted (Appendix E). Staff and student participation in the research was on a voluntary basis. I explained the aims of my research to both students and staff members and explained that participation was in no way compulsory. I did not want my authoritative position as a lecturer to influence students’ decision to participate. For this reason I made it very clear when asking for volunteers that my research was not related to their coursework in any way and that their decision to

participate would in no way influence our lecturer student relationship or affect their academic progress. I also made it clear to students that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time, should they wish to do so. Before asking for volunteers I also explained that I would do all in my control to guarantee anonymity and described to students how pseudonyms would be used to try and protect their identity. I then gave students the chance to ask any questions and I answered these to the best of my ability. Once student volunteers had put themselves forward to take part in the research, they were asked to complete and sign a consent form (Appendix F). Additionally, consent forms were completed by the members of staff who chose to take part in the research by completing and returning the questionnaires.

3.5.2 Anonymity

Although it is never possible to guarantee anonymity, I undertook to make sure that anonymity of the institution where the research took place as well as of the staff and students that partook in the research was protected as far as possible. A fictional name was given to the institution and throughout the study pseudonyms for all participants were used. Students chose their own pseudonyms and I selected pseudonyms for staff members, where required. Terms that are specific to the educational institution where the research took place and might therefore make the institution identifiable have been avoided or changed to a more generic descriptor.

3.5.3 Data collection methods

All the data was undertaken at the research site so that participants were more likely to feel comfortable in familiar surroundings. During the student focus groups participants were made aware that I would be audio recording the sessions and that this was being done in order to be able to return to the sessions at a later stage, and that the actual audio footage would not be used in the research presentation. During the three focus group sessions students were given refreshments as a means of thanking them for giving up their time to take part in my research.

3.5.4 Dual role as researcher and employee

I am aware that as researcher and employee of the private higher education provider where the research took place there exists the potential for a conflict of interest between conducting objective research and a possible bias towards my place of employment. As I had worked at the institution for more than two years when the research took place I had already formed sentiments and opinions about practices and relations within the institution. While my experience and relations with staff and students cannot be completely separated from my research processes, findings and interpretations, I endeavoured to keep these biases from interfering with the objectivity of the research. During the research process, I remained conscious of my dual roles of researcher and employee and endeavoured to keep the principles that come with each identity separate.

CHAPTER 4: PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT IDENTITY AND LITERACY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BELLEVUE ACADEMY

4.1 Introduction

Findings that relate to how the institution views student identity and literacy are presented in this chapter. Data gathered from the analysis of questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and course and website content are explored. Additionally, themes which emerged from the coding of data relating to conceptions of literacy are explored using Street's (1984) autonomous and ideological models, Lillis and Scott's normative and transformative perspectives (2007) and Lea and Street's 3 perspectives on academic writing (1998).

Student identity from the perspective of the students themselves is explored in the following chapter and a comparison between the two perspectives is presented.

4.2 Bridging course student identity from the perspective of Bellevue Academy

4.2.1 Nature (N₁) Identities

4.2.1.1 Age

Responses to the questionnaire given to student advisors and lecturers indicate that all respondents perceived the age of an average bridging course student to be between 17 to 19 years old. The theme of the introduction to the bridging course on the Bellevue website focuses on students receiving their grade 12 results and being disappointed by the outcome. It is not significantly unexpected that a student entering the first year at university would be perceived as having recently finished secondary school. However, further analysis of the website indicates that as well as having a preconceived idea of a typical bridging course student's age, there was also an underlying assumption that bridging course students were not likely to have a very high level of maturity, or a wide range of life experience.

The introduction to the bridging course also makes use of a metaphor that is presented in such a way that a reader of a certain age and maturity level is implied. The metaphor likens the inventor Thomas Edison's 9000 initial failed attempts at creating a functioning light bulb to students' attempts at academic success. The language and manner used to present the metaphor implies that the student who is reading the text is probably fairly young and without a significant amount of life experience outside of school. The metaphor is presented in a manner similar to that with which one would present a children's story. The text is directed at the prospective student by the use of the words "you" and "your" (used 13 times throughout the introduction). This use of direct address encourages reader captivation and involvement and places the reader directly into the scenario being described. The vocabulary used in the text is simple, descriptive, and emotive. The following extract from the website demonstrates this:

"Thomas Edison invented the modern little light bulb that we know. He in fact invented the whole electric lighting system as we know it".

The use of the words "little" and "in fact" in the extract are the type of vocabulary choices that would be appropriate to use to convey this information to a younger audience that does not have an extensive vocabulary. Direct address through the use of the pronoun "we" includes the reader in the happenings in the text, and assumes a shared understanding and outlook on the matter.

The introduction, after explaining that insufficient grade 12 results or an inappropriate subject choice are an indication that a prospective bridging course student would not cope with a degree program, and therefore need to do the bridging course programme, states:

"You might not want to believe this, but this is to protect YOU from failure"

This sentence also has an "adults know best" tone and again infantilizes students, reinforcing the impression that the institution views bridging course

students as being not only young in terms of their actual age, but also in terms of their maturity levels and life experiences.

4.2.1.2 Nationality

The information on the Bellevue Academy's website suggests that prospective bridging course students have a South African Matriculation (grade 12) certificate. In the 'Introduction to the Bridging Course' section of the website "grade 12" is mentioned five times. No mention is made of other school leaving qualifications in this section. The 'Bridging Course Description' section is more general and refers only to "school education" which might refer to school education in any country. If the link to 'International Student Info' is followed, there is no information as to how a non-South African student might calculate whether or not they had attained the requirements for entrance to a degree program or whether they would need to register for the Bridging Course year. If one follows the 'general admissions requirements' link the following statement can be found:

"Students with international school leaving certificates may be required to submit documentation to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). It is the student's responsibility to contact SAQA directly".

However, there is no information as to which students would be required to submit documentation to SAQA, or when in the application process this should be done. The lack of specification as to exactly which international students will be required to submit documentation, shown by the use of the word "may" as well as the allocation of responsibility regarding the acquisition of the relevant certification to the student implies international students do not represent a sufficient numbers to warrant resources being allocated to helping them to submit applications.

Lecturer and student advisor questionnaire responses supported the impression that the institution views bridging course students as being South African as all of the lecturers and student advisors sampled believed most bridging course students to be South African.

4.2.1.3 Language

Analysis of the Bellevue website suggests that the institution views most students as having English as their first language. The website is only available in English and there is no mention of provision, such as language support initiatives, being made for students who do not have English as their primary or home language. Included in the bridging course curriculum are the compulsory modules Bridging English part 1 and 2.

The course description for Bridging English makes no mention of being informed by an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) approach and this corresponds with the impression that bridging course students are viewed as English home or first language speakers. Given that only around 10% of the South African population (Statistics SA, 2011) have English as their home language, and international students may not have a high level of English proficiency, the absence of any reference to how EFL/ESOL students will be supported is noteworthy.

Responses from lecturers and student advisors supported the idea that the most common home language in a group of bridging course students is English. However, lecturers commented in their questionnaire responses that many students were bilingual and therefore had more than one home language. During the two in-depth lecturer interviews students' language problems were frequently cited as one of the main reasons that students were doing poorly in their assessments. One lecturer commented, "...their vocabulary is so limited and their grammar and spelling is atrocious. Assignments are full of mistakes. They don't bother to spell check or proofread." While this lecturer expressed frustration at students' ability to produce quality essays, she seemed to attribute these language errors to the students' unwillingness to plan, proofread and spell check rather than the fact that English may have been the student's second or third language. Once again, the deficit is attributed to the student, and not to the lack of language support at the institution.

4.2.2 Nature (N₂) Identities

4.2.2.1 Home environment

All lecturers and student advisors believed that the most common living situation for a bridging course student during the term was with family. Living in privately rented accommodation was ranked second. Content on the website did not give any overt indication of where the institution believed students resided during the term time, but as there is no residential accommodation facility offered for students other than those who are registered at the main campus in Johannesburg, it can be assumed that the institution does not assist with accommodation arrangements for students at remote campuses.

An absence of designated study areas on campus and no access to campus facilities on weekends or after 5pm during the week suggests that the institutional view of students' home environment is that that most students have their own rooms, or at least a quiet area to study, in their places of residence. It seemed that student advisors shared this view, as responses indicated that almost all student advisors believing that bridging course students had their own rooms during term time. However, lecturer responses differed significantly in this instance, with only one lecturer assuming that the typical bridging course student has their own room. As lecturers have more interaction with students than student advisors do, it is possible that students had discussed their home living situation and the effect it might have on their ability to study with their lecturers rather than with student advisors.

4.2.2.2 Access to electronic resources

The majority of student advisors and lecturers surveyed believed that the average bridging course student did not own a desktop computer, laptop, or tablet. Although around half the student advisors and lecturers believed that a student owned a phone with Internet connectivity, at the time when the research took place mobile Internet was extremely expensive and Bellevue Academy did not offer Wi-Fi connection to students, so using a mobile phone as a means of regularly surfing the Internet would most likely not have been seen as a viable option for most students.

Despite the fact that most student advisors and lecturers were of the opinion that the majority of students did not have adequate access to computers and Internet off campus, the extremely limited access to computers on the campus would imply that as an institution Bellevue Academy believed that students had these devices and access to Internet at home. When the research took place the student to computer ratio was very high with 15 computers and one printer in the library and over 300 students on campus. Other computer laboratories on campus were used for lectures and locked when not in use. For a student to have sufficient time for researching, creating, and submitting assignments electronically, they would need to have access to computers and Internet somewhere other than on campus as the campus shut at 5pm.

4.2.2.3 Digital literacy

As students were required to research assignment topics online, use electronic plagiarism software, and hand in assignments that are typed and printed; students required a certain degree of digital literacy to be able to demonstrate the assessment criteria that are measured in assignments.

It is stated under 'Course Info' section on the website that:

“Students are given the opportunity to develop their computer skills to support success in degree studies”.

However, it is not clear from the website how students will be able to develop these skills. During the time the research took place all bridging course students were required to take the 'Introduction to IT' course. However, students were only allowed to register for this module in the second semester. This course was the only instruction on computer-related competencies offered at the research site.

As students were required from the outset of the course to use digital technology to complete their assignments, and the only training or support provided on the use of digital technology was done in the second semester, it

can be inferred that the institution assumes that students enter the course with at least a basic level of digital literacy.

