

**A Social Realist Account of the Tutorial
System at the University of
Johannesburg**

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Abstract

Using Margaret Archer's social realist methodology, this study critically examines the construction of the tutorial system in several departments and faculties at the Auckland Park campus of the University of Johannesburg. The purpose of the study is to investigate the extent to which tutorials support the acquisition of programme and disciplinary epistemologies.

Social realism calls for analytical dualism of 'the people' (agents) from 'the parts' (structure and culture). This requires the separate consideration of structures (social systems, rules, roles, practices, policies, institutions, and organisational structures like committees, units, departments, faculties), culture (ideologies, theories, beliefs and values as evidenced in discourses), and agency (people and their ability to act within and upon their own world in terms of their social roles and positions dependent on their ability to activate their emergent properties and powers).

Through this investigation, an understanding was gained into how the emergent properties and powers contained within the material, ideational and agential elements helped to generate certain events and practices in the tutorial system. These generative mechanisms were examined to explore whether they enabled or constrained the construction of the tutorial system to provide epistemological access.

The study shows that while many official policy documents construct the tutorial system as being an intervention to support academic success, particularly for first-years, there are some tensions within the document discourses, where, on the one hand, student success is constructed in terms of throughput numbers, or, on the other hand, as being about becoming a particular kind of person who is able to access and add to powerful knowledge. Furthermore, the study found that policies are not being consistently implemented.

While certain key agents and actors, in the form of management, academics and tutors, were found to be able to overcome constraints and introduce innovative ways of enhancing access to target epistemologies, there is a need

for consideration of structural and cultural constraints. For example, structures in the form of funding, venues and timetabling were found to constrain the tutorial system as did some of the discourses in the cultural domain: for example, in the form of certain dominant discourses around teaching and learning, beliefs about the purpose of the tutorial and the relationship between academics and the tutorial system.

The study also found that the ontological aspects of 'learning to be' were not fore-grounded to any great extent in the ways in which the tutorial system was constructed. There needs to be more consideration of the ontological as well as the epistemological aspects of first-year study so as to take cognisance of the different learning needs of an increasingly diverse student body and to encourage the development of the student agency necessary for a deep engagement with the disciplinary epistemologies.

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List of Acronyms

AD	Academic Development
ADC	Academic Development Centre
ADS	Academic Development and Support
ALs	Academic Literacies
APK	Auckland Park, Kingsway
B degree	Bachelor's degree
C&TTO	Commercialisation and Technology Transfer Office
CBT	Competency-Based Training
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CEPs	Cultural Emergent Properties
CESM	Classification of Educational Subject Matter
CHE	Council for Higher Education
CR	Critical Realism
CS	Cultural System
DOE	Department of Education
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
FYE	First-Year Experience
HEDA	Higher Education Data Analyser
HEQC	Higher Education Quarterly Communication
HOD	Head of Department
MEC	Management Executive Committee
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NLS	New Literacy Studies
PEPs	People Emergent Properties
PhD	Doctorate in Philosophy
RAU	Rand Afrikaans University
S-C	Socio-cultural
SEPs	Structural Emergent Properties
SR	Social Realism
TEFOL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TLC	Teaching and Learning Committee
TWR	Witwatersrand Technikon
UJ	University of Johannesburg
VC	Vice-Chancellor

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

At the University of Johannesburg (UJ) in recent years, tutorials have been made compulsory in some faculties. The tutorial system has in many instances been introduced as a direct result of an extremely low throughput rate for first-year students, and has therefore been seen as an important intervention in terms of teaching and learning, to give academic support and to directly improve student success rates.

In the context of the increasing numbers of first-year students entering the university¹ and with the background of poor academic performance, lack of success and low throughput rates currently being experienced at most South African universities (Scott, I., Yeld, N. & Hendry, J. 2007), it was my aim, in this research, to investigate to what extent the tutorial system, which is a teaching intervention that is practised in order to provide supplementary academic support, is being constructed by the various role-players as providing epistemological access to first year university students.

I will unpack the notion of epistemological access in detail in Chapter 2, but, briefly, what it means in the context of higher education is that students need to be given access to the specific skills and knowledge required in their discipline and also to ways of actually generating knowledge themselves.

1.2 Research Question

How are tutorials constructed for first-year university students at the University of Johannesburg?

¹ See Appendix 8 for table of first-time entering cohorts at UJ for **general academic** B-degrees and **professional** B-degrees

Sub-questions:

- What are the structural conditions which enable and / or constrain the provision of support for epistemological access for first-year university students in the tutorial system at UJ?
- What are the cultural conditions which enable and / or constrain the provision of support for epistemological access for first-year university students in the tutorial system at UJ?
- What are the agential factors which enable and / or constrain the provision of support for epistemological access for first-year university students in the tutorial system at UJ?

1.3 Rationale for the Study

According to Scott et al. (2007:39), an analysis of the year 2000 student cohort of all South African universities showed that the greatest rate of attrition occurs at the end of the first year of study. While the termination of studies is without doubt also caused by many other factors besides academic ones, such as financial or other personal problems, Scott et al. maintain that to the extent that the high dropout rates of first-year students are influenced by poor academic performance, this is surely indicative of “systemic problems such as articulation failure” (2007:40).

While formal access to higher education has indeed generally improved, this has not however translated into improved student success and throughput. According to Scott et al. (2007), only around 30% complete their first qualification in five years, 56% ‘leave without graduating’ (as a result of withdrawal, ‘dropout’ or academic exclusion), while the remaining 14% are still trying to complete it (2007:12). In addition, the study indicates a clear racial differentiation in terms of student performance, with white students performing significantly better than their black counterparts (2007:7). Scott et al. argue that the broader conceptual issues of access and equity, as well as that of the quality of the educational process itself, have great relevance in terms of what is happening in higher education in South Africa. They feel that there needs to be a deeper understanding of “the relationship between access, equity and

quality, its theoretical underpinnings, and the practical tensions and challenges faced by different stakeholders in the implementation of strategies to improve teaching and learning” (2007:6). They further argue that those who are responsible for teaching in higher education need to understand better the profile and learning needs of their students, and that unless there are systemic changes in the educational process itself, continuing to merely increase the intake of undergraduate students will not result in an increased graduate output – in fact they argue that it will result in just the reverse, an increase in the proportion of “less-prepared” students (2007:32).

Scott et al.’s (2007) research used a study that was conducted by the Department of Education (DoE) of all of the South African higher education institutions for the year 2000 cohort. In comparison, the following tables show the overall completion rates for first-time entering students in both **professional** and **general academic** first B-degrees in a varied selection of faculties for the 2005 and 2006 cohorts at UJ.

The first table shows that in the 2005 cohort for the **professional** first B-degree at UJ, on average, only 36% of students had graduated within five years of entering, and around 40% were still registered after five years.

Table 1: Professional first B-degrees, by faculty: all first-time students at UJ, 2005²

2005 Cohort			
Faculty	Grad in 4 years	Grad within 5 years	Still registered after 5 years
Education	40%	46%	47%
Engineering & Built Environ	14%	29%	38%
Health Sciences	34%	34%	34%
Law	20%	35%	42%

The next table shows that in the 2006 cohort for the **professional** first B-degree at UJ, on average, only 42% of students had graduated within five years and around 48% were still registered after five years.

² The tables detailing UJ statistics were developed from information provided by UJ’s HEDA system. These represent **cumulative** graduate figures.

Table 2: Professional first B-degrees, by faculty: all first-time entering students at UJ, 2006

2006 Cohort			
Faculty	Grad in 4 years	Grad within 5 years	Still registered after 5 years
Education	36%	45%	48%
Engineering & Built Environ	9%	18%	28%
Health Sciences	43%	64%	66%
Law	30%	41%	50%

The next table shows that in the 2005 cohort for the **general academic** first B-degree at UJ, on average, only 45% of students had graduated within five years, and close to 50% of the students were still registered after five years.

Table 3: General academic first B-degrees, by faculty: all first-time entering students at UJ, 2005

2005 Cohort			
Faculty	Grad in 3 years	Grad within 5 years	Still registered after 5 years
Econ & Fin sciences	32%	49%	54%
Health sciences	30%	43%	50%
Humanities	33%	43%	47%
Law	33%	54%	61%
Management	27%	43%	49%
Science	26%	37%	40%

In the following table of the 2006 cohort for **general academic** first B-degrees at UJ, it can be seen that on average only 44% of students had graduated within five years, and that just under 50% of students were still registered after five years.

Table 4: General academic first B-degrees, by faculty: all first-time entering students at UJ, 2006

2006 Cohort			
Faculty	Grad in 3 years	Grad within 5 years	Still registered after 5 years
Econ & Fin sciences	33%	50%	57%
Health sciences	33%	42%	46%
Humanities	37%	47%	51%
Law	34%	49%	57%
Management	26%	38%	46%
Science	29%	36%	40%

The following tables show the ratio of black to white students in terms of graduation of first-time entering students after five years in **professional** first B-degrees (four-year degree):

Table 5: Graduation after 5 years in professional first B-degrees, by race: first-time entering students at UJ, 2005

2005		
Black	White	Ratio w/b
24%	41%	1.7

Table 6: Graduation after 5 years in professional first B-degrees, by race: first-time entering students at UJ, 2006

2006		
Black	White	Ratio w/b
25%	43%	1.7

The following tables show the ratio of black to white students in terms of graduation of first-time entering students after four years for **general academic** degrees (three-year degree):

Table 7: Graduation after 4 years in general academic first B-degrees, by race: first-time entering students at UJ, 2005

2005		
Black	White	Ratio w/b
33%	52%	1.5

Table 8: Graduation after 4 years in general academic first B-degrees, by race: first time entering students at UJ, 2006

2006		
Black	White	Ratio w/b
40%	49%	1.2

It is interesting to note that while there was a slight improvement in 2006 over the previous year in terms of the average black graduation figures for the General academic first B-degree, and a decline in numbers for the white graduates in the same category, the ratio of white to black is still higher (1.5 in 2005 and 1.2 in 2006). The figures that I have shown in the above tables have been calculated as an average graduation rate over four CESM³s for the **professional** (4 year) degree and over six CESMs for the **general academic** (3 year) degree for students who entered the university for the first time in 2005 and 2006. I created these simplified tables from more complex data obtained from UJ's HE A⁴ system. This is therefore only an estimate of the overall graduation figures and the ratio of black/white graduates (as an indicator of academic success). From my understanding of these statistics, independent of the race factor, while there seems in most CESMs to be indications of slight improvement, the overall graduation (throughput) rates at UJ are nevertheless still in great need of improvement.

My study seeks to investigate the tutorial system, which has been constructed as being an intervention designed to improve the throughput rate of first-year students. It could be argued that to really make an impression on the rate of

³ CESM stands for "Classification of Educational Subject Matter"

⁴ HEDA stands for "Higher Education Data Analyser"

academic success in terms of graduation, interventions (such as the tutorial system) need to be implemented for at least the second and third year as well. In fact, some departments have started to introduce tutorials for students in these other years, but this is not the general rule at UJ. In fact, in terms of the official Tutor Policy, the focus has been placed specifically on the first-year student. Alongside the first-year experience (FYE) idea which has been introduced at UJ in the last few years, tutorials for first-year students have been constructed as playing an essential role in helping students to integrate academically into university life.

In order to provide a wider contextual understanding and to understand the role that different teaching interventions, such as tutorials, might have, it is important to begin by considering what the nature and purpose of higher education is.

1.4 Purpose of Higher Education

There are different notions of the nature and purpose of higher education, and these have shifted over time. Ideas about what should constitute the purpose of higher education have changed (Badat, 2009; Boughey, 2004). Whereas previously, higher education tended to serve mainly those from privileged backgrounds, who could be viewed as the intellectual and social 'elite' who would have previously gained the advantages of an effective high school education system, more recently, there has been a shift towards a more egalitarian and open purpose, aimed at providing equal opportunities for all, regardless of their educational or social advantage and background. There have also been different understandings about the purpose of higher education in terms of its wider role in society. While these debates about the purpose of higher education are general across the world, in South Africa there is a particular concern with the relationship between higher education and a social justice agenda (RSA DoE Education White Paper 3, 1997; RSA DoE National Plan for Higher Education Transformation, 2001).

In line with global trends, universities in South Africa have had to change from their more traditional purpose of knowledge generation for its own sake, to

one where higher education has to engage with issues like efficiency and responsiveness to the economic development requirements of society (Quinn, 2003:70). Increasingly there have been drives from market forces for higher education to address economic growth demands and for higher education institutions to fulfil a more market-oriented function by providing graduates who are able to serve the needs of the marketplace directly (Badat, 2009:458).

Universities today grapple with seemingly conflicting ideologies about what the real purpose of higher education is (Brown, 2010). Whilst there are internal demands made on universities to encourage academic research for its own sake as well as providing an enriching environment in which student education can take place, there are also external demands which require universities to provide 'useful knowledge' which will be of social and practical relevance (Brown, 2010: 4). As Brown notes, "there is a clear difference between the pursuit of knowledge for the purposes of deepening our understanding, and its pursuit for advancing our practical projects" (Brown, 2010:18).

Higher education could also be said to be something that is undertaken in pursuit of learning and an understanding of what it means to be human. Nussbaum (2003) writes that the idea of a well-educated person being a 'citizen of the world' had a formative influence on Western thought about the purpose of education. She argues that the purpose of a 'liberal education' in the context of a democracy, is for the "cultivation of the whole human being for the functions of citizenship and life generally" (Nussbaum, 2003:9). This view that the essential purpose of higher education is to develop the whole person certainly resonates with what Badat (2009) writes:

[H]igher education has an intrinsic significance as an engagement between dedicated academics and students, around humanity's intellectual, cultural and scientific inheritances (in the form of books, art, pictures, music, artefacts), and around our historical and contemporary understandings, views and beliefs regarding our natural and social worlds

(Badat, 2009:463)

There is enormous social and political value in higher education; and in terms of the role it plays in learning, teaching, research and community engagement, central to the purpose of higher education is also the dissemination of knowledge and the production of graduates capable of critical thinking; in addition, an important feature of higher education is the production and application of knowledge through research as well as the contribution it makes to both economic and social development especially in the context of a democracy (Badat, 2009:463).

There have also been debates about issues around re-inserting the notion of the 'public good' into the transformation of higher education. Badat (200 :4) writes that whereas recent South African policy documents suggest that higher education should serve the public good, with the increase of 'globalisation' and its associated social and economic practices and ideologies, there has been a growing trend towards the marketisation of higher education which is weakening the concept of the link between higher education and the public good. It has been further argued that in South Africa, where higher education transformation is one aspect of a "larger process of democratic reconstruction" that social responsiveness should not be completely overshadowed by that of economic responsiveness (Singh, 2001:10).

In the context of transformation in South Africa, social development through wealth creation is understood to be the means by which past social injustices, disadvantages and unequal opportunities can be redressed. As part of the transformation of higher education, new policies therefore emphasise the importance of social equity as well as that of economic development (Jonathan, 2001:35). Providing those who were previously excluded and disadvantaged with an equal opportunity to benefit from access to higher education is one of the key elements for which these policies aiming to produce social equity have been created. According to Jonathan (2001:35) however, some of the assumptions that underpin the confident belief in the "socially transformative power of education", may need to be re-examined. She argues that while economic development is important and necessary, there is also the (not necessarily accurate) assumption made that "direct

beneficiaries, through their social commitment and enhanced understanding will contribute to the upliftment of their fellows” - thus there is an equal emphasis on both economic and social development in the new South African vision for the role of public higher education (Jonathan, 2001:34).

Because one purpose of higher education is to prepare graduates for various professions, students need to be given access not only to the disciplinary knowledge that underpins their particular field of study, but also to the ‘situated knowledge’ which is associated with specific work practices and sites of practice, in such ways that “support the provision of epistemological access” (Winberg et al., 2012: 72). This would encourage students to also engage with the foundational disciplinary knowledge of their chosen profession so that they can contribute to its advancement and not simply to give students the minimal amount of skills and preparation needed to achieve only practical competencies in their field and site of practice (Winberg, 2012:84).

These tensions between the different understandings of the functions of higher education are important to my study in as much as they may affect the way in which teaching interventions (like tutorials) for university students are constructed. In Chapter 2, I argue that fundamental to student academic success is the provision of epistemological access, which goes much further than the mere provision of access to practical skills or facts and information. In my study I was therefore interested to discover how university tutorials were being constructed and whether the purpose of tutorials in higher education was mainly seen to be for creating useful and practical knowledge in a particular subject in terms of future assumed careers or were they also seen to be an opportunity to deepen knowledge and understanding.

1.5 Higher Education in the South African Context

In South Africa, since the advent of democracy, a policy of transformation in education has taken place such that formal access to the university has been opened up to include those students who were previously excluded. The Council for Higher Education (CHE) explains the notion of ‘access’ in this

context thus: “the widening of access to higher education is an equity-driven concern and relates to the strategies and procedures that an institution undertakes to make its educational services accessible to a diversity of students” (CHE, 2004:97).

However, inequalities still persist in the schooling system in South Africa today, such as poorly trained teachers, a lack of resources and an inferior infrastructure, which place many black African students at a disadvantage and have created a lack of access to higher education due to their poor school results which has created a difficult position for universities which need to maintain certain standards and which require students to gain access on the basis of prior educational success while at the same time realising that access to higher education is necessary for social transformation (Bradbury & Miller, 2011:1).

With the increased numbers of first-time students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds now entering tertiary institutions, these students have in many instances been characterised as being ‘under-prepared’. According to Slonimsky and Shalem (2010:83), a great number of first-time students are under-prepared for university studies by their schooling because they have not been sufficiently exposed to the experience of working with or creating text-based realities and thus do not have an understanding of how to approach texts or the epistemic practices expected of them. Much schooling still uses the rote-learning approach, which is premised on the idea of knowledge reproduction rather than that of knowledge construction (Moll & Slonimsky, 1989).

Under-prepared students struggle with the kind of critical engagement required of them at university because their prior learning has taken place in contexts that make very different epistemic assumptions about knowledge (Bradbury & Miller, 2011:2). Thus, the notion of ‘under-preparedness’ has been argued to be “a distinct systemic phenomenon” which can explain the reasons for academic failure in terms of socio-historical processes rather than as a result of “individual dispositions” (Bradbury & Miller, 2011:2). Various

teaching interventions have been created to address this issue of 'under-preparedness'. The tutorial system is one such intervention.

Higher education in South Africa is still suffering from the legacy of apartheid in which the majority of the population suffered from marginalisation and inferior education due to social, political and economic discrimination and inequalities of race, class and gender (Badat, 2009:457). Still today, students who come from working-class or poor rural backgrounds find that their access to higher education is constrained, while the dominant Western traditional discourses of universities still predominate. During the apartheid years, higher education institutions were not only divided along racial lines and designated to be for either white, black, coloured or Indian students, but there were also language differences where either Afrikaans or English was the sole medium of instruction (Boughey, 2004:2).

However, the decisive shift from apartheid to democracy that began with the first democratic elections in 1994 resulted in a move towards the transformation and development of higher education with the aim of redressing the unfair practices of the past in terms of providing equal opportunities for a better quality of education for all students in the country (Boughey, 2004:1). This goal of transformation has led not only to the widening of access to higher education so as to make it more accessible to a diversity of students but has also sought to ensure that those who are granted access are also given the opportunity to succeed academically (CHE, 2010:81-82).

Thus, post-1994, with the birth of the new democratic South Africa, there were attempts by the new state to introduce a more equitable system in higher education. To this end, policy reform aimed to address the historical inequalities that were inherited from the previous apartheid government in which there were thirty-six higher education institutions, deeply divided and differentiated in terms of their geographical location in urban or poor rural areas and access to resources, academic and professional staff (Singh, 2008:253). In addition, there was a binary split between universities and technikons, wherein the latter 'non-university' types of institution were

constructed as catering for the application of knowledge and the learning of practical skills in contrast to the university whose aim was the production of 'pure' knowledge. This split tended to position the different types of students differently, with the universities attracting the more intellectually 'elite' type of student (Boughey, 2004:2).

A programme for the restructuring of higher education in South Africa began with an initial restructuring from 2002 to 2004, which resulted in the reduction of these thirty-six into twenty-three higher education institutions. The final restructuring meant that South Africa then had eleven traditional universities (which offer predominantly traditional formative degree programmes), six universities of technology (which offer predominantly vocational and professional diploma programmes) and six 'comprehensive institutions' (which offer both formative degree programmes and vocational programmes) (RSA Government Notice 855, RSA Government Gazette 21 June 2002).

1.6 Context of the Study

As part of this move to re-structure higher education, and in accordance with the National Plan for Higher Education, published in 2001, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) was established in 2005 as the result of a merger that took place between the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) (which already had been modified to incorporate the East Rand and Soweto campuses of Vista University in 2004) and the Witwatersrand Technikon (TWR). These recently merged higher education institutions, which together now make up the University of Johannesburg (UJ), had previously been separated artificially along the lines of language and race. The mergers have brought to the fore issues of institutional ethos and identity and in some cases sped up the shifts in student profile occurring with the demise of apartheid. UJ as a merged institution now has a student profile that very closely matches the demographic of the country.

Initially, the notion of mergers was highly contested, with some institutions, especially those catering for a traditionally white, privileged student body, expressing resistance, fearing that educational standards would drop, or that

jobs might be lost. It was argued that the basic motivation for the mergers was more about “a complex interplay between governmental macro-politics and institutional micro-politics in a context of political transition” and less about the interests of the process of higher education (Jansen, 2003a:1). It was felt by some that the rationale behind the complete re-shaping of the education system post-1994 was mainly justified in terms of politics and economics and only slightly motivated by academic considerations (Wyngaard & Kapp, 2004:200).

In contrast, Kader Asmal (2009:3), who was Minister of Education at the time of the mergers, stated more recently that the primary purpose of the mergers was in fact educational, in that the aim was to create efficient and effective institutions that would be responsive and contribute to the social and economic development needs of the country. The mergers were also constructed by the government as a way of creating new institutional identities and cultures that would “transcend the divides of the past” in keeping with the vision of a “non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society” (Asmal, 2009:3). According to Jansen (2004:7), in terms of the Ministry of Education’s national plan a merger can be considered to have succeeded if it:

- enhances access and equity goals for both staff and students,
- enables economies of scale through the creation of larger multi-purpose institutions with more efficient uses of buildings, facilities and human resources,
- overcomes the threat to institutional viability in terms of student numbers, income and expenditure patterns, and management capacities, and
- creates new institutions with new identities and cultures that transcend their past racial and ethnic institutional histories and contribute to their deracialisation.

