

Student persistence in higher education:
A study of the challenges and achievements of a group
of historically disadvantaged senior students studying
at the University of the Western Cape

by
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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy (Community and Development)
at Stellenbosch University



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March 2011

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Abstract

Students from impoverished economic backgrounds have the highest drop-out rates within the higher education sector. Research conducted both locally and internationally reveals that there are several variables that influence a student's decision to leave the higher education institution. Very little research has concentrated on why students from deprived backgrounds advance academically or what enables them to do so.

In South Africa, numerous changes have been introduced on the social, economic and educational fronts in attempts to correct the inequality prevalent in the country. In education, various changes and programmes have been introduced. Increasing access to higher education for poor black students has been one of the primary goals of change within that sector. The results, though, are alarming. Despite this increased access, many continue to drop out; the reasons are varied.

Some, however, do stay. This research was aimed at finding out what contributed to a group of poor black students' advancing academically when many of their peers had dropped out. There is no theory of what these factors could have been. Although the researcher realises that the results of this study will not be generalisable, it is an important discussion to initiate if we as South Africans truly want to support disadvantaged students entering higher education institutions. Without attempts to find adequate support structures, many will continue to be let down by the system.

Opsomming

Studente uit 'n verarmde ekonomiese agtergrond het die hoogste uitvalkoers in die hoëronderwyssektor. Navorsing wat plaaslik sowel as internasionaal uitgevoer is, toon dat daar verskeie veranderlikes is wat 'n student se besluit beïnvloed om die hoëronderwysinstelling te verlaat. Bitter min navorsing is al gedoen om vas te stel wat dit is wat studente uit 'n verarmde ekonomiese agtergrond in staat stel om akademies vol te hou en te vorder.

Daar is verskeie veranderings op die sosiale, ekonomiese en onderwysfront in Suid-Afrika ingevoer om die ongelykheid wat in die land heers, te probeer regstel. Wat onderrig betref, is verskeie veranderings en programme ingevoer. Een van die vernaamste doelwitte van verandering in hierdie sektor was verhoogde toegang tot hoër onderwys vir arm swart studente. Nogtans is die resultate kommerwekkend. Hoewel hulle toegang verkry, val talle van hierdie studente steeds uit – om verskeie redes.

Nietemin is daar studente wat volhou. Hierdie navorsing is daarop gemik om uit te vind wat daartoe bygedra het dat 'n groep arm swart studente akademies vorder terwyl baie van hulle eweknieë uitgeval het. Geen teorie bestaan oor wat hierdie faktore kon gewees het nie. Hoewel die navorser besef dat die resultate nie veralgemeen kan word nie, is dit belangrik dat hierdie gesprek aan die gang kom as ons as Suid-Afrikaners werklik steun wil bied aan benadeelde studente wat instellings van hoër onderrig betree: As ons nie toereikende ondersteuningstrukture probeer vind nie, sal talle steeds deur die stelsel in die steek gelaat word.

Acknowledgements

The time (five years) it has taken me to complete my master's degree is the topic of many conversations with friends and also a source of much amusement. The reasons are varied. However, despite this there has always been support – from friends, family and academics within the Sociology Department – when not continuing often seemed the most practical life choice to make.

I am glad that I did not make that choice. My journey has been one of periods of great excitement and near soul-destroying frustration, but always one of growth. Jacob du Plessis, my thesis supervisor – your input, guidance and walking beside me are greatly appreciated. Despite the long journey, I believe (and hope) that we both benefited from the experience.

To the Rural Education and Access Programme (REAP) – thank you for allowing me to use the students supported by you as my focus; your support is appreciated.

To the Ethics Committee staff of the University of the Western Cape and Stellenbosch University; thank you for your assistance and guidance.

To my dear friends, family and colleagues – you know who you are – thank you for always being encouraging!

To the amazing students who agreed to be interviewed – you have endured so many challenges – Live Large!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the reader with an introduction to the research and insight into the motivation thereof and introduces the reader to the contents of the thesis. The chapter concludes by providing the framework for the rest of the thesis.

May 10, 1994, was a triumphant moment in South African History.... While the end of the old apartheid order was an occasion for jubilation, it, sadly, bequeathed a ruinous legacy that will haunt generations to come. For the overwhelming majority of the South African population, the scourge of apartheid policies has left no aspect of human experience untouched: from racial discrimination, economic exploitation, social dislocation, cultural emasculation, and psychological impairment to educational deprivation.... Human development, in its democratic and inclusive sense, has not been an experience enjoyed equally by all South Africans regardless of race, class and gender.¹

In South Africa, many forms of 'corrective' legislation have been introduced since the first democratic election in 1994. These were aimed at eradicating the results of decades of separate development and white privilege as practised by the Nationalist Government that ruled from 1945 to 1994. One of the areas affected was education, including higher education.

In 1997, Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education was introduced. One of the objectives was to expand enrolments of previously disadvantaged groups. This has been achieved. In 2007, African students made up 63% of enrolments in higher education institutions, an increase from 49% in 1995 (Council on Higher Education, 2009:19). In the Letseka and Maile (2008:88)

¹ Foreword, Nkomo in Nkabinde. 1997.

study of higher education drop-out rates, the figures of the Department of Education (DOE) are provided.

The findings were that

of 120 000 students who enrolled in higher education in 2000, 36 000 (30%) dropped out in their first year of study. A further 24 000 (20%) dropped out during their second and third years. Of the remaining 66 000, 22% graduated within the specified three years duration for a generic bachelor's degree ... the drop-out rate was costing the treasury R4.5 billion in grants and subsidies to higher education institutions.

A 2005 study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), termed the Student Pathways Study, found that “[m]any students also come from poverty-stricken families and are indebted to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and other education funding agencies” and “blacks and coloureds ... continue to lag behind in education success rates” (Letsaka & Breier, 2008:83–86).

Without understanding what enabled the ones who stayed to stay or alternatively understanding why the majority dropped out, real equity in throughput rates and the aims of the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No 101 of 1997), will be not be achieved.

This research was aimed at finding out what made it possible for a group of six black and coloured ‘disadvantaged’ senior students studying at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) to succeed when so many of their peers dropped out.

1.2 Background

In discussing the issue of retention and high drop-out rates of mainly black and coloured poor students in South Africa's higher education institutions, the angles from which the issue can be approached are several. There exists the psychological and cultural dimension of ‘fitting in’; so do socio-economic background and family

expectations. There is also the impact of the institution at which the students study and how they fit in. These are all of vital importance and are addressed in detail later in the thesis.

The educational experiences of South Africans have been shaped over the last few decades by two different governments with very different agendas. The one government's agenda was to promote and protect white interests (pre 1994) while the current government's agenda is to achieve equity and correct past imbalances.

For the individual, the academic experience is influenced by various factors, some external and others internal. Amongst these influences are the type of school attended (and the quality of education received), the ability of the family structure to support the learning experience, the well-being of the family and the broader community. Factors considered as external to the individual are the curriculum, institutional cultures and government policies. Below is a discussion of mainly external factors that have shaped education in South Africa and that continue to influence student performance.

The Minister of Higher Education and Training, Mr Blade Nzimande, in a speech delivered in January 2010 made clear the intention of the Department of Higher Education that increasing access will remain a priority, this despite unquestionable evidence that poor black and coloured students (in that order) are not managing.

Education in South Africa has undergone numerous and fundamental changes. The interesting aspect of this particular period is that current students would have entered school under a democratic government. Their parents' education would have been under a Nationalist Government believing in white supremacy. The different kinds and levels of education experienced by the two generations contribute to the degree to which parents can become involved in their children's education; this, though, is for later discussion.

For now, the researcher will focus on the immediate influences in education that have had an effect on the experiences and academic abilities of the cohort that is the focus of this study.

Political changes: 1994

South Africa held its first democratic election in 1994. It was the first time that black people were allowed to vote. Prior to 1994, the country was governed by the Nationalist Party, which came into power in 1948. The Nationalist Party was a conservative right-wing organisation that believed in and practised white supremacy. Several racially based policies, such as the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Act No 41 of 1950), the Immorality Act of 1957 (Act No 23 of 1957) and the pass system, were implemented and continue to influence present-day South Africa.

Legislation

The South African Constitution, 1996, officially adopted in May 1996, is the overarching legislative document. Within the Constitution, the Bill of Rights states, "Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken"(South African Constitution, 1996 a:xx).

Amongst the most important policy documents (in terms of education) passed post 1994 was Education White Paper 3, A programme for the transformation of higher education; which stipulated as it's goals the following:

- The funding, planning and governing of higher education as a single coordinated system.
- Planned expansion of enrolments.
- Proposed establishment of a Council of Higher Education (DOE, 1997:13).

The Higher Education Act, 1997, promoted “institutional autonomy with public accountability” (Republic of South Africa, 1997:2). Further policy developments are discussed later in the thesis.

Change in governance structure

Pre-tertiary education

In a presentation made to a South African donor organisation in 2009, Badsha highlighted the extent of differentiation in education. She states,

Before 1994, government provision of education in South Africa fell under 19 different education authorities, differentiated in terms of geography and population group. The resourcing of the different departments, and the quantity and quality of services, differed substantially across the 19 authorities. Overall, under investment in human resource development during this period resulted in low levels of skills that have persisted until today.

Post 1994, as stated by Pampallis (2002:5), “Education at all levels, excluding tertiary education, is an area over which national and provincial governments have concurrent powers...The National Minister of Education determines national policy for planning, provision, financing, staffing, co-ordination, management, governance, programmes, monitoring, evaluation and well-being of the education system”.

Structure of higher education institutions

Pre 1994, apartheid policies had resulted in 21 universities, 15 technikons and about 140 single-discipline vocational colleges, all divided along racial lines (Badsha, 2009). This sector has seen several changes, both during the period immediately following 1994 and later in 2009, when government departments were redesigned under the new administration.

The following speech, delivered in January 2010 by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, reflects the current configuration: “We have in the past seven months

been shaping this new department, bringing the skills component of the department of Labour, and the Universities and College components from the Department of Education into the single Department of Higher Education and Training” (Nzimande, 2010).

The current institutional landscape is as follows:

- 11 universities
- six universities of technology
- six comprehensive universities
- two national institutes of higher education²

Curriculum changes

Curriculum 2005 was introduced in South Africa in 1998 in Grade 1 (first year of schooling).

OBE and C2005 provided a broad framework for the development of an alternative to apartheid education that was open, non-prescriptive and reliant on teachers creating their own learning programmes and support materials. The new curriculum had three design features. Firstly it was *outcomes based*.... *An integrated knowledge system* was the second design feature. School subjects were jettisoned, and eight ‘learning areas’ introduced.... (Harley & Wedekind, 2004:197).

Although the Minister of Higher Education mentioned intended changes (in his 2010 speech), what these changes will entail and how they will be implemented will not be discussed here as some confusion still exists. The new curriculum was first introduced in Grade 1 and then in each subsequent grade in each subsequent year. Curriculum 2005 was based on active learner participation and the teacher was to act as facilitator of learning as opposed to being the ‘provider’ or ‘holder’ of knowledge. This change was met with many criticisms; some of the issues of concern were the following:

² Source – presentation at DG Murray Trust in 2009.

- Classroom sizes, resources and infrastructure in many of the poor schools in South Africa did not promote the adoption of an Outcomes-based Education (OBE) approach.
- The level of teacher skills was not appropriate for the methodology.
- It placed an extra workload on an already burdened teaching force (extensive additional administration is required).

1.3 Overall aim of the study

Several factors determine academic success and the decision to drop out, not only academic potential. Further evidence of the disadvantages experienced by socio-economically compromised learners are provided by an analysis done by Taylor, Muller and Vinjevold (2003:52-53) of eight large-scale studies conducted in South Africa on school performance. The analysis found the following “contextual factors” to be “associated with improved learner performance:

- Race
- Education level of parents or community in which school is located
- Parental income or household wealth
- Settlement type
- Family structure
- Language use and language of instruction
- Teacher qualifications
- Facilities”

The focus of the current study was to find out what factors contributed to motivating a group of six disadvantaged students that formed the sample for this study to continue their education, despite the majority of their peers dropping out.

Some of the questions that influenced the research are the following:

- If certain students (from similar backgrounds to those that drop out) manage to stay at higher education institutions, what enables this?
- Is it self-determination?
- Who and what supports them?
- What is the nature of the support?
- Have they also been close to dropping out? Why?
- What have been the difficulties they needed to deal with?
- How have they adapted to academic life?

1.4 Research design and methodology

Design

Research design is described as “... to determine what you’re going to observe and analyse: why and how” (Babbie & Mouton, 2003:72). The overriding motivation for the selected methodology was to ‘get it straight from the horse’s mouth’. The aim was to obtain meaningful, in-depth feedback from a small group of senior students considered disadvantaged as to what, in their opinion, contributed to their remaining in the higher educational system when the majority of their peers dropped out.

Methodology

A group of six final-year students was selected to form the basis of the study, all of whom were studying at UWC. The group was selected as they presented all senior REAP students studying at UWC. UWC was selected due to easy accessibility for the researcher. Selecting REAP students was based on the fact that all REAP students are considered disadvantaged and fulfil the National Student Financial Aid Schemes criteria for qualifying for financial support. The limitations of generalising beyond the selected group are acknowledged.

The number of variables influencing students' decision to persist or drop out is numerous. As the researcher had no preconceived idea of what the factors are that influenced the students' to persist, the Grounded Theory approach was selected as a research methodology. Grounded theory is

... first and foremost a mode of *analysis* of largely qualitative research data. That is, it does not claim to offer a fully elaborated methodology from soup to nuts – from project design to data collection to final write-up. Many elements of a full-blown methodology are offered, but data analysis is the focus of most of the texts (Outhwaite & Turner, 2007:424).

1.5 Limitations of the study

The study was limited to only six higher education institution students and broader generalisation is not possible. The limited number of students was due to the following:

- Accessibility.
- They were the total number of REAP final-year students studying at UWC.

1.6 Relevance of the research

Within South Africa, political liberties and economic opportunities exist, which the first democratically elected African National Congress (ANC) government has created, as well as an enabling environment to promote and give effect to these liberties and opportunities. This enabling environment is encapsulated in the South African Constitution, which lays the foundation to “establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights” and “to improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person”.³

The South African Schools Act of 1996 (Act No 84 of 1996) in its preamble states that its aim is “to provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people’s talents and

³ Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

capabilities” and “to facilitate the democratic transformation of the national system of education into one which serves the needs and interests of all people of South Africa and upholds their fundamental rights” (Republic of South Africa, 1996:1).

In the 1997 Education White Paper 3, titled A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, one of the purposes of higher education is stated as follows:

To meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and aptitudes throughout their lives. Higher education equips individuals to make the best use of their talents and of opportunities offered by society for self-fulfilment. It is thus a key allocator of life chances an important vehicle for achieving equity in the distribution of opportunity and achievement among South African citizens (Republic of South Africa, 1997:2).

The purpose of higher education is further formulated as contributing “to the socialization of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens” (Republic of South Africa, 1997:3). The above policies, implemented since 1994, all speak of enabling learners and students to ‘achieve their highest potential’; the reality is that we do not know what poor black and coloured students need to achieve this within higher education institutions (*Mail & Guardian*, 2010:11). At the end of 2009, 109 697 matriculants qualified for admission to degree studies. Given the retention rate, many will not be in the system by 2014.

Bloch (2000) aptly conveys the importance of education with the following:

[E]ducation plays a role in reproducing all the inequalities and values of society, as it is, but it also carries the hopes and aspirations of society to emerge out of inequality, and this carries forward the laboratory potential of that society. The contradiction or paradox of education is that while it points to the means of escape for both the individual and society as a whole, those

who 'fail' receive the hidden message that often reinforces exclusion (cited in Maile, 2000:126).