4.2.3 Institution (I) Identities

4.2.3.1 Members of a separate faculty

As previously stated, the organisational structure of Bellevue Academy is such that students on the bridging course are in a separate faculty to any of the other students. At the remote campus where the research was conducted, this separation was very acute and bridging course students occupied a very distinct position in the student population, separate from other students in their prospective future faculties. Bridging course students did not have classes with any students from their future faculties and were referred to as “bridging course students” rather than, for example, “Psychology students”.

On Bellevue website there is a separate section entitled ‘Bridging Course.’ In this section information is provided for all students who might be registered for the bridging programme, regardless of the faculty under which they might register. The division, coupled with the fact that only one faculty-specific introductory module is provided for Commerce and Psychology students, may position these students more definitively as bridging students than as Pre-I.Psychology or Pre-Commerce students. This is particularly pronounced for the Bachelor of Commerce Tourism students who do not do any Tourism modules in their bridging year and only do an Introduction to Commerce module (which is predominantly centred around Economics) in the second semester.

Bridging students on the Graphic Design programme at the Cape Town campus do two graphic design-related modules in their bridging year, and have a designated room in the graphic design studio, and are thus less excluded from the Graphic Design faculty. While the bridging course Graphic Design students’ curriculum involves a significantly greater number of faculty-specific topics and assignments, these students do not need to complete a portfolio for acceptance into the Graphic Design programme and do not need any art-related subjects at school. Their acceptance is based on their

academic performance in their school-leaving examinations and not on their potential Graphic Design talent. This again reinforces the idea that these students, although given more faculty-specific subjects, are positioned as bridging course students rather than Pre-Graphic Design students.

4.2.3.2 Rejected by mainstream public universities

Of the student advisors and lecturers that took part in the research, two thirds of student advisors and half of lecturers agreed that the average bridging course student was likely to have applied to other academic institutions. However, the majority of student advisors and all of the lecturers did not believe that the student was likely to have been accepted into any other institutions.

Given that students who register for the bridging course do not do so out of choice (as the extra year is extremely costly) being a bridging course student is something that is imposed by the institution on the student. As anyone who passed grade 12 is accepted onto bridging course there is very little to no prestige involved in being a bridging student.

4.2.4 Discourse (D)-Identities

4.2.4.1. Academically weak

I found that the predominant Discourse-identity for bridging course students, from the perspective of the institution, was that the average bridging course student is academically weak and not able to cope with the demands of a tertiary education environment. Even though students may be on the program for several reasons besides poor academic performance, such as having a subject choice which did not allow for degree access, or having a school leaving qualification which is not recognized in South Africa, bridging students were prevailingly described as weak students.

The following extract from the website encapsulates this description of bridging course students:

“... this is an indication that you would struggle on the degree, as you do not currently have the level of knowledge or academic skills needed to cope...”

The words “struggle”, “cope” and “inappropriate” imply that the responsibility for a student not meeting the requirements for degree programme acceptance rests with the student himself or herself. However, a student’s subject choice in secondary school is often constrained by the range of subjects which the secondary school offers, and is also often strongly influenced by teachers, career counsellors, and parents that may not be professionally trained in providing career advice.

The vast majority, over 80%, of lecturers and student advisors, indicated that they believed that a typical bridging student would need to repeat one or more bridging course modules while registered for their first year of study. Both lecturers that took part in in-depth interviews reiterated the description of bridging students as academically weak, describing them as “lacking in knowledge” and having “scraped through Matric”.

4.2.4.2. Lacking essential academic skills

Another common descriptor of bridging course students was that they did not possess the necessary skills that were needed to excel in a tertiary education environment. This was evident in responses from the interviews with lecturers where poor student performance was attributed to students being “spoon fed at school”, and “learning from text books” and consequently unable to cope with the demands of higher education. Throughout both interviews lecturers frequently stated that bridging students were lacking in skills. Amongst the skills students were commonly seen as lacking were reading skills, note-taking skills, researching skills, skills related to learning for exams, and referencing skills.

Another indication that the institution describes students as being deficient in skills is the inclusion of a heavily skills focused compulsory study skills course that runs across both semesters.

4.2.4.3 Lacking motivation

All of the lecturers disagreed or strongly disagreed that the average bridging student was academically motivated. Contrastingly, only one student advisor believed bridging students lacked motivation for academic study. A similar pattern was found in responses to the question about whether bridging students would return to register for their degree after completing the bridging course, with most student advisors agreeing that students would return and most lecturers disagreeing. One possible reason for the differences in opinion on bridging students' motivation levels is that lecturers see students regularly throughout the week while student advisors predominantly only see students at enrolment which happens before the majority of students have experienced a tertiary educational environment. Student advisors also earn commission on each student that they enrol and so be more likely to believe students would return to study at the institution following their bridging year.

Findings from the two in-depth interviews with lecturers supported the findings from the questionnaires, with both lecturers strongly believing that all but a few bridging course students were not motivated academically to study.

4.2.5 Affinity (A) Identities

The fourth and final perspective from which identity can be viewed is the affinity perspective or A-identity. In order to best analyse this data using Gee's fourth perspective on identity, A-identities or affinity identities, I identified two primary affinity groups that would be most likely to be relevant to a bridging course student's identity. The first group is a "student of higher education affinity group" and the second is a "vocational affinity group".

However, before exploring the degree to which the institution viewed a typical bridging course student as identifying themselves with each of these two affinity groups, and therefore taking part in practices typical of members of these groups, I examined whether the institution viewed a typical bridging student as having knowledge about what practices were needed to be successful at higher education study.

When asked whether the average bridging course student knew the requirements needed for success in their degree, almost half of the student advisors believed that the average bridging course student did know what it would take to succeed in a degree programme. However, all but one of the lecturers disagreed. Findings from the lecturer interviews echoed the feelings that the vast majority of the lecturers expressed in the questionnaires.

4.2.5.1 Student of higher education affinity group

Given that bridging course students are preparing for degree study, it could be assumed that these students would be seen as belonging to, or preparing to belong to, the higher education academic community. While I acknowledge that the higher education academic community is an extensive group that consists of many sub-groups, I purposely kept this affinity group wide-ranging when analysing the data. There are also many practices relating to membership of the students in higher education group, so in order to organise the data I grouped practices into two main areas. These were practices relating to lectures, and practices relating to assessment.

a) Practices around lectures

Responses to questionnaires indicated that all lecturers either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the average bridging course student prepares for lectures, attends the majority of their lectures, are on time for the lectures, and revises lecture content after their lectures. Half the lecturers agreed that the average bridging course student is attentive in lectures. Student advisors tended to agree that the average bridging course student was likely to be on time for lectures and attend the majority of their lectures, but most were unsure about practices relating to lectures such as preparing for lectures, being attentive during lectures, and revising after lectures. As student advisors are not present in lectures this result is not unexpected.

During the interviews with the two lecturers, students' lack of note-taking and unlikelihood of revising after the lecture were highlighted. Student attendance was also mentioned as a concern, and this was a common complaint amongst other lecturers at the institution. While the first lecturer did not have a problem

with behaviour in lectures, the second lecturer mentioned that if they were given the choice they would choose not to lecture bridging course students.

b) Practices around assessment

All but one lecturer disagreed that the average bridging course student prepared adequately for their tests and most were unsure about whether they prepared adequately for exams. Again, most student advisors were unsure about student assessment behaviour, though mostly they tended towards the belief that a bridging course student did prepare adequately for their tests. Given that student advisors do not mark the students' tests or exams, this finding is again not unexpected.

During the interviews lecturers viewed students' practices related to assessment as highly problematic with both lecturers criticising what they considered to be students' lack of preparation for assessments.

While the first lecturer attributed students' poor results to their unwillingness to prepare adequately for assessments, the second lecturer believed that the way students prepared for their assessments sometimes was problematic, with students resorting to the same strategies they used at school. And while the first lecturer placed all responsibility with the students, the second lecturer acknowledged the role of course design in influencing how students needed to prepare for assessments: "*Though the way some courses are designed, that is what they have to do, learn the whole textbook word for word.*"

Both lecturers found students' assignments to be below the required standard. This was a common complaint from all lecturers who taught on the bridging course. Issues such as poor grammar and spelling, insufficient research, a tendency to copy and paste from the Internet, and a weak grasp of the academic writing style were frequently mentioned.

4.2.5.2 Vocational affinity group

Responses to the statement "a typical bridging course student had sufficient knowledge of the requirements that are needed to succeed in their chosen

field of work” differed significantly between student advisors and lecturers. While nearly half of the student advisors agreed that a typical bridging course student did know what it would take to succeed in their future career, around 80% of lecturers either strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement. As student advisors are expected to advise students which courses to enrol for it is not surprising that the majority of the student advisors believed that students did have sufficient knowledge about how to succeed in their intended field of work. As the majority of lecturers have industry experience in the vocational subjects offered at the institution, and student advisors do not, it is more likely that the opinions of the lecturers more accurately describe the average bridging course student in this case.

Vocational knowledge was a strong theme in the interview with the second lecturer. This particular lecturer lectured a range of vocational subjects and had only recently transferred into education from industry. Throughout the interview this lecturer expressed concern that students were not going to be able to find jobs in their intended industries as they did not possess the skills and attitudes needed to be successful in an industrial context. This lecturer also spoke of how bridging students did not seem to show any enthusiasm or passion for the industry that they planned to be a part of.

“It’s like they have no interest in what is happening in the industry. I try to bring in outside lecturers whenever I can, experts in the field, and yet the students are still disengaged. They have the opportunity to learn from these guest speakers but very few are even interested in what they are saying.” [Lecturer 2]

Responses in the first interview also alluded to a lack of vocational knowledge. While this lecturer was a specialist in an academic subject rather than a vocational one, students’ lack of workplace knowledge was mentioned in a more general sense. This lecturer worried that students would not be able to cope in a workplace setting and cited behaviours that students displayed such as laziness, poor time management and poor communication skills as being

problematic if they were to continue these behaviours in their future places of work.

Consideration of the data indicates that the institution does not view bridging course students as likely to engage in practices that would affiliate them with a particular vocation. While students are registered on the course as bridging Psychology students or bridging Graphic Design students, structures, practices and discourses in the institution do not encourage students to adopt a vocational identity, and in turn to display practices that are characteristic of a member of a particular vocational affinity group.

When asked in the questionnaire whether or not they agreed that the average bridging course student had sufficient knowledge of the requirements that are needed to succeed in their chosen field of work, all student advisors stated that they were unsure as to whether or not they agreed. All the lecturers who answered the questionnaire either strongly disagreed or disagreed that a bridging course student was likely to know what was involved in being successful in their chosen vocation.