(Jansen, 2004:7)

In mergers between former technikons and universities, such as was the case with UJ, the teaching and collegial relationships across merged campuses were complicated and posed many challenges in terms of the different pre-existing cultures, policies and procedures. There was therefore a need to create a common culture and a “positive organisational climate” (Reddy,

2007:486) based on a shared mission and vision; in order to effect this transformation, strong leadership and effective management was needed (Chipunza & Gwarinda, 2010: para 0). The kinds of 'people issues' that may lead to failure or success in the context of corporate mergers were just as important in contributing to the success of mergers in higher education. These 'people issues' relate most strongly to more personal rather than organisational factors, potentially affecting employee loyalty and motivation like negative staff perceptions of what the merger might mean to them as well as the role of management in communicating openly with staff to ensure their positive participation in the process of transformation (Reddy, 2007:487). Studies have shown that problems associated with the mergers were diminished when the process was conducted and managed carefully and in a transparent manner with due consideration for the different cultures of the merged institutions (Wyngaard & Kapp, 2004:199; Jansen, 2002).

The merger in the UJ context meant that it is now currently made up of four campuses. The main campus in Auckland Park, Kingsway Road (APK) was formerly the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU), which previously catered for white Afrikaans-speaking students, while two of the other campuses, Bunting Road and Doornfontein, formerly comprised the Witwatersrand Technikon (TWR). The fourth campus, formerly known as Vista University, is situated south of the city of Johannesburg, in Soweto.

UJ, comprising a former 'traditional' university and a former technikon, falls into the category of a 'comprehensive institution'. While the term 'comprehensive' has been used differently to describe various kinds of institutions in other parts of the world, in South Africa this term has been adopted to describe a specific kind of merged entity which was formed to fulfil the long-term goals in terms of the governments' Human Resource Development Strategy. Through the merging of universities with technikons, the idea was that these new comprehensive institutions would be able to offer increased access and diversity through providing a wider range of entry and exit points as well as a more diverse range of academic programmes including vocational and career-oriented courses as well as professional and general academic formative programmes. In addition, the new

comprehensives were constructed to be able to contribute to the economic and social development of the communities in which they were located by providing the required human resources. Furthermore, the combination of the applied research capability of the technikons together with the strength of the kind of academic research currently carried out in the traditional universities was also perceived to be a potentially positive development which would provide the opportunity to expand and deepen research output (Gibbon, 2004:5). However, some of the greatest difficulties in merging technikons with universities have been structural and organisational in terms of finding programmes and models to cater in a flexible way for the varying needs of a diverse student population within a unified and integrated institution (Gibbon, 2004:14).

As a product of a merger between a former technikon and a traditional university, UJ has had to face many structural and organisational challenges in order to create a strong new identity. It has actively tried to cultivate a culture of transformation and has been very successful in marketing the UJ brand and its associated 'values'. In keeping with the proposed purpose of the comprehensive university in South Africa as described above, UJ claims in its mission statement its intention to support "access to a wide spectrum of academic, vocational and technological teaching, learning and research". This mission statement clearly addresses the issues of broadening access to the institution by providing a diverse range of programmes, including those that are more academic and those that are more career-focused and practical in nature.

However, there is often a tension between, on the one hand, programmes in higher education that provide students with practical skills, facts and information related to a particular discipline aimed at equipping them with the competencies that they may need as practitioners or as professionals in the working world that awaits them outside the university, and, on the other hand, those programmes that encourage deep critical thinking and the capacity to generate new knowledge in the field. I will deal with this tension in more detail in Chapter 2.

Universities may use mission and vision documents to position themselves in terms of their institutional goals and their understanding of what their purpose is in terms of higher education. When UJ states in its mission and vision document that some of the “values” that guide university activities include: “academic distinction”, “integrity and respect for diversity and human dignity”, “academic freedom and accountability”, “individuality and collective effort” and “innovation” as well as its goal to “promote excellence in teaching and learning”, to “be an engaged university”, to “maximise its intellectual capital” and to “offer the preferred student experience”, it would seem that the concept of epistemological access is fairly central to UJ’s mission and vision, while UJ, as a comprehensive institution, is also positioning itself as providing programmes that are decidedly pragmatic in nature.

The goal of transformation has not only led to the widening of access to higher education so as to make it more accessible to a diversity of students, but has also sought to ensure that those who are granted access are also given the opportunity to succeed academically. There is therefore a tension created between the notion of ‘formal’ access – which simply allows for widening physical access to the university – and that of ‘epistemological’ access, which should ensure student academic success. The concept of epistemological access, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2, implies access to knowledge – and in the context of higher education further implies access to the particular ways of knowing that are valued in different disciplines or programmes. The gaining of epistemological access is key to academic success (see for example Boughey, 2002a, 2002b & 2005; CHE, 2010a CHE, 2010b; and Gasman & Palmer, 2008; Morrow, 2007 & 2009).

UJ is actively encouraging the use of tutorials, particularly focusing on first-year students, to provide additional academic support, supplementary to the lecture, so that students can be given an opportunity, in smaller groups, with the guidance of a dedicated tutor, to engage more thoroughly with their course work, so that academic success and the throughput rate of students can be increased. In its role in facilitating academic success, the tutorial system is thus fundamentally entwined with issues of epistemological access. In my

study I am interrogating how the tutorial system is constructed in terms of its function of providing epistemological access to first-year university students.

1.7. The Tutorial System

In order to investigate the ways in which the tutorial system, as it is practised at UJ, is constructed, it is important first to understand the historical context from which it originates.

The higher education tutorial system has had a very long history as a pedagogical mechanism. The practice of tutorial instruction has had a long tradition in the well-established old universities in Britain such as Oxford and Cambridge. This method of teaching, in which students are taught either individually or in very small groups of two or three, originates from the collegiate system in Oxford and Cambridge. As early as the fifteenth century, Oxford tutors were described as “having responsibility for the conduct and instruction of their younger colleagues” (Moore, 1968:20) – so their early role was not only an academic one. To illustrate, Waterland (1856) in *Advice to a Young Student, with a Method of Study for the First Four Years* writes:

Directions for the Study of Philosophy.

1. BEGIN not with philosophy, till your tutor reads lectures to you in it: it is not easy to understand without a master; and time is too precious to be thrown away so, especially when it may be usefully laid out upon classics. At first, after you have been at philosophy lectures, look no further than your lecture book, without special directions from your tutor, or from this paper: it will be time misspent, to endeavour to go further than you can understand. Get your lectures well every day; and that maybe sufficient in these studies, for the first half year at least.

(Waterland, 1856:401)

From this historical extract, it can be seen that the tutor in these early contexts was perceived to be “a master” who would “read” or “lecture” to the student on a particular subject and was there to give “special directions” to his student in order to promote his understanding. Implicit in this tutorial model is the idea of

individual attention in a one-on-one scholarly relationship between a master (a knower) and a novice (one who seeks to know).

The tradition of the discussion-based tutorial, following the teaching method of Socratic dialogue, was introduced as the general pattern at Oxford university in the mid-nineteenth century when Professor Jowett became the Vice-Chancellor in 1882 (www.greenes.org.uk, accessed 25 May 2012). Over the centuries, this model has developed and transformed so that today the concept of a tutorial has many interpretations and formulations in practice and the system itself has been questioned. In fact, in Britain in the 1960s, the tutorial method of instruction was thought by some to be too elitist and not relevant in the context of the modern university where large lectures were seen to be more efficient and appropriate. However, the tutorial system was vigorously defended by W.G. Moore (1968:20), who argued that “the tutorial method’s individual focus and unique ability to foster dialogue, argumentation, and independent thought outweighed any criticism against it” (www.greenes.org.uk, accessed 25 May 2012).

Conventional understandings of what constitutes a tutorial may still be largely influenced by the traditional tutorial system as it has been practised historically and continues to be practised today as a fundamental teaching method in the two most prestigious universities in Britain, namely Oxford and Cambridge (or ‘Oxbridge’). In these institutions, even today, one or a very few students meet with a tutor, who may also be a lecturer, where they would get individual attention and have the opportunity to engage in in-depth critical discussion. This system is referred to as ‘supervision’ at Cambridge, and as a ‘tutorial’ at Oxford. The tutorial in these institutions exists in a rather elite educational environment where the privilege of receiving such individualised attention is paid for through extremely high tuition fees. This system therefore cannot be practised in quite the same way in other institutions which have different fee structures and very large intakes of first-year students from diverse social and educational backgrounds, exemplified in the UJ context.

Nevertheless, it might be useful in some way to treat ‘the Oxford tutorial’ as representing the idealised form that this form of instruction can take. In the

University of Oxford's handbook, the role of the tutor is said to be to "encourage students creatively to engage with the knowledge they have encountered, constructing and re-constructing their own understanding; by demonstrating in this way the methods of the scholar, the best tutors enable their students to achieve their own scholarly independence" (Oxford University). The above description of the role of a tutor is compatible with the notion of supporting epistemological access to ensure student academic success.

The tutorial system as it is practised in Oxford has been characterised as being "a pedagogical gem, the jewel in Oxford's crown" and the best way to "challenge, stimulate and truly educate Oxford's high-quality 'young' in the crucial 'lifelong-learning' skill of sound analysis and critical thinking" in the context of a liberal education (Palfreyman, 2008:i). Palfreyman goes on to question what constitutes the notion of 'higher' education and distinguishes it from simply tertiary education. He makes the point that if only narrowly vocational skills are taught and students are merely expected to memorise lecture hand-outs and opportunities are not given for direct involvement in an academic discourse such as that afforded by small group discussions, and face-to-face feedback such as that of a tutorial, then higher education could become merely a continuation of school and be regarded as 'tertiary' only, rather than 'higher' (Palfreyman, 2008:3). The tutorial process has at its core the "critical interplay between the student's and the tutor's conception of learning" (Palfreyman, 2008:4). It is in this interplay between both the tutor and the student's prior understanding of what constitutes knowledge that many tensions can be experienced – but I would argue that it is within the kind of forum afforded by the tutorial that the gaining of epistemological access can be supported.

It has been argued that good small-group teaching improves the teacher-student relationship and encourages a collaborative approach to learning as well as providing a model for teamwork typical in the workplace (Griffiths et al., 1996). In addition, Cook, Macintosh and Rushton (2006:8) maintain that teaching in small groups such as that of a tutorial helps to fulfil Chickering and

Gamson's (1987) seven principles for good practice in undergraduate teaching in that it:

- encourages contacts between students and staff
- develops reciprocity and cooperation among students
- uses active learning techniques
- gives prompt feedback
- emphasises time on task
- communicates high expectations, and
- respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

While the above principles certainly hold true if done well, if they are poorly implemented the results would not reflect good practice and could cause more harm than good.

In the UJ context, the typical tutorial is still characterised as a group of students meeting regularly in a class room with their tutor. With the increasingly large numbers of first-year undergraduates entering the institution, who are perceived to be in need of academic support, tutorial classes can sometimes range from twenty-five students to as many as fifty in some departments. My study looks at the various events that constitute the tutorial across a selection of five departments and three faculties in order to expose to what extent the tutorial is being constructed as providing epistemological access to first-year students at the University of Johannesburg.

1.8 Outline of the Chapters

In Chapter 2 I outline the substantive theories that I have drawn on for this thesis. I firstly explain the concept of epistemological access and its relationship to learning in higher education. Secondly I deal with the notion of the access paradox, which deals with the tension created between either providing access to dominant discourses, which perpetuates their dominance, or creating barriers to access, which leads to social exclusion. After this, I discuss the New Literacy Studies notion of literacy practices, focusing firstly

on 'critical literacy' in terms of Janks's (20 0) themes of 'dominance' (power), 'diversity', 'access' and 'design'; and then on issues connected to student identity. Next, I discuss the relationship between epistemology and ontology as it relates to higher education and finally I briefly examine knowledge structures and how these link to my study.

In Chapter 3 I explain the methodology and the methods that I used. I firstly give an introduction to my ontological positioning for this research in terms of my meta-theoretical framework. Here I explain the philosophical approach of Bhaskar's basic critical realism (CR), which argues for a stratified view of the world which can be seen in terms of levels of the real, the actual and the empirical. I go on to describe how this view is used in research. I then explain my analytical framework in terms of the methodological approach offered by Archer's social realism, which uses analytical dualism to examine the interplay of the distinct strata of 'structure', 'culture' and 'agency'. Next, I clarify my research design and how I went about collecting my data with regard to the institutional documents I examined and the individual and focus group interviews that I conducted and transcribed, as well as the questionnaires that were coded and analysed.

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I present and analyse my findings in which I apply the analytical framework to the data in terms of the structural, cultural and agential domains to uncover the constraining and / or enabling factors that emerged with regard to the construction of the tutorial system in terms of epistemological access.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion of the thesis. In this chapter I present a summary of the research study and also discuss the limitations to the study in terms of certain practical constraints as well as challenges encountered in the analysis of the data. I briefly explain how I was able to use the theoretical and analytical framework and make suggestions as to the possible usefulness of the findings of the research in terms of other institutional contexts. I then make recommendations for how the research findings could be used to help improve the quality of teaching and learning at UJ in providing support for epistemological access to contribute more meaningfully to academic success.

Finally, I make a case for the potential usefulness or applicability of the theoretical and analytical framework which was used in this research to other research contexts.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the substantive theories and concepts relevant to my study. I have already mentioned that epistemological access could be understood to be crucial for achieving academic success, and that it means much more than merely providing skills, facts and information geared towards some practical ends (Boughey, 2005a). In the first section of this chapter, I unpack this notion further in terms of its significance for learning in higher education. I then outline the difference between formal access and epistemological access and discuss the tensions that lead to the 'access paradox', where access reinforces the prevailing powerful discourses while lack of access causes exclusion. I then go on to discuss how discourses relate to literacy practices and how these are both linked to epistemological access. There is then a section that deals with the link between language and power in which I briefly outline the notion of 'critical literacy' which seeks to expose who is being advantaged or disadvantaged by texts in literacy practices. I then examine the link between literacy practices and student identity, which leads to a discussion on the relationship between epistemology and ontology in higher education. Finally, there is a short section on the different kinds of knowledge structures that students are being inducted into and how the knowledge itself structures the kinds of literacy practices that students are expected to adopt.

2.2 Epistemological Access in Higher Education

The notion of 'epistemological access' is key to literacy studies. Epistemology (from the Greek word *episteme* = knowledge, and from *epistanai* = to understand or know, and from *epit-*+ *histanai* to cause to stand and *logos* = word/speech) is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature, origin and scope of knowledge. So what is 'epistemological access'? This term was first coined by Wally Morrow (1994) in an essay dealing with the issue of

'entitlement and achievement' in the academy. He wrote that "learning how to become a participant in an academic practice might also be described in terms of 'gaining access' to the practice in question" and that since these academic practices have "developed around the search for knowledge, we might say that what we have in view here is 'epistemological access'" (1994:77). Epistemological access therefore would imply access to knowledge.

However, epistemological access as it relates to higher education also implies access to ways of knowing that are valued in the different disciplines. In this context, then, epistemological access naturally incorporates issues of the structure of the knowledge, the expectations of the lecturer and the tutor, as well as the norms and ethos of the institution itself. Getting access to how to make knowledge in any particular course or discipline entails both understanding the 'rules' of the particular discipline as well as understanding the expectations of the university at that particular cultural-historical time and space. The notion of epistemology of the discipline is not a monolithic generic structure, but is culturally and historically bound. It can be argued that students need to be guided to "enter the distinctively discursive world of academia" through the provision of epistemological access (Bradbury & Miller, 2011:2). This means that the 'learning-teaching' task of university study needs to be framed in such a way that the main focus is more on the *form* of the construction of knowledge rather than mainly on the *content* of a particular discipline. In this way, students can develop the ability to think critically and independently so as to become contributors to and creators of knowledge in their fields of study (Bradbury & Miller, 2011:2).

The issue of epistemological access has been characterised as being both political and educational because it not only focuses attention on the uncontested and naturalised processes of the acquisition of knowledge and the formation of concepts, but also on certain underlying assumptions about how teaching should happen in a university (CHE, 2010a:vi). Many

universities still construct students as autonomous⁵ subjects who can achieve success and make the most of the opportunities provided simply by virtue of having been given access to higher education; however, this view of the autonomous learner prevents students from achieving their full potential and deprives them of the enriching benefits of gaining true epistemological access (Boughey, 2005a; CHE, 2010b). It has been argued that in order to achieve epistemological access, a different way of approaching teaching and learning at university is vital (CHE, 2010a:vii). With this understanding in mind, I was interested to discover how teaching and learning was generally being conducted in tutorials at UJ.

The difficulties that many first-time university students experience, in engaging with academic discourse, often have to do with their underlying epistemological assumptions in terms of the ways in which their prior knowledge has been framed. It has been argued that the 'question-and-answer mode' of academic discourse requires students to also understand the 'rules of the game' in which the particular types of questions asked are posed specifically in order to trigger a certain kind of analysis or critical response. However, unless the student shares an understanding of the discursive rules or epistemological assumptions made by the teacher, the student's response will not be the appropriate or expected one (Bradbury & Miller, 2011:2). It is thus important for students to be supported in the acquisition of epistemological access if they are to achieve academic success. This means that teaching practices need to make the rules of academic discourse more overt to students (Boughey, 2002b:306).

However, there also seems to be a tension in terms of different conceptions of what constitutes epistemological access, and it has been argued that the focus in higher education in South Africa has more recently shifted from its purpose of creating social equity through the meaningful development of students towards the goal of achieving economic efficiency (Boughey,

⁵ The 'autonomous' model (Street, 1984, 1995, 2003) sees literacy as being neutral and universal – having inherent qualities to produce beneficial social and cognitive effects. This view masks Western hegemonic assumptions about what literacy is (Street, 2003:77). I deal in more detail with the notion of the autonomous model or approach to teaching and learning in sections 2.4 and 5.5.

2003:69). The effect of this is that epistemological access is increasingly being understood in a narrower form in the context of an outcomes-based and market-oriented educational approach which focuses on producing graduates with vocational skills and competencies that can best serve the country and the global economy, rather than also on a deeper development of new academic identities and true educational and social equity.

The concept of epistemological access can be deemed to be a fundamental guiding principle to the achievement of long-term goals for UJ in terms of its stated mission and goals of social inclusion and student success rate. Yet, there seems to be a mismatch or a gap between, on the one hand, the stated goals of South African universities to grant increased access, and, on the other hand, the alarmingly low throughput rates that indicate actual academic success (Scott et al., 2007). It is not enough to allow formal access to universities without ensuring that all students are supported with epistemological access. As Jonathan (2006:26) writes, “mere formal equality of opportunity for access, measured by representivity, would be hollow without due attention to the proper progress of all students admitted”.

In this study, I examine in detail how the tutorial system is constructed by and in the university. The premise that academic success is dependent on epistemological access, which in turn depends on students being given access to discipline-specific practices, suggests that student support structures would be constructed to this end. Therefore, I am investigating whether tutorials are actually constructed within this frame or are instead constructed by other discourses about students and learning and academic success.

I am in agreement with Morrow (1994) when he argues that the use of the word ‘education’ to describe both a system of institutions and the process itself of acquiring knowledge has the effect of blurring the distinction between formal access and epistemological access. Epistemological access does not simply mean gaining ‘formal access’ to a university in terms of qualifying for university entrance. Epistemological access also does not just mean allowing entrance to the physical buildings or even simply access to the content or

knowledge base of particular disciplines, but goes much further than this. For epistemological access to be real and effective in producing success in higher education, students also need to gain access to the accepted ways of making that content and actually generating knowledge themselves.

In order for students to be given this kind of access, the student's 'agency' should be acknowledged and enabled. Epistemological access is not something that can be 'done' to a student. The student (as the agent) needs to achieve epistemological access through actively engaging with and learning how to participate successfully in academic practice (Morrow, 1994:78). This involves firstly the student having a level of respect for the practice itself as well as acknowledging the authority of the practice. This also means that the student needs to develop a certain amount of self-reflection and self-knowledge in terms of how s/he relates to the academic practice so that there is the understanding that the learner is a "novice participant" in the practice rather than "a victim, a consumer or an exploited worker" (Morrow, 1994:78).

In order to gain epistemological access to academic practice, students need to be socialised into the practice. This means something more than becoming familiar only with the literacy practices of the group into which they are becoming socialised: it also involves "ways of talking, interacting, thinking, valuing and believing" (Gee, 1996:4) or what Gee (1996) refers to as "Discourses". He argues that "Discourses" are "mastered" not by overt instruction (learning) but through a process of "enculturation" or "apprenticeship" into particular social practices (acquisition). He states that a student cannot be overtly taught a "Discourse" and that acquisition by the student must precede learning (1996:139). A more detailed explication of "Discourse" and its importance in the context of my study will be given in Chapter 3.

Providing epistemological access is also much more than just the imparting of so-called autonomous 'skills' and 'strategies' for coping with academic practice, but instead requires 'engagement with content' such that students are able to construct academic knowledge in an 'appropriate' way (Boughey,

2005a:241). Therefore, there also needs to be an appropriate⁶ kind of relationship established between learners and their teachers which makes it possible for the kind of teaching that will help enable students to achieve epistemological access. There is a danger in simplifying the practice in order to relieve students of the difficulties inherent in systematic learning, and it has been argued that this simplification would be doing the learners a disservice and would be failing to respect their efforts to achieve epistemological access (Morrow, 1994:80). As Wheelahan (2009:231) writes, “students need access to the disciplinary system of meaning as a condition for using knowledge in contextually specific applications”.

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, there is a debate in higher education about whether epistemological access is more about acquiring (generic) academic skills and competencies in order to meet the vocational needs of society or whether it is really about taking on literacies and the underpinning values of a particular discipline in order to be able to make some sort of contribution to that field of knowledge. Winberg et al. (2012) have argued that epistemological access needs to be provided such that students are not only prepared for various professions once they graduate, but have also gained a deeper understanding and foundational disciplinary knowledge of that particular profession in order to contribute to its advancement and development (2012:84). Following this argument, it is thus important for university courses to focus less on pure ‘content’ knowledge and more on the ‘process’ of knowledge making – or what students can “do with knowledge” (Star and Hammer, 2008:240).

2.3 The Access Paradox

The ‘access paradox’ (Lodge, 1997; Janks, 2004) is a concept that describes the tension that exists when, on the one hand, if students are provided with access to the dominant forms, this perpetuates the dominance of these forms, and, on the other hand, if access is denied, this perpetuates marginalisation or

⁶ Of course the very notion of what is ‘appropriate’ can be contentious. Here it is understood to include that which is expected by the Academy.

exclusion from a society that values these forms. The access paradox acknowledges that students who are excluded from the language and forms of language that are dominant and represent the most 'linguistic capital' are limited in terms of their life chances, since they can become confined or ghettoised within their own marginalised linguistic communities, and the only way to escape the ghetto has increasingly been seen by members of these marginalised communities to aspire to learn the language of dominance, namely, English. At the same time, through this aspiration, the power of the dominant language is reinforced and becomes naturalised (Janks, 2010:140).

