



Reimagining Writing Centre Practices

A South African Perspective

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and Laura Drennan

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*For writing centre practitioners everywhere
who fight against the tide in their quest
to support student writing. We see you.*

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Avasha and Laura

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Reimagining writing centre practices: A South African perspective

Foreword

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John Trimbur, in *Multiliteracies, Social Futures, and Writing Centers* (2000: 89), writes that ‘social justice and the democratization of higher education have always been parts of the mission of writing centers’, part of a struggle addressing ‘long-standing questions of subjectivity, cognitive justice and epistemic freedom’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020: 895). This struggle can be defined as ‘a sympathy for mass politics rather than elite politics, widening political participation, and the promotion of socio-economic equality’ (Harrison 2001: 387). It is a struggle of establishing and maintaining writing centres as centres of social justice and democratisation, and decolonisation is a process of becoming and transformation, often described as the *writing centre movement*.

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Stephen North, one of the earliest to describe this movement, writes in 1982,

Maybe we [writing centre practitioners] are a really diverse group of people with all sorts of spoken and unspoken interests, axes to grind, and hidden agendas, drawn together partly by our commitment to literacy, but more driven together by adversity, by a society and a profession neither of which seems to want to listen to us. Probably we sense that banded together despite significant internal differences we’ll have a more powerful voice, and that whatever we can’t agree on can be sorted out after the revolution. (1982: 44–45)

The revolutionary aspect of the movement is continuous, as all political spaces, including those in higher education, are always unjust and unequal (Soja 2009: 2). It is within this revolution that the struggle for justice and democracy continues, carried by writing centres in higher education. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni writes,

universities across the world have become the sites of struggles for decolonisation. Students and the youth are spearheading the decolonisation of the twenty-first century. Racism, patriarchy, sexism, Eurocentrism, and capitalist logics of exploitation are once more put in the public space for critique. The advent of the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) and the Fees Must Fall (FMF) movements in South Africa in 2015 and 2016 symbolises this resurgence and insurgence of decolonisation in a country that is still struggling to emerge from neo-apartheid colonialism. (2021: 895)

It is a struggle that is foundational, a struggle for ‘epistemic freedom as “intellectual sovereignty” ... articulated ... as involving a process of “domestication of knowledge production”’ (2021: 887).

This revolution is evident in this volume, which describes a South African writing centre movement’s deepening struggles to counter the vestiges of the Dutch, British, and apartheid regimes – as well as the ongoing forces of Global North neocolonialism – and their destructive cognitive empires (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021, quoting Thiong’o), cognitive injustices (Santos 2007), and epistemological genocides (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021). In the chapter, ‘Being and Becoming: Decolonising the Fundani Writing Centre Cosmos’, Mtonjeni, Sefalane-Nkohla, George and Duke set a foundational call for a South African writing centre movement to ‘decolonisation and decoloniality in respect of university curriculum, knowledge systems and institutional culture’ (see Chapter Two). In South African writing centres, this ‘has been a motivating force for a serious rethink of writing centre practices.’ (see Chapter Two). The continued ‘Englishification’ in monocultural institutions is no longer acceptable to a multilingual student body whose third or fourth language may be English.

What is apparent here is that a South African writing centre movement works to counter this hegemony of the Global North, a hegemony that Ngugi wa Thiong’o describes as the ‘detonation of a cultural bomb at the centre of victim societies, causing various dissonances and alienations’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021: 886). The consequences of which, writes Ndlovu-Gatsheni,

have been epistemicides (killing of existing endogenous knowledges), linguicides (killing of existing indigenous languages and the imposition of colonial languages)...and alienation (exiling of indigenous people from their languages, histories and cultures, and even from themselves). (2021: 886)

The linguistic and epistemological colonisation of South Africa by the Dutch, British, and the

apartheid governments, including the imposition of the colonial languages of Afrikaans, and British and American English on education institutions at all levels, continues: as Alberts writes in 'Bridging the Multilingual Divide: Enhancing Academic Literacy through Metaphors in South African Writing', '[i]n South Africa, the different languages are not currencies of the same value, and that must be rectified' (see Chapter Three). Alberts reinforces this: in a country with 11 official languages, where '[l]anguage, even more than race, is ... considered the primary identity marker,' (see Chapter Three), the revolutionary struggle of South African writing centres is a daily reality.

A tenant of the writing centre movement, 'regardless of the work actually done in writing centers,' write Gardner and Ramsey (2005: 26), is that 'writing specialists do their best work when opposing the practices of mainstream education, creating an anti-space'. This anti-space, sometimes called liminal space, is transformed again in the South African writing centre movement, as a global village. Taken up in this volume, the South African writing centre movement's *global village* – re-examining and challenging concepts of 'safe space,' challenging internalised Anglocentric academic writing practices, employing *Ubuntu* pedagogies, and Rambiritch and Drennan's re-imaging tutor training as an empowering, mentorly action – provides all writing centre practitioners a view of the global movement as a movement of community. As Rambiritch and Drennan write in the introduction, what is done here in this volume is a reimagining of the writing centre, 'from one that prioritised the institution, to one that prioritises the student, and ... the uniqueness that each student brings to our space' (see Introduction: viii), a pluricultural and plurilingual uniqueness. Throughout are transformative pedagogies, practices, and rhetorical foundations that '[enable] students' critical engagement with regard to academic literacies' (see Chapter Eleven).

North writes, 'I have come with experience to take a harder, less conciliatory position' on the writing centre – 'only writers need it, only writers can use it' (1984: 440). As writing centre practitioners, our work is an oscillating shift from writing to writers, always ending back with writers. When a student leaves the writing centre critically engaged and on a path of cognitive and personal transformation, we can then consider the struggle of the writing centre's revolution in action. These are the great gifts of this volume and its contribution to South Africa's writing centre movement.

Introduction

The internationalisation and associated massification of higher education implies the need for universities to accommodate the diverse learning needs of an increasingly heterogeneous student cohort (Briguglio and Watson 2014; Klapwijk and Van der Walt 2016). In catering for the diverse needs of this heterogeneous student body, the ‘international university’ (de Wit, Hunter, Howard and Egon-Polak 2015) must offer effective support for students’ language and writing development. As writing centre practitioners, we are well aware of these issues for they are at the core of what drives our writing centre agenda. Despite the contentious role of language and literacy development in the current context, writing centres in South Africa have and continue to make great strides in the ongoing support of our students, having established themselves as fundamental to the development and success of our students. This despite our largely marginalised, understaffed and underfunded status. Through this collection, however, we hope, as writing centre practitioners in the South African context, to move beyond the lamentations of our daily struggles and to instead foreground the resilience, flexibility and commitment of present-day writing centre work.

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This work is timely, following on only two previous edited collections. The first, published in 2011, is an edited collection by Arlene Archer and Rose Richards and is entitled *Changing Spaces: Writing Centres and Access to Higher Education*. As the first published book on writing centres in South Africa, it has, for the past ten years, served as an important resource outlining the development and transformation of South African writing centres. The second volume, edited by Sherran Clarence and Laura Dison and published in 2017, is *Writing Centres in Higher Education: Working in and Across the Disciplines* and as indicated in the title, speaks to the predominant thread of discipline-specific writing development. These two volumes touch on the important and current topics of writing centres as safe, transformative and democratic (socially just) spaces; and the affordances of multimodality and multilingualism. The views and research addressed in these volumes are a testament to the pursuit of writing centre practitioners’ endeavours to respond to the on-going transformation and evolution of the higher education context and to address the needs of its ever-changing student body. These works illustrate how an understanding of the history of writing centres in the country and the theories underpinning their practices are essential to developing the work of writing centres going forward. The aim of this proposed volume is to further conversations and research on the notion of the internationalisation of writing centres and the necessity to focus on the key issues of social justice and transformation, discipline-based writing, the implications

of Covid-19 and specialised consultant/tutor training. And to extend and combine philosophical and theoretical debates with practical strategies, advice and examples that can be applied in the everyday work of the writing centre practitioner. This is where the real value of the book should lie.

More than thirty years after the establishment of the first writing centre in the country, the field of writing centre research in the South African context is firmly cemented and while writing centre practitioners will continue to embrace writing centre literature from the Global North – and other places – the time is ripe for us to as writing centre practitioners in the South African context to continue writing our own writing centre narrative, to grapple with context-specific issues and questions and to provide context-specific answers and solutions that speak to the lived realities of our students. The transformation and evolution of the writing centre are, no doubt, inevitable and necessary. The support we provide, the training we offer and the conversations we encourage, within and outside the confines of our writing centres, must align with this transformation and evolution. Our responsibility in writing centre work has shifted too, from a focus on academic success only, to a focus on the development of and respect for, the uniqueness that each student brings to our space.

This book then is a celebration of these practices; for such reimagined, sustainable practices open up the possibility of embracing diversity and embodies the writing centre as a global village (Rambiritch, Forthcoming). It paves the way for discussions that acknowledge alternate and multiple forms of knowledge and knowledge production, a space welcoming a widely diverse and international student body, the proverbial melting pot – a colourful tapestry of tongues, histories and nationalities (Rambiritch, Forthcoming). As we take the first small steps in our journey to transforming our writing centre, we carry with us the burden of the past and the future of our students. For what is a writing centre, if not a place crafted from the mistakes of yesterday and the dreams of tomorrow?

Structure of the book

Part 1: Reimagining writing centre practices

As writing centre practitioners on the international front (Lape 2020; Hermann 2017; Raforth 2015; Witherite 2014; Suhr-Sytsma and Brown 2011) grapple with contentions issues, our writing centre community too must raise their voices as we seek answers to similar burning questions:

- Who does the writing centre serve?
- How must the writing centre evolve to satisfy the fluidity of our current climate and our ever-changing student body?
- What strategies are being investigated to effectively support the vastly diversified cohort of students that make use of our services?
- What does social justice look like in the South African writing centre?
- How do we move our writing centres from safe spaces to brave spaces (Arao and Clemens 2013)?

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The four chapters in this first part of the book are focused specifically on these issues, foregrounding the need to reimagine the space and practices of the present-day writing centre. Reimagining, however, forces us to wrestle with the challenges inherent in work of this nature and to be vocal about the difficult questions that must be asked and answered if we want to provide socially just solutions to our students' writing challenges. The background to higher education in South Africa, is one fraught with the unfair distribution of economic resources, misrecognition of language, culture and identity, racial segregation and political and spacial injustice, having rendered our students spaceless, voiceless and powerless (Rambiritch, Forthcoming). What practices and questions are necessary then to transform our writing centres into welcoming spaces that do not further marginalise and alienate our students? We need to interrogate, too, the not-so-harmless metaphor of the writing centre as safe space (Clarence, this volume) or relatedly as a home (McKinney 2005, McNamee and Miley 2017; Camarillo 2019), for 'many students have highlighted, through these and other protests and complaints, that the university does not necessarily feel "safe" for them or like a "home" where they can flourish and thrive, socially as well as intellectually' (Clarence, this volume). In offering the possible reimagining of the writing centre from a safe space to a brave one Clarence offers practical solutions through consultant/tutor training workshops and materials development

tailored at interrogating issues of ableism, discrimination and Anglocentrism, as well as other issues that may be pertinent in different contexts. Clarence, rightly so, provokes writing centre practitioners, writing centre peer tutors/consultants, directors, coordinators and administrators to rethink their conceptions of safe spaces, to embrace their activist roles by championing and advancing equity and inclusion within universities. In a similar vein, Mtonjeni, Sefalane-Nkohla, George and Duke propose the centralising of the concept of *Ubuntu* to transform dialogic interactions, to ensure meaningful learning in the writing centre cosmos and to decolonise writing centre praxes by affirming student beings, pursuing the pedagogy of contradictions and cultivating criticality among students in their becoming. This research speaks directly to the possible reimagining of the writing centre – from one that prioritised the institution, to one that prioritises the student and as asserted above, the uniqueness that each student brings to our space. Albert's contribution is a particularly thought-provoking one and aligns closely with the aim of this book to focus on context-specific practices that speak to the needs of our students. The present cohort of university students speak a variety of languages, yet study in institutions that are largely monolingual, as prescribed in the language policies of many public higher education institutions. This increased 'Englishification' of South African Universities (SAUs) means that they are not contributing significantly to the country's constitutional commitment to pluralism and the development of a nationally integrated society characterised by equity and parity of esteem between the major constituting language and cultural groups (Webb 2012: 206). Writing centres have a crucial role to play here, in exploiting strategies that can cross literacy, linguistic and cultural practices. Albert's contends that context-specific metaphors can be used during writing centre consultations to bridge the linguistic and cultural divide, but also to support the transfer of academic literacy skills. Janse van Rensburg's contribution, as the final chapter in Part 1, focuses on a slightly different angle, yet relates directly to the need to reimagine writing centre practices. He makes the case for efficacy assessment studies that can provide evidence of writing centre efficacy. The need for such studies that provide sound evidence that validates our practices and existence, is crucial, but sadly lacking. Thompson et al. (2009) wrote that during their rapid growth in the 1970s and 1980s, writing centres came to depend on 'lore,' what Stephen North defines as 'knowledge about what to do' (1987: 25), based on practice and inherited by one generation of practitioners from the previous one. This lore has been codified as 'cherished beliefs' (Capossela, 2001: 106 in Thompson et al, 2009), 'defaults' (Murphy, 2003: 65 in Thompson et al, 2009), or the 'bible' (Shamoon and Burns, 1995: 226 in Thompson et al, 2009). As we embrace the transformation of the present-day writing centre, we cannot still shroud the work we do in the language of lore. Writing centre practitioners, especially in the South African

context, must commit themselves to sound, thorough evidence-based practices that demonstrate our commitment to our students and our practices, but also to our desire to develop fully a body of South African writing centre literature that captures the rigour of our research practices. This case for a protocol for efficacy studies is a first step in this regard and as the aim of this book suggests, is one that can be applied in practice across writing centres.

Part 2: Discipline-based writing

The chapters in this section foreground the accommodation of the diverse learning needs of an ever-changing and growing student body as a result of, in particular, the internationalisation of higher education and what this means for writing centre practice. Thus, as we contemplate the myriad challenges inherent in the work of the present-day writing centre and the evolution of our practices and strategies to meet the needs of a diverse student cohort, a key consideration is the relevance of the support we provide. And it is this notion of relevance that underpins the argument for discipline-specific writing instruction (Clarence 2012; Butler 2013; Drennan 2019; Drennan and Keyser 2022; Goodier and Parkinson 2005; Parkinson 2000; Van de Poel and Van Dyk 2015; Van Schalkwyk et al. 2009). Instruction that includes activities and tasks specific to students' disciplines promotes engagement and facilitates skills transfer more effectively than generic alternatives (Butler 2013; Flowerdew 2013; Goodier and Parkinson 2005). Writing is still a prominent form of assessment, particularly at postgraduate level, which requires the effective negotiation of academic and discipline-specific discourses. However, Lamberti and Archer elucidate the common expectation of students to acquire rhetorical knowledge and discursive resources within disciplines without explicit instruction, and that such instruction can be decontextualised and done outside the bounds of disciplinary learning. In the first chapter of this section, Lamberti and Archer discuss the importance of writing centre support that makes explicit the discursive and rhetorical moves involved in disciplinary writing. They contend that without such support, institutional discourse and pedagogical practices can be detrimental to students, hindering their performance and limiting their identities as legitimate members of the discipline. The chapter offers insight into the 'moves' involved in students' production of legitimate disciplinary arguments, which has implications for disciplinary teaching and writing centre practice. This is of particular importance at postgraduate level, which demands mastery of disciplinary writing conventions and the production of sound academic arguments in the form of dissertations, theses and research reports.

As indicated by Vivian the production of new knowledge relies, to a great extent, on postgraduate research students, which justifies the National Development Plan's National Development Plan's (NDP) 2030 objectives to increase the postgraduate offerings and output of education institutions and to professionalise the public sector in South Africa. In light of these objectives, the chapter by Vivian discusses the importance of providing writing support to postgraduate students that is timeous and responsive to this student cohort's needs; she reflects on curricular and non-curricular components of postgraduate academic literacy interventions that are geared toward meeting the NDP goals of increased postgraduate success, the internationalisation of higher education and the professionalisation of the public sector. In line with the need to improve the literacy and writing abilities of graduates entering the public sector, Moore articulates the significant problem concerning the writing and research skills of Law graduates. Her chapter elaborates on the law students' struggles with legal writing and the implication this has for the legal profession. By drawing on the framing concepts of risk and resilience, Moore reflects on the situated work and role of a discipline-based writing centre during the time of flux brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, to exercise agency and facilitate students' social connection and academic success.

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Part 3: Lessons from Covid-19

The onset of Covid-19 imposed on our daily practices and required a hasty re-evaluation of our service provision in higher education. Writing centres became further marginalised as data and connectivity issues alienated us from our students. And even when they sought us out asynchronously, consultants found themselves consulting with a 'cold text' and not the 'whole student' (Rambiritch, Forthcoming). The severity of the impact of Covid-19 will remain with us for a long while – it was an experience that, in its unfolding before us, revealed the immense injustices and inequalities that plague our students. The upheaval that Covid-19 brought followed closely on the heels of a number of 'social turns' that had had equally devastating impacts. A 'social turn' as rendered in the Canadian Writing Centre Associations' (CWCA 2022) call for papers is a time marked by a change of perspective – a change that is communal and irreversible. 2015 and 2016 saw two such 'social turns', as the South African higher education community experienced national protests when students raised their voices against unfair language policies and practices, hikes in student fees, student debt and lack of sufficient funding in higher education. Higher education institutions (and writing centres) could not crumble under the pressure such protests brought, for

it is in such times that our students need us the most. In the hasty re-evaluation and reimagining of our practices through these social turns, writing centres had to remain stable, focused and resilient. And it is this resilience that is a common theme that echoes many contributions in this book and centrally so, in Dison and Kadenge's contribution. Written in response to exactly these upheavals, Dison and Kadenge advance that the 'notion of resilience has underscored the success stories of many writing centres across the world, particularly in South Africa where writing centres are seldom prioritised' – our focus here is not on the 'seldom prioritised' but, significantly, on the notion of resilience that has underscored our success. They argue in their chapter, through the illustrations of four turning points within the WSoE Writing Centre (WSoE WC), that their approaches and practices are and have always been, embedded within a framework of resilience; a framework that saw them engage in continuous reflection, challenging their own practices and changing them for better and effective ones. They contend, too, that their practices and pedagogical approaches are not static and have evolved over the years; that while there have been numerous shifts in the contexts of practice and resultant influence on their work, they have 'discerned some enduring resilient practices that have given our centre a 'signature pedagogy'' that demonstrates their commitment to socially just writing centre practices. Dison and Kadenge contribute to this collection in two other significant ways. The first is that they demonstrate that any such re-evaluation and reimagining of our practices have implications for tutor-training, for our tutors are the 'lifeblood' of our centres and two, that despite drawing on strategies and models for working in new and dialogic ways with students, they have formulated their own model of change specific to their teaching and learning context, furthering our commitment to context-specific practices and solutions: 'We have resisted becoming socialised exclusively into 'westernised' ways of conceptualising and implementing writing centre practices and have turned to resources and affordances of our internal workings.' This approach has given rise to a changed model of writing support at the WSoE. In keeping with such context-specific practices in the face of recovery from Covid-19, Nichols et al foreground collective thinking and dialogic interaction across generations in their quest to reconnect and promote a health writing culture and self-sustaining writing habits. Relying on the voices of a writing practitioner, writing lecturer, writing fellow and writing consultant, the authors interrogate how letter-writing responses to drafts and the creation of writing groups have been exploited to achieve their aim of 'spinning the University Writing Program ecosystem' into sustainable being.

Part 4: Transforming our Training and Development

The last part of this book ends appropriately with a spotlight on the training and development of our writing consultants/tutors. In the call for papers for this particular contribution one of the questions posed to possible contributors was: How do we align consultant training with our vision for writing centres? Contributors have responded actively to this question and in offering their narratives, reflections, experiences and expertise have also offered practical strategies, advice and examples of how we can train our consultants to help us achieve the vision we have for effective student support (see Moore; Clarence; Dison and Lamberti and Archer). The three contributions in Part 3 are, however, focused more explicitly on the training and development of writing centre consultants. Muna, Hoosen, Mthembu and Samuels, like writing centre practitioners globally, have been challenged to '[find] flexible ways to equip and train consultants to maintain sight of and address, both the immediate and long-term needs of a diverse student population in a manner that affirms and empowers students to take conscious ownership of their writing as a representation of themselves and to use their own knowledges and literacies to engage with and reshape academic "norms."' (See Chapter 10) In response to this challenge these researcher practitioners embarked on a process to establish a conceptual, reflective, values-based approach to consultant training and development and conclude that including critically reflective discussions as part of training offers a multitude of affordances. Such critical reflection and dialogic interaction can transform the writing centre into the brave space Clarence (this volume) references, a brave space not just for students but for consultants too, to 'unpack weighty ideas' and to acknowledge and appreciate multiple perspectives. This transformative approach to tutor training feeds directly into Dison et al.'s contribution which underpins the need for writing centre coordinators and directors to invest further time, effort and research into the development of our writing consultants as emerging academics. Using a collaborative autoethnographic approach, this research demonstrates that tutors' awareness about teaching and learning practices was raised through deliberate training processes, tutors developed confidence in their identity as legitimate and authentic academic professionals through working closely with experienced academics, and tutors' experiences of working at the writing centre enhanced their awareness of and reflexivity on, academic literacies as well as their capacity to support its development. The researchers argue that such consciousness can extend into their pedagogical practices as academics. In the very last chapter in this volume, Rambiritch and Drennan heed the call for evidence-based writing centre practices by analysing video-recorded writing centre consultations to investigate the talk that takes place between tutors

and students during consultations. Invoking Campbell's hero's journey metaphor, this research focuses specifically on the role of the mentor (Vogler 2007) and attempts to draw parallels between metaphorical mentors and the real-life writing centre tutors who students encounter on their educational journeys. Such a study, with implications for tutor training, may make a valuable contribution to supporting the diverse cohorts of students at South African public universities.

Final Word

As a last and final point we cannot help but draw our readers' attention to a recurring metaphor used in contributions. This interests us because writing centre practitioners have long theorised and metaphored the space of the writing centre. We have seen its evolution from labs and clinics to consulting rooms and fix-it shops, garrets, storehouses and parlours, to contact zones, Parisian cafés, homes and liminal and transformative spaces (Rambiritch, Forthcoming) and more recently as a global village (Rambiritch, Forthcoming). Contributors here offer a new and equally provocative metaphor – the writing centre as a possible ecological community. Vivian likens it to a greenhouse, Nichols to an ecosystem and Rambiritch and Drennan to consultants as planters. It is a metaphor that conjures up images of life, growth and interaction, but that of threats and danger too. It might not be a metaphor we choose to adopt, but what it illuminates is the potential our writing centres have to grow and develop and to transform and reimagine, in sunlight, but in darkness too.

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Part 1: Reimagining writing centre practices

Chapter One

Reimagining the Role of Writing Centres: From 'Safe Spaces' to 'Brave Spaces' in Pursuit of Equity and Inclusion

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1

Introduction

Peer tutors¹ are core to the daily workings of a university writing centre. In many writing centres across the UK, South Africa and the United States, these peer tutors are senior students, either at senior undergraduate or postgraduate level in their studies. The level at which peer tutors are working as writers themselves, and as mentors or guides for other students, has implications for how these tutors are trained, supported and extended in their roles. Directors of writing centres responsible for the training and development therefore need to think carefully and critically about the work their centre does, its mission and vision in relation to the goals of the centre itself and to the university community at large (Carter 2009) and the needs of the students (and staff/faculty) the centre serves.

Across higher education sectors in the last two decades there have been louder and louder

¹ In some writing centres these are consultants, but the term peer tutor is more widely used and recognised in the literature, especially as regards tutor training and development guides (see Standridge 2017).

calls for greater attention to be paid to questions of equity, diversity, inclusion and representation within universities. Student populations are increasingly diverse – socioeconomically, linguistically, in terms of race, gender, home language, nationality, (dis)ability and sexuality (CHE 2013; Quaye, Harper and Pendakur 2019). In some respects, universities have grasped and responded to aspects of this greater diversity but the notable increase in student protests over the last several years, for example #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall in South Africa (Langa 2017) and protests related to the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements, as well as anti-Islamophobia protests on campuses in the US, (Binkley 2018; Mendoza 2016) indicates that much more needs to be done. These protests are not just highlighting social issues that affect students (and faculty/staff); they are highlighting changes that need to be made to curriculum, to pedagogy and assessment (Langa 2017) and to the ways in which university structures consciously and unconsciously exclude students who do not ‘fit the mold’ or represent the ‘somatic norm’ (Puwar 2004: 3).

2 Many students have highlighted, through these and other protests and complaints, that the university does not necessarily feel ‘safe’ for them or like a ‘home’ where they can flourish and thrive, socially as well as intellectually. Rather, for many students, the university can feel like a proverbial minefield, where they are constantly trying to find spaces where they can feel safe within a large environment that may feel alienating, strange and unwelcoming (Boughey and McKenna 2021; Case 2007). Imagine, if you will, being a student from a working-class home who attended under-resourced primary and secondary schools, who speaks, reads and writes English as an additional language. You are the first person in your family to go to university. You are sitting in your first university lecture and the lecturer is giving an overview of the course or module, explaining what is coming up and what the ‘rules of engagement’ are. In class discussion, you are given a long list of required reading that needs to be done before lectures and tutorials so that you can answer questions and participate, several written assignments (which **must not be** plagiarised!) and a set of learning outcomes that you need to now decode and meet over the semester. You feel lost, at sea, unable to see a clear path forward. Very little of what is happening is familiar to you from your home or school background. You want to ask what you should do but you are afraid you will ‘out’ yourself as not being ‘university material’. Everyone else seems calm, ready to take this all on. Add to this, perhaps, a curriculum based on the works and thoughts of ‘dead white men’ (Pett 2015) and assignments that demand ‘proper academic writing and referencing’ and you may really start to feel alienated, panicked and unsafe.

Many students who share some or all of these and other, characteristics that make university exceptionally tough going come every year to university writing centres for help with their written

assignments and for reassurance, care and comfort. Additional support structures within universities include academic advising units, First Year Experience programmes and extended foundation or support programmes, all of which provide much needed academic and pastoral help for students. Students need help meeting their lecturers' academic expectations, but they also need to feel that they are not alone, that there is at least one academic space on campus that can feel safe for them. But what makes a space like a writing centre safe? What does it mean to be a 'safe space' within a university for such a diverse cohort of students? Who decides what that safety looks like and feels like? How is that space constructed and maintained and for whom? Can we make everyone feel safe when we all have such different reasons for feeling unsafe on campus and in the wider world?

This chapter picks up these questions and the concept of 'safe space' as it relates to the training, development and support of peer tutors who are tasked with being a front line of support and care for students who come to the writing centre feeling lost, at sea, unsafe and in need of help and care. I would like to explore, in this chapter, what we may mean in writing centres when we call them 'safe spaces', because I worry that we do not necessarily think hard enough about what we mean by 'safe', who we are making the centre 'safe' for or 'safe' from and whether the forms of 'safe space' we create actually do engender greater equity, inclusion and a sense of representation for diverse student cohorts. Yet, in striving (rather) to be 'brave' spaces are we creating a false binary – brave or safe – rather than seeing our work with students in a continuum – betwixt and between and both brave and safe – as needed? This is a conceptual exploration, but I am drawing on my experience of being the coordinator of a university writing centre in South Africa where I was responsible for training and supporting several cohorts of peer tutors, as well as my experience of working in higher education as an academic writing specialist and mentor for over 15 years now. I hope to provoke discussion within writing centre teams about their conceptions and creation of 'safe' and 'brave' spaces for students and specifically offer generative ideas for peer tutor development and for collaborative working with academic lecturers that could address some of the issues this chapter will raise, making writing centres ambidextrous spaces that can be both brave and safe and, in the enactment of this, champion and advance equity and inclusion within universities.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of peer tutoring and collaboration within and from writing centres, before moving on to discuss the concept of a 'safe space' drawing on a range of literature. This will then be applied to thinking about two ways in which writing within universities can be experienced as unsafe or alienating to students, before considering the concept of brave spaces as a counter to narrower notions of safe spaces and how we might begin to create these more consciously within our own contexts.

Peer tutoring in the writing centre

Writing centres first emerged in the United States in the 1970s, typically getting their start within English departments of faculties and linked to courses in rhetoric and composition (Boquet 1999). Now no longer just for students studying English Literature or Composition Studies, there are different kinds of writing centres across universities and colleges in the US, and the basic model of a writing centre has been exported and adapted across higher education sectors in the United Kingdom, South Africa, Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, Canada and China (Sefalane-Nkohla 2019). Many of these writing centres have a director or coordinator(s) who manage the centre, from creating its mission and vision, managing its budget, directing outreach within the university community and, crucially, selecting, hiring, training and supporting a cohort of peer tutors. In some writing centres, for example the Coventry University Centre for Academic Writing in the UK, these peer tutors are employed on academic contracts at the level of senior lecturer and professional tutor (CAW, nd). A more common model, though, is to employ senior undergraduate or postgraduate students on short-term contracts to work as peer tutors while they are studying (Govender and Alcock 2020; Archer 2010).

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These tutors typically receive initial orientation training, where the writing centre as a concept and a practice is explored; what is 'academic' about writing and how that is expressed in different genres and kinds of assignment students might bring to us, how we work with student writers through conversation rather than instruction, useful practices for making students feel welcome, power and authority in writing peer tutoring – these are relatively typical topics for orientation (Standridge 2017; Clarence 2016; Murphy and Sherwood 2011). In many writing centres, certainly in South Africa, peer tutors or writing consultants continue to meet as a group throughout the academic year for the purpose of continuing development and learning (Rambiritch 2018; Clarence 2016; Daniels and Richards 2011). Regular training and development meetings provide excellent opportunities to turn the selection of topics for discussion over to the tutors, to engage them more directly in their own learning (Clarence 2016) and to discuss problems that arise as the semester progresses, questions tutors have and feedback from students and lecturers.

Regular development and training opportunities can also create a space where tutors and writing centre coordinators or directors can tackle pressing yet tricky topics that are often too big for an initial orientation, or that need longer periods of time to be thought about carefully and collectively unpicked. I am thinking, in relation to my earlier comments about student protests and the slow pace of transformation on many campuses, of topics related to racism, sexism, homophobia,

ableism and other forms of discrimination – often expressed subtly rather than in an out-and-out manner (Crandall and Garcia 2016). These forms of discrimination may inadvertently affect or direct conversations with students, reflect beliefs tutors may unconsciously hold about (some) students, reflect beliefs many lecturers hold about their students and what counts as ‘successful’ or ‘good’ academic writing and therefore mean that writing centres – and academic writing as a practice – may be ‘unsafe’ for students who feel and are discriminated against. The next sections delve into three ways in which discrimination finds its way into academic writing and writing centre practices.

Microaggressions

Most forms of racism, sexism and ‘classism’ are no longer overt – in South Africa, the US and the UK, for example, it is fairly widely accepted that calling people openly racist and sexist names or mocking people’s accents and so on is unacceptable. However, because racism, sexism, misogyny and ‘classism’ are embedded in the construction and maintenance of the structures within our societies, including our educational institutions, they still exist and are still enacted, albeit in less visible or overt ways. This enactment tends to occur more commonly through different forms of microaggression. Microaggressions can be verbally expressed, expressed through behaviour or expressed through the creation of environments that are hostile to certain groups of students (or faculty/staff) (Sue et al. 2007). According to Crandall and Garcia (2016: np), ‘Many people of color, women, LGBTQ and other “minoritized” groups – social groups that may not be the minority in number but continue to be systemically oppressed and excluded – on college and university campuses experience microaggressions on a regular basis’.

There are three forms microaggressions can take: microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations (Sue et al. 2007). A microassault is an explicit verbal or nonverbal insult or attack, for example, a lecturer using racist examples or making openly sexist comments in a classroom full of Black and women students. A microinsult is a subtle comment about some aspect of a person’s minoritised identity that is demeaning or rude and assumes their ‘lesser’ status to the insulter, for example, commenting on how good an Asian student’s English is. A microinvalidation is an experience that excludes or invalidates a person’s minoritised reality, for example, hosting a workshop on diversity and inclusion that pays attention to white and Black people’s experiences while excluding the voices and experiences of Asian, Coloured or Latinx people in the room (see Crandall and Garcia 2016).

It is important to note that many people who enact microaggressions are not actively trying to exclude or harm minoritised people; they have good intentions and may not even see themselves as racist, sexist or in other ways biased or discriminatory. This means, for many students and faculty/staff who are harmed by microaggressions, identifying and naming these so that those enacting them can see their behaviour and make changes is difficult and they often wonder if they are being overly sensitive or misreading the situation (Lewis, et al. 2019). Further, people who do have good intentions and see themselves as caring and good may struggle to hear that their behaviour, words or the environment they are comfortable in has harmed or made others uncomfortable. Microaggressions are an expression of systemic inequities and exclusions, rather than down to certain individuals holding racist or sexist beliefs and their resulting pervasiveness makes them hard to eliminate (Crandall and Garcia 2016).

Microinsults and microinvalidations may creep into writing consultations or tutorials. With the best of intentions, an English speaking, white writing tutor may compliment an Asian or Black non-mother tongue student's command of English or accent, not realising that this is underpinned by assumptions that are racist. Examples that are used to explain concepts or aspects of writing may invoke sexist, racist or ableist orientations to the world that may make those hearing them feel invalidated, provoked, or excluded. Looking beyond writing centres to writing as an academic practice, there are further ways in which dominant cultural and social positions and forms of symbolic 'capital', such as being English speaking, or having attended a strong secondary school and having educated parents, are reflected in the 'ways of knowing, doing and being' (Clarence 2021: 4) at university that are validated and legitimated through the ways in which writing tasks are set, created and assessed.

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Ableist academic writing conventions

A second area of discrimination I would like to focus on that is not widely appreciated or spoken about in relation to academic writing is ableism. This pertains to the ways in which we ask students to produce or create written assignments and the ways in which we present students with assignment briefs and written documents they need to use to create their own written work. Ableism can be understood as actions, policies and environments that benefit or favour able-bodied people. Here, I am referring not to physical disabilities but to people who are neurodivergent, meaning

people who live with autism, dyslexia and/or ADHD². A significant example of ableism is the way in which formats are prescribed for creating academic texts: 12pt, Times New Roman, 1.5 or double line spacing – this is a fairly standard requirement for typing academic assignments in many universities and countries. If not Times New Roman, which is serif font, then other similar serif fonts are prescribed (for example, Cambria). The rationale is that serif fonts are easier to read, especially over longer pieces of text, such as an essay, thesis or book (Wood 2011). However, many neurodivergent people struggle to read serif fonts. Sans serif fonts, such as Calibri, Verdana and even Comic Sans are much easier for them to read (and to write in) (British Dyslexia Association nd; The Advonet Group 2021). Yet, none of the instructions to students I saw when I worked in a writing centre seemed to acknowledge this as an option. As a lecturer and tutor, I was responsible for enforcing these conventions, correcting students when they did not type in the ‘right’ font.

A further example of ableism is also related to formatting: the insistence on full justified text (lining text up with both margins). This is a common format for printed text prescribed to students as required and recommended reading, yet for people living with dyslexia, autism and ADHD, reading left justified text is generally easier (British Dyslexia Association nd; The Advonet Group 2021). Further, reading and writing on coloured rather than white paper is also easier for many neurodivergent people, which are invisible and unknown to lecturers, writing peer tutors and peers unless they are disclosed. Many people who do live with autism, ADHD and dyslexia may not even have been assessed and given a formal diagnosis, making it harder for them to understand why they may be struggling with reading and writing and thus making it harder for them to advocate for themselves in an academically demanding environment like university. If those who assist and guide students’ learning are more aware of the ways in which we may be making learning harder for some or many students, we can begin to create more inclusive, more enabling environments that then benefit all students and not only those who need the accommodations to succeed.

7

Anglocentrism in academic writing

A third form of discrimination is related to the Anglocentrism in many universities, even those not located in the Global North or Anglophone world. This specifically relates, for the purposes of this

² Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder. For a useful summary of what this is and how it affects those living with it, please see: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/living-with/>

chapter, to the forms in which we expect students to evaluate, create and assess knowledge, from the genres we ask them to write in (the dominance of the academic essay) to the ways in which we express 'voice' and 'authority' in academic texts. For example, do we allow students to write in the first person or insist on the rather odd and alienating third person; do we allow students to use colloquialisms and contractions, which sound more like speech, or do we mark these as 'wrong' in our feedback and assessment? Do we recognise forms of creating and evaluating knowledge that lie outside of the dominant forms we have learned as students ourselves and therefore prize as markers of success, of being a legitimate knower, of a high academic standard being adhered to? Many of the ways in which we write in English in academia, for example, are inherited from the Enlightenment, particularly the demand for clarity and the use of non-emotive, rational, non-colloquial terms and language (Turner 2003). As Turner puts it, 'It seems that logical exposition, concision in choice of lexis and economy of style continue to be the norms within which academic writing pedagogy and expectations of a smooth read, operate' (2003: 190).

This is a difficult topic for writing centres to grapple with on their own because their peer tutors have no control over what kinds of assignments students are asked to complete, or the formatting and writing conventions they are told to adhere to. Their task is to help students decode, understand and successfully complete whatever task is at hand. However, writing centres increasingly play roles within the wider university community, collaborating with lecturers and curriculum designers on feedback-giving on student writing, writing different kinds of assignment briefs, guiding student writing and embedding writing-intensive teaching into the curriculum and more (Is Ckool et al. 2019; Esambe and Mkonto 2017; Daniels, Richards and Lackay 2017). This means, if we take it, that there are opportunities to discuss with lecturers what assumptions and expectations underpin their assessment plan and assignment briefs, why the conventions they are insisting on are necessary and where there may actually be some flexibility or options for change, how they give feedback to students and what they choose to focus on (which is almost always possible to change).

Anglocentrism in academic writing practices is not easy to see if you see aspects of writing such as genre (that is, 'this assignment has to be as essay/a report/a case brief, etc.') as ideologically neutral or value-free and just 'the way things are done'. It is not easy to see if you have learned to write in the dominant genres, have mastered their forms and idiosyncrasies and now no longer see them as strange, or further, as Anglocentric and therefore not 'the way things are done' for many students who bring with them other knowledge-making and writing traditions and forms. This makes taking or creating opportunities to surface Anglocentrism in academic writing important and necessary. Writing centre practitioners could use existing collaborations to, as a starter, encourage

lecturers to make visible the values and assumptions that inform their assessment practices and explain what these are and why students need to adhere to them too, so that students who do not understand that underlying reasons for the conventions can begin to see and follow them. This could then be built on with braver lecturers, to revise existing assessment plans and briefs to create different forms of creating and evaluating knowledge that challenge Anglocentrism and bring different forms of knowledge-making, writing and creating into the classroom that honour and recognise the diversity of the student cohort.

These considerations lead me back to my earlier questions about safety and what universities may mean when they talk about 'safe spaces' on their campuses: what makes a space 'safe', 'safe' for whom and 'safe' from what/whom? When writing centres strive to create safe spaces, what do they mean? More importantly, if they are willing to be introspective and critical, what can they mean that may be more inclusive, more enabling, more critical and therefore 'brave' more than 'safe'?

Meanings of safety in educational spaces

The notion of 'safe spaces' has been applied to many different parts of educational structures such as schools and universities, from safe classrooms (Flensner and von der Lippe 2018) to safe writing centres (see special issue of *The Peer Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Fall 2017). The concept of a 'safe space' first emerged in the 1980s in LGBTQ+ activism, deemed necessary to enable people who did not feel safe in society more widely to have spaces where they genuinely could speak up without fear and be themselves without judgement or prejudice (Flensner and von der Lippe 2018). This concept, quite logically, was taken up and moved into a range of spaces where similar concerns may be raised and experienced, in other words, where there is difference and diversity as well as a power structure that makes some feel more comfortable and accepted than others and tends to silence or marginalise those who are marked as 'different'. These spaces included school classrooms (Flensner and von der Lippe 2018; Iversen 2019), theatre and performance groups (Hunter 2008) and university writing centres (Archer 2010; Shabanza 2017). The point of the 'safe space', allowing for contextual variance, is to create a space that is welcoming to those who do not always feel welcome in wider society and to actively encourage and amplify their voices, experiences and concerns.

Over time, then, different dimensions of 'safety' have emerged from the enactment of safe spaces across these different contexts. Safety is linked to dignity, to intellectual expression and to political

expression. In terms of dignity, safe spaces enable participants to 'be themselves' and to have their personal sense of dignity respected and to a significant extent, protected from attack (Callan 2016 in Flensner and von der Lippe 2018). For example, I have a right to feel safe from personal attacks such as having peers shout me down or say unkind things to me in a formal space like a classroom or community group. Intellectual safe spaces are more likely to be found in schools and universities, where participants feel able and encouraged to express their views without, again, being talked over, shouted down or dismissed (Callan 2016 in Flensner and von der Lippe 2018). Linked to this is the notion of political safe spaces, which are perhaps the most challenging in our increasingly diverse social contexts. Here, safety attaches to (perhaps contentious) social and political views – think of radical extremism as a stark example – and the demand, in democracies especially, to give everyone a 'safe' space to hold and express their views without being silenced, shamed or marginalised.

There are, thus, different notions of safety, especially within educational spaces, which is the focus of this chapter. It may be obvious to readers, though, that there are also limitations or problems with some of the ways in which the concept of a 'safe space' is deployed. Education – higher education in particular – is not actually supposed to be or designed to be 'safe', as in safe from being intellectually or even personally challenged around views you may hold or things you feel you 'know'. If we all knew everything, we would not need schools or universities. Higher education is supposed to be profoundly transformative (Ashwin 2021; Case 2013), personally, professionally, intellectually. We are not supposed to enter education with a set of views and knowledge and leave completely unchanged. This process of transformation – the transformative potential and role of education – implies risk, then, and unsafety at times.

While no one should feel unsafe in themselves in terms of having their dignity or right to be part of a conversation or space undermined, critics of safe spaces argue that education needs to create carefully unsafe intellectual and political spaces to enable learning and growth. Views that create unsafe spaces for many, such as radically sexist and racist right-wing views, need to be challenged rather than left alone, which an extreme version of a safe space may imply. There is, thus, a challenge to 'safe' spaces which invites us to think more carefully about, for example, who decides what 'safe' means in these spaces, who is made 'safe' and who is not and how we would know that, and how we can invite students and participants to co-create spaces they can co-exist in, rather than creating these spaces for them from outside of their realities and experiences of the world.

'Safe' is a word mentioned in a great deal of writing centre literature in a range of national contexts, including South Africa, the US and the UK. When the notion of safety and safe spaces

is invoked in writing centre scholarship, it tends to be in relation to dignity safety (Callan 2016 in Flensner and von der Lippe 2018), meaning making students feel 'at home' and welcome (Archer 2010); and to a limited notion of intellectual safety, meaning giving students a space to be 'unafraid of making mistakes' (Nichols 2011: 22) and to 'explore, understand and practice disciplinary genres and conventions' (Shabanza 2017: 165). However, as I have suggested elsewhere (Clarence 2019), many writing consultants/peer tutors may struggle to create truly playful and imaginative consultations where students can try out their agency as writers and their voice in written texts without reaching a firm resolution in the form of a piece of writing that meets disciplinary and academic standards and will therefore receive a passing mark. The structure of university assessment tends to create limitations on more critical or adventurous notions of 'safe spaces' linked to developing and expanding student agency, I would argue; do students already struggling to make sense of the university and its demands feel 'safe' when they come to a writing centre consultation/tutorial to find they are asked more questions they may not have answers to, offered more options than they know to choose from? For example, asking a first-year student how they want to write their text, what they would like it to sound like, whether they think what they have done meets the requirements? Is that not why they are with us in the first place, to find out how to write their text and what to make it sound like so that they can meet the requirements, which they need help decoding in the first place?

I am not suggesting that instead of continuing to focus on student agency and enabling students to own their writing and participate fully in conversations, we start writing or talking over students' work and ideas or telling them what to write, how to sound 'academic' or how to do what is needed to pass. Not at all. I am, though, asking all of us who work with student writers to think again about what we mean by 'safe' when we talk about the writing centre, given that many of the conventions we implicitly conform to as writers ourselves may feel alienating to many of the students we are trying to help, trying to create a safe space for, trying to include. In reflecting on my own relationship with writing and how I have spoken to and assisted student writers and peers over the last 15 years, I can see that I have often invoked Anglocentric and ableist norms and conventions, without thinking much at all about where they come from, whether they do make sense to student writers and whether they can be taken on by these writers in ways that feel as authentic to them as they do to me (an English-speaking, white, culturally Anglophone person). For those of us who already understand and know how to use academic writing conventions to create successful texts, seeing these conventions as strange, alienating, exclusionary to other ways of knowing, writing and creating is difficult (Bharuthram and McKenna 2006).

Being brave, then, in surfacing, challenging and changing these conventions is difficult, too. It may be beyond the writing centre to exert significant pressure on lecturers across the curriculum, and it may feel irresponsible or beyond our remit to start encouraging students to break the rules when we know they will be punished with low marks for doing so. The system needs radical change, really, and writing centres are but one part of a complex university organism, which is again part of a larger and more multi-layered higher education sector, which is in turn, part of society. It feels like an overwhelming task when we think in these terms. And we may feel that we are already safe enough: welcoming, kind, intentionally inclusive of all students. But I would argue that there is always more to learn, to reflect on, to change through learning and growth. Writing centres have been using the notion of 'brave' spaces, particularly in the US, to do this kind of learning and growth (see Standridge 2017; Oweidat and McDermott 2017) and I would like to challenge the global writing centre community, especially in spaces where significant social change is being demanded and is needed, to be willing to be provoked, challenged and uncomfortable so as to think more carefully and critically about how we could be brave spaces and what this might look like in terms of tutor training and development and wider collaborative work across the curriculum.

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From being 'safe' to being 'brave' in educational spaces

'Brave spaces' is a concept developed by Arao and Clemens (2013), social justice educators in the United States, to counter aspects of the notion and enactment of safe spaces. While they argue that there is nothing inherently wrong with what Callan calls 'dignity safety' (2016 in Flesner and von der Lippe 2018) – including students, making them feel seen, respected and listened to – what tends to happen in many 'safe spaces' in universities (and likely in society more broadly) is that safety is conflated with comfort and those who feel most comfortable are those for whom the space is safest (and for whom the world feels fairly safe too). In Anglocentric university contexts, like South Africa and the UK, those who feel safest, intellectually and socially, tend to be middle-class, comfortable in English as a medium of instruction and learning, familiar with the ways of learning, writing, thinking and socialising at university (Boughey and McKenna 2021). The problem with conflating a safe space with a comfortable space and prioritising dignity safety over more critical forms of intellectual and political safety, is that those who are comfortable are resistant to being discomfited and to change that includes and legitimates other ways of knowing, doing and being that are unfamiliar to them. Consequently, those who are often or always out of step cannot feel truly safe because the needs

of those who are already safe are elevated above or louder than the needs of those who are not.

Brave spaces are conceptualised as spaces that have elements of both safety and risk. The example Arao and Clemens (2013) use is education that touches on white privilege and acknowledging and seeing this in how some move through the world with greater ease than others, meaning white people compared to people of colour and Indigenous people. For most white undergraduate students, thinking about and acknowledging their privilege and how structural racism benefits them, even without their conscious engagement, is difficult – it is emotionally and intellectually challenging and uncomfortable. Many feel unsafe and may even feel attacked for being white, something they cannot help being. Rather than retreating into a more traditional ‘safe space’ where students who express anguish or struggle are not pushed further or asked to engage more deeply, which is counter to the goals of social justice education and race equity, Arao and Clemens (2013) deliberately designed what they termed a brave space, where they used tasks and activities to gently but firmly push all participants to think about their political and intellectual beliefs, knowledge and actions. This honoured their need for dignity but pushed them forward to set up a group dynamic in which all participants were part of creating a space in which important work could be done together, not avoiding but supporting discomfort, which can be a risky undertaking.

Risk is a necessary part of the transformative role of education in society. Risk is an inherent part of academic knowledge-making and writing because meanings are never stable, always contested and shifting; not even conventions and ‘rules’ are as stable as we may believe they are (Thesen 2014). Yet, many students – and lecturers – seem to see academic writing as a practice governed by a stable set of conventions expressed in different kinds of ‘how to’ guides in the form of books, pamphlets, Online Writing Labs (OWLs), style sheets and so on. These guides have a flattening effect in the sense that they present the act of successful writing as the act of decoding the style sheet or rules correctly and meeting their demands, rather than as a complex act of meaning-making (Thesen 2014). Further, when you layer in different forms of ableism, microaggressions in the examples or case studies used, or feedback given to students and Anglocentrism in the genres, formats and conventions students are required to follow, the act of academic writing becomes even riskier for many students as they navigate an intellectual and emotional landscape that may feel unfamiliar and unsafe.

Writing centres can, inadvertently, add to this lack of safety by reinforcing the ‘how tos’ of successful writing – in other words by telling students ‘this is how you write an introduction’, ‘this is the structure of a 5-paragraph essay’, ‘this is the tone you need to write in’, ‘this is the way you present Results in a scientific report’ and so on. This may feel helpful and productive: students come to us

wanting to know how to write a successful piece of work for assessment and we teach them tools and offer advice on how to do that. But do we stop to consider the extent to which student writers do experience this? They may have a more polished piece of work and have learned something of the way the university or their department and discipline like things done, but where are they in this process? Have the examples we have used made sense to them or been representative of an aspect of their ways of knowing, being and doing? Have we talked over their concerns with our good intentions, focussed more on the writing than on the writer sitting in front of us? Have we reinforced blindly Anglocentric conventions that make little sense unless they are carefully unpacked and explained? Have we called a student who challenges conventions, pushes back and wants to do things differently as a 'tricky' consultation or a 'difficult' student, or have we stopped to consider what they are asking for or pushing back against and how we could listen differently?

14 These questions and considerations of risk, as well as being honest enough with ourselves to see that what we say we can do and will do in theory or concept, is perhaps not the same as what we end up doing in practice (Clarence 2019), lead me to agree with Oweidat and McDermott (2017) who argue that the writing cannot be either brave or safe – it must be both all at once. We do need to be welcoming, kind, caring – we need to offer all students a form of dignity safety, where they feel they can be who they are in the world without having to apologise for or defend that. But we do also need to be brave, to push ourselves, students and the wider university community to confront discrimination, inequities and exclusionary systems, policies and practices with enough honesty and humility to accept our parts in maintaining them, and challenge ourselves to grow and change. Therefore, we cannot be either 'safe' spaces or 'brave' spaces, but both. Our work is to define for ourselves what both of these concepts mean within our contexts and look at how we move between both safety and bravery in the ways in which writing centres write and enact their own mission, vision, policies, methods and practices.

Both brave and safe: taking the writing centre forward

In this final section, I would like to pull these threads through to thinking about how we can challenge ourselves as directors/coordinators, administrators and peer tutors/consultants to reflect on training and development and on collaboration across the curriculum to find spaces to push ourselves from narrower notions of safety to bravery, and to focus in being brave on tougher questions about the issues raised in this chapter: ableism, discrimination and Anglocentrism, as

well as other issues that may be pertinent in different contexts. I have some ideas, which I will share here and I offer these as a generative starting point for reflection and conversations within your own writing centre teams and with peers and colleagues you work with outside of the writing centre too.

To begin with tutor training and development, a workshop on equity, diversity and inclusion would be a useful starting point. Peer tutors/writing consultants could reflect ahead of the workshop what they think these terms mean and how they have experienced both equity and inclusion as well as inequity and exclusion. This could then provide a basis for further, discomfiting work on how the students that come to the centre may experience inclusion and exclusion and how the writing centre can use this greater insight and awareness to consciously create more inclusive environments, rather than assuming they are inclusive because they have characterised themselves as a 'safe, welcoming space for all'. Further workshops could then probe the issue of microaggressions, starting from peer tutors' own understanding and experiences as a way into thinking about how we talk to students and peers, the things we say and do, our intentions and how to be present to and aware of others' experiences of what we say and do. In training and development work with the tutors in the writing centre I was responsible for, we used to use role-playing to get into and tackle potentially tricky tutorials and troubleshoot these together: what could we have done differently? What would be a useful way to handle a tutorial like this? Scenarios created were, for example, tutorials where a student was quiet and did not respond readily to questions, leaving the tutor to do most of the talking, which prompted us to talk about the writing centre as method and how we talk to and draw out students on their writing. This kind of role-play, scenario-based activity works well, in collaboratively facilitated and created and, therefore, could be extended to posing scenarios that prompt tutors and coordinators/directors to consider inclusion, how we think about diversity in relation to writing, language and ways of creating knowledge, and how we create equitable or socially just spaces within our writing centres that are tangible.

This could lead into work around unconscious bias and positionality, which may explore the biases we hold about others and the understandings of 'good' writing that come with us into each tutorial. What we think a 'good' piece of writing is in terms of form, style, tone, register, vocabulary and syntax certainly affects how we approach the writer and any conversation about how to improve or develop the writing further. What we think a 'successful' student looks and sounds like affects our approach too. We all hold unconscious bias towards others based on who we are, our education, home background, friendships and so on; further, we all hold assumptions and beliefs about what makes academic writing look and sound successful or 'good' and we do not often stop to name these and explore where they come from and how they influence the ways in which we give feedback on

or assess other writers' texts. These conversations may well be uncomfortable, especially for tutors and directors/coordinators who are successful and comfortable within the university, whose ways of knowing, doing and being are generally represented and legitimated. But, while difficult, these conversations are necessary if our goal is to create truly socially just and brave spaces within and from writing centres. This work could address how writing tutorials/consultations are created, how we can begin and sustain conversations with students about their writing in a range of ways rather than in only a few ways that work for us but may not necessarily work for students quite as well.

A further area for peer tutor development would be around Anglocentrism and ableism in writing. This could include materials development, too. Specifically, workshops with peer tutors/consultants throughout the year could focus on unpacking and critiquing writing conventions and formats that we often see students bringing to the centre and struggling with. Discussions could focus on what the convention is, where it may come from, why we insist on it (what 'work' does it do in writing) and whether we could replace it with something else and get the same or a better outcome in writing. Rather than rejecting academic discourse, writing centres can develop a conscious pedagogy that enables

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marginalized students to become aware of how and why academic discourses situate them within certain power relationships and require of them particular subject positions. The goal of such pedagogy...is to teach students how to self-consciously use and be used by [academic discourse] – how to rhetorically and critically construct their subject positions within it (Bawarshi and Pelkowski 1999: 44).

This pedagogic approach underscores the writing centre as a method as well as a place (Standridge 2017), a way of approaching writing rather than only a physical place to talk about it, which could reshape the writing and content of materials we develop for students – the 'how tos' we offer them and how we do that, as well as materials for the collaborations we engage in with academic lecturers and departments. This may include practical steps around the production of materials in addition to their content. Writing centres could work with disability units on campus to learn more about invisible disabilities such as ADHD, the autism spectrum and dyslexia and how to develop materials, for example changing the font and spacing, to enhance students' experience of reading and writing. Writing centres could, for example start producing printed and online materials with coloured instead of white backgrounds, typed in both serif and sans serif fonts, so that all readers

are accommodated, rather than only those who can manage well with white pages and serif fonts. This is a simple change but could feel profound to a neurodivergent student who may now feel seen and supported where they did not before.

Building on changes we can control within our own centres, we can then explore how we use our learning and growth to effect wider reflection and change within the university, encouraging lecturers to think afresh about the writing conventions they adhere to, how they create and share materials such as assignment briefs, how these may reflect Anglocentric and/or ableist tendencies and how these may then exclude and further marginalise students whose ways of knowing, doing and being may differ from or be less dominant than the ones we legitimise through curriculum and assessment. Reflecting on Anglocentrism in writing especially could be a way for writing centres to actively join conversations on decolonising the curriculum and assessment – important conversations to be a part of, not only in South Africa but in other post-colonial contexts as well.

There are, however, limitations to this work that need to be acknowledged and that are acknowledged in literature on safe and brave spaces. A significant limitation is the affective labour of this kind of work and how that is recognised and managed. Tackling topics such as Anglocentrism in writing, unconscious bias and discrimination is emotional work, not only for those who are pushed out of their comfort zones to consider how privileges and positions they take for granted are not shared by everyone in the room and may need to be given up or changed to create greater equity and inclusion. Even when we want to be challenged, change, learning and growth is not without struggle and self-doubt and this can be uncomfortable. Thus, facilitation of these conversations needs to be carefully done, by facilitators who can accommodate discomfort and create a space for dignity safety without conflating this with intellectual and political safety, thereby letting a chance for deep reflection and change pass by. For some writing centres this may mean bringing in outside facilitators which may have time and cost implications that may stand in the way of having these workshops and conversations. A further limitation that has to be noted is the struggle many writing centre practitioners experience in trying to initiate and sustain relationships with disciplinary lecturers, many of whom are resistant to taking on what they see as ‘more work’ and to changing the ways in which they already teach and assess students.

Conclusion

To close, I would like to return to the provocation for this chapter captured in the call for chapters written by the editors of this volume: conceptualising and enacting writing centres as brave spaces. I began the chapter hoping to provoke writing centre peer tutors/consultants, directors, coordinators and administrators to rethink their conceptions of safe spaces – most writing centres conceiving of themselves as such for students especially – and to think, too, about what it would mean to be a ‘brave’ space. The conceptual journey I have been on and have traced in this chapter, has led me to think anew about the practices of academic writing that all students need to engage in and that writing centres focus on decoding, unpacking and clarifying with students. Specifically, I have looked at ableism and Anglocentrism in academic writing and forms of discrimination that students may encounter linked to perceptions others (lecturers, peer tutors) may hold about their capacity to be successful writers and makers of meanings and knowledge at university. In thinking through how these aspects of the practices of academic writing may make the university and the work of writing itself, feel quite unsafe for many student writers, especially those who are not what Nirmal Puwar (2004: 3) has called the ‘somatic norm’. In other words, students who are not middle class, not proficient in the language of learning and teaching, not fully prepared for the social and academic world of the university by virtue of their home and school backgrounds (see also CHE 2013; Boughey and McKenna 2021).

Writing centres have a powerful role to play in advancing greater equity and inclusion in the university and have a unique role to play in larger conversations about decolonisation and other forms of transformation of higher education. We occupy this role because we are safe spaces – spaces students seek out because we are welcoming, we are caring, we are there, primarily, for students. But this does not mean that those who staff writing centres and enact our methods and practices are not judgmental, not biased, not incapable of microaggressions that, with the best of intentions, may exclude or silence some students’ ways of being in the world. Therefore, we do also need to embrace forms of bravery that enable us to confront the ways in which we shore up and maintain systems of knowledge and meaning making, as well as social systems, that include some and exclude others, that are comfortable for some and unsafe for others. We can hold ourselves to account and expand our own agency within our university contexts and communities. We are, in Inoue’s words, ‘more than centers of writing, but centers for revolutions, for social justice work’ (2016: 4). In embracing this activist role, we can use our processes and practices of developing and training peer tutors and of creating and sustaining collaborations with lecturers and departments

in ways that do more visibly and meaningfully champion and advance equity and inclusion within universities.

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Chapter Two

Being and Becoming: Decolonising the Fundani Writing Centre Cosmos

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Introduction

A call for decolonisation and decoloniality in respect of university curriculum, knowledge systems and institutional culture (Heleta 2016; Ndhlovu and Kelly 2020; Le Grange 2018, 2021; Lejano 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 2015) has been a motivating force for a serious rethink of writing centre practices. After analysing literature, Le Grange (2018: 9) characterises decoloniality as that which concerns a critical awareness of the logic of coloniality (the colonial matrix of power); it is a critique of coloniality, it resists expressions of coloniality and takes actions to overcome coloniality. For Mignolo (2005: 8) coloniality 'exists an embedded logic that enforces control, domination and exploitation disguised in the language of salvation, progress, modernisation and being good for everyone.' Ndlovu-Gatsheni describes coloniality as a darker side of modernity that needs to be unmasked. The author also warns Africans to be vigilant against normalising and universalising coloniality 'as a natural state of the world' (2013: 11).

Opportunity to reimagine practices was presented to the writing centre practitioners at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) when the Vision 2030 Strategy was adopted in 2021, with its core focus: *Oneness (Ubuntu)* and *Smartness* (technology). Oneness focuses on human-centricity whereas, smartness entails technological development and innovation, which must advance humanity. CPUT Vision 2030 therefore challenges everyone in the university to strategically come up with programmes and pedagogical practices within which *Ubuntu* is embedded and enacted. The reimagination of practice was directed mainly at epistemological assumptions and ideological edifices that remain unchanged and uncontested in the writing centre space. Examining the

practices of CPUT writing centre after its inception in the 1990s, how it has evolved over time until 2015 and the consequences of the 2015 and 2016 #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movement, became imperative.

The need for critique and radical transformation of pedagogical and curriculum practices bestowed a responsibility to writing centre practitioners and social actors in the university generally to rethink their practices to avoid being trapped in the abyss of untransformed Eurocentric ways of knowing, doing and being. Besides 2015 and 2016 student protests, agitation for transformation in higher education is synchronous to calls by Mezirow (1998) for transformative critical reflection, Nichols' (1998) need for writing centres to shift power to students, Giroux's (2004, 2009) critical pedagogy and Hlatshwayo, Shawa and Nxumalo's (2020) *Ubuntu currere*. Such calls challenge writing centre practitioners and social actors not to rest on their laurels but to reimagine the university beyond the present. Hlatshwayo et al. (2020: 3) proclaim, 'a *currere* that fails to adhere to critique and exhibit newness is subsequently anti-emancipatory.' This suggests that curriculum or pedagogical practices should always evolve – should be subject to further inquiry and renewal.

To achieve education for total emancipation, Giroux (2009) asserts that learning environments should not be removed from the larger political, economic and social forces that shape them and as a political project, education should illuminate the relationships among knowledge, authority and power. For instance, the continued alienation and disempowerment of students called for disquiet, interrogation and critique of their social reality. While acknowledging the revolutionary work done by Academic Literacy specialists to move from the Study Skills discourse to Academic Socialisation and, to a certain degree, Academic Literacies Approach (Lea and Street 1998, 2006), one cannot be oblivious to the fact that the hegemonic discourse practice of the writing centre largely focuses on epistemology and disciplinary genres (Clarence 2012) with little advances on the work of criticality and consciousness-building around issues of ontology and axiology. Thus, this emphasises the need to unmask and reveal contradictions inherently existing in the current writing centre literacy practices, to reflect on and enact the 'requisite' authentic transformations.

McKenna (2004: 273) describes academic literacy as concerning support given to students so they can have easy access to 'the linguistic codes or cultural practices of the academic communities.' Academic literacy is central to the academic success of students. Confronted with a social reality of students who were struggling with their higher education studies, Morrow (2009) proposed the concept of 'epistemological access' (EA) to explain that reality. EA is providing students with access to the 'university goods', that is, 'powerful' knowledge (Young and Muller 2013). Keser and Köksal (2017) argue that epistemology is concerned with attempts to reach the most reliable knowledge.

Reliable or powerful knowledge is said to be 'found in school subjects such as maths, science, history, geography, English and the arts, given that they are taught according to the canons of their parent disciplines as studied in higher education, for instance and reinforced by school subject associations' (White 2019: 431).

Essentially, the question of 'whose knowledge' looms large when the reality is that curricula in South Africa remain largely Eurocentric and continues to reinforce white and Western dominance and privilege (Heleta 2016). Hordern (2022) suggests that knowledge should be enabled to become meaningful and accessible to all in society without retreating into elitism and obsolescence. Therefore, the valorisation of epistemologies tends to de-emphasise the ontological subjectivity of students, an act that may contribute to the alienation of the majority of working-class students in South Africa (and globally): Perceptions of marginality and alienation serve to create feelings of isolation and self-consciousness, which have negative impacts on academic performance and persistence' (Herbert, Baize-Ward and Latz 2018: 539).