Content on the Bellevue Academy's website does not overtly indicate whether the institution views students as exhibiting behaviours which would associate them with a particular vocation. Yet the lack of content relating to future career choices is telling. While content relating to the bridging course frequently mentions preparing students for degree study, there is no mention of preparing students for a career in a particular industry. It can be deduced from this absence, and the inclusion of considerable content relating to academic skills that will be learnt, that the institution believes that during the bridging course year students should focus on academic behaviours rather than vocational ones.

In addition to the lack of vocationally related content on the website, curricula-related structures too have little vocational emphasis. Students on the bridging course for Graphic Design take two vocationally related courses but also have a yearlong compulsory social science subject. While a social science subject

could be relevant to any qualification, this particular course focuses on theories of sociology, politics and international study, and the content is fairly far removed from the vocation of Graphic Design. Psychology students are offered one introductory Psychology subject however it is only offered in the second semester. Students registered on the Bachelor of Commerce bridging program register either for a Bachelor of Commerce in Tourism or in Accounting. These students take an economics-based business course. However, there are no subjects on the bridging course relating specifically to tourism or to accounting.

4.5 Conceptions of literacy at Bellevue Academy: an autonomous model, normative stance, and study skills perspective

Data analysis showed that the ways in which literacy was conceptualised at Bellevue Academy favoured Street's (1984) autonomous model of literacy strongly over the ideological model. In the autonomous model literacy is seen as a set of technical, decontextualised skills, and context as well as power relations are ignored. I found that the study skills perspective of academic writing, and normative approach to academic literacy, most resembled how academic literacy was approached by the institution. The study skills perspective and normative approach assume that academic literacy is a set of atomized skills which students have to learn, and which are then transferable to other contexts. The focus is on attempts to 'fix' problems with student learning, and the theory of language on which it is based emphasises surface features, grammar and spelling (Lea and Street, 1998; Lillis and Scott, 2007).

4.5.1 Strong focus on a checklist of technical skills

Data from interviews with lecturers, as well as additional communication which I had with teaching staff, indicated that lecturers commonly attributed measures of academic success to mastery of skills such as reading and writing skills, referencing skills, and the surface features of language such as spelling, punctuation and grammar. Bridging students were often criticised for not adopting the technical conventions around academic reading and writing, and students' sentence structure, language use and referencing abilities were

often described as lacking. Academic reading and writing were viewed from a narrow perspective as a set of skills which could be transmitted to students through lectures and published guides.

Another way in which literacy was shown to be viewed from the autonomous model, study skills perspective, and normative approach was through curriculum choices. The course outlines for two of the four compulsory modules, Bridging English and Study Skills indicated that the focus for both courses was the provision of technical skills. While Bridging English was designed to provide students with skills such as “foundational language skills, foundational comprehension skills, clear and effective writing skills and oral presentation skills”, the Study Skills modules were designed to help students to “develop skills such as study skills, research skills and time management skills”. The course outline for the Study Skills first and second semester modules showed that every outcome for the course was related to skills acquisition, further highlighting the importance placed on skills.

4.5.2 Decontextualisation of literacy practices

McKenna (2004a:5) explains that the autonomous model constructs literacy as the technical ability to decode and encode text in the same way as the writer or educator, implying that the message of the text was neutral, value free and easily accessible by all. The profile of a typical bridging course student was someone who had just completed high school in South Africa, had English as their primary language, and had access to resources such as Internet access, a computer, and a place to study at home. However, this view of bridging students' N-identities was unrealistic and the barriers to learning, especially language learning, which many students faced were largely ignored. The bridging student cohort's N-identities were rather that students were multinational, multilingual, and had various levels of English language proficiency. It was highly unlikely that these students shared a common understanding of the texts they were expected to read and engage with, and if a common understanding is presumed then the difficulties which students faced when reading these texts would not be understood by their lecturers.

4.5.3 A disregard for the power relations surrounding literacy

Another way in which literacy at Bellevue Academy conforms to the autonomous model is that the cultural and social realities in which literacy is operating at the institution are being largely ignored. In an educational context, the autonomous model fails to address the relationship between the literacies of educational institutions and the power structures that exist in these institutions (Street, 1984).

One example of the disregard for the power relations surrounding literacy was the placing of the blame for assignments not submitted correctly or on time. Students were viewed as unwilling and to comply with the assignment submission procedure and were viewed as having poor time management skills for submitting assignments which had been done in a rush and were sometimes not handed in on time. There was no recognition of, or allowances made for the fact that almost all students did not have access to Internet off campus and were unable to get time on the computers while on campus due to lack of facilities, overcrowding and malfunctioning hardware. Although some students had never used a computer before they came to Bellevue Academy there were no tutorial or drop-in sessions available to allow students to become familiar with using the technology that was so new and foreign to them. There was a presupposition that students would have a level of digital literacy that would allow them to complete and submit satisfactorily assignments. However, not only was a basic level of digital literacy expected, but students were also expected to be able to use software that they almost certainly would not have used before. Students were expected to research using journal databases and submit assignments with a Turnitin report. This does not only presume that students have a basic level of digital literacy but also that they are able to teach themselves to use programs which are completely new to them, a skill which requires a sophisticated level of digital literacy.

Information on the website and data from the staff questionnaires depicts students as immature and no legitimacy is given to significant life experiences which the students had. The information about the bridging course on the website makes no mention made of any skills or abilities which students might

already possess. There is no reference to building on existing knowledge and attitudes, or developing existing skills or literacies, and students are depicted as empty vessels which need to be “filled” to succeed. When language and literacy are approached from a normative rather than transformative perspective, resources that students bring with them are not seen as relevant tools for meaning making (Lillis and Scott, 2007:13). That the significant range of life experiences which students bring with them from different backgrounds, upbringings, cultures and countries are not legitimised by the institution indicates that the institution views language and literacy from a normative perspective.

CHAPTER 5: STUDENT IDENTITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDENTS

5.1 Introduction

Findings relating to perceptions of bridging course student identity (using an adaptation of Gee's 2001 framework) are presented as two identity profiles of a "typical" bridging course student, the first from the perspective of Bellevue Academy, and the second from the perspective of the students themselves. Using the same framework to portray each perspective allows for comparison between the two perspectives, and for the similarities, differences, and the potential implications of these to be discussed in the next chapter.

5.2. Bridging course student identity from the perspective of the students

5.2.1 Nature (N_1)-identities

5.2.1.1. Age

Results from the questionnaires completed by the 35 student participants indicated that around 70% were either 18 or 19 years old. This finding was not unexpected as most students who had finished high school in 2012 would be 18 or 19 years old. However, more than a quarter of the sample was older than 19 years old. Of the 10 students who were older than 19 years of age, 8 students were either 20 or 21 years old and 2 students were older than 21 years old.

During the focus groups it became evident that age was a significant N_1 -identity for some students. Students who were outside the standard age range, particularly the two students who were older than 21 years old, frequently brought up the topic of age in the focus groups. While they did not feel that their classmates treated them differently because they were older than them, they expressed frustration at how they were treated as bridging course students. The student for whom age seemed to be the most significant

as an N₁-identity was Eunice, a student from Angola and the oldest student in the group. Throughout the focus group Eunice indicated that she did not feel like she was being treated in an age-appropriate manner. When asked what made her feel like this she responded that it felt as if, like a child, she had to learn everything from scratch.

“In my country people go to study very much later. 50 years old, 60. My mother-in-law is at university. It’s not a big thing, it is challenging. But I have my life done. I had a career. I was a very successful woman in my career. I was just getting levels higher and higher but I quitted everything because I wanted to have more knowledge in what I was already doing. But once I got here I realized I am just a child, 1 year old that has to start walking again, you know?” [Eunice, 2013]

For Eunice age was a significant N₁-identity due to the fact that she perceived herself to be in a situation where she was out of her depth, something that she felt she no longer was in other areas of her life. The above quotation illustrates Eunice’s frustration that the skills and life experience that she brought with her were not valued or seen as legitimate and all that mattered was whether she could demonstrate the proficiencies that the institution believed to be important. Throughout the focus group Eunice regularly expressed frustration and disapproval of the way she believed she was being treated.

However, age was not only a significant N₁-identity for students who were older than the majority of their peers. For some students who had come straight from school age became an important N₁-identity in the academic context when they felt that they were not being treated in an age-appropriate manner. Deepa, a single teenage mother expressed dissatisfaction that while her life experiences had forced her to grow up quickly, none of this maturity was recognised: *“I’m 19 but I had my baby when I was 16. I grew up then. I had to be grown up for my daughter. I don’t need to be treated like I am a child.”*

It was not only students who had more life experience than the average first year student who felt they were being treated in a manner that did not suit their maturity levels. Some students felt that they were not even being treated like higher education students. On the topic of Bellevue social activities one student expressed his frustration that although the students were being allowed to organise a social event, the institution tightly controlled the event. And while students wanted to take advantage of, what was for many of them, freedom from a stringent home and school environment, there was pressure from the institution to have the social during the day and to organise a series of interactive games for the event, which one student in the focus group described as being more “playing like children” than “partying like students.”

5.2.1.2. Nationality

Of the students who took part in the research, 82% were South African. The remaining 18% were from other African countries namely Angola, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Students who were not South African did not seem to find that they had been treated differently because they were from other countries. Nationality did not appear to be a significant N_1 -identity for the students in the research group. However, during a discussion on why students were asked to register for the bridging course year, students who did not write matric were not certain about why the results of their school leaving qualifications were not sufficient to get them into first year. Students did not question this decision and seemed to accept without question that they would need to do the bridging course.

Additionally, some of the students who were not from South Africa, especially those from Angola, found that it had been difficult learning in English as they had rarely spoken English in their home countries. The issue of language as an N_1 -identity will be discussed in the following section.

5.2.1.3 Language

The majority of students, 77%, indicated that they had either English or English and other language(s) as their language(s) of teaching and learning in high school. Despite the high percentage of students who had experienced

teaching and learning in English, many students still mentioned during the focus groups that language was one of the issues they struggled with in a higher education environment. While many students may have been taught and assessed in English at school, only 34% of the students responded that English or English and another language was their home or primary language. Students frequently mentioned that they struggled to access subject material because of language difficulties.