The access paradox is to a large extent really about the issue of cultural imperialism, since, although by providing epistemological access students are empowered, at the same time we, as educators, are strengthening the dominance of those ways of knowing over other possible ways of knowing. However, even if we are not teaching in ways that provide epistemological access, we often still expect students to know and act as we do – we just do not make those ways overt and we fail anyone who does not 'crack the code' (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988:8).

This paradox obviously can lead to a tension in terms of how epistemological access is provided. In this study I was also interested to discover in what way these conflicting notions play themselves out within the context of the tutorial system.

2.4 Literacy Practices

One way of theorising epistemological access is through the field of literacy studies. The meaning of the word 'literacy' has become extended so much over the years that there is no adequate dictionary definition that accounts completely for its complex usage in society. Whereas early definitions of literacy were confined to the concept of being able to read and write, contemporary theorists are now recognising literacy's connections to power, social identity and ideologies, and are questioning the traditional view of literacy which excluded its socio-cultural contexts (Gee, 1994:46). One of the

New Literacy Studies (NLS)⁷ theorists, Street (1984:6), defines the term 'literacy' as "the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing" and argues that literacy is a situated social practice. This means that learning is seen to be a social process and requires social interaction and collaboration. NLS argues that literacy is a set of "socially organized practices" (Scribner & Cole, 1981:236) which can be understood only in terms of the social practices in which it is acquired and used. This new literacy studies approach thus refers to literacy not in the singular but rather in the plural, seeing it as a set of social practices – or literacies. It also recognises that there are many areas of specialisation which are referred to in terms of literacy – such as computer literacy, economic literacy, political literacy and even film literacy (Barton, 1994: 9). Literacy can be said to have become a kind of "code-word" which has been used to describe multiple new ways of reading and writing across a range of disciplines collectively called literacy studies (Barton, 1994:22).

However, in the South African context, the so-called 'digital divide' (Castells, 1998) may have far-reaching repercussions for many first-time university students. Many students coming from poorer backgrounds will most likely have grown up with a lack of access to printed texts (in English) and now with the increase of new kinds of literacy, such as computer literacy, many of these students who would not have had easy access to computers and the Internet are disadvantaged even further. Thus, "computer literacy interacts with academic literacy and the English language in complex ways to compound existing barriers to entering the discourses of academia" (Thesen & Van Pletzen, 2006:19).

Literacy practices are socio-cultural in nature in that a person's social and cultural upbringing will determine the way in which s/he approaches language and learning (Gee, 1996) and it is through these particular practices that people gain access to the ways of making knowledge. For example, McKenna

⁷ NLS is embodied in the work of Heath (1983), Street (1984), Barton (1994) and Gee (1996). Further developments of it can be found in collections of writings edited by Street (1993), Barton and Hamilton (1998), Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic (2000), Breir and Prinsloo (1996) and Baynham and Prinsloo (2001) etc. This conceptualisation of learning has been particularly productive in higher education research in South Africa: for example, Boughy (2002), Jacobs (2007), Janks (2010), McKenna (2004), De Kadt and Mathonsi (2003) and Thesen (1997).

(2004a) writes that if students' prior home and school literacies valued colourful anecdotal forms of narrative, they would be likely to find great difficulty in writing according to the norms of academic discourse where objectivity and restraint are paramount and where any meaningful reference to the writer's personal experience is expected not to be revealed (McKenna, 2004a:280).

According to literacy theorists, knowledge should be co-constructed and be presented in an authentic context and not de-contextualised. Learning is seen as being embedded in a particular social and physical context and is socially situated. Street (1984, 1995, 2003) distinguished between two models of literacy: the autonomous and the ideological. The 'autonomous' model sees literacy as being neutral and universal and as such having inherent qualities which could produce beneficial social and cognitive effects on society. Thus, if literacy is provided to poor 'illiterate' people it will supposedly have an automatic beneficial effect on their cognitive ability, educational prospects and life chances regardless of the social and economic conditions which led to their being illiterate in the first place. This view, however, masks underlying Western hegemonic cultural and ideological assumptions about what literacy is (Street, 2003:77).

On the other hand, the 'ideological' model views literacy as a social practice and not a neutral technical skill. This perspective means that the different ways in which people approach literacy changes from context to context and it can be seen to be "embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles". In different socio-cultural contexts and world-views, people will have different conceptions of what constitutes knowledge and thus will have different literacy practices, and so literacy, in terms of its meanings and practices will always be contested and 'ideological' (Street, 2003:77). The so-called 'inherent qualities' proposed by the autonomous model of literacy are in fact simply "conventions of literate practice in particular societies" (Street, 1984:7).

Increasingly, the demographic profile of students entering university in South Africa reflects a great diversity in terms of language, socio-cultural

background and educational advantage. This means that students enter higher education institutions with diverse notions of and approaches to literacy, and this will have a bearing on how they approach and make meaning within the discourse of the university itself.

Using the concept of 'academic literacies' as a framework for understanding students' many and varied writing practices, Lea and Street (1998) have distanced themselves from the skills-based, deficit models of student writing in order to find a more "encompassing understanding" of the link between student writing and academic practices, which they see as being subject to the prevailing dominant discourse of the institution in which they take place. They argue that what it means to be 'academically literate' is a contested term and may mean different things in different contexts, genres, fields and disciplines as well as to the different parties involved (such as the students, academic staff, or administrators) (Lea & Street, 1998:158).

University students need to make a transition from their prior way of being and doing in terms of their literacy practices in order to succeed in a new academic environment which necessitates the adoption of its academic literacy practices. Paxton (2007) coined the term 'interim literacies' to describe the writing practices of first-year university students, which she saw as a reflection of a "transition process from school and home to academic literacy" (2007:46). In much the same way, children going to school for the first time also have to make transitions from their home and community environments into school-based literacy practices.

Because of these parallels, it is interesting to look at Heath's (1983) seminal ethnographic study, *Ways with Words*, in which she demonstrates that different cultural models exist in different societies and these differing models affect the ways in which people from different socio-cultural backgrounds approach literacy. She studied three communities in South Carolina and demonstrates how the different oral and literacy practices in preschool home and community environments in which children grow up affects their language development – which later impacts on their ability to succeed within the particular literacy practices of formal schooling. Her study found that children

whose backgrounds included approaches to literacy that were more closely aligned to the expectations of the school system were more successful when they had to make the transition to school-based literacy practices than those who brought with them approaches to literacy very different from school-based literacy practices (1983:235).

The notion of 'literacy practices' is thus a useful way to explain the link between the activities of using literacy and the particular social situations in which they are embedded. According to Barton and Hamilton (2007:7), "literacy practices are what people do with literacy. However practices are not observable units of behaviour since they also involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships".

If literacy practices relate to ontological issues of values, attitudes and ways of being-in-the-world, it is clear that issues of identity also need to be taken into account. The issue of identity will therefore be dealt with in more detail in section 2.6 of this chapter.

2.5 Critical Literacy

This study also draws in part on the critical literacy work of Janks (2010) who developed a theory of critical literacy in which she outlines a conceptual framework which comprises the interdependent themes of 'domination' (power), 'access', 'diversity' and 'design'. Janks, through her critical literacy project, always seeks to expose the underlying element of power and the way it functions in any particular situation. This conceptualisation seeks to reveal that which appears to be normal or naturalised as social constructs – which exist to privilege and perpetuate the status quo, while excluding or marginalising difference. The conceptual model therefore questions whose interests are being served by a particular social construct or literacy event, and exposes how people become positioned by the dominant discourses which are seen to be natural and the correct way of doing things. The model also reveals how these dominant discourses can act as gate-keepers and create social exclusion and be barriers to access (while professing to be trying to achieve the exact opposite).

The first theme that Janks deals with in her model is that of 'domination' or power. She argues that language and discourse is a powerful way to maintain and reproduce relations of domination. Janks explains how, through the use of critical discourse analysis (C A), language can be shown "to position readers in the interests of power" (20 0:23) – so that when examining a text⁸ the reader would need to ask how the text is working to position the reader, and whose viewpoint is being privileged. Language is a socially situated practice and not "an autonomous construct" (Fairclough, 1989:vi); it is shaped by "the structures and forces of (the) social institutions within which we live and function" (1989:vi). According to Fairclough (1989:239), "the perspective of language as socially constituted and constituting ... is all too often missing, leading to legitimized and naturalized orders of discourse being presented as legitimate and natural". In other words, language is not "a neutral form of communication", but "constructs reality" and is "central to ideology as power" (Janks, 2010: 60).

This study examines to what extent issues of domination or power (especially in the use of language) manifest themselves in the tutorial system. It aims to discover to what extent tutorials function to help provide epistemological access, or, conversely, alienate and marginalise students. While providing epistemological access does perpetuate the dominant discourse, this study attempts to expose the generative mechanisms which underpin the construction of the tutorial system to discover whether or not the facilitation of epistemological access in the context of the University of Johannesburg enables students in more equitable ways in line with notions of social justice.

In Janks's conceptual model, this theme of 'domination' interacts with a second theme, that of 'diversity', in the following way: Janks observes that students come to higher education with diverse language and literacy practices, and these differences can lead to them being marginalised by the dominant discourses they encounter. As they become exposed to the discourses and enter into them, they acquire new ways of being in the world – new social identities. While it is true that "academic language ... is no-one's

⁸ The term 'text' is used in literacy studies to encompass not only written texts, but all objects of meaning.

mother tongue” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1994:8), for some students, academic language is more accessible than for others by virtue of the literacies they bring with them.

This study also aims to discover to what extent the structure of the university, and the tutorial system in particular, is able to deal with and acknowledge this diversity, and enable epistemological access to all students and not only to those whose cultural capital seems to be more closely aligned to the dominant discourse.

When Janks (2010) talks of ‘access’, she is referring to epistemological access and not formal, physical access, and the notion of the ‘access paradox’ (discussed earlier in this chapter) describes the inherent tensions between providing access and perpetuating the dominant discourse, or withholding it and causing students to be marginalised and excluded.

The final aspect of Janks’s conceptual framework is that of ‘design’ – which deals with the production (rather than the reception) of texts. This is what Janks terms “the idea of productive power – the ability to harness the multiplicity of semiotic systems across diverse cultural locations to challenge and change existing discourses” (2010:25). Janks refers to the work of the New London Group (2000) – also known as the New Literacy School (NLS) – in multi-literacies. The multi-literacies project was established in response to the changing face of technology and media education, which has totally changed the literacy practices of students. Students today need to be taught how to make meaning by drawing on the totality of all the “semiotic resources for representation” (Janks, 2010:25). In terms of Janks’s framework, ‘design’ can also be seen in the relationship between writing, identity and power.

Students may experience their subjection to academic writing as oppressive or difficult. It is a contested debate as to whether students should be given the freedom or platform to produce texts in a form that reflects their own personality, experiences and literacy practices which may be in conflict with that of the academy and at odds with the value system of the discipline to which they are trying to gain access. The ability to critically engage with and challenge the dominant discourse, to create their own knowledge in terms of

the disciplinary field in which they are studying, would be possible only if students are supported in ways that enable epistemological access.

Bernstein created a language of description in terms of different forms of 'knowledge structures' (which deal with in more detail later in this chapter), to expose the fact that in the field of education the contrasts between these forms can become positioned ideologically such that:

One form becomes the means whereby a dominant group is said to impose itself upon a dominated group and functions to silence and exclude the voice of this group. The excluded voice is then transformed into a latent pedagogic voice of unrecognised potential. (Bernstein, 1999:158)

Bernstein's notion of the "latent pedagogic voice of unrecognised potential" resonates with the idea that when educationalists undervalue the potential of what their students may bring in terms of their prior literacy practices or local discourses, this results in a missed opportunity to create a pedagogically meaningful connection between these local discourses and academic discourse (Thesen, 1997:509).

It was thus also my aim in this study to discover to what extent tutors were aware of the prior learning and discourses of their students, and what discourses tutors themselves were drawing on in their construction of their students and their role as tutors.

2.6 Identity

It has been argued that there is a strong link between literacy practices and identity (Boughey, 2005a; McKenna, 2004a; Norton, 2010; Ligorio, 2010). Language as manifested in literacy practices is not a neutral way through which communication takes place. On the contrary, these practices have social meaning which can determine how someone is positioned in a particular linguistic community. "A person's identity must always be understood in relational terms: one is either subject *of* a set of relationships (i.e. in a position of power) or subject *to* a set of relationships (i.e. in a position

of reduced power)” (Norton, 2010:2). It is through language that an individual can negotiate a sense of self or gain access to a particular (dominant) linguistic community (Norton, 2010:2). In the South African context of higher education, due to the legacy of apartheid and the dominance of the discourse which privileges Western literacy practices, many of the students now entering the university “may not have easy access to the linguistic codes or cultural practices of the academic communities” (McKenna, 2004a:274).

The academic success of a scholar will therefore depend largely on whether s/he has access to the particular kind of ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1986) that is valued by the dominant social structures (such as schools and universities). Different ‘capital’ is valued in different situations. A student who has ‘done well’ in a rural school may be appreciated as being a kind of hero in that environment, but the same student may come to a higher education environment with what might be seen as being the ‘wrong’ kind of capital, which is under-valued by the system, and which may lead to a lack of academic success.

According to Thesen (1997)⁹, in the transitional context of post-apartheid South African universities of today, what constitutes the ‘mainstream culture’ in general is not something that is completely certain anymore (1997:505). She further argues that the conventional range of identity markers such as class, race, gender and language, or what Fairclough (1995) calls ‘orders of discourse’, needs to be extended to include emergent categories specific to the South African context, such as “urban-rural transitions, religions and political literacy practices, a strong oral tradition, and combinations of (other) practices within an institution” (Thesen, 1997:506). She also argues that educationalists, because they do not recognise the value of student agency in terms of what she terms their “new identity categories”, also fail to understand or appreciate the potential to make meaningful connections between traditional academic discourse and “new knowledge” which may be contained within their students’ prior literacy practices and local discourses (1997:509).

⁹ While this argument was made in 1997, Thesen’s observations still hold true further down the post-apartheid timeline.

Ivanic (1998) claims that writing is an act of identity – a way of representing the self, and aligning that sense of self or identity with particular socio-culturally governed positions. She also claims that academic writing can often lead to a conflict of identity for students who have not yet aligned themselves with the ‘self’ or identity that is embodied in academic discourse. Thus, in order to gain access to the (alien) discourse of the academy, students need to adapt and change aspects of their identities – at least for the time in which they are trying to function effectively in the new environment. It is in this area that issues of epistemological access (access to ways of knowing) become blurred with issues of ontological access (access to ways of being) – an issue to which this study needed to pay careful attention. I discuss the interplay between epistemology and ontology in the next section (2.7) of this chapter.

De Kadt and Mathonsi (2003) identified this aspect in a South African context in a study conducted on students who were speakers of African languages at the University of Natal, Durban. They investigated to what extent black students felt they were able to write in their ‘own voice’ and assume an African identity in the context of the university. Their research indicated that most respondents felt excluded by the dominance of the ‘mainstream culture’ and the academic identity that was expected of them was felt to be at odds with their own African identity. “Specific practices of knowledge construction and academic writing are valued, which tends to disadvantage any students not from strongly literate middle-class backgrounds” (2003: 00). e Kadt and Mathonsi argue that identities in South Africa have typically been constructed in terms of language, and the hegemony of English as the language of teaching and learning has further alienated many black students.

Non-traditional students in higher education experience an “all-pervasive” confusion that points to an “institutional practice of mystery” (Lillis, 200 :53). This can be extrapolated to also being an “institutional practice of misery” which disadvantages those students who are unfamiliar with the rules and conventions pertinent to the various academic practices of the institution (Prince & Archer, 2006:228). Because valued practices are often not taught to those who are not already familiar with them (Gee, 1990), formal institutions (such as universities) perpetuate the dominant discourses and continue to

privilege those in society who are already privileged. Thus the particular discursive practices and ways of making knowledge that are privileged in the university are ideological in as much as they maintain the current power positions in social relationships in terms of class, race and gender (Lillis, 2001:36).

In the context of my focus area of higher education, perhaps instead of labelling certain students as being 'unprepared' for university life, it might be more useful for those involved in providing epistemological access to acknowledge the different socio-cultural influences that have affected the development of particular literacies and to take cognisance of this as well as to become familiar with the profiles and identities of the students currently entering higher education institutions. This study investigates the extent to which the tutorial system is constructed with these understandings of multiple literacies and student identities in mind, and has tried to unpack what other understandings also construct the tutorial system.

If literacy practices entail issues of values, attitudes, social relationships and feelings, then their acquisition will have implications for identity. Intertwined with issues of literacy and identity are issues that relate to the nature of who one is in the world – that is, one's ontology. There is thus a connection between epistemology, the knowledge of the world, and ontology, the nature of being, or one's way-of-being in the world.

2.7 Epistemology and Ontology

Traditionally in higher education, epistemology has overshadowed concerns with ontology, which has meant that the major focus has been on transferring knowledge, skills and competencies in the various disciplines rather than taking into account the ontological reality of students (all'Alba & Barnacle, 2007:679). In higher education, it can be argued that it is not enough simply to attend to the epistemological needs of students: there are also important ontological issues that need to be addressed. If university educators construct epistemological access only in terms of providing students with the

knowledge, skills and strategies they need to 'crack the code' (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988:8) to gain academic success and do not also take into account the ontological reality of who students actually are and are becoming, this constitutes a significant shortfall in the fulfilment of the true purpose of higher education. As all' Alba and Barnacle (2007) write: " f being and knowing are inextricable, then exploring this interdependence provides a means of not only problematising but also transforming higher education" (2007:682). According to Barnett (2005), there needs to be an 'ontological turn' in higher education so that "instead of knowing the world, being-in-the-world has to take primary place in the conceptualisations that inform university teaching" (2005:795).

It has been argued (see McKenna, 2003; Morrow, 1993) that the diversity of students needs to be acknowledged in order to enable epistemological access for all students and not only for those whose 'cultural capital' is more closely aligned to the dominant discourse. It was thus important in my study to be alert to the possibility that beyond the epistemological issues at play, there may have also been something broader – such as issues around possible ontological differences that novice students experience on entering tertiary education.

2.8 Knowledge Structures

The concept of knowledge structures was first theorised by Basil Bernstein (9 99) to produce a 'language of description' in order to better understand the underlying structural principles of different forms of knowledge or discourse. Although I am not drawing substantially on Bernstein's theories, it is nonetheless useful to acknowledge briefly their relevance to the issue of epistemological access, which is central to my study.

In the different disciplines that students are studying, they are attempting to gain access to different 'knowledge structures', and the literacy practices that they are expected to become familiar with are derived from the values and functions of these different knowledge structures. A major critique of NLS (and other educational research) is that while it acknowledges the social power of

knowledge and learning and the ways in which literacies are the manifestation of this social power, it fails to acknowledge or consider the way in which the knowledge itself structures what are accepted and desired practices. Maton (2000) argues that while social power and knowledge are interlinked, they are not reducible to one another, and that knowledge “comprises both sociological and epistemological forms of power”, since knowledge in education does not simply reflect social relations of power but also does have some legitimate and “epistemologically powerful claims to truth” (2000: 49).

According to Maton (2004), Bernstein’s work with the concept of knowledge structures is a way to systematically describe “the differences between fields of knowledge production in terms of their organising principles” (2004:2 9). In terms of knowledge structures, Bernstein distinguished between two types of discourse: horizontal and vertical discourse. Horizontal discourse is everyday, ‘common-sense’ knowledge which is local, oral, context-dependent, specific, tacit and embedded in on-going practices, as well as being segmentally organised and differentiated with specific rules for accessing and distributing this knowledge (1999:158-159); the knowledge, behaviour and expectations around this are regulated by the status and position of those ‘knowers’ who hold the knowledge, and who may give or withhold access to the particular knowledge to novices in that discourse depending on the context or function. Vertical discourse, by contrast, is that of ‘official’ or ‘school(ed)’ discourse which in the sciences is “a coherent, explicit, and systematically principled structure, hierarchically organised” and in the social sciences and humanities is “a series of specialised languages with specialised modes of interrogation and specialised criteria for the production of texts” (1999: 59). Bernstein created this descriptive language to highlight the ways in which these different knowledge structures create their own modes of using language and which students are expected to adopt in their particular disciplines.

Since this study investigates the ways in which the tutorial system can enable real epistemological access, it has a central concern with issues of knowledge. It is therefore of interest to note that students are expected to adapt to the different ways in which knowledge is structured within their

different disciplines and I was curious about what effect this has on their understanding and access to these different forms of knowledge.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with substantive theories and concepts that were relevant to this research. These included a discussion around the importance of epistemological access in terms of teaching and learning in higher education. There was also a discussion about the differences between the notions of 'formal' versus 'epistemological' access and how the broadening of physical access does not automatically lead to academic success. The chapter also argued that although it is desirable to allow increased access to the dominant forms to those previously excluded or marginalised from the academy, simultaneously a tension is set up through the perpetuation and privileging of these dominant forms. In addition, not only was the relationship between literacy practices and discourse recognised, but also their common association with epistemological access. In addition, the chapter dealt briefly with 'critical literacy' which exposes the link between language and power with regard to who is being disadvantaged or advantaged by texts in literacy practices. The connection between student identity (ontology) and literacy practices (epistemology) was then discussed as well as how different kinds of knowledge structures influence the kinds of literacy practices that students are expected to adopt at university.

The next chapter will deal with the methodology and methods used in this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

Different forms of research construct different forms of knowledge which can make different claims to the truth. The assumptions one makes as a researcher will directly affect the methodology that is seen as 'fit for purpose' in one's research (Cohen, L., L. Manion & K. Morrison, (2007). These assumptions may take the form of ontological assumptions, which govern one's understanding of the nature of the social phenomenon being studied: for example does the researcher see social reality as being external or internal, objective or subjective? The researcher may also hold certain epistemological assumptions about whether knowledge can be acquired or whether it has to be experienced.

In terms of the ontology that a researcher subscribes to, two of the main positions which tend to be seen as polar opposites along a continuum of various positions would be the debate between realism on the one hand and relativism on the other. "A realist ontology maintains that the world is made up of structures and objects that have cause-effect relations with one another", whereas "a relativist ontology questions the 'out-there-ness' of the world and it emphasizes the diversity of interpretations that can be applied to it" (Willig, 2001:13). Whereas realism is the doctrine that states that objects of sense perception have an existence independent of the act of perception (i.e. the realist position asserts that objects have an independent existence independent of the knower), relativism is the doctrine that asserts that truth is relative to a particular frame of reference (e.g. language or culture, i.e. the relativist position states that there is no separate objective truth apart from how each individual perceives it). It is therefore important for me to consider from the outset what ontological position I will claim in this research in order to construct knowledge.