1.7 Outline of the thesis

The chapter progression for the thesis is presented below.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the study and provides background to the study in terms of socio-economic and historical factors that have shaped and continue to shape the educational landscape. The chapter also introduces the research methodology adopted and concludes by presenting an overview of the layout of the rest of the thesis.

Chapter 2: A socio-historical perspective on education in South Africa

This chapter presents a historical account of political factors that have shaped present-day society. It details the period pre and post democracy and provides an account of the sociological impacts of policies introduced.

Chapter 3: Theoretical perspectives on student attrition

The aim of this chapter is to provide an account of the various theoretical debates regarding student attrition. The discussion focuses both on the local and international debates. The chapter concludes by placing the changes within higher education in South Africa within the context of changes experienced within higher education internationally.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

This chapter focuses on the provision of a detailed account of the research methodology adopted, the reasons for its selection and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 5: Analysis and discussion of findings

In this chapter research findings are presented and analysed.

Chapter 6: Synthesis of findings, recommendations and conclusions

The thesis concludes by providing recommendations for possible inclusions in student support programmes.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter provided a summary of the focus and aims of the research, as well as the structural framework for the thesis. The following chapter will discuss the social, economic and political forces that continue to shape South Africa.

CHAPTER 2: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 Introduction

The current challenges within education in South Africa are deeply influenced by the political history of the country. This chapter aims to provide the reader with a historical perspective on educational developments within South Africa during different political periods. These developments have always been and continue to be indelibly linked to the political ideology of the ruling political party of the day.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Section 1 deals with education and educational influences in South Africa pre 1994. Section 2 deals with the educational reform after 1994 (the era of democratic governance). Section 3 deals with criticisms aimed at education within the context of development issues.

2.2 Brief overview: From colonial expansion to post-apartheid education

The early years of educational provision

According to Behr and Macmillan (2004:63), the first school in South Africa was established in the Cape in 1658. Emphasis in the curriculum was placed on how to read and write. The primary aim of teaching reading was to promote the reading of the Bible (thus promoting Christianity) and to enable learners to communicate with white settlers in both the workplace and the church.

Educational delivery in South Africa was initially mainly the responsibility of the missionaries. As stated in Seroto (2004:66) and Ndletyana (2008:1), the provision of education was mainly the responsibility of the missionary societies, initially in 1799 by the London Missionary Society. In the Cape, the

British introduced a public education system for white children and paid missionary societies to deliver education to coloured and black people. The first formalisation of differential provision of education was in the form of the Education Act, no. 13 of 1865, which “was introduced dividing schools into three groups, namely ‘A’ schools (mainly for Whites); ‘B’ schools (mainly for church controlled schools attended by poor Whites and Coloured pupils); and ‘C’ schools attended mainly by Black pupils, i.e. mission schools” (Behr & Macmillan, 1971:379). Kallaway (1988:18) further states that the main aim of mission schools was the imparting of the three R’s (reading writing and religion) and that the teaching of skills such as carpentry, masonry and agriculture was of primary importance because they were associated with the ‘upliftment’ of black people and the provision of appropriate labour for colonial farmers (cited in Seroto, 2004:73).

The level of educational provision at the foundation phase had obvious implications for access to higher education. According to Malherbe (as cited in Badat, 2004:48) black learners only numbered 950 in 1948, a mere 4,6% of total enrolments.

2.2.1 Higher education

Higher education delivery for racial groups other than whites in South Africa by the dominant economic and political groups (either the British or the Dutch) never had as its goal equality and maximising of human potential. The agenda was always to provide the minimum education to black and coloured people in order to support a racially oppressive system.

In terms of higher education,

Like primary and secondary schools, those institutions providing higher education for Africans were started by churches. Fort Hare, the first college for Africans on the continent and the alma mater of Nelson Mandela and many other African leaders, was established in 1916 as the South African Native College. Before World War II, it was the only option available to Africans seeking higher education. With the advent of apartheid, the

National government saw the need to provide some university training to Africans, if only to perpetuate the notion that Africans were citizens of distinct nations that required trained leaders, teachers, and civil servants (Fiske and Ladd, 2004: 46).

Higher education provision pre 1994 remained largely accessible to a minority.

Reddy (2004) provides further insight into higher education during this period. The first black university (Fort Hare) was established in 1916, nearly a 100 years after the establishment of the South African College (SACS) (later to become the mainly English University of Cape Town in 1828), and Victoria College (later to become the mainly Afrikaans University of Stellenbosch) in 1865.

The policies adopted, both on a social and educational level, and the difference in quality of racially based provision of education continue to plague the entire educational system. The winning of the 1948 elections by the Nationalist Party brought the dawn of a much more focused and institutionalised form of both black oppression and white promotion. The impact of the Nationalist Party's coming into power is discussed in the following section.

2.2.2 Apartheid legislation

With the coming into power of the Nationalist Government, a suite of legislation was enacted that would determine both the character of South African society and the quality of education for the next six decades. The legislation influenced both the quality of education provided and the socioeconomic environments in which learners lived and received their schooling. It should also be stated that the communities that are being discussed are only the poor and in this case mostly black (including African and coloured).

Inherent to legislation introduced post 1948 was the aim to keep racial groups separate, in order to promote the interest of the white ruling class and prepare non-white racial groups for positions of servitude. The group most severely affected were

African Black people. It was not only policy relating to education that influenced the life chances and social world of the youth in the South Africa of those times but rather various laws that were enacted to regulate the society of the day. Amongst the more important pieces of legislation passed was the Group Areas Act, no. 41 of 1950. This legislation determined that racial groups had to live in different geographic spaces. For African black people, homelands (settlement areas) were designated in the rural areas of the country. These homelands were removed from industry and had very little or no infrastructure, such as toilets and running water.

The 2008 Community Survey (a survey conducted by Statistics South Africa, with the main objective of providing demographic and socio-economic data at municipal level) revealed that inequality persists. The persons most affected continue to be poor rural households, who are still struggling to gain access to basic services such as running water, flush toilets and electricity (Community Survey, 2008).

Schools in rural areas remain worse resourced than those in urban areas, and learners walk long distances to schools. A recent visit by the researcher to Fort Beaufort confirmed the lack of infrastructure, as teachers and learners at one school went home to access toilet facilities and at another school a young boy needed to use the pit latrine without the privacy of a door. At yet another school, learners each contributed a bottle of water to the communal wash-basin. Many schools still have no telephone lines and have limited (or unstable) Internet connectivity, which has the potential to mitigate the distance from resources. Visits to district offices take principals out of the school for most of the school day. Frequent visits to numerous other rural schools confirmed the problems.

Since the focus of the study was on students predominantly coming from the Western Cape and studying at UWC (with a particular interesting history to be elaborated on later), the significance and impact of socio-political and economic changes over time need special mentioning. In Cape Town, coloured people were removed from the suburbs and areas close to the city centre to what is today known as the Cape Flats. In the words of respected University of Cape Town academic Crain Soudien at a public lecture (2009) delivered to the youth, “The geopolitical landscape of Cape Town can be judged from the location of communities in respect to Table Mountain. The Whites were settled in areas close to the mountain and coloureds, blacks and Indians further from it.” Similar incidences occurred all over South Africa, with non-white communities mainly being placed far from the economic hubs. In order to access the economic hub, blacks were required to carry passes (Pass Laws). They were only allowed to be in the cities to work; if they were not employed, they were required to remain in the homelands. This law would later result in mass uprisings and resistance.

On the social side, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, no. 55 of 1949 and the Immorality Amendment Act no. 21 of 1950 were introduced. These laws made it illegal for persons of mixed race to have sexual relationships with each other. In terms of segregation, these laws further entrenched the notion that intimate contact among different race groups was a criminal act.

In 1951 the Bantu Building Workers Act, no. 27 of 1951) was introduced to ensure that the position of white people in industry was not usurped by black people. Menial, poorly paid positions were the only kind black people were able to secure and occupy (Republic of South Africa, 1951). This act coupled with job preservation ensured that non-white people always occupied the menial positions, which were also the lowest paid positions.

On the economic front, South Africa experienced growth, growth needing a large low-skilled workforce. Much of this growth was experienced in mining.

In Nelson Mandela's autobiography, *Long walk to freedom* (1999:30), he explains the different destinies for him and the majority of the men he was at circumcision school with, when he was advised by a tribal elder that "It is not for you to spend your life mining the white man's gold, never knowing how to write your name".

Badat (2004:58) further explains the changing human resource needs of a growing economy as being heavily reliant on a more skilled workforce. The change in skills level coupled with job preservation ensured that white people were employed in the skilled (and better paying positions) and black people were employed in the semi-skilled positions or were unemployed. Like all other policies introduced, the socio-economic effects and the resultant establishment of different classes based on race are another characteristic of present-day South Africa that continues to influence educational achievements; these are discussed later.

Although the above gives an account of what was experienced by the majority of black people, an elite black class also existed, most of which would be able to access higher levels of education at institutions that allowed blacks, such as the famous Fort Hare University. The limited number of black people with degrees is described in Thabo Mbeki's autobiography; he says about his father, Govan, that "of the eight thousand Africans registered as teachers, he was one of only 14 with a university degree" (Gevisser, 2007:42).

Although not elaborated on extensively, this oppression was not passively accepted. During the period of oppression, mass resistance movements were started. In 1912, the (ANC) was formed, with the aim of promoting the interests of black people. The organisation was initially 'passivist'. In 1943, the ANC Youth League was formed by younger, much more militant individuals such as Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki; both were to become presidents of South Africa later in their lives. Resistance

movements were always present, the extremity and frequency of which changed over the years.

2.3 Specific legislation with regard to education

2.3.1 The Bantu Education Act of 1953

The Bantu Education Act was implemented to regulate black education and pass responsibility for the management thereof to the homelands (where the majority of black people lived), but control remained firmly entrenched within the Nationalist Government, which also determined the contents of black education.

The following two quotes, one from a man who was to become an icon of the struggle against apartheid and the other from a man who was considered the architect of apartheid, are an apt reflection of the aims and content of Bantu education:

An inferior type of education, known as Bantu education, and designed to relegate the Africans to a position of perpetual servitude in a baasskap (boss mentality) society, is now in force in almost all African primary schools throughout the country and will be introduced in all secondary and high schools as from next year (Mandela, 1957).

There is no place for [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour.... What is the use of teaching the Bantu child Mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? That is quite absurd. Education must train people in accordance with their opportunities in life, according to the sphere in which they live (Verwoerd, 1953).

For whoever was in power, the provisioning of black education was always with the aim to prepare a black workforce to serve the ruling white minority. In mainstream education in all provinces, courses such as gardening and agriculture were offered.

2.3.2 The Extension to University Education Act of 1959

The Extension of University Education Act, no. 45 of 1959, was introduced to keep the racial groups separate academically, and access to the better resourced predominantly white universities remained the preserve of white students. This policy resulted not only in mainly whites being able to access higher education; the resultant benefits accrued to subsequent generations as the benefits to children of having educated parents are well documented and will not be discussed further here.

In terms of this bill the minister is empowered to establish, maintain, and conduct university colleges for nonwhites. The students to be admitted to the university colleges must be approved by the minister. As from January 1958, no non-white students who were not previously registered shall be admitted to a European university without the consent of the minister. The bill also provides for the transfer and the control and management of the University College of Fort Hare and of the medical school for Africans at Wentworth⁴ to the government; all employees in these institutions will become government employees.

No mixed university in the country will be permitted to enrol new non-European students any more. The mixed English universities of Cape Town, Witwatersrand, and Rhodes will thus be compelled to fall in line with the Afrikaans universities of Pretoria, Potchefstroom, Stellenbosch, and the Orange Free State whose doors are closed to non-Europeans (Mandela, 1957).

⁴ The training hospital at Wentworth referred to is the McCord Hospital, opened in 1909. The hospital has an illustrious history of resistance and for promoting the interest of medicine amongst black doctors.

Table 2.1: Increase in access of different racial groups to universities (1960–1976)

Year	Type of university					
	African	Coloured	Indian	White	UNISA	Total
1960	488	161	-	1 728	2 004	4 381
% distribution	-	14.8	-	39.4	45.8	100
1965	956	416	1 009	981	2 911	6 273
% distribution	-	38	-	15.6	46.4	100
1970	2 011	936	1 654	1 106	3 704	9 411
% distribution	-	48.9	-	11.8	39.3	100
1976	5 204	2 438	3 108	1 550	10 609	22 909
% distribution	-	46,9	-	6.8	46.3	100

Source: SAIRR, 1963, 1966, 1971, 1977 in Badat, 2004

As a result of the Extension of University Act, “four new racial and ethnic universities were established in 1960 and 1961. The University Colleges of the North (UNIN), Zululand (UNIZUL), the Western Cape (UWC) and Durban – later Durban Westville (UDW)” (Badat, 2004:61). The table above details the number of students studying at the various racially differentiated universities:

The 1960’s saw an increase in both school level attained and higher education enrolment. For universities, the increase was 400% between 1960 and 1965. This increase was facilitated by low fees and the provision of numerous diploma courses requiring only a senior certificate. The expansion of higher education to black people is ascribed by Badat (2004:63) to the changes that were occurring in the structure of the economy:

The expansion of the manufacturing industry and the service sector, and the introduction of capital intensive technology, required large numbers of black workers who were semi-skilled and possessed more than minimal elementary education. On the one hand, the new racial division of labour was modified to accommodate this new reality. On the other hand, the provision of education was expanded and adjustments made to the system of financing black education.

2.3.3 Governance of higher education

The end of the apartheid era South Africa was riddled with numerous higher educational institutions, geopolitically situated, and the status of each (in terms of resources) was determined by the race groups it served. Fiske and Ladd, (2004:205) reveal that at the end of the apartheid era,

“the higher education system consisted of thirty-six universities and technikons. The white universities were among the best in Africa and included English-medium and Afrikaans-medium institutions. Black universities fell into two categories: those in the Republic of South Africa and those in the self-governing territories and independent homelands. Two were set up for non-African blacks: Durban-Westville for Indians and the University of the Western Cape for coloureds”.

The above section has provided an overview of developments within South Africa pre 1994. Of necessity the background is lengthy, given the various forces that shaped South Africa. The next section covers the period post 1994, the dawn of democracy in South Africa.

2.4 Significant post-apartheid changes

Any discussion on higher education performance cannot be held without also addressing the changes in the school system, which is ultimately the feeding system for higher education and influences the performance of students entering higher education. As changes within higher education did not happen in isolation from other changes introduced, these are included in the discussion below.

2.4.1 Legislative changes related to education

The Constitution

The coming into power of the ANC brought with it a period of radical policy change in almost all spheres of life. The overarching document was the new Constitution, heralded by many as one of the most progressive in the world. The constitution laid the foundation to “establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights” and “to improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person” (South Africa, 1996a:1).

The aims of the Constitution are further supported by complementary acts such as the following:

The South African Schools Act of 1996

The overarching goal is to “provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people’s talents and capabilities” (Preamble to the South African Schools Act of 1996, South Africa, 1996c:1).

The National Education Policy Act of 1996

The act has as its preamble “to facilitate the democratic transformation of the national system of education into one which serves the needs and interests of all people of South Africa and upholds their fundamental rights”. “It identifies the policy and legislative and monitoring responsibilities of the Minister of education and

formalizes relations between national and provincial authorities” (South Africa, 1996:1).

The Higher Education Act of 1997

This act “provides for the unified and national system of HE and for the establishment, governance and funding of public HE institutions, the registration of private HE institutions and general provisions regarding such institutions” (Republic of South Africa, 1997b:2).

2.4.2 Changes within education: Content and delivery

The education policies mentioned in the previous section have had profound effects on education in South Africa. In terms of governance of education, decision making regarding structure and financing is centralised at a national level but delivery is the responsibility of the provincial offices. One of the other major changes within the school system was the change from a religion-based approach to an outcomes-based approach.