Boughey and McKenna (2021: 65) rightly called for the interrogation and critical reflection on 'why it is that students do not always do what we would like them to be able to do' ('remedial' measures put in place). This succeeds a call made by Archer (2012: 362) that writing centres need to be grounded in critical discourses in order to understand and articulate individual cases and institutional practices. In this chapter we argue that such calls for radical and critical transformative agency in writing centre practice should be energised on the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* (Ramosé 1999, 2002) and decoloniality, as these metatheories are local, relational and antithetical to Eurocentricism, as a dominant force in South African higher education curriculum, culture and practice: 'Indeed, the dominance of the African sub-continent by the colonial culture is everywhere to the point that the African intellectual history is shaped and determined by Eurocentrism' (Dladla 2017: 42). This essentially side-lines, distorts and silences African indigenous knowledge systems, philosophy, culture and languages.

Eurocentrism is the belief that events that have shaped 'the international' have originated in Europe whereby Europe has the agency to alter 'the international', but such an agency does not exist outside of Europe (Çapan 2017: 656). Through education, students are expected to learn to 'speak well' and gain skills and Eurocentric knowledge that will allow them to enter the marketplace but not allow them to fundamentally change the status quo in society and the economy (Heleta 2016: 4). This has deeper implications for the decolonial transformation of society in the Global South in general and Africa in particular. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015: 490) states categorically that 'Africa is today saddled with irrelevant knowledge that serves to disempower rather than empowering

individuals and communities.’ Despite the call for the transformation of higher education (White Paper 1997) and decolonisation of curriculum by decolonial scholars and members of the Fallist Movement, so much remains unchanged. There is a tendency for actors (lecturers, researchers and students, etc.) to rely on theories developed in the Global North whose historical and contextual reality is different and, therefore, are not fit or relevant to address social problems experienced in Africa, in particular by Africans. Thus, Heleta (2016: 5) challenges all in academia to free education from Western epistemological domination, Eurocentrism, epistemic violence and world views that were designed to degrade, exploit and subjugate people in Africa and other parts of the formerly colonised world.

This chapter contributes to the current debate on the decolonisation of higher education raised by students during the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements of 2015 and 2016 by reviewing and re-imagining the writing centre pedagogical practices. The intention is to make visible Eurocentrism embedded in the CPUT writing centre practice, identify possibility for the decolonisation of practice and promote social justice and decolonial responsiveness at the writing centre. Pursuit of epistemology without ontology and axiology, in the writing centre, is antithetic to the attainment of social justice, which is understood by Coleman (2016: 17) as be an underpinning value that suggests that all students, irrespective of their social class, race, gender or disability, should be afforded the opportunity to participate as equals in the learning spaces of HE. Thus, the chapter seeks to address the following questions:

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1. How can writing centre practice be enhanced to expose Eurocentrism, de-marginalise the African knowledge system and promote a radical form of social justice without compromising the writing centre’s value and status in the academy?
2. What resources can be recruited to augment the transformative-liberatory work of a decolonising writing centre?

The international writing centre landscape

Writing centres have a long history in the United States of America that dates back to the 1930s (Chang 2013; Johnston, Cornwell and Yoshida 2008; Williams and Severino 2004). Originally, they were viewed as places to fix the writing of American students who had limited writing skills (Johnston, Cornwell and Yoshida 2008). The term 'writing laboratory' or 'writing lab' was used for early writing centres and is still used extensively in some universities in South Africa. Writing lab centres have experienced several transformations, from 'writing clinics' to the 'writing centres' of today (Chang 2013). When writing centres started, they were not described as a place for conversation about writing (Boquet 1999). Instead, instructors did the talking and students were expected to listen, go and improve their drafts.

Writing centres have evolved to focus more on the writing process and to become part of writing programs in universities. Now, writing centres have been established in junior colleges and senior high schools (Johnston, Cornwell and Yoshida 2008). Conversations about writing, dialogue and sharing of ideas is now facilitated in the writing centre. This helps in the process of developing the students' academic writing and themselves as academic writers (Archer and Richards 2011). Clarence (2019) suggests that there is growing body of writing research internationally and in South Africa which theorises academic writing practices. 'This research powerfully reflects a community of practice that is committed to social justice, diversity and critical approaches to academic writing, reading and knowing in higher education' (Clarence 2019: 118).

Archer (2010: 506) defines the pedagogy of the writing centres as involving the emancipatory dimension of knowledge, such as constructing arguments and thinking through ideas. She went further to state that writing centres are involved with the technical dimensions of knowledge, such as the mechanics of writing. This characterisation places writing centres in a unique position to empower students within the university system. Writing a foreword for the first book on South African writing centre, *Changing Spaces: Writing Centres and Access to Higher Education*, John Trimbur argues the situation of new university students in South Africa makes us aware that literacy is at once normative and potentially transformative (2011: 2).

Growth of writing centres has not only reached South Africa but some Asian countries such as Japan, India, China, Singapore and Taiwan. Kunde et al. (2015: 14) credits Japan for having played a dominant role in the development of writing centres in Asia. The start of most current Japanese writing centres could be traced back to 2004 when Waseda University, Osaka Jogakuin, Tokyo University and Sophia University each opened a writing centre (Johnston, Cornwell and Yoshida

2010). These universities provided liberal Arts programmes and English as a dominant language of instruction. A few universities in some Asian countries, for example, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore have a form of organised support to help their students learn the art of academic writing. As much as most writing centres in Asia tried to distance themselves from proofreading, the challenge that has to be met is to assist undergraduate students who need this service since some are developing their English linguistic knowledge at university (Ubaldo 2021).

Writing centres in Asia were in the main established to provide English writing support for students and to support the publication of faculty research in English. Later, they evolved to provide English Second Language (ESL) or English Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Chang 2013; Tan 2011). Except for the provision of academic literacy to bilingual and multilingual students (and lecturers) writing centres in Asia operated based on the North American idea. The writing centre, according to Steven North, 'represents the marriage of what are arguably the two most powerful contemporary perspectives on teaching writing: first, that writing is most usefully viewed as a process; and second, that writing curricula need to be student-centered' (North, 1984: 438).

The Fundani Writing Centre context

Writing centres in South Africa emerged in the mid-1990s as part of the academic development project. Their focus was to support 'educationally disadvantaged' students whose apartheid schooling had not prepared them for the cognitive and discourse demands of university study (Dison and Clarence 2017; Dison and Moore 2019). Many writing centres are situated within teaching and learning centres and they are often seen as a centralised service detached from disciplinary realities. Writing centres were framed ideologically as a skills offering (Archer and Richards 2011), a space to 'fix' students' writing. Although this contributed to entrenching the deficit frames of students; especially first-year students (Archer 2008; Paxton 2007), writing centres have and continue to evolve.

Writing centre practitioners and managers have now contributed to the shaping of new ideology through the publication of book chapters and journal articles. Currently, writing centres are deeply involved in the transformational project that defines a shift away from a traditionalist skills discourse to a progressive discourse on Academic Literacies that emphasises issues of 'identity', 'history', 'power', 'voice' and 'meaning making' (Lea and Street 1998; Ivanic 1998; Lillis and Scott 2007; Jacobs 2007, 2013). The shift is difficult to accomplish due to the positioning of writing centres in

institutions – both geographically and strategically. ‘The revolution and evolution of writing centres have resulted in writing centres taking various roles and functions at different institutions’ (Tan 2009: 47). Writing centres can be located in the library, a learning centre, an English department, or a residential hall and they may be centralised at just one location or may have several satellite centres, in the universities campuses (Haviland et al. 2001; Tan 2009).

Shortly after the writing centre at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) was established, the writing centre at Peninsula Technikon emerged. In 2005, as part of the government process to transform higher education, Peninsula Technikon and Cape Technikon merged to form the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). This meant that writing centre practices of the Cape Technikon, which was located in the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) and Cape Peninsula Technikon, part of the Educational Development Centre (EDC), would have to be re-aligned. A new name was adopted – Fundani Centre for High Education Development (that is ‘Fundani CHED’). In the former Cape Technikon, it was mainly the Academic Literacy lecturers who provided academic literacy support to the students and lecturers. Focus was largely on facilitation of academic literacy intervention workshops rather than one-to-consultations. At Peninsula Technikon, it was the writing consultants who consulted and presented workshops for students. They were under the guidance of the writing centre coordinator, who is now an Academic Literacy lecturer.

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The writing centre at the former Cape Technikon was located at the Student Learning Unit, which included tutoring and mentoring development. In the former Peninsula Technikon, the writing centre operated purely as a writing centre. There was limited engagement between disciplinary lecturers and the writing consultants: for any strategic or conceptual engagement that was required, it was conducted by the writing centre coordinator. After the merger, coordination was centralised under the Head of the Department of Student Learning Unit, which is a division of Fundani CHED. The original functions of these writing centres were now integrated. Then, mathematics support was initiated, which later evolved to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) support. The expansion of support included the training and development of the teaching assistants (TA) and retention officers (RO) and the provision of academic literacy support to satellite campuses.

For practical reasons, the CPUT writing centre is known as the ‘Fundani Writing Centre’ and it shall hereinafter be referred to as such. Fundani Writing Centre is seen as both a physical and an ideological space for holistic development of undergraduate students. Ideological space can be defined as a place where hegemonic discourses are interpreted and interrogated and transformational epistemologies are enacted. It focuses on cognitive-linguistic, psychosocial, academic and strategic

literacies development of CPUT students enrolled in six faculties – Applied Sciences, Business and Management Sciences, Education and Social Sciences, Engineering, Informatics and Design and Health and Wellness. There are four Academic Literacy lecturers employed on a permanent basis by the university. Annually, writing consultants/learning facilitators who are externally funded are employed on a part-time contract from the neighbouring sister universities.

Permanent staff members ensure continuity and stability of Fundani Writing Centre support in the university before and during the employment of consultants. As a result, the Academic Literacy lecturers facilitate academic literacy interventions, team-teach in the faculties, consult with students both face-to-face and online, participate in the teaching and learning committees, attend conferences, conduct research and publish papers and book chapters. There is a positive tension between what the Academic Literacy lecturers should do and what the function of writing consultants should be. However, due to limited funding and the fact that CPUT does not offer linguistics and language-related courses and cannot employ and grow its own timber, the Fundani Writing Centre does not attract a lot of writing consultants. The bulk of the work falls on the shoulders of the Academic Literacy lecturers.

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The Fundani Writing Centre has an established physical presence on two campuses: the Bellville campus and the District Six campus. The writing centre provides limited support to some of the satellite campuses such as Mowbray, Wellington, Granger Bay, the Media City building (Cape Town), the Roeland Street building (Cape Town) and the Virtual Tours campus. During the Covid-19 lockdown period, the writing centre operated online. It was partially equipped to offer online pedagogical assistance, but within a short period of time, it offered a fully functional digital service. This meant that hard-copy material that existed was transferred to online resources, now uploaded on Blackboard. Students' assignments were either submitted via WOnline Booking System or emailed to the administrators who distributed them equally to the Academic Literacy lecturers and writing consultants/learning facilitators. Since the national lockdown, the Fundani Writing Centre operates as a hybrid facility.

The Fundani Writing Centre provides reading and writing consultations to undergraduate students and also works with lecturers to plan and facilitate discipline-specific academic literacy interventions on academic literacies-related topics. The online pedagogy utilised is based on two methods – the review of essays or reports using track changes and providing oral feedback on Microsoft Teams or Blackboard and the WOnline Booking system. Nonetheless, the dialogic oral feedback strategy suffered due to network problems, load-shedding and shortage or lack of data. This means that the scornful, traditional laundrisation strategy was resorted to, which challenges

the ontological position adopted by the writing centre to promote dialogue and intersubjectivity (Sefalane-Nkohla and Mtonjeni 2019). Launderisation of the writing centre service means students would drop in their essays/reports to be 'fixed' and come back later to 'pick them up' – with no prospect for transformative dialogue on conceptual and substantive issues. This practice thwarted the *raison d'être* of the writing centre – to work with writers not writing (North 1984; Carlse 2019; Carstens and Rambiritch 2020). Thus, the post Covid-19 era calls for the hybridisation of pedagogic engagements. This includes recognising the need to restore transformative dialogue if any meaningful act of seeing and serving students as equal partners is to be achieved.

A small number of students visit the Fundani Writing Centre in Cape Town, Bellville and Tygerberg campuses via referrals from other student support units such as the Student Counselling Unit, the Disability Unit, residence managers, tutors, mentors, senior students and the office of the Student Representative Council (SRC). The primary target of the writing centre is the undergraduate students doing their first, second, third year and Advanced Diploma level (formerly known as B-Tech¹). Thus, the writing centre's scope at CPUT is regulated by the institutional policy on student development. Postgraduate students registered for Masters and Ph.D. fall beyond the scope of the services of the writing centre and must, as a consequence, seek assistance from the Centre for Postgraduate Studies (CPGS). However, with the help of the Fundani Writing Centre practitioners, the CPGS is planning to establish the postgraduate writing centre.

Some of the students at CPUT are referred to the writing centre by lecturers, peer mentors and Student Counselling Unit: they are facing psychosocial challenges which transcend academic literacy development. Since these challenges (cognitive, cultural, financial and emotional) have a significant impact on the students' academic progress, writing centre practitioners have to go an extra mile to provide psychosocial support. This expands the scope of work for the writing centre practitioners whose praxis compels them to listen and offer advice. It is perhaps the principle of non-judgementalism and of creating conducive atmosphere that encourages students to be comfortable, open and willing to share their lived experiences. Thus, to realise the act of developing students holistically, of being responsive to the student needs, of radically transforming student and lecturer support and of ensuring writing practitioners contribute meaningfully to transforming student-writers, including the culture, identity and structure of the university, the third tier of the Academic Literacies Model should be enacted, decoloniality pursued and *Ubuntu* be embedded in the institutional praxes.

1 B-Tech is the abbreviation for Bachelor of Technology, which was offered by Technikons and Universities of Technology, and has now been changed (after the recent rearticulation process) to 'Advanced Diploma.'

Academic literacies and its transformative potential

Among others, practices of the South African writing centres are theoretically informed by the work of the New London Group (Cope and Kalantzis 2009). In 1998, as part of a contribution to New Literacy Studies (the 1996 London Group), transformation of higher education (massification) and recognition of shortcomings in the traditional literacy practices, Street and Lea (1998; 2006) conceptualised and published the Academic Literacies Model. The theory sees literacy as a social practice and therefore recognises the plurality of literacies hence 'academic literacies' instead of a singular 'academic literacy.' In this chapter, the use of a singular form subsumes the plural. According to Lea and Street (1998) the Academic Literacies Model draws on a number of disciplinary fields and subfields such as applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, anthropology, sociocultural theories of learning, new literacy studies and discourse studies. It developed in recognition of a growing mismatch between students' needs and experiences, the curriculum and the academic institution (Lea and Street 1998, 2006).

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The Academic Literacies Model is divided into three main perspectives: Study Skills, Academic Socialisation and Academic Literacies Approach. The *Study Skills Approach* refers to atomised skills, surface language features and grammar. It sees writing and literacy as primarily an individual and cognitive skill (Lea and Street 2006). Writing is not some neutral activity which is learnt like a physical skill, but one which implicates every fibre of the writer's multifaceted being (Ivanic 1998: 181). *Academic Socialisation* is about inculcating students into a new 'culture' in the disciplines. It focuses on student orientation to learning and interpretation of a learning task. However, it lacks focus on institutional practices. The *Academic Literacies Approach* sees literacies as social practices (Lea and Street 1998). It is concerned with meaning making, identity, power and authority. It foregrounds the institutional nature of what counts as knowledge in any particular academic context (Lea and Street 2006).

The Academic Literacies theory defines the contested nature of the conventions of knowledge production and the determination of academic writing conventions as encroaching on the students' meaning-making capabilities (Lillis and Scott 2007). The authors claim, 'we move on to consider how academic literacies constitutes a specific epistemology, that of *literacy as social practice* and ideology, that of *transformation*', is instructive (2007: 13). As a transformative approach, Academic Literacies theory involves a critical engagement with academic conventions and an ability to locate these conventions within 'contested traditions of knowledge making' (Lillis and Scott 2007: 13). This requires writers to question these conventions and to determine how they may affect their

meaning making – an issue that is not only epistemological, as it appears, but ontological. Moreover, Academic Literacies theory explores alternative ways of meaning making in academia, valuing the resources that students bring to the university as ‘legitimate tools for meaning making’ (Lillis and Scott 2007).

Vincent and Hlatshwayo (2018) posit that black students who constitute the majority of first-generation students in South Africa often struggle to fit into alienating university cultures. Culture is the expression of human thought or creativity, as wherever human beings exist, they express their thought in language and culture (Komo 2017: 82). Students who do not hear their languages on campus, or even worse, have them being dismissed, are not going to feel welcome at university (Bouhey and McKenna 2021: 66). These authors further argue that such students suffer from what Fricker (2007, 2013) refers to as testimonial injustice, which manifests when someone’s identity is not recognised. Disapproval of the non-recognition of African students’ culture and being is expressed by Komo (2017) who asserts: ‘it becomes absurd to affirm that some human beings or human societies, who have their own cultures and languages, do not think’ (Komo 2017: 82). To deter the situation, universities should follow Gore’s (2021: 214) suggestion: ‘the need to change higher education content, teaching methods and academic staff from being Eurocentric to addressing the needs of all students, including black students.’

Grosfoguel (2013: 75) adds that ‘the knowledge produced from the social/historical experiences and world views of the Global South, also known as ‘non-Western’, are considered ‘inferior and not part of the canon of thought’. This, according to Grosfoguel (2013), is often accompanied by epistemicides (the systematic destruction of the sciences, philosophies and histories of the conquered). ‘Epistemicide, according to Santos (2018: 8) is ‘the destruction of an immense variety of ways of knowing that prevail mainly on the other side of the abyssal line—in the colonial societies and sociabilities.’ Heleta (2016) states that curriculum studies (including research and development) remain predominantly white in South African academia and therefore reinforce white and Western dominance and privilege. As such, it is very much prone to what Mills called ‘white ignorance’ (2007: 13). This refers to doxastic dispositions or a social structure which creates some veil that blinds white people to the privileges they continue to enjoy and the denial of cumulative effects of past differential treatment (Mills 2007).

Critique of Eurocentric values, which present knowledge as if it was the only kind of knowledge in existence, must empower the working-class students (and lecturers/writing centre practitioners) to unmask and reveal systems of oppression and marginalisation embedded in the curriculum and pedagogical practices. That would ensure different ways of thinking and viewing the world

emerge – ways that are both pluriversal and dialectical. In response to the Eurocentric view that the colonised did not have rationality and therefore were inferior to their Western counterparts, Mpfu and Steyn (2021: 12) challenge everyone to be conscious of the fact that the colonised and the enslaved were humans who practiced science and religion and had histories of their own. The authors claim that this is a truth that the empire could not and cannot live with.

The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory provides both philosophical and theoretical resources to respond to the marginalisation and the silencing of knowledge and systems of meaning for certain groups in society. Critical Theory aims to interrogate and critique the hegemony of Western systems of meaning (Eurocentrism), monolingualism (English-only) and universalisation of knowledge systems developed in the world province of Europe. It is an approach that studies society in a dialectical way by analysing political economy, domination, exploitation and ideologies (Fuchs 2015). Giroux (2009), for example, sheds light on what critical pedagogy does, which we believe can guide writing centre pedagogical practices. He describes his work on critical pedagogy as grounded in critique as a mode of analysis that interrogates texts, institutions, social relations and ideologies as part of the script of official power.

34 Giroux (2009) stresses that knowledge would become meaningful only if it connects with the histories, values and understandings that shape students' everyday lives. This point is captured by Johnson and Morris (2010) who described critical pedagogy as an approach that encourages academics (as educators) to develop context-specific educational strategies where dialogues, if used by both staff and students, can open up space for critical consciousness to emerge. A writing tutor/learning facilitator² who is critically conscious of ideological and political forces that influence and possibly motivate writers to take particular positions and interpret texts and discourses the way they do, is better equipped to ask student-writers questions that enable them to think critically and deeply about their subject matter. For example, the Academic Literacies Model was developed in recognition of a growing mismatch between students' needs and experiences and the curriculum and the academic institution (Lea and Street 1998, 2006). Academic Literacies scholars pay attention to understanding and interrogating difficulties experienced by students in higher education, especially those whose cultural and linguistic capital is in disharmony with culture and curricula at university.

Although the Academic Literacies Model is a theoretical construct from the North, it advances

2 Learning facilitator is a name given to writing consultants/writing tutors at CPUT. This is in recognition of the broader scope of work done in the writing centre beyond linguistic development.

the transformation of society through literacies globally. In South Africa, many academic literacies scholars have developed scholarship around the theory, applying it in their situational context for knowledge building purpose – the development of conceptual tools instrumental for the attainment of the political project encoded in the Academic Literacies Approach (see Cecilia Jacobs, Sherran Clarence, Sioux McKenna, Lucia Thesen, Chrissy Boughey, Brenda Lebowitz, Arlene Archer, Pamela Nichols, Rose Richards, etc.). Heleta (2016) warns South African academia to be critical of ‘global knowledge’ and to not accept anything from the global North as the norm. This means that the work of academic literacies practitioners must be agentivised and integrated with theories from the Global South in order to speak to South African students’ realities. In 2008 already, Archer, one of the stalwarts of the writing centre in South Africa, challenged writing centre practitioners to consider the power of writing centres in the knowledge production project: ‘Social, political and economic power is closely associated with knowledge of certain discourse forms and Writing Centres need to play a vital role in equity redress in tertiary institutions’ (Archer 2008: 211).

Another Academic Literacies specialist, Jacobs (2020: 227) challenges the use of the word ‘support’ to describe academic development work. She advocates for ‘a shift away from the dominant asocial, acultural and apolitical construction of learning and learners, towards a class analysis that provides a more social view of learning and learners.’ Jacobs (2020) believes such a social or contextualised view of learning would see students as being shaped by the very contexts in which they were raised, live and learn. Interestingly, the word ‘support’ is integral to the description given to the work of writing centres, including the CPUT writing centre. So, the critique advanced by Jacobs (2020) in line with Heleta’s (2016) proposition sends a clear message to researchers and practitioners in the writing centre fraternity, to not just adopt concepts, categories and phraseologies uncritically but to value the exigencies of the situational contexts.

Conceptual/theoretical framework

The African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, decoloniality and the CPUT Vision 2030 Strategy were employed to conceptualise this study. The concept of *Ubuntu* is well documented. In brief, *Ubuntu* is an African concept that serves as a framework for humaneness between people within a community (Nyaumwe and Mkabela 2007). It is summarised in isiXhosa as, ‘*umntu ngumntu ngabantu*’, which translates as ‘a person is a person through other persons.’ The concept of *Ubuntu* is found in most African cultures, though the word differs by language. It dates back to precolonial days and is part of

a long oral tradition (Mugumbate and Chereni 2019). Ramose (2002) defines *Ubuntu* as a collection of values and practices that Black people of Africa or of African origin view as making people authentic human beings. While the nuances of these values and practices vary across different ethnic groups, they all point to one thing – an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world (Mabvurira 2020).

According to Sanni (2021), *Ubuntu* can be expressed in terms of sociality that binds the people. It is driven by communitarian values, which serve as a guide for an individual's way of life and these values have ontological implications. For Ramose (2002: 41), *ubu-ntu* is the fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought of the Bantu-speaking people:

Ubu- as the generalised understanding of *be-ing* may be said to be distinctly ontological. Whereas *-ntu* as the nodal point at which *be-ing* assumes concrete form or, a mode of being in the process of continual unfoldment, may be said to be distinctly epistemological.

Dladla (2019: 159) interprets the above quotation well: 'In philosophical terms, *umuntu* precedes *Ubuntu* ontologically and, by virtue of such precedence, *umuntu* is the progenitor of the epistemology of *Ubuntu*. *Umuntu* is a Zulu word for a person. It has Xhosa and Sotho versions, namely: *umntu* or *motho* respectively. Elsewhere, Dladla provides a clear philosophical and practical distinction between *umuntu* and *ubuntu* (see the excerpt below):

To make an English translation then, while *Ubuntu* can be thought of as describing the more general and abstract human-ness or be-ing human, *umuntu* on the other hand is the specific concrete manifestation. *Umuntu* is the specific entity which continues to conduct an enquiry into be-ing, knowledge and truth, something we would best consider an activity rather than an act, a process which cannot be stopped unless motion is itself stopped in line with this reasoning then *ubu-* should be regarded as be-ing becoming, verbal rather than verb (2017: 51).

Ramose, who mentored Dladla's trajectory in philosophy, personified *Ubuntu* and characterised it as a philo-praxis because it is always a process of unfoldment toward *umntu* (Ramose 2002). Ramose (1999: 52) paints a clear picture of *Ubuntu* when he says, 'one is enjoined, yes, commanded as it were, to actually become a human being.' Someone who fails to play his or her part is recognised as 'an animal'. 'He is not a person' (Ramose 1999: 52). Indeed, in isiXhosa speaking communities, one would often hear people saying, '*powu, yinja umntaka bani*' (so and so's child is a dog) if someone is

failing to live up their expectation as a human being who is supposed to live relationally with other human beings in society.

Clearly, the *Ubuntu* ethic imposes upon everybody a concept of duty toward other people. The concept of duty requires an individual to place the common good before individual satisfaction (Mkabela 2014). In other words, *Ubuntu* transcends the private sphere of self-absorption in favour of a relationship that covers the community as a whole (Sanni 2021: 3). In the context of CPUT, *Ubuntu* (Oneness) is invoked to deal with the hidden culture of individualism/isolationism, which is dubbed as the 'silo mentality.' This unwritten code is observed when people refuse to work across the boundaries of their disciplines or become reluctant to engage in an open dialogue regarding pertinent issues. In a public sphere where open and honest engagements are a norm, such hidden culture becomes dangerous, as it can sow disharmony, distrust and irreconcilable contradictions. With respect to unity of purpose, Omodan and Makena (2022: 107) maintain, '*Ubuntu* gives strength to overcome adversity and create a more just and equitable society.' As the African philosophy centring humanity, empathy, compassion and liberation from coloniality and Eurocentrism, *Ubuntu* is key to driving the decolonial agenda of the Global South.

Decoloniality is one of the theories used to view the world in which the African or non-white students develop or suffer intellectually, linguistically, socially and economically in the post-colonial space. Decolonial turn was announced by Du Bois in the early twentieth century and made explicit in a line of figures from Aimée Césaire and Frantz Fanon in the mid-twentieth century, to Sylvia Wynter, Enrique Dussel, Gloria Anzaldúa, Lewis Gordon, Chela Sandoval and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, among others, throughout the second half of the twentieth to the beginning of the twenty first century (Maldonado-Torres 2011). In addition, Maldonado-Torres argues that decolonising knowledge necessitates shifting the geography of reason, which means opening reason beyond Eurocentric and provincial horizons, as well as producing knowledge beyond strict disciplinary impositions (Maldonado-Torres 2011: 10). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015: 485) argues, 'decoloniality speaks to the deepening and widening of decolonization movements in those spaces that experienced the slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neocolonialism and underdevelopment. This is because the domains of culture, the psyche, mind, language, aesthetics, religion and many others have remained colonized.'

The presence of Western epistemologies in African universities perpetuates one of the colonial myths that epistemologies from inferior humans of the South are subaltern knowledge systems (Grosfoguel 2011; Mayaba, Ralarala and Angu 2018). African students are still expected to continue imagining Europe as the centre of gravity and to promote Western epistemic hegemony. Anyone

who strives to counter this hegemonic reality is deemed as problematic in post-colonial societies. Ndhlovu and Kelly (2020: 60) posit 'Euro-modernist epistemologies proceed from positivist "scientific" principles that turn a blind eye to the diversity of ways of reading and interpreting social experience.' Essentially, these epistemologies reflect and represent subjective perceptions about what constitutes valid and legitimate knowledge.

As a result of coloniality, 'the imperial attitude promotes a fundamentally genocidal attitude in respect to colonized and racialized people. Through it colonial and racial subjects are marked as dispensable' (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 246). Elsewhere, Maldonado-Torres describes coloniality as that which survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and everyday (2007: 243). To counter the act of coloniality and ensure total liberation of the subaltern (the oppressed and marginalised), a revolutionary measure in a form of decoloniality was to be conceptualised and pursued. Ndlovu-Gatsheni postulates that decoloniality is born out of:

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a realization that the modern world is an asymmetrical world order that is sustained not only by colonial matrices of power but also by pedagogies and epistemologies of equilibrium that continue to produce alienated Africans that are socialized into hating Africa that produced them and liking Europe and America that reject them (2015: 489).

For Le Grange (2021), decoloniality is more than the removal of colonial governance. It entails the decolonisation of the interlocking domains of knowledge, power and being. The author credits Latin American scholars for giving clarity to the concepts of decolonisation and decoloniality. This has been helpful in understanding the legacy of colonialism which imbues the 'postcolonial world' and neoliberal order which makes decoloniality necessary (Le Grange 2021: 4). In his *Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality*, Maldonado-Torres (2016: 7) asserts that decolonial movements tend to approach ideas and change in a way that does not isolate knowledge from action. This means that they combine knowledge, practice and creative expressions, among other areas, in their efforts to change the world.

Elsewhere, Le Grange refers to decoloniality as a critique or an analytic of coloniality (2018: 9). Le Grange (2018) went further to state that decolonial scholars are of the view that although former

European colonies attained independence, in postcolonial times, the logic of coloniality remains. Maldonado-Torres characterises coloniality as:

surviv[ing] colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and everyday (2007: 243).

Coloniality can be divided into three concepts: coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being. While the coloniality of powers refers to the interrelation among modern forms of exploitation and domination (power) and the coloniality of knowledge has to do with impact of colonisation on the different areas of knowledge production, coloniality of being would make primary reference to the lived experience of colonisation and its impact on language (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 242).

Coloniality is often invisible as compared to colonialism, which it succeeds. That requires theory to unravel the world and expose the onto-epistemological realities of Western rationality and African/South relationality. For Lejano (2021) relationality emphasises connectedness amongst the people and that the ethic of relationality is distinct from an ethic of rationality (the Western logic). 'To become cognizant of a White supremacist ideology, therefore, individuals must be made conscious of the many subtle ways in which our values and beliefs are shaped by the messages we receive in our homes, workplaces, schools and various other institutions on a daily basis' (Powell 2000: 8). By virtue of its strategic in-between position and ability to engage in heteroglossic dialogues with many students, lecturers and institutional structures, the Fundani Writing Centre practitioners can conscientise individuals about the many subtle ways in which colonial values, cultures and ideologies shape discourses and practices, as indicated by Powell (2000).

Decolonial epistemic perspective is ranged against coloniality (Dastile and Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 109). According to the authors, this perspective builds on decolonisation discourse, but they say it adds the concepts of power, being and knowledge as constitutive of modernity/coloniality. Decolonisation aspires to break with monologic modernity by fomenting transmodernity, which is 'an invitation to think modernity/coloniality critically from different epistemic positions and according to the manifold experiences of subjects who suffer different dimensions of the coloniality of Being' (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 261). Essentially, the work on decolonisation, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021: 83), is aimed at dismantling the colonial structures of

knowledge. It confronts these Eurocentric ideas and rationalities which not only enabled physical colonialism but cognitive/metaphysical colonialism as well.

Moghli and Kadiwal (2021) explain decolonisation as a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, heterogeneous and multigenerational process, which builds on decades of work by scholars, activists and people from all walks of life who have been struggling for freedom and breaking structures of oppression. Decolonisation, according to Mills (2007), can be achieved by overcoming white ignorance and radicalising liberalism. So white ignorance is 'best thought of as a cognitive tendency – an inclination, a doxastic disposition – which is not insuperable' (Mills 2007: 23). Heller (1984) defines 'doxa' as everyday knowledge, an opinion not science or philosophy. Accordingly, 'doxa is inseparable from practical activity: it is in practical activity and nowhere else that doxa is verified' (Heller 1984: 203).

Writing about decolonisation of methodologies, research and indigenous people, Smith (1999: 39) argues that 'decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our purposes.' Arguments put forward by African decolonial scholars (Dladla 2019; Le Grange 2018; Mills 2007; Ndlovu and Kelly 2020) speak about the need to disrupt the reproduction of colonial-apartheid power relations. Power relations are always present when humans engage in educational exchanges (Le Grange 2018). Ndlovu and Kelly (2020: 61) maintain, 'the challenge then is how the Global South might escape the capture of Western traditions while still remaining in dialogue.'

Contributing to the discourse of centering African epistemologies and of using technology intelligently to better humanity, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) conceptualised Vision 2030 Strategy, (a decadal plan) which emphasises two dimensions – *Oneness* and *Smartness* – explained in Figure 1 below:

The notion of **One Smart CPUT** is designed in terms of two key dimensions that are in support of CPUT's one smart university concept.

Dimension 1: Oneness – The oneness dimension of V2030 is focused on our human-centricity through our smart people and the smart CPUT community that values and embraces unity (*ubunye*) in diversity (*ukungafani*). It directs CPUT to view itself in terms of trust, values, co-thinking, co-learning, co-creating and co-designing, dialogue and a unified spirit. For CPUT to become human-centric and human-hearted, it will require more than staffing, skills transfer, shared values and style, but will require a conscious way of living and shaping an identity of who we are and what we aspire to be as a collective or how we communicate and share information and build relationships at CPUT. Thus, we will ascribe to an African philosophy of "*ukuhamba unxibe izihlangu zomney umntu*", meaning, "to walk in someone else's shoes".

Dimension 2: Smartness – The smartness dimension of CPUT's strategy is focused on technological developments and innovations as considered by the current and future industrial revolutions. It supports the notion that CPUT, as a University of Technology, will embrace technology in the broadest and most positive sense to advance a better humanity, better socio-economic circumstances, better health conditions, education, safety, food security and general living conditions in our region, the rest of Africa and globally. Smartness will embrace a philosophy of open innovation – advocating to create better futures, communities and careers.

CPUT's staff and students will be trendsetters, working together to explore critical questions across disciplinary boundaries, developing important intellectual and civic capabilities, and using those insights to forge the alleviation of complex problems facing South Africa and the world.

Figure 1: One Smart CPUT Vision 2030

All the same, a critical appraisal of the decolonial literature and writings on the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* was performed with the aim of initiating purposeful conversations between the writing centre practices at CPUT and metatheory (decoloniality and *Ubuntu*). A critical assessment of assumptions and (in)advertently adopted ideological stance by the writing centre practitioners were pivotal for decision making and conversations on the strategic direction of the writing centre in the next decade. Conversations also become complicated when scholars of curriculum engage with their peers (particularly with those with different histories, beliefs, and ideas), and listening respectfully to them allows one to interrogate their own understandings of self and of the field (Le Grange 2018: 7). Put differently, critical reflections energised on *Ubuntu* and decoloniality allowed the practitioners to think deeply about social, intellectual and ideological issues surrounding them and can also enable them to interrogate their practices in order to imagine and activate change in their praxis.

Data collection: Method and design

Study design

The chapter sought to determine how the writing centre practice could be radically transformed by centering the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*. This includes exploring conceptual resources to strengthen the liberatory and transformative practice of the writing centre. The chapter employed a qualitative paradigm to study the above social reality. The writing centre practitioners were interviewed to critically reflect on how the writing centre can be decolonised and how the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* can be centred in the writing centre.

Reflection, a 'turning back' on experience for Mezirow (1998) can mean many things: it can be a simple awareness of an object, event or state, including awareness of a perception, thought, feeling, disposition, intention, action, or of one's habits of doing things (Mezirow 1998: 185). For Hickson (2011: 834), critical reflection helps one to identify and deconstruct their assumptions rather than focus on the narrative or the story. The author believes critical reflection has helped her to explore her ideas about uncertainty and change, flexibility, conflict resolution, knowledge, power and control. Fook (2015: 441) posits that reflective practice emerges principally from the work of Schon (1983).

Schon is one of the first scholars who raised awareness about the crisis in the professions, which is often represented by the perceived gap between formal theory and actual practice. Schon (1983) suggests that professionals use reflection to deal with the uncertainty that pervades their work and shapes their thinking and actions while learning from experience. However, the notion of critical reflection adopted in this chapter is provided by Mezirow who characterises critical reflection as 'the process by which people learn to recognize how uncritically accepted and unjust dominant ideologies are embedded in everyday situations and practices' (Mezirow 2000: 128). This calls for the development of critical language to interrogate the taken-for granted stances, concepts and experiences in the academy.

While we concur with Mezirow (1998: 186) that critical reflection is a principled thinking, which ideally, ought to be impartial, consistent and non-arbitrary, as researchers, we believe that critical reflection should be informed theoretically and practically by the reality of one's social situation. For others, reflective practice is an activity that is Western-oriented and has no cultural translation (Gardner, Fook and White 2006). The critique performed in this chapter is not the one associated with Western tradition, which is ahistorical, atheoretical and presumably neutral, but the one

associated with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, decoloniality and the centering of African philosophy of *Ubuntu* in the writing centre praxis.³

Recruitment of participants

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants. Participation in this study was voluntary and consent was obtained from the participants before the commencement of the focus group interviews. The participants were assured that they can withdraw at any point in the study and that their views are not intended to be used to compromise their *locu standi* as practitioners at the Fundani Writing Centre. Participants are four Academic Literacy lecturers and two learning facilitators/writing consultants who reflected their understanding of the history of writing centre practice, how decolonisation affected the practice after the Fallist Movement and how *Ubuntu* can be centralised in the writing centre pedagogy.

Data collection

Data was collected by means of document analysis and focus group interviews. The CPUT Vision 2030 strategy document was analysed to determine the underlying values, principles and propositions underpinned by the philosophy of *Ubuntu*. For this chapter, only the Dimension of Oneness is considered. Focus group interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. The interviews were scheduled for one hour but lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. The conversation was informed by the following three questions:

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1. What does CPUT Vision 2030, the dimension of smartness, mean for practice in your sector?
2. How has your sector transformed over the past few years in response to the Fallist Movement (#FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall)?
3. What would be the role of *Ubuntu* in changing practice in the Writing Centre?

³ Praxis is part of critical consciousness through which one demonstrates the ability of reflexive thinking that leads to commensurate transformative action (Maseko 2018: 84).

For this chapter, only responses to the third question will be reported. The interview data was transcribed. In fact, transcription from Microsoft Teams was downloaded by the first author (lead researcher). After realising that sections of the transcript were distorted by Microsoft Teams, participants were invited to sit with researchers to view the transcript, listen to Microsoft Teams audio and identify and rectify distortions. The purpose was limited to correcting the errors, but not to tamper with the meaning. So, this was an iterative process with repetitive steps of listening and re-listening to the audio. The names reflected in the analysis (Findings and Discussion section) are pseudonyms: to protect the identity of the participants. Tim, Paulina, Zinzi and Odwa are Academic Literacy lecturers and Zein and Peter, the writing consultants/learning facilitators.

Findings and discussion

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Regarding the role of *Ubuntu* in changing the writing centre practice, the participants showed understanding and appreciation of the idea. So much was uttered by the participants in relation to the implementation and valuing of *Ubuntu* as a guide to action in the writing centre. 'Attentive listening', 'non-intimidation', 'creation of rapport' as a strategy for open and frank engagement, 'relationality', treating 'students as equals' and 'human beings' as well as 'seeing the person, not language problems' are some of the key issues emerging from data. *Ubuntu* as a guide to action and restoration of relations between interlocutors is captured by Peter below and later by Tim:

Writing centre is meant to be a safe space where, as consultants, we listen attentively and engage students in a non-intimidating manner. As soon as you realise that the student you are consulting with is not relaxed, it's uncomfortable, probably because their writing is put under the spotlight you have to change your approach. You can ask about what made the student to choose the course and what future is imagined out of the chosen career path in the field of study. I guess that's Ubuntu in action (Peter, Learning Facilitator).

From the above excerpt, the notion of writing centre as a 'safe space', 'attentive listening', 'non-intimidation' and creation of rapport were crucial to how Peter believes *Ubuntu* should be practicalised in the writing centre. 'The idea of the writing centre as a safe space in otherwise culturally hostile or alienating environments was common in this first collection of essays on South African writing centres...' (Nichols 2016: 184). This means that writing centres were designed to look

welcoming and to encourage students to relax and to think. As a result, students become open and willing to share their lived experiences and emotional being. It is within a safe context that remains academically grounded, rigorous and free from the harshness of the academic environment, that students can be mentored to be better writers (Banda 2019: 200).

Creation of rapport by changing topic, as alluded to by Peter, is testimony to this appearance of the writing centre. The shift in politeness strategy illustrates *Ubuntu* as a dynamic force, which, according to Dladla (2017), denotes humanness, which obliges one to be humane, respectful and polite towards others. When rapport is achieved, the possibility for interactants to be trustingly open and vulnerable to each other gets heightened. Both students and writing practitioners listen attentively and engage visibly – with authority and power equitably shared. Nichols (2016) takes the idea of listening to a different level. She states that the surfacing of the codes of power and the coaching of students so that they can speak and be heard, requires listening (Nichols 2016: 186). Nichols cites Delpit (1995: 47), on the special kind of listening we must embrace: ‘we must be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to allow the realities of others to edge into our consciousness. In other words, we must become ethnographers in the true sense.’ According to Nichols (2016) this sort of listening takes courage and resilience for it goes against the grain of hegemonic culture and requires us to hear that which might otherwise be silenced. This obligation toward other people is a specific value advocated in *Ubuntu* ethics. *Ubuntu* as ethics is inseparably connected to the recognition that motion is the principle of be-ing (Dladla 2017: 53). Thus, the ethics of *Ubuntu* revolves around contingency and mutability (Dladla 2017).

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The power, depth and potentiality of *Ubuntu* as an African philosophy is often misconstrued or misjudged (see Tim’s utterances) albeit having a deeper liberatory potential:

I feel strongly that Ubuntu is often misconstrued or mistakenly reduced to philanthropic acts of giving or caring for the vulnerable. I think it is much deeper than that. As a philosophy, it ought to guide our action, our relations as a people ... Quite seriously, it challenges the position to which Africans were placed by their European counterparts and therefore aims to improve their status and dignity globally (Tim, Academic Literacy lecturer).

To Tim, many people hold a narrow view of the concept of *Ubuntu*, that is, philanthropism. However, from the above excerpt, *Ubuntu* is purported to do three other important tasks, namely: (i) recognition of students as a people, (ii) liberation of Africans from the zone of non-being and (iii) valorisation of their humanity and human dignity. This approach by the African philosophy of

Ubuntu is in stark contrast with its European counterpart. The European philosophy of Descartes and Kant was driven to the centre wherein knowledge was disconnected from the subjects that produced it, emphasising what was said and enunciated as ‘knowledge’, but concealed the subjects that produced it (Grosfoguel 2012). The strategy of ‘hiding the body’ and the situatedness of the European producer of knowledge enabled European produced knowledge as not just local but ‘universal’ – thereby acquiring epistemological validity – and, at the same time, negating the visibility and existence of the knowledge produced by the colonised non-European (Grosfoguel 2012).

As a guide to action, *Ubuntu* (philo-praxis) speaks to the need to redefine relations and recognise Africans as a people with rationality and relational capability. Therefore, *Ubuntu* should be at the heart of decolonising knowledge and pedagogical practices, which the writing centre must actively pursue. Heleta (2018) argues that decolonisation of knowledge is crucial in order to rewrite histories, reassert the dignity of the oppressed and refocus the knowledge production and worldviews for the sake of the present and the future of the country and its people, as well as the rest of the African continent. In the context of the writing centre, action refers to the laying down of foundation for critique and change. This includes sensitising our stakeholders (the majority of whom are students) about the need to confront the unequal distribution of power and contradictions that exist in the curriculum, to heighten the ontology of the often-alienated African working-class students. Essentially, the writing centre practitioners must challenge disciplinary lecturers to interrogate the type of knowledge imparted in their disciplines and determine its historicity (origins) including the valued sources of information. They would have to inquire: is the imparted knowledge promoting epistemic values, principles and world views emanating from the Global North or its alternative, Global South?

‘Caring’ and ‘giving’ are crucial elements of global ethics. From an African perspective, these concepts can be understood from the following characterisation: ‘*Ubuntu* is a comprehensive ancient African world-view based on the values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative community life in the spirit of family’ (Broodryk 2008: 17). *Ubuntu* is about activating everybody’s relational agency or relationality. Relational agency therefore has some resonance with the work of Hakkarainen and his colleagues on reciprocity and mutual strengthening of competence and expertise to enhance the collective competence of a community (Hakkarainen, Palonen, Paavola and Lehtinen 2004). It ‘allows us to work with others in pursuit of ever-expanding objects and to explore the possibilities that these new objects reveal’ (Edwards 2007: 6).

Paulina has done some introspection during the interview process and identifies her complicity to the narrow perspective on *Ubuntu* thus:

I agree with Tim. In fact, I am guilty of thinking of Ubuntu only in terms of the famous phrase, 'umntu ngumntu ngabantu.' Never did I think it goes beyond that. I am glad we are having this conversation about it. In the writing centre, we need to fight for the recognition of students as a people and through our interventions bring their social realities to the fore. Examples given and sources cited must be contextualised in African reality (Paulina, Academic Literacy lecturer).

Umntu ngumntu ngabantu translated as 'I am because we are' is an important starting point to recognise and learn how a person can be elevated and validated socially. According to Dladla (2017: 55) the aphorism applies to everybody including European descendants: it is said that '*lomlungu unobuntu*' [this white person has *Ubuntu*] or even '*lomlungu ungumntu*' [this white person is a human being]. In other words, this is not a biological valuation but an ethical one. Paulina defines the basic struggle of the practitioners in the writing centre as fighting for the recognition of students *as a people*. The challenge, as Ramose puts it, 'is to prove oneself to be the embodiment of *ubu-ntu* because the fundamental ethical, social and legal judgment of human worth and conduct is based upon *Ubuntu*' (Ramose 2002: 43).

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African solidarity, humanity and cooperation transcends Western singularity and individualism. A pedagogy that values humanity, collectivity and sociality is a living organism, as it is open to possibilities, contradictions, transformation and growth. Waghid (2004: 64) posits that pedagogy should make us 'open to the unexpected, the uncertain and the unpredictable.' Possibility for growth, in the academy, is expressed by Odwa in the following excerpt.

No one develops in isolation...Mna colleagues, I think, Ubuntu in the writing centre can be achieved if we can relate to how we were assisted as undergraduate students who did not know much about writing at university. I always go back to lived experiences of constantly visiting the writing centre and seeking advice from my course tutors (Odwa, Academic Literacy lecturer).

Statements such as 'no one develops in isolation' brings about the essential quality found in

interpersonal relationships, interdependence and the collaborative nature of African societies. *Ubuntu* for Mabvurira (2020) and Lejano (2021) brings about authentic individual human beings to be part of a larger community where their identity and development is intertwined with that of the communal others. *Ubuntu* is about communitarianism and co-development: everybody's contribution matters. Drawing material strength from others (tutors and writing centre practitioners) has, for instance, helped Odwa to navigate his university studies. This is in keeping with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of Zone of Proximal Development where the novice (student) interacts with the more knowledgeable other (teacher) until the novice can be independent.

Independence gains material value in collaboration. In the indigenous African context, for example, a sense of duty and responsibilities on individuals is more paramount than the notion of individual human rights. Related concepts, 'co-thinking', 'co-learning', 'co-creating' and 'co-designing' define the Oneness dimension (*Ubuntu*) in the CPUT Vision 2030 Strategy. This constructivist notion of co-dependence and co-creation is meant to counter individualism – a central concept of liberal education. Relationality for Lejano (2021) emphasises connectedness and that the ethic of relationality is distinct from an ethic of rationality (that is, dominant Western logic). Thus, the valuing of others, empathy and relational understanding of people's social reality are some key components of *Ubuntu*, which must be embraced and promoted in the writing centre.

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'Dialogue' is one of main concepts reflected in the CPUT Vision 2030 strategy. The centrality of dialogue or conversation, in the writing centre pedagogy, is captured by Zein below:

What is central to the work of the writing centre is dialogue and engagements. Africans like to talk. This oral tradition helps one to express herself more and unpack things, which otherwise would not have been possible when writing. Academic writing has lots of rules and restrictions. Ubuntu will assist us in seeing the person not the language problem, which is ordinarily the main reason why students are sent to the writing centre by their lecturers (Zein, Learning Facilitator).

Citing Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogicality and Middendorp's (1992) heteroglossia, Sefalane-Nkohla and Mtonjeni (2019) recognise the importance of dialoguing (as opposed to monologuing) during consultations. Pratt (1991) referred to dialogic and heteroglossic spaces as *contact zones* where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power. Participation in dialogue is essential for academic language learning (Smith 2022). Vaagan (2006: 168) states that in literary theory, dialogue (from Greek *dialogos* – conversation) signifies the

organising of fictional texts, usually novels, to allow the interplay of different voices, minds or value systems in such a way that none is superior to another. As they consult with students from various disciplines, writing centre practitioners ought to engage with disciplinary literacies (discourses) and the epistemic values which are often tacit (Jacobs 2021) and they must be able to empathise with those students' social and epistemic relations.

According to Zein, 'oral tradition helps one to express herself more and unpack things.' He also asserts that writing constrains the flow of ideas. Unlike oral tradition, it has a lot of rules and restrictions. In addition, Zein defines the ontology of Africans as people who like to talk. Orality is central to *Ubuntu* (Mugumbate and Chereni 2019). Its value in a decolonising university can be understood in three ways: (i) need for decolonisation of assessment practices, (ii) illumination of limitations of writing to meaning making and (iii) confinement of creativity and fluidity during academic writing. Thesen and Cooper (2013) argue that transformative practice calls for deep conversations about hopes and fears and attachments. They further state that such a conversation needs openness to risk and risk-taking.

Nichols (1998) posits that writing centres are based on the paradigm that language and knowledge are created socially through conversation or dialogue with people and texts. Important human actions and values such as listening, connectedness and inclusive pedagogies are enacted in dialogue (Smith 1999; Nichols 2017). Such actions and values are ontological. 'Seeing the person not language problems' (see Zein's utterances) is also deeply ontological. 'To be a human being is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and on that basis establish humane relations with them' (Ramose 1999: 37). Boughey and McKenna (2016) criticised the notion of centralising 'language problems' to Black students. Instead, the authors call for the focus to be shifted to more structural issues, which are often elided. Basseches (2005), Foucault (1984), Pollard (2014) and Pozo and McLaren (2006) propose both dialectical and critical ontology to be adopted as part of decolonising practices and to promote criticality. Invariably, the recommended conceptual and theoretical resources can strengthen Academic Literacies Approach (Lea and Street) which is central to the transformative and liberatory work of the writing centre.

While Zein suggests that students must be 'seen' as opposed to language problems, Zinzi says they must be seen as human beings and treated as equals:

In the Writing Centre, students are our major stakeholders. We cannot argue with that. Lecturers are also important. We have to treat students as our equals, as human beings who require assistance from us. Students are to be treated with the dignity they deserve. When

they come for one-on-one consultations, they are to be assured that what is discussed from the consultation remains between the student and the academic literacy lecturer. That mode of rapport building allows students to open up with the lecturers during the consultation process (Zinzi, Academic Literacy lecturer).

Disciplinary lecturers, writing centre practitioners and students are in a dialectical relationship, as they need each other for their educational project to be meaningful. Since students are major stakeholders, according to Zinzi, their voices matter. Issues of privacy, vulnerability and risk-taking are key to dialectical and dialogical engagements in the writing centre (and in the disciplines). When *Ubuntu* is at the centre such engagements cannot be unduly disconcerting. *Ubuntu currere*, which is characterised by Hlatshwayo et al. (2020) as emblematic of everything in the cosmos have the potential to emancipate educational and social relations of the African working-class students. For *Ubuntu*, which informs Africanist *currere*, is holistic, practical and integrated. It is poised to transcend colonial-epistemic relations between humans in the cosmos.

From the above discussion, one will realise that values and practices associated with *Ubuntu* are already operational in the writing centre space. Participants propose that they must be decolonised. Revolutionary practices of the writing centre practitioners can be deepened and critically sharpened by:

1. Adopting a critical transformative stance and humanising pedagogies to promote understanding of the students' social and epistemic relations;
2. Validation of the African working-class students in order to reduce their feeling of alienation and marginality in higher education;
3. Pursuing dialectical and dialogical engagements with students and disciplinary lecturers to expose inequalities and 'hidden' oppressive value systems embedded in the curriculum;
4. Adopting *Ubuntu currere* as a pedagogical practice to transcend and reconfigure the dominant colonial-epistemic model;
5. Recruiting *Ubuntu* philosophy and related conceptual and theoretical resources to strengthen the transformative and liberatory potential of Lea and Street's (1998) Academic

Literacies Approach;

6. Ensuring dialogue and orality (as opposed to monologue) define social interactions (during consultation) and proposed as alternative assessment practice;
7. Ensuring pedagogy of contradictions and open possibilities is pursued when providing academic literacy support;
8. Demonstrating the valuing of all students through attentive listening, empathy and relational understanding of their social reality; and
9. Ultimately, pursuing decoloniality to interrogate, dismantle and change the social reality of Africans and promote the perspective of the Global South.

Conclusion

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The chapter explored ways in which the writing centre practices can be strengthened to expose Eurocentrism and centre the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* to promote a radical form of social justice without compromising the writing centre's value and status in the academy. It also sought resources to be recruited to augment the transformative-liberatory work of a decolonising writing centre. Using Mezirow's (1998, 2000) transformative critical reflection (focus group interviews) and analysing the CPUT Vision 2030 Strategy (document analysis), the Fundani Writing Centre practitioners interrogated their practices and explored ways in which the African Philosophy of *Ubuntu* can be employed to radically transform their praxis. Data collected demonstrated that there are values and principles employed in the writing centre pedagogy which can be leagued with *Ubuntu* but need to be strengthened to ensure decoloniality (and Africanisation) is sustained.

Concepts such as 'dialogue', 'orality' and 'collaboration' are already employed during consultation in the writing centre. They were used to empower students to develop cognition and functionality (academic socialisation) within the disciplinary structure and culture embedded in Eurocentrism. Dialogue and collaboration are emphasised in CPUT Vision 2030 strategy. These concepts are related to 'relationality', 'communitarianism', 'co-thinking', 'co-dependence' and 'cooperation' as central values espoused by the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*. Pivotal are the claims

advanced by the participants in respect of promoting African epistemologies and *Ubuntu*: Zinzi (*We have to treat students as our equals, as human beings ... with the dignity ...*), Zein (*seeing the person not the language problem*), Odwa (*No one develops in isolation*), Paulina (*... we need to fight for the recognition of students as a people*), Peter (*listen attentively and engage students in a non-intimidating manner*) and Tim (*challenges the position to which Africans were placed by their European counterparts*).

Adopting decoloniality, decolonisation and CPUT Vision 2030 Strategy as conceptual/theoretical framework enabled the researchers (authors of the chapter) to look into how the writing centre practitioners can respond to call made by proponents of #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall movements and decolonial scholars. Engaging in conversation about how to radically transform the writing centre praxis is in keeping with valorisation of perspective of the Global South to counter the hegemonic epistemic relations of the Global North. Much more strategic and radical work needs to be done in pursuit of the struggle – to *decolonise higher education and decentre Eurocentrism*.

The chapter suggests recruitment and adoption of conceptual-theoretical frameworks from the Global South, Critical Theory, Marxism, decoloniality and *Ubuntu currere* or *Ubuntugogy*, the writing centre practitioners can go a long way to assist students in their pursuit of dreams, liberty, morality and human dignity. Since the study was limited to the practitioners' critical reflection on the possibility of radically transforming the writing centre practice, more research is needed to determine the extent to which *Ubuntu* is embedded and how students view the writing centre praxis in line with the CPUT Vision 2030 and decoloniality.

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Chapter Three

Bridging the Multilingual Divide: Enhancing Academic Literacy through Metaphors in South African Writing

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Backstory

Archer and Parker (2016: 1) write that their paper 'Transitional and Transformational Spaces: mentoring Young Academics Through Writing Centres':

changes the focus of investigation from student to consultant and, consequently, explores the way in which an academic writing centre can function as a mentoring environment for young academics.

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And this is exactly where my story starts. Although I was no academic then and definitely not young anymore, I was mentored in and by, the writing centre (personification!).

I consider myself a late bloomer, particularly in the academic realm. After spending 25 years as a farmer's wife, I returned to university in 2015. Pursuing honours and master's degrees in Translation and Interpreting, I was inspired by my experiences on the farm and at a rural high school. These experiences highlighted the challenges faced by non-native English speakers within a monolingual education system. At that time, I was unaware of the concept of Academic Literacy. My motivation was solely to improve mutual understanding by delving into the mechanics of language and culture.

I chose to home-school my children. Over 15 years, I learned the power of figurative language in teaching abstract concepts to my diverse-thinking children. Armed with only a B.A. in languages, majoring in French, isiZulu and English, I voraciously studied teaching and learning strategies. Despite numerous obstacles, my commitment to instilling a love for learning, critical thinking and respect for all peoples in my children remained unshaken.

My home-schooling experience became a foundation when I became a consultant at a university

writing centre in 2016. Following my honours degree, I applied for the position upon the suggestion of one of my lecturers. Working in the writing centre opened the door to an exhilarating new world. Throughout my master's programme, I continued working as a consultant.

It was during a research project focused on the writing centre in 2018 that my use of metaphors during consultations gained attention. The research involved analysing hours of recorded consultations, revealing fascinating and unexpected data. The research focused on politeness strategies used by consultants to enhance interaction, with findings diverging from prior international research and highlighting the importance of context-specific studies.

This is where I come into the picture – a context-specific consultant. Being older, white and a 'gogo' (grandmother), I faced the challenge of establishing common ground with much younger students from different backgrounds. Rejecting the notion of a generation gap, I believed in the responsibility of the older generation to bridge divides. As a solution, I turned to the use of figures of speech, particularly metaphors¹, when conventional teaching methods fell short.

I embody Archer and Parker's (2016) notion that writing centre pedagogy fosters critical thinking through discussion and argument. While grappling with my own academic literacy, I am also trying to confront the legacy of past government educational policies. My determination to level the academic playing field remains unwavering.

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Introduction

'Language, like poetry, evolves through metaphors.'

– Johann Adam Hartung (1831 cited in Jäkel, 1997:9)

Recent research (Carstens and Rambiritch 2018) has offered valuable insights into various aspects of writing centre theory, from the nature of tutor guidance (2021) to the importance of positive

1 Encyclopaedia Britannica gives the following definition for figures of speech: 'any intentional deviation from literal statement or common usage that emphasizes, clarifies, or embellishes both written and spoken language'. Examples are, amongst others, metaphors and similes. The difference between a simile and a metaphor is that with a simile the words *like* or *as* are used to compare two things whereas a metaphor is a direct comparison. For the purposes of this research, metaphor is used overarchingly in the spirit of Quintilian (1921) who defines metaphor in part in terms of simile: '*A metaphor is a short form of simile, contracted into one word*'.

politeness in consultations (2021). Among the intriguing findings, one consultant stood out by consistently employing metaphors to elucidate complex concepts during one-on-one sessions with undergraduate clients. It was noted that, after exhausting more literal explanations, students often grasped the subject matter only when they connected abstract concepts to concrete metaphors. This discovery prompts several questions:

1. Can the use of metaphors during consultations aid in simplifying complex metalanguage and help students understand, interpret and apply unfamiliar abstract concepts?
2. Can culturally specific metaphors foster a sense of belonging, addressing potential obstacles to student success?
3. Does this avenue warrant further exploration?

Though preliminary, these questions inspire optimism. This discussion is exploratory, grounded in two transcribed video sessions.

Background

The evolution of writing centres has been well-documented. From initial perceptions as remedial facilities (Nichols 2017; Slemming 2017), they have evolved into pedagogical spaces embracing diverse teaching approaches. These include the 'study skills approach' (Jacobs 2014; Boughey 2010), 'academic socialisation approach' (Lea and Street 1998) and the 'academic literacies approach' (Lea and Street 1998). Writing centres resisted being reduced to 'fix-it shops,' (Archer and Parker 2016; Drennan 2017; Moore 1950; North 1984) combatting the notion of solely improving grammatical proficiency. Today, writing centres are recognised as transformative realms amplifying student voices, particularly crucial in a country like South Africa, grappling with post-colonial and apartheid legacies.

Language, vital to expressing one's voice, has a contentious history in South Africa. Colonialism and apartheid imposed dominant languages, undermining indigenous identities. Consequently, the nation grapples with significant socio-political and educational challenges. Anyone that dares to take up the pen in this regard (metaphorically speaking) should do so with reverence for the

past. The writing centre stands at the crossroads of these issues, representing a battleground where unequal power dynamics become starkly visible. While students from diverse backgrounds engage in the same academic arena, disparate training and resources shape their experiences. It is therefore all the more important to keep the needs of the students firmly in mind. The writing centre today, is considered a transformed space, focussing on the voice of the student. This voice needs to be heard, understood and amplified.

Who is the student walking through the writing centre's doors today?

The typical student engaging with writing centres embodies complexity.

L2 English speaker

If the constitution of mother tongue speakers of South Africa's national languages is considered, it is a student whose mother tongue is not English (see Figure 1.). In other words, borrowing a term from the discipline of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), an L2 English speaker.

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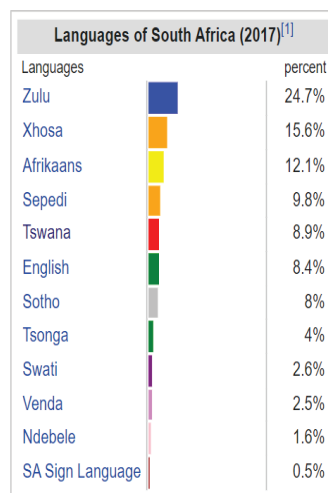


Figure 1: Mother tongue speakers of South Africa's National Languages (CIA 2023).

Apart from the South African citizenry, South Africa is also home to a large number of immigrants from all over the world, which means that a wide variety of other languages is also spoken in South Africa, not considering the many dialects and mixed languages.

Furthermore, in the South African context, of the 12 national languages of South Africa, only English and Afrikaans are developed to technical, academic and literacy levels (Krog et al. 2010: 18). If this is linked to the importance of language as an identity marker, it shows that nine people groups are still in the process of establishing their ethnic identity linguistically within the context of a multi-ethnic society. This leads to frustration on many levels. On the one hand, people are not able to communicate effectively as most of them need to communicate in a second language. The blame can easily be shifted onto South Africa's history of apartheid (Berkowitz 2013). On the other hand, as the cultures are so diverse, intercultural misunderstanding occurs even among various African cultures that one would normally mistake as being similar (Danisile 2012: 1). In the words of Ostler (2006: 9), language is 'the currency of human communities'. In South Africa, the different languages are not currencies of the same value and that must be rectified.

Indigenous Language Speaker

It can also be deduced that the student is a mother tongue speaker of an indigenous language, whose access to further education might be compromised by factors such as inadequate primary, as well as secondary schooling due to historical injustices. Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019) point out that such inadequate schooling can also lead to low productivity growth, high levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality. In turn, this has an impact on different facets of education including a compromised knowledge base, barriers to understanding of mother tongue as well as English and the lack of cognitive skills developed through school. Students, therefore, are impeded on many academic as well as emotional levels. Many students in the South African university today, therefore, find themselves in a multilingual, multicultural society which may be daunting and challenging as they have not adequately been prepared for the personal and academic demands of tertiary education.

Multilingual

Definition

De Bot (2019: 3) explains that when defining multilingualism, the difference between multilingualism at the group level and multilingualism at the individual level should be pointed out. This is an important distinction in the South African context. Due to the multilingual society at the group level, individuals are necessitated to be able to communicate in more than one language and, consequently, also be multilingual at the individual level (De Bot 2019:4). He follows the definition of multilingualism 'as the daily use of two or more languages' and asks why this is necessary. His answer is very pragmatic: 'Because one language is not enough' (De Bot 2019: 4). For De Bot, the motivation for multilingualism is always socioeconomic – being able to communicate in more than one language affords one chances to better oneself or one's children. This is demonstrated by the fact that the 'central aim of curricula developed during the colonial era was to reinforce socioeconomic relations between Africans and their colonizers, which advanced the imperial project' (Angu, Boakye and Eybers 2020: 3). Another important reason is actually as clear as daylight – in a multilingual community, being able to only speak one language excludes one from most of the daily activities, specifically education.