According to Bhaskar (2008a), "a philosophical ontology is developed by reflection upon what must be the case for (science) to be possible; and this is

independent of any actual (scientific) knowledge” (Bhaskar, 2008b:29). In this research I am adopting a realist position generally. More specifically, I will be using the ontological position offered by that branch of realism known as critical realism as elucidated by Roy Bhaskar (commonly accepted as being the founder of critical realism).

Critical realism is a philosophy of science and offers a meta-theoretical approach. Critical realism “embraces ontological and epistemological elements, which tells us what structures, entities and mechanisms make up the social world” (Burnett, 2007:3). In this study, I used critical realism’s notions of a layered ontology as the ‘underlabourer’¹⁰ for my research. This offers an underpinning philosophical framework that can be deployed most effectively to inform empirical research that uses various methodological approaches. One such approach is that of social realism, which will be discussed later.

Critical realism grew out of a combination of the general theory of science known as ‘transcendental realism’ and a particular theory of social science called ‘critical naturalism’, which uses “the emancipatory axiology entailed by the theory of explanatory critique” (Bhaskar, 2008a:2). In terms of a philosophical ontology, the transcendental realist distinguishes between open and closed¹¹ systems, between events and structures, and regards the structures and mechanisms that give rise to events or phenomena in the world as being “objects of knowledge” (Bhaskar, 2008b:15). Structures are regarded as being real and enduring and operating independently of our knowledge or empirical experience of them: in Bhaskar’s words, “knowledge and the world are structured, ... differentiated and changing” (Bhaskar, 2008b:15), and the world can be understood through “philosophical argument”, although “the particular structures it contains and the ways in which it is differentiated are matters for substantive scientific investigation” (Bhaskar, 2009: 9).

¹⁰ The term ‘underlabourer’ is a social ontology developed by Bhaskar and Archer. It is meant to be a theoretical ‘tool kit’ that can usefully be drawn on to guide research rather than forcing research findings to fit preconceived categories.

¹¹ An open system allows for interaction with and reciprocal influence on and by the environment and context in which it is situated; a closed system is isolated from the environment and is not subject to outside influence – e.g. in a controlled scientific experiment.

Through applying a transcendental account of the world, it was Bhaskar's aim to reconceptualise the philosophies of both the natural and social sciences (as a challenge to the established conventions) to show the superiority of critical realism to explain the world, as well to show that it is the most feasible way in which scientific investigation should be undertaken in terms of enquiries into open systems (Jessop, 2005:41).

Because critical realism is seen as an 'underlabourer', it is possible to apply this lens to any form of investigative study into an open system – including that of higher education and the tutorial system.

3.2 Bhaskar's Critical Realism

Bhaskar's (1978:56) critical realism (CR), which deals with understanding the relationship between reality and our knowledge about it, comprises three ontologically distinct, stratified layers of reality: the real, the actual and the empirical. He also distinguishes between two different dimensions of reality or 'worlds': "an intransitive world that is natural and (relatively) unchanging and a transitive world that is social and historical" (Bhaskar, 1999 : 0).

3.2.1 The level of the Real

The deepest layer of reality, according to Bhaskar (1978), is the domain of the real, which consists of the underlying intrinsic structures and mechanisms which are able to manifest or produce events in the world – i.e. they are 'generative' and have 'causal powers'. This layer is seen as being an intransitive ontological dimension. This is seen as 'intransitive', since the causal structures and mechanisms "endure and act quite independently of men" (Bhaskar, 2008b:42). This intransitive dimension is relatively unchanging because it is made up of these generative mechanisms that endure. In Bhaskar's (2008a) words: "a generative mechanism is nothing other than a way of acting of a thing. It endures, and under appropriate circumstances is exercised, as long as the properties that account for it persist" (2008b:42), and "the generative mechanisms of nature exist as the causal powers of things" (2008b:40).

However, Bhaskar (2008a) says that causal laws should not be seen simply as 'powers' but rather as 'tendencies' which are 'potentialities' which may or may not be manifest or even perceived in terms of particular outcomes or actual events (2008b:40). The complex manifestations of the phenomena of the world expressed as 'tendencies' can be explained in terms of two distinct elements: that of "continuing activity" and that of "enduring powers" (2008b:40), and it is in this context that "men must be causal agents capable of acting self-consciously on the world" in order to understand the deep and diverse structures underlying the manifest phenomena of our world (2008b:9). So there are distinct underlying generative mechanisms (both enduring and 'trans-factually' active) that are responsible for the complexity of phenomenological occurrences, but that depend on the "intentional actions of men" to be activated and to be manifested (2008b:9).

Bhaskar (2008a) argues that the generative mechanisms of nature at the level of the real are distinct and independent from the events they generate (at the level of the actual) and that these mechanisms "endure even when not acting" (2008b:36); and that even though the mechanisms are located at the level of the real, and it is unusual for them to be actualised or be "empirically identified", however, through experience, at the level of the actual and the empirical, they can "become manifest to men" (2008b:37). Bhaskar says that "the arduous task of science [is] the production of the knowledge of those enduring and continually active mechanisms of nature that produce the phenomena of our world" (2008b:37).

Thus, in my study, there was the 'arduous task' of coming to an understanding or knowledge of what were the generative (both enduring and continually active) mechanisms that were producing the phenomena that were empirically present in the events that constitute the tutorial system at UJ.

3.2.2 The level of the Actual

The next layer after the real is the domain of the actual, in which events are made manifest when the underlying structures and mechanisms (from the

level of the real) are activated – this layer is known as the ‘transitive’ epistemological dimension, where things are constantly changing. Whereas, at the level of the real, these structures and mechanisms are enduring and “intransitive” (Bhaskar, 2008b:36) (and therefore relatively unchanging), at the level of the actual, things are subject to flux and change when through “intentional action” by people they are activated and become identifiable as events or phenomena in the world. Furthermore, in open systems, events are not “deductively predictable”, because they can be the result or effects of a combination of two or more possibly radically different mechanisms (Bhaskar, 2008b:109).

Thus what constitutes society can be characterised as “an articulated ensemble of provisional tendencies and powers that exist only as long as at least some of them are being exercised via the intentional activity of human beings” (Jessop, 2005:44).

3.2.3 The level of the Empirical

The final layer is the empirical, the domain in which events or occurrences are experienced through the sense perceptions. It is at this level that actual events, and, in some circumstances, underlying structures or mechanisms can be observed or measured (Jessop, 2005:41). The empirical domain is where we experience events and is therefore distinguished from the actual domain, where events can happen whether or not we are able to experience them. What we experience or observe in the world (at the empirical level) is not the same as what actually happens (at the actual level) (Danermark, B., M Ekstrom, L Jakobsen and JC Karlsson, 2002: 20). All the data or facts that are used in terms of traditional empiricist research occur at the empirical level and are always ‘theory-laden’ – which means that we always experience events (data) indirectly and as mediated through our theories or conceptual understandings of the world (Danermark et al., 2002:21). The levels of knowledge and understanding in the empirical domain are fallible because they are also subject to differing interpretations depending on the individual’s socio-historical context (or state of awareness). It is because all objects of

investigation are mediated and do not directly reflect real or actual phenomena that all observations, experimentation and measurements are thus contingent and fallible (Jessop, 2005:43).

What Bhaskar (1978:36) called the “epistemic fallacy” results when the three domains of the real, the actual and the empirical are reduced into one, in which what we *know* about the world is conflated with what *is*. To avoid this, critical realists argue that empirical research should rather “investigate and identify relationships and non-relationships, respectively, between what we experience, what actually happens, and the underlying mechanisms that produce the events in the world” (an ermark et al., 2002:21).

3.3 Critical Realism in Research

In terms of critical realist ontology, my study seeks to look beyond the common-sense (fallible) everyday and variously interpreted experience of events (at the empirical level). It aims to identify and uncover the underlying structures and mechanisms from the level of the real, in the intransitive dimension, which are activated as ‘causal forces’ producing events at the level of the actual and empirical.

The critical realist approach is one that seeks to highlight those underlying factors that may be obstructions to emancipation. This means that research from the philosophical perspective of critical realism is undertaken primarily in order to expose the underlying relationships and causal mechanisms which give rise to the ways in which society is structured. This is undertaken with a view to understanding how these can be transformed in order to promote human liberty.

[T]he point of all science, indeed all learning and reflection, is to change and develop our understandings and reduce illusion...Learning, as the reduction of illusion and ignorance, can help to free us from domination by hitherto unacknowledged constraints, dogmas and falsehoods.

(Sayer, 1992:252)

One of the key elements in this, and what distinguishes critical realism from ordinary realism, is what is termed 'explanatory critique'. Critical realists consider the role of explanatory critique to be a key factor in helping to promote social change by exposing inequalities or barriers to freedom. According to Bhaskar and Collier (1998), explanatory critiques can "expose not just false beliefs but the false beliefs by which oppression and injustice are disguised, whether consciously or not, and perpetrated" (Bhaskar, 1998:389). The emancipatory and transformative role that critical realism claims is thus enabled through the use of explanatory critique. For Bhaskar, the way to achieve emancipation is through "the transformation of structures, not the alteration or amelioration of states of affairs" (Bhaskar, 1998a:40) and he states that "the world cannot be rationally changed unless it is adequately interpreted" (Bhaskar, 1989:5). The basic premise is that it is necessary to be able to understand and explain how society works in order to improve it. In the context of my study, I hoped through the use of explanatory critique to identify and understand the nature of the underlying structures and mechanisms that have led to tutorials being constructed in particular ways.

Critical realism assumes that there is a level of reality that exists independently of human consciousness or knowledge of that reality, and that the nature of social reality which is deeply stratified and structured is such that only the most superficial layer can be experienced (at an empirical, common-sense, observable level).

There is more to the world, then, than patterns of events. It has ontological depth: events arise from the workings of mechanisms which derive from the structures of objects, and they take place within geo-historical contexts.

(Sayer, 2000:15)

Events that can only be experienced or observed at the level of the actual and the empirical are assumed, in terms of critical realism, to have been generated by underlying causal forces or mechanisms that exist at an unobservable level of the real. It is therefore up to the social researcher to try to uncover or identify the underlying causal powers (structures, mechanisms

and tendencies) that are responsible for producing these social events. It is the contention of critical realists that although social structure cannot be observed directly, it can be seen to modify or influence human behaviour, and it can thus be known to be real and to possess causal efficacy (Lewis, 2000:250). However, reality can be directly experienced in the empirical domain only through our perceptions. These perceptions are 'theory-laden' in as much as we perceive reality through our particular conceptions of what constitutes reality depending on our social context, location and history and as such these perceptions are fallible. This therefore has implications for the researcher who is seeking to identify social structures.

While all social systems are 'open' and thus subject to change (transitive), realists maintain that there are underlying (intransitive) unseen mechanisms that have relatively unchanging properties and powers. The purpose of social research is to try to unmask these hidden causal powers and generative mechanisms. The difficulty lies in the fact that there is not always necessarily a directly attributable relationship between the empirical event and a particular causal mechanism, since this link may be coincidental or contingent.

Additionally, the emergence of a particular event or phenomenon may be attributable to more than one 'generative mechanism', and furthermore may not necessarily manifest at any predictable time after the causal property has been activated (if at all). In social systems there may be several causal structures and mechanisms interacting at the same time, making it difficult to accurately determine which mechanism or structure has caused a particular effect (Sayer, 2000:16). Thus realist studies are limited in the extent to which they can make definitive claims about the causal powers of particular mechanisms. Different contexts will entail different combinations of mechanisms being at play and different events emerging – thus critical realists stress the potential fallibility of their claims across contexts. Critical realism therefore tries to understand or account for 'causal tendencies' rather than direct 'cause and effect' (Bhaskar, 1997; Christie, 1990).

In social science research, because the systems studied are 'open' and complex, there is a problem of identifying causal responsibility because of the

risk of incorrectly attributing certain effects to having been caused by one particular mechanism (and its structure) instead of another (Sayer, 2000:16). My study is an attempt to uncover the mechanisms that are enabling or constraining the tutorial system. In order to lessen the likelihood of making false claims about what these mechanisms are, it was important to use a certain amount of interpretative judgement based on my understanding of the context in which the research took place. According to Sayer (2000), it is possible to interpret or identify the likely causal mechanisms in a particular context by asking a series of questions such as:

- What does the existence of this object or practice presuppose? What are its preconditions, e.g. what does the use of money presuppose (trust, a state, etc)?
- Could object 'A', e.g. capitalism, exist without 'B', e.g. patriarchy? (This is another way of sorting out the conditions of existence of social phenomena)
- What is it *about* this object/practice which enables it to do certain things? (There may be several mechanisms at work simultaneously and we may need to seek ways of distinguishing their respective effects).

(Sayer, 2000:16)

Interpretation is a key element to a social science researcher, and it is important to be able to interpret the meaning of particular social practices by examining the discourse of actors in terms of the wider contexts in which they take place. Sayer (2000) warns that “much of what happens does not depend on or correspond to actors’ understandings; there are unintended consequences and unacknowledged conditions and things can happen to people regardless of their understandings” (2000:20). The explanation of a social phenomenon depends on the researcher being aware not only of the stratified nature of society and the social world, but also the “emergent powers arising from certain relationships” and the ways in which the constraining and enabling effects of the contexts in which they occur are affected by the “operation of causal mechanisms” (2000:27).

The researcher thus needs to follow a process of ‘retroduction’, which is “a mode of inference in which events are explained by postulating (and identifying) mechanisms which are capable of producing them” (Sayer,

1992:107) and in which the theoretical question is asked of a particular event: what conditions or internal relations must exist for X to be what it is? (Castro, 2002:249). Retroduction involves asking what the domain of the real must be like, to produce or actualise such an event (Jessop, 2005:43). In the context of social science, retroduction really allows a researcher to try to discover the basic constituents or conditions of the particular event that is being studied in terms of its social structures and relations. The key element of retroduction is that through which one “seeks to clarify the basic prerequisites or conditions for social relationships, people’s actions, reasoning and knowledge” (Danermark et al., 2002:96). Since this form of argumentation transcends or goes beyond the empirical domain, it is also known in philosophy as ‘transfactual’ or ‘transcendental argumentation’.

Through retroduction or applying the concept of transfactuality to a social context, “it is possible to conclude that there may be certain social mechanisms, or trends or structures which may or may not be currently empirically present. They may be unexpressed or partially expressed potentials” (Price, 2012:2). Through the process of retroduction, a researcher would need to imaginatively reconstruct what would be the basic conditions for something to exist and in this way gain knowledge of what properties or mechanisms would be necessary for a particular phenomenon to have been produced.

In my study it was thus necessary to start from the empirical and actual level – where various events, social relationships and interactions are observable, and to then ask the question: what underlying structures and mechanisms must there be for these particular events, relationships and interactions to exist? In addition, it was important when interpreting the particular social phenomenon to be aware of how several different mechanisms ‘rub up’ against each other and interact to enable the emergence of different observable effects or events.

3.4 Archer's Social Realism

Building on the meta-theory of critical realism, Archer, a social scientist, developed social realism (SR), which adopts a methodological approach to researching the social world and takes into account the three domains of 'structure', 'culture' and 'agency' (Archer, 1995). This approach, expressed elegantly through Archer's notion of 'analytical dualism' insists that these three domains, while intertwined with each other in reality, need to be looked at and examined separately, for analytical purposes, and not to be conflated with each other, in order to properly understand their interplay. In other words it is important to separate the 'parts' (structure and culture) from the 'people' (agency). Archer's social realism treats culture, structure and agency as ontologically separate, each having its own irreducible causal properties and powers. For Archer, "separability is the predicate for examining the interface between structure and agency upon which practical social theorising depends" (Archer, 1998:203). Thus, culture, structure and agency are regarded as belonging to separate strata so that they may influence, but not determine, one another (Bhaskar, 1989; Archer, 2007). According to Archer, the main contribution of social realism as a social theory is that it gives researchers "a robust, stratified ontology of things social, an ontology which doesn't elide structure and agency, subject and object, voluntarism and determinism, conscious and the unconscious and all the other polarities" (Archer, 1998: 4).

According to Archer, there has been a tendency in social science theory to conflate the 'parts' (as found in a cultural system, an organisational or ideational structure) and the 'people' (who hold positions or ideas within the structures) or what Archer terms the "Fallacy of Conflation" (Archer, 1996:xiv-xv). She argues that it is key to any research into how society functions to examine structure, culture and agency separately as well as in terms of their interplay. For Archer, the tendency in sociology theory of "one dimensional conflationary theorising" needs to be replaced by "theories of the interdependence and interplay between different kinds of social properties" (Archer, 1995:8). People (agents) act within a structural and cultural context. If

these structural and cultural factors are examined in isolation, it is possible to understand how they can affect the actions of agents (e.g. by enabling or constraining them) – and the agents may in turn affect the structural and cultural contexts which emerge out of interactions.

Structure, culture and agency each possess their own ‘causal powers’ and have distinctive ‘emergent properties’ which are relational to each other, signifying the stratified nature of social reality. Even though structure, as exemplified in a particular Cultural System (CS), and culture, as expressed through Socio-Cultural (S-C) life, do not function independently of one another and are ‘mutually influential’, they can be distinguished for purely utilitarian purposes using analytical dualism, which allows for the exploration of their interplay.

It is important therefore to look at events, social relationships and interactions between people separately in terms of their structural, cultural and agential elements in order to understand fully the ways in which these systems operate independently as well as to discover the way in which they overlap and exert influence over each other.

I will now discuss how the three domains of structure, culture and agency are presented in the literature.

3.4.1 Structure

According to Danermark et al. (2002: 78), “a structure is made up of a set of internally related objects; a certain structure may in its turn also be part of a greater structure”. Structure refers to all organisational patterns, social systems, rules and practices and the relationships between these that constitute human society. This includes the various organisational aspects of society such as roles, policies, systems, and institutions. Structure can also include such things as material resources, socio-economic systems (e.g. race, gender, class), ethnicity, customs, and social institutions (such as marriage, education, the university) as well as certain structures that occur within organisations, like committees, units, departments and faculties. Structures

can also refer to roles and positions within organisations. It is worth noting here that “a position has to exist prior to its occupancy” (Archer, 1998:202).

Structures have emergent powers or social emergent properties (SEPs) which may “distribute material resources and positional, organisational and institutional powers differently” (Lockett & Lockett, 2009:47). Structures therefore not only precede and can condition agency to the extent that people can be either constrained or enabled by them, but can also be reproduced or transformed in terms of their interaction with human agency. Indeed, the emergent powers of structures are only activated when agents interact with them – in terms of their own causal powers – through the mechanism of human reflexivity (internal conversations) in which agents subjectively prioritise their “concerns, projects or practices” (Archer, 2007:4). It has also been argued that in situations where social structures whose mechanisms have caused people to have suffered or to have had the fulfilment of their needs obstructed “a socially emancipatory objective should be directed against structures” in order to replace “undesired social structures with desired ones” (Annermark et al., 2002:193).

Structures are real and can be relatively enduring, and can be considered to be the ‘parts’ of society into which and within which human agents (the ‘people’) interact. Structure, in terms of a critical realist understanding, is always pre-existent to human agency – which interacts with structural and / or cultural contexts to reproduce or transform them over time and space depending on the nature of the interaction of the agents within those contexts.

3.4.2 Culture

For Archer, the concept of culture as a whole refers to “all intelligibilia, that is to any item which has the dispositional capacity of being understood by someone” (Archer, 1996:xviii). Culture refers to systems of meaning such as ideas, values, theories and beliefs that people or communities subscribe to. It can also include language, forms of knowledge, rituals, traditions and common-sense understandings. Culture is “both the product of human

interaction and the producer of certain forms of human interaction”; it has its own underlying logic and can be both constraining and enabling (Hays, 1994, 65).

Cultural emergent properties (CEPs) distribute cultural resources and symbolic power such as ideologies and languages unevenly. For example, in the context of higher education, first-year students can be enabled or constrained (privileged or disadvantaged) depending on the nature of their previous experiences at high school and in terms of their prior access (or lack of access) to the kinds of discourses and cultural ‘capital’ valued at university. The academic success of a student will therefore depend largely on whether s/he has the particular kind of ‘cultural capital’ that is valued by the dominant social structures (such as schools and universities). Different ‘capital’ is valued in different situations. A student who has ‘done well’ in a rural school may be appreciated as being a kind of hero in that environment, but the same student may come to a Higher Education environment with what might be seen as being the ‘wrong’ kind of capital, that is under-valued by the system, and which may lead to a lack of academic success.

Discourses are CEPs at the level of the real, and one way of accessing people’s ideologies or belief systems is through accessing the underlying discourses or cultural mechanisms that they draw on through a critical discourse analysis (CDA). Much of this kind of critical work with discourses relies intensively on causal explanation by the researcher in order to interpret “the meaningful qualities of social practices” (Sayer, 2000:20).

According to Fairclough (2005), the prime objective of CDA is to give precise accounts of:

the ways in which and extent to which social changes are changes in discourse, and the relations between changes in discourse and changes in other, non-discoursal, elements or ‘moments’ of social life (including therefore the question of the senses and ways in which discourse ‘(re)constructs’ social life in processes of social change). The aim is also to identify through analysis the particular linguistic, semiotic and ‘interdiscursive’ features of ‘texts’ (in a broad sense) which are a part of processes of social change

(Fairclough, 2005:1).

Gee (1990; 1996; 1999) distinguishes between two types of discourses. The first are 'primary discourses', which constitute our first social identity and are shaped during primary socialisation as members of a family within a particular socio-cultural context. The second type he deals with are 'secondary discourses', which are those discourses into which people become 'apprenticed' outside the immediate home environment. A secondary discourse with its associated practices may cause a person to experience a conflict with his or her primary discourse. As Gee (1996) writes, "the conflict is between *who* I am summoned to be in this new discourse ... and *who* I am in other discourses that overtly conflict with ... this discourse" (1996:135). In other words, identities can be seen as "sites of struggle where individuals use their agency to take on certain discourses or to resist them" (McKenna, 2004a:269).

Gee also makes a distinction between Discourses (with a 'big D') and discourses (with a 'little d'). 'Little d' discourses refer to how language is used to enact activities and identities 'on-site' or what Gee terms "language-in-use" or "connected stretches of language which hang together so as to make sense to some community of people" (Gee, 2003:90). He terms 'Discourse' with a 'big D' as being the different ways in which we integrate language with non-language 'stuff' like "actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing and using various symbols, tools and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognisable identity" (Gee, 2005:2). Furthermore, people's identities are "determined by their discourses; that is, they are discursively constructed" (McKenna, 2004a:269).