“Besides having to learn all the new work, I also have to learn English. My English is very weak and I sometimes don’t understand my lecturers” [Litha, 2013]

Some students also mentioned that it was not just that they had difficulties with English, but also that the complexity of the English was very high and that subject-specific terms had to be learnt and understood. Many students said it was like learning many new languages which were complex and confusing. Even students who felt their level of English proficiency was above average indicated that they found themselves out of their depth.

“It’s like not enough to know English, the words you have to use here are bigger and it’s hard to know what they want from you” [Faith, 2013]

5.2.2 Nature (N₂) identities

5.2.2.1. Home environment

During the focus groups a common theme that emerged was that students often experienced factors at home that limited their ability to undertake effective home study. Many students said that they found it difficult to study at home due to many disruptions and other responsibilities in the home. Of the students that took part in the research, a third did not have their own bedroom, and shared either with a family member or roommate. Students sharing with family members found it particularly difficult to study at home.

A female student, Xholisa, commented on the limited space in her bedroom, as well as the fact that she did not have the space to herself:

“I just wish I had my own room. I share with my sister and it is so hard to learn in my room. We don’t have space for a desk so I must work on my bed which is hard. If I had my own room I think I could do so much better.”

Another barrier to opportunities for effective home study was that many students had responsibilities and expectations that they needed to meet at home. These included helping to care for their own children, their younger siblings or less able family members, as well as sharing in the housework tasks such as shopping, cooking and cleaning. Students found these tasks time-consuming, especially when coupled with the fact that many students did not live close to the campus and relied on public transport, which was often slow and inefficient, to get home. One student described a typical day for her: *“I leave home at 7 to be at varsity for my 9 o’ clock lecture. Then I leave at 4 and get home by 6. I then have to make food for us and help my sister with her homework. Then I clean up and wash and at that time I am so tired I don’t wanna work, I must just sleep”.*

Students felt that having somewhere to work on campus would be helpful as they found that there were hardly ever any free spaces on campus where they could work. One student explained how he overcame this problem by using the facilities at a nearby public university:

“I have a friend there who gives me his student card and I go in. I go to the library or an empty classroom. Sometimes I spend the whole night in the library. I just study and study. Everyone there works so hard. It is difficult to get there but easy to work there” [Immanuel, 2013].

5.2.2.2. Access to electronic resources

Lack of access to resources was the one of the most prominent causes that students gave regarding academic difficulties they had experienced and

students were very vocal about this issue during the focus groups. Most, but not all, students had access to a computer at their home. However, many stated that although they could type up assignments at home, Internet access was absent or limited, and so researching information at home was difficult. Almost all students in each of the focus groups cited lack of access to computers, printing facilities, and Internet connection on campus as a major problem they had experienced.

“I don’t have Internet at home. How are we meant to do research? There is never a free computer here and the computers are so slow. You finally get one and before you can even look something up it is time to go to your next class” [Justin, 2013].

When I asked students about their experiences using the campus library for research students were in agreement that there were not adequate resources there to meet their needs (assignments often required the use of at least 2 books). Students complained about the poor volume and quality of the resources in the library, saying that going to look for books there was a waste of time as the only books available were the textbooks used for the various courses offered and that these were not suitable for their research purposes.

5.2.2.3. Digital literacy

In addition to struggling with a lack of access to electronic resources, many students stated that they had trouble using the electronic resources that were available. These difficulties ranged from using computers themselves to using certain computer programs.

“I never used a computer before I came here. And there are no classes or anything. And no one helps you” [Akhona, 2013].

“They like want Ebsco Host, what is this thing? I have never used things like this before. At school you just use one book and that is fine. Or you just give your own opinion, not reference, reference all the time” [Neelesh, 2013].

Almost all students that took part in the focus groups mentioned that they found the use of the electronic plagiarism detection software, Turnitin, extremely problematic. Students often were presented with a similarity index higher than the acceptable amount but were unsure how to decrease the score. Although lecturers were, in my experience, not convinced by the reliability of the software, the way it was used was not, to my knowledge, challenged.

5.2.3 Institution (I) identities

5.2.3.1. Members of a separate faculty

During the focus groups students consistently expressed frustration that courses were not relevant to their areas of study. Many students experienced that although they are required to register as bridging course students for a specific faculty, for example bridging course Psychology, they do very few faculty-specific subjects. In the case of Tourism Management, the bridging course students did not have a specific tourism subject in their curriculum. Students appeared to have registered with the impression that they would be on an extended programme for Psychology, Graphic Design, Tourism or Accounting, and envisioned their bridging year as a first year of what for them would be a four-year degree. However, they seemed to have become disillusioned as the year progressed.

“Like we wanna do Psychology right? But this is basically mixed with Graphics and all that stuff, we’re all mixed together so they like okay well I want to do Psychology and I’m not doing Psychology so why am I staying? This is not what I wanted to study.” [Liza]

“I just wanted to be here. But when I got here and I had to do bridging course, at least I thought in the second semester I will be introduced in the Tourism. I just like to be practical. It just sort of just pulled down my efforts.” [Lebalo]

When I asked students whether they believed that the following year, their first year on their degree programme, would be different there was a consensus that it would be. This is seen in the following conversation which took place in one of the focus groups:

Lebalo: "Yes because at the moment we are just busy with the foundation because we are bridging course. Next, okay first year it's going to be different because you are actually going to be going into what you signed up for. So it will be more based on Tourism".

Justin: "Since this is our first year we like not really taking things so seriously. But we doing just enough so that we don't fail though".

MK: "Ya I agree with Justin. It's like if I pass this year it'll give me that nudge that I'm set for university and set for studying. Like I can naturally do it. So I think if I pass this year then it will be like you're a perfect student, you're getting there".

5.2.3.2. Rejected by mainstream public universities

Findings from questionnaires indicated that just over half of the respondents had applied to institutions other than Bellevue Academy. The main reason students did not apply to any other institutions was that they left the application process too late and missed the deadlines of other institutions. Of the students who did apply to other institutions, 60% applied to one other institution, 35% applied to two other institutions, and only 5% applied to three other institutions.

When asked why they chose to study at Bellevue Academy, around one third of the respondents indicated that Bellevue Academy was the only institution which had accepted their application. However, the remaining two thirds of students specifically wanted to study at Bellevue Academy. Around half of the students who specifically chose Bellevue indicated that the primary reason they chose this institution was because it offered the course they wanted to study. Just under a third (27%) chose this institution because they "were

convinced” that this was the best institution to meet their needs. Individual attention and assistance finding work after graduating made up the remaining reasons for choosing Bellevue. However, as individual attention and assistance finding work are part of this institution’s marketing message, it can be concluded that around half of the students who chose to study at Bellevue Academy were influenced by the strong sales discourse that the institution uses to recruit students.

When asked how students felt when they heard they were going to need to do a bridging year the feedback was that the experience had been negative for most students, especially those that only found out they did not meet the entrance requirements for degree study when they came to register in January. Students said that they “felt like crying”, and “felt sad towards my family”. One student said that when she had only been accepted at Bellevue Academy it was “as if you’re not really good enough to be in university”. However, despite their initial setback of needing to do an extra year and their continued frustrations at some of the disappointments they experienced on the course, most students continued to view the bridging course as a chance to better their prospects.

“I also thought of the advantages. It’s preparing you for first year. And I think that it’s done it. So if things actually get tough you can handle it.”
[Therusha]

Students mentioned that they were disappointed at first that, unlike some of their friends, they were not at well-known and renowned public universities such as the University of Cape Town, which a student described as the “best university in the country” due to the fact that the entrance requirements and standards were high. Students also mentioned that there was a stigma against Bellevue Academy as it was not well known. However, when asked if they were looked down on by their friends at more well-known institutions one student said:

“They do that but then you start comparing fees and they are like wow. That’s what breaks the ice. And then they see that it’s more serious, more private school.” [Justin]

“When you go to UCT then you’ve made it. When you’re there it’s like the pinnacle of everything. Which it’s not. They will kick you out if you don’t do well and then also your lecturers don’t know you”. [Mary-Anne]

Xholisa had heard similar feedback from her friends: “No one knows your name there and you can’t get help. Here all our lecturers know us and it is easier, like if you want to ask a question then you can.”

When I asked the students whether they thought they would be more academically successful at a mainstream public university they strongly rejected the idea, saying that they liked their small classes and the personal connection that they had with their lecturers. The overall consensus among students was that they now felt glad that they had not gone to these institutions as they did not think that the large class sizes and facelessness that students at large universities typically experience, especially in the first year, would suit their learning styles.

5.2.4 Discourse (D)-identities:

5.2.4.1 Academically adequate

While there were three reasons for students being registered on the bridging program: an inadequate subject choice (11%), an unrecognised overseas qualification (11%), and insufficient Grade 12 results, it was poor results which were the reason the majority (77%) of students were on the bridging course. However, although over three quarters of the students stated that insufficient grades in the Matriculation examination were the reason that they were doing the bridging programme, students did not describe themselves as academically weak or struggling during the focus groups. In contrast, students were confident about their academic abilities and their likelihood of success.

When asked to reflect on their academic achievements students were generally of the opinion that they were doing sufficiently well and that their academic performance was not a cause for concern. However, some students did indicate that they did see room for improvement in their academic performance.

“I think everyone’s taking a backseat in the bridging course. Because like you’ve just come out of matric in hectic work and now you just need to pass and get into first year. So it’s like okay I can calm down for a bit but when I get to first year I’m going to start working” [Litha]

“Since like it’s bridging or whatever. But like next year it’s going to be like pressure pressure pressure. And you can’t afford to just sit and be chilled. Whereas now you can afford to just sit and chill” [MK]

As well as admitting there was room for improvement in their academic performance and primarily attributing this to not seeing the need to put 100% effort into the bridging course, some students mentioned other reasons for not stretching themselves academically. Extrinsic factors such as responsibilities at home and distractions such as social media were mentioned as barriers to academic performance.

Another student, Carmen, spoke of an intrinsic barrier to academic success and the fact that she did not relate to the identity of highly academic student.

“We possess so much potential but we don’t want to like up our game.”

When I asked her why she felt she did not want to up her game she replied:
“Well for me, from a personal point of view, I know I’m not dumb but I don’t want to go for like high... expectations because... I’m modest... so...or like being just average and I think that’s always set my mind so...”

5.2.4.2. Gaps in essential academic skills

While students generally described themselves as academically able, they did highlight the difficulties that they experienced when they started at Bellevue Academy. Students described themselves as underprepared, and said that they had not known what to expect when coming to university. Students highlighted language difficulties, time management and practices around researching and referencing as some of the biggest challenges that they had to face.