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In South Africa, the medium for education at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is still predominantly English. Therefore, not being able to read, write and speak in English – be English literate – is a barrier to access to education and, by extension, employment. However, by creating opportunities, to turn the words of Angu (2019), Prah (2017) and Wa Thiong'o (1986) upside down, for 'African students to also read and write in their home languages', African students' right to study in the language of their culture as their European counterparts have done for centuries, will be acknowledged. This also means that in the process, African students will be presented with the opportunity to rewrite their narrative as they will have access to previous knowledge but be empowered to look at it through their cultural lenses. The preconception that one needs to be literate in English to be considered a literate person will be exposed as the fallacy that it is.

One way of creating opportunities is to create opportunities for multilingualism in the teaching and learning process. If communication is culture and language as a communication channel is such a strong identity marker, opening up spaces for students to connect to their world views, social experiences, traditions and values through the use of their languages will contribute to the decolonisation of South African curricula, as well as South African minds. But, more than that, it

might 'humanize and empower students to question and reject any form of human oppression' (Allen 2004), as their humanity is acknowledged, and dignity is restored.

Why is multilingualism such an important concept?

Firstly, multilingualism, in essence, challenges the dominant view that society is a monolingual society, which is considered a Western worldview—a residue of the 'us' and 'them' worldview where one group was forced to speak the language of the 'conqueror' and, consequently, became the subjugated. This created a power imbalance that has been in force since the Dutch set foot on the beach at the Cape of Good Hope.

However, by accepting the reality, not only of South Africa but globally, that we live in a multilingual society, as an expression of a multicultural citizenry, the hegemony of the monolingual worldview is broken and a more inclusive society is created. De Bot (2019: 3) writes that there are '30 times more languages than countries,' so even if there are a few countries that are possibly monolingual, most are not. Therefore, the rule is more multilingualism than monolingualism, with South Africa being an example of a multilingual, multicultural country, with the rights of the 12 national languages entrenched in The Constitution.

Secondly, in most HEIs, the primary language of instruction is still English. Although this contribution recognises that this is a pedagogical issue that is receiving a lot of attention, it also holds that there is still a lot of work to be done. As explained, language is the entry into different domains, specifically education. If the student does not understand the language of instruction, the student is, in effect, denied epistemological access. The concept of epistemological access was coined by Wally Morrow (2009: 77-78) denoting the need to 'democratize access to higher education.' This presupposes certain barriers. The barriers indicated here are expressed in the term itself—epistemology—the Theory of Knowledge. It concerns what exactly is considered knowledge. Can people know things? How and when do people know things? In South Africa, this is a burning issue as the knowledge that is presented in tertiary education is still considered the Western reality of the world; expressed in the western language. The greater number of the students in HEIs are not European anymore. Therefore, the knowledge that they possess, the way in which that knowledge was created and internalised and expressed in their languages, largely do not correspond with the curricula at the HEIs. There is, in effect, a disconnect between what is being offered and to whom it is being offered.

Consequently, being multilingual can present significant challenges for students in tertiary education. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from universities to provide the necessary resources and support.

Possible obstacles faced by multilingual students

Second language English speakers in South Africa may face a variety of challenges when studying at the tertiary level:

1. Limited English proficiency, which can make it difficult to follow lectures, understand readings and express ideas clearly in writing.
2. Cultural differences: Due to South Africa's diverse cultural landscape, it might be challenging to understand and communicate with their peers and lecturers.
3. Academic expectations: The gap between academic expectations at high school and at the university level can lead to difficulty managing the workload and can lead to stress.
4. Lack of support: Second language English speakers, or multilingual students, may not receive adequate support from their universities, for instance, language assistance or tutoring services, which can negatively impact their academic progress.
5. Discrimination: Unfortunately, some students may face discrimination or prejudice based on their race, language, or nationality, which again might negatively impact their academic performance and well-being.

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Disadvantaged background

Additionally, the Centre on Well-being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity² (WISE) in

² WISE is a part of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, with whom South Africa partners in 6 bodies and projects and is a participant in 15 (oecd.org, 2018).

the United Kingdom explains in a 2022 report that growing up on the fringes of society has an impact on most all areas of children’s lives. Clarke et al. (2022), show that children from lower socio-economic circumstances are more likely to:

1. experience poor material outcomes;
2. poor health;
3. do worse in their education; and
4. report poorer social and emotional outcomes, including lower self-belief and lower life satisfaction.

Today, the above is illustrated in South Africa in that the people groups denied quality primary and secondary education by the apartheid government display the worst educational outcomes. Consequently, the literacy rate is also a reflection of this disparity in the previous education system. The disparity between the literacy levels of the different racial groups in South Africa is illustrated by Table 1. The illiteracy rate is still the lowest amongst white students although there has been a significant increase in literacy rates amongst the previous disadvantaged racial groups.

Table 1: Number and percentage of persons in the population aged 20 and above who have not complete Grade 7 and above by population group, 2009 and 2019 (StatsSA, 2019)

Population Group	2009			2019		
	Number	% Share	Illiteracy rate	Number	% Share	Illiteracy rate
Black African	5 289 177	92.0%	23.4%	4 037 328	91.3%	14.0%
Coloured	399 305	6.9%	14.3%	336 637	7.6%	10.3%
Indian	46 704	0.8%	5.3%	35 502	0.8%	3.3%
White	11 516	0.2%	0.3%	12 117	0.3%	0.3%
Total	5 746 702	100.0%	19.2%	4 421 585	100.0%	12.1%

Source: General Household Survey (GHS). Statistics South Africa

In South Africa, the school drop-out rate has stabilised at around 17 per cent (DHET 2016), with only around 4 per cent of students that enrol in Grade 1 to Grade 12 completing a four-year degree. According to the Minister of Education, Blade Nzimande, university drop-out rates are therefore extremely high with between 50 to 60 per cent of first years dropping out (Dyomfana 2022).

Apart from the reasons mentioned, the same complaints regarding the quality of education in primary and secondary schooling, cannot be tabled concerning the quality of South Africa's tertiary education (Mlachila and Moeletsi 2019). They show that according to The Times Higher Education projection for 2023, four of Africa's best universities are South African. Additionally, three of South Africa's universities feature in the top 300 of the worldwide rankings: the University of Cape Town is Africa's top university, sitting at 160th position, while Stellenbosch University and the University of the Witwatersrand are in the 251–300 bracket. On the other hand, South Africa's secondary education system scores very low on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study³ (TIMSS) scale (Reddy et al. 2019). In the 2019 survey, in which a total of 64 countries were included, South Africa ranked 62nd, only slightly ahead of the lowest ranking countries namely Pakistan and the Philippines (Reddy et al. 2019:3). The same holds true for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) PISA test. This illustrated gap between the quality of education in secondary school and university, as reflected by the international rankings, might partly explain the low completion rate in South African universities (Mlachila and Moeletsi 2019). The fact that the jump from secondary to tertiary education in South Africa is challenging for many students due to learning deficits acquired during primary and secondary school is concerning.

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First-generation university student

Another factor to be taken into consideration is the fact that about 75 per cent of first-year students are the first in their family to enrol for a qualification at a tertiary institution, according to Strydom

3 Definition quoted from TIMSS SA Newsletter: 'The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is an assessment of the mathematics and science knowledge of fourth and eighth grade learners around the world. TIMSS is conducted every four years. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) designed TIMSS to allow participating nations to monitor their educational achievements and how these change over time, as well as to compare educational achievement across borders in the key subjects of mathematics and science. In addition to achievement data, TIMSS collects contextual information about the home, school and classroom to explain learner achievement' (Reddy et al 2019).

(2022) from the University of the Free State. 'First in family' (FiF) refers specifically to students whose parents who do not hold university degrees. He adds that

'Although these students come to university with an inspiring motivation to succeed, higher-education research shows that these students are at risk because of a lack of role models in their immediate family.' Consequently, FiF-students might not receive sufficient support to navigate their new reality. Tinto (1975/2012) names support as one of the four components vital for student success. Inadequate support might contribute to the high drop-out level for first year students which is currently as high as 17 per cent (Fourie 2020). Additionally, FiF-students do not only have high expectations of themselves but also carry the hopes of a better future, for their family.

Financial constraints

The Department of Higher Education's student numbers for 2019 indicate that there were approximately 1,2 million students enrolled in public HEIs and 200 000 in private HEIs (DHET 2021). Considering that the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has confirmed funding for 691,432 students for the 2022 academic year, it is clear that more than 50 per cent of the 1, 093, 353 students that have enrolled at public universities (including Unisa) are not able to fund their own studies. The effect of the constant stress due to financial challenges may have a negative influence on their academic performance, apart from the fact that it also impacts on their mental and physical health.

Not taking into account the direct stress related to not being able to pay for their education, studies have also shown that food insecurity, which differs from hunger⁴, is also increasing in HEIs (Sabi et al. 2015; Van den Bergh and Raubenheimer 2015; Rudolp et al. 2018). Due to more students gaining entry into HEIs because of the NSFAS funding, which targets working class and poor families, more students are also at risk of not having the financial means to have access to nutritional meals.

Sorhaindo and Feinstein (2006: 6) reported that nutrition influences cognition, behaviour and physical development. Picket et al. (2015: 529) add that 'students who are often hungry exhibit psychosomatic symptoms, including depression, dizziness, headaches and irritability'.

4 Hunger is defined by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) (FAO 2023) as an 'uncomfortable or painful sensation caused by insufficient food energy consumption', whereas food insecurity is not a physical feeling but rather a term that describes 'insufficient access to food that is nutritious, safe and meeting special dietary requirements'. In effect, the risk of hunger is heightened by food insecurity.

Struggling to belong

The reasons for student dropouts are many and varied ranging from academic difficulties, adjustment problems and uncertain goals to poor fit for the institution (Burke 2016; Tinto 2001; Williams 2016). Various in-depth studies have revealed that there are certain issues that universities can help with, like finances, but that overall, student retention is a more nuanced socio-cultural conversation (Quinn 2004; Walker, Matthew and Black 2004). Fourie (2020: 3) shows that ‘the interaction between individuals, institutions and the wider society also plays an important role in the drop-out phenomenon’. He specifically highlights the crucial role of ‘identity and identity-related constructs’ in students’ academic perseverance and points out the importance of students’ sense of belonging to the institution. Recognising this, South African universities should focus on fostering a sense of belonging to mitigate drop-out rates.

Post-#FeesMustFall era

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The students entering through the writing centre’s doors today entered academia after the #feesmustfall movement, reflecting changing educational dynamics. During these 2015 protests, demands were made for accessible higher education through free decolonised education for Black people; also, that the languages used in higher education should reflect the multilingual citizenry (Nkoala 2020: 1).

An answer to the question posed in Point 3: Who is the student walking through the doors of the writing centre?

This student is most likely an L2 English speaker, whose mother tongue is an indigenous language, from a previously disadvantaged background, who is a first in family student, possibly struggling with inadequate finances and finding it difficult to belong. They are also a student entering the academic arena after the #feesmustfall protests in 2015.

Possible problem statement

In a diverse and multilingual South African higher education landscape, students navigate a complex terrain laden with linguistic, cultural and socio-economic challenges. Understanding their experiences and addressing their needs is essential to enhancing student success and achieving more equitable educational outcomes. This exploration underscores the significance of employing metaphors as a pedagogical tool to bridge the multilingual divide, fostering understanding, inclusivity and a sense of belonging among students in South African writing centres.

Recognising the fundamental importance of effective communication, particularly in an academic context, it is acknowledged that students entering through the writing centres doors must engage in consultations conducted in English. However, we are acutely aware of the linguistic gap this requirement may create. This gap, if unaddressed, could lead to potential social alienation and hinder academic success, highlighting a need for bridging this linguistic and cultural divide. This realisation acts as a prompt to explore innovative strategies to make our writing centre approach more inclusive and representative of the multicultural and multilingual diversity of our student body.

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Purpose statement

The focal point of the proposed research lies in determining whether the utilisation of metaphors, especially culturally specific ones, during consultation sessions between consultants and students can serve as a tool for dismantling the barriers of academic metalanguage. The intention is twofold: first, to enhance comprehension and overall engagement among students; second, to foster a sense of belonging and reinforce individual identities within the academic community.

This research endeavour aims to establish the viability and effectiveness of incorporating metaphors into the writing centre framework. The anticipated outcomes of integrating metaphors are compelling:

1. Metaphors can serve as a bridge between a student's native language and the language of academic writing, facilitating smoother communication.

2. Consultants can employ metaphors to facilitate the connection between students' cultural experiences and the target language, thereby aiding them in expressing their ideas in writing more effectively.
3. Utilising metaphors can lead to a more nuanced grasp of the target language, enhancing multilingual students' understanding.
4. Exploring the subtleties and connotations of various metaphors can deepen students' comprehension of the language itself.
5. The use of metaphors in writing centres resonates with the African oral tradition, where metaphors are integral to conveying intricate concepts and cultural values.
6. In cases where students and consultants have diverse cultural backgrounds, strategically incorporating culturally specific metaphors can serve as an effective tutoring strategy.

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It is crucial to emphasise that consultants must exercise sensitivity in selecting metaphors, mindful of potential offense. Research indicates that making genuine efforts to understand and embrace a different culture is typically viewed positively, even fostering reciprocal understanding. Additionally, the process of comprehending a cultural metaphor can facilitate engagement and participation from both parties, further enriching the consultation experience.

The overarching objective of this research is to advocate for an increased use of metaphors in the South African context and to propose practical techniques for harnessing metaphors to impart academic literacy skills.

This will be achieved through a theoretical discussion of:

1. the importance of language as an identity marker;
2. what is meant by metaphors;
3. how metaphors are representative of culture;

4. multilingualism in a South African context; and
5. how the focused use of metaphors during consultations can facilitate meaning making by the student.

Considering the realities of demographics and budget constraints, expecting writing centres to offer consultations in every national language remains unrealistic currently. To address this challenge, our research suggests the development of context-specific metaphors tailored to multilingual educational spaces. By doing so, we endeavour to facilitate cross-cultural understanding and empower students to engage with previously elusive concepts.

The writing centre

The writing centre's multifaceted role

Pamela Nichols (2017) anchors her exploration of writing centres in South Africa within the context of a concrete incident – a brick shattering a window at the Wits Writing Centre. This event underscores the tangible connection between theory and application, a juncture at which academia meets real-world dynamics. Rambiritch (2018: 47) reiterated that social justice issues, as was playing off in front of our eyes, do not need to be

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abstract concepts or discussion tools for the experts who must make policy decisions, but, equally important, must/can be applied in practice in the academic literacy classroom/writing centre, so that those of us “on the ground” should be able to practically apply these principles to our teaching and the support we render in higher education.

She adds that ‘within the act of dialogue between writing centre consultant and student, there was evidence of the social justice principles of problem solving, critical thinking, student empowerment, social responsibility, student-centred focus, holistic education and an analysis of power’ (Rambiritch 2018:51). The writing centre, in its role as a nexus of dialogue between consultants and students,

holds a unique position to bridge cultural divides. By engaging with students' aspirations, anxieties and ambitions, the writing centre transcends conventional boundaries and becomes a vehicle for cultural exchange.

The significance of identity

The concept of identity, as expounded by developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1968), encompasses the continuity of the self across time and space. Baumeister (1986: 405–416) and Rouse (1995: 380–385), on the other hand, emphasise uniqueness as a defining attribute. Erikson's psychosocial stages of development provide a foundation for understanding identity's evolution, acknowledging both individual and societal influences. His term 'psychosocial identity' encompassed the different identities of an individual – as a person on his own and as part of various social groups (1968).

Tajfel's insights underscore the influence of social groups on identity formation. Tajfel puts forward that membership of different social groups is internalised as part of the self-concept and as such forms an integral part of the identity of an individual (1981). Tajfel explains that the 'us' and 'them' mentality was created by a normal cognitive process of mankind, namely the tendency to group things together. In this process, the differences and the similarities between groups are emphasised. The same is done with people – the differences and similarities between the group an individual belongs to and other groups are highlighted. The result is social categorisation which may lead to prejudiced attitudes between members of different groups. Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that there are three mental processes involved in evaluating others as 'us' or 'them'. These take place in a particular order: social categorisation, social identification and social comparison.

With specific reference to national and regional origins, Ramutsindela (1997: 99) views a nation as a 'modern form of collective identity'. Furthermore, Cockburn (1998), when discussing national identities, classified under Thornborrow's (2004) master identity, emphasises that identity in a national arena is crucial as it works to 'ensure compliance and hold existing lines of power in place'. Regarding the building process of identities, as Thornborrow (2004) terms it, Castells (1997:6-16) describes three forms of identity that embody the 'dichotomy between the self and the power of the search for meaning within society'. These definitions are applicable to understanding the current social structure of South Africa. Firstly, 'legitimising' identities are ascribed and upheld by the central establishments in society. In South Africa, it was historically the identity conferred on

members of society by apartheid. 'Resistance' identities are the second type of identity, generated in opposition to the 'legitimising' identity. In South Africa an example would be the 'construction of *Black* as a political and not only a racialised identity in the South African struggle for liberation' (Walker and Unterhalter 2004: 288). The identity that is specifically relevant to this study is the third type of identity defined by Castells, namely the 'project' identity. This constitutes the negotiating of new identities that seek to reconceptualise 'subjectivities and by doing so seek transformation of the overall social structure, for example, anti-racist identities' (Walker and Unterhalter 2004: 288).

The debate regarding identity is also a burning issue in postcolonial studies and again, relevant to this research. Postcolonial studies include the discussion of the impact of colonisation on the colonised and also gives insight into the forging of a new identity emerging after liberation. Students today find themselves in the sociopolitical arena of rewriting their identities, with reference to the definition of the term identity suggested, by Bornman (2003: 24) who regards it as a social construction through which people acquire meaning and a sense of belonging. Due to South Africa's history of social injustices, many students, on all the sides of the racial divide, find themselves in a totally different situation as their parents and grandparents. They must find a way to traverse their new social reality.

Language as a cultural identity marker

The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe. Hence language has always been at the heart of the two contending social forces [indigenous and imperialist] in the Africa of the twentieth century (Wa Thiong'o 1981: 4)

Wa Thiong'o (1981: 4) above, explains the importance of language for a people group's definition of themselves. In other words, he considers language as an important marker of identity. Identity markers are unique characteristics that distinguish one person or a group of persons from another. In the context of this research, it refers specifically to markers of an individual's social identity, which is, according to Tajfel (1979) a person's expression of who they are based on the social groups which they feel they belong to.

The term 'language', according to Fishman (1999: 25), includes 'varieties' of socially linked

human codes, as well as the different attitudes, behaviours, functions and usage conventions that typify each of them. He adds that all varieties are capable of being ideologically or politically laden (Fishman 1999: 25). It can be deduced; therefore, that language is a very important identity marker.

To further understand why this is so, it is necessary to understand the distinction that De Saussure makes in separating language from speaking and in doing that he separates what is social from what is individual (1959). He theorises that language is not a function of the speaker but 'a product that is passively assimilated by the individual' (1959: 14). Speaking, on the other hand, is a decision that the individual makes himself. Language, therefore, is the 'social side of speech', which 'exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by members of a community' (1959:14).

Nelson Mandela's assertion underscores the emotional resonance of language. He said that 'if you talk to a man in a language that he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart' (Mandela 2011). As 'the social side of speech', language is, therefore, again, considered a very important identity marker. According to Dieckhoff (2004), a common language may be the primary expression of the inimitable features of a social group. Here it is argued that 'language can be a robust marker of social identity, capable of binding and dividing groups and that its salience may displace other (for example, ethnic or religious) identities (Jaspal and Coyle 2009).

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Furthermore, more than half of the citizens interviewed for the South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey in 2017, expressed their willingness to more interaction between races in private as well as public spaces (Potgieter 2017). But, also according to the SA Reconciliation Barometer, the barriers to greater integration are identified as language and confidence (Potgieter 2017: 8). Language, even more than race, is therefore considered the primary identity marker in South Africa. See Table 3, Primary identity, from the SA Reconciliation Barometer 2017 (Potgieter 2017: 15). The report consequently recommends more active promotion of multilingualism as it is suggested that fostering multilingualism can actively contribute to breaking down barriers and nurturing a more integrated society (Potgieter 2017: 8).

Table 2: Primary Identity

Primary identity			
	Primary	Secondary	Combined
Language	30.0	16.4	46.4
Race	23.4	28.0	51.4
Economic class	14.0	13.1	27.1
South African	11.1	7.7	18.8
Religion	7.1	13.1	20.2
None	4.5	7.7	12.1
Don't know/Refused	7.3	3.4	10.7
Political party	2.5	10.5	13.0
Other	0.1	0.1	0.1

Source: Adapted from Potgieter (2017: 15)

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More about metaphors

The theoretical grounding

The main theoretical framework within which this research is situated is Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). The primary principle of CMT is that metaphors are an expression of thinking and, although expressed through language, it is not primarily an expression of language (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:3).

The foundation for their theory is that

the concepts that govern our thoughts are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world and how we relate to other people (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:3).

They add that one's conceptual system is not something that one is normally aware of. Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster n.d.) gives the following definition for a concept:

(noun)

1. something conceived in the mind: thought or notion;
2. an abstract or generic idea generalised from particular instances.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3) show that humans usually act according to how they conceptualise their world. And one way to understand how they do that is to look at how it is expressed by their language. They found, primarily based on linguistic evidence, that for the largest part human being's conceptual system is metaphorical in nature (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 4). Their research led them to identify the overarching metaphors that give structure to how humans perceive the world around them, how they think and how they act.

Arguably one of their most famous conceptual metaphors is:

- Argument is war.
- Mainly, an argument is won or lost.

They then show that, in a culture where argument is not perceived as war, but as a dance, people would think differently about arguments and therefore, argue differently. And, this is the essence of their theory: Understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5).

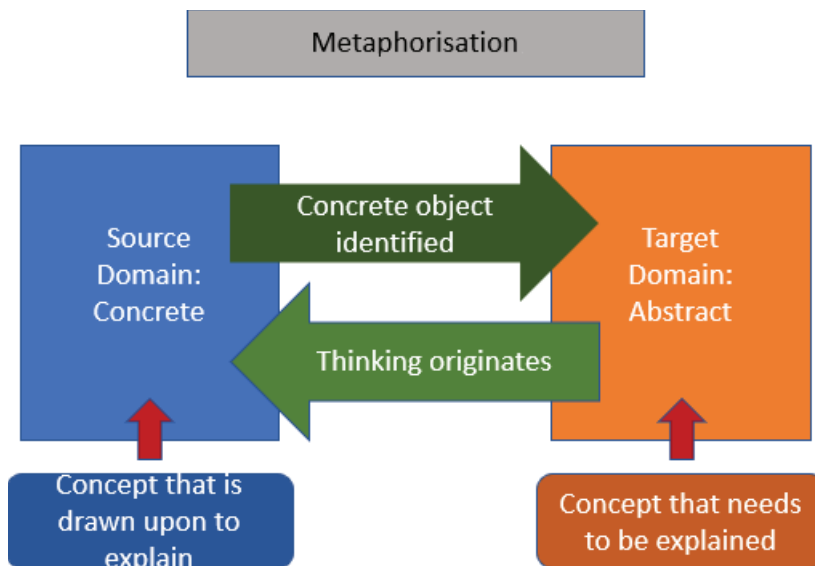
Lakoff and Turner (1989) summarise the five tenets of CMT as follows:

1. Metaphors structure thinking;
2. Metaphors structure knowledge;
3. Metaphor is central to abstract language;
4. Metaphor is grounded in physical experience; and
5. Metaphor is ideological.

How metaphors function

Since the introduction of the conceptual metaphor in 1980 by Lakoff and Johnson, the field of metaphor studies has gained significant traction. One of the pivotal aspects of this theory is understanding the mechanics of a metaphor. A conceptual metaphor involves grasping one idea or concept by relating it to another idea or concept. In essence, this entails making an abstract concept more tangible by associating it with a concrete, physical object or situation, as illustrated below. This process is often described as mapping, where meaning is transferred from one domain to another.

Figure 2: Metaphorisation

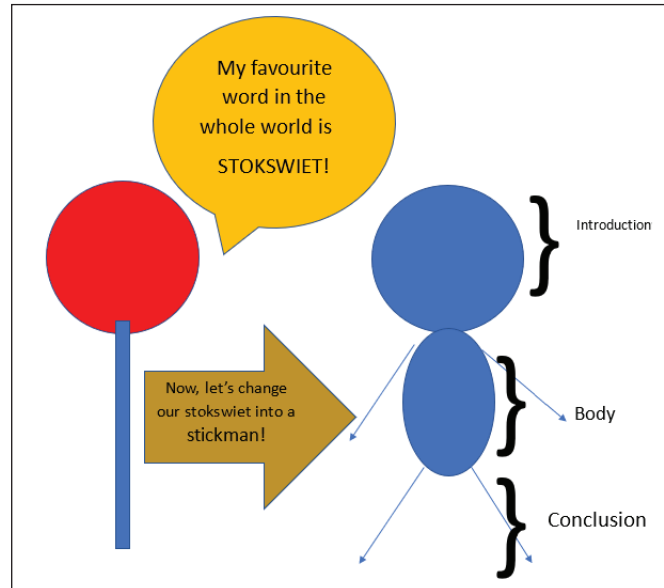


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To illustrate this process within the context of the consultation transcript, the concept is applied to one of the metaphors used in the transcribed consultation, namely the metaphor of the 'stokswiet':

Figure 3: A stokswiet as metaphor for the basic structure of an academic text

The mapping can be explained as follows:



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Table 3: Mapping of the stokswiet metaphor

Source domain	Rationale	Target domain
The stokswiet -	Coming from the farm, I knew that <i>istokswiet</i> is the Zulu word for a lollypop. Actually, known in all indigenous languages.	Basic structure of an academic text
Transformed into a stickman		
Head		Introduction
Mouth		
Body		Body
Legs		Conclusion

Utilising the 'stokswiet' metaphor, along with the analogy of a sosatie-stick, explained below, generated smiles, visibly relaxed the student and encouraged active participation in the conversation.

Figure 4: The importance of identifying the main idea in paragraphs

A paragraph is a grouping of sentences around a single idea or topic sentence. (The sosatie-stick!)

Supporting sentences or ideas then expand on or develop the topic sentence by:

1. Defining
 2. Explaining
- Giving examples or evidence



Metaphors identified in the relevant consultation

It needs to be explained here that during this consultation:

1. the metaphors were drawn on an A3 laminated paper and explanations written;
2. the student was given a set of highlighters to identify the elements of the text when asked to do so.

Table 4: Metaphors identified in the relevant consultation

Line	Example	Type
41	So it seems to me like you need a marketing company	
92 -136	Introduction explained in terms of a <i>stokswiet</i> transformed into a stickman: Mouth – Introduction Eyes – Hook Not crazy eyes like in the Walking Dead that scares the reader away Love dovey eyes So that the reader wants to look into the eyes.	
208	Background compared to laying the table: There’s a <u>plate</u> , but there’s no food. There’s a knife and fork, everything is there, but the food is to follow. After this explanation, when asked to highlight the background, the student indicates that from own observation, there is minimal background to highlight.	
228	Explaining why the thesis statement is given in the introduction already: An essay is like a TV series, but there’s one difference. We tell them who the murderer is right at the beginning	
232	The introduction is compared to a seed. Everything needed to write a good essay is already in the introduction. It then blossoms and grows into the body and in the conclusion, it is harvested. [What was drawn was a mealie seed]	

Line	Example	Type
240	Reference to a Disney movie titled Brave. Then, the bravery transferred to the stick man – which the student immediately understands and responds with ‘Oh <i>ja</i> , because you want to tell them’.	
254	Refer the student to a <i>Shisa Nyama</i> and telling them that they are eating a sosatie or a kebab and saying that the stick inside the kebab is the thesis statement. Upon which the student immediately replies that it is because the stick holds everything together.	
266– 269	The repetition of ingredients is like the paragraphs.	
274– 277	And, a pink marshmallow does not go with peppers and meat. Inferring that irrelevant information does not fit. The student then finishes the tutor’s sentence:	
	<i>Tutor: So if you keep in mind your thesis statement, your kebab stick, then you will not be tempted to –</i>	
	<i>Student: To put irrelevant information. (nods)</i>	
310-315	The student is asked whether the student now understood the introduction as a unit? And can see that it is a launch pad? To which the student replies affirmative.	
381-	When explaining cohesiveness with regard to the linking of the arguments, reference is made to a number of movies where the characters wore medieval gear, like ring chain gear. It was then explained that there should be no gaps in logic through which any arguments can pierce the author’s argument, with specific reference to linking devices.	

Line	Example	Type
425	At the beginning of the consultation, the student indicated that the student wanted to juice up their essay. Here the consultant likens the linking devices to Super Juice.	
463	In explaining the conclusion, the consultant draws but also explains that academic writing is like a snake that eats its own tail – one has to end where one started. The introduction needs to look at the tail.	
68/474	The student picks up on the metaphor of an argumentative essay as a fight and compares the conclusion to the final knock-out punch.	
521	Explaining that grammar mistakes in a text are like a giant jumping in front of one as one is only strolling peacefully through the forest.	
629	The student confessed to having a negative attitude towards the academic literacy module upon which the consultant points out that the module is like an antidote!	

The following excerpt from the consultation further demonstrates the positive impact of metaphors on understanding as well as dynamics between the consultant and the student:

Tutor: Of the fence. Okay. So. Then, furthermore, now this is the important part. Okay. Because it will immediately help you (.) with your introduction. With any (.) I actually (.) want to say (.) with any piece of communication, you have an outer structure and you have an inner structure. (writes) So. Let's first have a look at the outer structure. Okay. Now. My favourite word in the whole world (.) is.

Student: (laughter)

Tutor: Do you know what?

Student: No: (laughter)

Tutor: What's your favourite word?

Student: I don't have one.

Tutor: You don't have a favourite word! No, you must have a favourite word! My favourite word is – What is your home language?

Student: Shona.

Tutor: Shona? Okay.

Student: But (.) I can speak several.

Tutor: *Ja*. I am jealous of that. That is amazing.

Student: (laughter)

Tutor: So my favourite word is the Zulu and the Xhosa and the Tswana word for a lollipop. Do you know what it is? (4s) i-stok-sweet!

Student: (laughter)

Tutor: (laughter) Why?

Student: I was thinking of like (.) a deeper one. (laughter)

Tutor: (laughter) No. i-stok-sweet. Because it's English, Afrikaans and all the Nguni languages –

Student: Oh, *ja*.

Tutor: = And actually all the people in South Africa –
Student: Just use stok-sweet
Tutor: Just we, use stok-sweet. Okay. So. If you um immediately when you start writing, whether it's an exam, an assignment, draw yourself a little stok-sweet there in the corner and you <u>cannot</u> go wrong. Okay.
Student: <i>Ja</i> .
Tutor: Now I always make my little stok-sweet a stok <i>manneljie</i> like <u>that</u> (draws) and <u>why</u> ? <u>This</u> is now my outer structure. So the head, when you stuck your head around the corner there and you said hi, I'm Beaula. So. The head is a symbol of your (.) introduction because your <u>mouth</u> is there.
Student: Hm. (nods) <i>Ja</i> .
Tutor: And you introduce yourself with your mouth. Okay. So. Your <u>introduction</u> needs (.) um (.) to be (takes out pens) made up of four, we are like feeling like a kid again you know like Kentucky fried what is that? (makes ice cream licking gesture)
Student: (laughter)
Tutor: That ice cream ad? So. Introduction. So the <u>first</u> part of your essay, your paragraph, our oral presentation, is your? Introduction.
Student: Introduction.
Tutor: (draws) Okay. So the mouth has to open.
Student: <i>Ja</i> .
Tutor: Introduction. Now the introduction (.) on, in it's turn (.) is composed of four (.) segments. The very <u>first</u> segment (.) is called (.) a hook. Do you know about hook?
Student: Oh, to grab it, (makes hand gesture indicating pulling) to grab the attention.
Tutor: Yes. To catch that fish! So. You remember the <u>hook</u> by – do you ever watch those (.) those movies um like The Walking Dead, um, zombies,

Student: <i>Ja, ja.</i>
Tutor: Where they have those crazy eyes, you know?
Student: <i>Ja.</i> (nods, laughter)
Tutor: So if you see one of those people at night, you want to run away.
Student: <i>Ja.</i> (laughter)
Tutor: Okay. Now we don't want crazy eyes for your essay.
Student: No.
Tutor: We want those lovey dovey eyes, you know, those little hearty eyes when you tell your mother (.) or your grandmother, I have now, I have, I <u>have</u> gained acceptance!
Student: (laughter)
Tutor: Yes, I'm going to be a doctor! So you need those lovey dovey eyes. And those lovey dovey eyes is your?
Student: Hook.
Tutor: Hook. (nods) Like you said, they want to look deeper into those eyes, they don't want to run away. Now that is something relevant (clears throat) still relevant to your topic, you can't say um Beyoncé um has a new baby, you know.
Student: (laughter)
Tutor: So what does that have to do, oh maybe because they're dieting, yes. (laughter)
Student: With food, <i>ja.</i> (laughter)

If we now consider the possible outcomes mentioned earlier, we can see that the use of the cultural specific metaphors, as well as more commonly known metaphors, did transcend the language barrier but also the possible power imbalance between an older, white, female consultant and a much younger, African student. It is also clear from the above that the student understood the abstract academic concepts that were unfamiliar at the beginning. Linking these new, abstract concepts to something enjoyable in their lives, made them reconsider their apprehension of being able to apply the new knowledge.

Metaphors as representation of culture

Concerning metaphors and cultural coherence, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 22) argue that ‘the most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture. Considering that a conservative estimate of the percentage of our basic values stemming from culture falls between 25 per cent and 50 per cent (Hofstede 2001), studying a specific culture’s metaphors provides insight into their thoughts. Gannon (2011: 2) defines a cultural metaphor as ‘some unique or distinctive institution, phenomenon, or activity expressive of a nation’s values’.

Metaphors in education

Acknowledging that metaphors ground abstract concepts in concrete descriptions, the pedagogical value of metaphors, extensively explored in various fields of study, warrants revisiting in the modern writing centre setting. Sticht (1993: 485) proposed that ‘just as the repeated use of a hammer may strengthen the arm, so the repeated use of metaphors may strengthen the power of analysis and synthesis.’ Furthermore, it has been suggested that ‘the act of stretching the resources of language involved in metaphor is a way of forging a stronger bond between speaker and hearer’ (Charteris-Black 2004), also bridging the gap between instructor and learner. Additionally, research has established that metaphors effectively convey ‘complex meaning’ (Carter and Pitcher 2010: 579).

Hewet and Thonus (2019), in their report on the use of conceptual metaphors in writing consultants’ online feedback on first-year students’ essay drafts, found that students were more inclined to understand the metaphorical feedback. They explained that ‘we speculate that metaphorical feedback, particularly in online settings, activates embodied cognition through semantic integrity, enabling students to make the cognitive leap between instructional feedback and to revise a deeper meaning-focused levels’ (Hewit and Thonus 2018: 1).

Conclusion

This study is clearly exploratory, and I am eagerly anticipating whether the anticipated benefits of using metaphors will be substantiated:

- To acknowledge that we do not live in a monolingual society and thereby recognise the identity

- and dignity of each student who enters our doors.
- To unlock new knowledge and facilitate personal meaning-making;
 - To empower writing centre consultants by sensitising them to the importance of acknowledging their clients' existing literacies and equipping them with skills to unlock existing knowledge using culturally specific metaphors;
 - To encourage diverse tutors to apply their creativity in developing their own metaphors.

In essence, the proposed research will strive to leverage the power of metaphors to surmount linguistic and cultural barriers within the writing centre. By doing so, the aim is to facilitate not only better comprehension of academic discourse but also a stronger sense of belonging and shared identity among South Africa's diverse student population.

Aristotle aptly stated, 'To learn easily is naturally pleasant to all people, and words signify something, so whatever words create knowledge in us are the pleasantest.' The application of metaphors in our writing centre endeavours aligns with this sentiment, fostering an enriched and inclusive learning environment that empowers students to embrace their academic journey with confidence and cultural resonance.

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Chapter Four

Writing Centre Apologetics: A Case for Writing Centre Efficacy Studies in South African Higher Education¹

Zander Janse van Rensburg, NWU Writing Centre

Introduction

Since 1994, South Africa's higher education system has expanded and opened to students from all walks of life, providing previously disadvantaged citizens with greater access to higher education (Msiza et al. 2020). Through massification and internationalisation, institutions can offer promising prospects for students looking to improve their lives by transcending their circumstances through higher education. On the other hand, massification and internationalisation pose serious difficulties in areas of the higher education sector such as (1) institutional management and governance, (2) funding, (3) quality and relevance, (4) democratisation and capital formation and (5) infrastructure (Kipchumba 2019: 138). I shall focus on the role that support services, like writing centres, play in meeting the difficulties posed by massification and internationalisation with specific reference to quality and relevance. Writing centres, after all, are concerned with the quality and relevance of the abilities students require to advance in their academic careers and beyond.

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¹ The term 'apologetics' gained popularity in the Christian Theological tradition, where it can be defined simply as the act of defending one's faith. The term derives from the Greek term *apologia* ('a defendant's reply to accusations of the persecution'), which is traditionally used in the legal context, but traces and catalysts for this action can be found in various biblical passages, including Acts 22: 1, Acts 25: 16, 1 Corinthians 9: 3, 2 Corinthians 7: 11, Philippians 1: 7, Philippians 1: 16, 2 Timothy 4: 16, and most notably 1 Peter 3: 15, which states that believers 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have' (Beilby 2011: 11). As a result of the desire to defend one's faith on rational grounds, the discipline of Christian Apologetics arose. Inevitably, modern sciences began to pose difficult questions to Christian Theology considering scientific discoveries that may rule out the existence of God. As a result, Christian Apologists were forced to defend their faith on rational grounds, frequently using data from modern science. As a result, the use of this term in conjunction with the concept of writing centres is not a call to defend writing centre practice in a religious sense, but we, too, believe that our services produce results, but we, too, require 'hard science' to justify its role in higher education.

Writing centres serve the purpose of improving student academic writing. Thus, by implication, their developing of student writing abilities proves their importance in addressing the need to develop this elusive (tacit) skill. Given the importance of academic writing, there seems to be a prevailing underestimation of its value and strenuous teaching and learning implications, especially regarding the unconventional role that writing centres play. To this end, Whitehead (2002: 499) argues that within '[the] higher education settings, acquiring the skill of an academic writing style is seen to be paramount of importance as well as a prerequisite for student progression'. The importance of successfully teaching academic writing is further emphasised by the fact that 'writing can ... play a gate-keeping role in higher education' (Arbee and Samuel 2015: 49) because it is one of the primary means of evaluating competence. In addition, as Elton (2010) points out, the teaching of academic writing is seldomly combined (or properly integrated) in its generic or disciplinary form, mainly because of the tacit nature of academic writing knowledge.²

102 Considering the importance of academic writing as a primary method of communicating knowledge and the challenges of teaching this tacit knowledge, writing centres offer a relevant service to address systematic shortcomings. Thus, in following Lea and Street's 'academic literacies' approach, Archer (2010: 507) argues that: 'Writing Centres are involved with the emancipatory dimension of knowledge, such as constructing arguments and thinking through ideas. They are also involved with the technical dimensions of knowledge, such as the mechanics of writing. Thus, they are in a unique position to empower students within the system'. Therefore, given its importance and despite its lack of proper integration, the writing centre has the potential to fill this prevailing gap through focused intervention.

From my perspective, writing centres act as scholarly interpreters, essentially assisting students to understand better the tacit knowledge of academic writing and how to present their knowledge in their own voice. Writing centres have the potential and are often the nexus between generic and disciplinary academic writing development. For this reason, students visit the writing centre when

2 In his paper titled, 'Academic Writing and Tacit Knowledge', Elton (2010) argues for the use of an interdisciplinary approach (that is, close collaboration between academic writing and disciplinary specialists) when instructing students in academic writing and skills adjacent to it. It is possible that interdisciplinarity will make it easier for students to make the transition from their personal writing to academic writing. The reason for this is because the conventions and norms of academic writing are not often explicit to disciplinary specialists themselves. Instead, field experts acquire these abilities implicitly through observation and experimentation. Because of this, there is a disruption in the progression of transferring academic writing skills. As a result, writing centres have an important role to play in the process. This is since the low stakes/safe environment provides opportunities for students to receive guidance on academic writing principles, which has the potential to supplant the shortage of academic writing development in disciplinary fields.

they need guidance in understanding how to relate the demands of presenting their knowledge in an academically appropriate way whilst staying true to their academic voice – and adhering to international academic standards.

Given the importance of our work, we should be able to reflect on and interrogate our practices to report and replicate successes. Hence, Archer (2010: 508) argues that because of this positionality, we must continually reflect on our practices and share our experiences with our community. Wenger (as cited by Archer 2010: 508) posits ‘that if a community of practice lacks the ability to reflect, it becomes ‘hostage to its own history’ – that is, continually being undervalued. The close-knit writing centre community of South Africa has a long-standing tradition of sharing best practices at conferences, colloquia and producing high-quality research because the community believes that the support writing centres provide are applicable, meaningful and crucial to student success. Thus, the South African writing centre community must also strengthen their focus on empirical studies since, absent such research, claims of our practices and successes would continue to be unsubstantiated.

Writing centres are generally misunderstood and undervalued, perhaps because our research is not always formulated in such a way to show our progress and successes to the broader academic community. As North (1984: 433) observed in *The Idea of a Writing Center*, practitioners have long expressed frustration that colleagues and university administrators often misunderstand the objectives of writing centres. (Sefalane-Nkohla and Mtojeni 2019). The challenges facing writing centres are twofold: first, the perception among colleagues that they are primarily ‘fix-it-up shops’ or proofreading services and second, insufficient support from university management structures (Schell-Barber 2020: 108; Richards et al. 2019; Perdue and Driscoll 2017; Archer and Richards 2011: 13). Perhaps, academics do not fully understand the vital role of academic writing and the laborious enterprise of academic writing development. By receiving inadequate support, writing centre practitioners face the challenge of building writing centres that could have a widespread impact on their institutions and society.

Writing centres could, for instance, reconsider their methods of ‘convincing’ their institutions as to why their resources should be trusted to writing centres. In discussing the marginalisation of writing centres, Simpson et al. (1994: 78) refer to the ‘competition of resources’. They contend that the non-credit-bearing status of writing centres is a key factor in the lack of resources available to writing centres. Since non-credit-bearing entities at institutions, such as writing centre support services, do not directly contribute to revenue generation, they are not prioritised. Simpson et al. (1994), therefore, suggest that we (writing centre practitioners) state the case of retention, whereby

improving retention rates (compounding over time with continual optimisation) translates to the institutional ability to improve throughput. In supporting the notion of retention, Bell and Frost (2012: 19) and Lerner (1997, 2001) argue that administrators should 'investigate the presence of the writing centre as a factor of retention'. The case for retention may attract the attention of university management structures because state-funded higher education institutions in South Africa rely on student throughput rates to retain as much of their government funding as possible (Styger et al. 2015). Therefore, throughput and retention rates could be addressed by focusing on the shortcomings of academic writing development in curricula (Coyle 2010: 195) and embedding writing centre interventions in high-risk writing-intensive courses.

However, the 'competition for resources' concept contradicts the ethos of writing centre scholarship, which centers around fostering sustainable development. Considering this, there are at least three factors worth considering: (1) some argue that universities of the Global South have continued neoliberal tendencies (Cini 2019);³ (2) which is driven by capitalist ideals with the tendency to 'commodify' (Hölscher 2018), that is, turning students into clients or marketable goods; and (3) the writing centre exists to develop better writers, not only better writing (North 1984). Therefore, even though the argument for retention and throughput may run the most probable course for resources, we run the risk of driving neoliberal capitalist ideals. In other words, writing centres could quite easily become part of the production line without the lasting effects we wish to cultivate, such as developing writers as individuals. Archer and Richards (2011) argue that 'the work of writing centres cannot be understood only in terms of contribution to throughput', but other indispensable intangible skills must be considered. Notwithstanding, if writing centre practitioners could produce sound evidence of the efficacy of their work (both positive and negative results) and how this could increase retention and throughput, then institutional management could be in a better position to support and establish writing centres as strategic interventions.

With the growing concern about language skills and the marginalisation of writing centre practice, we are not only obligated to review the support we provide to a highly diversified and growing student population but also to review our strategies on how to reach a wider audience with the necessary resources aligned with our central focus. I argue that a starting point is to investigate the possibility of developing an efficacy assessment protocol for writing centres in the South African

3 Neo-liberalism is still a movement that we do not fully understand, however a common trend is to homogenise the student and staff population largely due to the capitalisation by means of massification (Cannella and Koro-Ljungberg, 2017). Large student population rarely allows for personalised interventions and accommodating difference.

Higher Education sector. An efficacy assessment protocol could provide evidence of the efficacy of writing centres whilst upholding the ideals of writing centre practice, that is, producing better writers, but on a larger scale.

This chapter, therefore, intends to highlight the importance of all levels of inquiry in writing centre scholarship. It, too, strives to emphasise the importance of efficacy assessments in South Africa and how they can complement the already stellar scholarship and support we provide. I will initiate this exploration by taking a closer look at what writing centre efficacy assessment means, locating its position in writing centre scholarships and referring to a sample of studies that have attempted to achieve this. After that, we will explore the justification for the need for efficacy assessments and why efficacy assessments are in the minority.

In search of writing centre efficacy assessment studies

A proposed framework for categorising writing centre research

It is essential to define what writing centre efficacy means to come closer to conducting studies on the efficacy of writing centres. Babcock and Thonus, in their book *Researching the Writing Center: Towards an Evidence-Based Practice* (2018: 4), make a compelling case for evidence-based practice. More importantly, they argue for a practical distinction between writing centre research and writing centre assessment. According to their definition of research, which is 'a diligent and systematic inquiry or investigation into a subject to discover or revise facts, theories, application, by inference, 'research, then, does not necessarily involve evaluation or judgement. Nor does it seek immediate application to a local context; rather, it opens inquiry beyond the local context (the individual writing centre) to global context and applications' (Babcock and Thonus 2018: 4). It is standard practice to apply the term 'research' in a broad sense. As a result, we unintentionally lump a great deal of different endeavours under the research umbrella. This is because, in the traditional meaning, everything that is publishable can be considered research.

However, if we consider Babcock and Thonus' (2018: 4) definition of assessment, which is 'to estimate or judge the value, character, etc., of; to evaluate', we note a slight difference in approach. Their goal is not to diminish the significance of traditional research; instead, they wish to define terms. This is because the definition of terms influences the methodology or, more crucially, how we frame the questions we ask in our research. Yet, there are intersections between research

and assessment: (1) both rely on empirical data; (2) both involve inquiry, which can be defined as 'seeking knowledge, operationalised as the request of data;' and (3) both strive for an 'evidence-based approach to our work' (Babcock and Thonus 2018: 4).⁴ Writing research and assessment both follow the same path, but they examine the environment around them from different angles. Writing centre research, as suggested above, might investigate specific aspects of operations and their success. Still, it does not necessarily prove a writing centre's efficacy in totality. At the same time, writing centre assessment seeks to investigate the efficacy of the writing centre as a whole in its local context, therefore, taking into consideration its unique character, positionality and the effect it has on its institution.

It is also worth noting the fact that it appears that the term 'efficacy' has, for the most part, been favoured over 'assessment' (see Tiruchittampalam et al. 2018; Missakian et al. 2016; Arbee and Samuel 2015; Irvin 2014; Bredtmann et al. 2013; Williams and Takaku 2011; Yeats et al. 2010; Hoon 2009; Henson and Stephenson 2009; Jones 2001; Mohr 1998 Roberts 1988). The terms 'assessment' and 'efficacy' are used interchangeably; nevertheless, they have different meanings but with similar results. 'Efficacy' denotes the 'power or capacity to produce effects; power to effect the object intended' (OED Online 2022). I take the liberty of refining these terms by suggesting that we refer to the 'assessment of writing centre efficacy' or 'writing centre efficacy assessment'. In doing so, we retain the notion of estimating/judging/evaluating the capacity of writing centres but add that it evaluates the effects or changes they enable in a given institution. In other words, researchers embarking on an assessment of writing centre efficacy could, for instance, measure whether writing centres are, in fact, creating better writers across a given institution. To further qualify this proposal, I will wager to explore different research expertise in the writing centre community.

Effective writing centre scholarship necessitates a combination of quantitative and qualitative research. Ligget et al.'s (as cited in McKinney 2016) classification system identifies three key types of inquiry in writing centre research: theoretical, practitioner and empirical. McKinney (2016: 9) postulates that these are distinguishable 'by what counts as evidence'. For instance, theoretical

4 For the readers that are interested in reading more about the concept of 'evidence-based approach' I would highly recommend reading Babcock and Thonus's (2018: 23-57) chapter, *Research Basics in Evidence-Based Practice*, here they explore the development of the field across disciplines with a focus on the application thereof in the health sciences. They do an exceptional job of indicating how the principles of evidence-based practice could be applied to writing centre research. Regrettably, I will not be able to discuss this at length in this volume; however, I urge interested writing centre researchers to do a close reading of their contribution to sharpen empirical research endeavours.

inquiry draws from secondary sources (typically literature reviews, like this chapter), practitioner inquiry uses the author's own experience (for example, studies of various aspects or elements of academic writing consultation sessions), whereby empirical inquiry uses data collected to be interpreted by the researcher as evidence (see Figure 1, illustrating the reciprocity of the variations of inquiry).

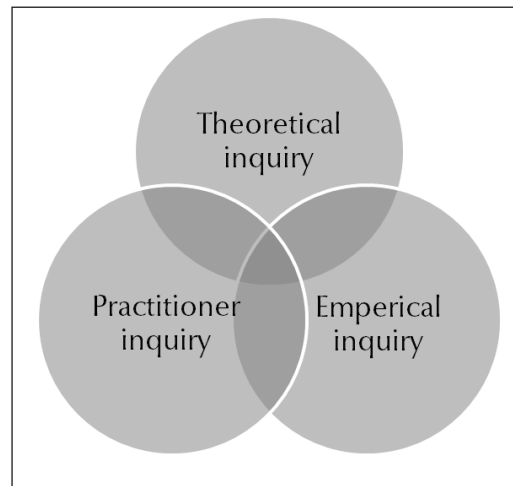


Figure 1: Primary Categories of Writing Centre Inquiry

Theoretical inquiry is and has been, indispensable to the formation of writing centre research because it seeks to describe, explain and justify practice (Gillespie et al. 2002: xix). Much like Nordlof's (2014:49) attempt to link a theory, namely Vygotsky's social constructivism theory of learning, to describe the 'directive/nondirective continuum'.⁵ In distinguishing practitioner enquiry from theoretical and empirical enquiry, Liggett et al. (2011: 58) argue that theoretical enquiry

5 Here I would like to commend Carstens and Rambiritch's (2021) paper, 'Directiveness in Tutor Talk', whereby they put 'directive/nondirective continuum' to the test by applying an evidence-based research approach. Carstens and Rambiritch collected 10 video recordings of consultations at the UP writing centre with linguistically diverse students attending the writing centre for the first time. By way of a micro-pragmatic analysis of directiveness Carstens and Rambiritch (2021: 165) found that 'directive tutoring can and does stimulate learning and interactive discussion with undergraduate, first-time visitors to a writing centre'.

is 'reflexive, experientially based research that requires dialectic to examine the experience and to arrive at carefully investigated and tested personal knowledge'. On the other hand, the empirical researcher works with a 'pre-established agenda or well-crafted plan for intensive investigation over time' (Ligget et al. 2011: 58) – in this case, whether writing centres are effective. Considering these levels of enquiry might be worth considering whether the South African writing centre community could benefit from working towards a common goal in strategically organising research or developing its own taxonomy of methodological pluralism (see, for instance, Table 1).

Table 1: Taxonomy of Writing Centre Research (Adapted from Ligget et al. 2011: 55)

Methodologies Pluralism in Writing Centre Research			
Inquiry categories	Research focus		
Practitioner	Narrative		
	Pragmatic		
Theoretical	Historical		
	Critical		
	Conceptual		
Empirical	Descriptive	Survey	
		Text analysis	
		Contextual	Case study
	Ethnographic		
	Experimental	True Experiment	
		Quasi-Experiment	

By understanding the various categories of inquiry and how these categories operate in terms of research, we will be better able to build strategies around the types of inquiry and how these could be meshed together to strengthen our understanding of how our writing centres function, and in this case, a step closer to writing centre efficacy assessment. I will later expand upon the potential of creating a national platform of aligned research efforts catered to different categories of inquiry and

preferred research methods. Herein we recognise our strengths in the South African Writing Centre Scholarship and strategically integrate findings to report on a fuller picture. It is important to note, however, that effective collaboration requires clear communication and a shared understanding of research goals and methods. Researchers must be willing to work together, share resources and data and coordinate their efforts. Later we will explore some recommendations to achieve this ideal.

Literature on empirical inquiry focusing on writing centre efficacy

To conduct a comprehensive literature review on writing centre efficacy assessment, it was necessary to focus on published works categorised as empirical inquiry. Thus, I excluded studies on theoretical and practitioner approaches from our search. The primary focus was to find studies that followed the principles of empirical inquiry, which involves collecting and analysing data through systematic observation or experimentation of writing centre efficacy. To locate such studies, an extensive search on various institutional repositories and Google Scholar was conducted utilising a combination of key terms, including 'writing centre,' 'efficacy,' 'assessment,' 'evaluation,' and 'impact'. After careful analysis to determine their fit into the category of empirical inquiry on writing centre efficacy, several relevant published works were retrieved (see below). While it is not feasible to examine each of these studies in this chapter, I will discuss some arguments for the justifications of writing centre efficacy and assessment and probable reasons for the lack of these studies. By doing so, I hope to motivate further analysis of these or similarly published works and integrate their findings towards a strategy for South African writing centre efficacy assessment.

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- Two Ph.D. studies (Grinnel 2003; Bennet 1988) were conducted to examine the effect of writing centre attendance on writing performance.
- Four books (McKinney 2016; Schendel and Macauley 2012; Babcock and Thonus 2012; Gillespie et al. 2002) were published on the topic of conducting writing centre research, with significant emphasis on the complexities and need for writing centre efficacy. These volumes covered important research methodologies enabling writing centre inquirers to conduct empirical research on efficacy assessments.
- In the Gulf region (Tiruchittampalam et al. 2018), researchers measured the effectiveness of

writing centre consultations 'on the essay writing skills of L1 Arabic foundation level students at an English-medium university in the Gulf region'.

- In the United States of America there were 18 studies (Missakian et al. 2016; Irvin 2014; Schmidt and Alexander 2012; Bell and Frost 2012; Williams and Takaku 2011; Henson and Stephenson 2009; Williams et al. 2007; Thompson 2006; Niiler 2005 and 2003; Lerner 1997, 2001 and 2003; Carino and Enders 2001; Bell 2000; Mohr 1998; Field-Pickering 1993; Roberts 1988). In addition, one literature review examines the 'direct and indirect ways in which writing centre activities can influence writing performance and the delicate line between measurable and intangible outcomes that researcher tread in the field' (Jones 2001).
- In the United Kingdom, Birmingham, Yeats et al. (2010) examined the 'impact of attendance on two 'real world' quantitative outcomes – achievement and progression'.
- In Germany, Bredtmann et al. (2013) studied the 'effectiveness of the introduction of a Writing Centre at a university, which aims at improving students' scientific writing abilities'.
- A literature review on 'selected evaluation studies' (Hoon 2009) was done in Malaysia.
- From South Africa three studies: Arbee and Samuel (2015) report on a small-scale quantitative analysis of the effect of writing centre assistance on students' academic performance in the context of management studies; Drennan and Keyser (2022) study's goal was to assess the potential impact of a blended, subject-specific writing intervention aimed at improving first-year Law students' academic essay writing skills in terms of structure, organisation and argumentation; and Archer (2008) interviewed forty first-year students about their perceptions of the Centre and its impact on their writing, examined consultant comments, examined grades and compared independent assessments of the student's first and final drafts.

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Across 30 years of research on writing centre efficacy, two major recurring themes arose: writing centre validity and continuous improvement of practices. Writing centre survival (or support) is perhaps among the most discussed topic in the broader writing centre community (Arbee and Samuels 2015: 51; Irvin 2014; Bell and Frost 2012; Yeats et al. 2010; Hoon 2009; Thompson 2006; Lerner 2003; Bell 2000: 7–8; Mohr 1998: 1). Even though we might not call it by name, our discussions orbit around our concerns for support or limits to our circles of influence; we frequently say or think along the lines of 'if only we had adequate support, we could ...'. While empirical data can help demonstrate the efficacy of writing centres, we believe the primary goal should be to evaluate our services to benefit the global student. If we focus on improving our services and meeting the needs of our students, the evidence of our success will naturally follow.

Some reasons for the lack of efficacy studies

Exploring the positionality and efficacy of writing centres: Challenges and opportunities

Writing centres occupy a unique space at the intersection of different academic disciplines, providing a shared space for students and faculty from various fields. This position can provide writing centre practitioners and researchers with the advantage of engaging with diverse perspectives and approaches to writing. However, it can also present challenges, such as navigating different disciplinary conventions or effectively communicating with students and faculty from diverse backgrounds. Consequently, the complex and diverse nature of writing centres may contribute to the scarcity of research on their efficacy. As Hoon (2009) notes, writing centers vary in terms of the levels of education they serve, their institutional positioning, subject/discipline orientation, funding sources and the expertise and experience of their consultants. These challenges are significant, but the core function of writing centers is to guide students in academic writing, regardless of the context. Thus, the essential element to measure in addressing these challenges is the efficacy of consultation (independent variable) under certain conditions (dependent variable/s). In other words, we must explore ways to leverage this unique positionality. By investigating the efficacy of the writing centre phenomenon under varying conditions, we can identify opportunities to modify these constraints and better serve the writing centre's ultimate purpose.

Linking to the positionality of writing centres is the concern that writing centres are, as previously mentioned, non-credit bearing, which most likely reduces the pressure to demonstrate efficacy. Bell and Frost (2012:16) refer to the issue of the marginalisation of writing centres and the 'common identity markers used by scholars to locate writing centres as "anti-curriculum"' (see also Richards et al. 2019). This critique implies that writing centres seemingly oppose traditional curricular activity; in their words, 'these markers situate writing center identity against opposing educational goals: writing centers are "liberatory" as opposed to "regulatory", or sites of "empowerment" as opposed to those of "coercion"' (Bell and Frost 2012: 16). Credit-bearing entities are outcome orientated or product orientated, whereas writing centres are process orientated, that is, the process of developing writers. Williams and Takaku (2011: 5) cite a critique posed by Jones (2001:5) that studying 'writing centre efficacy is invalid, not only because scholars cannot agree on what constitutes either good writing or growth in writing proficiency, leading him to ask: "How does one evaluate the impact [sic] of writing centres on writing ability if writing ability is so difficult to define?"' On several occasions at our Institution, we have had to mediate between consultant recommendations and

the expectations of faculty, staff, or students. This leaves students or consultants with a 'stuck-in-the-middle' dilemma.

With this in mind, we can consider developing an assessment framework that considers the unique positionality of writing centers and the process-oriented approach to developing writers. This framework could include both quantitative and qualitative measures that assess the impact of writing centre consultations on student writing outcomes and the effectiveness of writing centre pedagogy and consultant training. To address the critique that writing centre efficacy is difficult to define, the framework could also include a range of writing outcomes and proficiencies, such as critical thinking, rhetorical awareness and genre awareness, all of which are commonly associated with effective writing. In addition, the framework could include strategies for communicating the value of writing centre consultations to faculty, staff and students and promoting the integration of writing centre pedagogy into the broader curriculum. Ultimately, such a framework could help to establish the efficacy of writing centres as valuable resources for student writers and contribute to the broader conversation around writing pedagogy and assessment.

112 **Addressing the challenges of reporting writing center efficacy: The need for self-mandated assessments**

The positionality and non-credit-bearing status of writing centres are linked to the reporting that practitioners are required to do, which often focuses on 'bean counting' (Irvin 2014) and 'ticket tearing at the writing centre turnstile' (Bell and Frost 2014; Lerner 2001). Institutional management tends to prioritise writing centre attendance rather than the services' effectiveness. Consequently, practitioners tend to report on the effectiveness of their centres in terms of student satisfaction and perceptions linked to attendance statistics. However, this approach has not produced persuasive evidence of writing centre efficacy, according to Arbee and Samuel (2015: 51), who argue that writing centre reports on efficacy have been primarily motivated by the agenda for survival. As a result, it is less likely to find data that supports efficacy if writing centres are focused on survival. Writing centre directors face the ongoing challenge of providing data that supports the effectiveness of their centres in improving writing (Mohr 1998: 1). To address this issue, I propose that writing centres should initiate self-mandated efficacy assessments according to a framework that measures outcomes defined by the writing centre itself, as mentioned above. By doing so, writing centres can create a more accurate and comprehensive picture of their efficacy and use this information to inform future improvements.

Suppose we consider Thompson's argument for the value of externally mandated writing centre efficacy assessment. In that case, one can see the inherent value it holds for writing centre development: Thompson (2006: 1) lists four main advantages: (1) proof of effectiveness boosts the credibility of a writing centre within an institution; (2) the process of assessment enhances research activities; (3) increases the opportunity for reflective practices holistically and in terms of daily practices; (4) 'routine assessment is the intelligent, professional and ethical thing to do'. Therefore, writing centre managers should conduct routine assessments not just as a means to justify their position in a given institution but, more importantly, to foster professional responsibility and demonstrate the effects of our services through data and analysis (Bell and Frost 2014; Thompson 2006)

Expertise and professionalisation of writing centre scholarship

Efficacy assessment nevertheless requires expertise. In other words, writing centre efficacy studies necessitate expertise that occasionally falls outside the purview of the traditional writing centre director's expertise. Carino and Enders (2001:84) posit that quantitative research has fallen by the wayside due to a lack of statistical expertise for 'writing centre and composition scholars like writing that is more literary, writing that tells a good story', whereas '[q]uantitative research, in contrast, requires numbers and rouses math anxiety'. Bell (as cited by Hoon 2009: 49) also signalled that the academic writing centre directors are often based on rhetoric and language, not mathematics and statistics. Writing centre directors tend to be humanist scholars focusing on the value of social exchanges, manifesting in writing centres. Therefore, methodological approaches have primarily been qualitative (Arbee and Samuel 2015; Jones 2001; Bell and Frost 2012). Arguably, these traditional qualitative forms of research could be considered studies of efficacy describing the successes of certain aspects of writing centre work (see Carstens and Rambiritch 2020a; Govender and Alcock 2020), but not empirical inquiry required for efficacy assessment studies as a whole. Added to the issue of expertise is that writing centre staff (managers and consultants) conceive writing centre positions as temporary appointments before getting the job they studied for or desired. If writing centre positions are perceived as stepping stones, writing centre research, especially longitudinal research, does not necessarily build towards a career profile. This raises the question of whether the South African writing centre community should develop a plan to professionalise writing centre scholarship to make writing centre jobs a viable career option, ultimately leading to the recognition of writing centre work as a credible profession.

An initial proposal for an inclusive writing centre efficacy assessment model in South Africa

Based on the above points, I propose a writing centre efficacy assessment model that considers writing centres' unique positionality and process-oriented approach. This model should include a framework that measures outcomes defined by the writing centre using quantitative and qualitative measures. The framework should assess the impact of writing centre consultations on student writing outcomes and the effectiveness of writing centre pedagogy and consultant training. The framework could also include various writing outcomes and proficiencies, such as critical thinking, rhetorical awareness and genre awareness, all of which are commonly associated with effective writing.

The model could incorporate collaboration and coordination of research efforts among various stakeholders (that is, multidisciplinary and inter-institutional collaboration) to address the expertise required for efficacy assessment. Writing centre directors should work together to create a national platform of aligned research efforts catered to different categories of inquiry and preferred research methods. Researchers must be willing to work together, share resources and data and coordinate their efforts. This collaboration could enhance research activities, promote reflective practices and contribute to the broader writing pedagogy and assessment conversation.

In conclusion, the proposed model for writing centre efficacy assessment should not only focus on providing data that supports the effectiveness of writing centres but also foster professional responsibility, enhance research activities and contribute to the broader conversation around writing pedagogy and assessment. Writing centre directors should conduct routine assessments not just as a means to justify their position in a given institution but, more importantly, to demonstrate the effects of their services through data and analysis. By doing so, writing centres can create a more accurate and comprehensive picture of their efficacy and use this information to inform future improvements.