Curriculum change: Outcomes-based Education

In the above context, a new curriculum termed Curriculum 2005 was introduced in Grade 1 in 1998. Outcomes-based education was the first major change in education provision introduced by the new government. The new curriculum had three design features. “Firstly, it was *outcomes based*... An *integrated knowledge* system was the second design feature. School subjects were jettisoned, and eight ‘learning areas’ introduced for Grades 1 to 9. The third dimension of curriculum reform was the promotion of *learner-centered* pedagogy” (Harley & Wedekind, 2004:197). Curriculum 2005 was eventually revised, simplified and reintroduced as the Revised National Curriculum Statements.⁵

Accompanying the curriculum changes, which already placed an enormous demand on teachers, even in their revised form, were the Norms and Standards for Educators, gazetted in 2000 as national policy. The “Norms and Standards” for

⁵ For a much more in-depth discussion of the review process, see Chisholm, 2003.

Educators use an outcome based approach to teacher education and provide detailed descriptions of what a competent educator can do. The new policy contributed significantly to the implementation of Curriculum 2005.”

According to the Norms and Standards for Educators (DOE, 1979:12) teachers were expected to be subject specialists committed to their own continued growth and development in their subject areas.

The mismatch between policy and reality cannot be more glaring than what is being required of teachers and the realities they face in the classroom.

Teachers have suffered the most from the effects of policy overload and the failure to ask crucial micro-level questions as to what could enhance classroom success. Teacher morale is generally low with flight overseas or to other professions – over half express the desire to leave and relations with the departments are often antagonistic (Bloch, 2000:8).

In 2005, the Educator Labour Relations Council (ELRC) commissioned the HSRC to research the numbers of hours teachers spend on their various tasks. The survey included a representative sample of 900 schools, and a validation survey consisting of 10 in-depth case studies was conducted to confirm the findings. The findings were as follows:

- Teachers spend less time overall on their activities than the total number of hours specified by policy; whereas policy expects 1 720 hours per annum (translated into 43 hours per week or 8.6 hours per day in a five-day week) to be spent on all activities, educators spend 1 599 hours per annum (41 hours per week or 8.2 hours per day) on all their school-related activities.
- Educators spend less time on actual teaching or instruction than is specified by policy. Whereas policy expects educators to spend between 64% and 79% of the 36-hour week on teaching, the average time that teachers actually spend on teaching is 46% of the 35-hour week, or 41% of their total school-related time, an average of 3.2 hours per day.

- Generally teachers in urban areas spend more time on teaching and administration than their counterparts in rural areas. The general decline in time spent across the week is strongest amongst educators in rural areas, who also spend more time on professional development, pastoral care and breaks than those in urban areas.
- Generally, educators in former white schools spend more time on teaching than educators in former African and new schools established since 1994.
- Educators with larger class sizes spend less time on their different activities than educators in small classes (Chisholm et al., 2005:XI-XII).

2.4.2 Funding

Funding before 1994 was skewed towards a high level of provision for white learners and progressively reduced provision to Indians, coloured people and black people (in that order). This has changed. Funding is now allocated according to need, with the poorest provinces gaining a bigger portion of the education budget. The process of dividing the education budget is as follows:

In terms of the constitution and national legislation, the budget begins with the Medium Term Revenue and Expenditure Framework. This framework is an instrument for planning expenditure over a three year cycle. Education departments, both national and provincial, assess their needs and plan how to address those needs. Each department prepares annual budget proposal that link goals and policies to expenditure. While the division of the annual budget between the three tiers of government is negotiated, the provincial share is formulae-driven based on various factors such as population size and poverty level (Taylor, Fleisch, & Schindler, 2008:6).

The table below, from the South African Institute of Race Relations (2006/7), presents the provincial per capita expenditure in public and independent schools, 2003/04, and the increase in spending per pupil from 1999/2000 to 2003/2004.

Table 2.2: Provincial per capita expenditure in public and independent schools

Province	Expenditure per pupil 2003/4	Increase in spending per pupil 1999/2000–2003/4
Eastern Cape	R4 870	71.1%
Free State	R5 871	64.4%
Gauteng	R 5 728	42.4%
KwaZulu-Natal	R4 359	65.5%
Limpopo	R4 545	41.5%
Mpumalanga	R4 952	52.0%
North West	R5 498	52.6%
Northern Cape	R6 455	45.4%
Western Cape	R5 533	38.7%
South Africa	R5 011	54.9%

At a lower, provincial level, funding is again determined and allocated according to greatest need. Poorer schools are therefore provided with more ‘non-personnel-related expenditure’. Schools are divided into five quintiles, with quintile 1 being the poorest and quintile 5 the wealthiest. Schools are, however, allowed to determine school fees. In reality, this has translated into schools in the upper quintiles being able to charge higher school fees, which in turn enables them to employ more teachers, buy more resources, and so forth. So equality has been achieved in terms of government support, but wealthier schools continue to be better resourced.

2.5 Changes within higher education

Political reform of necessity needs to include the institutions where knowledge is gained, research is conducted and future leaders are prepared. Higher education in South Africa is no different. Having been traditionally accessed by the minority, a need for change was obvious. In 1995, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was established to inform changes. The commission’s recommendations, which influenced subsequent legislation, were that the principles that guided transformation should be based on the following:

- “Equitable distribution of resources and opportunities in higher education
- Redress historical inequities
- Democratic, representative and participatory governance (of the system and individual institutions)

- Balancing the development of ‘material and human resources’
- Quality in higher education services and products”(Reddy, 2004:34)

2.5.1 Key documents

Education White Paper 3 and the Higher Education Act

The first result of the work of the NCHE was Education White Paper 3. The paper “outlines the framework for change, that is, a higher education system must be planned, governed and funded as a single national co-ordinated system” (DOE, 1997a:2). One of the requirements identified in the White Paper is the need for increased and “broadened” participation guided by the principals of equity and redress, where “equity requires fair opportunities both to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them” (DOE, 1997a: 3). The White Paper formed the basis for the Higher Education Act, formally adopted in 1997.

The National Plan for Higher Education

The National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa (DOE, 2001) “gives effect to the vision for the transformation of the Higher Education System outlined in the Education White Paper” and was regarded as bringing “to a close the consultative process that began with the Minister’s request in July 1999 to the Council on Higher Education to advise him on the restructuring of the higher education system” (DOE, 2001:11). One of the key recommendations of the document was the proposal of a “reduction in the present number of institutions through combining institutions” (DOE, 2001:73).

The mergers did come about without serious opposition and fears, but this debate will not be discussed here. The result of the mergers were 23 public institutions, including 11 universities, six comprehensive universities (these institutions offer a mix of academic and technical courses and degrees, diplomas and certificated courses)⁶ and six universities of technology (these were the previous technikons but given that they started awarding degrees, the name was changed to universities of technology). Universities offer a “mix of programmes, including career-oriented

⁶ (DOE.2004)

degree and professional programmes, general formative programmes and research master's and doctoral programmes" (Council of Higher Education.2009:8).

Table 2.3: The merged higher education institutions

Comprehensive universities	
From	To
Sebokeng campus of Vista University; Potchefstroom University; University of North West	University of Zululand (comprehensive university)
Rand Afrikaans University; East Rand and Soweto campus of Vista University; Technikon Witwatersrand	University of Johannesburg (comprehensive university)
University of Port Elizabeth; Port Elizabeth Technikon	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (comprehensive university)
University of Venda	University of Venda (comprehensive university)
University of South Africa; Technikon South Africa	University of South Africa (comprehensive university)
University of Transkei; Border Technikon; Eastern Cape Technikon	Walter Sisulu University of Technology (comprehensive university)
Universities	
From	To
University of Pretoria; Mamelodi campus of Vista University	University of Pretoria
Dental Faculty of the University of Stellenbosch; University of the Western Cape	University of the Western Cape
University of Fort Hare; east campus of Rhodes University	University of Fort Hare
Medical University of Southern Africa; University of the North	University of Limpopo
University of Cape Town	University of Cape Town
Rhodes University	Rhodes University
University of Stellenbosch	Stellenbosch University
University of Witwatersrand	University of the Witwatersrand
University of Natal; University of Durban Westville	University of KwaZulu-Natal
Universities of technology (technikons)	
From	To
Pretoria Technikon; Technikon Northern Gauteng; North West Technikon	Tshwane University of Technology
Cape Technikon; Peninsula Technikon	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
Technikon Natal; Umlazi campus of the University of Zululand; Magosuthu Technikon; ML Sultan Technikon	Durban Institute of Technology
Technikon Free State; Welkom campus of Vista University	Central University of Technology
Vaal Triangle Technikon; Sebokeng campus of Vista University	Vaal University of Technology
Magosuthu Technikon	Magosuthu Technikon

Source: (CHE, 2004: 50)

2.5.2 Governance

The Council on Higher Education was established in terms of the Higher Education Act, no. 101 of 1997 and is responsible for

- advising the minister on all policy matters relating to higher education;
- executive responsibility for quality assurance in higher education and training;
- monitoring and evaluating the achievement of policy goals and objectives, including reporting on the state of South African higher education; and
- promoting students' access to higher education (Republic of South Africa, 1997:1).

2.6 Increasing access

2.6.1 National Qualifications Framework Bill

Increasing access was based not only on the natural progression of learners in schools but also on providing access for those who have left the educational system and wished to participate. Coupled with the structural transformation introduced, a framework for qualifications has also been developed, referred to as the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The objectives of the NQF are to:

- “create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths;
- enhance the quality of education and training” (DOE.2008:4)

The NQF is “organised as a series of learning achievements, arranged in ascending order from one to ten (NQF Bill) 6 (1) and comprises of three co-ordinated qualifications sub-frameworks for:

- a) General Education and Training
- b) Higher Education, contemplated in the Higher Education Act; and
- c) Trades and Occupations” (DOE, 2008).

2.6.2 Increasing target rates

The National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa further promotes access by setting targets for higher education institutions. Currently, participation in higher education in South Africa is 15%; the target as set in the national plan is 20% over the next 10–15 years (DOE, 2001:17).

2.6.3 The National Student Financial Aid Scheme Act, no 56 of 1999

An important enabler with regard to access was the establishment of the NSFAS, promulgated in 1999. The purpose of the act was:

- “To provide for the management, governance and administration of the NSFAS
- To provide for the granting of loans and bursaries to eligible students at public higher education institutions
- For the administration of such loans and bursaries” (Republic of South Africa, 1999:1).

2.6.4 Funding to higher education institutions

The National Plan (DOE, 2001) promotes access by linking funding to higher education institutions to the goals of the aims of higher education as identified in White Paper 3. Funding as per the National Plan will take place as follows:

- Linking the funding of student places and full-time equivalent enrolments of institutions to the numbers of graduates produced.
- Funding academic development programmes.

The above section provided the educational context in which the South African learner and higher educational student find themselves. The following section deals with the socio-economic factors that are the reality for many poor students, both in terms of family and the conditions of schooling.

2.7 A socio-economic profile of South African society in the post-apartheid era

2.7.1 Socio-economic indicators

The 2003 United Nations Development Report on South Africa and the 1999 October Household Survey reveal the depth and prevalence of poverty.

In terms of the spatial dimension of poverty in South Africa, the poverty rate for seven of the country's nine provinces was more than 50 percent of the respective population in 2002: In the Eastern Cape and Limpopo, 68.3 per cent and 60.7 per cent of the population respectively live in poverty ...[s]ingle families relative to other family types, and in the Eastern Cape relative to other provinces (Adelzadeh, 2004:42).

According to the 1999 October Household Survey

... about 1.3 million households with children under 7 years went hungry due to lack of money to buy food. This is about 11% of all households. The situation is even worse in rural areas, where 16% of households with children under 7 years old went hungry as a result of their inability to purchase food (Bonti-Ankomah, 2002:81).

In terms of job creation, research by the International Labour Organization indicates that

... between 1995 and 1999, the number of entrants increased by about 2.9 million. Over the same period 929 000 additional jobs were created. This has meant therefore that about 2 million – some first-time entrants into the labour market – have been rendered or have remained jobless since 1995 (ILO Report, 2001:7).

From the above it can be deduced that for the majority, the increase in jobs being created was not enough.

Discouragingly however, despite the positive trend in growth and other economic fundamentals, unemployment has risen even further from already high levels in the early 1990's. Between 1995 and 2003, the unemployment rate rose from 17 to 28% (based on the narrow definition of unemployment) and from 29 to 42% (based on the broad definition of unemployment) (Hodge, 2009:489).

The General Household Survey 2005 indicated that 42% of South Africa's children live in a household where neither parent is employed and

Children in the Western Cape were most likely to live with employed parents (70%) or any employed adult (86%). Children in Limpopo were least likely, as only 29% lived with an employed parent and only 42% lived with at least one employed adult. These stark differences underline the continuing impact of apartheid legacies (Leatt, 2006:26).

The October Community Survey conducted in 2007 revealed that the previous homeland areas of the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo (which has the largest concentration of black people) have less access to piped water than the national average: 56,3% of households in Limpopo used a pit latrine without ventilation, 25,2% of households in the Eastern Cape had no toilets at all and the proportion of households in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal using electricity for lighting was lower than the national average (Statistics SA, 2007).

The spatial dimension of poverty and its implications for level and quality of education obtained, as well as the negative health factors related to poverty (many households still do not have toilets) continue to affect the lives of millions of children, yet these are the ones on which the hope of expanding education and building the economy is pinned. Both home and school environments are a reflection

of the absence of basic services. Very little transformation has taken place in the former homelands. These are also the areas where many of the black students that access higher education come from and the conditions in which they have been raised and socialised.

2.7.2 Parental level of education

The level of education and income level of parents greatly influence the quality of the schools that learners are able to attend and the extent to which parents are able to provide academic support and guidance to their children. Information gathered from the 1996 Census found the following education levels of the age cohort 26 or more (parental age):

- Twenty-three per cent of South Africans never attended school.
- The percentage of women, often the primary caregiver, with no formal schooling (at 25%) was higher than that of men (at 20%).
- Close to a third (31%) of African women of this age and 26% of African men had no formal schooling.
- Close to a fifth of employed African people aged 26 years or more had no formal schooling, compared to 2% or less of the white and Indian groups.
- Of the employed population with no education, it was also found that 53% earned R500 or less per month (Stats SA, 1996).

The above statistics provide a backdrop to the home environment of most learners, in terms of intellectual stimulation and academic support parents are able to provide.

2.8 Social development versus economic growth

In addition to acknowledging, foundationally, the evaluative importance of freedom, we also have to understand the remarkable empirical connection that links freedoms of different kinds with one another. Political freedoms (in the form of free speech and elections) help to promote economic security. Social opportunities (in the form of education and health facilities) facilitate economic participation. Economic facilities (in the form of opportunities for participation in trade and production) can help to generate personal abundance as well as public resources for social facilities. Freedoms of different kinds can strengthen one another (Sen, 1999:10).

In 1994 when the ANC won the first democratic election in South Africa, it inherited a socially and racially segregated society coupled with immense economic inequality. In 1995, South Africa had a Gini coefficient of 0.596.⁷ Pre 1994 (up until 1993), the country's annual real growth rate was lower than 1% (Adelzadeh, 2004:170) and unemployment stood at 28% (October Household Survey, 1995).