5.2.4.3. Selectively motivated

Overall students did view themselves as motivated to succeed. During the focus groups students repeatedly stated that they wanted to succeed to make their parents proud, and the motivation to get a degree qualification was strong. However, for some students the desire to do well and to make their parents proud by getting a degree did not correspond with their wishes for what they had wanted to do after school. The following conversation is from one of the focus groups:

“Sometimes I feel like I have lack of motivation, and also confidence. I feel like I am doing this for my parents” [Autumn]

“Yes I wanted to stay home” [Zeze]

“I wanted to find a job” [Francis]

Additionally, while students were motivated to complete their studies there was a sense that they were losing motivation on the bridging course. Students mentioned that they were highly motivated in some classes (those where they liked their lecturer or believed the content was relevant) but could not see the point of other classes and did not see how they were worth any effort. As well as being motivated about selective subjects, there was a common theme that students did not need to be fully motivated on the bridging year as it “didn’t count”. And so while it was important to pass it to get into first year, the course was not seen as a legitimate university year.

“This is just a warm-up year. I’m just getting used to things. I just want to pass now. And next year I will be like I want to get distinctions.”
[Faith, 2013]

When I told students that their bridging course results would be reflected on their academic transcripts which they would need to use for job applications their surprise indicated the lack of legitimacy of the bridging year which they believed was “not a real year” and “just to get us used to degree work”.

5.2.5 Affinity (A)-identities:

5.2.5.1 Student of higher education affinity group

The first activity in the focus group involved students designing an “ideal” or “perfect” student. The aim of this activity was to gauge what characteristics and practices students attributed to a successful university student and open up a discussion on whether or not they identified with this “ideal” student. In all three focus groups students had no hesitation listing the requirements and practices needed for academic success. The groups’ ideal students were motivated, attended all lectures, prepared for lectures before the lecture and revised content after the lecture, studied extremely hard for tests and exams, and handed in all work on time (or early).

However, while students could list the practices related to academic success without hesitation, when asked whether they saw themselves as ideal students the response in all of the focus groups was a resounding “No!” Furthermore, it was not just that students acknowledged that they were far from being ideal students, but rather that students strongly rejected the idea of being an ideal student and indicated that this was not something to which they aspired. Students believed that their ideal students would face too much pressure and have no friends, no sense of balance and most likely “no life”.

“I think like being the perfect student, everyone is expecting so much from you. You’re like the centre of attention and people never remember the good you’ve done, they just remember the bad stuff.”
[Wes]

a) Practices around lectures

While all focus groups' ideal students never missed a lecture, were never late, prepared for their lectures and revised content after lectures, the students in the focus groups did not identify with these practices.

Many students failed to see lectures as an integral part of their learning process. Students regularly skipped lectures, especially in the early morning or late afternoons. This was more likely to happen if lecturers were considered "boring" or subjects were "pointless." Attendance at lectures and interest in the subject was strongly linked with the students' opinions of the lecturer. A Graphic Design student called Jamie described how he felt that Graphic Design students were treated differently in class and this led to demotivation:

"We were like outcasts. She was over the Psychology people. She didn't give us enough attention. She didn't like try to motivate us. She like dropped us down."

Students admitted that when they found lecturers were boring they were more likely to be distracted in lectures and start to use their mobile phones or talk to their friends. Students also attributed outside influences to poor attendance at lectures. Factors such as responsibilities at home and transport issues also affected student attendance. As well as external factors, some students reflected on the role they themselves played in their academic journey. The freedom students now had compared with high school and the inability to say no to friends who wanted to skip lectures were factors which some students found brought their attendance at lectures down. Some students lay the blame with themselves. This can be seen in the following reflections on what students believed was preventing them from improving their own academic performance:

“I’m a very lazy person. Especially in Maths, if I get it once I tend to, to, to ...” (“not go back to it?”) “Yes. Even in tests I just use the same knowledge that I got in class. I think that is my downfall.” [Justice, 2013]

“I think that I can be that [an ideal student]. It’s just that I get in the way of myself. Like I think that’s the only thing. We can all blame like social media and stuff. But it’s you that’s getting in the way of yourself.” [Amy]

While students did not see themselves as ideal students currently, the theme of a journey was often present in their descriptions of their academic performance:

“And I guess I’m sort of in the middle there, because I could see that in my assignments and my tests my marks have gone up. And the comments of the lecturers. And um, like I’m not into social media unless I’m at home. Like I haven’t watched TV in like 4 moths. We don’t have TV at res. If I go onto the Internet, then I would like read stuff that will actually benefit me. I guess I would reach the prefect student in 2 years.” [Carmen]

“Things they don’t come out the way that you would expected them to be because it’s a long process learning. Everyday it’s a new thing, new vocabulary. It’s a process that goes with you along the way.” [Francis]

b) Practices around assessments

Students admitted that they did not prepare adequately for their tests. They used methods which had got them through tests in high school but which they now found did not work for covering the content that they were expected to learn. Most students blamed poor test results on their tendency to procrastinate. When students did try to learn for tests they relied on methods such as rewriting the study guide or reading over their textbook the night before.

During the focus groups students frequently brought up difficulties that they had completing their assignments. Issues that students experienced with assignments were that the questions were difficult to understand and they “didn’t really know what the assignment was asking”. This often lead to procrastination and putting off the assignment until the last minute.

Students also repeatedly mentioned that they often did not understand the research and referencing criteria for their assignments and struggled finding and referencing resources. Assignments often required a range of sources to be used and students had difficulty in locating the sources. Problems such as “no books in the library”, lack of availability of computers and very slow Internet speeds were all mentioned as barriers to completing assignments. Students admitted that they eventually gave up trying to research according to the assignment criteria and used the Internet to find information.

Another difficulty which students experienced was completing assignments using academic writing conventions. Students were unsure of how to put their ideas across using information that they got from the internet.

“Structure, in text referencing. You can’t give your opinion. The words you use, you can’t say he or I. You use one a lot. It’s difficult to get your idea across” [Lolly]

“In my high school you could write however you want and still get marks. But here it’s like everything is difficult cos we didn’t have to do this in high school. And then like all this referencing. It kind of influences your work” [Jess]

While preparing for tests and assignments lead to some difficulties for students they believed the biggest barrier to their progress was Turnitin. All students in all three focus groups expressed a great deal of frustration and sometimes anger towards being forced to use the software without an understanding of the plagiarism score the programme was giving them for

their assignments. Students spoke of using their own words and still having a high score. The most problematic aspect of the use of this software was that when students ran their assignment through the programme, which could take a few hours if the Internet was slow, they would then have to redo their assignment and keep running it through the programme until their score was reduced. On occasion students were unable to do this and did not hand in an assignment as this was seen as a safer option than having a high plagiarism score.

Students lost motivation after redoing assignments and often gave up. Some students mentioned that this led to a decrease in self-esteem as they felt they had tried their best but still failed. Students who were able to submit an assignment with a low enough plagiarism score still sometimes felt demotivated as they mentioned that they often were unsure of why they received the marks which they were given. The lack of clear feedback was a common reason as students felt that they did not know what they needed to do to improve their written work.

“Sometimes you work so hard to do it. Then you are confident that you are going to get something good like a distinction or something. Then it comes back and it’s so low.”

5.2.5.2 Vocational affinity group

While a few students in the focus group had decided what they wanted to study at school and had a fairly good idea about the career they wanted one day, many of the students had very little knowledge about the career paths they would need to take. And while some students, such as Justin, who had always wanted to be a Psychologist, always others such as Ntabiseng were less sure “I always wanted to do nursing and when I came here they said Psychology is the same thing”. When students were asked why they chose the particular degree course they planned to study their answers were fairly non-specific. For example, most Psychology students answered “to help people” and most Graphic Design students answered “because I like drawing”.

When asked where they saw themselves in 5 years' time most students said they would be working or studying further (to become registered Psychologists). However, a few had ideas which would be extremely difficult to accomplish with a graduate's salary. These responses included "driving a BMW", "owning a huge house", "owning my own art gallery", and "travelling the world".

5.3 Student identity: Two divergent perspectives

The way in which Bellevue Academy views bridging course students and the way in which these students view themselves are very different. Participants in the institution was asked to describe a typical bridging course student, and while it is not suggested that they were of the view that every single student fitted this profile, it was possible to present a generalised profile of how the institution viewed bridging course students. Similarly, while students themselves did not share one identity, themes and key commonalities could be drawn out of feedback and responses from the students.

Table 5.1 presents a comparison between the identity of a bridging course student from the view of Bellevue Academy, and from the view of students themselves. The differences and similarities which are likely to have the most significant impact on students' acquisition of academic literacy are discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Identity Trait	Bellevue Academy's Perspective	Students' Perspective
N₁-Identities		
Age	Predominantly 17-19 Lacking maturity	70% 17-19 and 30% 19+ Mature and forced to grow up early
Nationality	Predominantly South African	Around 80% South African and around 20% from other African countries
Language	English as a first language or English at first language level	Around 1/3 English as first language Many experienced language difficulties
N₂-Identities		
Home environment	Access to quiet study area (although lecturers did not have this view)	Difficult to find quiet place to study Frustrated by lack of spaces to work on campus
Access to electronic resources	Off-campus access to computer and Internet (although lecturers did not have this view)	Most had off-campus access to computer but not Internet
Digital literacy	High enough level to use online databases and plagiarism software	Low levels of digital literacy created a barrier to learning and assessment
I-Identities		
Members of which faculty?	Strong bridging course identity - kept separate from their future faculties	Frustration at isolation from future faculties
Other options for study	Students at Bellevue Academy because it was their only option (rejected by all other institutions)	2/3 of students specifically chose Bellevue Academy
D-Identities		
Academic ability	Academically weak	Academically adequate and trying to improve
Acquisition of essential skills	Lacking essential academic skills	Gaps in essential academic skills
Level of motivation	Lacking motivation	Motivated to get a degree

		qualification but declining motivation due to disillusion with the bridging course
A-identities		
Student of higher education affinity group	<p>Students do not have what it takes to succeed in higher education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attendance at lectures is poor - Quality of submitted work is poor - Preparation for tests and assignments is poor - Discipline in class is poor - Compliance with academic literacy practices is poor 	Students know what it takes to succeed in higher education but reject the practices around higher education when they do not see the legitimacy of the practices
Vocational affinity group	<p>Students are unaware of practices relating to their chosen vocations</p> <p>Students do not display the employability factors necessary to succeed in their chosen vocations</p>	<p>Students do not associate the bridging course with their chosen vocations</p> <p>Many students have unrealistic perceptions of their chosen vocations</p>

Table 5.1 Comparisons between Bellevue Academy’s view of student identity and students’ own views

CHAPTER 6: POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ACQUISITION OF ACADEMIC LITERACY

6.1 Effects of the conceptions of literacy

The ways in which literacy and academic literacy are conceptualised at Bellevue Academy are likely to have a negative effect on students' chances of beginning to successfully acquire the standard of academic literacy needed to be successful on a degree programme. The autonomous view of literacy and the overriding focus on skills acquisition is problematic as it over-simplifies the complex learning processes which are involved in learning a new literacy. McKenna and Boughey (2016:5) state that decontextualised approaches to supporting students to become academically literate, such as those seen at Bellevue Academy construct the ability to read and write in socially legitimated ways in the academy as simply a matter of acquiring a set of neutral, a -social, a - cultural, and a -political 'skills'. When this is the case, these approaches often completely fail to acknowledge that reading and writing in the ways sanctioned by the academy have implications for students at the level of identity.