Conclusion

Writing centres play a crucial role in the current higher education landscape, particularly in meeting the challenges of the internalisation and massification of higher education. However, it is important to acknowledge that these centres often struggle with limited resources to cater to the growing

student population. Despite this challenge, writing centres have a unique positionality that could potentially provide an advantage in acquiring funding to support their services. To cater to the diverse student population, writing practitioners and researchers need to continually review and reimagine the services they offer and the methods they use to reach a broader audience.

This chapter has explored guidelines for evaluating the efficacy of writing centres in South African universities, highlighting the need for a protocol that supports the principles of writing centre practice, including creating better writers overall and providing evidence of the efficacy of writing centres. By working together on research initiatives, writing centres in South Africa could improve their profile and attract more generous grants to support their work.

While it is true that there is very little 'hard' evidence of the effectiveness of writing centres, their persistence over many decades is a testament to their importance in the lives of student writers. Therefore, educational institutions should continue to support writing centres, especially as the student population grows and evolves with new learning preferences and challenges. Writing centres must push forward and earn a seat at the 'head table' to be recognised as a valuable and credible resource in the higher education landscape (Harris 2000).

In conclusion, writing centres have a significant role to play in the education of students and their efficacy needs to be evaluated to provide evidence of their impact. By working together, writing centres can overcome resource constraints and reach a broader audience, ultimately making a difference in the lives of student writers. It is important for educational institutions to continue to support writing centres, recognising their importance in the ever-evolving higher education landscape.

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Part 2: Discipline-based Writing

Chapter Five

Academic Argument in Development Studies: Resources for Access to Disciplinary Discourses

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Introduction

In the introduction to the second South African Writing Centre collection, *Writing Centres in Higher Education: Working In and Across the Disciplines*, Dison and Clarence (2017: 15) state that ‘moving into the future, writing centres will need to increasingly venture beyond their four walls into other spaces – within and across disciplines’. Our chapter responds to this call by looking at a methodology for identifying constructions of academic argument within a particular discipline, Development Studies. In doing this, we suggest practical ways of helping students with the construction of argument and ways of producing dialogical text. In many cases, lecturers expect students to acquire the rhetorical knowledge and discursive resources required for participation in the disciplines with little explicit instruction. A common underlying perception here is that student writing can be ‘remediated’ outside the bounds of disciplinary learning, in general decontextualised academic writing courses. However, this deficit view of students has been strongly contested. ‘Academic literacies’ research has shown that institutional discourse and pedagogical practices often position students disadvantageously, limiting performance and constraining identities (Lillis and Scott 2007; Boughey and McKenna 2016; Paxton et al. 2008). It is thus important for writing centres to be able to make explicit the discursive and rhetorical moves involved in disciplinary writing.

We argue that the interrogation of argument is important because it is integral to the recontextualisation and reproduction of knowledge in Higher Education. Argumentation confers power on those who successfully engage in it. One possible reason for poor written argument is students’ differential access to academic and disciplinary discourses and the resources through

which these discourses are realised. By means of analysis of the language used in the introductory paragraphs and thesis statements of students' essays, this chapter offers insight into the discursive resources required for argumentation. By 'thesis statement', we mean a direct response to the essay question which functions to assert a position on the essay question, using the voices of the prescribed texts as a resource. We look at three aspects of argument in the opening paragraphs: positioning in writer-reader interaction, positioning in relation to authoritative voices and positioning in relation to knowledge construction. In this way, the chapter contributes to knowledge about how students learn to produce legitimate disciplinary argument and how we might make the 'moves' of argument explicit in different fields in our teaching and in writing centre practice.

Voice and authority in argument in Higher Education

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Argument is closely bound up with conceptions of the university, which is described as 'an institution whose rationale is argument' (Myerson 1995: 134). Argument is seen as essential for social criticism and for the preservation of democratic values (Andrews 2010). The process of engaging in argument is also seen as contributing to personal development and the construction of 'identity' (Clark and Ivanič 1997). Discursive resources for argument are, however, an aspect of students' 'cultural capital' and are therefore an indication of their chances of becoming economically and culturally productive citizens (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Students who are able to produce good written argument are rewarded in higher education. Yet, few lecturers can articulate what exactly they mean by 'good' writing in their own disciplines and therefore do not always make expectations about argument explicit. In this sense, academic argument is one aspect of what Lillis (1999) refers to as 'the institutional practice of mystery'.

In South Africa, many students have been offered limited opportunities to develop discursive resources for argumentation at school. Lack of experience in constructing argument may be a barrier to epistemological access in the disciplines. Effective argument requires the construction of an authoritative persona and students are required to find 'an authoritative and critical position from which to speak' (Kamler 2001: 82). It is difficult for students to write with authority, as the pedagogic context often positions them as novices. Students find it difficult to position themselves in relation to the 'jostling voices' of the discipline (Scott and Turner 2009: 159) and to integrate the voices of disciplinary authority into their own texts. From a dialogic perspective, we argue that a key move in the construction of authority in academic essays is locating the textual voice within the ongoing or past 'conversations' of the discipline.

We found Kress's view on argument helpful as, according to him, the fundamental characteristic of argument is 'to produce difference' (1989: 12). Building on this idea, we suggest that argumentation involves the integration, or accommodation, of difference, which is achieved through a process of *positioning* (cf. Archer 2016). We see argumentation as operating on three levels. On the first level, argumentation involves positioning of the writer in relation to the reader in the ongoing construction of voice in the text (Hyland 2008). On the second level, argumentation is an intertextual form of interaction between the writer and the authoritative voices from disciplinary texts. At the third, most abstract level, argumentation can be seen as positioning in relation to the interplay of 'difference' that occurs at the interface between social reality and material reality in representation. It is these three levels of argument that we analyse in the corpus of student essays.

Methodology for analysing argument in multiple-source essays

One of the most important aspects of disciplinary teaching is the design and assessment of written assignments. The essay is described as the 'genre par excellence for assessment in the academy' (Andrews 2010: 158) as it facilitates judgement of the extent of a student's understanding. The essay genre ensures differential performance according to students' mastery of essayist literacy and, in the process, can facilitate the reproduction of inequality in society. Despite its ubiquity as a form of assessment, the academic essay is a complex, multifaceted and still misunderstood genre. The typical essay genre in the social sciences is that 'written from sources', which requires students to write about 'knowledge-focussed reading' (Bazerman 2004: 60). The multiple-source essay is a hybrid genre, involving writing to both *explore* ideas and also to *demonstrate* understanding. Students are expected to show independent thought, but also to acknowledge the extent to which their thoughts are based on the ideas of others. They are required to engage in 'complex negotiation between individuality and authority, message and code, their own words and the words of others' (Bazerman 2004: 60). A symptom of this contradiction is students who make excessive use of unacknowledged quotation from sources. An understanding of the impact on students' writing practices of these paradoxes suggests that a less moralistic approach to plagiarism may be required. The negative discourses around plagiarism tend to perpetuate hierarchical and impenetrable spaces in higher education (cf. Moxley and Archer 2019). This is where writing centre interventions can be very helpful, in explaining tacit conventions to students, thus empowering them in the system.

The site of study was a third-year Development Studies course at a large metropolitan university that focussed on development theory and policy. It was designed to scaffold students' engagement with social and economic government policy and how it relates to development. The issues explored included globalisation, the developmental state and the impact of the Child Support Grant. All the students who attended the first lectures in the semester were invited to be research participants. Thirty of the approximately ninety students registered for the course agreed. The data referred to here are the two essays that these students wrote as part of their coursework. The larger study, only part of which is reported on here, did not involve a writing-focussed intervention on the part of either the lecturers or the researcher: in other words, the students received no explicit essay writing instruction. A total of 49 essays were analysed in the larger study, as eight were removed due to extensive plagiarism (see Lamberti 2013). For our analysis, we focussed primarily on thesis statements from a selection of these essays, as thesis statements can be considered the core of the argument in an essay. Since any text is conceptualised as a response to existing texts, the overarching argument or thesis statement emerges from the interaction with the disciplinary 'content'. Therefore, the existence of an identifiable thesis statement is evidence that the writer has engaged with the voices of the discipline and with the debates that they address, to produce a substantive textual response.

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The *placement* of the thesis statement in the essay is another aspect we focused on in our analysis. The students were not given any guidance on thesis statements or where in the essay they should be placed. At the essay analysis stage, bearing in mind that in disciplinary argument 'persuasion and inquiry enter into a complicated dialectic' (Crosswhite 1996: 258), we paid attention to the discourses of inquiry and persuasion. We found that when the thesis statement is placed in the concluding stage, a discourse of inquiry is generally indicated, whereas foregrounding the thesis in the introduction of the essay tends to orient to a discourse of persuasion. The inscription of objectivity is a strong indicator of an inquiry orientation. Objectivity is achieved through the use of passive forms and nominalisations; the use of impersonal constructions to effect the effacement of self; the metaphorical use of the lexis of observation, conveyed in words such as 'see', 'show' and 'demonstrate'. An inquiry orientation is also indicated through a high proportion of 'transition markers' associated with logical relationships (Hyland 2005: 50). In contrast, the use of metaphors of voice and dialogue indicate a persuasion orientation. The discourse of persuasion foregrounds the contestability of knowledge claims, whereas the discourse of inquiry allows the writer to present claims as if they are 'truth'. As shown here, we see the placement of the thesis statement as an indicator of the dominant discourse used for knowledge construction and as an important

aspect of the argumentation.

All of the essay topics involved evaluation and required students to construct a thesis statement centring on an argument of value. Academic convention requires that impartiality and criticality be inscribed in the text (Andrews 2010). Criticality is realised in the way in which 'difference' is managed – through engaging with perspectives and positions that differ from those advocated in the text. The student writer has to integrate, not only different voices, but also voices which may conflict with each other. In our analysis, we look at the ways in which conflicting positions on an issue are integrated using strategies or 'moves' (Swales 2004), which typically include concession and counter-argument.

Analysis of the thesis statements was done by the first author. The analysis examined the use of linguistic resources for dialogic contraction and expansion, concession or counter moves, evaluation and graduation (Martin and White 2005), the use of frame markers to signal the thesis itself and whether the thesis statement appeared at the beginning (front-loaded) or towards the end of the essay (back-loaded). This analysis is available in a table as an appendix in the thesis on which this chapter draws (see Lamberti 2013). In the sections that follow, using only the identified thesis statements, we illustrate three aspects of argument in student essays: positioning in writer-reader interaction, positioning in relation to authoritative voices and positioning in relation to knowledge construction. We discuss issues of voice, identity and authority in the introductory moves and the thesis statement, both of which are important for successful argumentation.

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Writer-reader positioning

It is in the interest of the student to ensure that the reader-assessor can follow the argument. 'Frame markers' (Hyland 2005: 51) prime the reader, facilitating the recognition of different moves and stages in the succeeding text and, therefore, comprehension of the argument. Analysis of the introductions across the data set showed that the writers make extensive use of frame markers. The most used are formulations for announcing goals and for previewing the stages of the argument that follow. Others refer to strategies the writer used for arriving at an 'answer' to the essay question. These are used in even the weakest essays, where students use formulaic frame markers as a resource to support their writing. This is exemplified below in an extract from a weaker introduction to an essay on the Child Support Grant.

In this essay I will discuss the Child Support Grant (CSG) on its own, then I will assess whether it is an adequate tool for poverty alleviation. I will compare it to the Foster Care Grant (FCG) and then I will consider whether it encourages greater economic activity.

Here, common instructional verbs used in the formulation of the essay question (such as discuss, assess, compare and consider) are combined with phrases from the lecturer's formulation of the specific task in the learning guide to indicate the aims, strategy and sequence in the essay.

In the majority of the essays (49 of the 57), a response to the essay task is represented in an identifiable thesis statement. Analysis showed that the thesis statement generally consists of two identifiably separate parts: a frame marker, followed by an overall claim or position. Frame markers function to point to the writer's overall thesis. The most common pattern observed was the use of impersonal constructions, such as: 'It is/was/has/can be ... that ...'. These constructions were combined most often with 'mental process' verbs (Halliday 1985: 106-112), such as 'conclude', 'find', 'establish', 'infer', 'determine', 'deduce' and 'prove'. These verbs, being associated with reasoning and legal process, explicitly signal that an evaluative or judgemental statement follows. Another common pattern observed was the combination of an impersonal formulation with metadiscourse for representing claims as self-evident observable 'reality', as exemplified in: 'It is therefore clear that ...' and 'It is evident that ...'. The most common verb forms that were used are 'show' and 'demonstrate', which were used in combination with third-person subjects: 'The above-mentioned ... show that ...'; 'The literature has shown that ...'; and 'The essay has also shown that ...'. This interactive metadiscourse is a necessary resource for writer-reader interaction.

Analysis of the introductions showed that, typically, contextualising moves are used that provide background information on the essay topic. Unlike frame-marking moves, which position writers as novices lacking in disciplinary authority, the contextualising move offers student writers an opportunity to affiliate themselves with the community represented by the reader-assessor and allows for the construction of an authoritative textual voice. An introduction which constructs an appropriate textual voice is discussed below.

A current debate in development is one that is concerned with the role that the state should play in the development process, with the "left" and the "right" views as the competitors in this debate. Those on the left side of the debate support the state as being an important and beneficial actor in the development process, while those on the right see the state as a despot, which should therefore be kept as far away as

possible from the development process (Rapley 2002: 1). The focus of this essay will be on the left side of this debate, as it is here where the notion of the developmental state has won a lot of approval.

In this example, most of the paragraph functions to contextualise and justify the subject content of the essay. The use of lexico-grammatical discursive resources enables multiple functions to be performed simultaneously in one move. In the first move, the writer shows awareness that the concept of the 'developmental state' is a specific concern in the development field. By referring to 'current debate', the textual voice draws the reader's attention and highlights the contested nature of the discussion that follows (government intervention in national economic and social development). The reference to development debate as the subject of the opening sentence and the indication of the different positions on the issue, contribute to the construction of an authoritative voice. The use of formal lexis from Development Studies, such as 'state' and 'actor', shows familiarity with field-specific academic terminology. The scare quotes for the terms 'left' and 'right' signal that they are contestable terms with different meanings in different discourses and shows awareness of the need for distancing of the textual voice when using the terms. Citing Rapley as support for the claims made indicates familiarity with an appropriate expert text and deference to disciplinary authority. The reader's interest is held by the use of lexical resources pointing to 'difference' and the resulting discursive tension: the repetition of the word 'debate', the metaphorical use of the word 'competitors' and the use of the terms 'left' and 'right' in balanced constructions. The second broad move is an indication of the left-leaning orientation of the essay: 'The focus of this essay will be on the left side of this debate, as it is here where the notion of the developmental state has won a lot of approval.' The use of the transition marker 'as' to introduce a reason for a left-leaning position acknowledges the convention of providing explicit reasons for claims that are made. This move shows that the student is familiar with and intends to fulfil the expectations of the discourse community represented by the reader-assessor.

As important as writer-reader interaction is, the integrating of authoritative voices into students' texts is a major determinant of whether the argumentation is judged to be legitimate and convincing. In the next section, analysis of students' thesis statements offers a nuanced picture of how students incorporate authoritative voices to position themselves in the knowledge domain.

Positioning in relation to authoritative voices

The challenge for novice writers is to establish an authorial presence while simultaneously incorporating some of the voices of the knowledge domain. The use of disciplinary sources is essential for legitimate argumentation. In the introduction below, limited engagement with both the voices of the sources and the task formulation is evident.

Globalisation is essential as it aids the third world in different ways to develop. Although there are challenges that can still be addressed with globalisation such as culture and religions being compromised it is vital to understand that the benefits are more rewarding such as reduction of poverty and equality.

128 The first short clause, 'Globalisation is essential', appears to be a response to the question posed in the task and therefore seems to be the first part of a thesis statement. The assertion is an evaluative claim which, not being formulated in terms of positioning in relation to an authoritative source, is what Martin and White (2005: 98–100) refer to as a 'bare assertion' or monoglossic text. The use of the evaluative word, 'essential', constitutes an unauthorised expression of 'stance' (Hyland 2008: 7–8), which cannot be linked to the ideas of any of the authoritative prescribed sources. The claim that follows in support of the evaluation is vague: 'it aids the third world in different ways to develop'. It shows that the writer has not engaged with one of the key source readings, in which it is argued that, on the contrary, globalisation does not necessarily help the developing world. In the sentence that follows, resources for concession are used ('although' and 'still'). However, the formulations that follow are also monoglossic. The attitude marker used for the construction of stance in 'It is vital to understand that' is followed by an awkwardly expressed claim that the benefits outweigh the 'challenges', which are evaluated as 'more rewarding'. Since the claims made in the thesis statement cannot be substantiated with reference to the source readings, the dominant pattern is monoglossic. The result is that the textual voice is not positioned in relation to the authoritative voices and the argument fails at the level of intertextual positioning.

The discussion above shows that thesis statements that do not incorporate legitimate authoritative voices can be unconvincing. In the more successful essays, the existence of other voices is acknowledged in explicit references to conflicting perspectives and debate.

The extract below comes from the final paragraph of a three-paragraph conclusion.

There are contrasting views as to whether globalisation is beneficial to the third world or not. Globalisation has brought benefits to developing countries, but it has not succeeded in bringing about a massive decline in poverty or inequality. Therefore, even though globalisation has the potential to improve the lives of those in the third world, thus far it has not succeeded in doing so as there are still a number of challenges to overcome in order to achieve this.

The thesis statement begins with a reassertion of the claim made in the introduction about the contestation that surrounds the impact of globalisation. While functioning at the level of writer-reader interaction to reintroduce the essay question, the opening sentence also opens up dialogue or inscribes 'dialogical expansion'. The clause that follows ('Globalisation has brought benefits to developing countries') functions as a concession, which is quickly undercut in the claim that follows the 'but'. It signals that a counter-argument move follows. Negation, signalled in the use of 'not', allows the writer to deny that globalisation is beneficial in any substantial sense. Thus, the use of 'but', a linguistic resource for the 'disclaim: counter' move, functions here as more than a 'transition marker' in the argument. The transition marker, 'Therefore', in the following clause, signals that a conclusion has been reached only after a process of reasoned consideration of conflicting views. This is followed by the phrase, 'even though', which is another resource for effecting a 'disclaim: counter' move that inscribes concession: the writer concedes that processes of globalisation are not necessarily negative. Again, however, the concession is undercut by a denial move that is effected by negation, 'thus far it has *not* succeeded' (italics added).

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A number of clear patterns emerged across all the thesis statements. As argued above, in the essays that exemplified strong argumentation, heteroglossic engagement was evident, whereas the thesis statements of the weakest essays tended to be primarily monoglossic formulations. The pattern that appears most successful is the use of a frame marker that not only draws the reader's attention to the thesis statement, but also contributes to the construction of authority in the textual voice. In strong argumentation, this is followed by the assertion of a position on the issue that includes at least two of three dialogically contractive moves described by Martin and White (2005). The first of these moves is a concession that is realised by means of lexical resources described as 'proclaim: concur'. The second is a denial move, effected by means of 'disclaim: deny' resources. The two moves allow the writer to position the textual voice in relation to specific claims of the authoritative sources. The third move is the introduction of a counter-argument that requires the use of the lexical resources labelled 'disclaim: counter'. This move allows the writer to oppose

the claims of some of the authoritative sources. Only a minority of the research participants used these resources at the most crucial stage of the argumentation, while most did not use them at all. This suggests that, even by the end of their years as undergraduates, some of the students had not learned how to use discursive resources that support legitimate argumentation and consequently did not yet have access to key resources for effective participation in disciplinary debate.

Positioning in relation to knowledge construction: Enquiry and persuasion

Academic argumentation draws on both inquiry-oriented and persuasion-oriented discourses for knowledge construction. Since Development Studies is a hybrid knowledge domain, a combination of these discourses can be expected. Analysis showed that the majority of students write as if there is an observable unquestionable 'reality' that can be known and that is represented in a body of texts that 'contain' incontestable facts. This is exemplified in the following idiosyncratic formulation, in which contingent *argument* is collapsed into the certain world of *fact*: 'This essay is comprise of an argument over the fact that ...'. The most commonly used discursive resources of the discourse of inquiry are instructional verbs. Analysis showed that two categories of these 'task' words are favoured: words associated with the physical manipulation and scrutiny of scientific processes, such as 'examine', 'investigate' and 'explore' and 'mental process' (Halliday 1985: 106–112) words, such as 'determine', 'compare', 'establish', 'consider', 'analyse', 'deduce', 'infer' and 'conceive'. Metaphorical expressions relating to vision are a favoured resource in the frame markers introducing the thesis, such as: 'When looking at the above discussion it is clear that ...' and 'From the information given in the essay; it is evident to see that ...'. These resources from the discourse of inquiry embody the 'visual space of reason' (Crosswhite 1996: 235) and realise a 'discourse of transparency' (Turner 2011: 81). The lexical resources discussed above are typically used in combination with grammatical resources for suggesting objectivity and impersonality.

While in a small proportion of the essays the discourses of inquiry and persuasion are used in careful combination, in most their inconsistent and inappropriate use is evidence that students are insufficiently aware of the discourses drawn on. In the introduction below the content of the text and the unreflective mixing of the discourses of persuasion and inquiry result in an inconsistent textual voice and, consequently, the first stage of the argumentation is rhetorically weak.

The central argument of this paper is on the analyses of the success of South Africa's development efforts, policies and programmes. It is the author's intention to define the term 'developmental state', its historical phenomenon and characteristics. In effect, the author will compare current development efforts with the articles that have been researched for this essay in order to form and substantiate an opinion on the state and its development efforts in South Africa ... This essay will elucidate on the several definitions of developmental states. Following this, the essay will look at different aspects of South Africa between the years of 1994–2007. Thirdly, the role of the government will be explored and following that the essay will examine certain challenges that the government faces. Following that this essay will make tentative suggestions and conclude with a possible solution.

The use of the frame marker, 'The central argument of this paper', at the start of the opening sentence promises a confident response to the task using the discourse of persuasion. The expectations set up by this frame marker are, however, not realised in the text that follows, which shows that the formulation merely introduces the topic and in a way that is dependent on the exact wording used in the learning guide. The move that follows is a statement of the writer's strategy, which is also dependent on the formulation of the task in the guide. The promise to 'make tentative suggestions' and to 'conclude with a solution', indicates that the writer is planning to use a problem-solution textual structure, which would result in recommendations or policy argumentation. However, policy argument is a type of argument that does not match the specification of the task, which requires evaluation of the positions of the authoritative sources. Furthermore, the 'instructional verbs' are typically used in the discourse of inquiry – 'define', 'compare', 'elucidate on', 'look at', 'will be explored' and 'will examine' – and conflict with the promise of the opening sentence that an argument will be constructed in the text.

All of the essay topics involved *evaluation* and required students to construct a thesis statement centring on an argument of value. 'Graduation' resources (Martin and White 2005: 154) were crucial for adjusting value claims in the thesis statement. For instance, 'globalisation does *to an extent* benefit the third world countries however in terms of security globalisation seems to benefit the developed countries more' (italics added). Analysis shows that in relatively successful thesis statements, the evaluative term used in the task formulation is used in combination with 'graduation resources' to indicate the writer's position. Weaker essays, on the other hand, tend to use evaluative lexis other than the terms used in the task formulation. In these cases, the use

of inappropriate evaluative terms is combined with a tendency to use intensifying lexical forms, which inscribe epistemic certainty, resulting in claims that are unjustifiable generalisations. In the examples that follow, the use of words such as 'all' and phrases such as 'a lot of' undermine the credibility of the textual voice: globalisation is described as 'good for people in all countries', as 'creating a better life for all' and as bringing 'a lot of positive change'.

One of the most striking findings in the data set was the dominant pattern with regard to the placing of the thesis statement. The low percentage of essays that have a thesis statement in the essay introduction runs contrary to the preference in academic writing pedagogy (Coffin et al. 2003). The strongly marked preference for a delayed thesis in the essays suggests that the essay task is seen as a process of discursive *inquiry* which leads to the discovery of knowledge, rather than the creation of a text that is designed to *persuade* the reader of a position on an issue. The overall rhetorical structure of almost all the essays in the data set suggests that there is a pronounced inquiry orientation to argumentation. There is thus a mismatch between the inquiry discourses favoured in students' essays and the more persuasive discourses used in expert and educational texts in Development Studies.

Final comments

By analysing the language used in essay introductions and thesis statements of a corpus of students' texts, the chapter offers insights into the discursive resources required for argumentation. In this way, it contributes to knowledge about how students learn to produce disciplinary argument, which can feed into Writing Centre and teaching practice in very practical ways. We began by defining argumentation as discursive positioning in relation to 'difference'. In examining how textual voice in student texts is positioned in relation to the authoritative voices in expert texts, we focused our analysis on the thesis statement. We chose the thesis statement for this micro-analysis, as so much of our work in the writing centre is centred around helping students with focus and argument as distilled into a thesis statement. Here, writing centres help both with the mechanical aspects (what are the components of a thesis statement) and the 'emancipatory' elements (how best to encapsulate argument as knowledge-making in a thesis statement). The act of constructing a thesis or overall argument shows that the writer is able to engage appropriately with the discipline by producing a response that can be seen as an extension or development of knowledge, however slight or incremental the contribution. Generally, student texts are reformulations rather than new

contributions to knowledge; however, they play an important role in the inculcation of disciplinary discourse. While we acknowledge the limitations of having focussed only on selected parts of students' texts, analysis of the use of discursive resources for constructing these thesis statements has proven to be illuminating. It is clear from our analysis that an effective thesis statement is a direct response to the essay question; it functions to assert a position on the essay question, using the voices of the prescribed texts as a resource. We have shown how the lexical resources for effecting concession and counter-argument are key resources for the inscription of the writer's position in relation to authoritative sources. These findings will be invaluable in training consultants in the writing centre in the structure of disciplinary argument and how to impart that to students, through one-on-one consultations or workshops or more structured disciplinary interventions. In addition, our analysis has shown that the greater the emphasis on the discursive construction of knowledge, the closer a text is to a persuasion orientation. Since the use of self-reference in the pronoun 'I' draws attention to the subjectivity of the writer and underlines the impossibility of being objective, the use of personal constructions and first-person pronouns position the writer in a context where persuasion is acknowledged as a significant dimension of the argumentation. Again, this awareness of how persuasion works in argument is one that is invaluable in tutor training in writing pedagogy.

Producing strong argument is important for success in Higher Education, particularly in a context like South Africa with such diversity and inequality. It is clear that the 'traditional academic pedagogy of osmosis' (Turner 2011: 37) does not serve the interests of all students. South Africa's history of educational inequity has resulted in a high proportion of students who are under-prepared for higher education, as suggested by the disturbing statistics on student throughput (DHET 2019). Academic writing is a high stakes activity, as it is a key assessment component in Higher Education. We have shown that written argument is an important area for writing-focussed research as it is where language, knowledge and thinking merge. Writing centre practitioners can make explicit to students the resources for argument highlighted here. They can guide students' thoughts and writing processes by questioning and clarifying so that students feel confident to enter the disciplinary debates.

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Chapter Six

A Reflection on Curricular and Non-curricular Writing Support for Postgraduate Students in the School of Public Management and Administration

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Introduction

South Africa's National Development Plan 2030 (NDP) includes quantifiable targets for higher education institutions, namely a 25 per cent graduation rate by 2030 (South African Government 2012: 278). More specifically, part of the NDP's 2030 vision is to '[a]chieve the target of 100 Ph.D. graduates per million per year, [this would mean that] South Africa needs more than 5000 Ph.D. graduates per year...' (South African Government 2012: 278). These national objectives are in line with the University of Pretoria's commitment to increasing postgraduate offerings and output as articulated in UP's Strategic Plan – 2025 (2011: 9):

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Postgraduate research students are a major engine for producing new knowledge. The future emphasis will therefore fall on research students – Master's, Doctoral and Post-Doctoral students – through active recruitment strategies and appropriate academic and financial support. In addition, attention will be devoted to providing a high quality environment and study programmes to enable postgraduate success.

By way of contributing to the University's goals, the SPMA currently offers one Honours programme, two Master's programmes (a Masters in Public Administration and Policy [MAdmin] degree and a coursework Masters in Public Administration [MPA]) and two doctoral programmes (a Ph.D. in Public Management and Administration and a Ph.D. in Public Policy). Typically, the SPMA's postgraduate students are individuals who work in the public sector and attend modules structured as block sessions. The School's degrees attract students from South Africa and a number of other

African countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. This is also in line with the University's objective to increase its number of regional and international postgraduate students (UP Strategic Plan 2025 [2011: 16]).

Maluleka and Ngoepe (2018: 1) posit that the growing need for postgraduate qualifications reflects 'the demand on the part of current economies for a highly knowledgeable workforce'. The researchers go on to cite MacGregor (2013) who suggests that the need for postgraduates is due to retiring professionals leaving gaps in the market. These comments equally apply to the public sector and also intersect with the call for the professionalisation of the public sector in South Africa. The National Framework Towards the Professionalisation of the Public Sector (South African School of Government 2022) was drawn up as a response to achieving chapter 13 of NDP 2030's objective of building a capable and developmental state through '[a] professional public service ... where people are recruited and promoted on the basis of merit and potential, rather than connections or political allegiance.' Postgraduate degrees will enhance the professionalisation of the public sector.

The SPMA is uniquely positioned to contribute to the NDP goals of increased graduates, increased number of Ph.D. degrees, the internationalisation of higher education as well as the professionalisation of the public sector. In order to achieve these goals, it is imperative to provide postgraduate students with the support needed to achieve these objectives.

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The chapter uses a mixed-methods approach to reflect on the curricular and non-curricular postgraduate writing interventions in the SPMA. Data will be used quantitatively to assess one of the SPMA's curricular postgraduate writing interventions (for the MPA research module NME 801) while qualitative data will be used to assess one of the SPMA's non-curricular postgraduate writing strategies, namely the student-supervisor-language coach model. The objective of using this approach is to identify strengths and weaknesses in the SPMA's postgraduate support offerings and to suggest ways to strengthen the SPMA's curricular and non-curricular postgraduate writing programmes.

Background to postgraduate writing support in South Africa

One of the ways to achieve the above-mentioned national and institutional goals could be by supporting postgraduate writing. The problem in developing postgraduate academic literacy support is seen in this chapter as threefold: assumptions regarding the writing skills of postgraduate students, the constraints faced by writing centres and the need to accommodate international students.

.Many South African universities (such as the University of Pretoria, Stellenbosch University, the University of the Western Cape and the North-West University) offer compulsory, credit-bearing first year academic literacy modules. Although postgraduate students are sometimes tested for postgraduate academic literacy skills using diagnostic tools such as the Test for Academic Literacy for Postgraduate Students (TALPS) (ICELDA: 2023), there are very few compulsory academic literacy modules for postgraduate students. In 2004 Thesen comments that writing is often seen as a skill which undergraduate students need to master and it is thus not the focus of postgraduate programmes. Further, Butler (2009: 291) comments that it can often be assumed that academic writing difficulties 'are restricted to undergraduate students as a result of their assumed inexperience in [an] academic context and that postgraduate students are mostly experienced, proficient writers in their specific disciplines'. His earlier thesis found this not to be the case and drew links between a student's academic literacy skills and experiencing obstacles in postgraduate writing (2007).

Over the last 15 years, many universities have extended writing support for postgraduate students. A survey conducted by Vivian and Fourie (2016) into non-curricular postgraduate writing support found that most faculties outsource language support to university writing centres, with 39 per cent of the larger universities in South Africa separating their postgraduate and undergraduate writing support (Vivian and Fourie 2016: 153). For the most part, postgraduate writing support is an extension of the university's writing centre services and serves all faculties and levels of studies. The above study showed that the primary activity of writing support is offered by peer tutors who receive training as writing centre consultants and the primary mode of engagement is one-on-one consultations (Vivian and Fourie 2016: 156). Vivian and Fourie's study shows that writing centres often experience budget constraints, this affects the number of consultants that can be hired to support students' academic literacy development and for this reason, combining undergraduate and postgraduate writing support could be financially and logistically efficient (2016: 153). The study found that in order to accommodate the specific needs of postgraduate students, writing centres frequently offered additional support in the form of workshops, writing circles and writing retreats (2016: 157).

A cursory look at university websites shows a growth in support for postgraduate writing. Despite the increase in support for postgraduate academic writing, anecdotal evidence and academic research point to similar, persistent writing challenges experienced by postgraduate students. Sonn's study of selected postgraduate students at Walter Sisulu University (2016: 226) supports Butler's position on postgraduate writing as described above and concludes that '[s]ome of the challenges experienced by the candidates included, inter alia, problems experienced in identifying

the problem statement; the complexity of proposal writing; a lack of professional writing skills.' More recently, du Toit et al. (2022) observed a link between academic success and academic literacy levels in a group of Honours Economic students at a South African university.

The SPMA is cognisant of these issues concerning the need to support postgraduate writing, the constraints faced by writing centres and the need to take into account the context of increasing numbers of international postgraduate students. The problems identified above have shaped the development of curricular and non-curricular embedded and scaffolded writing support for the SPMA's postgraduate students. The rationale behind using an embedded and scaffolded academic literacy framework is explained below.

A pedagogical framework for the SPMA's postgraduate writing support

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The pedagogical framework used to inform the SPMA's design and implementation of curricular and non-curricular postgraduate academic literacy support is underpinned by a discipline-specific, embedded and scaffolded pedagogy. The limitations of generic academic literacy support mentioned above, suggests that a discipline-embedded approach would be more effective in providing language support which is related and relevant to the student's field of study. More specifically, embedding, that is situating academic literacy within and not alongside the content curriculum may enhance language support. In order to argue for the pedagogical framework used by the SPMA to support postgraduate writing, literature on embedded and scaffolded pedagogies will be discussed below.

There has been much debate about the generic nature of non-curricular writing support traditionally offered by writing centres. Although generic approaches are cost and resource effective as discussed by researchers including Vivian and Fourie (2016: 149) and van der Poel and van Wyk (2013: 169), Thesen (2013: 124) attests that a decade ago that the growing demand for 'generic ... workshops on aspects of research writing' did not 'deeply satisfy the reader,' as 'they don't engage with the deep structure of postgraduate research and its central function,' which is 'to make new knowledge'. Thesen (2013: 104) refers to these generic workshops as unsatisfying 'pop-up' or 'soundbite' workshops.

Arguments for discipline-specific academic writing support have been made by various academic literacy researchers (Jacobs 2007; Clarence 2011; Butler 2013; van der Poel and van Wyk 2015;

Wingate 2018: 350). Wingate argues that generic academic literacy programmes do not 'prepare students for communicating in their disciplines' (2018: 351) and contends for 'curriculum integrated academic literacy instruction' (2018: 350) which requires co-operation between discipline and academic literacy specialists. Jacobs speaks to the link between academic literacy and concept development and similarly argues for the need for collaboration between the academic literacy specialist and the discipline or subject expert (2007) to embed academic literacy support in the content modules. Jacobs' approach uses New Literacies Studies and Rhetorical Theory which contests the neutrality of language and recognises how language is a social construct (2007: 61). The results of this study show that 'those lecturers who understood knowledge as discursively constructed and the curriculum as how the discipline intersected with the world, were inclined to understand [academic literacies] ALs as being deeply embedded within the ways in which the various disciplines constructed themselves through language' (Jacobs 2007: 70). These studies can be seen as part of a broader research area coined ICLHE (Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education) as outlined by Jacobs in her keynote address for the ICLHE 2013 conference (2015).

Van der Poel and van Wyk's contribution to selected papers published from the ICLHE conference of 2013 also acknowledges language as socially constructed (2015: 167). They focus on the complexities of acculturation of students into the higher education environment, with a specific focus on acquiring academic literacy (Van der Poel and van Wyk 2015: 164). As a result of a qualitative analysis of students, content lecturers and academic literacy specialists' perceptions on generic, discipline-specific and embedded academic literacy support, van der Poel and Van Dyk conclude that 'generic and integrated approaches are not mutually exclusive, but can very well be a both-and situation' (2015: 174) and suggest that generic programmes could be used in the early years of study, progressing to more discipline-specific intervention for higher levels of study. This approach suggests an incremental approach to academic literacy support which could be seen as linking the concepts of discipline-specific academic literacy support with the notion of scaffolding.

Pedagogical scaffolding is not a new concept and can be traced to Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development which refers to the optimal space for learning situated between students' current level of knowledge and the next level of potential knowledge. Although the concept of scaffolding has been applied in a wide variety of contexts, this discussion will concentrate on the pedagogy of embedded and scaffolding learning for academic literacy programmes.

The use of scaffolding pedagogy in curricular academic literacy programmes in South Africa has been well supported (Carstens 2016; Rose et al. 2008). This section focusses on the research by

Van Dijk et al. (2019: 159–162) which describes and justifies the use of scaffolding for an embedded discipline-specific curricular academic literacy programme for undergraduate students in the SPMA. This is relevant to the discussion in this chapter as the SPMA's postgraduate academic literacy interventions are founded on the same principles. We align our practices to more recent definitions of scaffolding as interactive rather than linear, drawing on Delen et al.'s (2014: 312) definition of instructional scaffolding as 'a term used to explain the relationship and interaction between learners and their guides and is a process that enables a novice to achieve a goal or objective which would otherwise be unattainable without assistance – instructional scaffolding is not one-way, but interactive and reciprocal process' (2014: 312). Further, Van Dijk et al. (2019: 161) rely on Carstens' (2016) work in academic literacy scaffolding using van Lier's four-quadrant model (2004). Carstens argues that this model, in conjunction with Walqui's six scaffolding types, provides a scaffolding model for subject-specific academic literacy interventions (2016: 2). Van Lier's non-linear four-quadrant model consists of four scaffolding contexts namely, assistance from more capable peers or adults, interaction with equal peers, interaction with lesser peers and use of own existing resources such as knowledge and experience. Walqui (2006: 170–177) builds on van Lier's model and identifies six instructional scaffolding types namely modelling, bridging, contextualising, schema building, re-presenting text and developing metacognition. The SPMA's postgraduate academic literacy programme is designed taking van Lier's four-quadrant model and Walqui's six scaffolding categories into account.

A scaffolded approach acknowledges the complex skills which students require in order to be academically literate. Although this point has been made by numerous researchers, Wingate (2018: 350) articulates succinctly that 'academic literacy [i]s the ability to communicate competently in an academic discourse community; this encompasses reading, evaluating information, as well as presenting, debating and creating knowledge through both speaking and writing. These capabilities require knowledge of the community's epistemology, of the genres through which the community interacts and of the conventions that regulate these interactions.' Van Dijk et al. argue that 'it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to structure their programmes in such a way that they assist students to develop the basic academic literacy skills needed for the attainment of the required level of intellectual content-related skills' and that this can be attained by using a discipline embedded and scaffolded design (2019: 158).

The majority of research discussed above relates to undergraduate (predominantly first year academic) literacy interventions and thus this study on postgraduate writing support in the SPMA is positioned to contribute to discussions on how to support postgraduate writing, taking into account

presumptions around postgraduate academic literacy skills, the constraints that writing centres face and the context of increasing numbers of international students. However, in my opinion, it is important to take note of Butler's reasoned discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of using discipline-specific academic literacy interventions, cautioning against advocacy for this approach without substantive evidence supporting these claims (2013: 80). Butler's concern could also be applied to research into the effectiveness of a scaffolded academic literacy pedagogy. Thus, it is the aim of this research to provide evidence concerning the effectiveness and/or limitations of a discipline-specific, embedded and scaffolded academic literacy programme for postgraduate students in the SPMA.

The nature of curricular and non-curricular postgraduate writing support in the SPMA

As the academic literacy practitioner positioned in the SPMA, I am part of a team that works together to ensure the success of our postgraduate students – that team is comprised of the student, content module lecturers, primary and co-supervisors and myself as the language coach. I was inspired by the 2022 Heltasa conference metaphor of 'a seed awakened by the sunshine and its thirst quenched by the rain...within a landscape of possibilities and potential' (Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of South Africa 2022) and I have extended the metaphor to describe the multidirectional and the multifaceted relationship between the student, lecturers, supervisors and myself. I compare our postgraduate students to seeds producing fruit (a completed thesis) and see the University and the SPMA as providing the necessary conditions (water, sun, nutrients and so on) with my role as providing additional support for seedlings (possibly like a greenhouse) to encourage growth and fruition, recognising that not all plants grow at the same rate and that they require different care to flourish and bloom. So how does this metaphor play out in practical terms?

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Curricular postgraduate writing support

Our postgraduate students will be typically offered curricular and non-curricular language support throughout their degree. As described above, a scaffolded and embedded pedagogical approach is used for curricular postgraduate language support. Modules offered at postgraduate level are

structured according to block lectures. As the academic literacy practitioner, I work closely with the module lecturers and schedule an academic literacy workshop during each of the degree's modules, supporting the module's writing assessment tasks. This often includes discussion on the wording of the assignment and expectations regarding structure and content.

At the beginning of any curricular academic writing sessions, I make a point of discussing students' rich linguistic heritage and their proven ability to decode and process language. I encourage students to see academic language used at the University and specifically at the SPMA, as a dialect of English which they have the capacity to master, while acknowledging that we use a version of academic literacy that is not universal and is not innately correct or superior to other forms of academic literacy. I acknowledge that the version of academic literacy we use is part of our British colonial heritage and although work is being done in the area of decolonising academic writing practices, much work needs to be done in order to align what is considered good academic literacy in most South African higher education institutions with indigenous knowledge systems. Further, this understanding of academic literacy is important to me in terms of the wide variety of contexts and countries that our students come from. This discussion forms the foundation and understanding of the academic literacy workshops which will assist students in making sense of this version of academic literacy used in the SPMA.

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For the purposes of this discussion, I will focus on our Masters in Public Administration degree (MPA) which is 2 year course consisting of seven modules and a mini-dissertation. Admission requirements are that students have any NQF level 7 degree and 3 years of administrative and/or managerial experience, preferably in the public sector. Using the discipline-embedded model, I see students face-to-face for a brief orientation session at the beginning of the academic year and subsequently for a 2-hour workshop per content module. Sessions are scaffolded using Walqui's six instructional scaffolding types of modelling, bridging, contextualising, schema building, representing text and developing metacognition as discussed above (2006: 170-177). The orientation session usually focusses on reading strategies, starting to read and organise what has been read towards the goal of writing the research proposal for the mini-dissertation.

Academic literacy support provided to the MPA students is linked to writing a research proposal as the summative assessment for the MPA research methodology module, NME 801. The research proposal written as part of this module, acts as the basis for writing a research proposal for the mini dissertation (which is the focus of the second year of study). The content lecturer covers this module in a block session of 5 days. The NME 801 module is usually held in March and consists of three assessments: a draft literature review and problem statement (due about 10 days after the

block week), a draft research proposal (due end of April/beginning of May) and the final summative research proposal (due in June). The content lecturer marks these three assessments and provides the students with written feedback for each assessment via Turnitin on ClickUP, the University's learning management system (LMS).

This reflection focusses on the academic literacy interventions for NME 801 during 2021 and 2022. In 2021, during the NME 801 block, I held an academic literacy workshop with the students which was based on the SPMA style and grammar guide. I developed the SPMA style and grammar guide as a user-friendly PowerPoint to address concerns about consistency in using academic conventions and to ensure that students were aware of the SPMA's academic literacy practices. This guide is fairly general but uses Walqui's scaffolding categories of metacognition, modelling, contextualising and schema-building in the way it explains concepts and uses relevant examples. The SPMA style and grammar guide is divided into a macro and a micro section with the macro section addressing topics such as available academic literacy resources, academic style, choice and evaluation of academic sources, logical ordering and structuring strategies such as planning tools and writing from general to specific as well as discussing what constitutes evidence to support an argument. The micro section focusses on practical ways to write clearly and concisely, including sentence and paragraph construction strategies and frequent grammar concerns. Due to the model used at the time, the next block academic literacy session I had with the students would be after the submission of their draft literature review so although the literature review had not been directly discussed during the block academic literacy workshop, I encouraged the students to apply these principles when writing their literature review for their first NME 801 assessment.

Secondary data of module averages for each of the three assessments conducted for NME 801 was used quantitatively to assess the effectiveness of this specific SPMA's postgraduate curricular academic literacy intervention. The class average for the first assessment for NME 801 was 48 per cent which is below the pass mark of 50 per cent and thus raised concern for both the content lecturer and myself as the academic literacy practitioner. A thematic analysis of the lecturer's feedback to students (as represented in Figure 1 below) showed that 53 per cent of the comments related to relevance of the students' writing to their chosen topic, sentence and paragraph construction formed 20 per cent of the comments, 18 per cent related to inclusion of inappropriate or inadequate content, while lack of transitions and structure constituted 9 per cent of the comments.

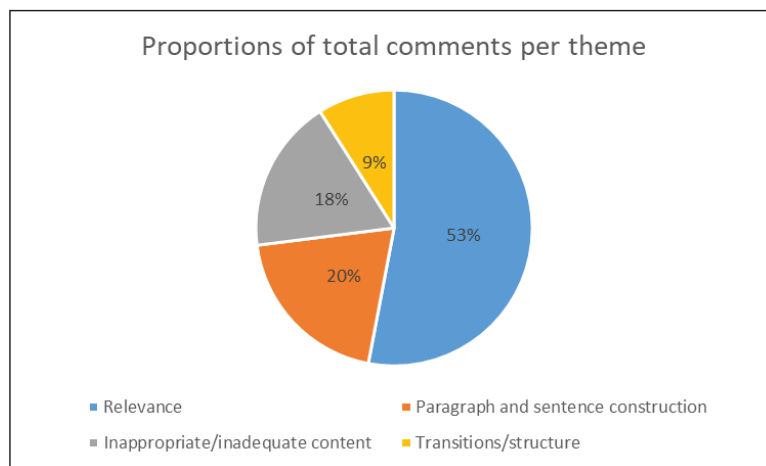


Figure 1. Analysis of lecturer’s comments on first NME 801 assessment 2021

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This analysis informed the design of two further academic literacy interventions to address the first assessment’s low pass mark (Table 1.1 below reflects the overall programme). The due date of the second assessment was also extended by a week to accommodate building in an extra academic literacy support session. In this way the academic literacy support provided to the students was reflexive, in addition to being embedded and scaffolded. The first intervention workshop focussed on selecting relevant information for a literature review and linking to the research topic, planning the structure of a literature review, grouping information and logical structuring from general to specific. The second NME 801 module assessment which was submitted after this intervention showed a favourable increase in class average of 10 per cent to 58 per cent.

The subsequent (second) academic literacy intervention workshop focussed on structuring paragraphs, creating linking/transitions emphasising relevance between and within paragraphs and sections. Both interventions used the scaffolding approaches of modelling, contextualising, representing text and metacognition by getting students to engage with excerpts from students’ work reflecting a range of academic literacy levels.

Table 1.1 NME 801 programme for 2021

Date	Academic literacy workshop	Format and duration	NME 801 assessment dates
29 January 2021	Brief introduction to academic literacy support	Online orientation for MPA programme (30 min)	
5 February 2021	General academic reading and writing principles (including self-study videos)	2 hour workshop during PAD 801 block week	
11 March 2021	Workshop on the SPMA style and grammar guide	2 hour workshop during NME 801 block week	1st assessment due 22 March: literature review, problem statement and research questions
15 April 2021	Academic literacy intervention 1: Selecting relevant information for a literature review, linking to the research topic, planning the structure of a literature review, grouping information and logical structuring from general to specific.	2 hour workshop during PAD 804	2nd assessment due 27 April: 1st draft research proposal
27 May 2021	Academic literacy intervention 2: Structuring paragraphs, creating linking/transitions emphasising relevance between and within paragraphs and sections	2 hour online workshop	3rd assessment due 11 June : final research proposal

18 August 2021	Workshop on paraphrasing	2 hour workshop during FHB 800	
20 August 2021	Workshop on synthesising	2 hour workshop during FHB 800	

Surprisingly, the module average for the final NME 801 summative assessment remained at 58 per cent. Speculation between the module lecturer and myself and anecdotal comments from students identified that possible reasons why the class average did not improve for the summative assessment were that the interventions were embedded but not timeous and the first workshop conducted during the first content block week was fairly generic and focussed on general academic writing strategies rather than specifically writing a literature review. It was also suggested that academic literacy skills such as paraphrasing and synthesising needed to be addressed and practiced more extensively. Another reason for the lack of improvement in the final assessment for NME 801 was anecdotal evidence from some students who indicated that they were satisfied with the mark they received for the first full draft of the research proposal and so made the decision to submit the final proposal without effecting significant changes. It was decided that although this would not have an impact on final NME 801 results, workshops on paraphrasing and synthesising would be held during subsequent MPA block sessions as these are important skills for academic writing which will support the students in their other modules and in preparation for writing the mini-dissertation in their second year.

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The experience of the 2021 NME 801 module and academic literacy support informed the structure of the MPA academic literacy programme for 2022. We realised that although the interventions were scaffolded and discipline-embedded, they needed to be more closely aligned with the assessment schedule. In 2022, more workshops were held earlier in the year so that there would be time to introduce general academic literacy strategies as well as to develop skills and strategies for writing a literature review before the first assessment was due. The programme is summarised in Table 1.2 below.

Table 1.2 MPA academic literacy programme for 2022

Date	Academic literacy workshop	Format and duration	NME 801 assessment dates
27 January 2022	Brief introduction to academic literacy support	Online orientation for MPA programme (30 min)	
8 February 2022	General academic literacy principles using SPMA style and grammar guide Reading strategies and reading towards writing the literature review and problem statement for the research proposal	2 hour workshop during PAD 801 block week	
16 and 17 March 2022	Workshop 1: Referencing the SPMA way, paragraphing and paraphrasing strategies Workshop 2: Tone and style of writing Skills needed for writing a literature review: critical reading/analysis / organising principle/synthesis	2 x 2 hour workshops during NME 801 block week	
23 March 2022	Tool for evaluating logical structure in writing Upload PowerPoint on using transitions/linking to create structure and flow in writing	2 hour online workshop	1st assessment due 4 April: literature review, problem statement and research questions

25 April 2022	Discuss lecturer's feedback on 1st assessment Research proposal alignment tool Paragraphing, structuring and transitions PowerPoint	2 hour online workshop	2nd assessment due 2 May: 1st draft full research proposal
8 June	Discuss lecturer's feedback on 1st draft research proposal	2 hour online workshop	3rd assessment due 10 June: final research proposal
18 August 2022	Wellness check-in	30 min in-person session during FHB 800 using AnswerGarden to gauge emotional and writing support needs	
7 September 2022	Referencing and plagiarism	2 hour online workshop at students' request	
27 October 2022	Exam essay writing	2 hour online workshop	

The class averages for the three NME 801 assessment were 58 per cent, 52 per cent and 61 per cent respectively. The first assessment showed a 10 per cent increase in average from 2021 to 2022. However, there was a decline in average from the first assessment to the second assessment of six per cent and also a decline of six per cent in the average of the second assessment between 2021 and 2022. We would have expected the embedded, scaffolded academic literacy interventions to produce linear and incremental module results. Clarity on what was required for the full research proposal during a two hour workshop focussing on the lecturers' feedback on the draft research proposal (assessment two) yielded pleasing results of a 9 per cent improvement for assessment three, which was also a 3 per cent improvement on 2021's summative assessment average.

The results of the three assessments for the NME 801 module over the last two years show that interventions need to be timeous, not only embedded in the content curricula but also aligned with the module's assessment schedule and reflexive in analysing and responding to students' needs as they arise. Further, this analysis highlights that even with a scaffolded pedagogy, development in academic writing may not necessarily be linear. We are yet to unpack all the variables that contribute to these results. A longitudinal study of this module may yield more insight into the long-term results of these interventions on thesis production in the second year of studies as well as throughput rate.

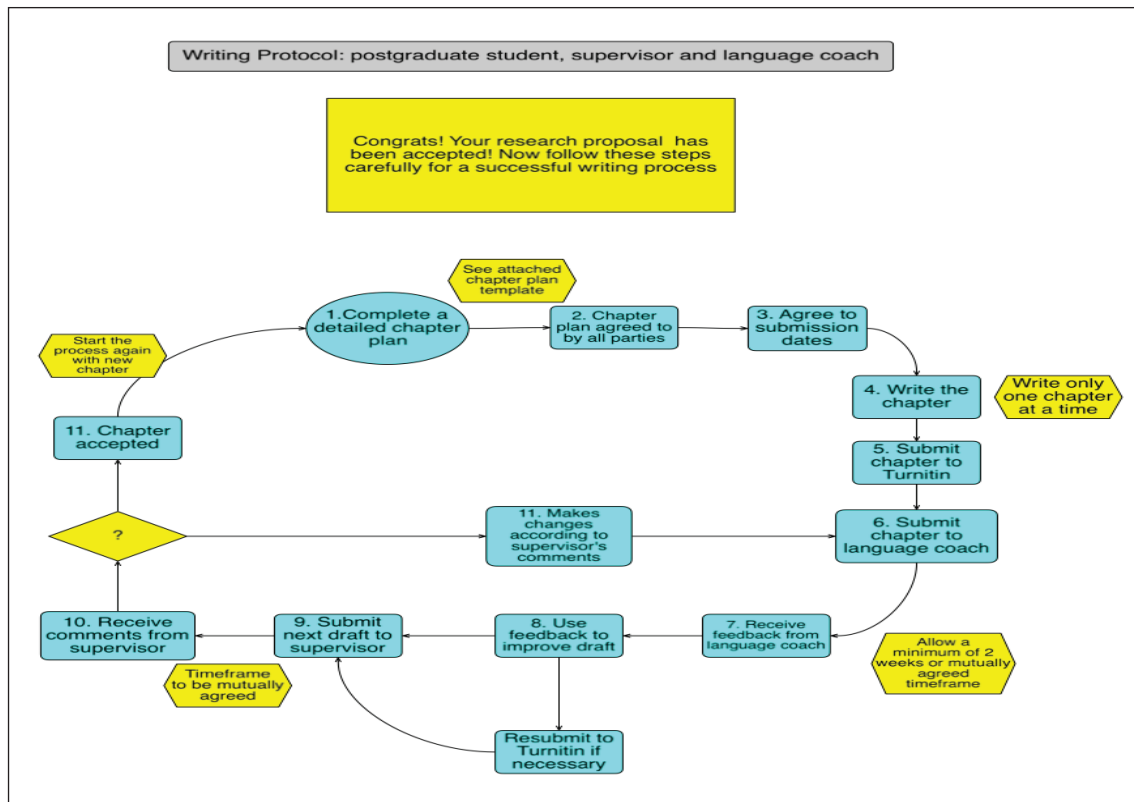
Non-curricular postgraduate writing support

The curricular postgraduate writing programme is supported by non-curricular one-on-one consultations with students which take place online or in person for all levels of students and at any stage of writing. At this level I function as a one person in-house writing centre for the SPMA and see myself as a language coach in this context. I provide written feedback, mostly in the form of track changes on Microsoft Word documents. Sometimes I will work with students on their research proposals and/or one or two of their dissertation chapters as that is all they support that they need. In some cases, I will work with a student chapter by chapter for the whole dissertation writing journey.

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In 2017 I developed the SPMA's student-supervisor-language coach model (Figure 2 below) as a response to my observations concerning one-on-one work with students. I identified a chicken and egg dilemma: who should look at the writing first, the supervisor/s as content experts or me as the academic language specialist? Supervisors report of struggles in understanding the chapter's content because of language constraints and so would prefer me to look at the chapter before they do. I would work with students on a chapter, identifying ways to improve the student's writing but sometimes I was not convinced that the chapter content was sound and felt that the students and I may be working on content that the supervisor might suggest is not relevant for the chapter or could be eliminated from the chapter. To ensure that the content of the chapter is sound, the first step of the model advises that the student and supervisors agree on a detailed chapter plan before the student starts writing the chapter. The idea is that a detailed chapter plan will prevent underprepared students from starting to write. The chapter plan will soon highlight any gaps in reading and research which need to be filled. Further, it will encourage students to organise and

structure the chapter properly before writing (I found that often students write without having a clear structure and direction for the chapter) and it will also give students the confidence to start writing the chapter.



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Figure 2: Student-supervisor-language coach model

By using the suggested model, the structure and content of the chapter is agreed to before the writing process begins. Once the chapter has been written, the student will submit the chapter to me for comments. This approach gives me reassurance concerning the content and direction of the chapter so, as the language coach, I can focus on the student's writing and language. Students then consider my comments, refine their chapter and submit it to their supervisor/s. This process will continue until the supervisor is happy for the student to proceed to the next chapter and the process

begins again. Using this approach, I work closely with both the student and their supervisor/s. We prefer to work on one Word document and comments remain visible to all parties until it is agreed that the comments have been resolved. Sometimes it is also effective for all parties to meet in person or online to circumvent lengthy e-mail round robins. In this case, I see myself as supporting both the students in their writing process and the supervisor in their role of overseeing and guiding the student's dissertation. Our goal is to work together to make the thesis writing process streamlined with reduced chapter drafts and achieving the final goal of a completed thesis.

Further to this, one-on-one consultations allow me to consider the linguistic background of our students, particularly international students, some of whom come from Francophone or Lusophone countries. I am sensitive to cultural differences in terms of communication and interaction customs. I believe it is important to be cognisant of potential lexical-grammatical differences and respectful of stylistic differences in other academic writing conventions, for example, the use of more elaborate and descriptive sentence and paragraph construction, the use of digression and repetition juxtaposed with the British influenced academic literacy focus on clear and concise writing.

In order to provide qualitative evidence of student and supervisors' perceptions on my role as an academic literacy specialist in the SPMA, primary data was collected through a survey which was sent to purposively selected postgraduate students and supervisors in the SPMA. The purposive sample consisted of approximately 40 students and supervisors who have worked closely with the SPMA's academic literacy specialist using the the School's student-supervisor-language coach model. The survey asked four questions namely:

1. What is/was your experience (as either a student or supervisor) of language coaching during the postgraduate writing process?
2. What do you think the role/s of an academic language coach are in a postgraduate writing environment?
3. Do you think the role/s of the language coach have shifted during and post-Covid? Please explain.
4. What do you think can be done to strengthen the language coach/student/supervisor interaction in the postgraduate writing process?

Responses to question one, yielded similar responses from students using words such as 'insightful', 'beneficial', 'very helpful' and 'crucial' and rating the quality of the coaching using words such as 'excellent' and 'exceptional'. The one respondent stated that they became aware of developing writing skills as a 'continuous learning process'. I would like to single out a comment from an international postgraduate student due to the goal of internationalising higher education as discussed in the chapter's introduction:

As an international student studying in a foreign country (during the Covid-19 pandemic) – the least I was expecting was another tough supervisor! But to my surprise (something that I keep talking about even up to now) was the kindhearted, patient and deeply committed language coach. She embraced my grammatical flaws, poor sentence construction...name it. She took time to read every single document I ever sent her and with grace, she guided me along the way. She boosted my self esteem and made me believe that I could write better. I am so grateful to the School of Public Management and Administration at UP for being intentional about my formation process while at UP.

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Although one comment cannot be generalised to the whole group, it was encouraging to hear that the postgraduate writing support provided by the SPMA was well received by one of our international students. Supervisors often state that not being a language expert, they do not know how to support students' writing and that the language coaching process makes students feel supported and they do not feel alone in their thesis writing process.

The role of the language coach, according to the responses to question two, includes guidance and assisting with developing structure, formulation of ideas, academic reasoning and critical thinking. Further, one comment saw language coaching as 'determining the strength and weakness of student writing abilities...To help students and supervisors to enhance their writing skills...' which I felt was pertinent in that it highlights that the role I play extends beyond the deficit model and supports both supervisor and students' writing.

A common theme that emerged from the responses to questions one and two involved the affective dimension of language coaching in terms of mentoring, guiding and supporting. A comment from one supervisor reinforced this notion by stating that '[language coaching] is [an] amazing support structure that both the students and supervisors have. The students feel supported and it takes some of the load off of the supervisors.' This supports the anecdotal evidence from check-in sessions with students who said that they needed 'moral support', even 'hugs'.

The majority of responses to question three suggested that the content of postgraduate writing support remained the same during and post-Covid and that only the format changed from being primarily face-to-face pre-Covid, to online during Covid restrictions and then hybrid in the post-Covid context. Numerous respondents indicated that a hybrid approach gave opportunity and flexibility for more frequent sessions with the language coach as illustrated in the following comment which emphasised that 'with the adoption of utilising online platforms ... it has made the language coaching services more accessible as the sessions are not bound to be at campus and there is more flexibility with time also. Thus, language coaches are becoming more of a first point of reference in terms of asking for assistance instead of a lecturer, compared to the period prior [to] Covid.' There was also reference to a heightened need for language coaching during the Covid-19 period and that my role may have 'enhanced a bit as a result of the pandemic due to the fact that some students may have been affected differently'. I feel it is significant to take note of the comments which indicate a preference for 'physical engagement ... which has allowed a bond between coach and student' and the response that post Covid restrictions, 'we can also hold meetings face to face, which helps people like me, as I suffer with speaking to people over the phone (especially an academic who has more knowledge than me). I believe for me, being face to face may help me omit some mistakes that I could've made when online.' These varying responses highlight the need for me, as language coach, to be flexible according to individual student's needs, context and learning styles.

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In terms of strengthening the student-supervisor-language coach model (question 4), numerous respondents referred to increasing the frequency and timing of the academic literacy interventions of both curricular and non-curricular postgraduate language support. It was recommended that more workshops, possibly in the form of a dedicated academic writing block, take place early in the year, ideally before the commencement of the academic year. The responses indicated that the hybrid approach is necessary, although this question also evoked a few comments suggesting that students value in-person contact. Two respondents' comments spoke to strengthening the relationship between student, supervisor and language coach with one respondent suggesting that the 'supervisor should have access to the language coach's comments and visa versa, in order for the two to avoid duplications'. This speaks to an instance in which the student-supervisor-language coach model is not being followed effectively as the model advocates that all parties should make comments on the same Word document to avoid repetitive or conflicting comments and opinions. Further, a few comments were made concerning the language coach to student ratio, highlighting the limitations of one language coach for all SPMA postgraduate students.

The results of the survey show that academic literacy support is multi-directional as student,

supervisors and language coach need to work collaboratively to support postgraduate students in their studies. The relationship between student, supervisor and language coach needs to be strengthened in some cases. The survey's responses emphasise that a flexible, hybrid approach to language coaching is vital to supporting students' postgraduate writing process. Additionally, academic literacy support is multi-faceted and does not only address surface level grammar and semantic issues. It is perceived to aid students' critical thinking in terms of conceptualisation, formulation and structuring of arguments. It is also clear that the academic literacy process has an important affective dimension in boosting students' confidence, providing emotional support and encouragement through relationship-building.

Concluding comments towards a way forward

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Taking into account both curricular and non-curricular academic literacy support given to postgraduate students in the SPMA, some lessons have been learned and thus some concluding comments can be made. The SPMA is in a privileged position of being able to provide in-house, discipline-specific academic literacy support. Although a discipline-embedded and scaffolded pedagogy yielded overall improvement in the class averages for the module NME 801, students' progress is not always linear. The process is more nuanced than expected and further research needs to be conducted concerning what factors could have an impact on the non-linearity of results. As suggested earlier, a longitudinal study on postgraduate students' throughput rates and degree completion time may yield useful insights into the student's writing progress over the course of their degree.

Reflexivity is needed in terms of timeously identifying and responding to students' needs (which may be reflected through students' assessment results). Using the SPMA's block lecture model to schedule an academic literacy block early in the year may give students a head start in terms of developing the academic literacy skills required for successful completion of their degrees which is dependent on the completion of a thesis. Subsequent workshops should continue to be embedded in the content modules and specifically aligned to address the assessment criteria for the module. The frequency of postgraduate writing support can be increased by continuing to use a hybrid approach as a two-hour workshop per module is not sufficient to support the complexity of writing at a postgraduate level.