One of the first documents to be produced by the new government to address the entrenched inequality was the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The initial RDP, introduced in 1994, had a strong distributive focus. The RDP was a

commitment to effectively address the problems of poverty and the gross inequality evident in almost all aspects of South African society (which) can only be possible if the South African economy can be firmly placed on the path of high and sustainable growth. The RDP was successful in articulating the main aspirations of the movement for post-apartheid South Africa, that is growth, development, reconstruction and redistribution, in a consistent macro-economic framework.... It proposed growth and development through

⁷ "Gini coefficient measures the extent of income inequality in a country. If the Gini coefficient equals 0, there is perfect income equality. A Gini coefficient of 1 is perfect inequality." (Adelzadeh, 2003:43).

reconstruction and redistribution, sought a leading and enabling role for Government in guiding the mixed economy. The release of the RDP White Paper in September 1994 signified the first major point of departure from both the goals and ethos of the initial RDP document. In 1996, a new macroeconomic policy, referred to as Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) was released. The aim of GEAR was the pursuit of 6% economic growth per annum. This policy was created after considering the models for growth submitted by both labour and business in response to President Mandela's call for "a national vision to lift us out of this quagmire" (Adelzadeh, A. 1996:24).

GEAR was a contentious document with business being strongly in favour of it and labour being deeply critical of it, but these debates will not be entertained here.⁸

The point of departure of GEAR was that "sustained growth on a higher plane requires a transformation towards a competitive outward-orientated economy" as "the present growth trajectory of about 3% per annum

- fails to reverse the unemployment crisis in the labour market;
- provides inadequate resources for the necessary expansion in social services delivery; and
- yields insufficient progress toward an equitable distribution of income and wealth" (GEAR, 1996:1).

The expansion hoped for was dependent on several factors, among others 'industrial development, expansion of the tradable goods sector, labour market flexibility and enhanced human resource development. According to Adelzadeh (1996: 66–67) GEAR unsuccessfully attempted to reconcile the original Keynesian approach to the RDP with a set of policy statements and recommendations that were inspired by the neo-liberal framework that had long been an alternative offered ... by big business, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

⁸ For the various positions refer to Adelzadeh, A. 1999. The costs of staying on course. *NGQOI*, 1(1)1–6; Adelzadeh, A. 1996. From RDP to GEAR: The gradual embracing of neo-liberalism in economic policy. *Transformation*, 31:66–96; and Smith, H. 1997. Forward GEAR. *INNES Brief*, 9(1):23–26.

GEAR is seen as “leaving little remaining of the RDP as it was first conceived” and concludes that “... the proposed policy framework and policy scenarios represent an adoption of the essential tenets and policy recommendations of the neo-liberal framework advocated by the IMF in its structural adjustment programmes” (Adelzadeh, A. 1996: 67).

Interestingly, criticism of the adjustment programmes advocated by the International Monetary Fund also resulted in the promotion of the human development approach by the United Nations Development Programme, which “came to recognize the need for an alternative development model due to many factors including:

- Growing evidence that did not support the then prevailing belief in the ‘trickle down’ power of market forces to spread economic benefits and end poverty.
- Social ills (crime, weakening of social fabric, HIV/AIDS, pollution, etc) were still spreading even in cases of strong economic growth” (UNDP,2003: 1).

Human development, as described by renowned and respected economics Professor Amartya Sen, who contributed to providing the conceptual framework, is seen “as an approach, is concerned with what I take to be basic development idea: namely, advancing the richness of human life, rather than the richness of the economy in which human beings live, which is only part of it” (Sen. A. UNPD).

In response to the above, the South African Cabinet in 2005 introduced its Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA). AsgiSA “originated from a commitment made by the ANC in its 2004 election manifest to halve unemployment and poverty by 2014” (AsgiSA 2006 annual report). One of the seven key constraints to realising the aims of AsgiSA was the “shortages of suitably skilled labour ...” and the action required to correct the constraint was “skills and education”.⁹

⁹ For further information on the other constraints and ‘remedies’ read the AsigSA 2006 Annual Report.

2.9 Criticisms of the current education system against the backdrop of development issues in South Africa

The changes brought about within education were criticised for several reasons, ranging from inappropriateness to local conditions, teachers' ability to implement the system and increased workload for teachers. The criticisms discussed below refer mainly to the school (feeder) system; the criticisms aimed at higher education will be discussed later in the thesis.

2.9.1 Large class sizes

OBE is dependent on extensive engagement by educators with their learners. This level of engagement is difficult in large class sizes, which are still common in many of the poorer schools. Curriculum 2005 is also seen by many as more a political than an educational project.

The new curriculum did not emerge from debates within the education sector about the most appropriate forms of pedagogy to bring about the new political vision, or about what was feasible in the profoundly diverse and unequal range of school. In the parlance of curriculum studies, C2005 did not arise from a 'situational analysis' of existing realities. Teachers, and probably most teacher trainers, simply found themselves in a new curriculum world (Harley & Wedekind, 2004:199).

Furthermore, the under-specification of the curriculum content and the priority given to integration was likely to lead to submergence of conceptual knowledge in the everyday, and well resourced teachers and schools were more likely to implement the curriculum as intended than teachers in poorer schools (Jansen & Taylor, 2003:3).

The conclusion was that

schools most in need of improvement are least able to respond to new external requirements. And the erosion of instructional time is most severe in former African (DET) schools, and the former Coloured (HOR) and Indian (HOD) secondary schools. In the primary schools of former HOD and HOR schools and the former white (HOA) and Independent schools more time was spent on instruction (Jansen & Taylor, 2003:3).

2.9.2 Teacher content knowledge and resources

In terms of quality of education provision, the majority of black students are disadvantaged both in terms of quality of teaching and availability of resources. In research conducted by Jet Education Services¹⁰ it was found that a sample of rural Grade 3 teachers tested on Grade 6 numeracy and literacy test papers, the language teachers scored a mean of 55% and the mathematics teachers scored 65%. (Paton, 2006:24).

2.9.3 Learner unpreparedness

The ability to understand mathematical concepts is generally accepted as an indication that a learner can deal with abstract concepts and spatial data and make linear connections. Mathematics is therefore an important indication of 'higher order' thinking and viewed as an important indicator of scholastic ability.

In the 2003 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS)¹¹, which had an international average scale score of 467, South Africa scored 264, with Singapore scoring the highest at 605 and both Botswana at 366 and Ghana at 276 scoring higher than South Africa (Reddy, 2006: 17-20).

¹⁰ JET Education Services (the precursor of which was the Joint Education Trust, with a R500 million initial capital from business) is a partnership between various social partners and has as its main goal "to contribute to the process of long-term fundamental change in South Africa's flawed education and training system". The organisation is highly respected in the education field.

¹¹ Further explanation and an analysis of the results are given in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

These results are replicated in the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Quality (SACMEQ 11)¹² research. Twelve years after democracy, education in South Africa has not improved. Sadly, the signs are that it won't improve anytime soon. The comment by Paton (2006:24) that "the first generation freed from the clutches of 'Bantu education', has been betrayed" seems applicable.

Doing comparative studies of learner performance before and after 1994 is not possible as measurement was not done before 1994. However, given the aims of the current government, the scholastic performance of the majority of learners is an indication that the current system is not producing the kind of learner and citizen (and worker) envisaged.

Interestingly, a recent announcement (the 2010 Presidential Address of the Nation speech) indicated that teachers would be provided with work schedules providing clear guidelines on what was to be covered and at what pace. Planned work-ordered days and guidelines as to what content is to be covered have traditionally been part of the method of curriculum delivery; this was changed with C2005 whereby teachers were given this responsibility. Hopefully, the announcement signals a shift towards reintroducing some of the aspects within education that were working well but were removed too hastily.

2.10 Conclusion

The preceding sections gave a (selective) explanation of both where South Africa, as a country, has been and the current situation. Given that this assignment is mainly focused on education and socio-economic factors that affect educational performance, such as socio-economic status, these themes have been concentrated on mainly.

From the above information, the following can be deduced:

¹² SACMEQ is a project "in which 15 countries from southern and eastern Africa participated. A random sample of 3 416 grade learners from 169 public schools were tested in reading (literacy) and mathematics (numeracy)" (Moloi, 2005:2).

- Access to education, both at a primary and higher educational level, has increased but this does not necessarily translate into quality of education achieved.
- Economic growth has been achieved but not at a rate that outpaces the number of entrants into the labour market. Unemployment remains high.
- The most substantial changes, which should be celebrated, continue to be on a policy level. The intended aims of poverty reduction, quality education and a life of dignity remain elusive for the majority, however.

The most damning indication of the lack of positive change in South African society is that in January 2010, it was calculated to have a Gini coefficient of 0.7 (in 1995 it was 0.59). South Africa has become a more unequal society, surpassing Brazil as the most unequal society in the world.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON STUDENT RETENTION

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous section, increasing access to higher education (also referred to as massification in some literature) has become one of the priorities within higher education and one of the key developmental aims of South Africa as a whole. The advantages to the individual with a higher education in terms of both employment and income earnings are increased (Cloete, 2009:5). The study by Branson, Leibrandt and Zuzu (2009:45) that found that “in 2000, the average individual with a degree earned a salary 320% higher than individuals with less than matric” confirmed this. The same study also found that those persons with higher education levels (tertiary) were more likely to be in formal employment than those with a lower level of education. The potential of those individuals who enter higher education in terms of their own development and as meaningful contributors to society is rich.

This chapter will focus on the literature that attempts to provide insight into conditions that affect the ability of students within the system to remain in and progress through the system. The first section will cover the South African theoretical debate. The South African experience is then placed in the context of the dominant international theories that have been generated on the subject of attrition and retention. The chapter concludes by comparing the challenges of increasing access to education in South Africa to those experienced by other countries that share a common agenda.

3.2 Current realities in higher education

The problem of poor student outcomes is a complex and multilayered one which is shaped by issues such as lack of preparedness of students and staff; the nature and organisation of teaching and learning at higher education institutions; the conceptualisation of the educational process, particularly in terms of the appropriateness of content and assessment methods and its relationship with different institutional cultures; the extent or lack of professionalisation of academic staff; the nature and extent of funding; and the role that system differentiation might have in addressing under-preparedness (Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007:2)

Within higher education, which according to the Education White Paper of 1997 “... comprises all learning programmes leading to qualifications higher than the proposed Further Education and Training Certificate or the current Standard 10”(DOE.1997), increasing access was and remains a priority.

3.2.1 Progress in terms of increasing access

“The principle of equity requires fair opportunities both to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them” (DOE, 1997:6).

Access to higher education has dramatically increased the participation rates for previously disadvantaged groups although these are comparatively still low in relation to participation rates of white students. “While the participation rates for whites has held steady at 60% since 1986, and while rates for Indians have increased from 32% to 50%, African and coloured students are under-represented at 12% and 13% respectively” (Taylor et al., 2003:34). According to Bunting and Cloete, higher education experienced a massive increase in enrolment in the two decades between 1986 and 2005, growing from just over 300 000 to close to 750 000, an increase of 143% (cited in Taylor et al., 2003). The NCHC via the Education White Paper further

reports that despite the challenges, "... the number of African students at universities and technikons increased by an annual average of 14% between 1986 and 1993, as against 0.4% for whites" (DOE, 1997:12). A study by Breier and Mabizela (2008:280) reported that the average number of students that entered higher education institutions between the years 2002–2004 was 709 000, of which 141 000 was first-time entrants. The total of 709 000 includes returning students, transfer students, new students and returning postgraduates.

The DOE statistics for the period 2000–2003 revealed that the head count enrolled total for the system increased from 587 000 in 2000 to 718 000 in 2003. This was a total increase of 131 000 (or 22%) over the four-year period. Most of the enrolments increased in the university sector, for which enrolments increased by 103 000 (or 27%) (DOE, 2005:7).

Table 3.1: Racial breakdown of students

Headcount enrolments by race, 2002–2004										
	African		Coloured		Indian		White		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
2002	405 914	60	38 965	6	48 717	7	181 999	27	675 595	100
2003	430 776	60	43 550	6	52 883	7	188 353	26	715 563	100
2004	453 639	61	46 090	6	54 315	7	188 957	25	743 001	100
% increase 2002– 2004		12		18		11		4		10

Source: DOE, 2005b in Breier et al.,2008:284.

From the above it is evident that there has been a serious commitment on the part of government to support access to higher education for disadvantaged students. It is acknowledged that even at the increased levels of access, many are still excluded. The reality is that significant changes have taken place in terms of increasing access. But how are the new entrants managing? The next section deals with student retention/attrition in the higher education system in South Africa: the real litmus test.

3.2.2 Student throughput rates

Recent research conducted provides evidence that a student's level of adjustment to the transition from secondary to higher academic institution is an important factor in determining academic success, which in turn is a strong contributing factor to student retention (Petersen, Louw, & Dumont, 2009).

A study by the HSRC, termed the Student Pathways Study, conducted in 2005 revealed that 50% of students drop out in their first three years of study, with about 30% dropping out in their first year. A further 20% drop out during their second and third years. The majority of drop-outs come from families in the category 'low economic status' and are either black or coloured (DOE, 2005). Although equity in education has been achieved, this is not reflected in graduation rates.

The table below reflects that graduation rates are still strongly linked to race, with white students having the highest rates, followed by Indians, coloured people and then Africans, the average white graduation rate being 15% higher than that of Africans. The socio-economic benefits of previous preferential treatment appear to be passed on generationally.

Table 3.2: Graduation rates per racial group

Undergraduate success rates for contact students in public higher education institutions by race, 2001-2004					
	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
2001	65	75	78	85	74
2002	70	74	81	86	77
2003	70	71	80	85	76
2004	70	75	79	84	75
average 2001-2004	69	74	80	84	76

DOE, 2005b cited in Breier et al., 2008:284.

3.3 The differing theoretical debates

The literature produced on higher education is extensive, detailed with regard to statistics and varied in terms of focus. What all literature has in common is that poor and mainly African and black students fare the worst of the student population. The literature surveyed focuses on the weaknesses of the school system, which is ideally the space where academic preparation takes place. Given the local situation (which was discussed earlier), this is unlikely to change in the very near future.

Some theories focus on the institutional climate in which learning takes place (organisational culture) while others focus on the socio-economic 'handicap' that the student has. Yet others focus on individual agency. The various debates seem to be in agreement that the problem of high attrition rates within higher education is a systemic one. Broadly speaking, the theoretical frameworks can be classified as dealing with factors 'internal' to the higher education institution and with 'outside' factors.

In the following section the researcher will attempt to divide the various studies into the broad categories of external and internal, although a clear division is not easy as influences bleed between categories.

3.3.1 Factors external to the higher education institution

Socio-economic factors

The 2005 HSRC study mentioned earlier focused on drop-out in seven higher education institutions; the institutions included the University of Fort Hare, the University of the North (now Limpopo), Pretoria Technikon (now part of the Tshwane University of Technology, Peninsula Technikon (now part of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology), the University of Stellenbosch, the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand. The students targeted were 20 353 'leavers' and 14 195 graduates; the response rate was 16%. The study also included semi-structured interviews with senior management and academics.

The study used the following four variables to determine economic status:

- Education level of father/male guardian
- Education level of mother/female guardian
- Income level of father/male guardian
- Income level of mother/female guardian

The findings of the study were the following:

- On average, 70% of the families of the surveyed higher education leavers were in the category 'low economic status'.
- Black families were particularly poor with parents and guardians earning as little as R1 600 per month.
- The majority of black parents fell in the categories 'no formal education' and 'some secondary education'.
- Many of the students coming from these families depended on their parents or guardians for financial support to pay their fees and/or supplement what they received from the NSFAS in order to provide for essential living expenses.
- Many leavers reported they were engaged in full-time, part-time or odd jobs to augment their meagre financial resources.

The results of the study for one of the seven universities (a previously black university) that formed part of the Student Pathways Study showed that for most students the main reason for leaving was that they did not have funds to pay for their studies.

Another finding of the study illustrated the differences between leavers and graduates. The differences were as follows:

- Graduates were less reliant on parents/guardians for financial assistance.
- A higher proportion of graduates had NSFAS support and/or bursaries.
- More graduates (18%) than leavers (9%) had full-time jobs.