What this means to students entering a university for the first time is that their own 'big ' i scourse which is made up of multiple everyday discourses or 'language-in-use' ('little d' discourses) is often not appropriate for them to cope with the demands of the ('big ') i scourse of the academy. n order to make the transition from their everyday language and ways of being (their existing 'big ' i scourses) to that expected by the Academy (the new 'big ' Discourse), students often engage in what Gee terms "mushfaking"

(Gee,1990:159) – in which they imitate aspects of the Discourse until such time as they start to integrate some of these into their own way of being. This transitional type of language has also been referred to as “interim literacies”, a term that was used to describe “the intersection of academic discourse and student voice” (Paxton, 2007:45). Kress (989) defines discourses as being:

... systematically organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that, they define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not possible to say (and by extension – what it is possible to do or not to do) with respect to the area of concern of that institution, whether marginally or centrally. A discourse provides a set of possible statements about a given area, and organises and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about, in that it provides descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions.

(Kress, 1989:7)

Using a realist social ontology, Fairclough (2005) sees social structures and social events as constituting parts of social reality which can be understood as being meaningful social practices which have a semiotic system (such as language) or ‘order of discourse’. He talks of discourses as being “diverse representations of social life” whereby “for instance, the lives of poor and disadvantaged people are represented through different discourses in the social practices of government, politics, medicine, and social science, as well as through different discourses within each of these practices corresponding to different positions of social actors” (Fairclough, 2005:2).

While Fairclough and Kress both explicitly describe discourses as cultural mechanisms, Gee seems to indicate that discourses, while being cultural artefacts, are things that the agent uses or does not use, acquires or fails to acquire. While the theorists do not share the exact definition of discourses or understandings of how discourses interact with agency, they do all describe them as being socio-cultural in nature and as having an influence on the social world. However, only Fairclough makes a critical realist argument about discourse. While all theorists who use discourse make claims about their impact and effect on how the world is experienced, it is only Fairclough who

argues that discourses are mechanisms that act in a critical realist way (Fairclough, 2005; Fairclough, Jessop & Sayer, 2004).

3.4.3 Agency

In terms of agency, Archer distinguishes between three basic strata:

1. *Primary agents (persons)* are those people who as individuals are not able to exercise much agency due to their involuntary disempowered position in society (perhaps as an accident of birth) and in relation to socially scarce resources; persons are “biologically embodied individuals, emergent from but not reducible to their material constitution” who are “involuntarily placed as agents ... as a consequence of involuntary positioning, as a result of demographic factors such as age and gender” (Mutch, 2004:433); Given South Africa’s history, demographic factors such as race and language may also be important aspects of such involuntary positioning.
2. *Corporate agents* – an agent, according to Archer, refers to a collectivity or a group of people, and ‘agency’ is therefore a term which is always only used in the plural. When agents who have a common interest become organised around particular aims and act collectively in groups when seeking to transform society, this is then termed “corporate” agency. When social agents who lack the personal power in their individual capacity to make structural changes to their life circumstances join together with other social agents who have a common vested interest to create collective organisations (e.g. civil rights movements, feminism, or trade union movements), they can “achieve together what they cannot bring about alone” (Archer, 2001:74).
3. *Social Actors* – these are individuals who have been able to develop a strong social identity which is often associated with a particular role or position in society. These individuals are able to exercise their agency by virtue of their more powerful position which imbues them with the

authority to do so. The social context into which agents are born and over which they have no control, will greatly influence the types of actor they can “choose to become” (Archer, 1995:277).

Agency, in social realism, thus refers to people and their ability to act within and upon their own world in terms of their social roles and positions, depending on their ability to activate their own emergent properties and powers (PEPs). Archer is interested in what motivates agents to act in the way that they do, in terms of their particular structural and cultural contexts.

Agency “explains the creation, recreation, and transformation of social structures” (Hays, 1994:62). It has also been argued that while many social phenomena are relatively enduring, this situation is often an intentional one and may have been achieved as a result of deliberate and frequent adjustments by people in relation to their circumstances in order “to maintain continuities through change” rather than being the effect of not doing anything. This is because people have a “remarkable sensitivity” to their contexts in terms of their ability to “interpret situations rather than being passively shaped by them” (Sayer, 2000:13).

While analytical dualism insists on artificially separating the ‘parts’ from the ‘people’ in order to clearly understand their interplay, there is naturally a fundamental relationship between structure and agency. The actions of people (agents) cannot take place without a pre-existing set of structures (including ‘shared meanings’) (Archer, 1995). It is thus important for a researcher to understand not only how actors are able to exercise agency in a particular situation, but also what the factors in that context are that enable or constrain this action (Sayer, 2000:26).

Since interests and resources may have been historically unevenly distributed in terms of the current social structure, this may enable or constrain how people are able to react to their circumstances. However, because people have their own PEPs, causal powers, and internal conversations, they are able to respond creatively and imaginatively to find ways to use what material and cultural resources they have at their disposal to their best advantage (Archer, 1995:70). According to Lewis (2000), it is important to understand

“human intentional agency” in terms of its ability to transform or reproduce pre-existent social structures which can “serve both to facilitate and to constrain the exercise of human agency in the present” (2000:250).

Since both social structures and human agency show evidence of having their own causal powers and properties (SEPs and PEPs), it is up to the social researcher to explore the different ways in which they interact and influence each other without resorting to ‘upwards conflation’ (where society is seen purely as the aggregation of individuals) or to ‘downwards conflation’ (in which individuals are completely moulded by society) or to ‘central conflation’ (in which the roles of each are so intertwined as to be impossible to separate out their particular influences on each other) (Archer, 1995).

It was important to frame this study in terms of the broader critical realist meta-theoretical approach, which sees the world as stratified or layered (the empirical, the actual and the real), and sees that at the deepest level of reality (the real) there are causal mechanisms that can give rise to events and happenings in the world. Critical realism maintains that while these generative mechanisms cannot be observed, they are nonetheless real, whether or not people are aware of them. In the context of my study, I hoped to discover the particular emergent properties from the level of the real that are attached to the domains of culture, structure and agency in the context of the tutorial system at the University of Johannesburg and to explore their interplay to discover how these domains overlap and inter-connect with each other.

Archer’s framework allows for an analysis and understanding of the interplay between both structural and cultural conditions. It is her contention that her unified theoretical approach allows researchers to give a full account of “how discursive struggles are socially organized and of how social struggles are culturally conditioned” (Archer, 1996:xxix).

Using Archer’s analytical framework, with its separate (but interlinked) domains of culture, structure and agency, as a guide, a process of retrodution was followed to try to identify the emergent mechanisms at play in the constructions of tutorials by the various role-players and participants.

Since critical realism is “a philosophical approach that seeks to be an ontological ‘underlabourer’ for a range of substantive theories in the natural and social science” (Mutch, 2004:430), was also able to draw on several other theories (discussed in Chapter 2) to help me with my analysis of the empirical data.

3.5 Research Validity

Experimental research in the natural sciences, which is set up with a focus on a particular set of circumstances under controlled conditions in a closed system, can by the process of logical deduction be said to be generally or universally applicable because such research is predictable and repeatable. However, research in the social sciences cannot make those sorts of claims. It has been argued that “experiments in the natural science sense of the word are not possible for social science. Here, the objects are distinguished by operating in open systems”, which means that people (the objects) can transform themselves through learning and adapting to new knowledge, as well as influence change in their environment by their behaviour and actions (Danermark et al., 2002:68).

If predictability is the test of validity, the difficulty then for research into the social world is to be able to make claims about a particular research area that are also of general significance. Danermark et al. (2002) assert that there is a difference between predictability and explanation, and that predictions are mainly about “factual events” and do not necessarily explain their underlying cause. They argue that even though it is impossible to make predictions in social science research, that explanations about how something works are still of practical relevance (Danermark et al., 2002:69).

In the context of my study, the goal of the research was to discover the underlying structures, mechanisms and tendencies at a deep level of reality that were producing the observable behaviours, actions and events at the level of the actual and empirical in terms of the construction of the tutorial system. Although social science operates in an open system, it is possible to identify the structures and their mechanisms that are producing particular

effects, and abstract knowledge of these can then be applied in a generalised way (Sayer, 1992:249).

Following a critical realist methodological approach, a researcher then uses retroductive thinking (see 3.3) to imaginatively abstract understandings and explanations about deep levels of reality to achieve a measure of generalisability in terms of the research findings.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In order to be open about my values and assumptions as a researcher, I have already declared my ontological perspective in terms of the metatheoretical approach of Bhaskar's critical realism that acts as underlabourer to this study. I have also given a detailed background and context to the study as well as outlined the substantive theories that inform my research. In addition I have stated that Archer's social realist methodological approach of analytical dualism has guided both my selection and analysis of the data.

Ethical clearance was obtained from Rhodes University, under whose auspices this study was done, as well as from the University of Johannesburg, where the data collection took place. Permission to record and transcribe the interviews was obtained from all research participants who all gave their informed written consent. All participants, including those who participated in the written questionnaire, were given an information sheet explaining the nature of the research on which it was stated that participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous (see Appendix 2).

3.7 Research Design

The design needed to engage with the critical realist aim of identifying mechanisms and their effects and to be true to the social realist concern with analytical dualism. The aim of this research was to investigate how tutorials are being constructed for first-year university students at the University of Johannesburg (UJ). I wanted to explore to what extent tutorials are

constructed (by academics, managers, tutors, students, institutional structures and processes) as enabling epistemological access – which I have argued is essential for student academic success – and, if not, to discover how else they are being constructed.

The research design involved a predominantly qualitative approach. As is the case with all qualitative research, my research set out to explore and gather an in-depth understanding of certain behaviours and the reasons for these behaviours. The general field of the research was higher education, with specific focus on the tutorial system, and because I was using critical realism as a lens through which to examine the data, I wished to discover what the underlying causal mechanisms generating the events and processes (social phenomena) in this particular area were.

My primary method of data collection, apart from the examination of pertinent institutional documentation and reading of the literature that was relevant to my study, was through conducting interviews, both individual and in groups, to gain a direct insight into the ways in which the tutorial system was being constructed at UJ. I supplemented the interview data with data obtained through surveying over one thousand students using a questionnaire.

I will now describe the process I followed in order to collect and analyse the research data. I will give details on how I selected the research participants, how I conducted the individual and focus group interviews, the kinds of questions that I asked and how I went about analysing the data.

3.8 Data Collection

My data included information gleaned from my research into the theory and practice around teaching and learning in higher education nationally and institutionally as well as from the examination of institutional policy documentation. This documentation consisted of: publications about the university's 'mission and vision' in the context of the 2005 merger and the creation of a new institutional identity as a comprehensive university; UJ's

Teaching and Learning Strategy (see Appendix 5); UJ's Policy on Teaching and Learning (see Appendix 6); the Policy of the University on Tutoring and Tutors (see Appendix 7); UJ's Language Policy; UJ's Admission Policy; and UJ's First-Year Experience (FYE) Proposal as well as information on the official UJ website. At departmental level I also examined any tutor guides or manuals that were available. These documents were all pertinent to my research since they can all act on the context and constrain or enable the ways in which tutorials are understood and implemented at an institutional, faculty and departmental level.

Furthermore, my data consisted of the transcripts that I made from recordings of in-depth, semi-structured interviews that I conducted with tutor focus groups from five different departments, which included first-time tutors as well as experienced tutors, as well as transcripts of the individual interviews conducted with several academics, tutor co-ordinators and heads of department from the five different departments across the three selected Faculties. In addition, I created transcripts of in-depth individual interviews conducted with several academic developers, a 'first-year-experience' (FYE) co-ordinator and a faculty administrator (a Vice-Dean, Academic). Moreover, data was captured and coded from a questionnaire that was administered to the students who attend tutorials in all five departments in which my research was located. The questionnaires were distributed to all the students who happened to be in attendance at their mainstream course in the particular department on that day. Later in this chapter I will describe in more detail how each of these forms of the data was collected.

It has been argued (Danermark et al., 2002:194) that in order to understand or explain social phenomena it is important to consider peoples' ideas, thoughts and beliefs about the different phenomena – and this is best achieved through conducting in-depth interviews and through asking unambiguous open-ended questions in written questionnaires. As a researcher in the social sciences, "it is necessary to understand the meaning people assign to their actions in order to understand the actions", since it is these actions that "mediate everyday social phenomena as well as deeper underlying structural relations, which are constitutive of the society under study" (Danermark et al., 2002:36).

3.9 The Data Collection Process

I chose to focus on departments who were known to be using tutorials as an integral part of their first-year courses. Because I work on the Auckland Park Kingsway (APK) campus of UJ, and because this is also the main campus, I selected five departments across three faculties that were all based on APK. The questionnaires were distributed and the individual and focus group interviews were conducted and recorded over a period of about two months during the second half of the final semester in 2011. I decided to collect the data towards the end of the academic year, so that by that stage both first-time students and first-time tutors would have had enough time in the tutorial system to be able to contribute meaningfully to the research.

3.10 Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured in that I designed a series of questions for the different sets of interviews¹² (both focus group and individual), but, depending on the differing responses to the questions, I was able to maintain enough flexibility to be able to follow any new train of thought that arose and to ask unplanned questions. While the design of the interview created a general framework to ensure that I was able to ask the fundamental questions that I needed to in order to gather the kind of information that was pertinent to my study, the fact that I did not feel unduly bound to a fixed list of questions gave the interviews more of a conversational flow – which resulted in the gathering of rich data.

I approached tutor co-ordinators, academics and key role-players in the tutorial system in the various departments as well as academic developers and a faculty administrator by sending out an email introducing myself, explaining that I was conducting research into the tutorial system at UJ and requesting their consent to be interviewed.

¹² See Appendix 1b, 1c, and 1d for list of questions used as guidelines in the individual and group interviews.

I approached eight academics from the five departments that I was investigating: two HODs, two lecturers, one lecturer/module co-ordinator and three lecturers/tutor co-ordinators. All eight responded to my invitation to participate in my research, but only seven of them agreed to be interviewed. The HOD of Department D indicated that he was not interested.

After initial reticence to participate, but then after obtaining the approval from the dean of the faculty, the faculty administrator agreed to be interviewed. The academic developers and the first-year experience (FYE) co-ordinator whom I approached all responded positively to my request for individual interviews.

I made appointments with all of those who had indicated their willingness to participate in my research and interviewed most individual respondents in their private offices. I was granted permission by all the respondents to record our conversations.

3.10.1 Individual Interviews

Academics

See table below for a list of the academics who were interviewed:

Table 9: List of academics interviewed

	ACADEMICS	
Department	Date of Interview	Role
A	20 October 2011	H.O.D
A	25 October 2011	Lecturer / Module co-ordinator
B	29 September 2011	Lecturer / Tutor co-ordinator
C	5 October 2011	Lecturer / Tutor co-ordinator
D	24 October 2011	Lecturer
E	3 October 2011	Lecturer
E	4 November 2011	Lecturer / Tutor co-ordinator

I began each of the interviews with the academics by requesting permission to record the interview and then asking them to identify themselves, their department and faculty and to briefly describe their professional title, role or position in the department. I then asked general questions about the number of tutors in their department, whether or not they held tutorials themselves, the average size of a typical tutorial class, the sorts of venues used for tutorials and the number of tutorials offered each week.

This led on to a more in-depth discussion on why they thought their department offered tutorials, what they think generally happens in tutorials and how effective they were and what impact they thought the tutorial system had in their department. I wanted to know what qualities they thought a tutor needs and on what basis they would select tutors, what kind of guidance or support their department gave to the tutors and what they thought the purpose of tutorials was. I finally asked if, based on their experience, they could offer any further insights into the role of tutorials with regard to teaching and learning in the UJ context.

Even though the interviews were relatively formal in as much as I was conducting serious research, the questions were phrased in a conversational way so that individual respondents would feel comfortable enough to express their views freely. Once respondents had agreed to be interviewed and recorded, I did not encounter any resistance to answering the questions that I posed. In all cases, the academics interviewed seemed keen to participate and the discussions were very relaxed.

My positionality with regard to the research study was an advantage to me in that I had a certain “insider status” (Chavez, 2008) since I am a member of the academic staff and am actively involved in the implementation of the tutorial system in my department at UJ. As Chavez (2008) argues, such “insider status” can give a researcher “a nuanced perspective for observation, interpretation and representation ... expediency of rapport building ... expediency of access ... (and) knowledge of the historical and practical happenings of the field” (Chavez, 2008:479). However, it was also necessary for me to carefully navigate the potential complications created by this

positionality to prevent my personal relationships or participants' perceptions and expectations of me to constrain my role as researcher. As Williams (2009) argues, "ethics demand that the researcher engages in moral deliberation within the context of the research" (Williams, 2009:2 3).

I was familiar with many of the academics that I interviewed and they all expressed great interest in my research area, which helped to produce a strong sense of collegiality. I wanted to explore what the dominant discourses around teaching and learning at UJ were and how these academics were constructing the tutorial system and the students at UJ. Each of the interviews took around an hour.

Other Role-Players

See the table below for a list of other role-players who were interviewed:

Table 10: Other role-players interviewed

Date of Interview	Role
13 October 2011	Academic Developer 1
21 October 2011	Academic Developer 2
11 October 2011	Academic Developer 3 / FYE Co-ordinator
15 November 2011	Faculty Administrator

The Academic Developers

I began the interview by asking for permission to record the conversation. As with the interviews with the academics, I asked the academic developers to identify themselves, their role or position at UJ and to explain what was their interest or role in the management of the tutorial system. I asked them their thoughts and opinions on what they thought was the purpose of tutorials in the context of UJ and what was UJ's policy on tutors and the tutorial system. I asked them to identify what were the challenges they faced and what qualities they thought a tutor needed to have as well as the basis on which they

thought tutors should be selected. I asked them to describe in more detail the sort of training they offered to tutors and their thoughts on the sizes of classes and the types of venues used. I asked for their input on how UJ manages tutorials in terms of the timetabling of tutorials and what sort of impact the tutorial system makes at UJ. I also asked if they had any further insights into the role of tutorials with regard to teaching and learning at UJ. As all of the academic developers were people with whom I had interacted before, and who knew of my interest in the tutorial system, I was probably perceived by them to be 'on the same side', as they were, and so there was a great deal of collegiality and willingness to share their views during the interviews.

Faculty Administrator

To begin with, it was very difficult to obtain an appointment to interview the faculty administrator. Several appointments were cancelled by her secretary at short notice, and I finally discovered that the faculty administrator felt that approval from the dean of faculty should first be obtained before agreeing to be interviewed. However, once the dean gave his unconditional approval, the appointment was set up and the faculty administrator was able to grant me an interview fairly late in the semester once her workload had eased. I asked similar questions to those that were posed to the academic developers, but found that because of her managerial position, and close working relationship with the dean of the faculty, the faculty administrator was able to give me a number of additional insights into the workings of the UJ Policies on Tutoring in terms of constraints such as the need for approval of budgets from the university's financial structures. The interview was conducted in a friendly and collegial manner and lasted just under an hour.

3.10.2 Tutor Focus Group Interviews

I chose to interview the tutors in focus groups rather than individually for several reasons. Firstly, there was the consideration that had I conducted personal one-on-one interviews with each tutor, this would have been

extremely time-consuming because of the large number of tutors involved. By rather choosing to interview tutors in focus groups, this was judged to be a more effective way to “increase the sample size of qualitative studies by permitting more people to be interviewed at one time” (Krueger, 1998). Secondly, as a lecturer, there may have been an unequal power differential between the individual tutor and myself which may have been inhibiting to the tutor. Thus, I felt that in a focus group situation, this power differential would be minimised. In addition, I also judged that by interviewing the tutors as a group they would be able to draw inspiration from each other and act as catalysts for each other when expressing their own ideas. In discussion on a topic that is of mutual interest to the group, participants are able to “piggy-back” on comments made by others which can add a certain richness to the conversation not easily achieved in an individual interview (Rennekamp & Nell, accessed online 4 March 2013).

From my contact with the academics I was able to obtain the names and email addresses of the tutor co-ordinators and head tutors in four of the five departments that I was investigating. I wrote similar emails to the ones I wrote to the academics, academic developers and the faculty administrator, explaining who I was, what I was doing and inviting them to help me with my research. In the emails to the tutor co-ordinators and head tutors, I requested that they send out a copy of my invitation to participate in a focus group discussion to all of their first-year tutors. In my correspondence I made it clear that participation was voluntary and that their identities would be kept confidential. As I already knew the tutors in my own department, which was one of the departments that I was investigating, I was able to email them directly and not through an intermediary. All of the appointments for the tutor focus group interviews were set up via email correspondence either directly with the tutors, in the case of tutors in my own department, or else with the tutor co-ordinator or the head tutor of the other departments. The tutor focus group discussions were all conducted in the seminar rooms of the respective departments. There were five tutor focus groups from three different faculties. The discussions were between an hour and an hour and a half in duration.

See table below for numbers of participants from each of the departments:

Table 11: Tutor Focus Groups

	TUTOR FOCUS GROUPS	
Dept	Date	No of attendees
A	21 September 2011	10
B	31 September 2011	7
C	15 November 2011	7
D	11 November 2011	6
E	25 September 2011	9

At the start of every focus group interview, participants signed a form indicating their willingness to participate and for their conversation to be recorded and their understanding that their real names would not be revealed. In each case, we were seated around a central table in each department's seminar room. These rooms usually seat about fifteen people so the space in which the discussions took place was quite comfortable.

I began the discussions by first going round the room and asking the tutors to identify themselves, their department and faculty, to say for how long they had been tutoring, and, as an 'ice-breaker', to tell me in a word or two how they would describe their experience of having been a tutor for that year. This 'ice-breaker' proved to be light-hearted and useful, as it gave me the opening to follow on and ask more questions about their experiences. I was particularly interested to discover why they wanted to tutor, and on what basis they thought they had been selected to be a tutor. I asked them about their thoughts on the training they had received and how useful this was to them. Many of the general questions that I asked were similar to those that I had asked the academics – such as how many tutorials they took a week, what the average size of their tutorial classes were, what sorts of venues they were using, and how effective they thought the tutorials were and what impact they thought the tutorial system makes in the department. I was also interested to find out how the particular type of venue used affected the way in which they would run a tutorial, what their general approach to running a tutorial was, why they thought the department offered tutorials, what kind of guidance or

support their department gave them, what qualities they thought a tutor needed to have, what they thought was the purpose of a tutorial and how they understood their own role as a tutor.