The feedback on the student-supervisor-language coach model shows that this approach to

one-on-one academic literacy support is valued and considered effective by both students and supervisors. The understanding of and sensitivity to the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students, enhances the SPMA's support for both domestic and international students. It must be noted however that the student-to-language-coach ratio is high and this limits the extent of one-on-one non-curricular academic support that can be provided and providing timeous feedback. It is evident that the process of supporting postgraduate students' critical reading, thinking and writing, is enhanced by the multidirectional and multifaceted interaction between student, supervisor/s and language coach. Thus, in part, the success of the model lies in successful relationship building which in turn boosts students' confidence and self-esteem. Mechanisms to further solidify this tripartite relationship need to be considered.

In closing, I would like to return to the seed metaphor used in section 4 of this chapter. Reflection on the findings of this investigation, reinforces the greenhouse image of the language coach providing extra protection and nurture for plants during difficult times, giving the students a safe space and time to clarify their thinking and explore transforming their ideas into words. Through addressing the weaknesses and building on the strengths, of the SPMA's curricular and non-curricular postgraduate writing support programme, the School will be even better positioned to contribute to achieving the NDP goals of increased graduates, increased number of Ph.D. degrees, the internationalisation of higher education, which will in turn contribute to the professionalisation of the public sector.

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Chapter Seven

Reflections on Risk and Resilience: A Law School Writing Centre's Learning from the Covid-19 Storm

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Introduction:

Background: Writing in Law

Although writing is important in most higher education contexts, it is crucial in law. Rideout and Ramsfield (1994: 43) observe that, 'in law, language is not mere style; it is itself the law'. In other words, in a Western legal tradition, written language is the means by which law is set out, maintained, developed and critiqued. Similarly, Bhatia (1987: 231) notes that 'the relationship between the language used in law and its content is exceptionally close'. Clarity and precision in writing, both at university and in the profession, is highly valued, as a poorly paraphrased idea or a misplaced word or punctuation mark can change legal meaning (Moore 2022).

Student writing in law in South Africa is viewed as a significant problem. In the Council on Higher Education's (CHE) Report on the National Review of Bachelor of Laws (LLB) Programmes in South Africa, it was noted that 'without exception, panels visiting each of the faculties/schools were confronted with the lament (from staff and often enough from students and alumni) that students' writing and research skills were sub-par' (CHE 2018: 56). These laments about law students' and graduates' writing are not new. Legal scholars Dhlamini (1992) and Motala (1996) addressed law students' struggles with legal writing more than twenty-five years ago. In the decade that followed, a range of legal scholars continued to articulate concerns about student writing (Greenbaum and Mbali 2002; McQuoid-Mason 2006, amongst others). This concern continues to date, with an increasing number of journal articles written on how different law faculties in South Africa are attempting to develop student writing (for example, Swanepoel and Snyman-van Deventer 2012; Clarence, Albertus and Mwabene: 2013; Broodryk 2014, 2015; Crocker 2018; Gottlieb and

Greenbaum 2018; Snyman-van Deventer and van Niekerk 2018; Bangeni and Greenbaum 2019; and Crocker 2020, 2021).

Of course, this struggle to become expert in an unfamiliar discourse is not unique to law. Most university students require assistance in developing academic literacies in their discipline (Hathaway 2015). In South Africa, given ongoing structural inequality and unequal access to quality Basic Education, this is especially pronounced (Dison and Moore 2019). However, given the particularities of writing in Law, the School of Law at the University of the Witwatersrand (a historically advantaged South African university) has a dedicated writing centre to assist all law students to develop their writing capacities.

Tertiary Writing Centres as Negotiated Spaces

It is well-established that writing centres tend to occupy shifting, negotiated and contested spaces in tertiary education (Clarence and Dison 2017: 129). Moreover, these spaces can be peripheral (Hutchings 2006; Hathaway 2015). Before 2015, this fluidity characterised the Wits School of Law's writing centre: student-run and without a secure source of funding, it was a generative yet precarious space. In 2015, this changed. Budgetary, curriculum and physical space for the writing centre was created, supported by School management. Two full-time academic staff members were appointed to oversee and facilitate the teaching and development of writing in the law school.¹ An embedded writing curriculum was developed and implemented across the four years of the undergraduate LLB degree. The work of the writing centre was conceptualised to include the traditional writing centre offering of individual and group consultations about writing in progress and draft review, as well as the teaching of writing within core modules across the degree. It further includes the annual appointment, training and mentoring of senior law students to be writing mentors.² In these ways,

1 Although the writing centre works with undergraduate and postgraduate students, this chapter focuses only on our undergraduate work with LLB, BALaws and BComm Law students.

2 South African writing centres draw on differing terms for the students working at the centres who are trained to consult with other students about their writing. Peer tutors, writing consultants and writing fellows are some of the terms. In this chapter, I use the term 'writing mentors'. This term encompasses both the writing consultants, who are paid for by the School of Law, and the writing fellows who are paid from the University Writing Programme's UDG grant for supporting writing intensive courses across the university.

the centrality of writing in law was acknowledged; and a clearly defined and valued space was claimed and animated.

However, in March 2020, this space once again changed and became fluid and shifting, when the Covid-19 pandemic led the State to announce a complete social lockdown. This necessitated a rapid shift to working wholly online. The writing centre – along with many others – had to rapidly reimagine its work in the online space.

Drawing on two framing concepts – risk and resilience – this chapter reflects on the work and experiences of this discipline-specific writing centre before, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. What follows is a brief articulation of the conceptual framework and the methodological tools of reflection and reflexivity. Thereafter, each of the three phases – before, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic – of the Centre are reflected upon. Four aspects of the Centre's work are considered during each phase: teaching, assessment, writing mentor training and writing centre consultations. The chapter concludes with an overview of the learning from these reflections that we are using to consolidate and reimagine the writing centre as we emerge from the Covid-19 storm.

Conceptual framework: Risk and resilience

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As reflected in the title, two important framing concepts for this chapter are risk and resilience. It is necessary, therefore, to briefly explore both and how they intersect. Zinn (2010) observes that the term 'risk' is used inconsistently and can mean very different things in different contexts. Thesen (2013), building on this analysis, shows how 'risk', as used today, tends to have negative connotations, frequently used as a synonym for danger. As a result, standard responses to perceived risk are attempts to manage or mitigate it. A common form of risk management in higher education is allocation of resources to solve the perceived problem (Thesen 2013). McWilliam (2009) describes this understanding of risk and risk management as 'cold'; a compiling of lists of what could go wrong and a concomitant set of systems to mitigate such risks. There is no doubt that a dimension of this understanding of risk informs our practice. Resources in the law school are allocated to the writing centre to mitigate the risk of graduating students who have not developed the kinds of writing capacities outlined in the opening paragraphs. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we worked hard to try and identify the potential barriers to learning and uptake of writing centre services whilst students had no physical access to campus. Having identified these perceived risks, we attempted to set up systems to address them.

However, risk, as used in this chapter, goes beyond this cold definition. Caplan (2000) suggests a reworked understanding of risk that acknowledges the agency of people to work with and make sense of challenges and contradictions that are defined, by more powerful others, as risks. Thesen (2013) similarly embraces a 'warm' notion of risk which, she suggests, emphasises the potential of risk. Risk here is understood in terms of risk-taking rather than risk-management. Our conception of risk encompasses these latter understandings. During the pandemic, although we may have attempted to identify risks to learning, we were as interested in our students' agency; how so many worked with and made sense of the challenges and changes wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, risk can be seen as a dimension of, or related, to, resilience, rather than its dichotomous opposite.

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The term 'resilience' is used frequently yet, as Davoudi (2013) argues, imprecisely, as the go-to solution for coping with the uncertainties and challenges of the twenty-first century. It emerged particularly strongly as a common – and often burdensome – term in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Stommel (2021: xiii) cautions that it is necessary to recognise that 'the capacity for resilience is a point of privilege'. Certainly, if it is understood as a mental or psychological trait that one must draw on to cope better with materially difficult or traumatic circumstances, it can be. But, in this chapter, I draw on a broader conception of resilience. With Morales (2008) I distinguish between psychological and academic resilience (whilst recognising that there can be significant overlap) and draw on an integrative model of resilience for academic contexts (Fullerton, Zhang and Kleitman 2021). Rather than framing resilience as an individual or purely psychological trait, an integrative model views resilience as a process in which students and teachers can work together to identify the resources that can protect against the negative impact of stressors to produce positive outcomes (Fullerton, Zhang and Kleitman 2021). Specifically, when I drew on this integrative model of resilience to reflect on our work during the pandemic, I was guided by the authors' claim that resilience interventions should not merely focus on emotional or psychological well-being but aim to develop 'skills and strategies for coping with challenges (for example, seeking social support, reducing avoidance and disengagement) and provide appropriate resources such as programs which facilitate social connection (for example, mentoring, peer support groups) and accessible student support' (Fullerton, Zhange and Kleitman 2021: 17).

A further dimension of resilience as used in this chapter is identified by Willard-Traub (2019) in her writing centre work with multilingual students. Agreeing that resilience is not fundamentally psychological, she argues that it is relational and characterised by an ethic of connection and empathy (327). She further identifies the role of listening and partnering in resilience (327) as

well as the role that translation and translanguaging can play (330). This is wholly congruent with contemporary writing centre scholarship on the relational and dialogic nature of writing centre practices (Ganobcsik-Williams 2006; Lillis 2011; Nichols 2014; Clarence 2017). It also resonates with the decolonial imperative explored in more detail later in this chapter.

In essence, risk and resilience are understood as complementary, rather than dichotomously. Used together, it is possible to identify both the danger and the potential of risk and the potential to develop resilience in a writing centre.

Methodology: Reflection and reflexivity

This chapter does not represent the findings of a formal research study. Rather it attempts to capture learning through reflection. Marshall (2019), after a careful analysis of the multiple understandings of the term reflection in professional contexts, arrives at the following definition: 'Reflection is a careful examination and bringing together of ideas to create new insight through ongoing cycles of expression and re/evaluation' (Marshall 2019: 411). The cyclical element is especially important in writing centre work, as learning through reflection is ongoing and iterative.

Specifically, I drew on elements of both collaborative and critical reflection methods. Collaborative reflection can occur both individually and collectively (Dixon, Lee and Corrigan 2021) and can be defined as the 'process of collective experiential learning through observation, cooperation and knowledge exchange' (204). Clarà et al. (2019) caution that collaborative reflection is most effective when driven by directive facilitation, by a subject expert, rather than remaining too open-ended. This informed my decision to guide the writing centre's bi-annual reflections through a series of open-ended questions, to which writing mentors would respond individually, in writing, before we met as a group to discuss responses collectively.

This process was also shaped by aspects of the critical reflection method. Morley (2014) suggests that critical reflection, as a method of inquiry, is especially useful in contexts where practitioners feel overwhelmed by externally imposed constraints and that it can be a powerful tool to 'envision possibilities for change' (Morley 2014: 1420) – apt words for the Covid-19 experience. Essentially, it uses the process of deconstruction and reconstruction to generate ideas for improved practice. Our process was guided by elements of Fook's (2011) model of critical reflection. He suggests that the critical reflection process has two stages. Before the first stage, participants record the experiences that they believe are most important to learning about their practice. For us, this meant

each writing mentor recording their responses to the directive questions. In stage one, this record is examined to try and uncover the assumptions and beliefs that are recorded (deconstruction). In stage two, these assumptions and beliefs are critically discussed to develop awareness that can be used for new and improved approaches to practice (reconstruction). Both stage 1 and stage 2 took place during reflective group discussions with writing mentors, where the written responses were deconstructed, discussed and elaborated on. Each discussion ended with commitments to what needed to continue and what practical changes we needed to make (reconstruction). I further reflected on these discussions and commitments and attempted to enrich these with further informal feedback from writing mentors and students, received during the period being reflected on.

Throughout this process, I consciously attempted researcher reflexivity, understood as 'rigorous self-scrutiny by the researcher throughout the entire research process' (McMillan and Schumacher 2006: 327). The combination of reflexivity and reflection yields, it is hoped, nuanced learning from our work during the pandemic. This learning is driving both a recommitment to effective practices, as well as changes in how our centre works in the School of Law.

I now turn to phase one – an overview of how the writing centre operated before the pandemic.

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Before the storm: Some core working principles

Teaching writing within a discipline through a collaborative pedagogy, drawing on Writing Intensive principles

There is a tension in the law school where I work. Although criticality is valued, so is the imperative to teach students to think and write like lawyers. Legal writing norms are simultaneously rigid yet fiercely contested by some, who view them as being part of an untransformed, conservative legal culture (Davis and Klare 2010) or a dimension of coloniality to be resisted (Moore 2022). Although these differences can be seen as a risk to consistent teaching of writing, they are also an opportunity for more nuanced teaching, made more resilient by being situated within the discipline. The nuances and implications of these various positions can only be understood, over time, after sustained engagement with the discipline.

There is a range of persuasive scholarship, both locally and internationally, that supports discipline-specific writing development for all students (Dean and O'Neill 2011; Boughey and

McKenna 2016, 2021; Gottlieb and Greenbaum 2018). Much of this scholarship emerges from the 'academic literacies' approach to writing development (Lea and Street 1998; Lillis and Scott 2007; Boughey and McKenna, 2016, 2021) which views writing as a social practice that can only be learned as part of the specific discourse or discipline, rather than a set of general, individual skills that can be taught generically, outside the discipline (Archer and Richards 2011: 10–11). This approach to writing development not only acknowledges the discipline-specificity of writing, but specifically transcends the notion that teaching of writing is an act of socialisation into the academy or discipline; it goes beyond socialisation to recognise the dimension of power and power relations in the teaching and learning of academic literacies (Lea and Street 1998; Lillis and Scott 2007). As a result, an academic literacies approach to teaching writing within a discipline can be both normative – making the hidden expectations and conventions of the discourse visible and accessible to students through explicit teaching, modelling and scaffolding – but also transformative – critiquing the norms and the power relations within those norms rather than simply passively learning how to perform the writing moves (Lillis and Scott 2007). Being able to traverse both normative and transformative approaches to the teaching of writing is one of the major affordances of being based in the discipline and arguably facilitates the dimensions of resilience defined earlier in this chapter.

Discipline-based teaching of writing at South African universities, although not yet widespread, does appear to be gaining traction. In law, for example, Gottlieb and Greenbaum (2018) argue for the effectiveness of a collaborative pedagogy (Jacobs 2007) in teaching and developing writing. Drennan and Keyser (2022) show how a collaborative pedagogy in law led to significant improvements in students' written assignments. Jacobs' (2005, 2007, 2013) concept of a 'collaborative pedagogy' or 'insider-outsider' partnership is central in our attempts to teach writing for epistemic access (Morrow 2009). This is an approach to writing development that Jacobs describes as

an integrated approach, which understands the central role that language plays in how disciplines structure their knowledge bases and how they produce text. This is different across different disciplines and therefore the approach to teaching students to be literate in their disciplines should be the result of a collaborative effort between academic literacy practitioners and lecturers (Jacobs 2007: 874).

Part of the rationale for a collaborative pedagogy is that experts in a discipline tend to struggle to make their deep, tacit knowledge explicit and visible to novices and that an 'outsider' to the discourse is able to assist in developing ways of teaching and explicating valued thinking and writing

practices. Our writing centre is thus staffed by one 'insider' – a legal researcher and academic with professional experience – and one 'outsider' – an academic literacies and educational specialist. The two staff members work with other teaching staff to develop and teach an embedded writing development programme that is specifically designed to teach and critique the ways of reading, thinking and writing in law.

Also in law, Clarence, Albertus and Mwambene (2014) show how discipline-specific writing can be taught in large-class settings. Clarence and Dison's (2017) edited volume on Writing Centres in Higher Education includes a range of accounts of writing centre work both in and across disciplines. My own institution, Wits, has adopted a university-wide writing programme, based on writing intensive principles, which supports and facilitates a discipline-based approach to writing development (Is Ckool et al. 2019). Writing Intensive is based on the underlying premise that writing is thinking and that writing is best taught and developed in the disciplines. Writing intensive principles align fully with our approach to teaching writing. Nichols (2017: 14) sums up the approach well:

A Writing Intensive course, therefore, does not include writing as an additional skill tacked on to 'learning the subject', but rather as the way to engage students with the core content. The starting point therefore, in adapting an existing course to make it Writing Intensive, is to identify the critical thinking outcomes desired and then to thread back learning activities which help to build those thinking skills.

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Teaching the embedded writing curriculum

Drawing on the scholarship outlined above, this writing intensive collaborative teaching of writing as part of the discipline of law includes lectures, seminars and workshops. The teaching is variously done by writing centre staff, collaboratively between writing staff and substantive lecturers and by writing mentors. A brief overview of the teaching dimension of the work, as it stood at the beginning of 2020, follows:

All first-year law students complete the full-year Introduction to Law course, which is a foundational, writing intensive course. Each block includes dedicated teaching, modelling and scaffolding of target reading and writing capacities, to all students, in mainstream lectures. In the first semester, the focus is on teaching students to read and write about case law and to write simple

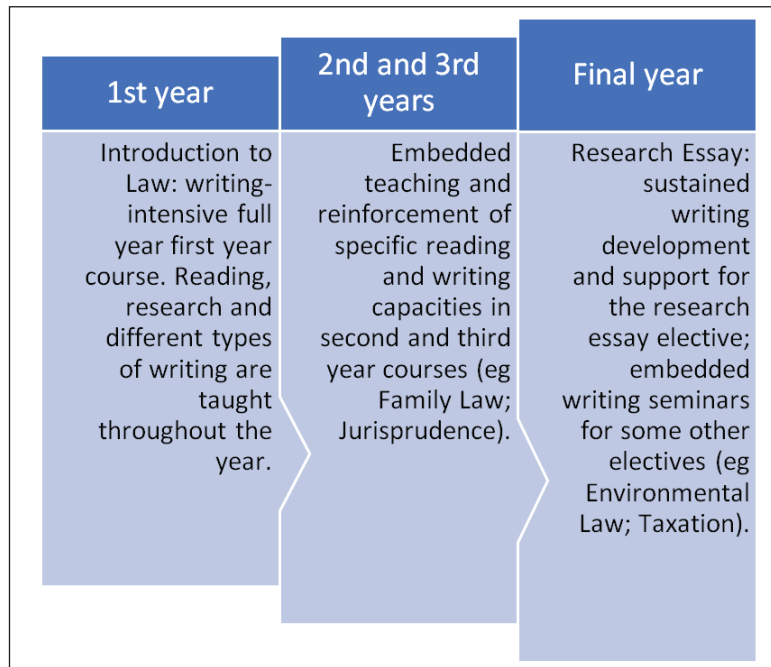
legal advice. This is largely normative (Lillis and Scott 2007), in that students are made aware of the discourse conventions and socialised into ways of reading, thinking about and writing about law. In the second semester, the students are taught legal research and essay writing, which includes a greater focus on criticality and is thus more transformative (Lillis and Scott 2007).

Writing centre staff work with disciplinary experts to develop and refine the teaching materials, tasks and processes. The reading and writing tasks align with the course materials and outcomes; students are not required to do 'extra' work, but rather to work more closely with cases or legal principles they already have to engage with for the course. Teaching at this point was done in-person, in large class settings.

In the second and third years of the degree, there are shorter and generally less scaffolded opportunities to teach and reflect on writing within the discipline. Family Law, a year-long course, has a series of short reading and writing spaces, which are designed to reinforce the principles explored in the first year, to facilitate transfer of prior learning in more complex contexts. Other courses embed a writing workshop or seminar, often to explore target reading or writing capacities valued in that course, or to support and strengthen the kinds of reading and writing required for a particular assignment. Again, up until 2020, all of this teaching happened in-person, on campus.

In the final year of the law degree, the writing centre is heavily involved in the Research Essay full year course, in which students develop a unique research question and write an independently researched extended essay. The course-coordinator and a writing centre staff member co-facilitate a series of twelve workshops throughout the year, designed to teach and explore the kinds of reading and writing that students need to be doing at various points of the research cycle. Other final year electives also create small spaces in their curriculum for teaching of writing associated with that course. For example, a collaborative seminar to prepare students to engage in the kind of reading, thinking and writing that is expected in the written assignment for that module.

This four-year embedded writing curriculum is summarised in Image 1, overleaf.



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Image 1: Embedded writing curriculum

Assessment

An essential element in any writing intensive course is the opportunity to engage in multiple opportunities to write; not just ‘high stakes’ formal writing assignments but smaller, formative writing tasks that facilitate engagement with core concepts, deepen reading and thinking and allow the student to practice the moves required in larger pieces of writing in the course (Nichols 2017). Another essential element is building in opportunities for constructive, formative feedback, so that students can learn and improve before their writing is formally assessed. This draws on Thesen’s (2013) ‘warm’ notion of risk, where students take risks with their writing, knowing that they have the agency to make changes or re-evaluate their choices before final submission.

The assessment that we engage in at the writing centre is almost wholly formative. Students share drafts at various stages of development, both with staff and writing mentors. We provide detailed constructive, formative feedback on drafts, which is then often discussed in a writing consultation. Some of this formative assessment is curriculated. For example, in Introduction to Law, in the first

semester, students get written feedback on four writing tasks. In the second semester, there is a compulsory submission of a draft essay. Detailed constructive formative feedback (Meyer and Niven 2007) on drafts is provided by writing centre staff and mentors. Students work with and consult about feedback to develop and refine their final essays. In the fourth year Research Essay course, described above, students are required to keep a research journal and to submit a range of short writing tasks. Some of these are reviewed. For example, students submit a draft abstract straight after being taught the purpose, structure and conventions associated with an abstract. Formative feedback on the draft abstract is provided, which is aligned with the summative assessment criteria. Students use the feedback to develop and improve their abstracts before submitting their complete draft essays for feedback from their supervisors. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, all curriculated draft submission and review occurred online, on the University's LMS. In consultations, however, students sometimes would bring a hardcopy of a draft for discussion.

The role of writing mentors is invaluable in formative assessments. In the next section, their training – as it stood in 2020 – is briefly described.

Writing mentor training

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Writing mentors undergo intensive training for their role, both at the start of the year and throughout the year. The training includes some theory on good writing centre practice; how to facilitate an effective writing consultation; and providing constructive formative feedback. The integrative model of resilience and Willard-Traub's (2019) insights on resilience in multilingual students, underpins much of this training. The training attempts to draw on decolonial principles, discussed briefly below and is designed to facilitate social connection (Fullerton et al. 2021) – both amongst writing mentors and between mentors and students. Overall, the training frames writing centre work as fundamentally relational (Clarence 2017), with a focus on an ethic of connection and empathy (Willard-Traub 2019) and the importance of listening (Nichols 2014).

Our writing centre was born in the same year that the #FeesMustFall movement began. Nationwide student protests called for 'quality, free decolonised education for all, now' (Wits Alumni Relations 2016). This contributed greatly to existing conversations in the academy about transformation and decolonisation of both curricula and institutional culture and encouraged us to consider what a decolonial approach to our writing centre training might entail. We had already intentionally attempted to draw on *Ubuntu* principles in establishing non-hierarchical working

relationships in the centre, in which each person's humanity is valued and consciously welcomed into the writing centre community. In this we were guided by Justice Yvonne Mokgoro's seminal thinking about *Ubuntu*, particularly this articulation:

It has also been described as a philosophy of life, which in its most fundamental sense represents personhood, humanity, humaneness and morality; a metaphor that describes group solidarity where such group solidarity is central to the survival of communities with a scarcity of resources, where the fundamental belief is that *motho ke motho ba batho ba bangwe/umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which, literally translated, means a person can only be a person through others. In other words the individual's whole existence is relative to that of the group: this is manifested in anti-individualistic conduct towards the survival of the group if the individual is to survive. It is a basically humanistic orientation towards fellow beings (Mokgoro 1998: 2).

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In the context of law – where combative and competitive individualism can become the dominant way of being – this commitment to solidarity, community and human orientation as we learn to read, write and think about law seemed particularly important. Writing mentors are referred to as colleagues and everyone is on first-name terms. Intentional cultivation of empathy and respect for each person's intrinsic human dignity are workshopped at the beginning of every year, as part of writing centre training.

Lastly for this section, Mbembe (2016) argues persuasively for the necessity of recognising that decolonisation occurs in a globalised and increasingly bureaucratic context in which knowledge has become a commodity and higher education has become a marketable product. Mbembe contends that – amongst other understandings – 'to decolonise means to reverse this tide of bureaucratisation' (Mbembe 2016: 31). This understanding illuminates the scholarship that highlights the problematic conception of writing development as a set of autonomous skills which can be taught to 'fix' under-prepared students (Bitzer 2009; Boughey and McKenna 2016, 2021). Resisting and attempting to reverse bureaucratic conceptions of writing as a skill, which makes a law graduate a 'better product', is especially relevant in the South African legal context, where law schools and faculties are under immense pressure from the legal profession to produce 'practice-ready' graduates who have the requisite reading and writing 'skills' to be marketable and hireable (CHE 2018; Moore 2022). We include and explore these ideas in our training of writing mentors. This allows us to focus on the value of deep, critical and reflexive learning and writing, as a personal

and social good. It resists the role of the writing centre as being to simply equip students with better writing skills so that they are more market ready.

Some of the aspects of training described here are risky – in both the warm and cold senses of the word. The training principles, in combination, create a strong foundation for a resilient writing centre that can facilitate both social connection and support. I now turn to the writing consultations that are conducted by the writing mentors, in which these principles are enacted.

Writing consultations

Much of the training, described above, prepares writing mentors to meet with students individually, or in small groups, to discuss their writing. Up until 2020, all consultations were held in-person, in the writing centre. Consultations with writing mentors are booked using the writing centre's online booking engine. As part of the booking process, students can upload drafts of work in progress, that writing mentors read before the consultation. Writing mentors prepare for each booked consultation and provide feedback on the writing in the consultation.

As part of our growing awareness of the need for a decolonial pedagogy, described above, the writing centre offers students the option to use languages other than English in consultations. There are several compelling reasons for this. Although language rights are constitutionally protected in South Africa, this does not translate into language equity, particularly in educational contexts (Khumalo 2016). If anything, the hegemony of English has become more entrenched than it was in the pre-constitutional era (Alexander 2000; Mayaba et al. 2018). In the context of higher education, this has implications for students' success. In the context of a law school – where huge amounts of complex, dense English text must be both read and written – these implications are of even greater concern. Use of vernacular languages in education has several affordances. It can increase students' positive experiences of learning; help them to develop deeper understanding; and can be used to develop English by transferring language skills possessed in the vernacular to English (Makalela 2015).

Translanguaging is one of our core working principles for writing consultations. It is well-established that translanguaging is a powerful practice in educational contexts, particularly for students' academic identity and cognitive development. The idea of 'purposefully alternating languages' (Makalela 2015) so that students can use their home languages in the writing centre was appealing, as was the prospect of deepening students' content and language knowledge. Getting

consultants and students to focus on what they do with their language repertoire, as they think through the writing demands of the discipline of law, seemed congruent with our purpose. And importantly, the purposeful use of translanguaging is congruent with the decolonial imperative. We take a pragmatic approach to embedding the option for translanguaging in writing consultations. Each year, all consultants indicate which languages they are comfortable using in consultations and we set up the online booking engine to indicate when consultants with various languages are available. In most years, we can offer the option to use at least seven or eight of the South African languages during consultations; one of the benefits of our geographical location is that our students and consultants are fluent in a wide range of languages.

To sum up, before the Covid-19 pandemic, our writing centre offered a principled system of integrated writing development initiatives that addressed some of the risks and challenges our students faced. Moreover, we had tried to ensure that this system was designed to foster resilience in our students, understood here as being able to cope with the challenges and stresses commonly experienced when learning to write in law. In the next section of the chapter, I explore the ways in which our teaching, assessment, training and consultations proved to be both resilient and at-risk, during the shift to emergency remote teaching and learning (ERT) during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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March 2020 – March 2022: The Covid-19 storm

Learning about teaching during the pandemic

This section highlights how our teaching changed during the pandemic, by focussing on the two modules, the first year 'Introduction to Law' course and the final year 'Research Essay' course, described above. It further reflects on what we learned about resilience and risk in teaching these two courses.

In Introduction to Law, all of the teaching that had been planned for the second half of the first semester was done online. The one exception was the peer-review workshop, which we changed to a guided self-review, as we did not yet know enough about facilitating peer groups online. Moreover, we could not assume that all of our students had the necessary technology and connectivity to participate in a synchronous online workshop. Because the University was still in the process of ensuring that all students had access to a device and sufficient data to work online, we deliberately chose to do all of our teaching asynchronously.

We created a week-by-week table of writing portfolio requirements, with an accompanying voice note that talked students through the tasks and requirements. The writing lecture was uploaded as a podcast, with compressed audio files and a pdf of lecture slides also being uploaded to the University's learning management system (LMS), to increase options for engagement for students with data and device challenges. The consultant-led peer review workshops were replaced by self-review, guided by a detailed document and voice note, in which students were given criteria and questions to guide their self-assessment of their first task. Writing centre staff also made themselves available to students in the Introduction to Law LMS Chat Room, every Friday lunch time, to discuss any questions or difficulties. This Chat was the only synchronous element of our teaching, which we mitigated by engaging with students who could not participate via email.

In general, students seemed to cope well with the shift to online teaching. Participation, which we tracked using the LMS analytics tool, was high. There was also extensive interaction with students by email. Some of these emails included students' expressions of appreciation, such as this:

I hope this email finds you well. This is a collective email from a few of my Introduction to Law classmates who have gone through some of the resources that you posted on Sakai regarding the writing portfolio. We'd just like to say thank you very much for making everything so accessible and easy to work with. This is not a usual email, but we really felt it was necessary to state and show our gratitude. The slides and the voice note you sent explained everything so beautifully and works perfectly together. Some things really don't go unnoticed (X, personal correspondence 2020).

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All of the above speaks to Fullerton, Zhang and Kleitman's (2021) integrative model of resilience that recommends that resilience interventions should provide resources and programmes designed to help students to cope with challenges and to continue to engage with learning, despite challenges.

In the second semester, the writing centre staff co-taught the block of lectures on legal research and writing. At this time, the University had provided all students in need with a device and all students were sent a data package every month. We therefore decide to teach synchronously, on Zoom. Mindful of students who remained unable to participate in this way, we decided to create compressed video and audio recordings of all lectures. These recordings and pdfs of lecture slides were uploaded to the LMS so that students could work through the material in their own time. Again, staff were available in the LMS Chat room each week and remained available to do further teaching via email and through consultations.

Despite the obvious risks to the teaching programme during the pandemic, a strong theme that emerged during the deconstruction stage of our group reflections was that teachers and the majority of students in Introduction to Law had been able to work together to ensure that learning continued, despite the very real and negative impacts of stressors during the Covid-19 lockdown. At the end of this section, some of the factors that promoted this kind of resilience are explored in more detail.

Our approach to teaching in the final year Research Essay course, from April 2020, encompassed the following:

- Synchronous workshops were held online on Zoom.
- As with other courses we were involved in, compressed audio and video recordings of the workshops, together with pdfs of workshop slides, were uploaded to the LMS, for students who were not able to participate synchronously.
- Attendance was monitored through the compulsory online submission of a short writing task after each workshop.
- We followed up with students who did not submit tasks and were able to assist some of these students to facilitate their participation. For example, some students asked for materials to be WhatsApped to them and they submitted their tasks via WhatsApp or email instead of on the LMS.

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To try and reduce students' sense of isolation and anxiety, the scope of the workshops was expanded to include anxiety management, dealing with procrastination and using writing as a reflective tool to manage both psychological and academic aspects of the research writing process. We also responded regularly to the tasks that students wrote. In their final reflections, many students indicated that this had helped them not only to persevere with and succeed in this course, but in others as well.

As a small example of this: The wordle below was created in a Google document, during a workshop, in response to the stimulus question 'Please write ONE word that captures how you are feeling right now (It could be in general or about your research essay)'.

the multiple stressors experienced by many students during the pandemic, we were also more flexible about deadlines and attempted to find solutions for every student who contacted us requesting flexibility.

Flexibility was also a key guiding principle for assessments that did not involve writing. For example, one of the Research Essay course requirements is that students present on oral 'pitch' of their research topic and question to a small group of peers and a staff member. This requires synchronous attendance at the pitch, which was difficult to navigate. We tried to be as flexible as possible, offering students a range of times and platforms (including after midnight, when data is cheaper and connectivity more stable in some areas). We also asked students to send us their suggestions for making the research pitches as accessible and painless as possible. Finally, when some students experienced repeated difficulties in connecting, we allowed them multiple attempts to try and do their pitch. It is a testimony to this group's resilience that every single one managed to present their pitches, despite the very challenging circumstances.

Our decision to commit to the greatest flexibility possible during this time was probably a factor that contributed to our relative resilience during this period. In the bi-annual reflection and evaluations conducted, writing mentors identified this as one of the main reasons why they were all able to continue with their work over this period. For example, one mentor, who was working from a rural village without electricity or internet connection, could not access students' writing assignments on the LMS. He was, however, eager to find a way to complete his draft review. We therefore reduced his workload and downloaded the rest of his assignments and emailed them to him. He walked to the nearest town every day, to charge his laptop and to access emails. He emailed us the reviewed drafts and we uploaded them to the LMS. In this way, he was able to continue to provide feedback on the formative assessment writing tasks.

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Learning about training during the pandemic

At first, this did not appear to differ substantially from face-to-face training. We organised one or two times for everyone (or the majority) to attend. We held synchronous sessions on MS Teams or Zoom, which were recorded and available as both a sound and video file, for anyone who could not participate. Slides and materials from sessions were shared. Follow-up chats and moderation of tasks continued, just online instead of in-person. The most useful change was being able to share recordings with those who could not attend, instead of having to arrange a catch-up session, as we

had to do with face-to-face training.

What became clear was that there was a need for some training in how to work effectively online. Because we had all only worked in person up to that point, we ran several training sessions to prepare everyone for online consultations. These were held on a range of platforms (Zoom, MS Teams, the LMS Chat Room and WhatsApp) so that everyone could learn about the features of each; the advantages and disadvantages; and how to use the platform optimally in a consultation. This training, although focussed on setting up and holding a consultation online, also dealt with any other issues that writing mentors were concerned about. For example, we realised that most had never had to create a Wits VPN for themselves before – and that it was now vital as this allowed them free access to all university online resources – so we extended training to include this, so that they were not just able to do it for themselves, but could check that students had done it and, if not, show them how.

Learning about consulting during the pandemic

Factors that we took into consideration as we planned our shift to consulting online included privacy, flexibility, costs and connectivity. Planning for these helped, to some extent, to protect against the negative effects of the pandemic on consulting. These are briefly explored below, before some of the risk factors are identified.

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As we prepared to consult online, writing mentors raised a number of privacy concerns. These included questions about sharing telephone numbers and email addresses with students. Each mentor decided for themselves whether they would choose to consult on platforms that required them to share personal information. Another aspect of privacy that was raised was that students – especially those who do not have the luxury of a private space in which they could consult – may not be comfortable doing a video call. It was agreed that this was important to bear in mind and confirmed our sense that choice was important, for students as well as for writing mentors.

The importance of flexibility and choice drove our decisions about which online platforms to use for consultations. We wanted to be adaptable and use whatever students and writing mentors agreed to use, keeping in mind the need to keep data costs low and being prepared to use at least one zero-rated option. It was left up to each writing mentor to give students a practical choice between a range of platforms, based on each consultant or fellow's own capacity and preference. A further dimension of flexibility was necessary in relation to time. Previously, writing mentors had

only been available to consult during their scheduled consultation hours; typically, between two and four hours each per week. It was necessary to become more flexible about when these hours were worked, as many students (and writing mentors) were constrained by data and connectivity challenges. For example, if a mentor and student agreed to meet at midnight, when data was cheaper or free, they were able to do so.

Connectivity and data costs had to be considered as we prepared to consult online. Most writing mentors had a laptop or tablet to work on and we assisted those who did not to ensure they received one. Some had limited Wi-Fi or access to data and one or two had challenges with connectivity in general. As the University had negotiated access to zero-rated sites through specific providers, the School of Law agreed to buy a SIM card for anyone who did not have one with the specific providers (as soon as the lockdown regulations allowed for the sale of SIM cards). We further put in a request to be able to offer writing mentors a stipend for data used in consultations. The request had to go through Faculty structures and was approved.

All of the risk-mitigation described above allowed the writing centre to become fully operational online from April 2020. All of the writing mentors – including those with extreme data and connectivity challenges – were able to continue to consult online. Most consultations were conducted synchronously, whilst some were conducted via email or online messaging. This success cannot be taken lightly and the huge amounts of flexibility, resilience and creative risk-taking to find ways to continue to consult online, demonstrated by the writing mentors, must be acknowledged.

A challenge that we experienced when working fully online was that it was difficult to maintain social presence and engagement in consultations. The relational dimension of writing centre work is well-established (Clarence 2017) but is hard to maintain online, especially in non-synchronous interactions. Hutchings (2006: 255) distinguishes between exploratory and functional approaches to writing consultations. In the former, the relational and social aspect of the consultation facilitates deeper engagement with the process of writing. In the latter, interactions tend to be more technical and task-focussed, with consultants instructing the student about what needs to be done to improve the writing, rather than listening to the student. Despite our attempts to maintain a dialogic and relational writing centre pedagogy, it was very easy to slip into the functional approach to consultations whilst online, especially in a context where most consultations took place with video cameras off, to save on data costs. Most writing mentors felt that it was much more difficult to ‘read’ body language, affect and silences when online, than it is in a face-to-face, in-person consultation. The literature on this reflects only partial support for these views (Worm 2020; Rowley 2022). Worm (2020) suggests that these difficulties are felt more strongly by those who are inexperienced

in online consultations. For this reason, we have decided to persevere with offering synchronous online consultations and attempt to address the concerns outlined above more directly in training.

A risk that emerged during this time was the marked drop in consultations when they were not curricular. For example, in Introduction to Law, it had been part of the students' writing portfolio requirements to engage in at least one consultation with the writing centre, to discuss implementation of feedback on their draft assignments. In 2020, this requirement was dropped – simply because the logistics of arranging several hundred online consultations during a short space of time seemed impossible. Booking engine statistics show that, in 2020, the number of first year students consulting about their feedback dropped markedly. Pre-pandemic, between eighty and ninety per cent of the class would book a consultation to discuss draft feedback. This dropped to below thirty per cent in 2020. The lecturers who marked the final essays also reported a marked drop in overall quality of the essays. Although no causal relationship can be established between the drop in consultations and drop in quality of the essays – there are too many other variables – this does speak to the challenges of implementing assessment for learning practices, especially during times of flux.

A related but unexpected risk to our work was that the number of students requesting a multilingual consultation dropped significantly whilst we were online. Before March 2020, approximately 20 per cent of our booked consultations selected to use a language other than English in the consultation. However, there was very little take-up of multilingual consultations from students while we were operating remotely. Writing mentors' reflections suggest that the creation of trust relationships, built in person over time, is necessary for students to feel safe enough to request a multilingual consultation. Underlying this is the possibility that – unless multilingualism is explicitly positioned as an asset and a strength – anxieties about remedial or deficit associations with using other languages in writing consultations may inhibit uptake of multilingual consultations. This was not something that we paid sufficient attention to whilst we were consulting online.

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Reflections on factors that facilitated resilience during Covid-19

Reflecting on our eighteen months of working fully online, it is possible to identify several factors that made our writing centre relatively resilient during the Covid-19 pandemic. These factors are explored, briefly, in this section. They include the advantages inherent in working for an urban, historically advantaged institution (HAI); the advantages inherent in working within a discipline; the

affordances of our commitment to flexibility; the importance of paying attention to ease of access to materials and consultations; and the importance of acknowledging the affective dimension of learning, particularly in a writing centre.

Mpungose (2020) articulates what many experienced during the lockdown period: that the rapid shift to online learning entrenched unequal access to learning for many, along the digital divide. Many materially poor students, especially those in rural areas or where internet connectivity was intermittent, were simply unable to access education – formally or epistemically – during this time. Although many of our students experienced significant challenges in accessing learning, these were mitigated, to some extent, by the advantage of being situated in a HAI. Wits had the resources to enact a range of responses to increase the likelihood that our students could continue to participate in the learning programme during lockdown. These included negotiating with internet and cellular telephone providers to make access to Wits e-learning sites free; the provision of monthly data bundles to all students; the provision or loan of laptops to any student who did not have a device on which to work; and early return to campus for those students unable to learn effectively from home. Although this observation is in no way intended to ignore the real and severe difficulties experienced by many of our students, I do believe that we were in a better position to assist our students than many others in less resourced contexts and therefore more resilient.

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Related, but slightly different to this, was the Faculty and School support experienced during this time. Because we were working with a relatively small number of students in one School, we were able to approach School and Faculty management directly with requests to enable our work online. Examples of these are the provision of the monthly stipend to writing mentors, to assist with data and the loan of devices such as laptops in cases where students did not qualify for the University-wide loan scheme. Being based in one School, with a set number of students to support, allowed us more flexibility to innovate, as we attempted to keep the writing centre operational.

Hutchings (2006: 260) observes that one of the major advantages of having writing centres situated in a discipline is that learning and discussions about writing ‘become established as part of the learning process – within the students’ sites of learning’. This was tested and confirmed for our writing centre during the Covid-19 period. Because the bulk of our writing development work is situated within the curriculum, in specific courses and remained part of students’ core learning, it was possible to continue with our work and maintain contact with students. Small practicalities – like being able to communicate with them on their course sites on the LMS and not just via generic ‘dear all’ type communications – made a great deal of difference. Being able to

talk to them in discipline-specific lectures, to establish challenges and ways of overcoming them, allowed us to adapt our practices and respond to students' suggestions. We were able to monitor, through activity on the course sites, which students were not engaging in writing development work and contact these students to find out what they needed to be able to participate fully in the programme. Often, during this contact, students told us that their failure to engage was more due to feeling overwhelmed and lost, rather than being physically unable to access the materials. Personal contact with writing centre staff allowed students to share experiences and co-develop solutions to challenges. In the cases where students were not able to access materials, alternatives could be set up, such as sending voice notes and pdfs of materials to certain students via WhatsApp in circumstances where their device or connectivity prevented easy access to the LMS.

Part of this flexibility was thinking hard about how students accessed learning materials and learning experiences. In this we were guided by writing mentors' and students' experiences and suggestions. It became obvious that we had to find low/no-data options for sharing materials and to create the smallest files possible of recordings and materials, that could be shared on WhatsApp or text message. One of the practices we developed was to create an audio recording of all lectures, as well as the full video recording. This audio recording – once compressed and converted to a MP3 file – could be easily shared and downloaded, even on quite basic cell phones. Similarly, all PowerPoints were saved as pdfs, which could also be shared and downloaded without taking up too much storage space on devices, or using much data. Many students who would otherwise not have been able to access the material, accessed it in these ways.

One of the major risks that we identified, as we reflected on this period, was that our success in keeping the writing centre operational throughout the lockdown period came at significant personal cost. Writing centre staff – academics and writing mentors – all had to commit significantly more time to their work to keep things going and to maintain contact with our students. The nature of the work was also particularly emotionally demanding, as many of the students we interacted with were extremely vulnerable or in crisis. Giving this time and emotional support, at a time when all of us were also experiencing financial, personal and work-related stresses, was extremely demanding. It is important to acknowledge this and not to idealise our work during this time. In short, our ways of working during the pandemic were not all sustainable.

A last factor that made our writing centre relatively resilient during this period was our deliberate consideration of the affective dimension of learning. Clarence (2020) argues that this affective dimension of writing development is both under-theorised and neglected and makes a strong case

for its more careful consideration in writing development work:

I believe part of the power of the writing centre, harking back to its activist academic development roots (Nichols 1998, 2017), is its ability to pause the relentless hamster-wheel of academic knowledge production that students and lecturers are all engaged in, and bring the focus to the person in front of us. This means not just or only talking about the writing and its deadline and specific needs, but how the writer feels about writing, what else they are working on, how they are coping. We have a unique and powerful space in which to enact a more humanising, inclusive pedagogy around writing that openly acknowledges the affective and its crucial role in providing access to or enabling deeper engagement with the epistemological and ontological aspects of knowing knowledge and making knowledge in higher education. (Clarence 2020: 54)

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Although this is always an important dimension in writing centre work (Mann 2001; Lillis and Scott 2007; Archer and Richards 2011; Paxton and Frith 2016) it seemed especially important to create space for this during lockdown; a time of great uncertainty, stress and anxiety. Writing centre staff chose to model vulnerability during this time and created space at the beginning and during most lectures and workshops, in which to acknowledge our own emotional landscape and to encourage students to articulate theirs. An example of this can be seen in the wordle task on page 13, above. We also, in a very basic way, shared research with students on the common effects of anxiety on learning, as well as strategies for overcoming these common effects, such as lethargy, procrastination, inability to focus and struggles with memory. The essential message to students was that they were not alone, that to struggle in such unprecedented and stressful times was normal and that they could share their struggles and find support. In many of the fourth-year students' final reflections, they indicated how much they had appreciated this and that it had motivated them to persevere, not only in their research essay course, but in their other courses as well. This kind of holistic, or dialogic feedback emerges as a key principle for sustaining resilience – not just in consultations and assessments, but in teaching as well.

After the storm: A time of strengthening and reimagining

In this section, I draw on the above reflections and attempt to summarise our learning from the years from which we emerge. I consider how our writing centre is evolving and how our practices are being both reinforced and reimagined during this emergent and reflective period.

Reimagining teaching

The Covid-19 storm reminded us, powerfully, about the central role of affect on learning, particularly when it comes to writing development and building resilience. We do not want to lose what we have learned about this. Clarence (2020: 54) reminds us that '[h]earing from a more experienced researcher that writing is often very hard work and that even the most productive writers struggle, get stuck and hate their writing can be enormously encouraging for novice researchers'. We saw how students were able to draw on this kind of vulnerability and encouragement to develop resilience and maintain engagement with their writing during an extremely stressful period. We are examining our teaching materials and pedagogy, to ensure that this is explicitly built into our teaching.

Another way in which we are reimagining our teaching practice is that we want to maintain the elements of online learning that facilitate resilience and engagement amongst the students. For this reason, we are carefully considering a blended approach to teaching in all the courses that we are involved in. For example, some of the first-year lectures are being presented in the form of a flipped classroom, in which students engage with a recorded lecture online, but then attend an in-person follow up lecture in which we discuss and engage more deeply with the material. The fourth-year writing workshops are offered on campus when physical presence is likely to improve learning outcomes, but they are offered online when the focus is suited to online learning. Students identified certain topics that they wanted to come back to as they wrote and indicated how helpful it was to have recordings of these workshops to refer to. This feedback is guiding our decisions about which mode to use when.

We continue to apply what we learned about accessibility of materials, even now that students can drop into our offices and get clarity in person. The emergency shift to online teaching forced us to become far more aware and intentional in our use of the LMS and this is a major strength that we intend to continue to develop. Improved clarity in how we organise, introduce and store teaching materials for students' use is something we continue to develop.

Reimagining assessment

Assessment for learning continues to be the bedrock of our writing centre. Our reflections on the teaching and learning during the Covid-19 pandemic confirmed the perceived importance of well-timed formative assessments that allow students to practise their writing in low-stakes ways that allow for the provision of constructive formative feedback that in turn allows students to deepen and apply their learning before formal assessment of their writing. A dimension of assessment that was lost during the pandemic was peer assessment. Due to our inexperience in facilitating peer review in groups online, built-in peer reviews were abandoned and became guided self-review (in the Introduction to Law class) or teacher-led review (in the Research Essay course). Reclaiming peer review seems important, in part as an element of community building. We have reintroduced in-person peer review workshops for Introduction to Law students and ensured that the Research Essay workshops that previously included elements of peer review are held on campus, so this kind of assessment can once again be developed and practised.

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An unintended consequence of working wholly online during Covid-19 is that we became more aware of a greater range of feedback techniques available to use online. These include the provision of voice notes, or verbal comments, on aspects of text, rather than simply providing written feedback. It also includes a greater range of options for marking up text online. Our new LMS offers a range of ways in which a student can respond to feedback on the LMS, without waiting for a consultation or having to email queries. This too offers potential for dialogic engagement with students about their writing that was not previously possible.

Reimagining training

The essential elements of our training remain the same. However, we have realised that we need to include more training in online pedagogies and techniques. For example, how to develop a stronger social presence in an online writing consultation; how to avoid slipping into ‘functional’ (Hutchings 2006) approaches to writing consultations; and how to develop and maintain a sense of community online.

Our training and reflection sessions continue to explore ways in which we can continue to be alert to students’ feelings about law, their identity in law and how this affects their reading and writing in law. Clarence (2020: 56) suggests a practice that can facilitate this is ‘to have frank conversations

about their own affective experiences as scholars who are also researchers and writers'. Drawing on what we learned about modelling vulnerability to develop resilience in our teaching practices, we are attempting to extend this to our training and consultation practices.

Reimagining consultations

The importance of presence, in the physical as well as the virtual space, is one of the main lessons we have learned. In their 2021 individual reflections, writing mentors unanimously expressed their relief and appreciation at being back on campus and their belief that it had been necessary to re-establish a physical writing centre on campus, from which they could consult. When we deconstructed these assertions together, they spoke about better connections with each other and students; better conversations in consultations that go further about writing; and the feeling that learning about writing is both deeper and more sustained in face-to-face consultations. A strong theme that emerged was that being on campus – visibly accessible to students at the centre of the School of Law once again – allows a greater range of students to drop in and engage; that some students had not consulted at the writing centre when it was online but were doing so once again.

Another theme that was surfaced was about the use of vernacular languages in consultations. Several writing mentors shared that they had engaged in far more translanguaging during in-person consultations than they had online and attributed this to students being more comfortable with them, after greater rapport had been built in-person. This relates to another theme that emerged during discussions, that of community. Although it was possible, to some extent, to create this online, writing mentors felt that the sense of community that is at the heart of our purpose is much more tangibly experienced in person. They suggested that in-person community building led to an increase in the number of repeat consultations with students and in their ability to draw each other into consultations, where necessary.

For all the reasons articulated above, we have decided to retain in-person consultations as our main mode of consulting. However, we do not want to lose what we have learned about flexibility and are attempting to maintain elements of flexibility that facilitate ease of access to consultations. For example, we now offer students the choice of in-person or online consultations. This hybrid model is helpful to students who choose to come to campus only on selected days, to save on transport costs. At the beginning of each semester, we ask writing mentors to be physically present in the writing centre during their consultation hours. This is to re-establish our presence on campus

and to allow for contact with drop-in consultations. As each semester progresses, however, we have decided to be more flexible about this requirement, so that mentors are only required to come in if they have in-person consultations. This allows those who do not have classes on that day the flexibility to work from home if preferred, during high-pressure periods of the semester.

Maintaining compulsory consultations with all Introduction to Law students during the Covid-19 pandemic proved to be very challenging. When the requirement was dropped, so did engagement with feedback. In 2021, when compulsory consultations were re-introduced in the writing portfolio, attendance at consultations returned to the pre-pandemic level of over eighty percent of the cohort. Lecturers also noted an improvement in the quality of the final essays. However, these gains came at great cost to writing centre staff. Huge amounts of time were spent not just on consulting but on the logistics of setting up multiple consultations in the space of a few weeks. In 2022, therefore, we replaced these consultations with compulsory small-group workshops on working with feedback. Mentors' reflections unanimously agree that these are well-received by students and achieve the same outcomes as the compulsory consultations, whilst being less onerous for writing mentors. This reimagining of an onerous dimension of the consultations has been one of our most effective improvements to the writing centre.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic was a time of great risk. The teaching, training, assessment and consultation work of our writing centre faced a range of challenges and threats, which we were largely able to identify and take steps to set up systems to manage and mitigate. It was also a time that revealed the potential of risk (Thesen 2013); where enforced risk-taking allowed staff, writing mentors and students to develop and discover their agency. We discovered skills and strategies for coping and for continuing to engage with each other; an integrative form of resilience that had not been previously realised. This resilience is allowing us to continue to reclaim and reimagine the writing centre space – both physically and online.

Finally, we are emerging from the Covid-19 storm with a renewed commitment to the importance of our core working principles. After a period in which many students describe feeling isolated and anonymous, it seems particularly important to recommit to creating a space that values, in the words of Mokgoro (1998: 2) 'personhood, humanity, humaneness and morality; a metaphor that describes group solidarity where such group solidarity is central to the survival of communities'.

Such solidarity, after our period of fragmentation and isolation, seems essential as we relearn what it means to be a community of scholars in law, learning to read and think and write together.

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Part 3: Lessons from Covid-19

Chapter Eight

Developing Resilient Pedagogy: New Questions for Writing Centre Practice at the Wits School of Education Writing Centre

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Introduction

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The context of Higher Education (HE) in South Africa is constantly changing and, in the last decade, has been confronted with momentous events in the form of student protests (#Fees Must Fall) starting in 2015 and the Covid-19 pandemic starting in 2019. These disruptions have required paradigm shifts and bold and significant responses from different stakeholders that include university management, academic and support staff and students in the HE sector. Writing centres across South African universities are amongst the stakeholders that have been affected and influenced by these macro-contextual occurrences but that have responded by formulating creative and sustainable solutions. This paper seeks to document the key turning points at Wits University School of Education Writing Centre (WSOE WC) and explicate how the Centre has evolved in terms of its pedagogical approach over the years. Each turning point is characterised by a conceptual shift or historical upheaval in the Higher Education sector that presented several challenges for writing centre practices. Following these varied episodes of change and associated challenges, the WSoE WC has sustained its core principles and practice of providing much-needed academic literacy support to students. As we have evolved, we have adapted to the different demands of the continuously changing context of practice. While we have had to change the pedagogical

focus and mode of delivery, we note how the WSOE WC has, with resilience, developed and sustained the core function of supporting students' effective learning in the university environment despite the challenging context of change and disruption. Following these observations, this chapter highlights the different ways in which the WSOE WC is demonstrating and has always demonstrated, pedagogical resilience over the years and has enabled students to 'rehearse their academic identities and to strengthen their voices so that they (can) participate in university life' (Richards, Lackay and Delpont 2019: iii).

The notion of resilience has underscored the success stories of many writing centres across the world, particularly in South Africa where writing centres are seldom prioritised (Archer and Richards 2011; Daniels, Richards and Lackay 2017; Kadenge et al. 2019). The WSoE WC, for example, has a history of relentlessly negotiating its relevance and significance, both physically and intellectually, within the university (Kadenge et al. 2019). This capacity to deal with difficulty and overcome challenges that threaten functionality is essentially an attribute of resilience (Bahadur et al. 2015). The concept of resilience, however, in comparison to previous times, has gained more currency since the Covid-19 pandemic and is now considered one of the prerequisite characteristics of institutional quality (Schwartzman 2020; Stommel 2021). The inclination is to consider resilient pedagogy as something new and that various pockets within the university space must quickly adapt and acclimatise to the 'new norm'. Stommel (2021) maintains that the discourse on resilient pedagogy is not entirely new, but one that has been amplified by the occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic. A more concise conception of resilient pedagogy, thus, implies that it is 'messy, iterative, and continuously reflective by emphasising process over product' (Thurston 2021: 4). In our case, resilient pedagogy constitutes the process over the last 10 years in which we have engaged in continuous adaptation and critical reflection, challenging our own practices and changing them for better and more effective ones. We argue in this paper, through our illustrations of four turning points within the WSoE WC that our approaches and practices are and have always been, embedded within a framework of resilience. As will be explored in the proceeding sections, each turning point was marked by significant change and associated challenges and, at each turn, we have, in numerous ways adapted and remained resolute in maintaining the core functions of our centre, that is, the provision of pedagogically sound academic literacy support and development to meet the needs of our students.

Key research questions

While we have engaged consistently in the practice of reflecting on our pedagogical approaches over the years, it is equally important to go back to each turning point and elicit the significant challenges and opportunities as we envisage academic literacy support and development in Higher Education beyond the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the overarching research question we address is: What aspects of the WSoE WC practice characterise pedagogical resilience? To address this question, the following sub-questions were used to guide the conceptualisation of this chapter:

1. What are the key turning points of the WSoE WC over the last twelve years since its inception in 2010?
2. What are the challenges we confronted at each turning point and how did they influence the WSoE WC's pedagogical practices?
3. What lessons and opportunities were realised at each turning point and how did they shape/influence the WSoE WC pedagogical and assessment practices?
4. What new questions beyond the turning points do we have now?

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Methodology: Critical review of literature and practitioner enquiry

This chapter, for the most part, is conceptual as it offers a critical review of both international and local literature that mirrors the broad landscape of writing centre practice. This forms the backdrop to our reflection as writing centre practitioners¹ having experienced, in over a period of twelve years, the four transformational turning points in the WSoE WC. We show how, for each turning point, we have resisted reverting to previous ways of thinking and practicing in meeting the normative institutional demands. We review our evolving model in terms of the pedagogical approach (dialogic) and mediation. In addition, we extend this criticality by analysing our capacity

¹ Author Laura Dison as academic director and Author Emure Kadenge as research director (former peer tutor and current lecturer)

development in terms of peer tutor² training and interrogation of our materials and how these have played out at each turning point. In doing this we assume, following Tight (2019), a researcherly attitude' where we document the WSOE WC narrative over a twelve-year period, by critically explicating the traversed turning points and raising questions that are critical for advancing enduring writing centre practice at the WSOE WC and in higher education in general.

We use Nordstrom's (2021) Practitioners Inquiry (PI) methodology to examine our own practice, systematically and intentionally, by asking questions and challenging our own assumptions about our practice. The PI research methodology has roots in self-study where forms of human engagements are studied from the perspective of those involved (Berry and Kitchen 2020). Traditionally, the PI methodology has been used in collaborative research projects and teams deliberately with the view to positively influence practice from gathered insights. Similarly, undertaking this study was a collaborative activity which we found hugely meaningful as we created opportunities for lengthy and deep conversations about the work we have been doing at our centre for the past twelve years. We treated our professional context of practice, the WSOE WC, as the site of enquiry (Cochran-Smith and Donnell: 2012). In doing so, we reveal (i) how the WSOE WC has evolved in response to the contextual demands; (ii) the areas of effectiveness which may need further improvement; and (iii) raise questions for consideration as we chart the way forward for the WSOE WC and writing centres in general beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.

The following section showcases the four turning points that identify challenges confronting us at that time, the inherent opportunities and how we have used responsive and flexible writing pedagogies generated from within our specific writing centre space. The discussion of each turning point reveals the form and foci that demonstrate our resilience in the face of immense external pressures. We base each turning point on extant bodies of knowledge in the academic literacies and writing centre fields and explore the impact of the Writing Centre in challenging some of the deeply held assumptions about student deficit and the importance of writing in particular social contexts. We show how the shifts in our practice have contributed to the transformation of

2 Peer tutors are senior students (from third year to Ph.D.) who are selected on their academic writing ability and listening skills. They are trained to support and develop students within the school with academic writing and generally inculcating an appreciation of appropriate academic writing conventions. At the Wits School of Education (and in many other universities in South Africa), peer tutors were formerly referred to as writing consultants but the name 'consultant' implied expertise and was too tied to the business world (Clarence 2013). This, and additional motivation from funders, led to the adoption of a more appropriate name, 'peer tutor', which encapsulates the idea of a peer supporting another peer in a friendly and non-judgemental way (Carlse 2019).

assessment thinking and practising at the WSoE WC.

Engaging in a process of self-reflection by narrating our experiences of working in the WSoE WC space across these turning points has enabled us to interrogate our assumptions about shifting writing centre practice. This approach is guided by the view of reflection (Brookfield 1995; Mezirow 2009) that emphasises the importance of interrogating the hidden assumptions and power dynamics that shape our teaching and learning practices.

Turning point 1: Establishing a writing centre informed by academic literacy models

The focus in academic development in the 90s was on the support programmes offered to 'educationally disadvantaged' students whose apartheid schooling had not prepared them for the discourse demands of university study (Scott 2009). It soon became apparent that the standard approach to literacy development work was remedial in nature, aimed at 'bridging the gap' that existed between these students' prior schooling and the expectations of higher education literacies and learning. It was important to transform the student deficit model to the recognition by writing centre and academic development practitioners that this approach had failed on several levels and that stand-alone generic programmes alone were not addressing the dynamics of the changing demographics at the university or the systemic structuring of inequality (Boughey and McKenna 2021). We needed a systemic overhaul to shift some of the intransigent systems and deficit conceptions of student learning. Working with students on their writing in the disciplines (Ganobcsik-Williams 2006; Deane and O'Neill 2011; Lillis et al. 2015) has formed part of an important global shift towards the establishment of discipline-based writing centres which focus on equitable ways of enabling meaning making.

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The purpose of the WSOE WC, established in 2010, was to enhance academic literacy development at all levels of study through the creation and implementation of a peer tutoring model. Education students were seen to have discourse requirements and demands that were best mediated by peer tutors with a foundational knowledge of the course content and the assessment task demands³. The Writing Centre quickly became a visible writing space for supporting

³ The development of students' understanding of literacy in the classroom as future teachers was a key consideration in the Council of Education offering financial support from 2014 to present.

undergraduates and post graduate writing development. As pointed out by Dison and Clarence (2017: 9) in their edited collection on writing centres in South Africa, 'the establishment of these writing centres signaled a recognition that widening access had not necessarily resulted in enhanced access for many students'. The Writing Centre needed to play a key role in helping students benefit from an explicit focus on reading and writing.

The move towards embedding writing in the disciplines is framed by literature on academic literacies which has shifted the interest away from 'skills' to issues of power and identity within institutions. Lea and Street (1998: 159) distinguish between three approaches that have characterised academic literacy development work, namely add on study skills approach, the 'socialisation' approach and the 'academic literacies' approach. The 'study skills' approach, focussed on teaching students to encode and decode the printed text and correcting students' inadequate writing errors. In the second approach, which subsumes the first, students are shown the 'rules of the game' as they are socialised into disciplinary discourses. In the third approach there is an ideological focus on transformation which resists the deficit framing of students. This supports Jacobs' (2015) view that students are inducted into thinking and practicing in the disciplines and critique and contest these practices. Boughey and Mckenna (2021: 64) describe the ideological model which enables lecturers and students to understand the role of redress, identity and self-worth.

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What we have realised over the years in running the Writing Centre at the School of Education for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, is that it is useful to hold the academic literacies approach as an ideal to aim for, but that circumstances and conditions necessitate the application of more generic offerings even within a discipline-based writing programme. Students from backgrounds that did not prepare them for requisites of academic literacies at university, need to be acculturated into ways of practicing and thinking in the disciplines (Meyer and Land 2005) and it is not always possible to adopt an academic literacies paradigm. In a volume on normative and transformative approaches to writing development (Lillis et al. 2015). Paxton and Frith (2015: 156) reflect on the history of apartheid schooling and the ongoing lack of resources and inequities in SA schools. They argue that it is necessary to 'induct students into existing and available discourses' before tackling issues of power and identity in academic writing. For the WSOE WC, our underlying approach was to create a model of support that focussed on dialogue around disciplinary writing practices. Lillis (2006: 33) proposed a framework of different types of dialogue as a pedagogical tool for enabling student writers to 'participate in normative essayist practices at the same time as critiquing such practices'.

The training of peer tutors has presented many opportunities for shaping WSOE WC pedagogical practices as they have developed a range of sustainable interpersonal competencies and pedagogical strategies for listening and conversing effectively with their students (Nichols 2017a). Peer tutors have always been trained to work dialogically with students to help them make their meanings clear in contrast to a view of writing linked primarily to grammatical errors and accuracy. Peer tutors have responded well to the view of writing as a mode of thinking and value the creation of a meta-language about writing that name the thinking processes. This enables them to work with students to reflect on the content, processes and assumptions in their writing. It is evident that this holistic perspective on writing development has allowed students to be heard in an open and interactive space where they had been sent by lecturers for 'remedial' writing support. This philosophical shift helped peer tutors to be seen as insiders who assist students through conversations about writing as a process of identity formation. Following Lillis (2006), this approach requires peer tutors to induct students into academic writing through a detailed focus on student writing in dialogic conversations.

Informed by the theoretical work of the academic literacies' paradigm, writing centre practices have reframed the notion of writing strongly related to ways of thinking and practicing in Education with students as engaged participants in their writing development. This process has given rise to a culture at the School of Education of challenging deficit assumptions of students and highlighting the role of the WSOE WC as deepening students' critical and reflective engagement with course concepts through reading and writing activities. The next turning point shows how moving into the discipline of Education Studies solidified this re-positioning of writing centre practice.