In terms of education levels of parents, the following were found:

- Only 13% of fathers and 10% of mothers of leavers had a tertiary education; for graduates, 15% of fathers and 13% of mothers had a tertiary education. Education levels of parents of both leavers and graduates were very low.
- For both groups, 15% of fathers and 13% of mothers had no education (Letseka & Breier, 2008:83).

The school that students come from is a contributing factor. The home environment is also generally regarded as contributing to the intellectual development of a child. Given that many parents also have low education levels, the home environment is not able to buffer the learner from the deficiencies inherent in the school system; they are therefore doubly disadvantaged. These factors are explored further in the following sections.

Family and community of origin

Increased access for black and coloured students from poor socio-economic backgrounds also means that they are often the first in their families to gain entry into higher education. The communities from which they come (and are socialised in) can also be assumed to have very few members who are educated beyond the school level. “Particularly significant within the current South African context is that many black students come from traumatized communities that are still subject to very high levels of violence and poverty” (Hamber, 2000, quoted in Sennett et al., 2003:108).

The importance of parental educational background for academic progress of their children is generally accepted. As stated by Maitra & Sharma (2009:7),

... educational attainment is typically influenced by both public and private investments in education. While state policy typically drives the former, parental education is a crucial part of the latter; indeed parental income is one of the most important determinants of a child’s education.

The school system

The shortcomings in the school system (and learners' performance in it) were discussed extensively in Chapter 2 and will not be entertained here again. In discussing deficiencies in the school system, the focus is often the teaching skills that teachers lack.

Cliff, Hanslo and Visser (2005) provide a list of the competencies that learners are expected to possess. This list is provided here as the areas of weaknesses highlighted and are potential areas of intervention. These required competencies are the following:

- Make sense of what they read.
- Understand and interpret conceptual and metaphorical language.
- Identify and track academic arguments.
- Follow discourse structure in text.
- Make inferences about and extrapolate from what they read.
- Demonstrate familiarity with and understanding of the conventions of visual and multimodal literacies, such as reading and interpreting graphs, pictures, flow-charts and diagrams.
- Cope with basic numeracy (Cliff, Hanslo and Visser (2005) cited in Scott, Yeld & Henry, 2007:36).

Instead, learners from poor educational backgrounds have the following approaches:

- A propensity for verbatim reproduction or plagiarism in essays.
- A propensity to describe rather than analyse.
- A propensity to focus on examples rather than principles.
- A propensity to write from a highly subjective viewpoint without depersonalising.
- A propensity to be prescriptive or normative when asked to be analytic.

Financial factors

Most research agrees that an important factor contributing to student drop-out is related to finances; this is revealed in the results of the 2005 Student Pathways

Study discussed above and will not be discussed in detail here again. The effects of the financial strain experienced by students were further elaborated on by Sennet, Finchilescu and Gibson (2003:108). The study found, “Of further significance in the adjustment of black African students to university in South Africa are the adverse effects of financial strain, transport problems and housing-related difficulties, and the stress of living large distances from home.” Tinto’s model of student attrition (which is discussed later) also claims that finances influence the student’s early decision to stay but the level of integration of the particular student also influences persistence; this is discussed further under International theoretical frameworks.

Self-motivation

Studying at higher education institutions for any student is challenging. It demands hard work and commitment. However, for the writer these qualities are also possibly linked to the socio-economic factors. Families have the potential to play a role in the motivation of students and the expectations created. Some studies in self-motivation have, however, been a focus of work in academic institutions and are therefore included. The studies are mainly localised to specific universities and this should be taken into account, given the varying nature of higher education institutions.

The value of these studies for the writer lies in highlighting possible areas of intervention when students enter the higher education institution. A study was done at the University of Zululand, focussing on the full-time Bachelor of Education degree to determine the correlation between students’ and lecturers’ ratings of factors that contribute to academic success. The finding was that the degree of correlation is strongest around the following factors (in descending order of agreement):

- self-discipline
- effective study methods
- family support
- appropriate balance between academic commitments and social life
- self-motivation (Ngidi, 2002).

A study done by Chireshe et al. (2009: 862) confirmed the above finding: “The study showed that the students consistently attributed success to internal factors and failure to external factors.”

3.3.2 Factors internal to the higher education institution

Dealing with cultural diversity

From the previous sections it is evident that the student demographics at higher education institutions are changing; the expectation of universities to contribute to the greater development aims are highlighted in all the policy documents discussed in Chapter 2.

The increase in the number of black students entering higher education was also discussed. The culture (in terms of language) within higher education is predominantly English, except perhaps for Stellenbosch, which is a predominantly Afrikaans institution. The majority of students are therefore also lectured by academics that are predominantly white (and have a different first language). The profile of academics is provided in the CHE report (CHE.2009:86), “White staff continue to fill most of the academic posts at all levels. Indian staff are also overrepresented, while African and coloured staff are underrepresented at all levels. This profile has changed very little since 2004, the most noticeable shift being at the senior lecturer level where the proportion of African staff moved from 17 per cent in 2004 to 20 per cent in 2007.

Increased student numbers and varying ability

Not only do the increased student numbers place pressure on lecturers; they also need to deal with an ever larger student population for whom the medium of instruction is the student’s second or third language. Students also come from a school system that ill-equips them for academic life (the lack of expected competencies was discussed earlier). Academics therefore also need to deal with a student whose level of preparation is not ideal.

In a paper presented at the South African Actuarial Society of South Africa Convention 2008, challenges that disadvantaged students faced were highlighted. One was the expectation that all first-year students had to do research electronically and submit assignments electronically when many were not computer literate and had limited access to both the Internet and computers (Naidoo, 2008). A study of first-year students at Stellenbosch University by Bitzer (2003) found that between 70 and 80% of white learners indicated that they had used their own or a school computer frequently or occasionally; for black students, this number dropped to between 40 and 45%.

Fitting in

In a study conducted at the University of Cape Town, Hall et al. found “black African male students to constitute a group that feels most frustrated and alienated within the UCT environment. Black students found their fellow students less friendly and supportive than did their white peers.” (Hall et al. (2003); quoted in Sennett et al., 2003:109). A further study found that black students “... characterized UCT culture as ‘English’: these students expressed a sense of alienation and powerlessness in this culture” (Kapp, 1999, quoted in Sennett et al., 2003:109). The Student Attrition Study conducted by Letseka et al. (2010) revealed that ‘institutional culture’¹³ continue to impact students’ learning experiences, at some institutions more so than others.

From the above it is clear that there is a range of variables that influence students’ academic success. They range from the socio-economic, including quality of schooling, financial factors and family and community of origin, to institutional factors such as institutional culture and traditional methods of teaching when the student base has become more diversified, to factors pertaining to individual motivation and commitment. The following section deals with international studies aimed at identifying factors influencing attrition.

¹³ Farmer (1990: 10) defines culture as the “sum of the assumptions, beliefs and values that its members share”.

3.4 International studies on attrition

Although the literature revealed several South African studies focussing on student retention and attrition, the largest studies (and some of the most prominent) appear to be international studies. The lessons for South Africa in addressing student attrition are valuable and are therefore included.

3.4.1 Spady's sociological model

Spady was one of the pioneers in research on student retention and his work informs models developed later. For Spady (1970),

... student drop-out is best explained by a process involving an interaction between the individual student and the university environment. In this interaction, the student's attributes such as attitudes, skills and interests are exposed to influences, expectations and demands of the university. The result of this interaction will determine whether the student will be assimilated in the academic and social system of the university and subsequently whether the student will be retained in the university. Linked to this process are variables that promote the academic and social integration of students in higher education. These variables are family background, academic potential, normative congruence, grade performance, intellectual development and peer support (cited in Jama et al. 2008:996).

3.4.2 The student integration model – Tinto

Tinto's model attempts to "formulate a theoretical model that explains the processes of interaction between individual and the institution that lead differing individuals to drop out from institutions of higher learning" (Tinto, 1975:90). Importantly, the model claims to explain drop-out not from higher education as a whole but rather from a specific higher education institution. Tinto's model is a construction of a number of building blocks and variables:

- The model has "its roots in Durkheim's theory of suicide" and also "takes from the field of economics of education, notions concerning the cost-benefit analysis

of individual decisions regarding investment in alternative educational activities” (Tinto, 1975:91). Durkheim’s model of suicide postulates that individuals are more likely to commit suicide when sufficient moral as well as collective integration does not exist. In terms of Tinto’s model, which compares the higher education institution to a social system, lack of integration (both socially and academically) leads to low commitment. Low commitment in turn leads to the decision to drop out.

- “Individual characteristics and dispositions relevant to educational persistence” – this includes background characteristics such as social status, high school experiences, community of residence. [I]ndividual attributes such as sex, ability, race and ethnicity as well as expectational and motivational attributes of individuals’ educational expectations include both the level of expectation (duration of planned study) and the intensity to which the expectation is held” (Tinto, 1975:94).

In summary, the model argues that the process of drop out from college can be viewed as a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems ... continually modify his goal and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of drop out (Tinto, 1975:94).

3.4.3 The student attrition model – Bean

Bean (1980) has done extensive research into student retention, with various sample groups and several theories being developed over time. The earliest of the research, based on turnover in work organisations, was conducted in 1980. The model, called the causal model, contains four categories of variables, the independent variable being dropping out and intervening variables being satisfaction and institutional commitment, organisational determinants and the background variables. Most importantly, the “model indicates that the background characteristics of students must be taken into account in order to understand their interactions within the environment of the IHE”¹⁴ (Bean, 1980:157–158).

In 1985, Bean and Metzler developed the model of student attrition. In the model, external factors (which were already a focus in the 1980 work) that contribute to student attrition/retention are divided into “academic, social-psychological, and environmental elements” (Grayson & Grayson, 2003:15).

One fairly constant finding is that students leave school because they do not fit in. They may not fit in socially or academically or religiously or economically or for some other reasons.... “Fitting in depends on the student on one hand and the institution on the other – either can change to enhance the fit.... The research also indicates that different types of students (such as older/ white/ Hispanic, full-time/part-time) depart from institutions for different reasons ... in particular cases almost anything can increase attrition or retention ... ” (Bean, 1990; cited in Hossler et al., 1990:149).

¹⁴ IHE = Institutions of higher education

3.4.4 The 'Combination theory'

In 1992, Cabrera et al. used a longitudinal study to examine the degree of convergence between the student attrition and student integration models. The initial sample size consisted of 2 453 students that fitted the criteria of both models. The items included in the questionnaire were items that previous research had confirmed as validating the two individual theories.

From the attrition model, the following items were included: loyalty, fit, practical value, family approval, institutional quality, courses, opportunity to transfer and encouragement of friend. From the integration model, frequency of contacts with and interaction with faculty, faculty and staff concern for student development, academic and intellectual development, and institutional and goal commitment were included.

The findings of the research yielded the following:

- “both theories ... are correct in presuming that college persistence is the product of a complex set of interactions among personal and institutional factors as well as in presuming that Intent to Persist is the outcome of the successful match between the student and the institution.”
- Bean’s proposition that the role that factors external to the institution play on the college persistence process is by far more complex and comprehensive than the one portrayed by the Student Integration Model.
- With the issue of convergence, the results indicated that the two theories were not mutually exclusive; rather, they were complementary to one another as far as the presumed role of the organisational culture and students’ commitment to the institution was concerned” (Cabrera et al., 1992:158).

In 1993, Cabrera et al. did further research based on the findings of the 1992 study. As the 1992 research confirmed the degree of overlap between Tinto’s and Bean’s models, the 1993 study focused on developing a model based on the convergence of Tinto’s and Bean’s studies.

The conclusions were as follows:

[t]he results of this study indicate that better understanding of the persistence process can be derived in combining the two major theories of college persistence.... Results indicated that when these two theories were merged into one integrated model, a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay among individual, environmental, and institutional factors was achieved (Cabrera et al., 1993:135).

The above discussion served to place the South African theories into the international discussion regarding student attrition. The problem of student attrition in itself, though, is not a uniquely South African phenomenon. Internationally, there has been a move to provide access to more students. The following section attempts to place the local aim of increasing access to higher education within the context of a broader movement of increasing accessibility for those previously denied.

3.5 International developments

Within South Africa, making higher education accessible for the majority of the population is one of the country's current priorities. The need to increase access is, however, not unique to this country. The literature reveals that for many countries of the world, higher education was initially provided exclusively to an elite minority and that at some point in their various histories the need for change dawned.

“An academic revolution has taken place in higher education in the past half century marked by transformations unprecedented in scope and diversity” (Altbach, Resiberg & Rumbley, 2009:iii).

Trends in global higher education: Tracking an academic revolution, authored by Altbach with several contributors and prepared for the 2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, provides a succinct summary of universal developments. Most of the information for this section is taken from this report.

3.5. 1 *'Massification'*

Important social change has also taken place in the world. The era of colonialism has come to an end, and in the newly independent nations of Africa and Asia populations were empowered to demand political and social development. These new expectations involved access to education at all levels including higher education, which has been limited to a tiny population of the age cohort (Altbach et al., 2009:6).

Globally, the percentage of the age cohort in tertiary education has grown from 19% in 2000 to 26% in 2007, with the most dramatic gains in upper middle and upper income countries. There are some 150.6 million tertiary students globally, roughly a 53% increase over 2000. In low-income countries tertiary-level participation has improved only marginally, from 5% in 2000 to 7% in 2007. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest participation rate in the world (5%). In Latin America, enrolment is still less than that of high-income countries (Altbach et al., 2009:iv).

In terms of drop-out rates, "the attrition rate in Australia in 2002 was 19% for domestic students. In the United States, approximately 58% of first-time students seeking bachelor's degree or its equivalent and attending a four-year institution full-time in 2001/01 completed the degree or its equivalent at the institution within six years" (National Centre for Education Statistics, quoted in Letseka, Crosser, Breier & Visser, 2010:3).

3.5.2 *Addressing inequality*

Access to higher education is made difficult for many for various reasons. For some the limitations are based on gender, for some it is distance from the institutions of higher education and for some it is an aim not promoted or encouraged by their communities. Yet education is an important capacitor of individuals and an aspiration of increasing numbers. Economics and social pressure have resulted in

many nations ensuring that more of their citizens have access to higher education. Providing higher education to all sectors of a nation's population means confronting social inequalities deeply rooted in history, culture and economic structure that influence an individual's ability to compete. Geographically, unequal distribution of wealth and resources all contribute to the advantage of certain population groups. Participation tends to be below national average for populations living in remote or rural areas and for indigenous groups (Altbach et al., 2009:iiix).

Below are some key developments initiated in various countries to address inequality and representing some possible lessons for South Africa.

- Mexico's Ministry of Education has invested in the development of additional educational services in disadvantaged areas with some success: 90% of students enrolled are the first in their family to pursue higher education; 40% live in economically depressed areas.
- Ghana, Kenya, Uganda and the Republic of Tanzania have lowered admission cut-offs for women to increase female enrolment.
- The Indian Government obliges universities to reserve a set of space for 'socially and backward classes'.
- In Brazil the legislature has mandated universities to reserve space for disabled and Afro-American students.
- In the United States of America, where participation rates for minority students continue to lag behind, community colleges have made tertiary education more accessible.
- Income-contingent loan schemes (whereby repayment plans are tied to post-graduation earnings) have gained popularity in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa (Altbach et al., 2009: VIII).

From the above, inequality within higher education, both within countries and among countries, appears to mirror the inequalities that are experienced in South Africa. The one major difference is that for most countries, it is minority groups that are the most disadvantaged and these are also the poorest classes.

Within South Africa the opposite holds true; the poorer class is the majority of the population. The extent of the challenge thus appears much bigger.