While academic literacy acquisition does rely on the mastery of skills such as using formal language, assessing a source for reliability and following a referencing system's conventions around in-text citations, an overemphasis on skills teaching and learning can be detrimental to students' acquisition of academic literacy if the skills focus is at the expense of other aspects of academic literacy acquisition. Kamler and Thomson (2006) and Thesen (2013) suggest that "how to" texts and courses, can have the effect of deskilling students and ignoring issues of power and authority as they tend to position students as novices encouraging them to mimic existing conventions rather than recognising that they are deeply problematic.

If the acquisition of skills relating to academic literacy are viewed as the only aspect of academic literacy acquisition, then the very complex practices around reading and interpreting academic literature, as well as putting one's own ideas forward using findings and concepts from the literature are ignored and

disconnected, disjointed pieces of writing are likely to result. The students who took part in my study expressed frustration when they believed they had followed instructions and had produced work that they thought would match what their lecturers were looking for. They became discouraged and demotivated when their work was returned with a negative mark and they were unsure as to what they could do to improve their results.

The practice of drawing on various sources of academic literature to argue one's own opinion cannot be reduced to a checklist of technical skills as the process is complex and requires discussion, negotiation, modelling and extensive feedback on students' initial attempts. Students new to the academic reading and writing often struggle to position themselves in their writing, and find that the style of academic writing does not easily allow for the writer's thoughts and opinions to be expressed.

Boughey and McKenna (2016) caution that while technical accuracy and structure are important aspects of student writing, some academic development courses focus on these aspects at the expense of helping students to produce an argument, where students demonstrate their ability to construct a series of claims, each of which is supported by evidence. In order to do this students not only need to know what is valued in the university but also need to "give themselves permission" to try to make those claims. If students are to be adequately supported in the process of learning to make arguments in a particular discipline, the acquisition of academic literacies requires shifts at the level of identity as students refine who they are and who they can be.

Another way in which an autonomous, normative and skills-focussed model of literacy disadvantaged the students at Bellevue Academy was that these models of literacy view literacy a construct which is dissociated from the context in which literacy operates. Had there been a focus on the context in which the students were expected to produce texts, then it would have been observed that the students did not have the resources required to do so successfully. This normative perspective on literacy assumes students, if given instructions on producing academic texts, should be able to do so. However, students were

expected to use the Internet to research, type up, and submit their assignments, but many students had limited access to digital resources, very poor digital literacy, and difficulties in accessing the level of language that was needed to complete these tasks. The assumption that students had a shared understanding with the authors of the texts, as well as with the lecturers' understanding of the texts is problematic as it does not encourage discussions and questioning around meaning, nor allow for critique or alternate readings of texts.

As students continually failed to submit work of the required standard, the blame was placed on the student and viewed as an unwillingness and innate inability to conform. Little effort was made by most lecturers to discuss these barriers with students and although myself and another lecturer frequently raised the issue with the institution no changes were made during the time I worked at Bellevue Academy.

As well as preventing students from producing the kinds of texts which are legitimised by the institution, and therefore necessary for academic success, McKenna & Boughey (2016) caution that the prevailing dominance of the autonomous model is likely to lead to students feeling marginalised, misunderstood, and ultimately becoming disillusioned and with the university environment. For Boughey and McKenna, as well as Le Roux (2016), the understanding of academic literacy practices as neutral, and the concomitant construction of students as decontextualized at South African universities, "sits alongside the anger about the rise in fees and decreased state subsidy, broad political instability, and frustrations about ongoing social inequality" (McKenna & Boughey, 2016:7).

6.2. Deficit Discourse Around Decontextualised Learners

According to McKenna & Boughey (2016:1), the autonomous model of literacy is often combined with a discourse of a "decontextualised learner". The decontextualised learner is seen as being separate from their social context, and there is an assumption that the responsibility for success at higher

education relies largely upon attributes inherent in, or conversely, lacking from the individual student.

This research highlighted a pervading 'decontextualised learner' discourse that surrounded the bridging course students at Bellevue Academy. The blame for poor academic performance was almost exclusively put on the students. Students were viewed as academically weak, demotivated and unwilling to conform to the practices and ways of being that were valued by the institution. Students were judged according to a specific institution-defined set of criteria and a more holistic view of the students was not valued. Students' inability to crack the code of the academic literacies required of them was frequently attributed to language problems which were seen to be an inherent problem and fault within the students themselves. McKenna and Boughey (2016:2) critique this simplification of difficulties faced by students and warn that it has allowed social differences and institutional culture issues to be erased under the label of a supposedly neutral 'language problem' inherent in the student. They critique the presentation of the difficulty of engaging with complex abstract concepts in a language other than one's home language being presented in the 'language problem' argument "as if unrelated to the social groupings of students or staff or the institution within which the language is used".

Despite the prevailing negative views that many members of the institution had towards bridging students, the students themselves did not view their abilities in a negative way. Instead, students believed that although they were not generally performing well academically on the course, they would be able to succeed and to earn a degree qualification. While students were resilient enough not to be affected by the deficit discourse that surrounded them, many had become disillusioned with the bridging course itself. They struggled to be motivated by the subjects which they were required to take and were resentful that they were not getting the support which they felt they needed.

The opinion of the institution was that students should be grateful for the fact that they were accepted onto the bridging course (despite the fact that there

was no prestige involved in acceptance onto the course) as this course was the students' only option. This opinion led to frustration with students' lack of compliance and negated the need to look deeper into the reasons behind students' attitudes and behaviours, instead laying the blame with the students.

Although students did not feel that they were viewed in a negative way, they held negative views of the bridging course and as they did not see the value in it and so their target was to pass the course rather than to excel academically, preferring to put in effort the following year. As the students did not place value on the bridging course year they were unlikely to invest in developing academic literacy proficiencies during the bridging year. The students were uninterested in their curriculum, so it is not surprising that they did not see much value in attempting to adopt the discourses and practices surrounding academic literacy.

6.3. Lack of Developing Academic and Vocational Identities

As previously discussed, institutions such as Bellevue Academy occupy an interesting space in the South African higher education setting as they offer degree qualifications for courses which are historically vocation-based. However, instead of students on the bridging course beginning to develop academic and vocational identities, or experiencing conflict between these two identities, students in my study did not begin to develop either identity.

The organisational structure and curriculum design choices made by Bellevue Academy lead to students on the bridging course, who originally sought to find and adopt a vocational identity, beginning to lose interest in the bridging course and doubt its legitimacy and value. Without the organisational arrangements and curriculum choices which would allow students to see themselves as students on, for example, a Psychology or Tourism course, students became disillusioned and lost motivation for the procedures and practices which to them were not aligned with their future academic and career goals. Bridging course students were insulated from the courses which they planned to study but then were criticised for not adapting the practices of students in a particular vocation.

While Graphic Design students regularly partook in art-related practices typical of a Graphic Design related vocation such as sketching, colour techniques, and the use of online design software, Psychology students did not take part in any practices which might relate to a Psychology/Counselling vocation such as mock counselling sessions or voluntary charity work. Business students did not have the opportunity to engage in business-related practices such as simulated business idea pitches, product design and advertising, budgeting activities or intergroup competitions. Tourism students did not have any Tourism-based courses and did no extra-curricular activities such as trips to popular tourist destinations.

Given that students believed that they were sectioned together as a bridging course group, separate from their respective faculties, they began to incorporate the identity of being a bridging student rather than a bridging student in a specific faculty. Unfortunately, for many students this lead to a lack of academic motivation. Many students expressed that they felt that, as they were not doing subjects that they believed were relevant to their future careers, they found it difficult to find the amount of motivation needed to succeed academically.

Bridging course students were also expected to demonstrate proficiency in the practices exhibited by the academically literate. Attempts to introduce students to academic writing were made through the Student Skills course, which I taught. However, the curriculum was pre-defined and very few changes were able to be made. The Student Skills course was a stand-alone course and did not make attempts to integrate the students' core courses. As a result students often struggled to buy into the legitimacy of the course, and did not make connections between what they were learning on the course and what was required of them in assignments for their other courses. Jacobs (2005, 2013) emphasises the need for tertiary educators to focus on discipline-specific strategies which attempt to integrate academic literacies and disciplines of study as opposed to generic approaches that attempt to teach decontextualised language and academic literacy skills to students.

Although Bellevue Academy had some elements that were similar to a typical public university: departments were called faculties, teaching staff were called lectures, and degree qualifications were offered, there were also many differences between the institution and a public university. Bellevue Academy was much smaller than the public universities, and had fewer courses on offer. Additionally, there was no emphasis on research, the resources in the library were sparse, and academic excellence was not part of the philosophy of the institution. By not providing adequate resources and by not promoting an ethos of questioning, critiquing and challenging, and learning from the academic work of other scholars, the learning environment at Bellevue Academy did not encourage the adoption of “university student” as part of students’ A-identities.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore perceptions of bridging course student identity as well as perceptions of literacy, and to suggest what effects these perceptions may have on students' potential for academic literacy acquisition.

I used an adapted version of Gee's (2001) framework to build two comparable student identity profiles, one from the perception of the institution where the research took place, and one from the view of the students themselves. I used Street's (1984) autonomous and ideological models of literacy as well as Lea and Steet's (1998) three strands of academic literacy and Lillis and Scott's (2007) normative and transformative view on academic literacy to describe how literacy was constructed at Bellevue Academy. I found that students were not well-prepared for degree study by the bridging course, predominantly because students were not given adequate opportunities and support to begin to acquire the levels of academic literacy which would be needed to succeed on a degree programme.