The questions that I asked were open-ended and were chosen in order to stimulate a general free-flowing conversation. I wanted to explore what some of the constraining and enabling factors of the tutorial system were. My questions were framed in such a way that respondents could feel comfortable about describing their observations, feelings and experiences (i.e. to generate data of the empirical and actual level) and, in so doing, give me enough detailed information for me to retroductively access some of the causal mechanisms (at the level of the real) which seemed to be generating certain events and practices. I was interested to discover the dominant discourses around approaches to and understandings of teaching and learning – which I was able to identify by closely analysing the language and terms of reference that people used.

At first some of the participants seemed a little shy, but in a very short space of time all appeared to be at ease and eager to voice their opinions. In each group there were always one or two individuals who tended to dominate or to have a lot more to say on each issue, but everyone did contribute to the conversation. Because of time constraints it was not possible to schedule a second tutor focus group discussion which may have included tutors who were unable to attend the first one. However, on reflection, I feel that those tutors who initially made themselves available were probably those students who saw this as an opportunity to share their experiences and express their opinions and therefore had the most to contribute. Particularly in my own department, I got the impression that tutors felt that my presence (as a lecturer and a former course co-ordinator) and someone with whom they were very familiar, afforded them an ideal opportunity to 'vent' about their experiences, voice their opinions about the tutorial system in general and how they saw themselves positioned in the department.

3.11 Questionnaires – Students

Because the first-year student cohorts for 2011 who attend tutorials in the five departments that I was researching ranged in number from 485 to 3 500, I decided that the most practical way to collect data from them about their experiences and understandings of the tutorial system would be in the form of a survey which could be administered via a questionnaire.

In order to collect the data, I obtained permission from departmental heads or the lecturer concerned to hand out questionnaires which would be filled in voluntarily by students at the beginning of their lecture period. I encountered no problems with obtaining this permission because the timing of my research coincided with the fact that the lectures being given at this point (late in the semester) were for the purpose of revision prior to the year-end examinations and were not covering any new work.

Included in the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was a short paragraph located at the top, in which I introduced myself and explained that I was conducting research for a PhD in Education and that my area of focus was the tutorial system and what role it plays in support of the teaching and learning experience of first-year university students. It was stated in this introductory paragraph that their participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous, that their participation would be greatly appreciated and that it was hoped that the research would contribute to a larger body of knowledge about the role of tutorials in support of teaching and learning. For reasons of anonymity, students were not asked to sign the questionnaire.

The questionnaire contained twenty questions, the first ten being simple, closed questions which only required a one- or two-word answer. The early questions were easy to answer so that once respondents had committed themselves to answering the questionnaire, they would be more likely to continue and then to complete the more complex questions that required more detailed responses. The remaining ten questions were open-ended and space for a few sentences was provided on the form. The final question invited respondents to add any further comments or suggestions that they might like to make about the tutorial system and there was sufficient open space

provided on the form for an extended piece of writing if they so desired. I tried not to include any loaded or ambiguous questions in the questionnaire. The response categories in the questionnaire were free choice – in other words, the responses were not standardised for every respondent, so multiple responses were recorded.

The questionnaire sought to collect data on students' views about tutorials and their understandings of the process and their purpose. This kind of data was helpful to my study in terms of discovering how the tutorial system was constructed from the point of view of those students who actually experience it.

See the table below for a breakdown of numbers of respondents over the five departments:

Table 12: Number of student respondents to questionnaire

DEPARTMENT	DATE	RESPONDENTS
A	25 October 2011	270
B	26 October 2011	230
C	21 October 2011	430
D	27 October 2011	350
E	28 October 2011	180

3.12 Analysis of the data

I decided to transcribe all the recorded material myself for two reasons. Firstly, because I had conducted all the interviews personally, I felt that I would be in a better position to ensure an error-free process. This was because I felt that I would be able to make a much more accurate transcription from the recorded words than may have been the case if I had used the services of a person who had not been present for the discussions or interviews. If an outsider had made the transcriptions, s/he may also not have been able to comprehend exactly what some people may have said due to either problems

understanding their accents, or imperfections in the sound quality of the actual recording.

Secondly, I felt that becoming directly involved in the process of transcription, because it required close and careful attention and sometimes the necessity to play back sections of the recording several times, would also help me to become very familiar with the data collected, which I considered an advantage to me when I was doing the data analysis.

Once I had transcribed the recorded interviews into a word document, I imported all of these texts into Nvivo, a qualitative data management system loaded on my computer. I read through all the texts and used the system of 'nodes' to separate the sets of data (texts) into themes according to my analytical framework, which I will describe in detail in the next section (3.13).

The transcribed texts formed part of my qualitative research data, and because I had over a thousand questionnaires that had been filled out by students from all five of the departments in my study, I decided that it would make better sense first to code the responses to the questions. After this coding process, for which I used the services of a student assistant, the codes were captured into a database by the statistical services unit at UJ. From this I was able to create an analysis of the data, which also included some quantitative data in terms of a statistical report, in addition to the qualitative data and a list of extended responses which was obtained from the open-ended questions.

3.13 Analytical Framework

In order to analyse the data collected, I made use of the analytical framework as provided by social realism. This framework allowed me to artificially separate the domains of structure, culture and agency, each of which has its own emergent properties and powers. In the structural domain these are known as structural emergent properties (SEPs), in the cultural domain these are cultural emergent properties (CEPs) and in terms of agency, there are people emergent properties (PEPs). It is clear that these different domains are

interwoven and interdependent and that there is also much overlap between them, so it was useful to look at them separately in order to examine and understand their interplay in the context of the tutorial system at UJ. It was also important not to conflate the 'parts' (structure and culture) with that of 'the people' (agency).

To illustrate how the interplay between the 'parts' and the 'people' takes place, an example can be given in terms of how tutors ('people') find themselves having to function within a particular institutional context which has its own structural system and socio-cultural-historical context ('parts') with its concomitant constraining or enabling aspects. Tutors in this study are themselves senior students at UJ, which is a comprehensive urban university, in which increasingly large numbers of first-time students are being granted access. They have to work within the structural confines of a tutorial system which has been set up by the university management structures and have to function within the constraints of their particular department in terms of curriculum and approaches to teaching and learning.

In many cases, tutors may also be made aware of the fact that the module in which they are tutoring may well have been constructed as being 'at risk' and that it is incumbent upon them, as representatives or agents of the department, to help contribute to student academic success – which is perceived by management structures to be indicated by an increased 'throughput' rate. There are additional structural constraints that tutors have to contend with, such as the size and type of their venue (the classroom), the timetabling of the tutorial, the length and frequency of classes, and the number of students in the class.

The tutors then bring to these structures, which have their own SEPs, their particular understandings, values, beliefs and ideas about what it is to be a tutor, who their students are and what their role is with regard to teaching and learning (CEPs). Finally, within this structured environment framed by their particular beliefs, they are able sometimes to exercise agency using their PEPs in the classroom in terms of their approaches to the running of the tutorial as a kind of social actor (by virtue of their role and position as a tutor).

3.14 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained how this study adopts a critical realist position as developed by Bhaskar, which advances a stratified ontology and underlying philosophical framework that informs the empirical research. This layered ontology comprises the realms of the real, the actual and the empirical. By following this approach, a researcher aims to identify and expose those underlying structures and mechanisms (at the level of the real) that are activated to produce events and phenomena (at the level of the actual and the empirical). There was also a discussion about how Archer's social realist framework, built on the meta-theory of critical realism, provides a useful methodological approach to conducting social research. Social realism divides the social world into the domains of structure, culture and agency which can be examined separately through 'analytical dualism' to give a researcher the opportunity to understand their interplay. I also explained that research in the social sciences deals with 'open' systems (as opposed to the natural sciences that examine 'closed' systems) and so predictions are not generally made but rather explanations are given for what might be the underlying causal mechanisms producing particular social phenomena. This chapter also outlined the ethical issues that were taken into consideration as well as describing in detail the research design and data collection methods used, giving explanations for the choices made.

In addition to using the social realist framework to come to an understanding of the interplay between the domains of structure, culture and agency, I have drawn on the substantive theories discussed in Chapter 2 to deepen my understanding of the dominant discourses (which can also be recognised as being culturally emergent causal mechanisms) that I have identified through a close examination of the data transcripts.

I will begin my discussion of the analysis in which I have generally framed the data in terms of a social realist approach by highlighting some of the elements of the tutorial system that could be said to belong to the domain of 'structure', 'culture' and 'agency' in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 4: Discussion of Findings: Structure

4.1 Introduction

Structures are mechanisms that precede and condition agency in as much as they can serve to constrain or enable those people who interact with them (Archer, 2007). Through this interaction, the various structures may be reproduced or transformed depending on how the structural emergent powers and properties (SEPs) are activated. While all mechanisms work in interconnected ways and 'rub' against each other, Archer calls for analytical dualism and therefore this chapter will look at structures on their own as they were evident in the data.

As described in Chapter 3, the structural domain includes those organisational patterns, systems, rules and practices to be found in society such as institutions and structures within organisations. In terms of my study, the university itself is a structure, as are the systems within it (such as the tutorial system), committees, units, departments and faculties. Also included in the structural domain are policies and the documentation around such policies. In this study I was curious to discover to what extent the structures enabled or constrained the construction of tutorials as being about enhancing access to knowledge, which I described in detail in Chapter 2.

4.2 Open Access

Worldwide, the university has transformed in recent times to being more egalitarian in nature where everyone (and not just the elite) has an opportunity for higher education. It has been argued that the driving force in terms of the international move towards mass higher education has been globalisation and its resultant effects on economic structures, such as an increase in occupations which require the skills and professional knowledge that only higher education can provide (Beerkens-Soo & Vossensteyn, 2009:3). This has meant that the university is increasingly being seen as providing a space for the development of skills to serve the economic needs of the country. In the South African context, the demand for a broader participation in higher

education has taken a particular form because of the exclusionary racist structures of the past higher education policy under apartheid. The transformation of the higher education system in South Africa is part of a broader process of transformation in terms of its “political, social and economic transition, which includes political democratisation, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity” (RSA DoE Education White Paper 3, 1997: 1.7).

The National Plan for Higher Education of 2001 (RSA Government Gazette, 200) provided a strategic framework for “re-engineering the higher education system for the 21st Century” and for the implementation of the vision of transformation in higher education contained in the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Education (1997). This national drive for transformation in higher education seeks to redress the inequalities caused by the past apartheid policy. The four main goals and policies for the development of the higher education system that were outlined in the White Paper, and on which the National Plan is based, are to:

- promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities;
- meet, through well-planned and co-ordinated teaching, learning and research programmes, national development needs, including the high-skilled employment needs presented by a growing economy operating in a global environment;
- support a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights through educational programmes and practices conducive to critical discourse and creative thinking, cultural tolerance, and a common commitment to a humane, non-racist and non-sexist social order;
- contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, and in particular address the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, southern African and African contexts, and uphold rigorous standards of academic quality.

(RSA DoE Education White Paper 1997: 1.14)

As can be seen from the above, one of the main aims of this plan was to enable equity of access to university education and therefore moves generally to broaden access have become a structure within South African Higher Education. This structural mechanism manifests in a specific way within the context of UJ, which has led to significant transformation of its admission policies, ensuring that increased numbers of students from diverse backgrounds are now able to gain formal access to the university.

In terms of the second goal listed above, there is also a great focus on meeting the “high-skilled employment needs” of the economy. The fourth listed goal makes mention of the need to “uphold rigorous standards of academic quality”. These multiple goals for the transformation of higher education, while necessary and laudable, have created a number of challenges for universities.

In this regard, Badat (2009:462) argues that there is a tension set up when the drive towards achieving “social equity and redress” is simultaneously sought with the aim of improving the quality of higher education. Badat (2009:462) argues that if the focus is on social equity and redress only, “the goal of producing high-quality graduates with the requisite knowledge, competencies and skills” may be compromised. Conversely, he argues that if the focus is purely on “economic development, quality and ‘standards’ (especially when these are considered to be timeless and invariant, and attached to a single, a-historical and universal model of higher education)” this could delay the attainment of equality and the elimination of racial and gender attributes of high-level graduates entering the workforce (2009:463).

In addition, the worldwide shift to a ‘knowledge economy’ has resulted in a closer relationship developing between the market and intellectual property especially in the field of science and technology (Lauder & Brown, 2006:32). This shift has also had a great impact on how higher education in South Africa is increasingly being understood more in terms of efficiency and how best to serve the development needs of society and the economy, while less attention seems to be placed on the equity issue in terms of the provision of epistemological access (Boughey, 2002a:65). Thus, while issues around

social justice or equity and those around economic effectiveness are both key to transformation in South Africa, they are often in tension with one another.

Nevertheless, the social justice and efficiency-driven issues in the post-1994 policy reform project have resulted in increased and broadened access to higher education in terms of race and gender diversity (Singh, 2008:257). In addition, the “massive growth” of student financial aid has resulted in student profiles becoming more diverse, the majority of students in the system now being black (Singh, 2008:256). As Jansen states:

Massification assumed an absolute growth in student enrolments as well as a more egalitarian distribution of students in higher education – one that reflected the race and gender profile of the nation. This would mean, in essence, a shift from higher education as an elite system to higher education as a mass-based system.

(Jansen, 2003b:292)

However, he goes on to argue that massification in the international sense did not really happen in South Africa to the extent that was initially expected, and the predictions of massive student growth made by the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) post-1994 especially with regard to non-traditional students (black) were “completely off target”. Instead, as the idea of developing a mass-based system to promote access weakened, the idea of “merger thinking” emerged as the “dominant project of the post-apartheid state” (Jansen, 2003b:293). UJ as a product of a merger has embraced the idea of transformation and the widening of access that this entailed.

To illustrate, UJ established a Transformation Office and a Transformation Steering Committee in 2010 which assists the Management Executive Committee (MEC) with the implementation and evaluation of UJ’s transformation agenda (as stipulated in the UJ Transformation Charter), which ensures that “institutional transformation goals are aligned with the Higher Education Transformation agenda” of the country (UJ Website). The preamble to ‘The Institutional Transformation Plan’ states that “transformation is woven into the social, intellectual and structural fabric of the University of Johannesburg”, since UJ “owes its existence to the agenda of the national

government to achieve transformation of higher education in South Africa through, among other means, the merging and restructuring of existing higher education institutions embedded in the apartheid ideology". In addition, the preamble states that while the university recognises the challenges (both internal and external) that the resultant diversity has created, it also acknowledges the opportunities that are presented "in establishing and sustaining a process of transformation that will result in positive social change and the full embodiment of the democratic values of the Constitution in the institution" (UJ Website).

As already discussed, the tutorial has been constructed at UJ as being a key intervention to provide first-years with support to enable their academic success. With the entrance of increasing numbers of students, there has been a need for increased numbers of tutorials to be provided, which has placed a strain on the university's resources with regard to the availability of both venues and suitable senior or postgraduate students who can act as tutors. The broadening of access in accordance with the National Education policy in this context, however, is more concerned with physical access, while the tutorial system is more concerned with epistemological access. Ironically, then, though both come from the same drive for transformation in higher education, the one (open access) might at times constrain the other (epistemological access) due to increased pressures on the resources of the university.

As a structure, increased access has thus indirectly affected the tutorial system. Broadening access in the interests of transformation exerts a great number of constraints on all the human, structural and material resources of the university. One example is that with greatly increased numbers of students there is a shortage of available venues that can be used for tutorials, which is a constraining factor to the support for epistemological access. This issue was reinforced by the view of the FYE co-ordinator, who felt that "venues is basically the biggest constraint" on the APK campus, which is the biggest of the four campuses with a "really massive group of students" that makes up "30 of the 50,000 students" registered at UJ – and which is "completely over-

subscribed ... to such an extent that we're actually over-flowing when it comes to students" (FYE co-ordinator).

It was the view of a lecturer / tutor- co-ordinator, from Department C that:

The whole issue about our *open access policy comes from higher up*¹³— their strategy – and don't see why this strategy is not going downwards, it's only a strategy around allowing students in, but then there's a strategy on paper for continuing but there's *no additional strategy in terms of how are we going to manage our open access policy down to the lowest levels* (interview with lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, Department C).

Despite it being an admirable goal in terms of achieving transformation in higher education, there have been some unintended consequences of widened access (as a structural mechanism) in allowing university entrance to many more students. The irony is that more open access is also a structure of constraint on the ability of the tutorial system to act as an enablement for epistemological access. This is because the university structures cannot keep pace with this increase even in terms of the physical structures that are needed – such as providing sufficient numbers of tutorial venues, as well as in terms of budget, sufficient tutors and timetabling issues, all of which together have negative implications for effective teaching and learning. This is problematic because part of the goal of transformation of higher education in South Africa is also to ensure that those students who are given access to the institution also have the prospect of achieving academic success (CHE, 2010:81-82).

4.3 The University Management Structure

Broadly speaking, the tutorial system has been set up and is being supported by the university management structure at UJ as being a structure to enable student academic success, and, to this end, the data shows that the university management structures are very invested in the tutorial system from an organisational level. So here we are talking about structure at the level of the

¹³ Italics in the data quotes have been added by researcher to emphasise key points

organisation (the university) as well as the adoption of a particular structure within the organisation – that of the tutorial system. As explained by a faculty administrator:

From the point of view of the DVC academic, it [the tutorial system] was instituted as a *mechanism* to improve performance, so the idea was then to provide support that would allow a better pass rate – throughput (interview with faculty administrator).

It is interesting to note that the faculty administrator referred to the tutorial system as a “mechanism”, which suggests an understanding that it is a structure and has a fairly pragmatic function of improving throughput. In terms of the Tutor and Tutoring Policy¹⁴, tutorials seem to have been constructed as a support system specifically to address the issue of enabling academic success. It is not evident from the above comment by the faculty administrator that the general support of tutorials by management extends to a shared understanding of tutorials as being specifically about enhancing epistemological access. However, epistemological access (along with the notion of a first-year experience) is specified as being one of the main objectives as part of ‘Strategic Thrust ’ under the heading ‘Theme 5: A Student Centred and Caring Institution’, as part of UJ’s ‘Institutional Transformation Plan’ as follows:

1. Epistemological Access: Ensuring that students who gain access to higher education also gain access to academic practices and ways of approaching academic studies.
2. A first-year Experience (FYE) in the context of an invitational and equitable institution, which establishes an ethos and a way of life so that all first-year students positively experience the transition from school into university life.

According to the university website, UJ “takes very seriously its obligation, as a publicly-funded institution, to exercise good corporate governance in respect of all its activities” and so it seeks “to ensure that each decision-making structure in the institution functions in accordance with a Charter that defines

¹⁴ See Appendix 7 for UJ Tutor and Tutoring Policy.

its composition, its functions, its accountability, its reporting lines, its operations and its operational governance principles” in which “such Charters are approved by Senate and by Council and, in appropriate cases, by the Management Executive Committee”. The official statement continues as follows:

Each chartered decision-making body also operates within a policy framework that has been approved by Senate and/or Council and/or the Management Executive Committee. Such policies typically describe the *strategic objectives* that the institution seeks to accomplish within a particular domain, the underlying principles that govern the pursuit of such *objectives* and the *criteria by means of which the achievement of such objectives can be measured*.

(UJ Website)

The reference to the measurability of criteria in order to assess the achievement of certain objectives is an example of the ways in which many of the “principles and techniques of financial auditing” (Shore, 2007:7) have been introduced into the governance of the university. These include structures like performance appraisals and review systems in which academics are graded in terms of certain measurable performance criteria which are linked to levels of competence and ‘excellence’. This requires academics to ‘specify and quantify’ their ‘outputs’ and ‘learning outcomes’ in what Shore (2007:7) argues is increasingly becoming a ‘skills-based’ model of knowledge and an indication of what Strathern (2000:455) has referred to as “neoliberalising innovations and competitiveness strategies”.

UJ seems to some extent to construct itself in terms of a corporation in its general description of its system of governance. Here it makes mention of how the leadership, in the person of the vice-chancellor and principal, assisted by a senior executive management team consisting of five deputy vice-chancellors (DVCs), oversees:

strategic and institutional planning, finance, human resources and operations, academic matters and research, innovation and advancement (UJ website)

In the above extract, it is interesting to note the order in which the various functions of the university are listed, with the apparent prioritisation of “strategic and institutional planning, finance, human resources and operations” over “academic matters and research, innovation and advancement”. In this construction, the vice-chancellor is seen to be the chief executive of a hierarchy with five “reporting lines” (in the form of the five deputy vice-chancellors) and where each department is framed as a separate “cost centre” so that decisions can be based on an “economic rationale” (Wright & Rabo, 2010:6).

The ultimate governing body at UJ is the University Council, whose responsibilities are to determine “the mission, objectives, goals, strategies and policies for the progress of the institution [and to] ensure an environment that is conducive to attaining these goals efficiently, effectively, economically and ethically” as well as “maintaining and ensuring a financially secure, healthy and viable environment and is accountable for all decisions made at UJ.” The Senate is the body that is responsible for academic matters and consists mainly of full professors and heads of departments and is accountable to the University’s Council. The UJ Senate falls under the chairpersonship of the vice-chancellor (UJ Website).

In addition, UJ has also embraced the idea of the commercialisation of technology developed at the university and the marketing of its intellectual property with the creation of a special unit called the C&TTO (Commercialisation and Technology Transfer) unit. The C&TTO identifies its primary role as being responsible for:

The *managing of UJ’s inventions*, and licensing them to *industrial partners*. It guides the evaluation process, helps inventors to define the context of the invention and identify its *commercial potential* ... and for filing the patent application and following the patent process as well as managing UJ’s *intellectual property* in general. It advises UJ researchers in all aspects of technology transfer and intellectual property.

(UJ Website)

According to Fitzsimons (1999), there has been a growing tendency in contemporary Western society to adopt a neoliberal philosophy, and this has resulted in a general concern with the promotion of economic efficiency through management rather than through administration and policy, which in turn has led to a form of “new managerialism” that “explains public services not as production functions or firms, but as governance structures” (Fitzsimons, 1999:1). In the context of UJ, the emphasis on corporate governance as exemplified in the extracts from the official university website cited above, along with a discourse that frequently refers to students as ‘clients’, speaks to a self-construction of the university as a corporation controlled by the executive management structures. This is congruent with what Shore (2007: 5) described as “a new vision of the modern university as a centralized transnational business corporation operating according to the logic of the free market”.