A notable phenomenon at the WSOE WC from the start, is that peer tutor work involves shared assessment criteria, rubrics from Education Studies and working with students to engage with feedback. This has given rise to a range of suggestions and recommendations for changing assessment practices at the school. Many of these insights have emerged during tutor training when peer tutors reflect critically on their experiences and observations of writing challenges and affordances. A major assessment research project was initiated in 2011 and culminated in four published articles (Shalem et al. 2014), spurred on by a particular concern with epistemic weaknesses identified in student writing at the WSOE WC that could be attributed to the formulation of application type assessments. The 2013 Assessment project involved an in-depth exploration of undergraduate assessment tasks and accompanying rubrics. Colleagues have continued the practice of critiquing each other's assessments and writing briefs from a student's perspective (Bean 2001: 87) through questions about the clarity, level of complexity and explicitness of assignment questions.

Turning point 2: Moving into the disciplines and the inception of project WURU⁴: Resisting student deficit and marginalisation.

The model of writing support at the WSOE WC has shifted from its primary focus of providing writing support for the growing number of 'at risk' undergraduate students, to a more expanded vision of integrating a variety of writing development activities. In 2014, a significant project named WURU was established which would be formally embedded in Education 1 in 2014, a compulsory theoretical first year course. The uniqueness of the project was that it was designed in collaboration with Education 1 lecturers to cater for all Education students and not only those identified as 'borderline' by the faculty. WURU has been acknowledged, at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University) and nationally, as a vibrant and transformative space for providing reading and writing support to first-year Education students (Clarence and Dison 2017; Kadenge et al. 2019).

The selection of students for WURU is indicative of why this was a key turning point for the Writing Centre practices at the School of Education. It was initially decided that selection would be based on the students' first Education I assignment mark which they received in April. Students attaining less than 50 per cent were encouraged to join WURU. However, in view of the sort of thinking encompassed by the deficit view of students, a new approach was taken from 2018 where it was decided to allow first year students to join the programme voluntarily and the programme was marketed especially at Orientation. Students signed up willingly and in large numbers and the fact that it was voluntary seemed to remove the negative stigma attached to being 'invited' to a programme. WURU sessions continue to be run by peer tutors where both academic reading and writing skills are taught as well as guidance provided in relation to the Education I course work and assignments. WURU sessions are not a fixture on the academic programme timetable; however, they are held in line with the timetable periods. Besides the work-related subject matter, the peer tutors also support the students socially by discussing issues like the transition from school to university and other student-related social issues.

In a paper by Dison and Moore (2019) WURU was flagged as an important pedagogical initiative for developing students' reading, writing and critical engagement with course texts and writing requirements. As will be argued in this chapter, the success of this intervention has endured

4 The name was proposed by one of the peer tutors and voted, democratically, by all peer tutors in 2014. WURU is an abbreviation for Write Up Read Up.

through various disruptions over the years and continues to offer multifaceted support for first year Education students. Contextualised reading and writing materials produced at the WC have been embedded in mainstream tutorials. In line with this trend, the WSOE WC has extended its work steadily into the mainstream tutorials for all first-year students by involving the Writing Centre in the courses themselves. This has resulted in different forms of writing support collaboration with lecturers, and writing peer tutors have been trained to work with students on coursework that involves reading, writing and making rhetorical choices. These processes have addressed the constant concern expressed by lecturers that students do not integrate ideas from texts or external resources appropriately into their writing to bolster their own arguments and positions. Writing Centre practitioners hold strongly to the view that learning to write well at university is not simply developing a generic set of communication skills but involves engaging students with practices of what 'good writing is', 'which are shaped by the 'histories and cultures of our academic disciplines and institutions and which privilege the forms of writing which are valued by those with power within these contexts' (Ashwin et al. 2015: 29).

Dison and Mendelowitz (2017) argue that peer tutors' content knowledge allows them to help students identify conceptual misunderstandings through talking and writing about the content. Their subject matter credibility with students is enhanced but they have learnt, through modelling and role play, not to tell students what to write and to avoid 'over explaining' concepts and theories. Instead, peer tutors are encouraged in the training to use the concepts as a vehicle to empower students to develop their thinking and writing processes. We have drawn on Clarence's (2017: 51) use of semantic gravity, a tool from Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) to show the value of peer tutors 'mov(ing) between the generic and the specific task-related writing concerns'. The intention is for students to write effectively with an understanding of the generic principles of good writing that are applied to specific writing tasks in Education Studies.

Peer tutor training focusses on allowing students access to disciplinary languages manifested in learning and teaching materials 'that sought to make explicit to students the rules underpinning the literacy practices of (the) discipline' (Jacobs 2015: 135). The goal is for students to learn how to summarise academic arguments, how to quote and paraphrase texts using disciplinary conventions and how to integrate their own voices 'into conversation with other scholars' (Bean 2011: 232). Tools like concept maps have helped students connect disciplinary ideas by labelling links between ideas. The prime purpose of the training is for students to recognise and use the disciplinary discourse effectively and to develop a meta-awareness of how knowledge is produced in the discipline. This process of 'making the language visible' is an important form of dialogue (Lillis 2006: 38). For all

the main theoretical texts in Education Studies, critical reading questions integrating into the texts, prompt students to evaluate the quality of the argument and to reflect on their own approach to reading a text. The dialogic view of writing underpins these processes as peer tutors and students deepen their knowledge about writing processes in conversation and see knowledge as dialogic rather than informational (Bean 2001) within the disciplinary context.

The Project WURU as argued elsewhere (Kadenge et al. 2019), had to become more pro-active in creating transitional support structures for all students with the awareness that students did not identify as requiring support with their writing. We could not assume that students would 'show up' at the Writing Centre without being refereed by their lecturers or tutors or being encouraged through the various student networks. The changed model of writing development shows that our voices were heard in the institution as we conceptualised more inclusive and flexible ways of working with students.

During this period, a significant shift was that the peer tutors were constantly made aware in the training of 'changing conceptions of feedback' (Boud and Malloy 2013: 3) and reflective forms of writing to structure students' critical engagement with the feedback on their essays. In pairs or groups at the centre, students were encouraged to discuss the feedback they received and how best to address core conceptual, structural and language challenges. This was also an attempt to shift the focus away from an exclusive mark or results orientation to one in which students could learn strategies and take ownership of their writing. In line with this thinking, lecturers at the WSoE became more receptive to a process-oriented approach to feedback (Winstone and Carless 2020) through staff development seminars and strategy exchange sessions driven by the Writing Centre practitioners.

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Turning point 3: Aligning with the transformation agenda.

During #Fees Must Fall, the greater Higher Education (HE) contextual environment was confronted with a tension whose effects are still in play today. The student-led protests began in mid-October in the year 2015 and the motivation for the protests was a fight against increases in student tuition. The students' argument was centred around the need for government to increase university subsidies to allow free higher education, particularly for students from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds (Maringira and Gukurume 2016; Mdepa 2022). While this took centre stage and caused students across the country to arise in protests, Griffiths (2019) argues that the protests were a manifestation

of deep-seated discontent amongst the South African populace. In fact, these protests brought to the fore discussions around social transformation with the decolonisation of HE in South Africa as the most topical. These concerns proliferated the HE space and the role of the university beyond the academic project was in question. The University of the Witwatersrand, being the centre of the #Fees Must Fall protests, was certainly confronted with the question of its role, relevance and contribution to the larger social transformation agenda.

As writing centre practitioners, with the very important role of strengthening students' writing skills and supporting their academic success, we were equally confronted with the need to question our own pedagogical approach and reflect on the ways in which we were contributing to the transformation agenda. We had always realised that our contribution was to mediate students' epistemic access beyond formal access to the university and the Writing Centre as a physical space. However, during the period of the #Fees Must Fall campaign, we dug deeper and interrogated the conditions for working differently with students. The scholarly literature on writing centre practices around this campaign (Nichols 2017b; Richards et al. 2019) is telling of the robust reflection in writing centres following the protests. We responded to the input from all stakeholders (peer tutors, students and lecturers) to change our approach to academic literacy support and development profoundly.

Nichols (2017b) notes the importance of confronting what she calls the 'codes of power' and the lecture room, by traditional design and default due to large numbers of students, often takes on the Freirean 'depositing' or 'banking' approach (Micheletti 2010) where students are mere recipients of information without an opportunity to speak and be heard. Symonds (2020) argues that it is important to challenge and transform the relationship between students and academics evidenced by the inception of writing centres, especially in South African universities, to create safe spaces for students to learn and create their own ideas through writing (Richards et al. 2019). In the aftermath of the #Fees Must Fall protest, the WSOE WC expanded its reflective capacity by holding ongoing discussions as a team to come up with our own interpretation of transformation. We raised critical questions about our role as a Centre and as individuals in contributing to the grand transformation agenda. It was during these reflection exercises⁵ that we resolved to ensure that all our engagements with students 'speak to the strengths of learners rather than focussing on

5 The WSOE WC has a meeting every Wednesday afternoon, lunch hour, where WC management engages peer tutors to reflect on individual experiences for the week. These weekly meetings are also used to share information with peer tutors in terms of major assignments that students are more likely to bring and strategies on how to assist students better are shared.

perceived weaknesses' (Nichols 2017b: 185). In other words, we were deliberate in institutionalising a partnership with students where they knew that their voices, thoughts and ideas matter and they could self-express without fear or judgement. This was in line with our existing democratic and dialogic practices where emphasis in our peer tutor training was on the use of the Socratic dialogue or questioning patterns where the peer tutor, during an engagement with students, uses a variety of questions to try and understand students' ideas and slowly help them think of their own writing in more critical ways (Thompson and Mackiewicz 2014).

Although employing this approach has always been one of the focal elements that defined our practice, the #Fees Must Fall protests and associated dialogues brought this to the fore. Thus, to strengthen the implementation of this extended dialogue and questioning approach, we conducted several workshops and training sessions with peer tutors where we explored the different ways through which we could establish and cultivate more inclusive consultations. What came out of those deliberations were ideas that included recognition of students' cultural and linguistic diversity and allowing students to engage with the literacy tasks in ways more relatable to them. This was certainly encouraged in other universities and a case to note, especially around intentionally partaking in the transformation agenda is that of the multi-lingual Writing Lab at Stellenbosch University where the Writing Centre accommodates different languages during writing consultations. Bailey (2016) explains that the Stellenbosch Writing Lab, particularly given the tensions around language policies in universities that was sparked by the #Fees Must Fall protests, became a hub for inclusion, social justice and support for students who would otherwise be estranged to the university space due to poor command in the academically accepted writing discourse. At that time, we encouraged similar practices and witnessed some consultation sessions being conducted in vernacular languages such as Zulu and Sotho to develop students' confidence and initiate comfortable participation (Bailey 2016). We went on to emphasise the importance of student voice during face-to-face consultations in all our peer tutor training. Our conception of developing student voice was to help the 'student-writers take greater control of the (diverse) voices in their texts' (Lillis 2006: 40). The issue of raising and strengthening the students' voice became a key aspect of our tutor training more generally and was particularly relevant during this time.

Turning point 4: Working online during the Covid-19 pandemic

The most trying phase in Higher Education and for writing centres in South Africa, perhaps, were the unprecedented challenges that came with the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic's lockdown restrictions in 2020, most lecturers at the University of the Witwatersrand were forced to adopt emergency remote teaching (ERT) where all teaching and learning was abruptly transferred to the online mode (Hodges and Fowler 2020). This meant that course teaching and assessment material had to be developed and customised for the available tools on the online Learning Management System (LMS). Student support structures within the university were not spared; all our services were disrupted and needed to follow the ERT pattern or risk being dysfunctional. Most of our students were struggling and it was at this time that the 'digital divide' was exacerbated with many students not having access to the required digital technology to access online learning. Despite these glaring disparities, the academic year had to continue and students were still required to meet their academic obligations such as submitting assignments and meeting assessment requirements. It was at this time that our service was most needed, necessitating our alignment with the new instructional mode while sustaining our student academic literacy support offerings. However, the transition to the online modality, for both peer tutors and students, was difficult (Lee et al. 2022; Joosten et al. 2021; Rapanta et al. 2020; Weidlich and Kalz 2021).

It is important to mention that there was general pressure for staff and students to quickly master online instructional and learning design pedagogies (Rapanta et al. 2020). At the same time, there were stronger calls for developing a resilient pedagogy, one that is generally conceived as an approach to teaching that is flexible and adaptable, with the ability to sustain learning experiences despite disruptive circumstances or conditions (Schwartzman 2020; Stommel 2021; Thurston 2021). While the university was focussed on supporting academic staff to develop an effective online presence, we used similar resources and additional training to support peer tutors' online pedagogy with students. A peculiar challenge worth mentioning at this time, however, was that peer tutors were confronted with a double dilemma of learning the Wits University learning management system both as students and as course designers and instructors simultaneously. We were concerned about the quality of the online pedagogy given that our peer tutors were novice online teachers (Lee et al. 2022). As lecturers ourselves, we were cognisant of the challenges inherent in online teaching and learning and the heavy demand for additional mediation to ensure students participation and interaction (Culpeper and Kan 2020). Thus, we were deliberate in our approach to peer tutor training and ensured that it focussed on maintaining a clear focus on flexibility and resilience in

working with student writing in various online spaces. Some key skills honed in the training included how to maintain the dialogic approach and use effective communication, technological guidance on the digital site, time management as well as working with the new assessment modalities. We wanted peer tutors to feel equipped and confident to tackle the cognitive and technical challenges of supporting students in the new online mode.

Lillis (2006) asserted 14 years before the pandemic, that although different types of dialogue with students in a writing development context are usually associated with face-to-face talk, these can be readily applied to working with students in online and blended modes of communication. The WSOE WC drew on guidelines prepared by the Writing Programme on main campus to develop a manual on how to provide effective feedback to students online and pointers to peer tutors and subject tutors in the feedback process. An explicit aspect in the training has been on student and tutor reflection as they consider steps for addressing or 'talking back' (Lillis 2006: 41) to the feedback comments. It demonstrates the value of ongoing interaction with students to help them develop their agency and connection to others and to rely on their own evaluative judgements (Carless 2015).

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During the student protests and the pandemic, the nature of assessment tasks presented many challenges for students and lecturers in a context characterised by high student numbers and a powerful culture of summative assessment that favours assessment for accountability. Over the years and particularly during Covid-19, the opportunity presented itself to help staff develop a range of authentic assessment tasks to find ways of 'designing out' plagiarism so that students, from their participation in authentic assessment tasks, could see the relevance of what they were doing to their future lives and selves. The WSOE WC reflected publicly by using various committee structures at the school, faculty and university, on possibilities for the development of sustainable online and/or blended assessment strategies for enabling critical thinking, reading and writing in the disciplines.

Discussion

In this section, we draw key insights from the four turning points described above to articulate the most significant of our WC principles and practices that have stood the test of time and that demonstrate our flexibility and resilience. The questions posed at the beginning of this critically reflective study helped us identify and expound on aspects of our practice at the WSOE WC that

characterise pedagogical resilience. Unpacking the turning points has been a meaningful exercise for our role as academic and research directors at the WSOE WC as it has enabled us to surface the challenges and opportunities manifested through each turning point and to consider how these situations and experiences have influenced the WSOE WC and broader pedagogical practices. It is evident that our practices and pedagogical approaches are not static and retain the values we uphold. While there have been numerous shifts in the contexts of practice and influence of our work, we have discerned some enduring resilient practices that have supported tutors and students' navigation of unprecedented events and the often unpredictable nature of the writing process.

Below is a discussion of four of these core writing centre practices.

Sustaining the dialogic approach

A key approach to developing criticality and the capacity to self-regulate in writing centre practice is the adoption of various forms of dialogic engagement with students. The dialogic engagement between peer tutors and students in writing centres is a social justice project underpinned by social justice principles that includes 'problem solving, critical thinking, student empowerment, social responsibility, student-centred focus, holistic education and an analysis of power' (Rambiritch 2018: 53). In agreement with this observation, through explicating the four turning points, we have shown that the WSOE WC has been committed to a similar social justice agenda where our broad aim has been to contribute to enabling epistemological access and academic success, particularly for marginalised students. The dialogic pedagogical approach has afforded us an opportunity to create an inclusive non-judgemental space where students can participate and be heard as they work their way through learning the conventions and codes of academic writing. What is apparent is that regardless of the modality, whether in a one-on-one consultation, group session or online engagement, the underlying framework has remained a dialogic approach. This has remained consistent over the years as peer tutors ask probing and incisive questions with the view to assisting students to clarify their thinking and understanding. Turning points one and two have established the groundwork for turning points three and four by supporting all incoming students rather than those deemed to be 'at risk'. They embody an approach to writing as a social practice in which texts are constructed in dialogue between students and the peer tutor.

The development of peer tutor reflexivity and agency

One practice that has reinforced and sustained our dialogic pedagogical approach over the years has been in the form and foci of our peer tutor training. Consistently, the focus of training for peer tutors has been on maintaining a clear emphasis on flexibility in working with student writing in the changing spaces described in the chapter. Our aim has been to ensure that students felt recognised and that after a writing conversation they feel more confident to tackle the cognitive challenges of the required writing tasks. In the first turning point, our mandate was to resist the overemphasis of generic approaches to writing. The second turning point saw us moving into the disciplines and the emphasis in training for peer tutors shifted to an awareness of writing as a process and developing an understanding of the subject specific conventions of Education 1 as illustrated in our discussion of the WURU intervention project above. A key defining focus during this time was resisting student deficit approaches and further marginalisation as was the original motivation for the WURU intervention project.

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This philosophy was carried through to turning point three where, amid national student protests, we reflected and theorised on our role within a reimagined model for student support. We aligned our peer tutor training and focussed on developing an expanded vision of integrating a variety of writing development activities that recognised the individual identities of our students. Turning point four occurred during the onset of ERT due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Operating in a different online mode made us reflect critically on our pedagogically flexible approach for addressing inequities that were magnified by the pandemic. Writing peer tutors and students felt the loss of human interaction but a key lesson learned from ERT was that writing pedagogies that are traditionally used in individual and group consultations, could also be utilised in pedagogically appropriate ways online. Following this, peer tutor training focussed on humanising the online engagements by exposing peer tutors to a variety of activities to make the online sessions interactive.

An important observation is the mechanism through which, over the years, we have sustained our peer tutor training. The Wednesday lunch meetings at the WSOE WC stand out as an instrumental in-person or online platform through which the resilient dialogic pedagogical approach has been enacted. It is in these meetings that peer tutors, in conversation with the WC directorate and subject lecturers mediate and discuss the various course tasks as well as the specific approaches and strategies applied by peer tutors to support students. A variety of reading and writing oriented resource materials is shared and discussed, reinforcing the underlying dialogic approach. In addition, several workshops have been conducted to introduce innovative and creative strategies to

deal productively and critically with the demands placed on peer tutors and students by contextual and organisational change.

Influencing writing practices at the School of Education

Many of the training activities at the Writing Centre have concentrated on addressing the concern by lecturers that students do not synthesise sources or references appropriately. The training has taken it further to include students and peer tutors in important discussions about literacy practices in the curriculum by embedding explicit discipline-based reading and writing activities. The ongoing challenge is to provide conditions at the WC through appropriate resourcing and institutional investment where peer tutors and students can continue to participate in these critical conversations with subject specialists. Our goal is for writing interventions to continue enabling epistemic access and writing mastery and no longer to be external to curriculum offerings as demonstrated by WURU and other writing intensive courses at the School of Education. This chapter has demonstrated how the tensions between normative and transformative approaches to writing have surfaced during times of disruption and have affected all aspects of academic literacies. We argue that a more integrated model underpinned by dialogic and interactive principles, contextualises the teaching of writing within the disciplines and makes it relevant to students' conceptual and literacy needs.

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Influencing assessment practices at the School of Education

In this chapter, we have shown that strong partnerships have emerged between writing specialists, peer tutors and subject lecturers to develop strategies for promoting student engagement with criteria and rubrics, using exemplars of student writing to showcase quality writing and to improve pre-task guidance for students at different levels of performance. We argue that the WSoE WC has contributed to discussions in the school about alternative assessment strategies, drawing on dialogic and reflective writing as the cornerstones of writing centre practice. This has been an important way of confronting the tensions highlighted by Boughey and McKenna (2021: 68) between writing centre philosophies informed by sociocultural theories and academics who revert to 'de-contextualised understandings of learning and who direct their students to the centres to get their language problems 'fixed'.

Conclusion

We argue in this chapter that we have always used responsive and flexible writing pedagogies that are generated from within the specific writing centre space. Though we have drawn on strategies and models for working in new and dialogic ways with students, we have illustrated the resilient nature of our practice by formulating our own model of change specific to our teaching and learning context. We have resisted becoming socialised exclusively into 'westernised' ways of conceptualising and implementing writing centre practices and have turned to resources and affordances of our internal workings.

Over the years, the WSOE WC has contributed to the conversations about changing the framing of writing and student deficit in the school, and has contributed to the writing-rich orientation of mainstream tutorial pedagogies, and to challenging normative assessment practices, focussed on summative assessment. The peer tutors have played a major role in all four turning points as they have learnt to guide students to explore their writing and thinking processes. The sociological underpinning of the academic literacies' paradigm has guided all aspects of WSOE WC practice. A central concern in this chapter was to use our reflectivity to point to new directions for our centre and for writing centres in general, beyond the turning points. This is consistent with the ultimate objective of practitioner inquiry research that seeks to develop an improved understanding of the educational project with the view to identify and discard limiting practices and, at the same time, explore and promote identified transformational possibilities (Cochran-Smith and Donnell 2012; Nordstrom 2021).

As we conclude, we contemplate on two new questions that we believe point to several challenges we and other writing centres need to grapple with.

The first question is related to institutional and structural support. We question the extent to which the university is committed to supporting writing centre work, as more than twelve years since establishing our centre, we mostly rely on external funding for our core activities. A key principle in writing centre practice is for peer tutors to understand students' literacy histories and the implications of students' poor readiness for their participation in their university studies. As it stands, students continue to be underprepared for the kind of thinking, writing and academic rigour required at university because of their often under-resourced and inadequate educational backgrounds. This phenomenon was exacerbated by the loss of learning time during the Covid-19 pandemic period. While we have invested in rich peer tutor training and our peer tutors have evidently become more knowledgeable about students' writing practices and the nature of working

with all students dialogically rather than with a few students on the margins, we are still confronted with the challenge of dealing with huge student numbers beyond our capacity. It is, thus, timely to question institutional and structural commitments towards the work of writing centres. The role of inculcating and anchoring academic literacy practices within the university has never been more significant given the current demand on universities as instrumental in developing 21st century imperatives that include critical thinking, creative thinking, communicating and collaborating.

The second question emerging from this critical analysis relates to what we can do to avoid reverting to negative student deficit conceptions, as described in the first two turning points and traditional ways of working with students that do not enhance the quality of student critical engagement and learning. Students are coming to the institution even less prepared for the discursive challenges of tertiary study post Covid-19. The university is increasingly relying on writing centre expertise to enhance the quality of university programmes and address the educational needs of undergraduate and postgraduate students.

In these institutional spaces, we will continue to question traditional framings of the 'student problem' and to work with subject specialists to find sustainable ways of systematising and institutionalising tried and tested approaches for enhancing academic literacy practices. We will interrogate how we can retain the affordances of the dialogic and interactive principles that underpin our contextualised WC pedagogical practices described in this chapter, especially in consideration of the new online mode with its inherent challenges of poor student participation and engagement. This chapter has allowed us to reflect deeply on our principles and practices and to strengthen the macro and micro level elements that have given rise to a changed model of writing support at the Wits School of Education Writing Centre.

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Chapter Nine

In the Forests of the Library: Five Paths Through Letter Writing and Writing Groups Towards Sustainable Writing

Pamela Nichols, Barbara Adair, Fouad Asfour, Babalwa Bekebu, Lucy Khofi and Esther Marie Pauw, University of the Witwatersrand

Introduction: The library as refuge, resource and place of reconnection

Pamela Nichols, WWP Head

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Disciplinary background: Ph.D. in Comparative Literature (New York University), 40 years' experience of teaching writing in universities in Beirut, New York, and Johannesburg

All writing begins with reading, with internal engagement with the voice on paper or screen. Early experiences of reading are hopefully often associated with pleasure. In my own case, two memories come to mind. The first, a very early memory of sitting on Grandad's lap in front of the coal fire, listening to his telling of the stories from the delicately illustrated golden book, looking into the embers of the fire as he spoke and playing with the maps of blue green veins on his hardworking hands. The second, as a teenager, being told to turn off the light and instead burrowing down under the eiderdown, torch at the ready, because I had to find out what happened next. I cannot think of either memory without a wave of remembered pleasure. The books were alive with lights, voices, feelings, colours, alternative realities: they were my escape and resource, extending the limits of my world.

But what if reading is not associated with pleasure? What if the earliest memories of reading are connected to punishment at school? What if there were no, or very few, books at home and

no welcoming local libraries?¹ How do we then provide students with entrances into a culture of reading and writing, where they can realise Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's dictum that there is no single story and apply that possibility to all learning (Adichie 2009)? The Covid-19 years deprived many students of just such a possibility, because of the exclusion from the potentially levelling spaces of school and university and because of poor quality online learning associated with the 'passive consumption of pre-packaged meaning'.² What can we do now to rekindle engagement and to generate pleasure as we re-open the gates of learning?

One answer is to activate libraries and renew these local, resilient resources described by the great philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, as 'Palaces for the People'³ and which might, as suggested by several recent novels, provide a way to avoid an unpleasant future.⁴ Activate libraries not through prescribed and directed reading, but rather by opening the doors, literally (through physical and online curation) and figuratively, so that students can find and choose their paths through forests of meaning.⁵ I make no apology for mixing metaphors. We need the idea of the library and the forest,

1 It is striking that love of reading and libraries often begins with defiance and an assertion of will and agency. See, for example, Richard Wright's strategy of borrowing someone else's library card, pretending to be stupid so as to gain access to the library, and then staying up all night as he read, hearing the voices of what he was reading all round him, being amazed not by what they said but that they had the courage to say it and then knowing by daybreak that he could no longer live in the oppressive South, see *Black Boy*, chapter 13.

2 Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills, and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris, in answer to my question during an OECD webinar 18/01/2022. Also see Adam Garfinkle (2020) 'The erosion of deep literacy' for a devastating account of the implications of superficial reading and writing promoted by social media and online browsing, and Maryanne Wolf (2007) and (2018) on the current urgent need to reintroduce a love of deep reading.

3 Andrew Carnegie was a child worker in a cotton mill and taught himself through access to a rich man's private library. He never forgot this gift and during his life founded over 2000 public libraries. Carnegie's description of public libraries, 'Palaces for the People,' is the title of Eric Klinenberg's excellent 2018 book, which is subtitled, *How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarization, and the decline of civic life*.

4 See for example Anthony Doerr, *Cloud cuckoo land*, 2021.

5 See also Nichols 2020 'To remember, to reason, and to imagine together: Activating the 21st century university library through reading and writing programmes,' a concept document written for the Wits Senate Teaching and Learning committee and available on request.

to assert the value of the library as a public, responsive, anchor institution and the value of the pleasurable and primal freedom to explore at will its myriad and sometimes hidden holdings and so encourage creative adaption.

This paper considers two current strategies to reactivate such self-motivated learning: letter writing and writing groups. Both strategies seek to 'nudge' students towards increasing ownership of and engagement in, their own intellectual and imaginative journey through libraries of knowledge and increasingly scholarly and creative conversations.

First some background to our context from which these strategies have grown. It is not a coincidence that the Wits writing centres are found in or next to university libraries. This paper draws from experiences in the main Wits Writing Centre (WWC), founded in the mid-1990s, rather than from the discipline-specific writing centres in Education and Law.⁶ The WWC is a resource, mainly, though not exclusively, for undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as for staff within the humanities faculty. It also houses a writing reference library. The WWC does not attempt to teach the literacies of different disciplines⁷ but rather provides writing consultants as attentive listeners, to help students to develop an ear for their writing and to learn how to effectively situate that writing in terms of style and argument within disciplinary conversations.

The paper also draws from experiences in the Wits Writing Programme (WWP), formalised in 2018, involving currently more than 40 Writing Intensive (WI) courses across the university (run by discipline specialists and supported by around 400 Writing Fellow (WF) tutors). The WWP, like the WWC, employs writing cognitively and rhetorically to enhance learning and the ability to craft disciplinary texts.

While different – the WWC is a voluntary resource and the WWP is a mainstream pedagogy – both share the principle of writing as thinking, rather than the packaging of thinking and both institutionally fall under the WWP. The WWC and the WWP constitute a single developing ecosystem, with a complex set of interrelations. For example, both depend on postgraduate students to promote and further student engagement: consultants in the WWC or WFs in the WWP. These postgraduate respondents are a dynamic group, usually successful students, or scholars themselves, who move between the following roles:

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6 The Education and Law writing centres operate separately and within their disciplines, though there is collaboration among all three writing centres in the WWP not least through the frequent sharing of writing consultants.

7 See McKenna and Boughey (2021) for the inadequacies of decontextualised academic writing support, pp. 67–69.

1. writing centre consultant,
2. WF in different disciplines,
3. Senior Writing Fellows (SWFs) with extra mentoring or administrative responsibilities,
4. in some cases, as WI lecturers.

As these roles change, learning about writing facilitation is transferred, compared and built upon and the work of the WWC and the WWP is knitted together by their movement between them.⁸ All of the co-authors of this paper have moved between some of these roles.

222 Within the developing ecosystem of the WWC and the WWP, the letter writing strategy was employed as a low data method to encourage students during the Covid-19 years to write about their processes of writing and thinking. Letters prompt students to use informal writing to hone formal writing and create the opportunity to pause and to think about thinking through the encouragement of an attentive interlocutor. The letter writing method was guided by templates, designed by the WWP Head in 2020, for both cover letter requests and the consultant responses. First, the student completes a consultation-requesting cover letter, which includes explanation of task and writing concerns and then submits both cover letter and draft to the WWC. The student is then assigned a consultant, who responds through strategic annotations on the student draft and sends a response letter back to the student. The guiding templates for the cover letter and the response letter ensure consistency of response and a prioritisation of concerns following the writing process.⁹ We were fortunate to have among us an author who enjoyed the literary challenges of this method and mentored others in its practice.¹⁰ This letter writing method built on earlier WWC work with school children which encouraged regular informal channels of communication and opportunities for metacognition,¹¹ became the basis of a national research project called Epistolary Pedagogies (Erasmus 2021), and the main mode of response to writing in the WWC during the

8 See *Writing within simultaneity* (Is Ckool et al. 2019) which is written as letters between and among WF and WI lecturers.

9 See 'Letter from the Wits Writing Programme', April 2020. Available on request.

10 Barbara Adair, see next section.

11 See descriptions of the resonant classroom in Nichols, 2016.

Covid-19 years, as well as being a common strategy across the WWP between WFs and students and sometimes also between WI lecturers, students and WFs (Erasmus 2021).

Writing groups are a group version of the one-to-one conference, drawing from Donald Graves and Lucy Calkins' early ideas of the writing workshop, as well as from Peter Elbow's even earlier teacher-less groups of peers (Graves 1994; Calkins 1994; Elbow 1973, 1981). At Wits, writing groups were initiated by the WWC Director in the early 2000s for postgraduates and for women lecturers who participated in the Wonder Women project, Buttons and Breakfasts (see Orr, Rorich and Dowling 2006) As with the letter writing, the primary aim of a writing group is to establish sustainable, independent and effective writing habits, this time not in dialogue with one other person but among a group of peers. In 2022, the WWC employed Senior Writing Fellows (SWFs) to promote writing groups for both postgraduate student writing and WF and writing consultant writing, including an SWF who has previously worked and published on writing groups at Rhodes University.¹² During the Covid-19 years, the writing group strategy became particularly important to promote writing and community for consultants and WFs and also served to promote their professional development through the practice and sharing of teaching strategies.

The two strategies, letter-writing and the regular meeting of writing groups, create an opportunity for learning which is not tied to the centre, so replacing the hub and spokes metaphor (used previously by the main academic development unit at Wits) with a concept of symbiotic growth, such as that of a forest. The strategies have also been influenced by the arguments of the Organisation for Economic and Co-operative Development (the OECD) that collective thinking is vital for post-Covid-19 educational recovery (OECD 2021).¹³ This chapter presents the reflections of five colleagues in the WWP, selected for their noticeable engagement in one or both strategies. In the sympathetic words of anonymous early reviewer, we aim to offer 'a kaleidoscopic perspective on one institution's writing programme response to both recent and enduring challenges in higher education.' Following Barbara Walvoord's¹⁴ approach to writing programme evaluation and development, we also aim to record and build upon the perceptions of value identified by our

¹² Fouad Asfour, see following section on writing groups as seed beds.

¹³ OECD principle 9 (2021).

¹⁴ Barbara Walvoord's method of surfacing and then building on the reflections of lecturers is remarkably close to writing centre methods and has obvious professional development advantages. It has been endorsed by Bean, Carrithers and Earenfight (2005) as an efficient and rich method of programme evaluation, though obviously it can and should be supplemented by student data.

colleagues, so affirming and investing in their engagement and developing the WWP through the engine of collective reflection.

The first path describes how letter writing can encourage engaged reflection, as the well-known South African author, Barbara Adair, considers how to draw out the writer's voice.

A letter to another

Barbara Adair, Senior Writing Fellow

Disciplinary background: Human Rights Attorney and law lecturer, novelist, travel and short story writer, Ph.D. in Creative Writing

Speaking is not my strength; it is the written word that speaks to and for me. Writing excites me, as reading creates an environment that is conducive to listening and intimacy; I can hear myself speak in my writing and another is listening as they read my words and learns with me.

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How can a letter do this? A letter is writing that goes back and forth between two people, an on-going process whereby one person writes to another and in this writing they speak. Writing becomes speech, as writing is the vocalisation in words of thoughts, musings and questions. An intimate conversation develops.

There are no rigid rules in letter writing. Questions are asked and replies are read, thoughts are mirrored, responses challenged by posing questions, requests for clarification made. Writing is informal, stories are told to illustrate academic concepts. In letter form this engagement exists in the to-and-fro of the letters as both parties come to understandings that they may not have had before. Both participants begin to hear their thoughts in their writing and so adapt and judge their thoughts in relation to their correspondent.

The relationship in writing can be more intimate than a physical meeting as there is less danger in the sharing. Neither party is placed on the spot to respond in speech then and there, they can mull over what they have written, think about how to phrase something, find a book in which the same subject and thoughts are discussed, speak and share the ideas with a friend or member of the community. There is so an intimacy and a widening of knowledge in letters, time is spent in their construction, the words are thought out carefully and so, therefore, is the thinking. Both writers

can reveal expansively as professional trust is established. The letters go back and forth: What do you think? How does it sound to you as the reader? Does what I am saying make sense? Does what I am saying answer the question for you? Can you hear what I am saying or am I leaving things out as I know about them even though you do not? Why are you repeating this as it has already been answered in the previous paragraph?

In my practice, the following questions, phrases and challenges have prompted this conversational process.

To show that the student is aware of my experiences and knowledge that I have, or don't have, but also to show that I am here to listen to them and to learn:

1. I have read little/nothing about X. It is a fascinating subject so I am really looking forward to learning more about it from your essay.

To develop a two-way conversation and the sharing of ideas:

- I, as the reader, understand you to be saying X in your essay. Is this what you want me to hear and understand?
- I hear what you are saying but I am slightly confused, what do you think when you read it?
- Often I imagine when I write something that I am the first reader so I try to listen to how the essay sounds to me. I do this by reading it aloud; it helps me when I write things.
- I show my work to others, other academics, friends, family, I think of them as the second reader, and then imagine the following.
 - What they know and what experiences they may have in this field.
 - That they are not devoid of knowledge and experience, but at the same time are not conversant with the ideas in this discipline; or they have a diametrically opposed view to my view.
 - Now I try to convince this reader by my argument. I try to share my knowledge with them, and travel with them towards a new understanding.

To develop shared thoughts and auto-critique:

1. What is the purpose of this paragraph/sentence/word? Is it linked to the body/the concepts raised/the title or question?
2. I notice many words in the essay so for me as a reader the communication between us has been broken. I can't seem to get past what I perceive is an abundance of words and so I can't understand what you are trying to say, I feel lost. Can you help me understand?
3. I am not an engineer/biologist/architect/artist so for me the words used in your discipline are not simple or familiar and I want to know what they mean. What do these terms mean?
4. For me when I write an essay it is important to engage with the references and quotations. When I read my writing I try to link and connect them to what I am trying to say; if I can't do this I take them out. What do you think? Maybe look at all your references and quotations and decide if they connect with what you want to say, so you can decide what to do with them.
5. It is my view that brevity is a skill, so I always try to keep the essay brief and to the point. What is your main point?

Letter writing responses to drafts as suggested above, can promote a constructive written conversation which helps the students to reflect and build on their thinking through epistolary connection to a listening other. During the Covid-19 years, this was particularly important as such letters offered the possibility of human companionship while learning.

Our second path into the forests of academia is taken by Babalwa Bekebu, who has won a leadership award for her work as Chair of the Wits Postgraduate Association and has more recently than most of us writing here, travelled the difficult gap between school and the university and knows how easy it is to become lost or discouraged. The university is a constructed culture for everyone, can we through writing make ourselves more at home?

Letters home

Babalwa Bekebu, WWC consultant and WF

Disciplinary background: Bioethics and Health Law

My journey with the Writing Centre began when I was reading in the library for my master's research project at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2019. A student job advertisement got my attention and I remember rushing home to complete the application so that I could submit it that same day. We were required to write a 300-word piece on our earliest memory of reading. My mind was suddenly filled with candid childhood memories of my mom and me reading to each other.

I think this was my first moment of writing from an intuitive place in the four years that I had been at university. We had always been hammered and drilled into thinking that the only writing that was allowed was academic writing. But here, the way the question was phrased evoked a sense of calm. Professor Nichols asked us to describe an early memory of reading. We had to include all the details that we could remember, including physical details. We were asked whether this early reading experience affected the way we write or understand writing.

The two stages of this question, to first mine our memories and then to reflect, made me start to see writing as a process of thinking. Reflective writing tends to do that, in the same way that letters allow us to pause and think about what we think. Also, when we write to a friend or a family member, we re-tell events, often from an intuitive place. I started thinking that writing could allow me to fully express myself, without being distracted and self-conscious by the need to sound academic.

I have always been attracted to reading and writing. Few things in life have excited me as much as when I, or a student I am working with, have a breakthrough, when we finally understand what we want to say and how best to write it. Throughout my writing journey with the WWC and the WWP, the premise that 'writing is thinking' has helped me to shift focus from being self-conscious and self-doubting, to owning my voice. The excitement that comes with getting it right, is the excitement of understanding how to be heard and how to graduate from being an outsider to participative insider.¹⁵

¹⁵ Professor Pamela Nichols, the Head of Department at the WWC, has stressed this approach to writing since we joined the WWC and so this premise and way of thinking, the way we approach writing and work with other students.

In 2022 I was one of the many WFs who facilitated a short, large-enrolment, online gateway course on climate change for over 7000 incoming first-year students. I am sure that these students were terrified of writing in university. They were not at home at all and had had their last years of school severely disrupted by the pandemic. We welcomed them to their new home by providing a letter writing space online to write their thoughts and 'find their feet'. We were not; evaluators: we offered a *listening eye* (Murray 1979) almost like a pen-pal and tried to guide them in their understanding and storytelling about their learning and so ease their adjustment into academic writing. This is the WWC: a writing home, with peer support or confidants to help you tell your own story in your way, of what you understand or are beginning to understand.

Letters can create this relaxed communication and can increase confidence. You start to trust your interlocutor. You start to get interested in your own reflections, to consider and reconsider, knowing that someone is waiting to hear your reformulation. Without realising it, you begin to think in a more complex way. Without pain, you cultivate critical thinking skills. As we reflect, we better understand the *why* and *how* and *what next* and practice how to convey our adjusted thinking. We are not speaking to someone who intimidates us but rather to an interested and eventually internalised, reader. So, the walls between student/teacher fall and are replaced by generative dialogue.

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We need to maintain our connection with students as fellow learners to be effective writing coaches. This gentle, subtle, but powerful relationship was threatened by the panic and pressures of rushed online teaching. When we deviated from being peer listeners, the WF-student relationship was lost and students either resented our lack of disciplinary expertise or demanded that we edit. If WI lecturers assumed that WFs would fix students writing on the side, rather than being integrated into a WI course as peer coaches, students viewed us as extra and unnecessary work.

During Covid-19, writing helped all of us connect. We wrote to stay sane and survive, sending out 'letters in a bottle,' which was the subtitle of the WWP Online Handbook. We were forced to adapt to online learning, so we had to come up with creative and viable ways to ease both our own and student adaptation. As WFs, we had to work on remaining relatable to students, because we were after all in the same boat and needed to find ways to stay afloat during these up-ended years.

Letters can create a relationship which mirrors the physical space of the WWC: a space of peers, which encourages us to tap into the best parts of our minds and improve our articulation. Students want to be seen and heard, to develop their ideas, make them more theirs and place their thinking against others. Our current educational culture does little to encourage independent and creative thought and too often alienates students and limits their ambition. In letter writing, students can find themselves, choose their own words and employ their own languages, follow their own meaning,

grasp and develop their own agency.¹⁶ Through such writing, students can make the university their home and contribute to its greater relevance.

The third path is that of the Women's Health activist Lucy Khofi, named by the *Mail and Guardian* as one of the top young South Africans to watch in 2022 and who, in her spare time, has already set up an NGO for Menstrual Health Education and in 2020 a mentoring organisation for undergraduates. Lucy Khofi sees writing and scholarship as serving change and letters as teaching writing as action.

Letters as action

Lucy Khofi, WWC consultant and WF
Home discipline: Medical Anthropology,
Ph.D. candidate in Public Health

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In my career it is crucial to communicate with the general population. I see myself as a 'pracademic' because I integrate academic interests with practical action on the ground. A pracademic, or academic practitioner, is both an academic and a practitioner/activist in their subject area (Macduff and Netting 2010; Powell et al. 2018).

My role as a pracademic frames my interaction with students who come to the WWC. As a person who serves communities in various ways, helping students with their writing means more than helping them to write a particular text. For the students and for myself, I want to constantly improve and see writing as a life-long craft which is crucial to our careers. For example, I have learned that activism is frequently ill-documented and ill-communicated and so I dedicated 2021 to documenting my work. In tandem with my studies, I have been blogging, raising awareness of sexual and reproductive health realities on radio stations, in primary schools, high schools, communities, streets and other places. I wish to translate academic insights into action through writing and so partner more effectively with communities and empower their abilities to solve problems.

¹⁶ For theory and further discussion of an epistolary pedagogy, see Erasmus, 2021; Nichols, 2020; Erasmus et al. 2019; Nichols, 2016.

Letters are a concrete form of communication, which are successful if the letter writer communicates their intended meaning to their letter reader. In their cover letter, students explain their concerns and consider their next steps. From the beginning of this communication, the reader is a key presence for the writer, as they will be unable to help without this contextual information. When students realise this need to work with the idea of someone else in the communicative act and embrace the dialogue, their writing improves almost without them realising it. For example, a student in Health Sciences submitted a first draft to me which was full of unnecessary jargon, over-complicated sentences and was generally reader unfriendly. This student revised through being asked to explain, to be cognisant of a reader who wanted to understand and in so doing, dramatically uncomplicated her work. She revised through inserting explanations, signposts, clarifications of argument, acknowledgment and response of anticipated objections, following her newfound sense of how her reader might read her argument and follow her style. In her final letter to me, she observed that the letter-writing process had taught her that her goal was to communicate rather than to prove her intelligence and that she could see how that improved her writing. Now she was more confident in her seminar presentations because her focus was on communication to colleagues, many of whom come from different disciplines, rather than on a self-doubting performance of academic prowess.

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The skill of developing reader-centred writing when revising drafts is guided by the consultant and then internalised by the student. At the WWC, we encourage students to be independent and to have autonomy. We do not think for them or give them solutions to their writing. The approach is to ask guiding questions so that they can view their writing from the standpoint of readers and choose for themselves how they wish to revise. The writing centre serves as a GPS, but it is a student's responsibility to find the best way to arrive at their destination.

As an undergraduate I was aware of a stigma associated with going to the writing centre. We thought it was only for students with learning difficulties or who were struggling with their courses. However, with the WWP and the proliferation of WI courses, many students are writing regularly and consulting WFs as part of mainstream learning. This habit of frequent writing and the sharing drafts with several readers, has started to change the culture of writing at the university. Along with other WI methods, the letter writing method and the establishment of peer-led writing groups has initiated an idea of learning through multiple conversations. The goal now is to be clear about what you mean because someone is interested in what you think. This is a vital step towards promoting the citizen scholar.

Writing Group read-along

Fouad Asfour: Senior Writing Fellow

Disciplinary background: M.A. in linguistics at Vienna University, M.A. in Creative Writing at Rhodes University, currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Wits School of Arts Fine Art Department and a Center for the Liberal Arts and Sciences Pedagogy Fellow at the Bard College Institute for Writing and Thinking.

Dear Reader,

Thank you for joining us on these pages and welcome to our Writing Group. We're pleased that you found your way to our midst. You might wonder how, as you read these lines outside of our physical presence. Perhaps, think of this as an asynchronous meeting, where the readers' attention and commitment connect outside of time and space. Our writing group has been meeting for years: experimenting with how creative writing exercises can enrich academic writing, aiming to bring out writers' voices.¹⁷

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In our peer-led meetings, we engage in writing exercises to facilitate processes of becoming and growth, informed by Peter Elbow's focus on 'intuitive processes in the first half of the writing cycle and conscious awareness or critical discrimination in the second half' (Elbow 1981: 11). Peer-sharing instills solidarity and complicity in learning through mistakes, for example, by encouraging colleagues to present 'shitty first drafts' (Lamott 1995: 21–27). The glue that keeps writing groups together is a shared curiosity and supportive response to experiment. As the group reflects, we think together and gain insights.

For postgraduate students, this can allow new beginnings. Writing groups can explore how we shape language in writing, while language shapes ourselves, based on the insight by learning theorist and psychologist, Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky:

Thought is not begotten by thought; it is engendered by emotion, i.e., by our desires

¹⁷ My writing group facilitation practice is informed by popular education in South Africa (see for example, Busch 2014; Boughey and McKenna 2021; Nichols 2017; or Oluwole et al. 2018).

and needs, our interests and emotions. Behind every thought there is an affective-volitional tendency, which holds the answer to the last 'why' in the analysis of thinking. (Vygotsky 1986: 252)

It may be objected that such experiences could confuse and defocus a postgraduate writer. However, while the facilitator endeavours to ensure that writing group meetings are a free and safe space, the shared sense of risk and trust also forms a bond between writing group members and fuels agency. We acknowledge that writing operates in a space of vulnerability and supplies the contact details for professional counsel if needed.

There is no formula to ensure a successful writing group; members usually decide in the first few meetings if they will continue to engage or not. The recent experiences of lockdown appeared to galvanise writing groups. As the social space of interacting with peers disappeared, online meetings became vital informal spaces to allow collective, explorative thinking, experienced as 'epistemological becoming' (Asfour et al. 2020) in postgraduate journeys.

To engage in deeper, playful ways of writing, is to explore the self as source of inspiration. While our meetings aim to support traditional academic writing, for example, by responding to argument, we want to invite you here to explore your thoughts through creative writing exercises, to consider how experimental, generative writing can create new inroads into research questions.

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Our meetings usually start with exercises designed to shift focus from meaning to form. For example, drawing from a variation of the *Cadavre Exquis* (Exquisite Corpse) game, presented by Suzanne Césaire as the 'Voice of the Oracle' (*Tropiques* 5, April 1942), we wrote down questions and answers independently from each other, then read them aloud. The resulting combinations of question and answer generated unexpected connections and a heightened listening to processes of meaning. My text below was written after listening to this call-and-response experiment.

The shadow outside is waiting. Not on the pavement, but between the stones. A dry sound finds a gap. An echo grinds sand between its toes. When this moment finds an exit, the walk will begin. A cloud forms around the path, leaving a spray of salty mist in my face. A hand presses against the window, next to it a leaf falls, shaking in the wind. Its five corners span the house the shadow lives in. The flap in the back door is jammed. The grey cat snuck in to get food, too grainy to be located. Paws leave prints in the cloud, where rainwater dissolves oil in a prism of light. Another step now. The walnut cracks and splits open. The grey cat jumps out, carrying a golden comb, running

towards the shore. I hear the sound of blood rushing in my ears as I reach the waves. The hand presses against the glass it shatters. The leaf explodes falling through a crack into an abyss of five dimensions. (Asfour 2021).

Apart from enjoying the forms of language evoked and witnessing listeners'/readers' collective contribution to the growth of a text, these exercises make visible ways in which language shapes perception and imagination.

Another fruitful exercise was prompted by the need to create our presence in our writing, especially when under pressure or facing writer's block. The following prompt, called 'writing as breathing,' was inspired by the following excerpt from Natalie Sarraute's 1965 book *Tropisms*.

Write in regular phases of breathing – each thought one breath. Your body is an instrument, your body makes beautiful sounds. Allow the sound to carry your words. Become aware how the enunciation of each word reverberates through your body.

Write as you speak, speak as you read. Allow the words to activate the air, watch spit fly as you speak, watch air enter your lungs as you inhale what will be the next word.¹⁸

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(You could try this, if you have a few minutes, to listen to the breath of your hand as you write.)

In discussing our experiences of writing in response to these prompts, we found confirmation and inspiration, or surprise about the way that they revealed silences and gave them voice. Visual artist Philiswa Lila responded, for example, to the moment of sharing by exploring facets of agency hidden within language. The text was later included in a series of artworks entitled 'Willing to Share'.

I am willing to share

I already know what I would like to say. To share with you as honestly as I could. With all the details I can find. No more silence and silencing the fact that I can actually share the interior truth of me. The willing to share. The will to want to share. I am practicing this will. Practice is me thinking about what to say. Where to say it. How to say it. Practice in my imagination.

Is it my body that has the will? My voice. Tone. Gestures. Senses. The willing to share in a space of comfort. The one that I am sitting on right now. In my room. On the floor. I sit in a

¹⁸ Authored collectively by the writing group.

corner where I am next to my books, plants and candles. It's quiet when I sit here. I do not hear the outside. I am able to make nothing of sounds. I am not sure if it's a choice I make. But. My corner is very silent. Elevating my thought process. What am I thinking of sharing? Now this is when the thinking and overthinking the will to share becomes the thinking and overthinking the known and unknown. The knowing is what I can actually share. The unknowing is in another voice that says... ask do you really? (Lila 2021: n.p)

These metacognitive moments and movements revealed by exploratory writings allowed us to consider presence and writing at the moment of utterance and to explore further how writers perceive themselves in and through the act of writing. Experiencing and sharing these moments of creation, inspired courage and endorsement of each other's developing work and has led to co-authoring publications. So far, I have been part of the co-publishing of three research papers as well as online texts connected to writing groups.¹⁹

Thank you for joining this short writing group introduction. I hope that it gave you a first impression of how these can become a fertile seedbed for postgraduate writing.

Lastly, a perspective from Esther Marie Pauw, a postdoctoral artistic researcher at the Africa Open Institute (AOI), Stellenbosch University (SU), coordinator of the AOI's sonic residences, winner of SU's 2020 postdoctoral award for excellence in research, flutist, WI lecturer and SWF, of developing networks and how writing groups can cross university and even national boundaries to help writers and readers to connect and so activate new channels of learning, meaning and intellectual creativity.

¹⁹ Among others, a research paper about writing groups furthering student's agency (Oluwole et al. 2018); translingual writing as epistemological becoming (Asfour et al. 2020); as well as a reflection on reading groups (Khan, Asfour and Skeyi-Tutani 2022). A creative writing paper was published online as; 'The love of writing, or writing as love/r: Collaborative writing as shared visual art studio practice' by the UCT based project *Creative Knowledge Resources*: <https://www.creativeknow.org/bopawritersforum/the-love-of-writing>.

Writing as spinning this world into being

Esther Marie Pauw

Africa Open Institute for Music, Research and Innovation,
Stellenbosch University

Disciplinary background: artistic music research

In 2021 and 2022 an Oppenheimer Memorial Trust funded grant²⁰ enabled researchers and practitioners at Wits, and specifically at the WWP, to explore and implement ideas about epistolary writing, peer group writing practices, citizenship writing and writing beyond individual university nationalisms. WFs and SWFs from various disciplines and several universities in South Africa were appointed to liaise with students on their writing projects. I was appointed as one of the SWFs for the period March through August 2022 and I was based at Stellenbosch University. My appointment enacted the grant proposal aim of extending writing practices that emanated from the WWP to work beyond narrow university nationalisms.

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During my time as a WF, I came across Ghanaian Asante mythology about Spider Man and Native American mythologies about Spider Woman. These myths, from different parts of the world, inspired my practices as a WF and helped me to understand the power of a network of cooperation and sustenance.

The Asante stories about Ananse the Spider Man who receives stories from the sky gods, tell us that stories help shape human survival. Similarly, the many myths about Spider Woman from North American indigenous knowledges point to the powers of Spider Woman as trickster, helper, teacher and creator (Philip 2004: 15). Through her thoughts, Spider Woman spins this world into being. She also bestows her gifts on humans, so that humans become thinkers who spin understanding through language.

The notion that humans think thoughts, tell them as stories and write them as texts that help to spin this world into being is potentially a vivid reminder that acts of writing as thinking are

²⁰ This Oppenheimer Memorial grant was awarded to Professor Zimitri Erasmus and Dr Nosipho Mngomezulu from the Wits Anthropology department and Professor Pamela Nichols, head of the Wits Writing Programme at the University of Witwatersrand.

important for contemporary living. Furthermore, the metaphor of a spider's web that is created to catch sustenance as food, amidst dew drops and sunshine shafts that sparkle off its fine strands, is potent when applied to writing networks. The metaphor of the spider's web suggests writing-doing-thinking as a practice of many threads, enduring, yet fragile, housed within communities of foresting libraries, nurturing collectives of people who are co-connected in sustainable pasts and futures, hereby relying on the forest metaphor that Pamela Nichols suggests early on in this chapter.

Along with the WWP's gesture to share its resources by appointing writing fellows at two other universities in South Africa (North-West University and Stellenbosch University), I extended my work as a SWF at Stellenbosch University to include emailed letter-writing with a doctoral student in artistic research who was based at a European university. As an outcome from this engagement, I sensed that the cross-pollination of ideas that emanated from differing geo-political contexts were important to broaden the scope of both of our contexts of artistic research writing. Our interchanges explored ways of writing about artistic research where the writing brought together the academic, the artistic and the practitioner's reflectivity. Our work was collegial. We were perhaps 'finding' our 'homes' without becoming assimilated into institutional binds.

236 The notion of 'finding home' without becoming assimilated is derived from a text by the scholar Willie Jennings who writes about academic institutions that search for new ways of operating 'after whiteness' (2020). For Jennings, 'whiteness' is not a narrow reference to people of European descent, but a reference to 'a way of being in the world that forms cognitive and affective structures able to seduce people into its habitation and its meaning-making' (2020: 9). For Jennings, the harmful focus of the remains of whiteness-thinking in institutional culture is the advancement of programmes of assimilation (2020: 110) above programmes of acknowledging individual contribution. Similarly harmful is the tendency by lingering whiteness-thinking to continue to '[explain] the world' (2020: 138) in a controlling and all-knowing way. By contrast, Jennings suggests that the individual's desire should be to venture beyond whiteness and instead to find 'home' and 'belonging' without becoming assimilated in whiteness. Also, for Jennings, exchange networks should not be about 'items and money', or 'commodity' (2020: 144), but about 'something personal, communal, storied and obligatory that leans toward mutual recognition and relationship' (2020: 145). Networks and friendships are then about 'strength and desire of the one for the other' (2020: 145).

The WWP's strategies to work beyond narrow nationalisms, as illustrated by the broadening of the network of WFs nationally and the encouragement of subsequent support for networks internationally, probe to go beyond harmful traces of control and assimilation that may yet lurk in institutional cultures.

Borrowing from conversations with Pamela Nichols and from her ideas in the *Creative Academic Writing Journal* (2020), I am reminded that writers across networks and continuums of writing practice 'catch' messy thoughts and weave them into strands of connection. Writers spin webs of sense-making that acknowledge writing as thinking, recognising that writing can be developed in context-specific ways that energise and provide courage. The WWP's focus on letter-writing, peer group writing, citizenship writing and especially home/belonging beyond university nationalisms are the type of practices that help foster values of the sharing of resources, of creative and sustainable forward-thinking and of the freedom to roam in public, shared spaces. The spider's webs that are rebuilt every day and that hang between books and leafy vines are a reminder of the power of relationality, care and sustenance. The spider's web is also a reminder that the human and the non-human can intersect to find new futures for an ecological world in trouble and for a cultural world teetering between need and greed. Those spider's webs cojoining books and vines in Nichols' metaphor of the forests of the library remind us of Donna Haraway's Camille stories of butterflies and humans, symbiotically and biologically inter-connected and emerging from the compost to take flight on migration routes of the future (Haraway 2016).

Conclusion: the common library

Each of these paths describes the deep engagement of the practitioner: through letter writing correspondence and the development of voice; through students encouraged to make the university their home without feeling that they are being assimilated or distorted; through learning how to use writing as chosen action; or in a writing groups to find ways to foster and support a group recognition of the act of thinking and its individuality; and lastly, through laterally functioning national and international networks in which ideas are nurtured through widely spun webs of meaning. The life of these engagements is the relationship between writer and reader.

The novelist Ruth Ozeki writes of the intimacy of the relationship between writer and reader: '*I'm reaching forward through time to touch you... you're reaching back to touch me*' (Ozeki 2022: 39). This fusion of writer and reader could not be further from remedial instruction it is rather the touch that allows us to enter the library of learning.

To allow the proliferation of these practices of deep learning, we need to change our programmatic structures from being predominantly governed by a hierarchical model. The idea of the commons (Ostrom 1990), which has informed recent work on the Writing Enhanced

Curriculum (Anson 2021), posits that individuals and local groups can self-organise and work sustainably so long as there are clear mechanisms for interaction, monitoring and management. The development of the idea of the successful commons was the life work of Elinor Ostrom, the late Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences, who remarked in her Nobel acceptance speech that, 'What we have ignored is what citizens can do and the importance of real involvement of the people involved' (Arrow, Kechane and Levon 2012: 13135–13136). This chapter attempts to follow that lead through considering the motivations and trajectories of colleagues. Further research is necessary to investigate and assess both student responses to these methods and to consider how Ostrom's principles for the successful working of the commons can be applied to writing programmes and how these principles can be built into a continuous professional development plan for WFs and writing consultants. However, the practitioner reflections here demonstrate how teaching experiences can be mined for future programmatic development and most importantly reveal a common investment in the letter writing method and writing groups as supporting and strengthening self-chosen paths into sustainable and verdant forests of learning.

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Chapter Ten

Reimagining Writing Centre Consultant Training: Establishing a Conceptual, Reflective and Values-based Approach to Support Transformative Learning

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Introduction

The consultation space and the consultants (tutors) who work with students in these spaces, are the heart of a writing centre and the most powerful means we have through which to effect transformative change. Yet, despite this potential, consultations often remain largely text-focussed, primarily attending to the immediate needs of students and thus reinforcing normative institutional practices, with little attention to students' authorial identity development. To address this challenge and align consultation practices with a vision of writing centres as transformative learning spaces, we argue that writing centres need to rethink their approach to consultant training.

In this chapter, we, staff members of the Faculty of Health Science Writing Lab (FHS WL) at the University of Cape Town (UCT), present our argument for the impetus to reimagine consultant training, review the literature that has informed our thinking and, alongside this, provide a descriptive narrative of how this has influenced the development of our consultant training programme. We then present a critical reflection on our experiences of this process, by exploring the challenges, affordances and benefits we have encountered on the journey. Finally, we conclude with recommendations for other writing centres who are similarly interested in adopting strategies to strengthen the transformative potential of writing centre spaces.

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Writing centres as transformative learning spaces

In South Africa, writing centre scholarship has been strongly influenced by the transformative

ideology (Lillis and Scott 2007) of the academic literacies approach (Lea and Street 1998; see Clarence and Dison 2017 for a review). This body of work has developed our understanding of academic literacies as a complex suite of contextually-situated, socially-negotiated practices, which both influence and express a writer's identity. Accordingly, many writing centres have expanded their focus from students' immediate writing products (texts) to their longitudinal development as writers.

These ideas were central in guiding the establishment of the FHS WL (Muna et al. 2019) and are the foundation from which we are developing our identity and vision for the WL as a mutually transformative learning space (Grimm 1996). For us, this means a space in which we work to address the power imbalance between educator and student by reinforcing students' ownership of their learning, development and texts and by recognising that we too are on a learning journey; and where, from an Interpretivist perspective, we endeavour to recognise the diversity of students' knowledges as their truth, by resisting normative and prescriptive approaches in favour of co-constructing knowledge with students. Ultimately, our goal is to enable and support the important work of transformative identity development (Mezirow 1997), which, for us, has come to mean situating *authorial* identity development as central to what we do. Although this goal has become our Southern Cross, we have encountered multiple confounding and competing factors along our journey towards aligning our work to our values.

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While a focus on authorial identity development aligns closely with the espoused sectoral values and goals for transformation and decoloniality in higher education (UCT Curriculum Change Working Group 2018), the systemic and practical application of these is lagging. Writing centres still exist in service to the institution, providing support to students to enable their academic success. And, to evaluate this 'success', students are still primarily required to write for assessment purposes, which creates a high-risk, performance-orientated environment that rewards those who demonstrate proficiency in the assessment criteria within the prescribed timeframes (Lockett and Shay 2020). To mitigate the risks and succeed within this system, most students prioritise instrumental goals (Grimm 1996; Dowse and Van Rensburg 2011; Cheung et al. 2018), such as meeting assignment criteria and deadlines and achieving particular grades and so often want consultants to tell them what to do, or 'fix' their texts (North 1984; Dowse and Van Rensburg 2011; Clarence 2019). As a result and in a well-intentioned effort to meet the students' most pressing needs (Simpson 2011; Clarence 2019), consultants are pulled into tension between the transformative ideologies valued by the writing centre and normative values and approaches that are rewarded by the institutional system, with the latter often winning out.

By repeatedly allowing only the instrumental goals to take priority, we undermine students' authorial identity development and risk perpetuating colonial and normative practices inherent in the system (Lillis and Scott 2007; Clarence 2019). And yet, if we do not prioritise students' immediate needs, we risk losing sight of the text (Lillis and Scott 2007), dismissing students' valid concerns (Grimm 2009) and risking our institutional reputation (Clarence 2019). It is therefore clear that if we want to narrow this gap and mitigate the risks, a balance must be struck that equilibrates the tensions experienced between addressing instrumental and developmental goals.

Furthermore, as each student represents a dynamic and unique intersection of knowledge, identities and proficiencies (Archer 2010), consultants cannot be taught a pre-determined set of practices (Nicklay 2012) that will allow them to effectively meet all students' needs. Thus, the challenge for the WL has been in finding flexible ways to equip and train consultants to maintain sight of and address both the immediate and long-term needs of a diverse student population in a manner that affirms and empowers students to take conscious ownership of their writing as a representation of themselves and to use their own knowledges and literacies to engage with and reshape academic 'norms'.

Writing centre consultant training: Challenges and risks

The goal of consultant training is to prepare consultants to meet the needs of a diverse student population, through developing their understanding of the importance, challenges and pedagogies of academic literacies (Archer and Parker 2016). Although the nature and focus of training varies from one centre to another, consultants usually receive intensive training following their recruitment, with further training throughout their tenure (Nichols 1998; Archer 2008; Daniels and Richards 2011; Boughey 2012; Arbee and Samuel 2015; Muna et al. 2019).