7.2 Main findings

Findings from this study showed that at the institution where the research took place, students were viewed very differently by the institution compared with how students viewed themselves. Although there were some similarities in the two identity profiles, the two perspectives on student identity differed on almost every one of the categories used to describe student identity. Students were seen by the institution as being a homogenous group, when in reality the students were diverse, multi-cultural and multi-lingual. Few provisions were made to cater for the students' diversity, both in terms of their language development needs, as well as their need for physical learning resources such as quiet study areas and internet access. Students experienced frustration and demotivation from their positioning as bridging students rather than psychology,

graphic design or commerce students as they struggled to find relevance in the bridging course subjects. As a result of their disillusion with the course and the inadequate resources provided by the institution, students had not begun to adopt either a “university student” or a “vocational” Affinity - identity. As students did not see themselves as part of the “university student” or “vocational” affinity groups they did not adopt the practices typically associated with membership of these groups. As a result students were predominantly described as academically weak and unmotivated. A strong deficit discourse surrounded the bridging students and they were regarded as lacking in academic abilities and skills. Prior knowledge and experience which students brought with them was not acknowledged or valued, and overall little effort was made to understand reasons for students’ apparent lack of motivation and academic capability. However, regardless of their disillusion with the bridging course, this research showed that students were highly motivated to succeed academically and to earn a degree qualification.

In addition to large discrepancies between how students are viewed by the institution and how students view themselves, the way in which literacy was conceptualised at Bellevue Academy was a barrier to student progression in higher education. The overemphasis on the skills-based competencies of academic literacy was at the expense of a two-way learning process where students’ induction into the discourse of the academy is supported, openly discussed and critiqued, and based on their current primary discourses and prior knowledge and life experience. Furthermore, despite the overemphasis on the skills-based competencies of academic literacy, most students did not actually master these skills, largely due to poorly designed and planned curricula and inadequate provision of the resources needed to acquire and practise the required skills. The absence of the critical Academic Literacies gaze at Bellevue Academy meant that students were sold the promise of access to higher education but were then denied access to the powerful and privileged literacies which would allow this access.

7.3 The potential role of private higher institutions

Although the study only involved a small sample of students at one private higher education institution I aimed to give an insight into a context which has not been widely studied. While this study built on invaluable research around academic development programmes in the public university context, given the potential role that private higher institutions have to play in the South African tertiary education sector, research needs to be done at these institutions. As more students than ever before are looking to enroll at private higher education institutions it is essential that research into the student experience be done and that these institutions then act on the findings of this research to inform their decision-making processes. AMbembe alluded to in his interview with xx, education is more frequently being viewed as a commodity and while it is expected that private universities will be run on a profit-making model, it is important that this is not done at the expense of high quality teaching and learning.

7.4 Reflections on the study

The aim of this research was to investigate the relationship between student identity as well as how literacy was conceptualised, and the potential these may have had on students' acquisition of academic literacy. When I set out to explore identity I wanted a framework that was concrete and would allow me to build student profiles from two comparable perspectives. Given the abstract, fluid, and contextualised nature of identity, I initially struggled to find a way that would allow me to describe and compare student identity. The main limitation of Gee's framework is the very property which made it suitable for this study. The framework allowed for the abstract concept of identity to be studied as something definitive, allowing for measurement and description of the concept. However, while I found Gee's N, I, D and A-identities a very useful way to describe student identities, these categories were at times restricting, and there was a risk of constraining the data by using these pre-defined categories.

A limitation of this study was that without a concrete measure of students' academic literacy acquisition as defined and endorsed by the institution) I was only able to speculate the effects that student identity and conceptions of literacy may have on students' chances of acquiring the levels of academic literacy proficiency needed to succeed in degree studies. I believe the study would have benefitted from statistics on bridging course student performance rates such as retention, success rates and destination data. Unfortunately, as these statistics are unlikely to have positioned the bridging course in a positive light, it is questionable whether they would have been publicly released.

Further research is needed into all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment at private institutions. From an Academic Literacies perspective, research is needed to examine the resources and experiences which students bring with them to university, and to explore how these can be used to help students to succeed in the higher education sector. Research that builds on lessons learnt from the public sector needs to be contextualised for the private sector in order to promote equal learning opportunities for all students.

7.5 Conclusion

Given the tumultuous times South African public universities are in at present, it is vital that students are no longer denied access to the literacies which will help them to be successful in a higher education environment. As private institutions are likely to play a more prominent role in the South African higher education system, it is important that those who with strategic, operational, curriculum, and teaching responsibilities at these institutions learn from research and the experiences of the public universities. If academic leaders and practitioners continue to view literacy only along autonomous and normative lines then students will continue to be viewed as decontextualized and deficit. This is likely to lead to, as was found in this study, and as is the case for many students currently at private universities, disillusionment with the system and exclusion from the very academies in which they seek to belong.

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APPENDICES⁸

Appendix A: Questionnaire for staff regarding bridging course students

Questionnaire on [REDACTED] ⁹ Students

⁸ Where necessary institution-specific terms concealed to protect identity of institution

I am interested in exploring the impressions you have of [REDACTED] students. The aim of this questionnaire is to use feedback from lecturers and student advisors to build a profile of a 'typical' [REDACTED] student.

Please use your experiences with, and knowledge of [REDACTED] students to answer the following questions. The aim of this questionnaire is not to gather a census-like collection of data on the current group of [REDACTED] students, but rather to create a general conception of a 'typical' [REDACTED] student.

A space has been given under each question to add any further information should you wish to elaborate further on the topic covered in the question.

Questions 1-6:

Please order the items in questions 1 to 6 from most common (1) to least common in terms of their relation to the 'typical' (or 'average') [REDACTED] student.

Example:

The most commonly occurring faculty choice in a 'typical' group of [REDACTED] students is:

Faculty	Order
Commerce	3
Psychology	1
Graphic Design	2

The response above would indicate that you think that in a 'typical' group of [REDACTED] students, most belong to the Psychology faculty, fewer to the Graphic Design faculty, and the least number of students belong to the Commerce faculty.

Question 1:

The most commonly occurring age group of a typical group of [REDACTED] students is:

Age group	Order
17-19	
20-22	
Over 22	

Further observation:

Question 2:

The most common home/primary language in a typical group of [REDACTED] students is:

Home/ Primary Language	Order
English	
Afrikaans	
Xhosa	
Other	

Further observation:

Question 3:

The most common language of learning and teaching that a typical [REDACTED] group experienced at high school is:

Language of Learning and Teaching	Order
English	
Afrikaans	
Xhosa	
Other	

Further observation:

Question 4:

The most common nationality in a typical group of [REDACTED] students is:

Nationality	Order
South African	
Foreign (from an African county)	
Foreign (from another continent)	

Further observation:

Question 5:

A typical [redacted] student's course fees are financed by:

Source of finance	Order
A Bank loan	
The student themselves	
The student's parents	
Other members of the student's family	
A scholarship / bursary	
Other	

Further observation:

Question 6:

A typical [redacted] student resides (during term time):

Term Residence	Order
With family	
In a student residence	
In private accommodation (a 'digs')	
Other	

Further observation:

Questions 7-11:

Please tick the option that you feel best describes a typical [redacted] student.

Question 7:

A typical [redacted] student has:

a) Their own room

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
----------	-----------	-------

b) A desktop computer at their place of residence

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
----------	-----------	-------

c) A laptop computer

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
----------	-----------	-------

d) A tablet computer

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
----------	-----------	-------

e) A phone with Internet connectivity

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
----------	-----------	-------

f) Computer Internet access at their place of residence

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
----------	-----------	-------

Further observation:

Question 8:

Before registering at MGI, a typical [REDACTED] student:

a) Applied to at least one other higher institution

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
----------	-----------	-------

b) Was accepted into at least one other higher institution

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
----------	-----------	-------

Further observation:

Question 9:

A typical [REDACTED] student:

a) Will pass the year without failing any subjects

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
----------	-----------	-------

b) Will need to repeat the [REDACTED] year

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
----------	-----------	-------

c) Will need to repeat one or more [REDACTED] modules while registered for their first year of degree study

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
----------	-----------	-------

d) Will return after the [redacted] year to do their degree at [redacted]

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
----------	-----------	-------

e) Will complete their degree at [redacted]

Disagree	Uncertain	Agree
----------	-----------	-------

Question 10:

A typical Pre [redacted] student:

a) Is motivated to succeed academically

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-----------	-------	----------------

b) Has sufficient knowledge of the requirements that are needed to succeed in a degree programme

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-----------	-------	----------------

c) Has sufficient knowledge of the requirements that are needed to succeed in their chosen field of work.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-----------	-------	----------------

Further observation:

Question 11:

A typical [redacted] student:

a) Attends the majority of their lectures

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-----------	-------	----------------

b) Is on time for lectures

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-----------	-------	----------------

c) Is attentive during lectures

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-----------	-------	----------------

d) Prepares for lectures by reading over the work before the lecture

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-----------	-------	----------------

e) Revises the work learnt by reading over lecture notes / slides after the lecture

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-----------	-------	----------------

f) Prepares adequately for tests

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-----------	-------	----------------

g) Prepares adequately for examinations

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	-----------	-------	----------------

Question 12:

The reason(s) for a typical [redacted] doing the [redacted] course is (are):

Appendix B: Questionnaire for bridging course students

Student Background Questionnaire

Name (pseudonym): _____

Age: _____

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of my research. This questionnaire is designed to help me to understand a bit more about your background and your reasons for studying.

Please answer the following questions as openly as possible.

1. What country did you write Matric / your school-leaving examination in?

2. What year did you write Matric / your school-leaving examination?

3. Is ██████ the first higher institution you have been to?

YES	NO
-----	----

If you answered "NO" please give the details of the other institution (s) you have been to. If you answered "YES" please continue to question 4.

Name of Institution	Year (s) you were there	What you studied

4. Are you the first person in your family to study after school?

YES	NO
-----	----

5. What were some of the factors that influenced your decision to study after school?

6. Please tick the ██████████ course you are doing:

7. Why are you registered for the [redacted] program (and not for the 1st year of your degree)?

Psychology	
Graphic Design	
Tourism	
Accounting	

8. Why did you decide to study Psychology / Graphic Design / Tourism / Accounting?

9. Did you apply to any other institutions besides [redacted]?

YES	NO
-----	----

If you answered "YES" please give the details of the other institution (s) you applied to in 9a. If you answered "NO" please give a reason why you did not apply to other institutions in 9b. 9a.