In other research dealing with access (and participation of non-traditional students) that experiences similar barriers as those experienced by disadvantaged students, the following were found: "Situational barriers' arise because of the individual's life situation, and include issues such as learner's work commitments, domestic responsibilities, as well as finance and transport". Institutional barriers include physical location, entry requirements..." (Cross, 1981. cited in Spreen & Vally, 2006: 109).

The challenge remains not only to increase access to higher education but also to provide a higher education system that is sensitive to and supportive of the needs of the increasingly divergent student base. This should include addressing the various factors that disadvantaged students from lower socio-economic backgrounds encounter once they gain entry to higher education.

3.6 Conclusion

The information provided in this thesis is evidence of the complexity involved in the massification of higher education provision in South Africa and internationally. What further compounds the issue is that most students at whom expansion of access is aimed are from low socio-economic backgrounds. Their backgrounds both in terms of the 'quality' of the education they have received and their challenging social and economic conditions greatly influence their adjustment to and academic performance in higher education. All theoretical models on attrition and retention confirms that a range of variables influence student performance. Support for students can therefore not simply focus on the financial; the challenges are systemic, including academic workload, the inefficient school system, changing student profiles, and so forth.

It is acknowledged that within higher education, numerous stressors are at play; it is a challenging environment for all. Whatever the stressors are, it is important to keep in mind that

[e]ducation is at the heart of the national question. Employment for those who wish to work and a skilled workforce to sustain growth in the economy are both dependent on an effective education system. In South Africa this means that the system must be transformative – it should help learners from poorer socio-economic backgrounds to overcome disadvantage (Soudien, 2005:56).

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

“In the broadest possible sense, the aim of the social sciences is to understand the world as it is made by human beings, the structures and institutions they produce, and the actions they take within those structures” (Hancké, 2009:12).

Research in the social sciences has been described as falling into two main categories: one to “test theories” and the other “theory building” (Layder, 1995:2). Research is also considered valuable for its ability to “generate concepts”, the usefulness of which is that “it increases understanding of persons in their everyday lives – their routines, habits, problems, and issues – and how they handle or resolve these. Second, concepts provide a language that can be used for discussion and debate leading to the development of shared understandings and meanings” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008:ix). Research is furthermore useful for an “understanding rather than prediction of human behaviour” (Babbie & Mouton, 2003:72).

4.2 Purpose and aims of the research

The purpose of this research project should be clarified from the outset. The aim of this research was exploration; it aimed to explore what contributed to the academic success of a selected group of disadvantaged black students studying at UWC, according to these students themselves. The researcher was interested in their stories.

The aim of the research has been mentioned in the preceding section. The overarching research question that informed this research was, Why do some poor students succeed academically while others do not, given their similar social and economic backgrounds?

Specific areas in support of the main research aim that were explored were the following:

- What services the students used most and found most beneficial.
- Gaining insight from students as to what services are needed within higher education that can assist students in staying.
- Finding out what the challenges were that students experienced during their years at university.
- What factors/persons enabled/supported them during their student years.
- What was lacking in the services provided to students at their university, if any.
- What suggestions students had in designing a model for student support within higher education.
- What their Grade 12 grades were .

4.3 Research design

Research design is described as follows: "... to determine what you're going to observe and analyse: why and how" (Babbie & Mouton, 2003:72). In determining the research design, the steps provided by Babbie and Mouton were used mainly in selecting an appropriate design. It was also understood that "a research design is a plan or blueprint of how you intend conducting your research" and is influenced by "what kind of study is being planned and kind of results are aimed at" (Babbie & Mouton, 2003:72).

As suggested by Babbie & Mouton, (2003:72) the steps followed in choosing a design were the following (one flowing from the other):

Step 1: Distinguish between an empirical and a non-empirical design.

Step 2: Determine what data will be collected, in other words distinguish between primary and secondary sources of empirical data (each requiring a different method).

Step 3: Distinguish between types of data sources (notes, documents and textual data).

As the aim of the research was to explore what factors influenced students' academic success, the design selected can be classified as empirical research (an attempt to answer exploratory questions), with the understanding that "Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting" (Merriam, 2001:5).

The following characteristics of qualitative research provided by Fortune and Reid¹⁵ further served as support and motivation for the selection of a qualitative approach:

- The researcher attempts to gain a first-hand, holistic understanding of phenomena of interest by means of a flexible strategy of problem formulation and data collection.
- Methods such as unstructured interviewing are used to acquire an in-depth knowledge of how the persons involved construct their social world.
- Qualitative methodology rests on the assumption that valid understanding can be gained through accumulated knowledge acquired at first hand by a single researcher. As the aim of this research was to understand what enabled the selected students to persist, this approach was most appropriate.

4.4 Methodology

The above persons were selected for various reasons. Justification for their selection was based on the convenience and easy access to the students selected, who had already agreed when entering the REAP programme to be involved in research projects if needed. Another contributing factor was the proximity of both the university and the students' residence to the researcher.

To clarify, REAP was approached earlier in the year and approval and support for the research were obtained in principle by the REAP Director and Board, although students could not be approached until ethics approval was obtained. All students

¹⁵ In De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont,(2002:74)

and staff of REAP agree contractually when joining the organisation to participate in research that might have benefits for the higher education sector.

The respondents selected to participate in this research were the following:

- Six senior (fourth-year) students. This group was selected as the possibility of their not completing their degree was minimal; they had less than a few months to go towards completion. One third-year student had to be included as one of the six selected students could not be contacted.
- The REAP staff member responsible for providing support to the selected group. This staff member was selected as she has a relationship with all the selected students.
- The Director of the Centre for Student Support Services at UWC. This person was selected to gain information as to what services the students had access to.
- The senior staff member of REAP who could provide more information as to the nature of support students had needed.

4.4.1 Research methods

In selecting a methodology, the following were taken into account: the stated aims of the research and the position of the researcher that no theory exists as to why certain students succeed while others with the same social and academic profile drop out; most of the literature deals with why students drop out. The approach that seemed most congruent to the above was what is referred to as 'Grounded theory'.

Grounded theory is described as

methods that consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves. Thus data form the basis of our theory and our analysis of these data generates the concepts we construct (Charmaz, 2006:2).

Grounded theory is also described as "a style of doing qualitative analysis that includes a number of distinct features, such as theoretical sampling, and certain

methodological guidelines, such as making constant comparisons and the use of a coding paradigm” (Strauss, 1987:5).

It is further described as

first and foremost a mode of *analysis* of largely qualitative research data. That is, it does not claim to offer a fully elaborated methodology from soup to nuts – from project design to data collection to final write-up. Many elements of a full-blown methodology are offered, but data analysis is the focus of most of the texts (Outhwaite & Turner, 2007:424).

4.4.2 *Direct methods: Interviewing*

In-depth semi-structured interviews were selected as methodological tool as

intensive interviewing fit grounded theory methods particularly well. Both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended.... Qualitative interviewing provides an open-ended, in-depth exploration of an aspect of life about which the interviewee has substantial experience, often combined with considerable insight (Charmaz, 2006:29).

The value of using interviews is further described by Siedman (1998:2) as follows:

Recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout history that humans have made sense of their experience.... The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to ‘evaluate’. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of their lives.

During the interview process, the focus of the research was always uppermost in the researcher’s mind and used to guide the discussion; this is referred to as ‘sensitising concepts’. Sensitising concepts are described by Blumer (1969) as “initial ideas to

pursue and sensitize you to ask particular kinds of questions about your topic” (cited in Charmaz, 2006:16).

4.4.3 Analysis of data

Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe qualitative analysis as “a process of examining and interpreting data in order in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge”, and they also state, “How a person does qualitative analysis is not something that can dictated. Doing qualitative research is something that a researcher has to feel him- or herself through” (x-1). A further definition is provided by Strauss (1987: 3), who states that grounded theory is “a particular style of qualitative analysis”.

Corbin and Strauss (2008:51-53) discuss the various levels of analysis that Grounded theory can reach with the understanding that various researchers have different aims, motivations and resources, the ultimate (for the writers) being in-depth analysis. The writers specifically state that “some research projects do not demand a detailed analysis.... In such projects, a summary of major themes may be sufficient”. The writers further state that “[t]here are different aims of qualitative research. The aim can vary from description, to conceptual ordering, to theorising”. Conceptual ordering is described as “the organisation of data into discrete categories”. For this research, the level of analysis focused on the emergence of major themes (conceptual ordering). The project was not aimed at generating a new theory.

Fundamental to the use of Grounded theory is the use of coding as a means to analyse the data collected. According to Strauss, one of the founders of the method, coding entails the following:

- Follows upon and leads to generative questions.
- Fractures the data, thus freeing the researcher from description and forcing interpretation to higher levels of abstraction.
- Is the pivotal operation from moving toward the discovery of a core category or categories.
- Moves toward ultimate integration of the entire analysis.

- Yields the desired conceptual density (Strauss, 1987:55).

Coding is also described as “the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data.... Grounded theory coding consists of at least two main phases:

- 1) an initial phase involving naming each word, line, or segment of data followed by
- 2) a focussed, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate and organise large amounts of data” (Charmaz, 2006:46).

Also importantly, “grounded theorists evaluate the fit between their initial research interests and their emerging data. We do not force preconceived ideas and theories directly upon our data. Rather, we follow leads that we *define* in the data” (Charmaz, 2006:17).

4.4.4 Memo writing

An important activity while engaging in grounded theory research is one referred to as memo writing in the literature. This activity, however, does not fit in linearly in the process; it happens almost in parallel with the other activities and starts immediately after the first interview and is therefore discussed at this stage. Glaser (1998) describes memo writing as “the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers. When you write memos, you stop and analyze your ideas about your codes in any and every-way that occurs to you during the moment” (cited in Charmaz, 2006:72). Writing memos “also relies on treating some codes as conceptual categories to analyze” (Charmaz: 2006:91).

Categories are described by Glaser and Strauss (1967:37) as “a conceptual element in a theory” (cited in Charmaz, 2006.91). Charmaz further describes the methods of writing memos as simply being to “do what works for you” and says that they can be “short and stilted – especially as you enter new analytical terrain”. The activity of

memo writing was used during the period of conducting the interviews and contributed to the emergence of the categories that were selected.

4.5 Justification for methodology

The researcher had no preconceived idea why certain students succeeded when many of their peers failed. There is a belief that a number of variables might be at play; what exactly they are, however, is unknown. Given that the only persons who could provide further insight were the students themselves, 'rich' data were being sought, hence the selection of in-depth interviews. The grounded theory approach allows for 'sense' to be made from data collected during the interview process; this was the most appropriate method of analysis and the aim of the research.

Given the time frames, financial constraints and academic requirements, a small group of students and their support structures were selected to be interviewed. The reasons were discussed earlier in the chapter.

4.6 Validity and reliability

The design selected for this specific research was qualitative. Discussing reliability necessitates discussing the difference between the natural and social sciences. In the natural sciences, it can be assumed that the same 'experiment' would yield the same results given the same conditions. This is not the case in qualitative research in which "reliability is a concern every time a single observer is the source of data" (Babbie & Mouton, 2003:120) and results are dependent on the responses of the person/s being interviewed and the interpretation of the interviewee.

The transcribed interviews and memos written during the research process are proof of the validity and reliability of the authenticity of the interpretation of the data.

4.7 Ethical considerations

Flew describes ethics as “a set of standards by which a particular group or community decides to regulate its behaviour ...” (cited in May, 1993:41). May also describes ethical decisions as “those decisions that researchers make, not in their own interests or the interest of the project, but also taking into account the interests of the participants” (May, 1993:45).

The ethical considerations were the possibility that the information provided in the analysis stage could make it possible for students to be identified. This problem was solved by withholding the names of the schools that the students were linked to. During the interviewing phase, the recorder was switched off when students chose to share personal information that they did not want to be included in the analysis. The researcher is a staff member of a donor organisation that supports REAP; it was requested of REAP that this relationship be kept confidential in case students felt that funding was in any way linked to their participation. The researcher has no influence in funding decisions in respect to REAP, and this was clarified.

4.8 Limitations

Given the size of the sample, it is understood that generalising the findings to a broader population is not possible. The one critique aimed at Grounded theory researchers of using “too small a sample” (Outhwaite & Turner, 2007:427) is acknowledged. The research, however, was not conducted with the purpose to generalise.

4.9 Conclusion

Without gaining a greater understanding of why some students succeed and others drop out (given similar profiles), the aims of attaining equity within higher education in terms of throughputs rates will be severely compromised. The researcher is well aware of the limitations of the research that was undertaken; that there was no control group is one of them. However, obtaining input from students remains of great value.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

As was mentioned in the preceding chapter, the research methodology selected was the Grounded theory approach. As was also mentioned in the preceding chapter, in this research the level of analysis focused on the emergence of major themes (conceptual ordering). The project was not aimed at generating a new theory. Although extensive literature on Grounded theory was consulted during the selection of a suitable research design and methodology (these sources are detailed in the preceding chapter). Charmaz provides the most concise and detailed step-by-step information on 'doing grounded theory' and this was used as the main instruction 'manual' by this novice researcher.

Fieldwork consisted of one-on-one interviews with all interviewees. With some students follow-up was needed, and this was done telephonically. The duration of the interviews varied from between one to one and a half hours. The particular aims of this research, although already provided in earlier chapters, are reiterated in the table below as these provided some of the sensitizing concepts used to frame the interviews with students.

Table 5.1: Initial categories used to organise data

<p>Purpose of the study: A study of the challenges and achievements of a group of historically disadvantaged senior students studying at UWC.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Who and what supports them?▪ What is the nature of the support?▪ Have they also been close to dropping out? Why?▪ What have been the difficulties they needed to deal with?▪ Is it self-determination that causes them to persevere?▪ How have they adapted to academic life?
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5.2 Analysis

To best relate the student's whole story while fulfilling the requirements of using Grounded theory was the challenge during the analysis of the data. To do justice to the students and keep their stories as complete as possible I have opted to provide quotes from each student in the initial and second stages of coding. Grammatical errors have not been corrected to keep the student's story as authentic as possible. Certain joining words have been added and sentences have been rearranged to make for easier reading and to cluster sensitising concepts. Specific details regarding community of origin and school attended have been withheld to protect the student's identity.

5.2.1 Coding

Using Grounded theory involves various analytical steps, the first of which is termed 'coding'. Coding is described as "categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data" (Charmaz, 2006: 42). Also, Grounded theory consists of at least two main phases: 1) an initial phase involving naming each word, line or segment of data, followed by 2) a focussed, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent codes to sort, synthesise, integrate and organise large amounts of data (Charmaz, 2006:42). The examples of coded texts provided by Charmaz (44, 52 & 72) were used to familiarise the researcher with the practice. The problem of 'forcing preconceptions on the data we code' was taken into account.

Initial codes identified related to the aims of the research

Given the sampling method selected, it was expected that all students would be from low socio-economic backgrounds. The different degrees of poverty were, however, interesting and are provided as background. All students are in their early twenties. All students, except student 5, are from the Northern Cape. Student 5 is from a rural village in Limpopo. Only one student's parents have completed matric and none of the parents are professionals.

Code 1: Socioeconomic background/community of origin

Student 1: “Most of the people (in the community) do seasonal work at the canning factory. At school they had the food scheme where you get milkshake, bread and soup in the winters.”

Student 2: “My father is a painter, and my mother a housewife. In the community work is hard labour.”

Student 3: “My mom is a domestic worker and my dad a safety security guard worker. A lot of people depend on the social grants for their children.”

Student 4: “My mom is a housewife. All the ladies are housewives. There is no professional people staying there; my dad was a general worker.”

Student 5: “I from a village in Limpopo. My family consists of six including both my parents. I have a sister that is unemployed, both my parents is unemployed.”