In terms of theoretical and conceptual issues, training generally includes topics such as: the social nature of language (Nichols 1998; Archer 2008); writing as process (Lewanika and Archer 2011); the idea of writing as thinking (Nichols 1998; Lewanika and Archer 2011); the role of audience (Nichols 1998; Boughey 2012); academic voice and plagiarism (Lewanika and Archer 2011); cultural translation (Nichols 1998; Daniels and Richards 2011); access and redress (Archer 2008); ethics and logistics (Nichols 1998); the principles and goals of collaborative consultations (Nichols 1998; Archer 2008; Boughey 2012) and generic language development (Arbee and Samuel 2015). While, in relation to practice, training tends to focus on consultation activities and strategies such as: task

analysis (Lewanika and Archer 2011); error analysis (Nichols 1998); evaluation and self-evaluation (Nichols 1998; Lewanika and Archer 2011); genre teaching (Archer 2010; Lewanika and Archer 2011; Boughey 2012); constructive feedback (Boughey 2012); collaborative discussion (Nichols 1998; Daniels and Richards 2011; Dowse and Van Rensburg 2011); using a Socratic approach (Nichols 1998); educating students on academic voice and plagiarism (Lewanika and Archer 2011); and improving students' sense of coherence and cohesion (Lewanika and Archer 2011).

At the WL, we devote approximately 10 per cent of consultants' time to training, with the whole team (two full-time academics and four part-time postgraduate consultants) meeting for about four hours once a month to learn together. Yet, despite the comprehensive range of theories, concepts, practices and strategies which consultants are commonly exposed to, we, like other writing centre coordinators and consultants, are aware that there is often a disjuncture or 'gap' between the theory covered in training and the practices employed when working with students (Clarence 2019; Dowse and Van Rensburg 2011; Simpson 2011). In part, this theory-practice gap is likely due to consultants' challenges with internalising writing centre theories and applying these in practice (Simpson 2011). However, it also derives from the tension consultants experience when prioritising between students' immediate instrumental goals and their longitudinal development as writers. We believe that it is possible to ease this tension by actively seeking alignment between these seemingly competing priorities and agree with Clarence (2017) that what is required is a conceptual 'toolkit' that enables navigation between the theories which inform our understanding and thinking about writing and the practices through which we apply these to text.

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Narrowing the theory-practice gap: Aligning instrumental and developmental goals

We began to rethink our approach to consultant training in 2019, when we encountered a paper by Cheung et al., (2018) in which they describe their qualitative analysis of academics' understanding of the domain's authorial identity. Like Cheung et al., (2018), we understand authorial identity as the sense of self an author has and how they represent themselves in their texts (Pittam et al. 2009).

Cheung et al.'s. (2018) framework identified five key domains of authorial identity: confidence, valuing writing, ownership and attachment, authorial thinking and authorial goals; and two sub-domains: tacit knowledge and negotiating identities. Based on our own close reading of theirs and others' work (Pittam et al. 2009; Maguire et al. 2013; Cheung et al. 2015), we understand these

domains as follows. Authorial confidence is understood as the belief or feeling that you can rely on, or trust in, your ability to write and think well. Valuing writing relates to the value you attribute to your own writing, as well as to writing across a variety of genres and contexts as part of the process of learning and constructing knowledge. Ownership and attachment are understood as taking pride in your work and the sense that the ideas expressed are your own. Authorial thinking refers to the expression of individual, creative thought and thought processes. Authorial goals relate to how writers intentionally communicate with their target audiences to persuade them about an idea or perspective. Tacit knowledge is understood as the aspects of successful writing that are not the focus of conscious thought or attention. As a sub-domain, tacit knowledge can be understood in terms of the attitudes, perspectives and practices required to develop within each of the main domains described above. Finally, negotiating identities refers to how a writer manages their various personal, academic and professional identities and how these identities influence their authorial identity projected through the text.

This framework echoes current understandings about the features of a mature authorial identity (Archer 2010; Bird 2013; Cheung et al. 2017; Pemberton 1994; Pittam et al. 2009) and is congruent with established frameworks for authorial identity, such as developed by Ivanic (1998). However, while Ivanic's (1998) framework primarily organises the domains of authorial identity at the level of the social 'possibilities for selfhood' (p23), Cheung et al.'s (2018) framework offers a refined view of these domains in more direct relation to the level of the discourse. As such, Cheung et al.'s (2018) framework represents a practical and helpful contribution within which theories can be operationalised, practices can be organised and pedagogical interventions can be orientated.

Although we also recognise limitations with this framework – it was developed based solely on perspectives from the global North, it does not provide clear definitions for all the conceptual domains identified, nor does it fully define the relationships between the domains - we still feel that it offers a valuable and productive starting point for bringing theory and practice into closer alignment.

We began adapting and developing the framework through our monthly training sessions; producing definitions and operationalising each of the key domains, mapping out how we might see levels of development within these domains manifest in student talk and text and curating collections of consultation practices and strategies that could be consciously put to work to address specific needs.

Following this initial phase, we focused training sessions on individual domains by reading and discussing literature, developing associated resources for students and continuing to adapt the

framework.

By positioning each domain of authorial identity as a developmental goal and orientating training around these goals, we sought to empower ourselves to make thoughtful assessments about the areas of development where a particular student could most benefit from our support. Likewise, when students raised concerns about their texts, we wanted to be better able to see how these issues related to specific aspects of authorial development.

Although this initial shift in our approach to training enabled valuable intellectual gains in terms of how we were able to think and talk about our work, it did not seem to produce a similar level of impact in the consultation space. Consultants continued to express challenges with applying theory in practice and the short reports written by consultants following each consultation continued to describe a primary focus on text development.

We needed to focus our attention more explicitly on both our practice - by critically exploring what we were doing during consultations - and on the relationship *between* theory and practice - by finding a vehicle through which to navigate the pathway connecting theory to practice and practice to theory. It is in this regard, we view action research as offering a valuable approach.

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Narrowing the theory-practice gap: Using action research to enable consultant development

Action research (AR) is a method of enquiry primarily focussed on ‘...improving the quality of human life, acquiring knowledge to become better practitioners and developing strategies to address problems.’ (Beaulieu 2013: 33). However, in terms of the context and goals and thus design of the research, there is significant variability (see Beaulieu 2013 for a review). As such, researchers and practitioners need to make careful and considered choices regarding the form of AR that most appropriately aligns with their ideological orientations.

AR is a formal and legitimate qualitative research method, which can yield ‘living’ theoretical explanations about the contextualised focus of the research (Beaulieu 2013; McNiff and Whitehead 2010). However, AR can also be used as a scholarly activity to both improve practice and enable ‘authentic professional learning’ (Webster-Wright 2009) and development, although this latter goal has attracted some criticism (Beaulieu 2013; McNiff and Whitehead 2010; Newton and Burgess 2008, Noffke 1997). As Noffke (1997) highlights, the use of AR for professional development raises questions of power and privilege – who is being developed? To what end? And, in whose interests?

While Webster-Wright (2009) critiques the terms ‘development’ and ‘training’ as implying some deficit on the part of the professional. As we intended to use AR as a scholarly and developmental activity, we were attentive to these concerns. Given the standard writing centre model of employing postgraduate students as consultants, there is a legitimate need for training and development, as consultants are learning to perform a role that is new to them. However, alongside this, we have been conscious of using AR to enable consultants to direct their learning and critically reflect on their own practice. Our adoption of McNiff and Whitehead’s (2010) values-based approach to AR aligns with the transformative ideology of the Writing Lab and provides a cyclical framework for learning, practice, reflection, evaluation and development, through which we can continually improve how we authentically live our transformative values through our day-to-day work with students’ texts.

An important foundational principle is that the focus of the research is on the practitioner’s (or, researcher’s) own actions. As McNiff and Whitehead explain (2010: 36), ‘You cannot “improve” someone, or “educate” them, because people improve and educate themselves.’ This idea aligns with a transformative perspective of educators as facilitators, rather than owners, of students’ learning (Mezirow 1997) and with a focus on dismantling traditional power structures. As such, if we want to improve students’ authorial identity development (the impact of our teaching practice), rather than trying to ‘improve’ students, we should focus on improving our own practice through learning and reflection, so that students will respond in positive ways (McNiff and Whitehead 2010).

A second important principle is that the goals for improvement should be values-based. In other words, practitioners must identify the values they want to embody through their practice and focus on researching their actions to better understand what they do and why they do it, in relation to living their values (McNiff and Whitehead 2010). The affordance of this is that it allows the space for utilising a wide variety of pedagogical practices, while still maintaining a clear developmental focus, by holding the practitioner accountable to their value/s.

These two principles go some way to mitigate the concerns raised regarding issues of power (Beaulieu 2013; McNiff and Whitehead 2010; Newton and Burgess 2008; Noffke 1997; Webster-Wright 2009). Although the WL, as an institutional unit retains power in terms of implementing and structuring the training programme and activities, the primary site of development lies with the consultant themselves and they are in control of how to direct their learning. As such, within the structure of the programme, the consultants’ power to retain ownership of their learning journey is respected and reinforced. Each consultant embodies both the researcher and the research subject and in this way is positioned as a knowledge maker.

Through our training programme, we began to explore our personal and collective values and how our values aligned, or could be aligned, with the conceptual domains of authorial identity development (Cheung et al. 2018). For example, the domain of authorial confidence, can also be framed as *valuing authorial confidence*. Through this process, we became better able to align our values with the theories informing our work and acutely aware of the need to hold our practices accountable.

In AR (McNiff and Whitehead 2010), holding practice accountable to values is largely mediated through critical reflection, which takes both personal and social issues into account (Hatton and Smith 1995) and is an essential practice in transformative learning (Mezirow 1997). Through reflection, claims to new knowledge about practice are interrogated in relation to evidence and values (McNiff and Whitehead 2010). This interrogation occurs first on an individual or 'personal' level and then at a group or 'social' level, where members of the group act as 'critical friends' (Costa and Kallick 1993; McNiff and Whitehead 2010) by providing feedback and constructive critique to one another. Learnings derived from reflection are then applied to future actions, leading to revised or refined claims to knowledge about practice. Through an iterative process, personal claims to knowledge may become validated at the social level and ultimately legitimised as living theory (McNiff and Whitehead 2010). We introduced reflection in two ways: firstly, by encouraging a practice of *regular* individual reflection and secondly, through critically reflective discussions as part of our meetings.

After each consultation, consultants complete a short report, the intention of which is to enable continuity in terms of the support students receive. As many students often only visit once per an assignment (especially at the undergraduate level), the focus in terms of continuity should not be on the text, which is likely to change, but rather on the student – making these reports the ideal site in which to consider aspects of students' authorial identity development. We therefore integrated a space for individual reflection into this existing system, which both encouraged a focus on authorial development and a practice of regular reflection.

Student reports are an integrated function of the WCONLINE (v8.0.77. ©2023) scheduling and consultation software we use. As part of our training programme, we developed and piloted several iterations of a guide to encourage engagement with both instrumental and developmental goals and the interrogation of practice. Our current version (Table 1) provides consultants with a series of prompting questions for each section of the report. These questions still speak to the issues consultants typically described in their reports, such as the student's reasons for visiting the WL, aspects of the student's writing practice that were addressed and aspects of the student's writing that need further support. However, consultants often framed their comments about these in direct

relation to the text, thus here we have purposefully framed the questions in direct relation to the student. Building on this existing functionality of the report, the reflective guide further prompts consultants to also describe how the consultation addressed aspects of the student’s development as a writer and to reflect on their assessment of the students’ needs, areas for further writer development and the effectiveness of the consultation.

Table 1. Reflective guide for completing student report forms

Report Section	Reflective questions
Issues addressed:	<p>Why did the student come to the Writing Lab? From the students’ perspective, what aspect/s of their writing did they want to work on? From your perspective, did this align with your assessment as a consultant? For example, a student may come for help with coherence (authorial thinking), but through talking with them, you found that their thinking was clear, but they lacked a sense of purpose (authorial goals). Descriptive overview of the consultation How did the consultation progress? For example, did you begin with a discussion and then read together and then analyse a section of text? What aspects of the student’s development as a writer did you focus on and how? For example, did you focus on building confidence by providing positive constructive feedback on everything they had done well? What aspects of the student’s writing practice did you focus on and how? For example, did you focus on integrating sources, or writing a strong comprehensive conclusion?</p>
Issues that still need to be addressed:	<p>What aspects of the students’ development as a writer need further support? For example, building confidence or developing authorial goals? What aspects of their writing practice need further support? For example, how to do a task analysis or writing a comprehensive paragraph?</p>
Additional comments:	<p>What worked well? What tools or approaches did you use that helped the student to move forward in some way? Why do you think these strategies were successful? What didn’t work? What tools or approaches did you try that the student was not receptive to? Why do you think these strategies were unsuccessful? Based on your analysis, what would you do differently next time and why?</p>

The practice of individual reflection has been reinforced and supported by the reflective group discussions, which have become a standard part of our monthly training programme. This space for social reflection has allowed consultants more opportunities to explore the affective domain of their work and their personal values with a group of people, who are all acting as critical friends to one another.

Critical reflections on the development of our consultant training programme

In response to the call for chapters for this volume and building on our established practice of reflection, we, the authors of this chapter, held a series of four reflective discussions to critically interrogate the development of our consultant training programme and explore our experiences of this process in relation to the challenges and risks we faced and the opportunities and affordances we encountered.

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Method

Participants

Ideally, the whole WL team would have participated in the critical reflection. However, due to the demands of their Ph.D. studies, two WL consultants chose not to participate. As such, this work includes and represents four of the six members of the WL staff team.

Natashia is a senior lecturer and has been the coordinator of the WL since its establishment in 2015. Taahira is a full-time lecturer (appointed in 2018) and a Ph.D. student in the WL. Both Natashia and Taahira have previously worked as writing centre consultants and both also hold postgraduate qualifications in the biosciences. Nontobeko and Veneshley are currently both health sciences Ph.D. students; Nontobeko is a senior consultant, appointed in 2018 and Veneshley is a novice consultant, appointed in 2022.

Research design and data collection

To explore and reflect on our experiences of the WL consultant training programme, we held a series of four reflective discussions over a two-month period in 2022. Each discussion was initiated by a single prompt circulated before the meeting:

1. Discussion 1: Critically reflect on how you experience tensions, challenges, risks and opportunities as a WL staff member.
2. Discussion 2: Critically reflect on the affordances and limitations of an AR approach to staff/consultant training.
3. Discussion 3: Critically reflect on how you have put AR into practice, highlighting challenges and lessons.
4. Discussion 4: Critically reflect on your professional learnings, highlighting challenges and lessons.

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Discussions lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and took place in either a hybrid or fully online format through the Microsoft (MS) Teams platform. This platform allows the organiser of the meeting to record a video and automated transcription of the meeting, both of which are integrated functions of the MS Teams Office application. The recordings were automatically saved to the WL's OneDrive account and the transcriptions were downloaded for analysis in an access-controlled MS Team.

Data production and analysis

Natashia and Taahira assumed primary responsibility for the data production and analysis, however all four authors participated in the process. Guided by Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis (2006; 2019), we began by familiarising ourselves with the data. As part of this process, the automated transcription of each discussion was checked against the video recording of the discussion and corrected for transcription errors. The four clean transcripts were then combined into a single word document for analysis. Taking a primarily deductive approach, we collaboratively

coded the data for content related to our discussion prompts, with all authors contributing to the process and providing clarity regarding their meanings in relation to codes assigned to their own data items (that is, those things which they themselves said during the discussions).

In seeking to identify both semantic and latent meanings, we worked recursively to generate, refine and define themes in the data related to the experience of being a WL staff member, the adoption of an AR approach to our training and the impact this has had on our professional learning. The intention of this process was not to achieve consensus, but rather to surface the diversity of our perspectives as a source of richness in relation to shared meanings or themes. Below, we discuss the following themes: 'There are inherent tensions in the role of WL staff member' (which speaks to the competing goals and priorities we face); 'A focus on professional learning can feel like a competing priority' (which speaks to the challenges of introducing new ways of learning); 'Learning a new 'language' takes time' (which recognises the protracted process of acquiring new theoretical orientations); 'Using a conceptual framework enables flexibility' (which highlights the affordances of these tools for recognising alignment between theory and practice); 'negotiating priorities is risky business' (which acknowledges the risks consultants face and the social nature of language and learning as protective factors); 'Establishing a reflective practice is hard for scientists' (which speaks to the challenges of traversing disciplinary contexts); 'Structure is both constraining and supportive' (which explores how we have engaged with adopting and using these tools); and 'Reflection enables you to grow differently' (which highlights the transformative learning experience).

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Description and interpretation

There are inherent tensions in the role of WL staff member

In reflecting on their roles, both Natasha and Taahira highlighted ideological orientations, national imperatives, institutional priorities and contextual issues (discussed earlier in this chapter) as informing their perspectives. Natasha positioned her role as coordinator as synonymous with the WL, seeing it as a representation of herself, 'We have a particular kind of ideology and there are certain practices and theories that we recognise as valuable... [we serve] the students...we serve the institution...But there's also this...movement of activism around transformation and decoloniality, that we also feel very kind of called to be part of...'

Given the array of competing priorities around the WL, this perspective enabled an equilibrated sense of responsibility for Natasha, however she also recognised that it obscured some of the

internal tensions, ‘... sitting in the role as the coordinator – sort of holding the Writing Lab, so to speak – I look at things from that perspective. And when I do, it means I miss certain things that others see, because they are differently positioned in the space.’

Taahira positioned herself in tension between the students and the consultants, saying ‘there’s a lot of emphasis on the responsibility towards the students we serve ... But we also have a responsibility to the students we employ ... the consultants.’ While she recognised the risks of over-prioritising consultants’ needs, especially given that they will move on once they graduate, she still felt responsible for their development. Taahira highlighted the challenges postgraduate student consultants face such as heavy workloads and the precarious nature of part-time employment and felt that, ‘Having been in that previous kind of consultant role gives us this affordance to change kind of the way we see consultants and where they head to in future. I’m talking about capacity development.’ She described her view of the consultant role akin to Dowse and Van Rensburg (2011) as an opportunity, ‘for rehearsal to becoming an academic or an educator, a teacher, whatever you will. Alright, so we’ve got this opportunity for kind of true transformation.’

Although the WL does provide a mutually transformative learning space (Grimm 1996), which we view as beneficial to consultants, transformative learning is an uncomfortable process (Mezirow 1997). Veneshley articulated this discomfort as a,

constant battle between yourself and your studies and being a student and a consultant and that’s kind of why it’s a challenge...you’re constantly trying to be flexible and you’re trying to see how you can work with the different people...in the different spaces and those different roles. So you’re constantly adapting.

The need to constantly adapt also echoed in Nontobeko’s description of feeling pulled between ‘what the writing centre stands for, as well as the students’ goals and my own goals’, as she strove to, ‘work collaboratively with the students, to help them to build confidence in their ability as writers and just help them see value in the writing and how ideas are being communicated.’

Within this web of competing priorities, both consultants felt primarily responsible for meeting students’ immediate needs (Clarence 2019; Simpson 2011), as Veneshley said, ‘someone’s coming to you about something that they need help with. You want to try your best and see how you can help them.’ Thus, the challenge as Nontobeko expressed, lies in ‘trying to maybe hold all these roles, or the different things that are expected, with a single goal to ensure that the student is being satisfied with whatever service they are receiving when they come to the writing centre.’

A focus on professional learning can feel like a competing priority

The overarching shift in our programme has been from a focus on student needs to a focus on consultants' professional learning and development as knowledge makers. And to enable this, a shift from learning as an activity that takes place during training sessions, to learning as an activity that is part of our daily practice (Webster-Wright 2009).

In relation to this, Natasha described how she has come to see her own development as aligned with her daily work, 'instead of thinking about how I can improve this student or help this student, you're thinking, how can I improve myself so that the student will respond to me better?' However, for the rest of the team, situating professional learning as part of their practice felt like, as Taahira described, 'that huge tension between the [student's] needs and you know, your own personal needs as well.'

Self-development was interrogated as a competing priority, with Nontobeko asking, 'While improving our practice, do we not then negate the students' immediate needs or goals?' For Veneshley, it produced a sense of uncertainty about her purpose. Although she articulated her main goal as working towards students' development as writers, she also asked,

if we're going to constantly focus on improving [authorial development], will that not cause some sort of distraction from how we are teaching it, if that makes sense? ... I'm not saying that there is anything wrong with what we're doing. But what I'm trying to say is that I don't want us to get distracted from the main goal.

In part, these contentious feelings arise from the inherent complexities and uncertainties of working with people (Webster-Wright 2009). However, the experience of this may be exacerbated when also necessitating a paradigmatic shift. As Natasha highlighted,

science has a strongly positivist perspective that we are trying to achieve a singular version of the truth. So, we're trying to figure out the facts, basically what is known? What is always true? What is absolute? But when we move into a social science space and educational space, like the Writing Lab, because we're now dealing with people and their lived experiences and their identities, that singular version of the truth is just not aligned or applicable to this kind of work. We have to think from an interpretivist perspective that recognises that there are multiple truths. Because what each person is

experiencing is true for them and may be different from everybody else. That doesn't mean that it isn't true. So, I think it's about that shift that has to happen and that's a difficult shift because that's a paradigm shift.

And, in addition to these overarching shifts in ontology, there is also the need to grapple with differences between the process and outcomes of learning as a student, with which consultants are familiar and the ways of learning as a professional (Webster-Wright 2009).

Learning a new 'language' takes time

There was also a strong assertion among the group that coming to understand theory was a challenging and protracted process. As Natasha reflected, 'it probably wasn't until into my second or third year working as a consultant that I really started to feel like I understood academic literacies and that theory and what that theory was saying about how things worked ... it took time.'

Similarly, Nontobeko shared,

We had trouble at the beginning to understand all these, with the new terms and the new theories and the practice mainly at the writing centre. And I think how we become comfortable with it, it comes with experience and more training. I don't think I could say that I was comfortable at the beginning when I started working at the writing centre ... even now there are things that I'm just like ... what is this?

These experiences align with a characterisation of learning through stages of, 'initial resistance, conversion and continued uncertainty' (Wilson 1994 cited in Simpson 2011: 179). Yet despite these difficulties, there was also a recognition of this discomfort as part of the learning process (Mezirow 1997). As Nontobeko explained, 'I think it's OK to have tension, as long as everything works well together to push you to be a better version of yourself or improve or develop your practice ... I guess you can't expect to grow without any tension. So, the fact that we are experiencing tension with this model, it means there's growth.' In navigating the pathways between theory and practice, a particular challenge Nontobeko articulated, was regarding the theoretical and conceptual language. She described using this language as, 'a daunting task because it was never like ingrained in our brains, that when you're talking about this, this is what it means. So, we always had to, like, go back to the document and read what is authorial identity'.

However, she indicated that engaging with the discourse in social learning contexts was

particularly supportive (Mezirow 1997; Nichols 1998), saying, 'all the training and having sat through so many sessions of reflecting and talking about difficulties that you might have experienced before and how to handle a certain situation if it were to happen in future, has really helped in the development of my practices.'

Nontobeko further reflected on how, through this learning, she is now able to connect theoretical ideas to student talk and writing and how that enables her to guide the consultation in particular ways.

Obviously we don't use academic writing terms, or the terms that would be normally used in our training, when consulting with students, but obviously we would look at things ... like authorial thinking. Although we don't really use the words when you are talking to a student and you ask them what they're struggling with and then they start to clarify what they are thinking and what they think the problem is. Then I think that's where authorial thinking comes from. You see an incoherent text and you see that this person has a problem with authorial thinking if there's a lack of critical analytical engagement with the work and therefore you know where to focus...to actually help the student develop as a writer.

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Using a conceptual framework enables flexibility

In addition to adopting a situated approach to professional learning as part of our strategy to narrow the theory-practice gap (Webster-Wright 2009), we also began working with tools such as our adapted version of Cheung et al.'s, (2018) conceptual framework for authorial identity development. Although acquiring a theoretical orientation to practice was experienced as a challenging process, the consultants described how the tools have enabled them to work in more flexible ways with a diverse student population (Archer 2010; Nicklay 2012)

Veneshley explained that she is,

constantly still going back to [the conceptual framework]. It doesn't mean that I don't understand it, but it's because I'm trying to use it as a guide. So, I can definitely narrow down the focus area. Because we are being exposed to different situations ... we get students that come with different tasks, different things, different problems, the different

areas that needs to be focussed on and so that is why I see the positive of how we are doing things.

Nontobeko also spoke to an increased sense of flexibility,

So, I think because with having learnt the theory of academic writing and the practices of academic writing and how to go about having consultations with different people, then it teaches you to be able to be very flexible. And obviously because you've been exposed to the different methods of teaching, or collaborating with students, then you're not really overwhelmed with what you have to do in the consultation. And that's only now that I'm like, in quotation marks, a 'senior consultant'. Like at the beginning, I was really uncomfortable with students who just wanted me to teach, teach, teach. And I think now I understand where they might be coming from and I think I am able to accommodate that.

In this sense the conceptual framework not only enabled consultants to better tailor their practice to student needs, but also to be able to see ways to align and accommodate students' instrumental goals in relation to their long-term development as writers (Clarence 2017).

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Negotiating priorities is risky business

Although conceptual tools are helpful in enabling us to develop a plan for how we can work with students to support their authorial development (Cheung et al. 2018; Clarence 2017), negotiating student engagement with this in addition to, alongside, or through the students' immediate needs is an uncertain and risky process (Clarence 2019). As Nontobeko expressed,

the writing centre plays a role in helping students at any stage of their writing process, with obviously an end goal being helping them become independent writers. Whereas, the student, their role is to be able to read and understand a task and answer whatever questions may be posed at them, based on the given guidelines, which then becomes the driving force behind how students think of the tasks they are given and how they become goal orientated and not necessarily concerned with being strong independent writers, just focussed on getting good marks.

Venesley felt similarly, saying,

what I find challenging is the fact that we are trying to work towards this goal and what we stand for versus the student ... It's not like development is important to them. They're just trying to get to their deadline. They just want to get the work done. So, it's like you are stuck in the middle and you are trying to see how you can bring the two together, to make sure that you can have an impact on the student to show them that there is more to this thing just finishing that deadline.

As Nontobeko shared, consultants feel the risks of, 'losing the student's interest when trying to push the writing centre narrative, or my own narrative of just helping them build confidence and become independent writers' and 'of creating a narrative, if you focus more on the student's goals, that we are a 'fix it' garage', which can fuel students' expectations for the consultant to know everything, 'I always felt the pressure of knowing everything that the student comes with, whatever problem I need to be able to solve it.'

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While consultants are acutely aware of the risk to our relationship with students when we do not fully meet their needs, Nontobeko's comment also highlights the risks that consultants face if they carry too much responsibility as she reflected earlier, to just, 'teach, teach, teach'. Nontobeko described how her practice has developed as she has focussed on applying strategies to equilibrate instrumental and developmental goals.

I've moved to trying to make the student more responsible for the consultation. So, one of the things that I do, is I ask the student to tell me a bit about the assignment. And, that sort of gets them into a position where they're not expecting you to be the one talking all the time. So, I think once that then settled in their brain that this is not a lecture, or it's not a set up where I'm sitting here telling you what to do. It's supposed to be collaborative ... we share ideas and we talk about things that you've done to work on what you have and where you might be having challenges. And then I come in with, OK, let's see what we can do with that ... I just talk about their previous essay, especially for undergrads and ask them what it is their facilitator commented on. And they usually have the feedback on their laptops and they just go back and be like, 'Oh yeah, but I've worked on this and I think for this part, this is what I'm struggling on'. So, I think moving the responsibility from you as a consultant to it being the student's responsibility to sort

of be able to pinpoint their areas of improvement really takes away the pressure and it obviously comes with a lot of reflection.

Her approach to consciously using dialogue to help students develop knowledge about their own areas for development not only aligns practice to theory by reinforcing students' ownership of their learning (Cheung et al. 2018; Nichols 1998), but also works to alleviate the burden consultants may feel to 'know everything'. As such, strategically using dialogue to enable and guide student agency is both supportive in that it facilitates the process of negotiating priorities and protective in that it shifts the weight of responsibility away from the consultant.

Establishing a reflective practice is a challenging process for scientists

Although the value of reflection as a strategy for improving the alignment of theory to practice and balancing instrumental and developmental goals (McNiff and Whitehead 2010; Webster-Wright 2009), was collectively acknowledged, so were its associated challenges.

As Nontobeko expressed, '[reflection] is not something that we normally do [in science] and it's even more of a challenge if it's something that you don't really do, even in your personal life.' Veneshley shared similar feelings, 'What is a challenge for me is reflecting on myself, because it's not what you are told to do as a scientist.' Taahira echoed these sentiments, saying, 'it takes a long time to kind of focus on self, especially when you come from a positivist background. So, I'm finally being able to come to grips with reflection and it's part of my daily routine.'

In exploring these discomforts, Taahira posited that they may partly relate to the incongruence between a developmental focus and the largely mechanistic and procedural focus that imbued our basic science training,

maybe [it is] discipline related? I don't know, maybe just it's 'the Ph.D.' you know? Get the job done. We're not interested in your own development, no one's asking you about your own development. I wonder if that is anything to do with the fact that as scientists, we see the world differently?

As a transformative learning practice, critical reflection requires you to challenge your frames of reference (Mezirow 1997) and interrogate the broader sociocultural contexts that inform experience

(Hatton and Smith 1995). The group's reflections shine a light on the experience of this for consultants who are traversing disciplinary contexts, such as between the hard and social sciences and highlight the associated, 'difficult ... paradigm shift' which Natasha spoke to previously.

Structure is both constraining and supportive

In relation to the protracted process of establishing a reflective practice, the issue of time was particularly concerning for consultants (Clarence 2019; Grimm 1996). As Veneshley shared, 'one of the things that I find challenging is, to basically find sufficient time to reflect properly.' Consultants felt that the use of structured prompts to guide individual reflections after each consultation exacerbated this issue. Nontobeko reflected that, 'sometimes you have back-to-back appointments. Sometimes you will have appointments that are so draining that you can't do anything after and you just leave the client report for another day. But even then, like having to write that much detail in a client report needs time.'

Nontobeko further explained,

while it's very useful in giving you a structure, I feel that it's limiting in a way that you are limited to always going back to using these terms that we chose for this conceptual framework ... So, when you do your reflection, it's almost like you have this booklet that limits your reflection in a way that you always have to refer back to this, whereas if you didn't have this, then you would just like generally reflect on what happened in the consultation: What did the students say? How did you respond to it? And what were the things that were not said, that gave away how the student might be feeling or what they might be struggling with? So, you sort of always have to go back to like using these terms of the authorial confidence and stuff. Whereas, if it was not [action] research, you almost used like informal language of reflection.

Although the structured prompts are not a necessary part of reflection, Natasha expressed concern that without this structure, we might default back to simply reporting on consultation activities, rather than interrogating our practice. 'My feeling with the client report forms and maybe it's there in the title "client report forms", is that they do get used as reports, they don't get used as reflective spaces organically. It's not the default to use it as a reflective space.'

Natashia further added that for her, the structure also offers a way to acknowledge,

students' immediate needs, which is the sort of typical things that would go into a client report form. What were the immediate needs? What did we do? How did we address those? Right? And then the need to still be thinking about authorial identity development...despite the challenges, this approach has value because it does push you, or give you a structured way, to be conscious about applying the theory in your practice.

Veneshey shared this perspective, saying that the structured reflection was the very thing that, 'allows us to narrow that [theory-practice] gap to bring the two together.'

In terms of navigating the challenges associated with reflection, Nontobeko highlighted the value of the AR approach saying, 'now at least we have, like something structured, we sort of have a guide ... I feel like that's what action research does for us.'

The experience of structure as both constraining and supportive draws attention to issues of power (Beaulieu 2013; McNiff and Whitehead 2010; Newton and Burgess 2008; Noffke 1997; Webster-Wright 2009). Although the structures were collaboratively developed and adopted by the team, the directive to do so came in a hierarchical manner via Natashia as the coordinator, as part of her vision for the WL. Although the reflections demonstrate initial feelings of resistance and resentment, as consultants have continued to use the tools, their comments indicate how they have come to find them to be supportive for aligning theory to practice (Cheung et al. 2018; Clarence 2017) and enabling a practice of situated professional learning through regular reflection (McNiff and Whitehead 2010; Webster-Wright 2009).

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Reflection allows you to grow differently

To mitigate issues of power we have been conscious to create a space in which each team member can direct their learning in relation to their own values (McNiff and Whitehead 2010). The impact of this has been in the experience of growth that extends beyond the walls of the WL. As Nontobeko described,

with action research, we're obviously afforded a chance to do some introspection and

actually grow and improve in our practice. Which not only obviously impacts how we interact with students, but I feel like it also has an impact on how you interact on, like your daily life, because you learn things about yourself that you might have not noticed if you didn't have to do like a reflection on yourself ... action research forces you to actually go through this whole reflection process and come up with a plan on how to change, or how to implement change and what to do differently.

Venesley described the WL space and the role of a consultant as an opportunity for 'a different type of growth'. She described this as, 'personal development, personal growth and how you can improve', with the WL providing a unique space to engage with values.

You're thinking about things that are important to you, that you can use to basically help the student or the people that you are working with. So, it comes down to you. Whereas in the Ph.D., your values don't matter. I know this sounds very harsh, but this is literally what it is. It's not about your values, it's about your work.

264 Taahira highlighted how she has found reflection to be a protective practice which can be used to debrief after stressful situations, 'I use it as a breakout, or if I'm feeling overwhelmed, you know, after workshop, you know, I just stop and I say, "OK, what happened there? What did I learn?"' This protective effect can also function through shifting our sense of positionality. Venesley spoke to how reflection centres you, which can provide an appreciative reframing of sitting in tension between two things, 'I feel like the reflective part allows you to put yourself in the middle, so this is the part where it comes to the personal development ... so, that, I feel, it's a positive, because it allows you to grow differently.' She added,

as much as reflection is a challenge, it's also a lesson because you start questioning your own identity and how it shapes you and your interactions with others in those different spaces, so you constantly learning to facilitate, or you're trying to improve your own teaching practices, your own interactions and your responses. So, you are more attentive at the end of the day.

These reflections highlight how the structure of tools such as the conceptual framework, the AR

approach and the reflective prompts have collectively supported a mutually transformative learning space and experience (Mezirow 1997).

Recommendations and conclusion

In this chapter, we have presented a description and reflection of our journey to establishing a consultant training programme that prioritises using a structured conceptual, reflective and values-based approach. Our reflections have highlighted an array of challenges and affordances we experienced and highlighted strengths and gaps in our programme, which is in an ongoing state of development. We conclude now by briefly distilling some of the lessons we have learnt, offering recommendations to others about the features of our programme that have been effective.

The WL, situated and positioned as it is, both within and between spaces as a transformative learning environment (Grimm 1996; Mezirow 1997), means that staff continuously experience tension between various competing demands and priorities, regardless of the role they occupy. For consultants, who are traversing disciplinary spaces, the introduction of professional learning (Webster-Wright 2009) as an individual and collective activity that occurs not only during training, but is situated in practice as well, can feel like yet another demand and expose them to further tension and feelings of risk. In addition, consultants may face significant paradigmatic incongruences and challenges to their way of being. To mitigate these tensions and help staff negotiate between and align competing priorities, we need to engage with the discourse in social learning contexts as we would with students (Mezirow 1997; Nichols 1998).

Including critically reflective discussions as part of training provides a space within which staff can unpack weighty ideas related to world views, values and theory, alongside the day-to-day activities of the writing centre. Furthermore, by reflecting within a social setting, individuals also come to appreciate a wider range of perspectives, which is important as although we may share values, the different roles we embody mean that we understand and prioritise these values differently.

In addition to exploring the relationship between positionality and practice, discussion spaces also give consultants an opportunity to practice using theoretical language, the unfamiliarity with which was identified as a major challenge in applying theory to consultation practices and in reflection. Theory acquisition can also be supported by collaboratively developing and adopting conceptual tools. We recommend that other centres consider including activities that actively work to align the theories and ideological orientations that inform your practice, with ways that

consultants engage with students. Consultants articulated that once they were comfortable using the theory, they felt substantive gains in their practice. This was expressed particularly in terms of being able to identify areas for authorial development across a diverse range on students and better manage the challenges of the consultation space.

Although the conceptual framework (Cheung et al. 2018) was helpful for identifying areas for development, negotiating with students to give these attention exposes consultants to professional and personal risks. Consultants need to be equipped with practices that enable them to equilibriate the tensions between students' immediate needs and their long-term authorial identity development.

Including a structured approach to regular reflection was especially helpful in maintaining a view of both students' instrumental and developmental goals, as well as supporting consultants' acquisition of the theory and AR (McNiff and Whitehead 2010) was recognised as particularly important in guiding this process.

However, although staff came to see these practices and tools as enabling a transformative learning journey that extends beyond their role in the WL (Mezirow 1997), there were structural features of the programme that encountered initial resistance. One of the key challenges cited was the time required to engage with reflection in an authentic and meaningful way.

Within writing centres, time is always a limiting factor as writers work towards deadlines, budgets constrain the number of consulting hours available and consultants occupy the centre transiently between registration and graduation. Determining how best to manage resources and use our time effectively is an important consideration for coordinators who have a responsibility to staff, student and institutional needs.

Although the nature of the WL consultant training programme has changed dramatically, the investment of tangible resources such as budget and time have not. We have continued to devote approximately 10 per cent of our time to training, but how we work during that time has changed. We have also shifted the ways we work with time. By contenting ourselves with a slower, collective journey we have gone further than 'quick-fix' approaches would have achieved and by situating learning in practice, we have also stretched the time we have available.

Investing in consultants may seem like a distraction from the core student business of the writing centre and yet an investment in consultants is an investment in the centre, as they represent our 'frontline' workers. Although consultant turnover is high within writing centres, many go on to occupy academic roles and continue to use what they have learnt to support their future students (Archer and Parker 2016). In this way, an investment in consultants is not about growing our own timber, but rather pollinating the forest.

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Chapter Eleven

‘This Work has Paid Off in Bountiful Ways’. Development of Writing Tutors as Emerging Academics at a South African University Writing Centre

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Introduction

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Most of the research on writing centres in South Africa has focussed on the writing development of students (Archer and Richards 2011; Archer and Parker 2016; Clarence and Dison 2019). In addition to this role, writing centres can provide a powerful context for writing tutors¹ development as emerging academics (Archer and Richards 2011; Lewanika and Archer 2011; Clarence 2016; Archer and Parker 2016). However, this aspect of writing centre work is largely invisible and unrecognised within university settings (Archer and Parker 2016). This chapter reports on the first stage of a study on the growth and development of tutors at a writing centre at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in South Africa, which is based on tutors’ reflections from a collaborative ethnographic (CAE) process. Our mutual engagement in this research project has felt like a natural continuation of our work together in the Writing Centre. Each of the three tutors has had experience of working closely with the coordinator and shared responsibility for writing centre work and/or scholarship in different contexts.

The tutors at the Writing Centre are postgraduates – Master’s or doctoral students. Writing tutors are described by Nichols (2017: 184) as ‘potential future scholars’. In this study we use the

1 Writing centres use different terms for student tutors, such as tutor or consultant. These terms have the same meaning.

term 'emerging academics'. While we claim that working in a writing centre can facilitate growth of professional capabilities generally, our main focus in this chapter is on those capabilities that are valuable for an academic career and how these are developed. There is not much research on the development of writing centre tutors as emerging academics in the South African body of writing centre literature. The work that resonated most for us in relation to tutor development were publications by Lewanika and Archer (2011) and Archer and Parker (2016). Both of these studies were conducted at the University of Cape Town (UCT) which is a historically advantaged university (Cooper 2015). Conducting research on tutor growth and development in the context of a historically disadvantaged university would make a worthwhile contribution to this relatively new field. We argue that many Writing Centre tutors at UWC come from backgrounds that place them in marginalised positions with regard to the university and that working at the Writing Centre has the potential to equip them to negotiate their paths into academia and assists them to develop the capabilities and attributes that can help to prepare them for an academic career. Writing centres tend to occupy marginal spaces at universities, existing outside of disciplinary learning and teaching (Archer and Richards 2011; Clarence and Dison 2018). Because of the marginalised nature of the Writing Centre, these processes are not visible or recognised as significant within the university. We argue that the ways in which tutors' development can be enabled in a writing centre constitute practices contributing to social justice and institutional transformation.

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We begin by providing a background and context of the UWC writing centre, followed by a review of literature that theorises writing centres in relation to tutor development. We then describe the collaborative autoethnographic methodology employed to elicit data on capabilities developed by the researchers through working at the Writing Centre. Two themes that emerge from the data are discussed in detail. These are, firstly, identity formation as emerging academics and, secondly, multidisciplinary and collaborative engagement of UWC Writing Centre tutors. We conclude by emphasising the valuable role that a writing centre can play in the development of tutors as emerging academics. We suggest that the writing centre community can pay more focussed attention to their role in developing writing tutors as emerging academics and gain recognition of this contribution within higher education.

Background and context

UWC Writing Centre

UWC was originally established by the apartheid government as a university for 'coloureds'² as part of a racially differentiated higher education system. It has transformed into a high-quality university in both teaching and research. It has a diverse student population, with many coming from poor socio-economic and educational backgrounds (<https://www.uwc.ac.za/about/mission-vision-and-history/history>) and a significant number of postgraduates from various African countries.

The UWC Writing Centre was established in 1994 as part of the Academic Development Centre to assist students from disadvantaged schooling backgrounds, many of whom did not have English as their first language, but may have been conversant in other languages (Leibowitz et al. 1997). Over the years, the role of the Writing Centre has changed to assist students from diverse backgrounds, as there was a recognition that acquiring academic literacies is challenging for all students, not only English Additional Language (EAL) students (Archer and Richards 2011).

There is only one writing centre at UWC and it is available to assist students from all faculties in the university, namely, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Community and Health Sciences, Dentistry, Economic and Management Sciences, Education, Law and Natural Sciences. Despite the significant and widespread need for development of students' academic literacies, the Centre is small and under-resourced, particularly in terms of staff. The staff complement consists of one full-time academic post, that of coordinator and one full-time administrator. In addition to this, it employs approximately fifteen writing tutors, who work for ten hours a week, for nine months of the year. Writing tutors are UWC-registered master's or doctoral students with diverse disciplinary backgrounds and previous work experiences. They come from different African countries and most are either bilingual or multilingual. The writing tutors' work at the Centre is temporary as they can only stay for as long as they are registered students of the university. As such, the Centre recruits new tutors every year and it has put in place a robust training programme to develop their capabilities for facilitating students' writing development.

Tutors are relied on to do the bulk of the Writing Centre day-to-day work. This consists of individual and group consultations with students and workshops on aspects of academic writing

2 The term 'coloured' refers to a racial category imposed by the apartheid government as an official definition between 1950 and 1991. All people were identified as either 'white', 'black', 'coloured' or 'Indian' and treated differently within the state systems.

such as developing argument or referencing. The Writing Centre is, at times, requested to provide written feedback on a whole class of students' assignments with verbal feedback and engagement in groups. One of the areas that the Centre has been involved in, which we would like to expand, is working with lecturers to embed development of academic literacies within modules. We will discuss this further below.

A new vision for the Writing Centre was conceptualised in 2018, which argued for an expanded role of the Centre, which up until that point had been focussed mainly on individual and group consultations with students. It emphasised the need to consider the Writing Centre critically within the UWC context more broadly. The vision was that UWC should adopt a more integrated strategy for the development of students' academic literacies with a greater role for lecturers in the faculties and departments. It also identified a need for there to be more collaboration of the Writing Centre with courses and organisations on campus that were involved in developing students' academic literacies such as academic literacy courses in the faculties, the UWC library and student support services. One of the additional suggestions was for the Centre to become a 'vibrant hub for promotion of scholarship on writing, as well as exploration of academic reading and other literacies on the boundaries of academic writing' (Dison 2018). One of the ways in which the latter was later practised was through several Open Mic poetry readings for UWC students, when the Centre had the capacity to offer these.

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It was not possible to implement the vision at an institutional level at that point. Nevertheless, the Centre has maintained an ethos of being a warm, welcoming space, where opportunities for development were provided which tutors could take up. Naturally, there was variation in the extent to which tutors became involved in the work of the Centre and took up developmental opportunities. When we argue that a writing centre can provide an enabling space for tutor development, we focus on those tutors who choose to exercise agency in their participation in the Centre (Archer and Parker 2016) and take up development opportunities.

Context provided by the Writing Centre for tutor development

Archer and Parker (2016) describe writing centre spaces as 'both transitional and transformative – hidden and sometimes not valued or significantly acknowledged by university leadership' (Archer and Parker 2016: 45). Writing centres are transitional in that they can facilitate a transition process for students in terms of their writing and for tutors, from postgraduate students to professionals, possibly academics. This will be discussed further below.

Writing centres simultaneously play *normative and transformative* roles. In their *normative* role, they assist with socialising students into the dominant academic literacies of the universities (Archer and Parker 2106; Clarence and Dison 2017; Lillis and Scott 2007). The *transformative* role of writing centres enables students' critical engagement with regard to academic literacies (Lillis and Scott 2007). Both the normative and transformative roles contribute to furthering social justice at different levels, particularly given the inequalities in our society. For example, writing centres can 'offer possibilities for transformation, not only of the learner but also of the social and political contexts in which learning and other social action take place' (Saunders 2006, as cited in Moje 2007: 31). On the other hand, students' increasing grasp of university and disciplinary expectations, their ability to meet these expectations and their academic achievement arising out of this can build their general sense of self-worth and confidence at an individual level. This may enable their successful negotiation of academic culture and subsequent integration into their respective professional fields.

With regard to the students at the UWC Writing Centre, we focus mainly on playing a *normative* role. However, in most of our practices, there is not much continuity for working with students, with the exception of the few projects where we work in a sustained and integrated way with them in a disciplinary course. We believe that our *transformative* role is most prevalent in the processes that the tutors go through. We will unpack this more as we identify some of the capabilities that the co-researchers in this project developed as tutors and explore how these capabilities developed within the context of the Writing Centre.

According to Archer and Richards (2011: 9), writing centres occupy a liminal space on the margins of the institution 'to which members of a group withdraw and redefine their identities before re-emerging in society to play a new role'. This metaphor applies to both students and tutors. The metaphor is apt for tutors as they are transient in the organisation. They enter the writing centre as postgraduate students and undergo both formal and experiential processes of professionalisation. The metaphors of initiation and rite of passage have been used for tutor training and development (Kail 2003; Campbell 2008). Gillespie and Lerner (2000) argue that being a writing centre tutor can empower individuals in a unique way, going so far as to say that the experience of becoming and being a writing centre tutor may 'change your life, if you allow it to' (9).

Writing centres in South Africa have been seen to provide a 'safe space' for students in a sometimes harsh environment (Archer and Richards 2011: 9). The discourse of 'writing center as home' has been used (Miley 2016: 18) and writing centres have been described as 'communities' (Lewanika and Archer 2011). They are seen as 'safe spaces' because they are not linked to assessment

and the type of judgement that this entails. They strive to provide a relaxed atmosphere where tutors engage with students on work in progress in order to help them to gain 'a better understanding of what is required of them as writers and thinkers' (Clarence 2019: 122).

In addition to providing a safe space for students, they can provide such a space to tutors, where they are likely to develop a sense of identity as staff of the centre, while in some disciplinary departments they may be fairly marginalised as postgraduate students. Furthermore, it can provide a place of belonging during the often isolating process of doctoral study (Lewanika and Archer 2011).

Tutors' development as emerging academics within writing centres

Writing centres can facilitate tutors' development of professional and academic identity. Professional identity formation within a relatively stable context can be seen as a process where an individual's identity develops over a period of time, during which the values, norms, standards and characteristics of a particular professional community (for example, academia or particular disciplines) are internalised. This results in an individual 'thinking, feeling and acting like a member of that community' (Cruss et al. 2014: 1447). In other words, in developing a professional identity, individuals begin to acquire a sense of belonging within a profession. Central to the process of professional identity development is experiential learning through participation in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), which is enhanced by guided reflection by role models and mentors (Mann et al. 2009). When we discuss the development of writing tutors further on, we consider how tutors are influenced by both formal training as well as experiential learning that takes place through engagement, collaborative work and mentoring in the Centre.

Social constructivist theories of identity formation conceive identity to be a dynamic phenomenon that is continually negotiated and co-constructed within a social and relational environment (Wong and Trollope-Kumar 2014). Scanlon (2011) describes the process of identity formation as that of 'becoming' rather than 'being' a professional. Rather than reaching a final endpoint, professional identity formation is seen as 'a multidimensional, evolving and lifelong process throughout one's career' (Wong and Trollope-Kumar 2014: 490). The concept of academic identity formation is problematised within the context of the wide-ranging changes happening in universities (Barrow and Xu 2021). Academic identity is fluid (Findlow 2012; Lopes et al. 2014, cited by Barrow and Xu 2021) and academic work is increasingly diversified (Osbaldiston et al. 2019). These factors will be explored further in our discussion section.

According to Lewanika and Archer (2011) and Archer and Parker (2016), working in a writing centre improved tutors' writing, research and teaching skills, while boosting their confidence as academic writers and possible future lecturers. Past and present tutors in both studies indicated that through interactions with students and fellow tutors they learned more about writing styles across disciplines. One informant in Lewanika and Archer's (2011) study observed that discussions, which took place in tutor training sessions regarding disciplinary discourses, served to 'illuminate the opaque taken-for-granted literacy practices of the genres of the various disciplines of the University' (153). Another informant in that study found that the diversity of academic disciplines exposed to in the Writing Centre opened her eyes to the numerous possibilities in academic research and writing. This enriched her approach to her own work and influenced her to 'explore alternative perspectives from the sociological field in developing [her] conceptual framework' (Lewanika and Archer 2011: 154). Strategies such as 'free writing' learned at the centre and the regular practice of helping students led one tutor to formulate internal strategies which she applied and improved her metacognitive abilities in academic writing (Lewanika and Archer 2011). Teaching is a fundamental capability for academics that is often not built into doctoral training (Dison and Hess-April 2019; Leibowitz et al. 2017; Mantai 2019). Through practice and training processes, tutors also gained knowledge of pedagogical strategies for teaching within a higher education context (Lewanika and Archer 2011) and enhanced the quality of their teaching practice when they began their careers as academics (Archer and Parker 2016).

Methodology

Research design

Our research project on the development of writing tutors as emerging academics consists of a number of phases. This chapter reports on the first phase, which was conducted using a collaborative ethnography (CAE) method (Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez 2012). The CAE process was undertaken by the Writing Centre coordinator, Arona and three past and present tutors from the UWC Writing Centre, hereafter referred to as co-researchers. Two of these three tutors, Phoene and Mapula, are co-authors of this chapter, while Irene chose not to participate in writing this particular chapter.

Collaborative autoethnography (CAE)

CAE is a methodological variation of autoethnography, which is a qualitative research method in which the researcher draws on his/her autobiographical material as 'a window into the understanding of a social phenomenon' (Chang, Ngunjiri and Hernandez 2014: 376). Autoethnography is autobiographical in the sense that researchers collect data about their personal experiences and socio-cultural environment and ethnographic in the sense that the data is analysed and interpreted 'through an ethnographic research process to gain a sociocultural understanding of personal experiences' (Chang et al. 2014: 376). Collaborative autoethnography, as the name suggests, takes a more collective approach to the autoethnographic method. In CAE, two or more researchers share their autobiographical materials related to a common social phenomenon; in this case development of tutors as emerging academics. They then analyse and interpret the collective data to interpret the meanings of their personal experiences within their sociocultural contexts (Chang et al. 2014).

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CAE holds potential for shifting the power relations that exist in conventional research processes. People can be involved in the research who might otherwise be in hierarchical relationships to each other. Typical power relations are altered to contribute to a mutually enriching process amongst researchers (Hernandez, Ngunjiri and Chang 2017). When multiple autoethnographers engage each other in CAE research, they 'complement, contradict and probe each other as critical peers' (Hernandez et al. 2017: 252). Through this process, individual perspectives are tempered through intersubjectivity and the interaction of multiple voices as they explore the social phenomenon (Chang et al. 2012). When two or more researchers contribute to data generation, analysis and writing/performing, CAE is strengthened by the contribution of multidimensional perspectives on the research (Chang et al. 2013). Applying different disciplinary and experiential perspectives can 'deepen the analytical and interpretive components' of the research (Lapadat 2017: 598).

Data collection and analysis

In our project, the four co-researchers met every week for ten weeks to write and reflect. Both Phoene and Irene are Kenyan, currently living in Kenya. Thus, it was necessary to meet online. Phoene, Mapula and Irene wrote about experiences of their own development while working at the Writing Centre, particularly the capabilities that they developed or expanded and the processes

through which this took place. The use of CAE methodology was exploratory and we felt that we were finding our way through the process (both collaboratively and individually). Our narratives provided a stimulus for discussion, which was recorded on the online meeting platform.

We used thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2008) for extracting themes from the data. We looked for themes which constituted capabilities of writing tutors and also searched for data which referred to how these capabilities were enhanced or developed in the Writing Centre. We used a combination of inductive and deductive methods to analyse the data (Freeman and Richards 1996). We were aware of the themes which had been identified in literature but, in some cases, we reorganised the themes or identified more themes. For the purpose of this chapter, Phoene and Mapula each identified one theme which resonated for most for them from the data and Arona initially wrote up the other elements of the chapter which encased the discussion of these themes. Mapula chose to focus on opportunities for development through collaboration. Phoene focussed on development of professional identity. We wrote on one Google Drive document and then engaged with each other about the different sections and worked collaboratively on the whole chapter (Bozalek et al. 2016). We are intending to still do a more careful and systematic coding and analysis of the data.

Discussion of selected themes arising out of the reflections

All writing centres have the potential to contribute to tutors' development of capabilities and confidence. In the collaborative autoethnographic (CAE) component of this study, we reflected on the particular contribution of the writing centre at UWC, a historically disadvantaged institution. We view writing tutors as emerging academics, who are likely to face a number of challenges, such as negotiating the alien culture of the academy (Orbe 2008) and feeling a low sense of confidence about being able to succeed in academia. In our discussions, we also explored the idea that tutors from marginalised backgrounds hold transformative potential to bring change and innovation in this environment. They have potential to contest and transform normative teaching and learning practices in academia. From the written reflections and group discussions, we identified several themes that outline ways in which the work of writing tutors at the UWC Writing Centre can contribute to their development as emerging academics. In this chapter, we focus on two of these themes, that is, the development of professional academic identity, and the cross-disciplinary and collaborative engagements of writing tutors.

Development of academic professional identity

Academic identity development among emerging academics is characterised by a wide range of insecurities relating to their self-efficacy to perform conventional academic tasks, their (in)authenticity and (il)legitimacy to occupy and navigate an academic professional environment and a sense of liminality that is characteristic of becoming a part of the academic community (Archer 2008; Mantai 2019; Hollywood et al. 2020; Larsen and Brandenburg 2022). These insecurities can be heightened in a neoliberal context where academic identities are constantly evolving (Shahjahan 2020). Tutors' reflections revealed that the UWC Writing Centre enabled their development of key capabilities for academics, specifically with respect to teaching and learning, boosted their academic profiles and confidence and equipped them to adapt to contemporary dynamic academic identities. These capabilities were developed through exposure to training processes at the writing centre, but also came about inadvertently, through participation in communities of practice that tutors engaged in as they performed various roles at the centre.

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Previous research has described writing centres in South Africa as communities of practice in which tutors begin to understand and embody an academic professional identity (Lewanika and Archer 2011). Similarly, in our context, tutors reflected on the UWC Writing Centre as a community in which they were *socialised* into the academic profession. They observed that they had developed capabilities, specifically teaching and facilitating learning, which are expected of academics, often assumed, yet not deliberately nurtured within disciplinary training (Dison and Hess-April 2019, Leibowitz et al. 2017, Mantai 2019). Consequently, while postgraduate students may be competent within their respective disciplines, they may perceive themselves to be falling short of a key expectation of an academic professional (Jepsen, Varhegyi and Edwards 2012). In turn, their sense of confidence and preparedness for an academic career is negatively affected. In contrast to this, some of the writing tutors experienced an increase in knowledge and confidence about teaching. For example, Irene, a former tutor at the UWC Writing Centre, had recently started a lecturing position. She recalled training sessions at the Writing Centre which influenced her pedagogical knowledge and practices – conscientising her to facilitate learning, rather than edit students' writing – a perspective that continues to influence her personal approach to work colleagues and students.

I recalled that one of the writing centre training sessions was about how to respond to students' writing. [...] The idea was to move us from being editors of students' work and towards becoming facilitators in the acquisition of academic literacies among our clients.

Phoene observed:

One of the things I carry with me is a better understanding of what academic literacy is all about and how to support students to develop it. I not only got trained but I also lived it, sharing with the student and every time I tried something out, I would reflect and improve on my writing around it. I found it enriching to understand what academic writing is about.

The idea that understanding a culture (for example, academic culture) brings about a consciousness where one can begin to contest some aspects of that culture has been highlighted in previous research among former writing centre tutors turned practising academics (Archer and Parker 2016). This can especially ring true for emerging academics such as our tutors who, much like the students who they serve, are marginal to the university culture. Idahasa and Vincent (2014) have found that marginality can be a resource with regard to first-generation female academics in South Africa. They note that 'occupying a position on the margins but at the same time having some access to power by virtue of being academics provides the ability to 'see' those who are in a similar position [...] and to be a resource for those people' (65). Irene's and Phoene's narratives above highlight this possibility, showing that the experience of working at the writing centre can attune tutors to the centrality of academic literacies to supporting students' learning at university. Most importantly, it can engender a willingness to support students' development of academic literacies and facilitate their acquisition of tools to achieve the same within their disciplinary teaching practice. Taking this approach, which embeds academic literacies within disciplinary training, is distinct from conventional approaches where disciplinary training and academic literacy are not integrated (Collett and Dison 2019) and transformative, in that it recognises and addresses a key barrier to success at university especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Archer and Parker (2016: 15) in their interviews with academics who were previous UCT Writing Centre tutors found that they had become capable of 'recognising and reflecting on accepted norms and destabilising them in the process'. They argued that these academics had learned how to 'employ a critical 'academic development' perspective' through their work in the UCT Writing Centre and they were able to apply this in their teaching (51). The authors argue that the 'consultants-turned-academics are better equipped to deal with the complexity of academia and effect change where it is warranted' (Archer and Parker 2016: 51).

Both Irene's and Phoene's narratives above illustrate the significance of deliberate developmental processes at the UWC Writing Centre on tutor's professional identity development. While

knowledge that is gained through participation in communities of practice can be explicit, often it is tacit (Lave and Wenger 1991). Reflections by Phoene and Mapula, who worked at the Writing Centre both before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, emphasised the significance of the writing centre's physical space, where tutors from different backgrounds could easily draw on each other's experiences and expertise. Covid-19 containment measures however meant that such unstructured interactions shifted to online platforms, like Google Meet and WhatsApp. We aim to explore the opportunities and limitations that such platforms presented for tacit learning in subsequent phases of our research. Thus far, in contrast, reflections by Phoene, who only worked in the Writing Centre during the Covid-19 pandemic, highlight formal and informal interactions with lecturers rather than peers as sites where she acquired tacit knowledge, which influenced her professional identity development.

To see oneself as an (authentic) academic, but also to be seen as one, is a key aspect of one's professional identity (Archer 2008). Previous research has reported emerging academics' anxieties concerning their positioning by themselves and others as (in)authentic and (il)legitimate scholars within academic communities (Archer 2008). Huber (2010) has found that professional mentors are a key support system for first-generation graduates navigating the norms of new work environments. Within the academic context, collaborative writing has been recognised as a valuable activity for developing the skills of graduates or young academics and boosting their confidence in writing (Chang et al. 2016). In her narrative, Irene highlighted an opportunity to collaborate with senior academics in a research project and how this process bolstered her profile as an academic and affirmed her confidence and identity as a scholar. She participated in a collaborative writing process based on a project that she had been involved in in the Writing Centre. This resulted in a published book chapter. Irene further elaborated that her professional experience at the Writing Centre had proven to be valuable to her transition into an academic position as follows:

Interestingly when I interviewed for a part-time teaching position in a private university here in Kenya and was asked what value I could add, I talked about being part of collaborative research and supporting students to develop academic literacy skills since I had worked at the UWC Writing Centre before.

Tutors also described the significance of writing centre structures and processes in reinforcing their professional identity. The value of a structured writing centre work environment was highlighted by Irene and Phoene who both described its influence on their professional conduct as academics.

Irene noted that the Centre's structure provided a sense of order and impacted on how she organised and approached her academic responsibilities. In addition, the tutors identified writing centre processes which signified that they were recognised and valued as academic professionals and this influenced their self-perception as members of an academic professional community. In this regard, they contrasted writing centre tutors with faculty tutors who support students in disciplinary courses. Faculty tutors implement instructions from lecturers, who are the core academic staff. Within the Writing Centre, this distinction (tutor versus lecturer) was seen to be less apparent as tutors worked collaboratively with the coordinator and lecturers and were more agentic. Rather than responding to instruction, Writing Centre tutors proactively performed the majority of the writing centre work. Alongside the coordinator, they participated in briefing meetings with lecturers and collaboratively prepared academic writing workshops for different departments. Once they had been through a training process, they also had full control of their personal engagements with students during consultations. Their execution of these functions was supported by a review of practices, for example, during weekly meetings that informed upskilling intervention strategies, based on identified needs. Systems of accounting (for time and work done) and reward for extra effort further reinforced this professional dynamic. In one of our discussions, Phoebe stated that the tutors' work at the Writing Centre 'felt like a real job', echoing the significance of the Writing Centre environment in which tutors embodied the roles and responsibilities of an academic professional and were recognised as such. In turn, tutors developed a professional identity in which they came to 'think and see' (Crues et al. 2014) themselves as part of the academic professional community and not merely 'appendages' to the system.

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Our discussion thus far clearly demonstrates that a writing centre can facilitate tutors' development of an academic identity in the conventional sense – it enables tutors to embody the values and standards expected of an academic and reinforces their confidence as authentic members of the professional community. Beyond this, however, the value of the Writing Centre in equipping tutors to adapt to *evolving* academic identities was also reflected on in our discussions. Academic identities are not stable. According to different theoretical frameworks, the meaning of 'academic' itself is seen as increasingly fluid and therefore in need of redefinition (Findlow 2012; Lopes et al. 2014, cited in Barrow and Xu 2016). According to Fanghanel (2007), perceptions of academic identity and being a lecturer at university level prior to the eighties was taken for granted and seen as unproblematic. Academics were seen as 'experts' in their fields of research who seemed de facto qualified to pass on their knowledge to future generations (Fanghanel 2007: 4). However, in a context of increased massification since the nineteen-eighties, teaching has become

a much more complex activity. In addition, the tasks of academics have diversified. They have had to become 'multitaskers', people who manage funds, paperwork, emails, meetings, supervision, teaching and research in order to succeed in academia (Osbaldiston et al. 2019, cited in Barrow and Xu 2016: 2).

Tutors' reflections highlighted ways in which working at the Writing Centre can potentially enhance their responsiveness and adaptability to contemporary dynamic academic identities. The Centre's work is not fixed. Even though tutors' work mainly comprises one-on-one consultations with students, they are often required to design interventions that respond to the needs of students in different departments and to adapt such interventions to the needs of specific groups at different levels of study. The discussion in the second theme of this chapter elaborates on some of these interventions. Phoene, who was in the final stages of her doctoral studies, reflected that performing different academic tasks enhanced her understanding of normative demands of an academic, the time and 'mental' demands of different tasks and increased capacity to plan and allocate time to various responsibilities.

She also noted that working closely with practicing academics had alerted her to the demanding nature of an academic career and that this had led her to potentially reconsider this option. The significance of this experience is elucidated in relevant literature which suggests that unrealistic expectations about the nature of academic work, workload and time pressures among emerging academics can influence their overall career satisfaction (Hollywood et al. 2020), with possible implications for their disengagement from academic careers. Phoene's reflection highlights the ways that the Writing Centre influences emerging academics' development of a realistic view of the demands of an academic career and can potentially enhance their capacity to balance various academic identities. The need for adaptability became even more apparent while working within the Covid-19 pandemic context where all interactions were online. The strategies adopted by tutors to support students and lecturers under these circumstances will be explored in greater depth in subsequent phases of our research. At this stage, our reflections reveal that tutors were working in a context in which they did not know what to expect and thus had to be open to changing workplace demands, which resonates with the dynamism that characterises 21st-century academic identities.