The data suggests that the fundamental structure that is acting to constrain the tutorial system in terms of management is the budgetary system and the related issue of venues. The budget is a mechanism that controls the allocation of funds. The budget is managed in accordance with typical business models which focus on quantifiable ‘strategic objectives’, efficiency, and notions of ‘accountability’. It could be the case that neo-liberal forces (both internationally and nationally) may be pushing universities to operate according to business principles, and these may sometimes create some tension with some of the academic principles. An example of this is the need to provide students with the means by which they can acquire epistemological access to ensure their academic success – in this case, for example, sufficient and appropriate kinds of tutorial venues as well as the funds required to employ enough tutors.

In this context, then, one of the *demands* is for increased formal access to the university coupled with the need to ensure academic success, while *supply* could relate to the ways in which the particular organisation provides what it constructs as being the essential services required of it to fulfil this demand. In the context of UJ and its mission to boost the throughput rate, the tutorial system could possibly be seen to be an essential service. Despite the general

enablements of management in terms of having a strong support for tutorials, their role in the provision of venues and budgets is subject to some constraints.

The limited funding for higher education as well as the increased expectations placed on universities in terms of wider society requires management to consider the very real issue of ensuring the economic viability of the institution. In addition, the problem of rising student numbers and financial constraints stems from the immense pressures towards transformation in education that are being exerted by government structures. While there are these 'managerial' aspects that constrain the tutorial system in terms of the allocation of budget for the employment of sufficient tutors and the provision of appropriate venues, management is also a highly enabling structure in that it has supported the development of tutorials in many ways.

The university management structures are ultimately responsible for controlling how the tutorial system is able to function at UJ because they allocate funds for the building of tutorial venues and approve budgets for the payment of tutors. The emergent properties of the management structure are such that in its response to a perceived need for additional academic support in terms of the university's mission to raise the throughput rates, it then generated the tutorial system as an intervention (or mechanism) to address this issue, and then in using its emergent properties and powers (SEPs) acts in different ways to enable and /or constrain it.

4.4 UJ Policy Documents

Other structural mechanisms that generate certain events and experiences and may enable or constrain actions, are the official UJ policy documents. Some of the policy documents that inform UJ's policies on Teaching and Learning could be considered as enabling the provision of epistemological access. However, the fact that a policy exists (as an event in the world) does not necessarily mean that it will be universally implemented by all agents in the institution, because they will bring multiple interpretations and

expectations to the policy at the level of the empirical. The Tutorial Policy is a structure that has been created to manage the tutorial system at UJ.

It was stated by one of the academic developers that “UJ is very progressive, in that ... it’s one of the few universities that actually has a Tutor Policy which is really good, and it’s meant to regulate tutorials at UJ”. However, she felt that there was a problem because the policy was not enforced and that although there is documentation, many people are either unaware of it, or choose not to adhere to it. In addition she felt that:

Our infrastructure also doesn’t necessarily allow for us to implement this policy. If you think about venue constraints, the logistical arrangements, and timetables – so although we have this policy, implementing it practically is very difficult because of the constraints that we face, and budget constraints as well (interview with an academic developer).

In the Teaching and Learning Strategy document,¹⁵ which informs the UJ policy on Teaching and Learning, it is argued that “an information-oriented view of teaching and learning in a university context is not conducive to optimal learning”.¹⁶ In this strategy document it is argued that in the context of a rapidly changing world, and in the context of the twenty-first century – where students face a complex and uncertain future – learning in higher education needs to be such that it will “enable students to act purposefully in situations they are going to encounter in the future”, which implies “developing their capabilities for ‘seeing’ and thinking in effective ways in their specific domains of knowledge and its practice”. It further argues that this type of learning makes a distinction between ‘learning about’ (facts, information, concepts, and procedures) and ‘learning to be’. In terms of its official policy on Teaching and Learning¹⁷, UJ has introduced the notion of ‘learning to be’ that puts forward a perspective on higher education that “conceptualises learning as becoming a practitioner of a knowledge and professional domain”. quote at length the

¹⁵ See Appendix 5 for UJ’s Teaching and Learning Strategy document.

¹⁶ This quote comes from the document *Teaching and learning at the University of Johannesburg: a position paper* (Amory, A., Gravett, S. and van der Westhuizen, D. 2008) which in turn is referenced in the ‘UJ Teaching and Learning Strategy’ for “the development and presentation of strategies which will allow for full implementation of the UJ Teaching and Learning Policy, and thereby make a substantial contribution to Strategic Goal 3: Excellence in Teaching”.

¹⁷ See Appendix 6 for UJ Teaching and Learning Policy document.

description on the characteristics of this latter kind of learning (according to a position paper by Amory, Gravett and van der Westhuizen, 2008 which forms part of the “UJ Teaching and Learning Strategy” document). ‘Learning to be’ encompasses:

[T]he practices of the knowledge domain (discipline or profession) which includes the principles, dispositions, attributes, competencies, activities, skills, procedures and values of the knowledge domain. This type of learning also requires how to best utilise the conceptual frameworks and/or theories of the domain to identify and solve problems or interpret and address everyday issues ... This view of teaching and learning *contrasts sharply with the transmission-of-knowledge or delivery view of teaching and learning*. “Seeing” teaching and learning like this, is (still) prevalent at many higher education institutions. It “assumes that knowledge comprises discrete, pre-formed units, which students ingest in smaller or greater amounts until graduation or indigestion takes over ... Learning is thus, we would suggest, also learning to ‘be(come)’ (Amory et al., 2008).

It would seem from the above arguments that UJ’s official policy on Teaching and Learning as informed by its Teaching and Learning Strategy document, in terms of the notion of ‘learning to be’, would be supportive of granting students epistemological access to ensure academic success.

The ‘learning to be’ concept forms one of the five “fundamental pillars of learning to provide quality education and foster sustainable human development”, which are “learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to be and learning to transform oneself and society” (UNESCO website, accessed 1 October 2012). The ‘learning to be’ component assumes:

that each individual has the opportunity to develop her or his full potential ... based on the precept that education is not just for purposes of the state or national development, for responding to globalisation or for moulding thinking, but for enabling individuals to learn, and to seek, build, and use knowledge to address problems on a scale that ranges from the minute to the global and beyond. This relates to knowledge, values, personal skills and dignity for personal and family well-being, in order to:

- see oneself as the main actor in defining positive outcomes for the future;
- encourage discovery and experimentation;
- acquire universally shared values;
- develop one's personality, self-identity, self-knowledge and self-fulfillment;
- be able to act with greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility.

(UNESCO Website)

The idea of 'learning to be' as described above conceptualises the student as a whole person who should be given the opportunity to fulfil his or her potential as a human being and be able not only to learn but to also construct knowledge. This implies development not only in terms of subject knowledge but also in terms of self-knowledge and identity. The goals of the 'learning to be' philosophy are also compatible with the notion that when students need to adapt to the different literacy practices or discourses (or ways of thinking, speaking, reading, writing, believing, valuing etc., (Gee, 1996)), that are required in a particular disciplinary field in order for them to understand and construct particular kinds of knowledge (i.e. epistemologies), this will also have an ontological effect on who that student is or can become.

UJ's adoption of the 'learning to be' philosophy as part of the teaching and learning strategy indicates that this policy is a strongly enabling structure in that it conceptualises the tutorial system as being concerned with the broad teaching and learning endeavour of gaining access to the epistemology of the different disciplines. The UJ teaching and learning policy document critiques the traditional 'transmission-of-knowledge' or 'delivery' view of teaching and learning still common to many universities and argues for a 'different approach' – which seems to be an approach which would enable the provision of epistemological access.

In this study, I wanted to find out whether those responsible for teaching and learning in the tutorial system were providing the kind of support to students which would enable them to begin to generate their own knowledge of their disciplinary field by providing access to the specific kinds of knowledge

'capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) needed in their particular field of study – as specified by UJ's proposed 'learning to be' philosophy and policy on teaching and learning.

In terms of the notion that tutorials can offer a space for enabling access to discipline specific epistemologies, it was thus interesting to discover the conceptualisation of the tutorial contained in UJ's Policy on Tutors and Tutoring.¹⁸ This policy was also developed in the context of the broader Teaching and Learning Policy and is associated with the Teaching and Learning Strategy, both of which are said to be indicative of "UJ's commitment to excellence in teaching and learning". In terms of this policy and strategy, according to the Preamble:

This Policy has been developed in the context of the UJ Teaching and Learning Policy and the associated Teaching and Learning Strategy, both of which represents UJ's commitment to excellence in teaching and learning. The Teaching and Learning Strategy identified the importance of tutorials as a key means of *facilitating student learning*, by allowing *cooperative interaction* in a relatively *safe learning environment*, and *time for reflection on and application of core academic practices and concepts within the disciplines being studied*. In particular, tutorials offer scope for the learning tasks prioritised by the '*learning to be*' teaching philosophy, which contribute to *transforming information into usable knowledge*.

(UJ Policy on Tutoring and Tutors)

The terminology used in the above extract from the UJ Tutor Policy seems to indicate a theoretically sound basis on which to promote the tutorial system as an effective teaching and learning intervention in terms of the idea that this "safe ... environment" provides "time for *reflection* on and *application* of core academic practices and concepts within the discipline being studied". This sentiment would seem to be in line with a construction of the tutorial in terms of enabling the provision of epistemological access. The particular emphasis on the scope of the tutorial to offer the opportunity to focus on specific *tasks* of a practical nature in order to 'contribute to transforming *information into usable*

¹⁸ See Appendix 7 for UJ Tutor and Tutoring Policy document.

knowledge' may possibly be seen in the light of UJ's positioning as a comprehensive university in which both theoretical and practical education is provided.

Funding, as well as those other policies of the university executive management structures that are needed to implement the tutorial system, is administered by the management structures of the various faculties. A faculty administrator explained that she inherited the management structures of the tutorial system from her predecessor and at that time departments would approach her with their needs in terms of tutors and whatever money that was available was allocated to them. Since then, she said that she had managed to increase the budget amount from what had been given out in previous years, and this new budget had had to be approved by the DVC Finance. More recently, since 2010, she developed a framework to try to implement this policy to allocate funds according to a formula. This formula would allow one tutor per hundred first-year students in a department, and stipulated that tutors should be appointed for not more than fourteen hours per week.

This policy was put in place by faculty to ensure some control over tutor workloads (because over-loading tutors could negatively affect their own performances as postgraduate students). It also links very much to the payment structure of tutors as temporary staff members from each department's allocated funds. The faculty administrator then communicates with the Heads of Departments (HODs) to inform them how many tutors they can appoint in terms of the available budget. From the perspective of one of the HODs, the data showed that much work around the tutorial system is taken up "in arguing for tutor budgets with faculty ... promoting the tutor system within the faculty, arguing for a bigger budget" (HOD Department A). The faculty administrator saw it as an important part of her role to develop a framework or structure that would clearly set out the responsibilities of the tutors – to "frame and understand what tutors will be required to do, from perhaps attending lectures, meetings, doing some marking pertaining to the tutorials" (faculty administrator).

This framework envisaged that each tutor could take between four and six groups of twenty-five students in each tutorial. The optimal size of a tutorial was thus seen to be twenty-five students, but as this administrator conceded:

It doesn't work like that in practice always, because some departments, ..., very large departments with a great number of students, I think sometimes the *groups are bigger* than that, but that is more or less, you know, the thing is, if I start on the basis of one hundred students per tutor – if it means you have four groups, it will be four groups of twenty-five (interview with faculty administrator).

Thus it can be seen that while enabling structures have been put in place by the university in terms of its construction of the tutorial system and in terms of governing the optimal number of students in a tutorial in relation to the number of tutors that can be appointed, there are other constraining factors that come into play. The main constraint in terms of the structural domain here again is the budget and the pressure caused by increased access. The budgetary constraint is acknowledged by the university, as can be seen from a statement to this effect made in the 'Procedural Guidelines' section of the UJ Tutor Policy:

Given that *tutor budgets are likely to remain constrained*, faculties will need to prioritise their use of tutors, to ensure that 'at risk' modules are accommodated

The 'at risk' modules are those modules in which the throughput rate has been particularly low. Tutorials are constructed by the university as playing a major role in helping to improve this throughput rate. I discuss the approach to teaching and learning in greater detail in the next chapter, which deals with culture.

It would seem from the above that because of budgetary constraints, there is sometimes the notion that tutorials are 'nice to have' rather than integral and can preferably be utilised in contexts where success rates are low in 'at-risk' modules. There seems to be some contradiction in terms of the UJ tutorial policy, however, because elsewhere in the documentation, the description of

the definition of the tutorial suggests that they are integral to UJ's overall teaching and learning approach.

According to the Tutor Policy, "a tutorial is defined as a session of *intensive tuition* led by a tutor. It aims to promote an *enabling learning environment* which *facilitates the development of discipline-specific skills* and enhances the academic success of students". The afore-mentioned conceptualisation of the tutorial in terms of the official UJ Policy is compatible with the construction of the tutorial as a space to enable the acquisition of epistemological access. The Tutor Policy acknowledges that the tutorial is "tuition" and therefore is part of the teaching and learning process and not separate from it. The construction of the tutorial as promoting an "enabling learning environment" is an indication of a particular understanding which connects the aspect of learning with that of teaching. It is up to the teacher, in this case the tutor, to create the conditions in the learning environment that would be enabling to the student. The facilitation of "the development of discipline-specific skills" in particular, seems congruent with the idea that tutorials can provide the space for access to disciplinary knowledge and knowledge-making.

Since the university structures that control the admissions policy at UJ have been granting entry to massively increased numbers of first-years,¹⁹ in order to be compatible with the pedagogical aims of tutorial policy structure it seems that allowance needs to be made in terms of the university budgeting structure for the building of sufficient venues for tutorials and tutors to run the tutorials, and that all students, not only those registered in modules that are deemed to be 'at-risk', need to be given the opportunity to acquire the support for epistemological access that can be provided by the tutorial system.

According to the UJ Tutor Policy "the tutorial programme must be integrally related to the other modes of teaching and learning used in the module". This statement clearly shows the integral nature of the conception of tutorials. However, this is undermined by the comment noted above: that tutorials should be prioritised specifically for the 'at-risk' modules. In addition, the policy

¹⁹ See Appendix 8 for tables of entering first-time cohorts showing details of increasing numbers.

does not refer specifically to the issue of timetabling to reinforce this integration.

4.5 Budgets, Venues and the Timetable

It was the view of a senior academic, who was also an HOD, that although the tutorial system is well supported by the university management as an idea, in practice, there are significant constraints to its effectiveness in terms of the structural problems of too few venues and a lack of funding:

Support for tutorials definitely goes all the way to the top, definitely, if you look at senate minutes, and faculty board minutes and things like that you'll see that there's a lot of support for it. There's a lot of conceptual and philosophical support for it, *where we don't have support is venues and funding* (interview with HOD, Department A).

A lecturer / module co-ordinator from Department B endorsed the view that budgetary constraints were undermining the effectiveness of the tutorial system:

The information must be cascaded to the point *to make them [management] understand what we're doing*, we're working with a situation with large numbers of students, we want to give them all the additional support *the university wants us to give them*, but in the process of doing that, you can't cut the very thing that you want to look at improving. You *can't suddenly cut corners because you want to have a budget*, you have to put up the resources to be able to show the results at the end of the day (interview with a lecturer / course co-ordinator, Department B).

According to a senior academic developer involved specifically with the tutorial system, budgetary constraints have an enormous impact on the size of tutorial classes and the availability of venues. Her view was that with sufficient money to appoint more tutors, the classes could be much smaller, but stated that there would still be a problem with insufficient tutorial venues. This academic developer acknowledges that the building of new tutorial venues was an attempt to address the venue issue by UJ management, but her view

was that at present there are still too few venues in relation to the number of students who are being given formal access to the university:

The problem is, you know, *you can't build twenty tutorial venues but you allowing twenty thousand students to come in*, it's not proportional at the end of the day, so our infrastructure ... doesn't work at this point. We have too many students and too little space in which to accommodate those students (interview with an academic developer).

There has been a broadening of access to the university in accordance with the drive to ensure transformation in higher education to redress the inequalities of the past (see 4.2). This 'massification' in higher education has put a great deal of strain on the university's structural capacity, which has led to a shortage of venues that can be used for tutorials.

The faculty administrator, however, maintained that "we're getting most of the venues that we apply for" and that they were in the process of trying to formalise the process so that, "as we do with the lecture venues, that we schedule tutorial venues in the timetable code book" but that this was in the early stages still. She acknowledged that it was a problem to "find open spaces" for tutorials after all the lectures had been scheduled on the timetable and departments were left with the task of directly approaching the timetable division and trying to find suitable venues – depending on the size of their student cohorts. She also mentioned that departments with fewer students were able to use their seminar rooms, which meant they could then schedule tutorials themselves.

The faculty administrator highlights the link between the timetabling system and that of the allocation of venues for tutorials. The timetabling system is a structure which has enabled the efficient management of the allocation of various venues, but also has a constraining effect on the tutorial system. In order to ensure that they can secure the available venues, departments need to have their tutorial times placed on the university timetable from the beginning of the year. This means that course co-ordinators need to work within the constraints of the university timetabling system and 'find' venues

that are available at times that they anticipate will suit the majority of their students.

There's *always an issue of timetabling*, even to find those tutorial venues, whether it be for fifty or one hundred – is problematic because there's always an *issue with venues* ... that is part of our challenge, and maybe we need to be thinking of other ways to present tutorials (Interview with an academic developer).

One issue that was highlighted by the academic developer cited above was that the tutorials are not timetabled for all faculties or all departments, so that if after students register for their subjects and the tutorial does not show on their timetable – when they go to a lecture and are told that they have to attend a tutorial, the tendency often is for students to question how important the tutorial is, and whether it is part of their course or curriculum if it is not actually on their timetable. Her view was that the tutorial:

needs to be actually timetabled so that students see, once you register, say for Psychology, there's your tutorial right next door, or whatever the case may be, and that then makes it an *integral part of teaching and learning* and it's not just ad hoc. Students already get the idea that this is part of my course, I need to attend (interview with an academic developer).

That the academic developer felt that students would only take the fact that they needed to attend tutorials seriously when the tutorials are timetabled indicates the power of the timetabling structure to constrain or enable the tutorial system. The fact that at the time of this study not all tutorials were timetabled indicates that the tutorial was still not universally conceived to be integral to the structure of the course and suggests in some instances that tutorials were understood to play more of an 'add-on / support' function in the discipline. esp ite the tutorial policy's statement that tutorials must be 'integrally related' to all teaching that occurs for the subject, it does not refer specifically to the issue of timetabling to ensure that this integration is structurally supported.

On the other hand, the faculty administrator felt that even in situations where the tutorials were not yet included in the formal timetable, it was the

responsibility of the first-year lecturer to inform students of the necessity of attending tutorials and to make it known that students needed to sign up for them, and that this could be done by putting a list on the departmental notice board, or doing it via 'EduLink' (an online student management system). This latter view, however, presupposes that the first-year student who is unfamiliar with the layout of the university, firstly already knows where and when to attend the lecture, secondly, knows the physical location on campus of the particular department, and finally, that the student has registered on and is already aware of how to access the EduLink system. All of these organisational structures, while set up by the university in order to enable the smooth running of the first-year programme, can also be a constraining factor and confusing to the uninitiated.

Furthermore, even if the first-year students have successfully navigated all these issues and are well-oriented in the university, the fact that the tutorials are only added to the timetable after it has been made available may suggest to the student that tutorials are 'add-on' in nature and just an additional extra that is not central to their course and thus could be perceived by them to be less important. The timetabling structure, in departments where tutorial details are added on later, can therefore have the effect of augmenting a discourse that tutorials are over and above the 'proper' teaching and learning that students are expected to engage with.

An example of how a structural issue around timetabling and available venues can act to constrain teaching and learning and therefore student academic success can be found in the following example:

In Department B, which had a first-year cohort of 3,500, tutorials were offered as part of a 'large class' project and pilot programme for first-years. Because of these very large numbers, it was impossible to enrol all the students in this module into the tutorial system. Students had to sign up on a 'first come, first served' basis on EduLink. The only venues that could be timetabled for this particular course were available at 8:00am on a Monday morning. This meant that in many cases students who were for the most part dependent on public transport were routinely unable to arrive on campus in time for the tutorial. In

addition, tutors complained that over the weekend the chairs for the venues were often collected together and locked away so that when Monday morning came the first part of the tutorial time was taken up with wandering around from classroom to classroom looking for chairs.

Sometimes you have like fifty desks and two chairs ... and then you have *tutors running around looking for chairs in some other venue* ... I think what happens is that for the weekend they lock it, they've moved all the chairs to that one venue, my room 401, they lock it so no-one steals the chairs and tables, because on Monday when we have our meetings in the morning – there's like just chairs stacked up in that room, and you're like, okay ... (interview with a tutor focus group, Department B).

This may seem like a trivial example of a structural constraint, but it had a harmful impact on the success of the tutorial as an event at the level of the actual, and routinely limited the available teaching time that tutors had with their students, thus negatively affecting their learning experience and chances of achieving academic success. The structural constraints caused by the scheduling of classes first thing on a Monday morning begs the question as to the extent to which the tutorial system is taken seriously as a mechanism for epistemological access.

A similar situation was mentioned by the lecturer / module co-ordinator from Department A:

We start at twenty past eight on a Thursday morning, and the students weren't, especially the twenty past eight group they'd start showing up at about nine-ish, which meant that they *only had about 15 minutes* of the actual tutorial.

When asked why she thought they were arriving late to the tutorial, she responded thus:

The same old excuses, transport, I live too far – you can't really fight with them when they say they've *been on a taxi since 6:00am* and it took the taxi that long to get there (lecturer/ module co-ordinator, Department A).

There is also the reality that many of the UJ students come from disadvantaged homes and in many cases the issue of transport costs impacts negatively on their willingness or ability to attend tutorials on a day when they do not have a lecture scheduled in terms of the university timetable. This can lead to overcrowding in certain venues simply because, as was mentioned by the lecturer / tutor co-ordinator from Department C:

Students don't want to come in an extra day, because they have lectures on one day and they're not going to *pay taxi fees* or whatever just to come in for a tutorial so they *cram everything into the one day they're on campus, or the two days* (lecturer/tutor co-ordinator, Department C).

Another related factor evident in the data that acts to constrain the tutorial's effectiveness in enhancing epistemological access is the structure of the tutorial in terms of the length of time allotted to each tutorial in terms of the timetable and the fact that students get only one short tutorial a week (currently 45 minutes). A tutor complained that after all the settling down to the class there was not enough time:

Not even half an hour to try and make these kids good writers and good researchers and we just can't because *there's no time, one tutorial a week, and move on* (interview with a tutor focus group, Department A).