Student 6: “We stayed in a shack. My aunt her boyfriend and her two kids and me stayed in the shack.”

Code 2: Top achievers

This category seems to be related to the students being in the sample selected, in other words REAP students. The teachers at most of the schools seem to provide the application forms to the students that are performing well academically. Given the context in which this research was being performed, that is drop-out rates in higher education, this category was included as it might be a contributing factor to this group’s having persisted.

Student 1: “I was the top student at the school.”

Student 2: “Every year I was in the top two; when I was in matric I stayed on top.”

Student 3: "At school we had a top five; some years I was in and for two years I was not."

Student 4: "In matric I was head girl."

Student 5: "I was the best Grade 12 learner."

Student 6: "I was one of the brightest in school."

Code 3: Family relationships

All students selected, except for numbers 5 and 6, came from very close and caring homes. During periods of difficulties, the students' families were their 'fall-back'. This support system seemed to be a source of strength and comfort. Students 5 and 6 did not grow up in a warm and caring environment; they were used to being self-supporting.

Student 1: "I started questioning myself in that, and my mother said that it happens to everybody and that you do not need to be top all the time: just do the best that you can do then you will get through."

Student 2: "My mother and father supports and encourages me."

Student 3: "My dad, he is the one that does all the walking around for me. He is very pressing because I can become very slack. I constantly need someone to push me. My father would fill in the forms and post it. My family was very supportive; they encouraged me."

Student 4: "I always got what I needed not what I wanted. The love that we had at home kept us together, I was also always alone. I never socialised with other kids; I did things with my family all the time."

Student 5: "My dad is a drunkard and does not care what is happening to our schooling. He would fight with my mother because she would tell him it is not right

the kids need to go to school the next day. With my mother she was interested. After Std 3 she got sick. From Std 4 to Grade 12, I did not spend much time with my mother; she did not stay at home, my father was at home. We took care of ourselves. My father would just buy food. During that time I just went to school and was surviving.”

Student 6: “I grew up with my aunt after my mother passed away in 1998; I never knew my father so my aunt took me in. My aunt and I was not close. I was under foster care and received a grant from 1999 till when I finished my matric in 2007. I was ten when I started getting grant.”

Code 4: Expectation by others that students would attend university

All the students were encouraged by either family or teachers to pursue higher education, due to their intelligence. Student 6 was the only student who did not receive the same level of support; although one specific teacher was very supportive while she was at school, for student 6 the greatest expectation to pursue further studies came from herself and her close friends.

Student 1: “I really never thought about it (university). If you are a top student at a public school, teachers usually want you go further.”

Student 2: “On school everybody expected me to go to university. I had the same teacher for business economics, and accounting. They all expected me to go further.”

Student 3: “Because I was a hard worker I was expected to go and study.”

Student 4: “All the teachers spoke to my mom to send me to study.”

Student 5: “After Grade 10, my Grade 11 teacher introduced me to university. She said ‘that this is how things work, you and need to work hard’; she gave me special treatment because she saw that I worked hard, she told me that I must not let my

background distract me from my future. Mrs M she was too generous. She would come with information about university and said if we want to apply we can apply.”

Student 6: “In Grade 12; I had two friends we were very close – we study together – we had dreams of going to varsity.”

Code 5: Various forms of support provided by teachers

All the students had either a group of or one teacher that supported them. The degree of support varied and seemed to be linked to the student’s domestic situation. For all students their experiences with their teachers were largely positive and reinforced the idea that they were ‘special’. Even student 1, despite the comment below, was encouraged to pursue further studies.

Student 1: “Teachers was of a good quality, not great quality. They were committed.”

Student 2: “The principle did [filled in application forms for universities]. He encouraged me to fill it in. He gave me one for Stellenbosch, UWC and Pentech.”

Student 3: “The teacher at school gets the REAP bursaries. She is the teacher that selects the students.”

Student 4: “All the teachers spoke to my mom to send me to study. Then in the beginning of January I was phoned by REAP and I did not know about bursaries. They phoned me to say that I got a bursary. I applied at school – they came and handed out forms. Also at school they give you bursaries.”

Student 5: “When I was writing my matric I had a dream that I might make it to varsity and there was the teacher that kept telling me. She was the one that pushed me.”

Student 6: “My ‘mom’ aunt [relative with whom student had a close bond] passed away when I was in grade 10 – and then I wanted to drop out. But then I had teachers, since I was one of the brightest in school; so most of the teachers would come and all they liked me – so I wanted to drop. But then my teacher was always there for me ‘till I did matric. She promised to give me lunch and fare every day – one specific teacher who I use to call ma’m at school – she was always there for me until I did Grade 12. So I never dropped out.”

Code 6: Support received in the transition from home to university

For the researcher that was one of the most interesting categories to emerge. For many students their experiences highlighted the support from social networks; for some it was relevant strangers that were committed to supporting them in various ways. More importantly, the support was provided at a critical period during the initial month, when assistance was needed.

Student 1: “During the first few months, when I started, I stayed with my aunt in Mitchell’s Plain; my uncle would drop off and fetch my friend and myself in the evening.”

Student 2: This is the only student who moved directly into a student’s residence.

Student 3: “I stayed with a family friend for a month as I did not get a place in the res. It was people that I knew.”

Student 4: “December my dad’s nephew came to my grandmother’s house. We were visiting and met him. I told them that I want to study and they also encouraged me and said when I come to Cape Town; I am welcome to visit and they gave me their numbers. So when I came to Cape Town that was the only numbers that I had. So I phoned him and told him I don’t have a place to; he said that I could stay there. My aunt said it is fine I can stay with them for a year, they will drive me in and out or I can take a taxi so it was not necessary for me to get a room (at residence). Every

morning he took me in until I was settled – but I got a room.”

Student 5: “My teacher’s husband was thinking of who he could call to hook us up with at a university. Then he called someone that he taught and asked where he was studying and the guy said UWC. He said – I have got this two that want space – can you find out if they have something for them. So that guy said I know nothing about this science thing but I have a brother whose girlfriend is doing physics. So that girl went there and asked if they have anything for students who want to do anything related to science. We gave our details to that guy and he applied and did everything for us. The teacher’s husband bought me a bus ticket and gave me R700 to buy food and my stepbrother gave me R200. In residence we were four in a room squatting (the room of the person the teacher called) until our room was sorted. We stayed from Feb to April.”

Student 6: “I decided I am going to Cape Town to come fetch this letter [acceptance letter from UWC to apply for a bursary in the student’s home town]. I did not know anyone in Cape Town, I don’t know where is Cape Town; I don’t know where is UWC – the plan was to sleep at the police station and take the train back on Monday. When the train passed Worcester I called another girl that was doing intern at my school – teaching intern; we were close. I asked her if she does not know anyone in Cape Town – she called another girl she knows that stays in Mfuleni – she told her to tell me to take a taxi to Mfuleni taxi rank and she will meet me there. So when I got to Mfuleni – they welcomed me very well and I stayed there – slept there. When starting university: Now I didn’t have res. So I asked my other teacher and she found me a place in Brackenfell – somebody she knows stays there. I’ll stay there for the month and need to pay them month end.”

Code 7: Hardships endured

All students had had previous experience of hardship, either at university or while at home. Enduring hardships was something they were familiar with.

Student 1: "If there is no money we change the bottles for money for bread."

Student 2: This is the student who had the 'easiest' time financially but admitted, "I do not want the kind of life for myself forever" (referring to living conditions while growing up).

Student 3: "It was quite difficult in my matric year; we moved five times during the exams because of the joblessness; we could not pay rent and we had to move. We even stayed in someone's garage. I would not been able to go through all this if I had not gone through all the moving and nights not eating."

Student 4: "There has been so many and I do not know. There was too many things in my life that was difficult; I honestly can't say what was the most difficult."

Student 5: "So I experience a lot of challenges in my life but without me realising that that was a challenge. The way I pass through challenges to me it is just a normal way of living; I think everybody is experiencing the same thing and it's something we must deal with as an individual. It (challenges) is part of my daily life; it's not new. I knew when I came to varsity I will experience such things; I knew that as a human being you can spend weeks or months without money because of where I come from. I knew I can go to school without money, I can go to school without anything in my stomach; I can go sleep with a hungry stomach."

Student 6: "Our school was more than an hour away to walk – we use to walk home – I never used a taxi – so I walked every day; in the morning and after school. Now this person is now hungry. I can stand hunger – now I must buy food for this person."

Code 8: Adaption from small town to city

This code entailed many elements. It included students' insecurity, their limited contact with and knowledge of other racial groups and, for some, the adjustment to a new lifestyle that made the community of origin less attractive a place to return to. It is included as 'cultural fit' and is often cited in attrition literature as reason why students drop out. It must be noted that four of the students are coloured and for them the issue was mainly being from a small town; they did not have the racial issue to deal with.

Student 1: "No (response to question asking student whether she will go back home after completing her studies), it is a small community, there is no work really, I got used to Cape Town life. I have outgrown (name of town). I will go and visit anytime but for working and staying there – no."

Student 2: "Yes, in the first year I was too scared to ask. And you think that everybody knows what is happening and you are the only one that does not know."

Student 3: "Because you from the Northern Cape and you with all this Capetonians and you feel left out, I think it was also a self-esteem thing; they gonna think I am stupid if I ask, especially since people tend to think that people from up country are stupid; they think that because you did not go to a private school your level of education is not on the same level; which in some cases it's true."

Student 4: "I really don't want to work at home. They will say 'you know that (student's name); sy hou haar so en so – hier groot geword kyk hoe lyk sy nou' (translation: she acts superior – she grew up here and look at her now). That is small hospitals and that people have been working there for years and they still have the ranking. And now I come and have more experience; they won't have respect and call me sister; and for me to tell them what they must do!"

Student 5: "Where I come from you only see white people after a long time I would sometimes see them in town. I never used to see coloured people and was never

introduced to Zulu people and I could never get used to them. It was difficult for me to cope with. Every morning I would think I am going to class this morning and I am going to meet these people.”

Student 6: “Round about nine they came to fetch us and we took the affidavit to the Director of res admin – now we must meet him – so fresh from high school – I must meet a white man – I have never spoken to a white man. I’ve seen them but never spoken to them.”

The previous section dealt with what can broadly be described as the social aspects of the students’ experiences. The next section and codes deal with experiences directly related to learning. These questions were addressed during the interviews as they are often cited in literature on attrition as reasons why students drop out.

Academic experiences

Code 9: Dealing with English as language of instruction

None of the students are English first language speakers, although all have studied English as a second language. Language is also described as one of the contributors to student attrition and therefore this sensitising concept was included for analysis.

Student 1: “Before my father passed away we had this English thing going, we would irritate my mom and speak English. At school I was required to speak English for the English classes. The adjustment was not that big.”

Student 2: “It was difficult reading the English textbook and then the test which I did not understand anything and that will make you give the wrong answer. I started to read more English, I got myself a dictionary and work on the computer and search on English and then I started to read the textbook. I understood some of the words but some words were too hard. It was during the first year, in the second year I adjusted. Most of the lecturers from second year were Afrikaans. So you are more comfortable for consultation sometimes they talk English and then they switch and talk Afrikaans so that was fine. It helped a lot to get home because you just need some strength to

sit in a lecture for an hour from someone that speaks foreign.”

Student 3: “Even our English was sometimes in Afrikaans. The teacher would sometimes explain the work to us even though it was in Afrikaans. I always loved English and read a lot. Some of the words I did not understand and would go back and look up the word and that would make one fall back.”

Student 4: “Writing and reading (English) was not a problem. Only speaking English was a problem. My communication developed and I got the confidence to speak in first year; one of the courses has communication in it – that developed my communication.”

Student 5: “I am from a village high school and taught by our mother tongue and the classes (at university) is in English; and not English from a black person – you are taught English by a white person. When you do physics you get it from a white person. Like when you are at school they will explain it in your mother tongue. Sometimes if they (lecturers) talk you don’t understand what they are taking about and I would think, okay maybe they mean that. And you could not go and ask them if you don’t understand because you still have this language thing – that village thing.”

Student 6: This student made conflicting statements about her competency in English. Statement 1: “English was not a problem; I am not shy so I am not scared to talk and ask; even if it is broken. The problem is Xhosa.” Statement 2: “They are English – most people that talk are the people from private school or they are coloured because they speak English. People like us are scared and not confident to say anything.”

Code 10: Familiarity with technology/computers

When entering university, students are expected to deliver typed assignments and do electronic research from their first year. Although many of the students admitted that they were introduced to computers during their orientation period, this was considered not as in-depth but as ‘helpful’.

Student 1: “At primary school they had computers. When I was in Grade 6 something happened to the computers, it was out. In high school there was no computers, if we needed to do an assignment we had to go to the shop, they had computers there. There was an assistant who would open a word document and all you had to do was type; they would save it and print it. I never really worked on computers until I came here.”

Student 2: “No (response to question about computer literacy). I had two modules in computer in my first year; they teach you Excel; PowerPoint and all that. At school only once a week I get to work on the computers; maybe for half an hour.”

Student 3: “Nothing at all. In high school we had no computer access. The residence has a computer lab; it’s about ten computers for 300 students. In first year we had a module called computer literacy – it helped a bit. Mainly I asked others and taught myself.”

Student 4: “At school there was computers but we never got a subject. There was ABET classes. I only went a few times because the person that gave it seemed like he also did not know himself. If you do not know something how can you teach someone? So I dropped out. I taught myself, for assignments it was difficult to do because I had to sit for hours and type a thing.”

Student 5: “I am computer literate and it was not difficult for me.”

Student 6: “First year I struggled a lot with computer literacy. Since forever you have never been exposed to one and now you must do it as a module – did not know how to use it and the lecturers were so fast; you need to know it; I was already preparing to fail.”

Code 11: Motivation to succeed

Student 1: “Just the fact that I got this far means a lot to myself and my family. So that is why I would not drop out.”

Student 2: “My circumstances; I do not want to be poor all my life and I do not want my children to have the same life I had.”

Student 3: “The motivation and support I got from home and because I wanted to (succeed). I want to study because I want to give my sister and my brother better.”

Student 4: “I still feel it is not for me (nursing). I can do better things with my life. In matric I wanted to do medicine but there was no money for me to study, that is why I worked hard so that I could get a bursary – my option was to do medicine. So because of what happened (student’s father died), I did not apply.”

Student’s plan for next year: “I want to apply to WITS. They are offering a bridging course from nursing to medicine. So they place you in the beginning of your third year. So you still have your third, fourth, fifth and sixth year – four year for that course; but I don’t mind as that is what I wanted to do.”

Student 5: “Looking back where I come from, my background, my family status, for me it is not good for me to see my family suffering – it makes we work hard and looking back where I come from I would like my children not to experience the difficulties that I experienced.”

Student 6: “I like people that succeed. At school there was a young intern and she motivated me. She was so young and doing well for herself.”

Code 12: Personality traits

Student 1: "I got a perception that if I start something I have to complete it, I try not do it by half measures, because by dropping out would be failing dismally in that aspect."

Student 2: "I always need to be motivated; I am hard working."

Student 3: "I know that I am hard working and I know that I am capable of finishing my degree even the faith that I have in myself, even when I failed I did not let it define me as a failure because I knew I can do better; I can just try again you must also know that you can do it."

Student 4: "Hardworking; whatever I wanted in life I had to work for it."

Student 5: "Calm, dedicated in what I am doing, conqueror, hard worker."

Student 6: "Intelligent; ambitious; strong; outgoing and fun."

Focussed coding: Major themes

"These codes are more directed, selective and conceptual than word for word, line by line, and incident-by-incident coding.... Focussed coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data" (Charmaz, 2006:57).