Multiple disciplinary and collaborative engagements of UWC Writing Centre tutors

Collaboration and cross-disciplinary engagements are integral to all functions of a modern university. It is necessary for all academics to be able to create and participate in team projects where they would work with peers from any disciplinary background. The present-day university environment is dynamic and complex. Research is increasingly conducted within applied contexts by interdisciplinary teams. Academic roles have expanded beyond the traditional focus on research and teaching (Bryson 2004). These include administrative and managerial roles. As academics, they are expected to manage growing research groups, liaise and negotiate with different stakeholders within and outside the academic environment, source and manage research funds and possibly take up leadership roles within the faculties (Cunningham et al. 2015; Menter 2016). These transitions can be challenging as they are not always supported by formal training. By participating in collaborations, particularly within cross-disciplinary contexts, academics can create platforms for sharing knowledge, information, skills and resources as well as for building synergies for the completion of big projects. Collaborative work can also constitute safe enclaves for emerging and marginalised academics, within which they can increase their productivity, in spite of the complexity of their work environment (Tynan and Garbett 2007).

The work of writing tutors at the UWC Writing Centre is cross-disciplinary by its very nature. In this space, tutors enter a learning and teaching environment where they support students' development of academic literacies. This work is in many ways very different to the research activities in their postgraduate programmes. The centre provides support to students and academic staff from all seven faculties of the university, but, due to capacity constraints, the students' disciplinary areas are not matched to the tutor's disciplinary background. Therefore, the writing tutors must always be prepared for students from any discipline and writing on any subject matter. In their interactions with students and lecturers, the tutors are challenged to interrogate knowledge from different fields of study and to understand the requisites for a broad range of text genres. They are also expected to be cognisant of the varied applications of academic writing conventions across different disciplines. To capacitate tutors for this task, the centre emphasises these elements in its training programme. Furthermore, the tutors are trained to support students at any level of study, including first-year students, postgraduates and adult learners.

Working in these multidisciplinary contexts, the writing tutors gain a broader perspective of the academic discourse and theoretical knowledge beyond the scope of their own studies. They

also form a deeper understanding of conventions across disciplines. Commenting on this aspect, Phoene wrote:

Working in an interdisciplinary context has exposed me to the diversity of academic writing approaches in different disciplines at the university ... This can be challenging and often times requires a bit more research in order to effectively support such students...[furthermore] my appreciation [of this diversity] has been enhanced.

In our discussions, Phoene explored the idea that her 'experience of engaging with different disciplines' might be valuable for her in her future academic career.

Especially when you're doing collaborative research with teams of people from different disciplines – I think that will be relevant, you [can] know where people are coming from – you know the value they can contribute and you know the limitations of where you're coming from.

286 Thus, this exposure could give her more appreciation of the workings of different disciplines and openness to hearing what and how they could contribute to addressing a particular problem. Knowing 'the limitations of where you're coming from' can be a step towards appreciating the need for multidisciplinary research and can put an academic in an advantageous position to engage in such research.

The tutors also have the opportunity to work collaboratively with various members of the campus community including their peers at the centre, academic staff and other student support services. For instance, the tutors are required to carry out various administrative and marketing tasks, in addition to supporting students' development of academic literacy skills. These tasks are performed in teams, where tutors can take advantage of the knowledge and skills gained from their diverse disciplinary backgrounds and collectively rich life and work experiences to develop solutions. Collaborative teamwork fosters camaraderie and a collegial culture in the Centre. When reflecting on this area of her work, Irene noted the development of relationships within the teams and their importance in creating safe spaces for peer-to-peer learning and support.

To deal with my own inadequacies, I was very careful to listen and observe what the more experienced tutors were doing ... I found myself seeking support from Kenny,

Retang and Rasheeqa.³ In fact, Kenny sat in two of my sessions and gave me very valuable feedback. With time, I learnt to take a middle ground and became more confident about my approach to students' work and my role as a facilitator who supports the academic literacy skills acquisition process.

Irene also highlighted how she gained support from these relationships even in her own doctoral research work, when she was writing her first article for submission to a journal.

I got a lot of help from two colleagues who had either published or were in the process of doing so. [They] read my article and commented on it constructively, which encouraged me.

When tutor teams collaborate with academic staff in the faculties, it is mostly to plan and implement strategies towards addressing students' academic writing challenges within the modules. In this role, the writing tutors provide feedback on written tasks in specific modules, advise lecturers on the assessment processes, develop and facilitate workshops on various academic literacy topics for students and/or facilitate training workshops for tutors and graduate lecturing assistants (GLAs). This work brings tutors closer to the learning and teaching processes taking place within the faculties. In the one-on-one consultations with students, the writing tutors apply the guidelines they learned during their training. However, when working with lecturers, the tutors have to align their input with the lecturer's teaching philosophy and the objectives outlined for the course. During the group discussions, participants in this study agreed that these elements constitute a unique, but powerful training process for a teaching role at university. The writing tutors have an opportunity to learn from experienced academics and to contribute meaningfully by exploring innovative solutions under the tutelage of their own coordinator and the lecturer, in a way that is not common in the faculties. This was highlighted by Irene in her reflections:

Involvement in this [collaborative] project has exposed me to processes that take place 'behind the scenes' to facilitate learning, which had I not been a writing centre tutor, I may only have encountered in [an actual] teaching role.

3 Past tutors from the Writing Centre gave permission for their real names to be used.

Mapula also shared this view, writing:

During these interactions [with teaching staff], we gain a lot of insight into the practical aspects related to the application of teaching theory.

Because the centre supports different members of the campus community, the problems addressed in each individual collaborative project are unique and so, the solutions developed by the tutors are tailored to the needs within each case. As such, tutors would often prepare by first educating themselves on new processes/concepts that are relevant to the task. They also have to be creative and innovative when developing novel solutions. When reflecting on these processes, tutors involved in the current study pointed out that these collaborations provide a space where tutors can experiment with various tools and processes, in a safe environment, free from judgement. This is also an area of significant skills development. Mapula shared her experience in one such project:

Collaborative work is often commissioned as 'projects' ... Here, I worked with various teams ... In some of these endeavours, I provided leadership. My role in the Biotechnology Hons project involved conceptualising, planning, creating content, establishing collaborations [with other support services] and facilitating the workshop ... I had to delegate [responsibilities] and manage resources for the whole project. This was a difficult task to accomplish, but I learned valuable lessons [on] planning, time-management, resource-management and contingency plans.

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Our discussions also interrogated these collaborative engagements as potential communities of practice. Indeed, communities of practice were initially defined as groups of people working together on shared interests and sharing knowledge and skills through informal processes (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998). Over time, the concept of community of practice was adopted by different fields, where it expanded in meaning and application within diverse contexts (Wenger 1998). Nevertheless, the collaborative engagements at the Writing Centre retain the core elements of any community of practice, that is, the existence of a community that is working together where learning takes place through mutual engagement (Lave and Wenger 1991).

It must be noted that many of the collaborative projects at the UWC Writing Centre are once-off or short-term engagements. We perceived that there was little interest from most of the academic staff to engage directly with the Writing Centre (Sefalane-Nkohla and Mtonjeni 2019).

Some lecturers did not even know about the Centre and others saw it as a service that students could be 'sent to' to improve their writing. We also found that many lecturers who did engage with us did not take up further opportunities for collaboration beyond the first intervention, even when the objectives of the first engagement had been successfully realised. There are a number of possible reasons for this. Some lecturers may not see students' development of academic literacies as an ongoing process that needs continued focus and scaffolding. Some may have continued with interventions to develop academic literacies of students within their modules without the assistance of the Writing Centre. We are aware that there are many demands and pressures on lecturers and it may be that they have limited capacity for additional collaborative work that takes time and effort. It could be a combination of these factors. Certainly those lecturers, who were in touch with the Writing Centre, would encourage their students to use the services of the Centre.

There are a few collaborative projects that continue for long periods. One example of this is the ongoing collaboration between the Writing Centre and the lecturer in a postgraduate programme in the Faculty of Education. Here, the tutors provide input on the assessment structure and formative feedback on a structured set of tasks throughout the course. The students' development of academic literacies is continuously monitored and responsive measures in the form of short workshops or process adjustments are applied when necessary. Over time, this engagement has expanded into a sustainable process, supported by learning and teaching theory and ongoing research. Due to the continuous development of effective procedures by all role-players and improving terms of engagement, this collaboration is growing less susceptible to the transience of tutors. Every year, the tutor team involved in this project changes without collapsing the collaboration itself. This suggests that within the context of UWC Writing Centre, or perhaps all writing centres, communities of practice can be used as highly effective strategies for embedding academic literacies in curricula, but their sustainability requires strong procedural frameworks and the commitment of proactive teaching staff.

Overall, the collaborative landscape at the UWC Writing Centre contains frequent short-lived and small-scale engagements and a few long-term engagements that grow around a well-defined purpose and evolve into self-sustaining organisms capable of self-check and self-repair. In the written reflections and subsequent discussions in this study, the tutors mostly reference the more established long-term collaborative projects as areas of learning and development. This could imply that these projects carry the most development potential for tutors when compared to shorter projects. It is perhaps, Irene's reflection on her participation in the collaboration with the Faculty of Education that encapsulate the importance of these long-term engagements:

At the end of the collaborative [engagement for the year], the Writing Centre Coordinator and the Faculty of Education lecturer invited me to collaborate with them on a writing project that reflected on the collaborative work [...], which resulted in a published chapter in 2022. I am proud that this work has paid off in bountiful ways. I feel much more confident as a scholar going into the academic space. The book chapter will bolster my profile as an academic, not only as a publication, but also by demonstrating the ability to work in a team and achieve results.

Whilst the opportunity to participate in collaborative projects is equally accessible to all, it was noted in our discussions that the level of involvement is not the same among the tutors. Tutors are not limited in the roles they can play in these projects. It is clear that the three tutors whose reflections were captured in this study were intentional about playing serious roles in the different projects at the Writing Centre. As such, they were each later invited to take on greater responsibilities, which include leading important projects, participating in research and, in the case of Mapula, formally stepping in as the acting coordinator of the writing centre when the coordinator was on leave. These are privileges only accessible to tutors who prove their ability to handle greater responsibility. There are tutors in the Centre who prefer to play smaller roles in the collaborative projects, even if they had worked at the Centre for a long period. The choice to respond to the available opportunities is a matter of agency (Archer and Parker 2016). Some tutors are overwhelmed by the demands of their postgraduate research and are not able to invest more time in this area.

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Multifaceted, multidisciplinary and collaborative roles at the UWC Writing Centre carry innumerable benefits for tutors who intend to pursue an academic career. The varied roles played by the writing tutors increase their capacity to handle greater professional responsibility and train them to adapt quickly in dynamic environments. The majority of writing tutors at the UWC Writing Centre are black African students, many of whom grew up in underprivileged communities, far removed from opportunity and influence that can afford them entry into the academic environment. However, collaborative and cross-disciplinary engagements at the Writing Centre bring these tutors faster to the 'big players' table' where they work directly with established academics. Here they can access mentorship, professional networks and career guidance. They also learn skills in leadership, management, conflict resolution and communication. These interactions afford them the recognition from potential future managers and supervisors. Importantly, tutors coming out of the Writing Centre with this vast experience and entering an academic career can potentially bring innovation and transformative developments into their research and teaching practices.

Conclusion

Writing centres are often undervalued and even invisible within university contexts. Whilst much research has been done about writing centre work with regard to students, with some exceptions, the growth and development process that *writing tutors* undergo, through working at a writing centre has not been widely researched. The reflections of the co-researchers in this study elucidated ways in which the UWC Writing Centre contributed to the development of tutors as emerging academics. Furthermore, the processes of development that Writing Centre tutors undergo can make a contribution to social justice and transformation in higher education.

We identified two ways in which working at the Writing Centre supported the co-researchers' development of academic, professional identity. Firstly, awareness about teaching and learning practices was raised through deliberate training processes. Furthermore, tutors developed confidence in their identity as legitimate and authentic academic professionals through working closely with experienced academics. The transformative potential of the Writing Centre was apparent in the way that tutors' experiences of working at the Writing Centre enhanced their awareness of and reflexivity on academic literacies as well as their capacity to support its development. We argue that such consciousness can extend into their pedagogical practices as academics. In a context where there is a diverse body of students from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (Mdepa and Tshiwula 2012), academics who proactively develop academic literacies within their disciplinary contexts can reduce barriers to success at university.

Secondly, we found that the UWC Writing Centre not only socialises tutors into conventional academic identities with respect to teaching and learning, but can also assist them to manage evolving academic identities within an increasingly complex and dynamic university environment. Tutors highlighted capabilities that could smooth the way to navigating this context, including adaptability to the changing demands of an academic, ability to transgress disciplinary boundaries, innovation, teamwork and the ability to draw on collegial expertise. For tutors such as those at UWC, who are likely to emerge from marginalised backgrounds, having the tools and confidence to navigate complex academic identities can draw them from the margins to the core of academic communities of practice.

Even though reflections by tutors in this study highlight numerous developmental opportunities within the UWC Writing Centre, there is a need for a closer examination of the context within which such capabilities are developed. Reflections by tutors revealed that capabilities that were developed emerged from both deliberate and unintended processes. They pointed out deliberate

developmental processes that facilitated their sensitivity to academic literacies and their ability to work in cross-disciplinary contexts. However, other capabilities such as adaptability in dynamic contexts were tacitly developed as secondary outcomes of tutors' election to engage in different communities of practice. There is immense value in opportunities for experiential learning where tutors learn through agentic participation in communities of practice. We acknowledge, however, that because of the way that work is structured at the Writing Centre, not all tutors elect to take up these opportunities or they may participate in projects without taking the initiative that facilitates learning. The extent to which developmental opportunities are accessed by our tutors is worth exploring as we extend our research to other tutors in the writing centre. Ironically, it is likely that the lack of resources of the Writing Centre, particularly the fact that there is only one academic post, has increased the development of the pro-active tutors in the Centre, since they were called on to participate in tasks that might otherwise have been done by academic staff. Thus, while the under-resourced nature of the Writing Centre has meant that its overall work is constrained, there has been innovation and significant growth of tutors arising out of it.

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In this initial phase of our study, which is based on reflections and discussions of three co-researchers and the Writing Centre coordinator, we see opportunities to expand spaces and communities of practice in which tutor development takes place within our Centre. These spaces can be enhanced by sustaining and extending collaborations with other structures within the institution, such as departments, faculties and student support services. In order for such expansion to take place, we need more recognition and support from the institution. This phase of our study suggests that the UWC Writing Centre has transformative potential. We will continue to research this transformative potential and actualisation. We hope that this will foster more recognition, support and collaborative engagement with the UWC Writing Centre.

The next stage of the research will take the data collection process beyond the narratives and reflections of the research team. A further phase will be conducted, which will include various other data-gathering tools, including interviews with current and past tutors of the UWC Writing Centre, focus groups and analysis of artefacts. We will hold regular reflections as researchers and these reflections will also be part of the data set. Our assumptions are that those tutors who choose to take up opportunities within the Centre undergo significant processes of development, particularly those who form a 'bigger picture' of the purpose of the Centre and see the potential for their own growth within this. We are also interested in the limitations and flaws of the Writing Centre context with regard to the facilitation of development that we are researching. Lastly, we would like to hear the ideas of past and present tutors about how the findings of this research could be taken further in higher education spheres of practice.

We believe that all writing centres are facilitating development of their tutors, but they do so in different ways. During this period, we plan to engage with other writing centres in South Africa and possibly some international writing centres about the role that writing centres can play in facilitating development of tutors. Through communication and collaboration, we can all learn from each other. We can also formulate strategies for increasing the visibility and valuing of writing centres and advocate for more recognition of writing centre work, including their role in facilitating development of writing tutors as emerging academics.

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Chapter Twelve

Invoking the Power of the Mentor

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Introduction and background

For the vast majority of university students in the South African context, the road to higher education is one fraught with difficulties and challenges. Against the backdrop of a disparate educational system and considered one of the most unequal countries in the world, where rural areas have the highest poverty concentration (The World Bank 2018) and more than 50 per cent of university students suffer food insecurity (Wegerif and Adeniyi 2019), our students are constantly ‘fighting against the tide’. Today one of the biggest challenges facing the South African public higher education system is the historical approach of academic Darwinism – survival of the fittest; that is students who do not pass are considered not ‘fit enough’ (Lewin and Mawoyo 2014; Van Zyl 2013). It is estimated that as many as 55 per cent of students who enrol at university will never graduate, while a quarter of them will leave in their first year of study (Council on Higher Education [CHE] 2013). Van Zyl (2013) argues that although higher education institutions in South Africa have made considerable strides in providing equity of access to higher education, there is still a considerable difference in the success levels of the various groups of students. These differences have been highlighted by a number of researchers as originating from the transition between school and university, the phenomenon of first-generation university entrants, the linguistic diversity of the South African landscape, the financial aspect linked to university studies and life experiences, amongst others. These are the serious and complex problems that have shaped the unique students who are enrolling in institutions of higher learning and thus require institutions to continuously adapt in response to their needs in order to cultivate success. As a result, Tinto (2012) and Thomas (2012) advocate for interventions that are contextualised to students’ needs and goals, accommodating of their diversity and not constructed on perceptions, expectations or past experiences.

It is in this context that one large-scale institution in the country approaches the ever-potent issue of the language proficiency of the diverse groups of students that it services each year. To widen participation and access and as part of its curricula support, a range of academic literacy modules aimed at developing the academic literacy abilities of undergraduate and postgraduate students are offered. Our main mandate, however, is the development of the academic literacy and academic ability of our first-year students across a number of faculties. This has been motivated by twelve years of poor schooling for the majority, an undifferentiated post-school system and the yet-to-be established predictive validity of the new National Senior Certificate examination for university study (Ogude, Kilfoil and Du Plessis 2012). Thus, to further support this cohort, non-curricular support is provided through the services of a writing centre. This approach (curricular and non-curricular support) advertently encourages an experience of university which can be equated to the hero's journey – the concept of travelling into a foreign land, facing challenges with the assistance of helpers and returning wiser and more self-confident (O'Shea and Stone 2014). Like Campbell's metaphoric journey, the heroes in our narrative too traverse a number of steps and stages, encountering trials, tribulations and helpers in their quest to complete their higher education journey and emerge victorious.

300 This research will thus aptly invoke Campbell's hero's journey metaphor as a theoretical lens through which we can view this journey. As opposed to focussing specifically on the student as hero, this study draws on *the role of the mentor* as expanded on by Vogler (2007) and attempts to draw parallels between metaphorical mentors and the real-life writing centre tutors that students encounter on their educational journeys. The tutor's role as mentor can best be identified and analysed by investigating the talk that takes place between tutors and students during writing centre consultations. Such a study, with implications for tutor training, as discussed later, may make a valuable contribution to supporting the diverse cohorts of students at South African public universities. For the majority of our students, already vastly disadvantaged on multiple fronts and part of a mass education setting, the time spent with a writing centre tutor may very well be the only time in the 'school' day that that students receives individualised one-on-one support. Writing tutors should be effectively trained to adopt the multiple roles to suit the needs of each individual student. This research will attempt to make a small contribution in that regard and perhaps open up opportunity for further contextualised research on such role adoption in the South African writing centre.

The study of tutor talk

The study of talk between writing tutor and student in the context of a writing centre has been the focus of a number of studies. These studies can be clustered around a few core themes: the directive/non-directive debate and/or tutor/student-centered conferences and/or tutor roles (Ashton-Jones 1988; Carino 2003; Truesdell 2007; Corbett 2015); scaffolded learning (Benko 2012; Thompson and Mackiewicz 2014); writing centre tutor training (North 1982; Santa 2009; Appleby-Ostroff 2017); collaboration (Clark 1988; Behm 1989; Harris 1992) and tutoring ¹NNS/²ESL speakers in writing centres (Harris and Silva 1993; Thonus 2014; Winder, Kathpalia and Koo 2016). The main focus has, however, been largely on the directive and non-directive debate with traditional experts advocating for a student-centred, as opposed to a teacher-centred, approach. While writing centre lore suggested that such tutoring was and should be Socratic, minimalist and non-directive, research evidence alludes to something quite the opposite. As experts questioned the then current practices, the need to critically evaluate our practices by looking closely at the talk that takes place during such interactions led writing centre practitioners to study this talk in interaction. The analysis revealed that contrary to writing centre lore, such tutoring was more directive than non-directive, that tutors adopted a largely 'teacherly' role as opposed to that of peer and that the institutional nature of writing centres led inevitably to a hierarchy of sorts during such interactions. Rambiritch and Carstens (2022) maintain that this power dynamic is inevitable, especially because the tutor may be seen as a representative of the institution, appointed to their position because of their excellent writing ability. Managing roles during a writing centre consultation is thus crucial for the success of the session.

Emerging views thus appealed for more flexible approaches to writing centre tutoring, encouraging those involved in writing centres to train their tutors to adopt a range of roles during interactions to accommodate the varying needs of a diverse student body, by moving smoothly through a continuum of tutor roles. This research will present a brief analysis of tutor-talk that takes place during writing centre consultations with a view to investigate the extent to which tutors adopt specific roles akin to the metaphorical mentor in Campbell's hero journey. The study of such talk and accompanying role adoption is important to better understand the contradictory role of peer-tutor (Trimbur 1987; Thonus 2001; Blau and Hall 2002; Carino 2003) and provide insight into

1 Non-native speakers

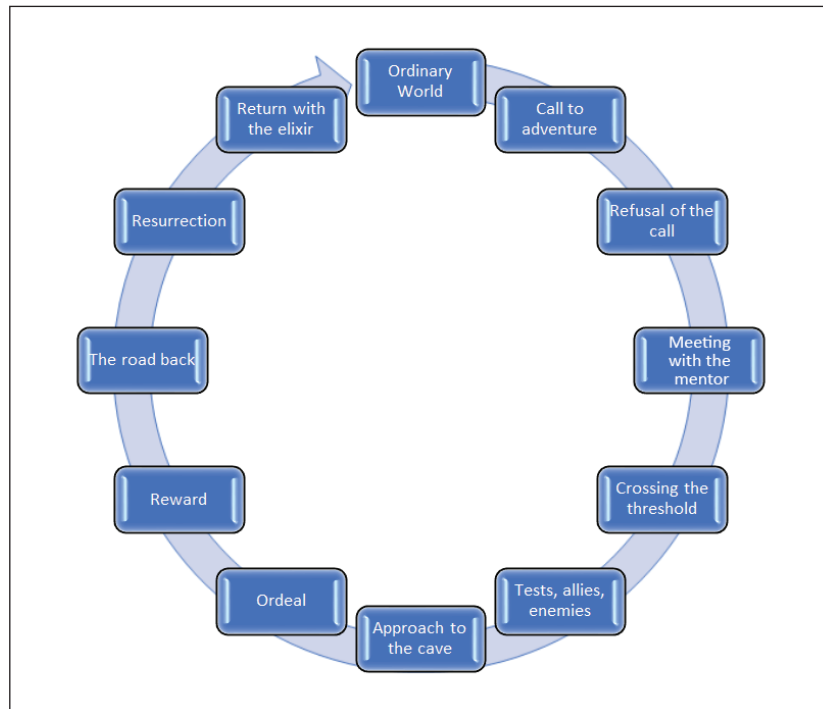
2 English second language

whether tutors do indeed adopt different roles during consultations and whether they are able to balance these in relation to students' individual writing needs (Blau, Hall and Strauss 1988; Clark and Healy 1996; Thonus 2003; Morrison 2008; Appleby-Ostroff 2017). Secondly, the postgraduate students who generally staff writing centres are not always equipped with the skills and training to offer support effectively. We therefore argue that if tutors are to fulfil the role of mentor and guide the hero on their writing journey, they need to be aware of the roles and purpose of the metaphorical mentor, reflect on its relevance and application to consultations in the writing centre context and be able to balance or shift between roles to accommodate the individual needs of the student-hero. The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which tutors assume Vogler's mentor roles during consultations to inform future tutor training practices. The next section of this paper will provide an overview of Campbell's hero's journey metaphor, followed by a review of the existing literature on tutor roles in writing centres.

Campbell's Hero's Journey

302 Widely considered 'one of the most influential books of the 20th century' (Vogler, 2007), Campbell's hero's journey metaphor has been applied across disciplines and narratives. For Vogler (2007), the theme of the hero myth is universal and occurs in every culture. At its most basic, the journey is one of separation-initiation-return (Randles 2012: 11; Robertson and Lawrence 2015: 267) but is best understood as a series of twelve steps or stages that the mythical hero with a thousand faces must undertake and overcome.

Figure 1: 12 steps of Campbell's Hero's Journey



As depicted in Figure 1, the hero's journey begins in the Ordinary World from where they are called to adventure. The hero could refuse but will most likely heed the call to adventure and victory. As part of the journey the hero will meet mentors, helpers or protectors who can connect them with the resources needed to continue their journey (Robertson and Lawrence 2015: 268); supernatural aids who appear in times of great need (Lawson 2005: 136); a positive figure who aids and trains the hero (Vogler 2007: 39). Importantly, while the mentor can go far with the hero, the hero must inevitably face the unknown himself (Vogler 2007: 3). When our hero crosses the threshold into the special world, there is no turning back and they are compelled to see this to its end. Like all hero stories, there are tests, trials, challenges and enemies, a cave holding the golden sword or treasure, an ordeal to overcome and then, reward in hand, the hero embarks on his journey home, fights demons en route, emerges victorious and returns home golden sword, treasure or princess in hand.

This journey narrative has been applied across disciplines (see Lawson 2005; Kauffman 2019) as

a tool to understand the challenges of humanity in general, a mirror of the rites of passage existing across time and around the world (Robertson and Lawrence 2015: 267). Most often, however, it has been used in the field of education. Follo (2002) applied the metaphorical hero's journey to research on the perceptions on forestry of a group of female Norwegian students as a subject at school and as a possible career path. The research was especially significant because of the general under-representation of women in the forestry industry in Norway. In a largely qualitative study using semi-structured, in-depth interviews, Follo (2002: 296) concluded that the myth gives a 'coherent frame to the crucial elements of the female student's stories.' Goldstein (2005: 8), in a study with pre-service kindergarten teachers, offered the metaphor to her students 'as a powerful way to understand their field experiences and to explore their roles in those experiences.' Using her student essays and reflections as her primary sources of data, Goldstein analysed these to determine how her students applied the steps and stages to their own journey as pre-service teachers. Similarly, O'Shea and Stone (2014) analysed the stories of seven 'older women' who returned to education and used the metaphor of the hero's journey. They concluded that this metaphor provides an 'alternate' story by which to understand the student's role, that is, successful travellers as opposed to 'individuals pumelled by forces beyond their control' (2014: 89). Regalado et al. (2017) frame first-year students' experiences with the writing of a research essay in that of the hero's journey. Two librarians are introduced along the way as 'helpers and counsellors' who support the students in their journey. They found that the experience of applying the 'student-as-hero' metaphor was 'transformative' for students and librarians. By reflecting on their role as mentors in the students' research journey, librarians could (re)conceive the students' experiences at the institution and use the feedback to inform future library research instruction. Most significantly was their finding that this process encouraged students to communicate about their research journey and could, in future, use it as a frame with which to approach other writing they may engage in (Regalado, Georgas and Burgess 2017: 128).

In the context of higher education, our student-hero faces several trials and tribulations. From a literacy perspective, many of our students emerge from a disparate schooling system underprepared for the demands of higher education. The majority of students study in a language that is not their mother-tongue and they do not have the necessary literacy skills to navigate their studies successfully. Institutional discourse and pedagogical practices place these students at a disadvantage, as they are expected to acquire rhetorical knowledge and discursive resources necessary to participate in their respective disciplines with limited explicit instruction (Boughey and McKenna 2016; Lillis and Scott 2007). To succeed in higher education and beyond, students are faced with the challenges of

demonstrating their knowledge of disciplinary discourse conventions, developing and establishing their 'voice' within their disciplines and producing legitimate disciplinary arguments. Within this context, writing practices serve as a tool to control access to particular communities of knowledge – those who have knowledge of academic and disciplinary writing conventions and produce sound arguments are rewarded (Burke 2008; Clarence 2012; Drennan 2017). It is the task of mentors, helpers and protectors, in the form of lecturers, tutors, peers and the like, to help the student-hero overcome these challenges and come out victorious at the end of their education journey.

The monomyth of the hero's journey is thus ubiquitous (O'Shea and Stone 2014: 82), having been successfully applied to describe a number of life's challenges. The studies above investigated the value of the application of the metaphor for the *hero* – the student, but Regalado et al.'s (2017) findings showed that the metaphor also proved to be informative and fulfilling for the librarians in their role as *mentor*. It follows that there is merit in analysing the functions fulfilled by the mentor in the hero's journey, particularly as it could provide insight into improving and refining the assistance and guidance offered during the course of the journey. There is, however, a definite lack of research on individual steps or stages of this journey and on the application of this metaphor to the context of a writing centre. This research will therefore attempt to address this gap by focussing specifically on role of the mentor in the hero's journey as outlined by Vogler (2007) within the writing centre context. Campbell's mentor, 'is the archetype expressed in those characters who teach [specific skills] and protect heroes and give them gifts' (Vogler 2007: 39, 45). These could be writing resources, or advice on student counselling, or other support structures. Importantly these could also be more abstract gifts; that is, lessons, advice and explanations that help demystify the discipline or the entire higher education experience. The mentor is a function, not a set character type; thus, the hero may encounter multiple mentors who express different functions of the archetype. The mentors are often former heroes who have survived life's early trials and now pass on the gift of their knowledge and wisdom (Vogler 2007: 40) and therefore represent the hero's highest aspirations – what they may become if they persist on the Road of Heroes. In the context of the writing centre, the writing tutors are the multiple mentors who teach the hero specific skills and present the gifts necessary to help them overcome the writing-related trials and tribulations they will encounter on their academic journey. Vogler (2007: 120) explains that the names *Mentes* and *Mentor*, along with the word 'mental', stem from the Greek word for mind, *menos*. He states that mentors in stories strengthen the hero's mind to face an ordeal with confidence (2007: 120). Similarly, the tutor works towards building the student's confidence in their ability to navigate the complex and challenging task of producing appropriate written texts within their field of study.

This study will therefore focus on Vogler’s (2007) mentor roles and their respective functions (see Table 1). This is relevant to this study, as the writing centre tutors are one of many advisors, helpers and mentors that first-year students encounter at our institution. More importantly, however, is to determine whether our writing centre tutors, during the course of a single consultation, fulfil the multiple mentor roles necessary to assist students on their academic writing journey.

Table 1: Vogler’s mentor functions and roles

Mentor Roles	Function
teacher	teaching or training the hero
gift-giving	helps the hero by giving them a magic weapon, key or clue, piece of advice (that may save their life)
inventor	the gifts in the form of devices, designs and inventions
motivator	reassures and motivates the hero, helps them overcome fear
planter	provides advice or information that will become helpful later on

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In one of the few studies focussing on the role of the mentor, Putri (2018: 647) conducted a textual analysis of Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Horse and His Boy* in an effort to determine the ‘influence of the mentor to the hero in completing his journey’. Invoking Vogler’s (2007) theory of mentor character archetypes the study found that the mentor positively influenced aspects of the hero’s journey and that the ‘types and roles of mentors she identified in her study can also be found in real life where people find these characteristics in the figure who guides or trains them throughout their life’ (Putri 2018: 660). Both Vogler (2007) and Putri (2018) allude to the extended time a mentor may spend with the hero. This may not always apply in the case of the student and the writing centre tutor. While students are encouraged to forge a long-term relationship with the writing centre, writing centre practitioners still hold true to North’s (1984) adage that we should create better writers, not just better writing. What this means in practice is that while the writing centre supports students in their writing journey, the centre should not become a crutch to the student; that the aim is that the student improves and develops until they are no longer dependant on the writing centre. Thus, it is not unusual for a tutor to see a student just once, or a few times only. This limited contact makes it even more important that the tutor guide, advise and motivate

the student effectively so that what is learnt during a consultation is applied to other writing the student engages in. To better understand the link between the roles of the metaphorical mentor and the writing tutor, the next section focusses on the role of the tutor as outlined in the writing centre literature.

Tutor roles

The contradictory nature of the peer-tutor role has long plagued writing centre experts (Trimbur 1987; Thonus 2001; Blau and Hall 2002; Carino 2003). As a start, the oxymoron 'peer-tutor' is in itself problematic, because the tutor's success as a writer, their appointment as a 'tutor' by the institution and the institutional power inherent in that relationship (Trimbur 1987: 24) sets the terms 'peer' and 'tutor' and the peer-tutoring relationship 'at odds' (24). This creates cognitive dissonance by asking tutors to be two things at once – to play what appear to them to be mutually exclusive roles (24). The ideal, he states, would be for tutors to juggle roles, to shift identify, to know when to act like an expert and when to act like a co-learner (25); to walk the fine line between teacher and peer, hierarchy and collaboration, creating a new, more flexible model for writing center tutoring (Blau, Hall and Strauss 1988; Clark and Healy 1996; Thonus 2003; Morrison 2008; Appleby-Ostroff 2017) and to acknowledge that 'tutor' is not a sharply-defined role, but a continuum of roles stretching from teacher to peer, negotiated anew in each tutorial (Thonus 2001: 61). The question that remains, however, is whether tutors *are* balancing roles and if they are, what are these roles and how does the (cognitive-affective) talk during writing centre interactions influence these. Most commonly accepted tutor roles are those of tutor as peer and tutor as teacher. Early literature, often considered 'lore' and based on anecdotal evidence and early tutor training manuals, advocated for the tutor as peer who collaborated, listened and guided through probing questions. Studies of actual tutorial interactions provided evidence of quite the opposite – that tutors were more 'teacherly' (see Thonus 2001: 61; Rambiritch and Carstens 2022) and directive, with experts advising that writing tutors be trained to adopt a range of roles.

A number of effective metaphors have been used to describe and define these tutor roles. In terms of the 'teacher' role, Harris (1986: 35) posits that teachers have wardrobes of 'hats', changing these frequently in the course of an interaction. She identifies five roles teachers adopt in one-on-one interactions: coach, commentator, counsellor, listener and diagnostician. While Harris' roles are valuable and attest to the multiple roles teachers play as part of their teaching, the main

difference here is the role of the teacher in the classroom (which Harris refers to) and the role of the writing centre tutor (our focus). While teachers may don multiple 'hats', their role is restricted to that of teacher.

Lee, Hong and Choi's study (2017) explored tutor, student and instructor perceptions of tutor roles. Their review revealed three possible roles (145): **academic**, which involve pedagogical and intellectual responsibilities, directing, coaching cognitive activities, feedback; **managerial**, involving social, administration, organisation and sometimes pastoral care and **technical** that are specific to technology-based learning. Their findings indicate that perceptions between tutors, students and instructors differ in respect of tutor roles. The students and tutors believed that tutors should primarily provide academic and managerial support, but the instructors perceived the tutor's primary role as providing technical support (152). The researchers point out that although the instructors acknowledged that academic support was an important part of the tutor's role, the instructors and tutors had different definitions of academic tutoring (152). Overall Lee, Hong and Choi declare that the tutoring arrangement in this study was not successful as it did not bring the tutor and student 'closer' (153). The roles identified here are also not applicable to our study, which attempts to identify distinct roles and not categories. Thonus (2001) also investigated perceptions of tutor roles. She maintains that little unanimity exists in perceptions of the tutor role by the members of the tutorial 'triangle' (tutor, tutee, instructor) (61). Her findings indicate that instructors viewed tutors as their 'surrogates'; tutors saw themselves as '*colleague*' pedagogues, thus viewing the instructor as their peer and not the tutee, while students viewed tutors as different from instructors but less authoritative (2001: 71). In a similar perception study, Abbot, Graf and Chatfield (2018) found that tutors perceived themselves not only to be writing coaches and class discussants, but also liaisons, intermediaries and connectors, linking the world of professor and student (251). Carstens and Rambiritch (2020), in discussing the main theories and sub-theories associated writing centre models, identified tutor roles that align with approach. Additional roles they identified include tutor as: remedial teacher, who focusses on correcting student papers; lawyer, who listens and asks questions; quality controller, who instructs and evaluates; and activist, who encourages students to speak freely and to resist and contest the status quo (Carstens and Rambiritch 2020: 6).

Over the years, the tutor role has extended from peer-tutor and teacher, to coach, collaborator, commentator, counsellor, diagnostician, lawyer, remedial teacher, quality controller and activist. While some of these roles overlap in some research, others are specific to each study and context. What we note, however, is that not enough research pertaining to tutor roles has looked closely

at tutor talk during writing centre interactions. Thonus (2001: 77) maintains that often tutors are themselves unaware of how they play out their actual roles and importantly that the tutor's role must be redefined and renegotiated in each interaction. This research will, as a starting point, invoke Campbell's hero's journey metaphor and Vogler's (2007) mentor types as a theoretical lens through which we can view the continuum of roles that writing centre tutors assume.

Methodology

The research methodology underlying the design of this study is qualitative. A detailed qualitative content analysis was first undertaken in an effort to interrogate writing centre literature to identify key themes. The study takes a case-study approach within a socio-constructivist ontology wherein knowledge is socially created through interactions with others. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2023) defines case study research as 'a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest' (302). This definition succinctly captures our research aim, which is to investigate the extent to which tutors fulfil mentor roles during consultations with students. A case study approach is most applicable, as it allowed us to analyse a number of individual cases (writing consultations), captured in the same setting for the same purpose (writing centre), that represent the general consultation service offered by the writing centre.

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Data collection

Data was gathered through video recording 10 writing centre consultations with undergraduate visitors to the writing centre who sought assistance with their (academic) writing. The video data was transcribed by a professional transcription company using the transcription symbols adapted largely from those developed by Jefferson (1984) as adapted by Seedhouse (2005). Although the main focus of this study is specifically tutor talk, the turns of the student were transcribed as well, but only the tutor turns will be analysed here.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select cases for analysis, as it was necessary that our sample comprise undergraduate visitors to the writing centre. The reasons for this is that this is representative of the student cohort utilising the services of the writing centre. All students in this sample were in their first year of study. There were two female and one male tutor, ranging between 20 and 55 years in age, with varying levels of qualifications and tutor experience. Both tutors and students were a good representation of the tutor and student dynamics at the institution.

Data analysis

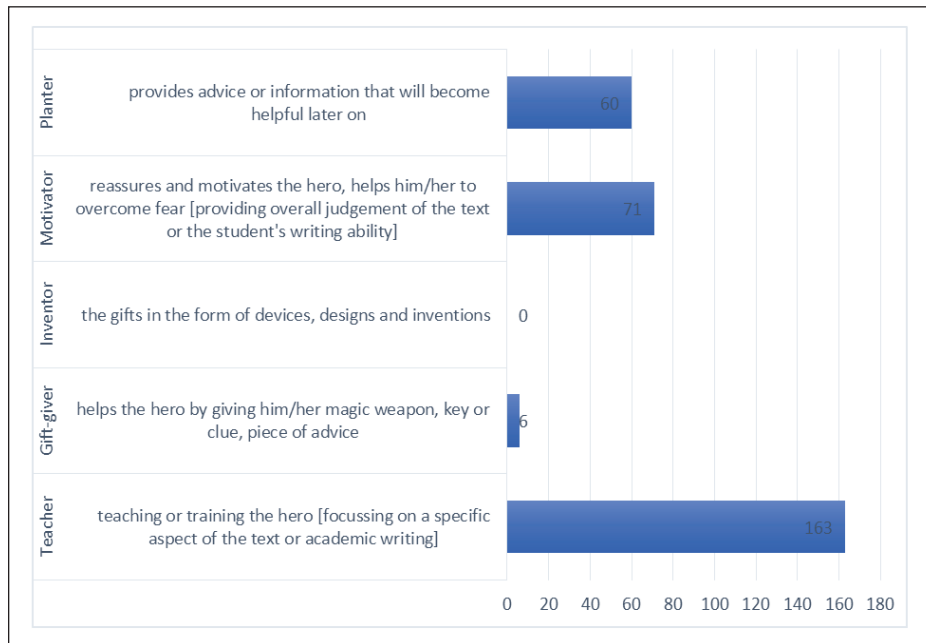
310

Once the data had been transcribed and verified for its correctness, data-analysis began. This comprised two steps. The first-order, qualitative analysis of the existing research on writing centre consultations allowed us to identify possible coding categories. An interrogation of writing centre literature revealed two possible categories (directive/non-directive and Higher Order Concerns/Lower Order Concerns). One further category was included to provide further information on the purpose/focus of the interaction, that is Cognitive or Affective, thus leading to the sub-category: cognitive-affective. Mention must be made here of the fact that tutor turns could not be read and coded in isolation, as student responses impact on tutor responses, and ultimately on the codes. Once all the data was coded, Atlas.ti 7, a qualitative computer data analysis program, was used to assist researchers analyse the coded data and identify recurring themes that may or may not align with current writing centre literature. Transcripts for all ten consultations were uploaded to Atlas ti 7. Once fully coded, the program generated documents according to specific codes as requested by us. For the purpose of this study, we focussed on the output documents generated for the code cognitive-affective, given its relevance to our analysis of the function or purpose of tutor turns as they assume specific roles. The results of the analysis of the other two categories are available in a previous publication (Rambiritch and Carstens 2022). The cognitive-effective quotations were then coded according to the mentor roles identified by Vogler (2007), which were adapted slightly to align with the focus on academic writing.

Findings and discussion

In total, we identified 304 cognitive-affective quotations. Of these, 300 could be coded according to Vogler’s mentor roles. Figure 2 reflects the frequency of quotations per mentor role category, illustrating how tutors assume different roles and move between a continuum of these during the consulting process. The findings for each mentor role are discussed separately below.

Figure 2: Mentor roles and number of quotations per category



Planter (planting)

One function of the mentor archetype is to *plant* information or a prop that will become important later on in the hero’s journey (Vogler 2007: 43). In the context of the writing centre, we understand this as the tutor providing invaluable advice, clues and strategies to the student that they will use later on. This is not limited to the conventions of academic writing, but includes any information that can be used to ‘survive the trials’ of higher education. In keeping with the traditional definition

of a planter as someone who ‘cultivates’ [plants] (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2023: n.p.) or, in the case of the writing centre, cultivates academic writing skills; statements that saw the tutor use creative analogies/metaphors to describe and explain the process of academic writing were clustered in this category too. This is because these creative explanations were new and novel, enriched traditional explanations and descriptions and attempted to plant or sow knowledge that could be remembered and applied to other texts the student may write. Incidentally, a number of these quotations related directly to plants and planting.

Excerpt 1: Video 00064

Tutor turn	Dialogue	Purpose/Function
122	Yes. To catch that fish!	Explaining the hook in the introduction
230	So. Your introduction is like a seed. Everything is there. And now (.) it blossoms and grows in your body and then in your conclusion we harvest it.	Explaining the introduction
226	So. An essay is like um a TV series, but there’s one difference. We tell them who the murderer is right (.) at (.) the beginning. (laughter)	Stating the thesis statement and standpoint in the introduction
310	Okay. And can you see that that is a launch pad?	Explaining the introduction

Excerpt 2: Video 0002/0003

Tutor turn	Dialogue	Purpose/Function
356	You plant that mieliepit, (.) you get (.) a beautiful, strong mielie plant (.) with (.) the stalk (.) as the main idea.	Explanation of the thesis statement
364	And then you will reach your conclusion? and you will have a fruitful (2s) harvest.	Explanation of the structure of the essay and its narrowing to the conclusion

Motivator (motivating)

This was the category with the second highest number of quotations. Vogler's (2007) *Motivator reassures and motivates the hero and helps them overcome fear*. McKiewicz and Thompson (2013: 38) state that motivation, which is the drive to actively invest in sustained effort toward a goal, is essential for writing improvement, while Kirchhoff (2016) states that motivation is one of the most important incentives of human behaviour that guarantee higher performance in any field. The aspect of motivation, though prevalent in educational studies and in studies focusing on writing in general, has not been a large focus in writing centres. One of the few studies by McKiewicz and Thompson (2013) focuses rather on motivational scaffolding and the politeness strategies that tutors use to assist students to participate in the dialogue. In the Kirchhoff (2016) study, the researcher uses her own personal experiences as a peer tutor at a writing centre to highlight the importance of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) for the evaluation of students' motivational levels. In politeness studies, the strategy of motivation and encouragement are synonymous (see McKiewicz and Thompson 2013). Thus, our tutor talk that included elements of motivation and encouragement were clustered under the role of Motivator. While a number of research articles discuss praise and encouragement together (McKiewicz and Thompson 2013), we have chosen to separate them. This is because our findings indicate that praise was specifically related to the text that was the focus of the consultation (Rambiritch and Carstens 2022); thus, praise statements were coded under the role of Teacher, while encouragement related to the student's attitude, future actions and overall writing ability as well and therefore clustered under Motivator. The comments in this category saw tutors' attempts to build confidence, motivate and encourage the new writer on their journey.

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Excerpt 4: 'Motivating' tutor turns

Video/Tutor turn	Dialogue
00000/253	And I just want to encourage you (.) to keep doing that.
00005/583	And... And if you can do creat- and if you write creatively (.) you will be able to do this
	Go and save the princess.
00069/	It's good, it's a good process and keep on doing that it's really good practice. Hmm. (nods)

0048/191	But (.) I'm actually (.) li- I must say I really (2s) was impressed with your writing style because (.) um (.) the more (.) clearly someone can write about their own research topic the more it shows that they understand what they're talking about.
0048/199	Ja. (nods) So. Um. I'm I'm actually really happy with the way you write and the language that you've used.
0064/224	Wonderful, I'm so glad that you can see that for yourself. (laughter).
0069/283	So:. Just be wary of those, but ja I definitely think you're on your way to becoming a good writer.
0069/283	Bu:t if someone writes in a concise way like this, and kind of interprets the um (2s) the: (2s) the evidence, I think it's very good way of writing so ja keep on doing that.

Teacher or trainer (teaching or training)

The role of teacher saw the highest number of quotations. This aligns closely with the writing centre research. Numerous studies have found that the writing centre tutor is more often directive and 'teacherly' (Thonus 2001) and while earlier research (lore) argued vehemently against this, later evidence-based research argued that the non-directive, non-teacherly stance may not resonate with all students (Shamoon and Burns 2001). As alluded to in the introduction, what is needed is a balance of roles and a measure of flexibility in approach on the part of the tutor. Importantly, the tutor must be guided by the needs of the student and, should a student need direct teaching and training, then these needs should ideally be met. Many of our students are first-generation university students. While the demographic information on participants indicates that 6 out of the 10 students speak English as their first/home language, this may not be the case. Given the majority of students in South Africa are non-mother-tongue speakers of English, it is highly likely that the language of these students in which they studied at school has been equated with their home language. Additionally, engaging in academic writing for any first-year student is new and daunting. These consultations took place between March and September of the academic year. Students would either have either no academic literacy and/or writing support, only one semester

of such support (in Semester 1), or would have been in the process of completing a semester of such support (during Semester 2). This may have required the tutors to teach and train during these very early visits to the writing centre.

The tutor talk in this category illustrates the teaching and learning processes of instruction (teaching principles of academic writing), responding to students' questions and/or requests for confirmation/clarification, as well as feedback on students' writing.

Excerpt 5: 'Teaching' tutor turns

Video/Tutor turn	Dialogue	Purpose/Function
Teaching a principle or rule of academic writing		
0065/160	One (.) idea per sentence. Keep it at one. (laughter)	Explaining the rule of one idea per paragraph
0064/156	(nods and writes) Yes. Number one you have to say exactly what you are talking about? So take another colour, please. And highlight (.) your thesis statement.	Explaining the function of a thesis statement
0064/258-266	<p>Okay? And that stick (.) is your thesis {statement.}</p> <p>(262) So you need to (.) hold that (.) sticky in mind (.) all the time. So if you have a, um a meat kebab a meat sosatie, you have a little piece of bee:f and then you have a piece of red pepper you know?</p> <p>(264) And then you have a piece of green pepper, okay and then you have your next bite. You have your little piece of mea:t and you have a...</p> <p>(266) (laughter) And now, this shows you your paragraphs.</p>	Explaining paragraph formulation

0044/50	Right? So (..) But (.) for the introduction you want that kind of (.) strong lead into (.) what am I reading? What is going to be the point of this. (nods)	Explaining the function of the introduction
Responding to questions and/or requests for confirmation/clarification		
00009/306	Mm:. No. I think it's okay. 'Cause you're quoting the person (.) um: (.) You're not introducing a new idea.	Confirming whether the student quoted correctly
0057/276	Ja, that's fine. That's fine. Ja, you did it right.	Confirming whether the student quoted correctly
0070/75	Even if it's in your own words, even if it's someone else's idea (.) that you used? You need to reference it. Just to be safe.	Clarifying when to include references
Commenting on students' writing		
00006/476	And it shows. Like, I can see that (.) there is (.) clear flow of ideas.	Commenting on cohesion in the text
00007/23	Okay. (3s) This is a v- (.) it's a good introduction. I see there's a thesis statement (.) and then there's some background information. That's really good. (smiles) Né?	Praising the student's introductory paragraph formulation
	Okay. This is a ve:ry good topic sentence.	Praising the student's topic sentence formulation
0048/197	Then that's (.) it really does show that you have a clear understanding of (.) of what you want to discuss.	Praising the student's thesis statement
00000/?	So I can already tell then from (holds up both hands) this first glance that you understand like what needs to be in your introduction	Praising the student's introductory paragraph
0007/23	I see there's a thesis state:ment (.) and then there's some background information	Commenting on the student's introduction

Gift-giver (gift-giving)

Vogler's gift-giving (gift-giver) helps the hero by giving them a magic weapon, key or clue, piece of advice that may save their life or, in the case of this study, their academic writing. This is not a role found anywhere in writing centre literature. In interpreting this role within the context of the writing centre, the gift-giver becomes the tutor who shares advice, tips and strategies (like the *stok-sweet*) with the student, often speaking as the tutor or senior student and *not* the teacher. The role of gift-giver was used very sparingly – only 6 out of 300 statements were coded as such and only one tutor made such statements: 5 in Video 00064/00065 and 1 in Video 00004/00005. The actual act of giving was found in only one instance (see Excerpt 6) where the tutor left the writing centre to get her cellphone to be able to email a list of cohesive devices that the student could use (Video 000064/000065) – a valuable resource for any student.

Excerpt 6: Video 0064/0065

Tutor turn	Dialogue	Purpose/ Function
33	Okay now. We need those linking words and that is why I actually need (.) and I'm going to run. I'm just going to get my cell phone because I've got it on my cell phone, and (.) you need to know about that. Hallelujah. (Tutor leaves the room for 20 seconds, from 03:08 to 03: 28)	Explaining the structure of an essay

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The excerpt below shows other comments that offer valuable advice and information. In the first quote above, the use of the word 'they' is telling, with the tutor showing solidarity with the student and providing advice that will be valuable whenever the student is engaging in academic writing. This piece of advice resonates with the advice given by North (1984) that the aim of such tutoring should be to improve the writer and not just the writing. The same is true for the second quotation where the tutor in question 'arms' the student with advice. In the case of turn 287, the 'stok-sweet' and 'kebab' references, classified earlier as evidence of 'planting', could also be viewed as gifts – a key that could 'save' students in their academic writing journeys. There could thus be some overlap of what could be considered evidence of different mentor roles.

Excerpt 6: Video 0064/0065

Tutor turn	Dialogue
214	At university they want us to be brave (.) right from the very beginning you stake your (.) claim.
287	So with your, with your brave little stok um woman, eating a kebab, you will be well armed.

These ‘gift-giver’ statements differ from those of the Teacher, which focused specifically on teaching or commenting on a particular aspect of academic writing, such as those in the excerpt below. The statement in video 0001 is another example of a potential overlap of the ‘gift-giver’ and ‘teacher’ roles, as it may also be perceived as evidence of praise.

Excerpt 7

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Video/Tutor turn	Dialogue
00000/136	So here you’re giving a good background.
0001/50	Your references look (.) look um (.) proper as well.

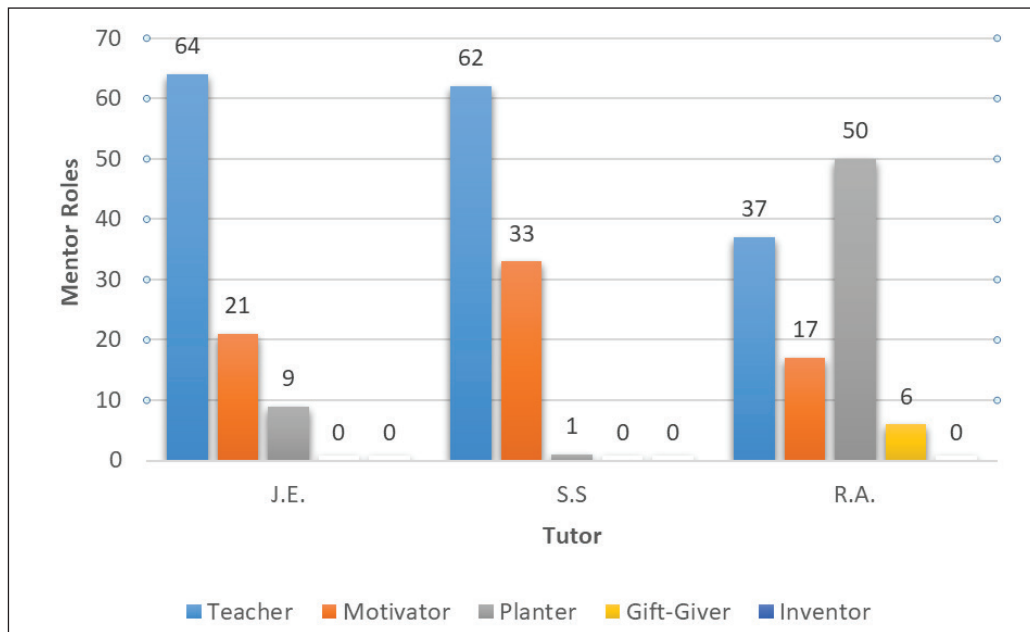
Inventor (Inventing)

Once again, this is not a category referenced in any of the literature or one utilised by our tutors. Vogler’s (2007) *Inventor gives the gifts in the form of devices, designs and inventions*. The Inventor then is closely related to the gift-giver with the difference being the kind/type of gift. One is in the form of devices, designs and inventions and the other is a magic weapon, key or clue, or piece of advice. In the context of the writing centre, the latter will be more applicable: key, clue or piece of advice, often based on a tutor’s knowledge and experience. Vogler (2007: 42) points out that the Inventor is a role that occurs ‘sometimes’ (Vogler 2007: 42), while the gift-giving is an important part

of the mentor function (40), suggesting that the Inventor function will not always be fulfilled, as is evidenced by our findings.

The findings indicated in Figure 2 provide a clear indication that Vogler’s mentor roles can be applied to tutor talk in a writing centre. Importantly, however, is how we use this information to improve our offering. Figure 3 illustrates the mentor roles adopted the individual tutors across their consultations. According to our analysis, RA adopted 4 different roles: Teacher, Planter, Motivator and Gift-giver, while JE and SS adopted 3 different roles: Teacher, Motivator and Planter.

Figure 3: Mentor roles per tutor



SS’s consultations were dominated primarily by the roles of Teacher and Motivator. The role of Planter was adopted only once. One of the reasons for this could be that he was still an undergraduate student and had limited academic writing and consulting experience in academic writing. RA and JE had considerably more experience in the writing centre, had undergone more intensive training than SS, taught academic literacy and other modules in addition to consulting in

the writing centre and were postgraduate students with sufficient experience in academic writing. This extended experience would have built their confidence to explore a variety of consulting strategies and share valuable resources, tips and clues. Only RA adopted the Planter role more than that of the Teacher – this finding was not surprising as she is a RA is a middle-aged female whose teaching and mentoring style is much more nurturing than younger tutors.

Conclusion

Ideally, according to the literature, tutors should remain flexible and adopt a range of roles. In so doing, they will be less likely tempted to adopt only the role of Teacher, exploiting only directive tutoring. Thonus (2001: 77) maintains that often tutors are themselves unaware of how they play out their actual roles and, importantly, that the tutor's role must be redefined and renegotiated in each interaction. While the role of Teacher still dominates our consultations, it is heartening to see that tutors do make an effort to use other strategies and adopt other roles. If tutors are themselves unaware of the roles they adopt during consulting, as maintained by Thonus (2001: 77), it might be advisable that such roles as identified in the literature, as well as those exploited in this study, be introduced to tutors during their training. We share the table below as one possible way to apply the roles identified here, to the training of writing tutors. We acknowledge, too, that such application cannot be done blindly across all writing centres. Key to effective training is the need to first conduct context-specific research which can then inform training practices.

Training Opportunities/Possibilities

Mentor Roles	Function	Considerations for the writing tutor
Teacher	Teaching or training the hero	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is important to gauge the students' level of literacy/writing proficiency to determine how much 'teaching' is necessary. While a session that is primarily teacher-centered, where the tutor lectures and the student is a passive recipient of information, may not always be effective nor conducive to developing better writers, the writing tutor needs to engage sufficiently with the student to determine their writing needs. 2. Ideally, the tutor should maintain a balance between student-centered facilitation and teaching opportunities in a session. 3. An important aspect of the 'teacher' role is praise. Tutors should encourage students by providing positive feedback on aspects that were executed well as opposed to only identifying problems and errors in students' texts. 4. Provide sufficient and effective feedback to students. This should include reference to errors/weaknesses/gaps, explanations of why these are incorrect, as well as advise on how to rectify such errors (see Rambiritch and Carstens 2022).

Mentor Roles	Function	Considerations for the writing tutor
Gift-giver	Helps the hero by giving them a magic weapon, key or clue, piece of advice (that may save their life)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Although there may be some overlap between 'gift-giving' and planting, 'gifts' in this sense may include advice that a tutor can offer as a fellow writer, peer or member of the academy. For example, the tutor may have insight into the discourse rules and expectations of a particular discipline or have knowledge of institutional policies and practices that are important for the student to understand in relation to tasks and assignments. 2. Tutors should reflect on their own writing journeys and the process involved in overcoming the challenges they faced when confronted with unfamiliar and nuanced writing conventions. Such exercises are useful in identifying key strategies and approaches that may be conveyed to students during consultations. Sharing their experiences and challenges with students (solidarity in writing centre speak, see Rambiritch and Carstens 2021), may motivate students into adopting such strategies and approaches.

Mentor Roles	Function	Considerations for the writing tutor
Inventor	Provides gifts in the form of devices, designs and inventions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tutors who understand and are proficient in specific disciplinary discourses and practices may be able to give students a 'recipe' that could be applied to future tasks and assignments. For example, Law courses require students to follow a particular pattern when formulating a response to discussion questions in examinations – first they discuss the Issue, then the Rule, followed by the Application and finally the Conclusion (IRAC). Knowledge of such 'recipes' are essential for students' formulation of successful responses in examinations (Hinchliffe). 2. Tutors from specific disciplines can also help students understand what constitutes 'evidence' to support and develop arguments in their writing.
Motivator	Reassures and motivates the hero, helps them overcome fear	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To help students overcome writing anxiety and build their confidence as writers, tutors should make an asserted effort to encourage students by identifying areas where they have improved as writers. 2. Tutors should work towards building a relationship with individual students and encourage them to frequent the writing centre so that the tutor can track students' writing progress and development. 2. Showing solidarity (see point above) will also help solidify this relationship.

Mentor Roles	Function	Considerations for the writing tutor
Planter	Provides advice or information that will become helpful later on	<p>1. Tutors should be encouraged to use a variety of strategies, tips and/or metaphors to facilitate students' understanding of key writing aspects. Some examples include the PIE (point, information, explanation) structure to facilitate better paragraph and argument formulation; thesis statement formulation (topic + commentary = thesis statement); introductory paragraph formulation ('hooking a fish'); basic essay structure (stick-man metaphor), etc.</p> <p>2. Experienced tutors could be required to source, share and discuss strategies and tips during training sessions to create a bank of 'resources' that can be used during consultation sessions.</p>

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It must be noted too that should such a table be exploited during a training programme, it should be accompanied by effective examples and excerpts from actual consultations to give tutors a clear and accurate picture of these roles and their respective functions. It must be remembered, however, that while writing centre administrators and directors can train tutors by introducing them to a number of effective strategies, the strategies a tutor adopts is ultimately guided by their personal preference, personality and experience. Adopting roles and strategies that a tutor is uncomfortable with or inexperienced in, may unfortunately have more negative than positive outcomes.

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Emure Kadenge is a lecturer in the Curriculum and Social Studies Division at the Wits School of Education. Her research interests are, broadly, in the field of teacher professional development and lie at the interface between initial teacher education and early career years in the teaching profession. She focusses on the professional development of early career teachers by exploring the different ways in which they learn and grow as professional and efficient teachers in the context of practice. Her research includes in-service teacher professional development, induction of young graduate teachers as well as academic literacy development of student teachers. Emure is also passionate about early career teachers and their conceptions and implementation of the curriculum.

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Jean Moore is a Language Development and Academic Literacies Specialist, with a particular interest in legal writing. She recently completed a Ph.D. in Education, in which she interrogates conceptions affecting what it means to write in law. Jean currently works as the writing expert at the School of Law Writing Centre, University of the Witwatersrand. Previously, she worked for five years at the UKZN Law Faculty, as their academic development coordinator and ran UNISA's Reading and Writing Centre in Pietermaritzburg. She has co-authored a range of English textbooks and other writing development materials. She is an accomplished teacher of English and led the research team for English (First Additional Language) in the 2013-15 Umalusi curriculum review. In her current role, Jean facilitates a range of embedded writing development initiatives for undergraduate, postgraduate and short-course students. In 2021, she was the co-recipient of the Thomas Pringle Award for best Educational Article in English Education.

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Thembinkosi Mtonjeni

Thembinkosi Mtonjeni is an Academic Literacy Lecturer at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). He has the experience of working in the Writing Centre for more than two decades (since 2001). He is passionate about the student's academic literacy development, decolonisation of curriculum and the cultivation of student's disposition for dialectical and dialogical thinking. Thembinkosi is a change agent, serving in a number of institutional committees. He has co-authored several journal articles and book chapters wherein the transformative agenda of the writing centre in a university of technology setting is advanced. His research interests range from student writing, academic literacies, translanguaging methodologies, Euclidean Geometry, decoloniality, African Philosophy of *Ubuntu*, to decolonial linguistics.

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Natashia Muna

Natashia's background is in science, with a B.Sc. (Hons) in Biodiversity and Zoology and an M.Sc. and Ph.D. in Molecular and Cell Biology. During her Ph.D., Natashia worked as a student consultant at the UCT Writing Centre and the knowledge, training and experience she gained in that role profoundly impacted the trajectory of her career, motivating her to completely shift her focus to academic development. Since making the transition, her research has broadly focussed on the integrated literacies required for learning within scientific contexts, with a special interest in multimodal social semiotics. More recently, Natashia has established a research interest in how

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Pamela Nichols

Pamela Nichols is an Associate Professor at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature (New York University) was guided by the work of Edward Said and funded through teaching writing at the university. Said's understanding of the institutionalisation of knowledge as well as her experiences of working with major writing teachers in America, contributed to her understanding of how to set up the Wits Writing Centre (WWC) in 1998. In 2018, Nichols spear-headed the Wits Writing Programme, which is a university-wide programme of Writing Intensive courses supported by Writing Fellow tutors and the Wits Writing Board. Her recent publications have focussed on listening and the development of the citizen scholar.

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Reimagining Writing Centre Practices

A South African Perspective

Edited by: **Avasha Rambiritch**
and **Laura Drennan**

In light of the changing face and internationalisation of our student body and their concomitant needs, this book attempts to foreground both the strides made in the field, as well as the important questions and debates confronting writing centre practitioners in the South African higher education arena. The latter demands that we review and reimagine the support we currently provide. Reimagining, however, forces us to wrestle with the challenges that are inherent in work of this nature and to be vocal about the difficult questions that must be asked and answered if we want to provide socially just solutions to our students' writing challenges. The onset of Covid-19 also imposed on our daily practices and required a hasty re-evaluation of our service provision.

The aim of this volume is to further conversations and research on the notion of the internationalisation of writing centres and the necessity to focus on the key issues of multilingualism, discipline-based writing, social justice, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as specialised consultant/tutor training. Writing centres at South African universities have established themselves as fundamental to the support and development of our students. Thus, the time is ripe for us as writing centre practitioners in the South African context to continue writing our own writing centre narrative, to grapple with context-specific issues and questions, and to provide context-specific answers and solutions that speak to the lived realities of our students. We hope to achieve this through this book.

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