Name of Institution	What you planned to study there	Outcome of application (successful / not successful)

9b. Reason (s) for not applying to any other institutions:

10. What influenced your decision to come to [redacted] (as opposed to another institution)?

11. What is your home / first language (s)?

12. What was the language of learning and teaching at your high school?
16. Where do you live during the term? (e.g. with parents / with family / in a residence)
17. Please tick the items from the list below if you have them at your place of residence during the term:

Your own room	
A desktop computer	
A laptop computer	
A tablet computer	
A phone with internet connectivity	
Computer access	

18. What do you think you will be doing next year? Please explain your answer.
19. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? Please explain your answer.

Appendix C: Guidelines for focus group activities

Focus Group Activity Outline: (Groups of 6)

Part 1: Introduction

Design an avatar together on the projector using:

<http://www.bitstrips.com/create/avatar/>

http://pickaface.net/create_avatar.html

Choose features such as:

- Gender
- Skin tone
- Hair colour and type
- Clothes
- Name

Part 2: The 'Ideal' Student

Personal characteristics / demographics:

The answers to questions such as the following will be written on the whiteboard around the 'ideal' student.

- What year are they in?
- What are they studying?
- Who do they live with?
- What does their bedroom look like?
- What are their friends like?
- What are their hobbies / what do they do on weekends?

Academic Practices:

- What marks does this student normally get?
- What does their average day at college look like?
- How do they go about learning for tests and exams?

The 'ideal' student has just been given an assignment which is due (insert date):

- When do they start the assignment?
- How do they do research for their assignment?
- How many different sources do they have for their assignment?
- How many drafts of the assignment do they have?
- How do they go about writing their assignment?
- What is their Turnitin score for the assignment?
- When do they hand in their assignment?
- What mark do they get for their assignment?

- What comment does their lecturer make on their assignment?

Part 3: How you see yourself

Academic Practices:

- What marks do you normally get?
- What does your average day at college look like?
- How do you go about learning for tests and exams?

You have just been given an assignment which is due (insert date):

- When do you start the assignment?
- How do you do research for their assignment?
- How many different sources do you have for your assignment?
- How many drafts of the assignment do you have?
- How do you go about writing their assignment?
- What is your Turnitin score for the assignment?
- When do you hand in your assignment?
- What mark do you get for your assignment?
- What comment does your lecturer make on your assignment?

Appendix D: Questions for interviews with lecturing staff

Lecturer Interview on [REDACTED] Students
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A. Lecturer's background:

- 1) Which subject(s) do (did) you lecture to [REDACTED] this year (last year)?
- 2) How many years have you lectured [REDACTED] for?
- 3) Do (did) you lecture any other students (1st / 2nd /3rd years?)
- 4) How would you describe your experiences lecturing [REDACTED]?
(Compared to other years or other teaching / lecturing experiences?)
- 5) If you were given the choice, would you choose to lecture [REDACTED]?
Why or why not?

B. General subject information:

- 1) Please describe the amount and types of reading needed in your subject.
- 2) Please describe the amount and types of writing needed in your subject.
- 3) How important do you think the role of citation and referencing are in your subject?
- 4) In your opinion, what constitutes academic plagiarism?
- 5) Do you find that academic plagiarism is a cause for concern in your subject?
Please explain.

C. [REDACTED] and general academic writing:

- 1) Do you think that [REDACTED] have problems / difficulties with academic writing? If yes please describe (briefly) what you think these problems are.
- 2) If yes to previous question, why do you think they have these difficulties?

D. Pre Degrees and specific aspects of academic writing:

1. Do you find that [REDACTED] are generally able to satisfactorily interpret the assignment topic?
2. In terms of academic sources, do you find that [REDACTED] are generally able

to successfully use the following sources in their assignments?

- Websites
- Reference books
- Journals

3. In terms of format, would you say that [REDACTED] essays are:

- Suitably arranged into an introduction, body and conclusion?
- Suitably referenced with in-text citations and a bibliography?
- Correctly formatted in terms of neatness, spacing, font size, headings etc.?
- Largely free from grammatical errors?

4. Would you say that [REDACTED] are generally able to successfully paraphrase the ideas of others in their assignments?

5. Would you say that [REDACTED] are generally able to successfully incorporate their own ideas into their assignments?

6. In terms of developing a coherent argument in an assignment or essay, have you found that [REDACTED] are generally able to do this successfully?

7. Correctly apply subject-specific conventions? (if applicable)

8. Are there any subject-specific aspects that students need to be aware of for your subject? For example specified layouts / structures? If there are, do you find that [REDACTED] students are generally able to adhere to these subject-specific aspects?

E. [REDACTED] and Academic Practices

1. Do you find that [REDACTED] students generally do the following:

- Make sure they understand the topic before they start the assignment?

- Conduct adequate research for an assignment?
- Consult an adequate range of sources for an assignment?
- Edit and rework essay until ideas flow and argument is clear?

2. All assignments that require referencing require a Turnitin report to be submitted with that assignment.

- How accurate do you think this software is in terms of identifying instances of plagiarism?
- Have you found Turnitin to be a useful tool to help students eliminate instances of plagiarism or not? Please explain.

3. What do you think an 'ideal' student would do from the time they receive an assignment for your subject to the time that the assignment is submitted?

Appendix E: Ethical Clearance from research site



RESEARCH COMMITTEE
APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE OF RESEARCH ¹⁰

APPLICANT DETAILS					
Surname:	Pearton	Name:	Nicola	Title:	Miss
Email:	Nicola_pearton@yahoo.com	Cell Phone:	074 154 4540	Work:	
Qualifications:	BEd Hons Education (UCT)	Faculty:	Humanities		
Relevant experience:	Completion of first year (coursework) of MEd in Applied Language and Literacy at UCT Completion of Research Design course on MEd programme at UCT				
University enrolled at:			Student Number:		
University of Cape Town			PRTNIC009		
Degree:		Dissertation/ Mini-Dissertation/ Thesis:			
MEd (Applied Language and Literacy Stream)		Mini –Dissertation (24 000 words)			
PROJECT DETAILS					
Title of project:	Academic writing and student identity: a discourse analysis of a bridging programme's Student Skills course at a private higher education institution.				
Supervisor:	Lucia Thesen		Co-supervisor:		
Purpose of research: (Mark with X)	Non-degree	Diploma	Degree		
			Honours	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Masters	Doctorate
Research Design: (Mark with X)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed methods	Other (Specify):	
Data collection ¹¹ : (Mark with X)	Questionnaire	Structured Interviews	Semi-structured Interviews	Open ended Interviews	

¹⁰ Form adapted from the Application Form of the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria V08.02

¹¹ Please attach all questionnaires and forms as addenda.

	Observation	Intervention/Therapy	Experimental	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify): Focus Groups
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OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH PROJECT

The objectives of the research project are to investigate the issue of student identity in the context of research and referencing, primarily in the Student Skills course, but also in all aspects of the student's experiences with academic discourse.

The aim of the research is to determine the way in which the topic of research and referencing is currently approached and how this approach impacts student writer identity.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PROJECT

(Give a brief outline of the research plan):

The proposed research will take place in two phases:

Phase I will involve a discourse analysis of key texts relating to the issue of research and referencing. These will most likely include the Student Skills textbook and the MGI guide to referencing.

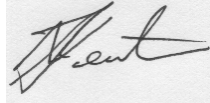
Phase II will involve two focus groups consisting of about 8 pre degree students per group. During these focus groups issues of student, and particularly writer identity, will be discussed in relation to research and referencing.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants are: (Mark with X)	Under 18 (minors)	Over 18 (adults) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Orphaned, separated or unaccompanied minors	Extremely poor or illiterate	
	Mentally compromised	Physically challenged	Limited in language proficiency	Male <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Female <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	Subordinates	Selected	Volunteers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							
Consent: (Mark with X)	Is not needed	Will be verbal	Will be in writing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							
Participants will: (Mark with X)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Benefit by participating/not participating	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Be disadvantaged by participating/not participating									
Provide reasons	Students may possibly see participation in the research as beneficial because participating in the focus group may give them a chance to reflect on their identity as a participant in academic discourse. This reflection may possibly help students to be more reflective in their future writing practices.	It is possible that students who do not participate in the research may feel as if they have missed out. However, in order to avoid this, students will be asked to volunteer to take part in the research.									
Risk to participants (Mark with X)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Risks	Discomfort	Pain	Possible Complications	Side Effects						
GENERAL INFORMATION											
Permission from the relevant authority obtained:	Awaiting response from UCT ethics committee Awaiting response from Claremont campus principal										
Confidentiality of participants will be maintained by:	Using pseudonyms (chosen by participating students)										
Results will be disseminated to the following parties:	Lucia Thesen (supervisor) External examiners (appointed by UCT)										
STATUS OF RESEARCH PROJECT											
Proposal Defended?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO	N/A	Fieldwork Started?	YES	NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pilot study/Fieldwork concluded?	YES	NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

APPLICANT:



Date: 6 June 2013 Signature: _____

Approval Ethics Committee

Research Approved:

Yes

No

Reasons: _____



Date: 15 /07/2013 Signature: _____

Appendix F: Consent forms for staff and student participants

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study that I am conducting at [REDACTED]. The research findings will be submitted as the thesis requirement for my Masters degree at the University of Cape Town.

The research focuses on [redacted] students and relates to the relationship between student identity and academic writing.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below, and feel free to ask questions or voice any concerns you may have, before deciding whether or not to participate.

Voluntary participation

Please be aware that you do not have to participate in this study. If you choose not to participate, there will be no negative consequences. If you choose to participate, but wish to withdraw at any time, you will be free to do so without negative consequence. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to:

Complete a questionnaire	
Take part in a focus group	
Take part in an individual interview	

Please note that all interviews will be recorded: the focus group and the individual interviews will be tape recorded, unless you would prefer note-taking in the individual interview. By consenting to participate in this project, you are granting the researcher permission to record interviews, in either note or tape-recorded forms.

Anonymity and confidentiality

Your real names will not be used in the reporting of findings. Instead, pseudonyms will be used. Please do not hesitate to contact me (nicola_pearton@yahoo.com) if you have any queries.

Nicola Pearton

I, _____ agree to participate in this project. I understand that my real name will not be used in the project.

Signed: _____

Date: _____