Focussed Code 1: The value and importance of social relationships

One of the most striking features that stood out in all the interviews was the importance and value of relationships. For four of the six students what was important was family, for one student it was the bond formed with a teacher (that still exists now, four years later) and for one student it was the 'pact' made with fellow classmates. All these relationships have profoundly influenced the students' commitment and motivation. The only student who does not currently have an adult interested in her life was adopted by an aunt who does not appear to have been supportive. "She use to complain about how far the police station is; but I pushed;

eventually she went” (the affidavit was so that the student could apply for a bursary). The following statement by the student describes her current source of motivation and support: “No one; myself and I. No one asking did you pass, can I see your results, whether I attend classes, have you been passing; as for my results only me and REAP will know.”

In terms of facilitating the transition from home to university, three of the six students’ families offered vital support in terms of accommodating the students and orientating them; this support included financial support initially. For one student support came from a stranger whom he had never met who shared a mutual relationship with a teacher; this student was offered accommodation for four months in the stranger’s hostel room. For another student it was also a connection of a teacher who offered accommodation: yet another stranger. For all students, their teachers played a significant role in their lives, in various ways

Focused Code 2: Expectations of success by others

All students, to a lesser extent student 6, had it reinforced by teachers that they had potential and they were always ‘the special students’. University was introduced to all of them as an important next stage after school.

Focused Code 3: Disappointing others

All students were under pressure to perform; they were the first in their families to study. Their family and teachers were proud of them; they were also respected (and in the case of student 4 envied) by others in their community. As student 5 said, “Now they somehow respect me.”

Focused Code 4: Intrinsic factors, including intelligence, motivation and resilience

The students selected were all top achievers at school and naturally intelligent. Given that they had been purposely selected for being in the REAP programme, the information gathered during the interviews indicate that teachers seem to select the brightest students to provide the REAP forms to. In terms of attitude, the students all have an ‘I can do it’ attitude; this is evident from their comments in Code 12. They

are hardworking and resilient, they use dictionaries to look up words they do not know and they make sure they are prepared before going for consultation with their lecturers.

The above section is the end of the analysis stage of the information. For the researcher, the above four themes were the most significant to emerge from this process. The exact relationship among the themes (theory building) was not explored during this research process but has the potential to make for an insightful study.

Table 5.2: Answering the research questions: Who and what support the students and what is the nature of the support?

	Who and what support them?	What is the nature of the support?				
Student	Encouragement to pursue HE	University student support services	NSFAS	Additional financial aid/ second bursary	Emotional support / motivation from family	Emotional/ financial support from others
1	School	n	√	√	√	Uncle/aunt – accommodation during first three months
2	Teachers and family	n	√	√ Dean’s merit list and corporate sponsorship	√	Friends – emotional support
3	Teachers and family	n	√	√ Northern Cape Dept. of Health	√	Family/friends – accommodation
4	Teachers	√ Extensively	√	√	√	Uncle/aunt – initial accommodation and continued emotional support and caring
5	Teacher	n	√	√ From third year and Dean’s merit list	None	Ex-teacher and teacher’s husband – continued motivation/ contact and financial assistance during transition from home to HE. Community of origin ‘contact’ (referred by teacher’s husband) offered accommodation during first few months.
6	Friends	√ Makes use of all the services offered: counselling and medical.	√	√ Dept of Education bursary – obtained in second year but no payment made in current year – unsure of support. REAP monthly allowance.	None	Initially a REAP staff member. Now mainly self-motivated.

Answering The Research Questions:

Have they also been close to dropping out?

None of the students ever seriously considered dropping out, although two had to take time out during stressful periods.

What have been the difficulties they needed to deal with?

Most literature on student attrition notes several reasons for dropping out; they are cultural difficulties, fit with the institution and money. All of these students dealt with the same challenges. They did, however, receive regular monthly allocations from REAP for food, class notes, travelling and other smaller expense.

How have they adapted to academic life?

Of the six students that formed part of this research, three are in the process of registering to do their honours degree next year. Of these three, two are aiming to become chartered accountants. Of the other three, one is planning to pursue further medical studies.

In terms of personal growth, one student admitted, "I like the person I have become at university"; another said, "I have grown so much; the exposure to a different way of seeing things has changed me – in a good way."

5.3 Conclusion

From the analysis of the data, it is clear that for this group of students their relationships with others, either parents or teachers or sometimes strangers, played an important part in the transition from home to academic life. Their natural intelligence not only enables them to deal with the academic requirements but has also since school resulted in their being made aware of their potential.

Chapter 6 – Synthesis of findings, recommendations and conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to find what factors contributed to a group of six poor coloured and black senior students persisting in higher education when so many of their peers drop out. In this study, a number of factors were found to contribute to their persistence, the most significant being the value and importance of social relationships at a time when they needed support the most, the positive reinforcement from parents and teachers of the expectation of success and the fear of disappointing those who believed in their ability and provided support. But these students also experienced difficulties. Some felt alienated from the general student population; many felt inferior and inadequate due to their communities of origin. For some, the lectures attended were delivered in a language that seemed foreign. Many experienced nutritional deprivation. Both the factors that contributed to their success and the difficulties they experienced have considerable congruence with the literature on student attrition. This group of students is all living at UWC's student residences. Some recommendations made are therefore applicable to students not living at home, while others are applicable to the general student population that come from deprived socio-economic environments and have received their schooling in the communities in which they grew up.

This concluding chapter of this thesis will deal with the following questions: What is the correlation between the findings of this research and the theories on student attrition? What are the students' recommendations for inclusion in a model of student support? The chapter also includes the researcher's recommendations for possible institutional support that can be provided, recommended policy changes with regard to funding, a motivation for the design of a national model of student support and areas for further research.

6.2 Correlation between students' experiences and theory

Socioeconomic status of family

The 2005 HSRC study mentioned earlier found that 70% of higher education dropouts came from poverty-stricken backgrounds and many were dependent on parents for financial support, either to pay for their studies or to supplement what they received from the NSFAS. The study also found that graduates were less reliant on parents for financial assistance and that a higher proportion had NSFAS support and/or bursaries.

In terms of correlation with the above study, the following holds true: This group of students fits the profile of dropouts in terms of poverty-stricken backgrounds. Most of them are, however, not dependent on their parents for financial support; although their parents do give them money, it is usually on a 'when possible' basis. They therefore fit the profile of graduates in terms of financial support received. All had NSFAS bursaries during their first year in addition to regular monthly allowances from REAP; this could range from R300 to R500 per month. The students applied for other bursaries as soon as they were in the higher education system and opted out of NSFAS support as the bursaries they secured were more lucrative.

Self- motivation

In terms of self-motivation, the University of Zululand study findings (which were confirmed by the study done by Chireshe, Shumba, Mudhovosi and Denhere (2009) focused on the correlation between lecturers' and students' ratings of factors that contribute to academic success. Both studies had the highest correlation for the factor self-discipline and the lowest correlation for the factor self-motivation. Family support was second. For this study, family support and self-motivation were certainly the most important motivational factors. Although self-motivation seemed to be linked to the fear of disappointing significant persons in the students' lives, the link is not clear.

Fitting in culturally

In terms of cultural diversity, all of the students did not fit in immediately. Inadequate social integration, one of the variables in Tinto's model (discussed under 3.4.2), which leads to lack to commitment to the institution and therefore influences the student's decision to drop out, was a factor initially. The other variables that contribute to persistence, such as high school experiences, ability, expectational attributes and motivational attributes, were present, however. The students all performed better in their second year when they were 'happier'. Therefore there exists strong congruence with Tinto's model of integration. Student 5 is the student who struggled most with both fitting in and commitment as he had to register for a four-year academic development programme as opposed to the straight three-year degree as the degree programme was full when he eventually registered. In the first year, the student scored three C's and two E's for his courses. In the second year, when he had come to terms with the course that he was in and was happier, he achieved straight A's for his modules. The research and the students' experiences, as discussed in the previous chapter, also have strong congruence with intervening variables of satisfaction and institutional commitment, as discussed in Bean's model of student attrition (3.4.3)

6.3 Students' recommendations for inclusion in a student support model for higher education institutions

All students were asked what factors they considered most important to include in a model for student support. The following were their individual recommendations for higher education, in order of importance:

Student 1

- a) "Definitely the finances."
- b) "Counselling."

Student 2

No recommendations

Student 3

- a) "Make time to build that personal bond with the students; when you are far away from home that is the one thing that you need; that somebody that you know that you can talk to. Just a normal person, just a student; they do have them – they say that it is a mentor or tutor when you basically just need a friend."
- b) "Finances – they give you money for food, school fees, tuition and what not, but they don't care about the small things that you need like notes; sensation kits you may need when you go off on your block as that is not included, the small things that pop up is the problem because they do not make provision for that."

Student 4

- a) "I think that the counselling is very important and to expand it."
- b) "And computer training – when people come they should have some computer training. I would make a training centre available because there are labs. More tutors as well."

- c) "A trust fund if you have an emergency – an emergency fund."
- d) "They should also know who is the underprivileged people and reach out to them as well."
- e) "Finances – lecture notes; they (students) can't afford it lots of times – I did not have notes and had to borrow somewhere here; write it off and study. Most of the time I would go to the e-learning and study from the computer. Most of the time people would come to me and say I don't have notes can you give me notes or can I study with you. Really often people do not have notes."
- f) "To include meals in the residence as well – That (residence) food should be nutritious food; that is why people are so sick. So you go to the bar and buy a gadsby because you don't have a choice then you have to buy that kind of food."
- g) "Even entertainment – the only thing on campus is that when weekend comes you have to go to the bar. There is no TV; why not put a TV with a DVD and when you feel like watching a movie you can come here. It is unsafe to go out to a place here. People don't have their own cars and have to walk wherever they want to go or take public transport."

Student 5

- a) "I would create a programme where we would come and share our problems, and then you can motivate them and show them how things are done. Sometimes you feel lost. Be a support for those that are lonely."
- b) "A programme that would help the academically connect them with people that speak the same language and try and connect them. Sometimes it's easy to understand someone that speaks the same language."

c) "Money to do other things; just pocket money with e.g. transport to go to Bellville."

Student 6

a) "I'll make sure that when they come here they get food; even if it has to be included in their fees; they should have food. Dining hall should be accessible to almost everyone. We get here we apply for NSFAS and you only get NSFAS in May in the meantime what must we eat?"

b) "Peer mentors – make sure the orientation programme is strong and useful; like a big brother big sister thing not one peer facilitator to a group of 30 students at end of the day you don't get to know them."

c) "Language – make sure that lecturers for the first three weeks that they are trying to build everyone's confidence; they are English – most people that talk are the people from private school or they are coloured because they speak English. People like us are scared and not confident to say anything."

d) "Give them friends; most of us that come here do not know anyone. You have to find your own way – it's really difficult. Even if that person can speak the same language. The first time you come here it feels like everybody is speaking a foreign language. You are scared and not confident to say anything."

6.4 Recommendations: Institutional

There are three elements that appeared most often in the students' recommendations: money, support to fit in and the need for a friend. Although the student support services have a mentoring programme, students want a programme less 'structured'. The researcher's recommendation would be to recruit a group of students in their second year and prepare them to be buddies the next year for first-year entrants. A person from the same area and speaking the same language is what students are saying they need.

Language

This group of students struggled initially with the language of instruction; according to them, lecturers lectured in English without concern for the fact that the students did not understand the contents. Although it would be impossible to request that lectures be delivered in a language that all students understand, lecturers can take some time either to explain concepts or to compile a glossary of terms that students could potentially have difficulty with. Helping students to fit in should be the entire institution's responsibility and not just that of the student support services. Everything is not necessarily about funding.

Finances

This group of students fits the profile of students that are struggling financially; this was the case especially during their first year when they only received NSFAS and REAP grants. The one big 'life saver' was the R300–R500 per month from REAP. Is R3 600–R6 000 per annum the extra amount that would enable NSFAS-only students to stay?

Food

This seems to be a big need, especially during the first few months before NSFAS funding is received. Higher education institutions and the NSFAS need to collaborate and find a solution that serves all, especially the students. The first few months seems like a crucial period for settling, yet for NSFAS students, it is the most

challenging as they somehow have to 'survive' without money. This group, except for two, was fortunate to have parents that were working. Although the jobs were not high paying, the parents were in a position to make some contribution to cover books or travelling.

Computer literacy

All students except one were unfamiliar with working on a computer, and this was an area recommended for inclusion by the students in a student support model. During orientation, all had exposure to computer orientation; this seems not to have been enough, though. The university has resources such as computer laboratories that are all mainly under-utilised over weekends. In a system where so much input is needed, does a university week need to end on a Friday? The researcher's recommendation would be to make computer classes compulsory for first-year students that indicate they are not computer literate and to have these classes on Saturdays, if necessary.

6.5 Recommendation for policy

Financial support to students

NSFAS funding, one of the financial vehicles to increase student numbers, does not take into account travelling costs, toiletries and equipment for certain courses. It certainly does not cover a trip home for students living on campus. This seems to have disadvantaged the students in this research project and affected their ability to settle in and concentrate on their studies.

Although the national higher education goal is to increase student numbers, it should also take into account what the available funding is and what the minimum amounts students need are. Would giving more to fewer students influence success rates? The researcher's recommendation would be that a proper costing be done that allocations can be based on. Perhaps fewer students can be supported but perhaps a much higher percentage will succeed.

Academic support to students

It is difficult to recommend what needs to be included for academic support based on the group of students in this research. They are all highly intelligent. Any national model of student support cannot, however, be based on the experiences of a group of bright students. This is a shortcoming in this research and it is acknowledged. For computer literacy, for example, the researcher would like to suggest here that perhaps we need to start thinking out of the box of Monday to Friday, 8:30 to 16:30. In a system that has so much to correct, we perhaps need to start thinking of working longer hours.

6.6 Recommendation for further research: A national model for student support

Research reveals that almost all universities have student support services, each operating relatively independently. The bigger research projects on student attrition seem to focus on reasons why students drop out. This researcher has not come across any collaborative research project of higher educational institutions on models of student support, despite all facing similar challenges. There seems to be sufficient South African studies on attrition to, at the very least, inform what a model should include. Institutions may be able to learn a great deal from each other.

6.7 Conclusion

This research focused on a small group of students from poverty-stricken backgrounds and from the public school system. The researcher is aware that the results are not generalisable; this was not the aim. The aim was to hear and convey the students' stories. The results of this study show that this group of students is coping with the academic demands despite coming from a school system that is considered inadequate. For all students, the support provided by family and social networks, their own ambitions and their hopes to support their families are strong

motivators. They are used to living and coping under difficult and demanding situations; they are resilient.

Social relationships played an important factor in students' ability to make the move from home to university. For many it was the core family at home, but for some it was persons whom the students had had no close relationships with previously but with whom there was some 'connection': either a relative or a community member.

All students are fortunate enough to have had additional support in the form in a monthly allowance provided by REAP. This made it possible for them to meet some of the basic needs such as class notes, trips home to family and food, although the allowance was not enough to cover all costs.

Out of this group of six, by the end of the year, an African scientist will have been produced, two black (coloured) women will have graduated with commerce degrees, both with plans to further their studies to achieve their dreams of becoming chartered accountants, one black woman's ambition of becoming a medical doctor will no longer be such a distant goal and one Black woman will have graduated as a professional nurse, with the intent to pursue further medical studies; in her own words, "I can still do better than being a nurse." The third-year African female B.Sc. student majoring in environmental and water science will be in her final year next year.

What a terrible waste of potential it would have been if these students had been part of that 50% that drop out during the first three years! Can South Africa afford that students with similar potential be lost by the higher education system? What are the implications for the expected growth of the economy and a more equitable society if this amputation of potential is continued? A great deal of blame can be attached to the school system, but as this group of students has shown, they have the potential to succeed, despite coming from a public school system that is inadequate. All they needed was support.

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