As I have discussed, because of increased access to the university, and due to the budgetary constraints, the university is experiencing an extreme lack of venues for both lectures and tutorials. The timetabling system is the structure or mechanism that is used to try to handle this issue. According to Woods and Trenaman (1999), a timetabling system needs to:

... satisfy [the] *hard* constraints, that is, those constraints that must be satisfied for a timetable to be considered valid. For example, a lecturer cannot give two lectures at the same time, similarly, two lectures cannot take place at the same time in the same theatre ... [and] consider also the satisfaction of *soft* constraints: these are constraints that are not essential for a valid timetable, but nonetheless capture what makes one timetable *better* than another. *Soft constraints embody what is desirable in a timetable, for both*

lecturers and students, favouring lectures at certain times and minimising the number of lectures and events 'in a row'.

(Woods and Trenaman, 1999:1)

In order to function efficiently it is understandable that the timetabling system functions as a constraining structure, since it essentially involves the setting up of 'constraints'. However, it could be argued (given the challenge of incorporating in the timetable the large numbers of tutorial classes that are required), that the timetabling system at UJ is much more focused on the satisfaction of what Woods and Trenaman (99) call the '*hard*' constraints (where there are no resource clashes) than with the '*soft*' ones (where timetables that cause less "pain" to students and lecturers are favoured over those with more "pain") (Woods and Trenaman, 1991:1). The ideal timetabling system would be one that is able "to produce clash-free low-pain timetables" (Woods and Trenaman, 1991:6). It could be argued, however, that in the South African context where students have extreme financial constraints (such that they avoid attending classes every day to reduce their transport costs), some of these so-called '*soft*' constraints may in fact become '*hard*' ones. Because of the great inflexibility in the timetabling system at UJ in its current form, the issue of finding available venues at times that are appropriate for most students is a major challenge and a constraining factor in the tutorial system.

It was already noted that UJ has recently built a series of new classroom specifically for holding tutorials. Although these classrooms do have moveable desks, there are still several other problems. Firstly, as was pointed out by one of the academic developers, the twenty new classrooms are still insufficient in number to cope with the increasing numbers of students.

Secondly, the new tutorial classrooms are situated on the top two floors of a six-storey building where the only effective access is via numerous flights of stairs. There is a lift that serves some of the lower floors but does not go to the uppermost floors, and in any event, access to this lift is reserved for staff members only. This could be a constraining and exclusionary factor for a student with disabilities, for example, who could not easily access these

particular venues and would thus have to arrange to see the tutor outside of tutorial times during the tutor's consultation hours. Several students complained about having to climb so many flights of stairs and also mentioned that because the building is located at some distance from the main campus building where most lectures are held, students who come from a class in the main building are often late arriving for the tutorial, or, alternatively, if their next class is to be held in the main building they tend to be late for it unless they arrange to leave the tutorial five minutes before the end of the period.

Thirdly, the new classrooms consist of a series of adjacent rooms that are divided from each other only by means of moveable partitions. According to the tutors, this often causes sounds to 'leak' from one classroom to the next which can be quite disruptive. Finally, the tutors complained that these classrooms are windowless and so once the door is closed, the room temperature needs to be artificially controlled. Even though the temperature can be raised or lowered depending on the weather conditions, the air quality inside the rooms becomes stale as there is no fresh air circulating. Quite often this means that the door often needs to be left ajar, and this again can disrupt the flow of a lesson due to noise levels from students passing by in the corridors. All of these environmental conditions can have a negative impact on students' energy levels and consequent levels of engagement with the tutorial activities.

The need for the kinds of venues that are best suited to the purpose of tutorials was also stressed by the FYE co-ordinator:

Tutorials happen best when people are seated on the same level and can have interaction and real conversation in relative comfort while still being able to make notes etc., but *if you have a raked venue, for example, that becomes quite difficult*, it's not impossible, but it becomes quite difficult to do. We don't have many flat venues where we have moveable desks and chairs where you've got enough *sound proofing* that people can actually meet in a sensible way and have real interaction, so I think the physical spaces on our campus, on this campus specifically, but think it's true more generally as well don't really lend themselves to effective tutorials (interview with FYE co-ordinator).

The problem around the number of venues versus the size of classes due to sheer volume of student numbers at UJ was echoed by another academic developer, who noted that even though the new venues are more suited to group work, very many other tutorial classes take place in less than suitable environments:

They have built recently venues that have furniture which can move which facilitates good group work, but generally, *because of the size of tutorials, tutorials take place in lecture halls*, so that again makes it very difficult for interactive learning and co-operative learning and all that (interview with an academic developer).

Most of the research on the relationship between physical classroom structures and teaching / learning has been conducted in terms of the school classroom. However, I would argue that many of the findings also apply to the first-year university tutorial classroom situation. Much research has been conducted to investigate the relationship between the physical conditions in teaching spaces and student wellbeing, learning, engagement, and even attendance of class (Higgins, S., Hall, E., Woolner, P. & McCaughey, C. 2005; Earthman, 2004; and Weinstein, 1979). For example, it was found that certain physical elements like inadequate temperature control, air quality and acoustics can have unfavourable effects on students' mood, level of concentration, well-being, attendance and eventual attainment of academic success (Higgins et al., 2005:36).

Other studies have indicated that the physical structures of the classrooms and buildings in which they are situated have an impact on student learning, and if the environmental factors are not conducive this can constrain teaching and learning – and I would argue, by implication, the support of epistemological access in the tutorial. On the other hand, research has shown that “if essential physical conditions are provided in education buildings where students spend most of their time, students' academic achievement will be increased” (Selda, A.L., Odaci, H & Sagsöz, A., 2011:92). For example, Earthman (2004:8) argues that “there is sufficient research to state without equivocation that the condition of the building in which students spend a good deal of their time learning does in fact influence how well they learn”. It has

also been argued that students “should be allowed to learn in ways suited to their individual differences” and that the traditional classroom arrangement with desks lined up in rows has the effect of impeding “flexible and varied groupings necessary” for effective collaboration and group work (Marks, 2001:5).

The faculty administrator was hopeful that more venues would be built, and because of the shortage of venues, referred to the newly built series of tutorial venues as being prioritised for those modules that are judged to be ‘at-risk’:

Looking at it from the side of the MEC – they request faculties to *schedule those venues for the at-risk modules* – so only those first-year modules where you have a pass rate of lower than 60% – but on my own I’m trying to get as many venues as possible (interview with faculty administrator).

The notion of ‘at-risk’ modules is tied in with a low throughput rate (which is taken to be an indicator of lack of academic success) and could be characterised as part of a particular understanding of what academic success means in the UJ context – and thus is an indication of certain underlying ideological assumptions which have their own CEPs. These CEPs will be dealt with in the next chapter.

It can be seen that the overriding structural issue of funding and the choices around the allocation of funds is responsible for constraining the effectiveness of the tutorial system. The lack of funding is causing a shortage of appropriate, well-designed and adequately sound-proofed venues as well as limiting the numbers of tutors who can be employed in order to cope with the large numbers of students entering the university.

With regard to the physical structures such as the classrooms or teaching spaces, the forms that these physical spaces take at UJ are quite varied. While some departments that have very large cohorts of first-year students are now using the newly built tutorial classrooms already discussed, which do have moveable desks and chairs and can accommodate up to fifty students, other departments have to use whatever venues that they can get – with the result that some are using lecture rooms with fixed desks for tutorials, while

still other departments are having to use their departmental seminar rooms (which usually consist of a central table with about fifteen chairs) to accommodate sometimes over thirty students – with the result that many students then have to sit on the floor around the edges of the room. The physical numbers of students in a tutorial classroom in the departments that I investigated in my research ranged from around twenty-five to over fifty.

However, according to the data, 95% of the students from the departments in this study stated that their tutorials took place in a small classroom (or seminar room) as opposed to a lecture hall. Of these venues, 53.9% had moveable desks. The data thus shows that slightly more than half of the small venues that are being used have the kind of furniture in them that allows for group work to be done more easily. The other half had ‘fixed desks’ or else were using a seminar room which would usually have one central desk with a number of free-standing chairs around it. Since the response categories in the questionnaire allowed for free choice, this meant that students’ responses were not standardised, so in terms of these questions, students could create their own categories of responses or even have multiple responses. When asked what it was about the venue that affects their experience of the tutorial, 41.7% mentioned the fact that the venue was small, 23.4% mentioned that it allowed ease of communication or interaction with the tutor and 21.7% said that the small size encouraged participation and enabled them to ask questions.

Of these respondents, 62.6% felt the small size of the venue had a positive effect, with 25.2% being unaffected.²⁰ If the ‘positives’ and the ‘unaffected’ respondents are totalled, the data thus shows that most students (87.8%) either appreciate or feel unaffected by the size of the tutorial classroom. This percentage is supported by the fact that 87.9% of the students stated that they were comfortable enough to ask questions or raise issues in tutorials. The reasons for this included: the small size of the classes (not overcrowded / fewer students) which was stated by 31.4%; the ability or attitude of the tutor – 31%; the student-tutor relationship – 21.5% and the intimacy or familiarity of

²⁰ See Appendix 4 for summary of data statistics from student questionnaires.

the surroundings – 17.6%. In other words, the students' comfort with regard to asking questions in the tutorial was dependent almost as much on the small size of the class as their relationship with the tutor and their perception of the tutor's ability or attitude. The data indicates, however, that the small size of tutorial classes compared with lectures lends itself to the creation of a closer bond or relationship between the tutor and the students in the class. So the fact that students may have cited the relationship with their tutor as being the reason why they are comfortable to ask questions could still be as a result of the small size of tutorial venues, even if they did not mention this specifically.

There are various reasons for the increased enrolments which have had the unintended consequences of exerting great pressure on venues and increasing the sizes of the tutorial classes. One of these reasons is that in terms of its public identity, UJ is increasingly being seen by prospective students as a desirable institution. For a third consecutive year, UJ was rated 'second-coolest' university in South Africa (after the University of Cape Town) in the *Sunday Times* 'Generation Next 20' youth brand-preference survey in which almost 6,000 young urban South Africans between the ages of 8 and 22 were polled to discover how young South Africans perceive and respond to consumer and corporate brands (UJ website). According to the UJ website, "it is the hip and sometimes tongue-in-cheek advertising campaigns that draw the attention to this tertiary institution".

The 2011 UJ brand campaign '*Be anything you want to be*' builds on the very successful 2010 '*Escape the Ordinary*' campaign. These campaigns capture the 'spirit of potential' in a visual and witty way.

The Senior Manager: Marketing and Brand Management (on UJ Website)

The university, as the new kid on the block when it comes to higher education institutions, is being recognised for everything universities stand for: academic excellence, cultural diversity, global credibility, stature, and freedom. In essence the UJ brand illustrates the holistic educational experience afforded by UJ and it seems that the kids, teens and young adults agree. (UJ Website)

It can be seen from the above promotional material on the UJ website that UJ has undertaken an aggressive marketing strategy aimed at youth to promote the 'UJ brand'. This campaign seems to be working very well, given the growing masses of students who apply for enrolment as first-year students every year. This view is endorsed by the FYE co-ordinator, who stated in the interview that UJ seems to be perceived "out there" as "a place where you get a chance" and "an institution that is open to people who have not had opportunities before", compared with many other institutions in the country that are seen as "ivory towers where you have to have the right lineage or the right money to get in, or the right background". These remarks were based on what he called "gut-feel" and "anecdotal perceptions" and on the basis of having seen "the 20,000 students arriving to come and study here".

Below is a table with some statistics for 2007 – 2011.

Table 13: Statistics for 2000-2011

Year	% Black	%Undergraduate	Headcount
2007	74.0%	85.2%	41 740
2008	77.2%	85.3%	44 456
2009	80.8%	86.7%	49 315
2010	82.3%	86.9%	48 315
2011	84.8%	86.9%	50 528

Statistics from HEDA (on UJ Website)

From the above statistics it can be seen that over the last five years there has been a 10.8% increase in the number of black students and 1.7% increase in the number of undergraduates over this time, with nearly 87% of the total UJ student body being made up of undergraduates. In terms of the overall number of students, there was a 21% increase between 2007 and 2011.

The increased numbers of students entering UJ at first-year level have had a negative impact on the tutorial system. This can be illustrated with regard to Department B, where due to the size of the first-year cohort there were challenges around which students should be given tutorials and which

students should be excluded. Because of a lack of human resources and space, a decision was taken to 'stream' the students, and so groups of between fifty and sixty were put into tutorials:

We tried to put all students, for example, who hadn't done that course at school into the tutorials, but that actually didn't work because the *ITS system couldn't supply the information timeously*, so you see you always have to consider constraints like that, you know, so it's very easy to say, you know, in theory this is what we should do but then there are always these *practical constraints* (interview with an academic developer).

Budgetary constraints so negatively affected the availability of sufficient venues and tutors to cope with the increased student cohort that tutorials in this department were then only made available to selected students only. The challenge was in deciding which of the first-year students would benefit most from a tutorial. This situation begs the question, is epistemological access for some students only? It seems to imply an understanding that some students perhaps have more difficulties accessing the ways of being of the university and the practices of the disciplines within it than others, and if this is the case, it raises the question of how to identify them.

It has been argued that *all* students are to some extent 'unprepared' to cope with the expectations required of them in terms of academic discourse, irrespective of their prior educational advantage or disadvantage (Moll & Slonimsky, 1989; Bradbury & Miller, 2011). The great diversity of students in terms of language and socio-cultural background currently entering higher education in South Africa means that these students also will bring with them diverse approaches to learning and making meaning in the context of the discourse of the university (Gee, 1996; Street, 2003). The implication of targeting only some students for inclusion in the tutorial system necessarily leads to the exclusion of others from an opportunity to gain epistemological access to the discipline and is rather contradictory to the construction of the tutorial as being integral to teaching and learning in terms of the official UJ Tutor Policy and the UJ Teaching and Learning Policy.

In the extract above, the academic developer highlights an issue in which the reliance on a computer information system proved ineffectual. In this instance it can be seen that this particular structure was a constraining factor in terms of the management of the tutorial system in this department. Furthermore, the “practical constraints” referred to by the academic developer in the above quoted extract are yet again symptomatic of some of the unintended consequences caused by UJ’s popularity and the widening of formal access. As a result of this, the demand (numbers of students) exceeds the supply (venues and tutors), and so a great many students in this department were excluded from receiving academic support through the tutorial system.

The large size of the class can be a structural constraint in terms of the quality of teaching and learning. According to research on the relationship between class size and student achievement conducted by Ehrenberg, R.G., Brewer, D.J., Gamoran.A., & Willis, J.D. (2001), when there are fewer students in the room, students tend to pay better attention; and likewise, teachers who use group work find that their instruction is more effective in smaller classes, leading to the finding that “class size and instructional practices would interact to affect student achievement”. In addition, Weinstein (1979) states that there is substantial proof that the classroom environment can influence “non-achievement behaviours and attitudes” in classrooms where “high levels of density” result in unhappiness, lower social interaction between classmates and “increased aggression” (Weinstein, 1979:598). This research finding has relevance to the typical tutorial classroom at UJ, where the shortage of venues and increased number of students can sometimes lead to overcrowding.

Other research conducted by the Brookings Institution in Washington, USA (2011, accessed online 28 August 2012) states that “it appears that very large class-size reductions ... can have meaningful long-term effects on student achievement and perhaps on non-cognitive outcomes” (2011: para 6). This paper goes on to say that “the academic effect seems to be largest ... for students from less advantaged family backgrounds” (2011: para 6), and the positive effects of a reduction in class size may also be created more “in

classrooms of teachers who are less well prepared and effective in the classroom” (20 : para 39).

The findings of the research quoted above would seem to have direct relevance in the context of the tutorial system at UJ, where the majority of the first-year students are from disadvantaged backgrounds and where tutors may be expected to be less prepared or effective since they are not professionally trained teachers and in some cases have only received generic training (which I deal with in the section that follows). The size of the tutorial class would therefore have some kind of impact on the way in which tutors were able to approach teaching and learning. For example:

In my first year of tutoring we had about twenty to thirty students, whereas this year we had about sixty in a class, sixty in a crowded venue, a bit bigger than this. So it became quite a *challenge to do activities* because I like doing group work activities, so it takes me about ten minutes to get them into groups, and set up the group section (interview with a tutor focus group, Department B).

It can be seen from the extract above that the large size of the class can be a constraining factor in the running of an effective tutorial and therefore negatively impacts on the potential of the tutor to adequately support epistemological access to the discipline.

It is clear that budgetary constraints and the lack of available venues seen against the increasing size of the first-year student cohort (combined with the fact that many students remain in the system longer than the expected three or four years for a general academic or professional degree) have led to great challenges to the effective running of the tutorial system. However, the faculty administrator held the view that things were changing for the better, but that this was a slow process, because, university-wide, the management looks at a ‘five-year plan’:

Even just in terms of venues there are plans and I think *the situation will change* I think quite drastically say from 2013 and 2014 when at least two of

the faculties currently on APK²¹ will move to other campuses²² – so that will make *more venues* available, I think there are plans as far as I know, to build *additional tutorial venues*, and also I think, the decision was taken that the university in terms of the undergraduate numbers should be looked at, at a downward slope (interview with a faculty administrator).

The university management's 'five-year plan' functions as a structural constraint in the context of the tutorial system because this means that changes happen very slowly. As discussed in section 4.3 of this chapter, the various decision-making structures in the university have to function according to a Charter that needs to be approved by Senate, Council and, when necessary, the Management Executive Committee (MEC). This means that any decision to make structural changes in terms of policy is subject to an ordered process of deliberation involving these various committees and levels of management, all of which takes time.

It has however been argued that “the optimal approach to institutional reform is gradualism”, because this can provide an option of “early reversal if the prospects look bad after the introduction of the first reforms” (Roland, 2004: 34). According to Roland (2004: 3), “what is often called ‘culture’ including values, beliefs, and social norms, can be classified as a slow-moving institution”. The university, being a complex and multi-layered organisation, situated in a particular socio-cultural and historical context could be said to be, of necessity, a ‘slow-moving’ institution, with its own ‘culture’ – which in this sense can also be seen as a structural mechanism.

It effectively means that if the time lag for any structural transformation to occur in response to interaction with agency is as long as five years, this is longer than the optimal time a cohort of first-year students should take from the time they enter the university till graduation (three years for a general academic degree and four years for a professional academic degree). As Higgins et al (2005) argue, “investment in change should be seen as an

²¹ APK stands for the Auckland Park, Kingsway campus (previously known as Rand Afrikaans University – RAU).

²² UJ as a merged institution comprises 4 different campuses: APK, Doornfontein and Bunting Road (previously Technikon Witwatersrand – TWR), and Soweto (previously Vista University).

iterative process, rather than a five-year programme to cover the needs of a subsequent generation” (Higgins et al., 2005:37).

Certainly, the transfer to other campuses of some of the faculties currently at the Auckland Park, Kingsway campus where this study was located should relieve some of the pressure related to the shortage of venues over the next few years, provided UJ does not allow the number of newly entering students to increase. However, there is very often a tension between the concept of potentially ‘capping’ student numbers in certain faculties and departments, with the university’s policy towards broadened access, late registration and a tendency in the recent past to allow ‘walk-ins’, which increasingly swells the numbers of first-years on campus.

UJ has in recent years accepted late applications in January after the final school examination results are released when many students realise that they are eligible for university. This policy had tragic repercussions in January 2012 when the mother of a prospective student was crushed to death in a stampede at the main gates of the Bunting Road campus by thousands of students who had been queuing for possible ‘last-minute’ places at UJ (www.bbc.co.uk, January 2012). According to a report (www.timeslive.co.za, January 20 2) the university’s registrar stated that “the planned intake of first-years is 000, subject to the number of returning senior students” so the senior students were to be registered first, followed by the first-year undergraduate registration. According to this report, more than 85,000 applications were processed, which meant that at UJ about 74,000 prospective students were turned away.

Given that the tutorial system is strongly supported (conceptually) by university management, and despite budgetary constraints, certain additional structures have been put in place. An example of this is the special Unit for Tutor Development.

4.6 The Unit for Tutor Development

The Unit for Tutor Development is a structure created by the university to support the effective running of the tutorial system. It had its beginnings in 1995 when the Learning Centre was launched. With the launch of the foundation programme in 2001, the tutorial system was expanded and some years later, the Learning Centre became known as the Academic Development Centre (ADC) as part of the Division of Academic Development and Support (ADS). This unit conducts its own research on the tutorial system which results in various reports and feedback mechanisms which are then regularly sent to the university management structures. Its function, according to a senior member of the unit, is to monitor the effectiveness of the tutorial programmes across all the campuses and faculties.

According to the official Tutor Policy document, this unit:

... is responsible for ongoing collaboration with faculty representatives and/or departments and the provision of expert guidance with regard to the continuing development and implementation of the tutorial programme (UJ's Policy on Tutoring and Tutors).

One of the functions of this unit is to devise and deliver compulsory tutor training. The generic training:

... encompasses *basic tutoring practice skills* ... things like what are the tutor responsibilities, what kind of relationship you have with your department, what can you expect from your students, so, a general tutor code of conduct, how to be professional, and then we do things like basic classroom management, *basic tutoring strategies* (interview with an academic developer).

Senior students who are selected to become tutors are not trained teachers and because the tutor unit is understaffed and the training given is generic and very limited, as was expressed by the academic developer responsible for tutor training, the training they receive can only offer "basic tutoring practice skills". However, it has been argued that a skill-based or competence-based approach to training tutors has no epistemological basis as "it is concerned with *what* can be done ... rather than with *how* skills are developed and knowledge acquired" (Whitty & Willmott, 99 :309).

In terms of the structure of tutor training, because the generic training is fairly limited, this can have a constraining effect on the understanding of the function of tutorials. Tutors tend to construct students in terms of their own understandings of what it is to teach others, and in most cases this understanding has been informed by a mixture of their prior experiences with their high school teachers or from having been first-year students in a tutorial class themselves as well as from their experiences in lecture halls. Generic training for tutors is therefore not sufficient if the real purpose of tutorials is to give epistemological access to the discipline specific norms. This view is supported by Star and Hammer (2008), who write that “generic workshops ... that are separated from disciplinary learning run the risk of promoting a shallow, technical approach to teaching and learning” (Star & Hammer, 2008:241).

Generic training assumes a particular understanding of tutorials (and of teaching and learning). In the UJ context, the tutor training sessions have been set up to offer guidance for tutors (both new and experienced). However, they were criticised by many of the more experienced tutors interviewed as being ‘too generic’, ‘repetitive’ and ‘boring’. In terms of its function in providing on-going monitoring of the tutors, the unit also runs follow up sessions called ‘tutor check-ins’, which are supposed “to ensure that tutorial programme goals are being met by both academic staff and student tutors” (UJ Policy on Tutoring and Tutors).

One of the tutors from Department A expressed her view on the tutor training and follow-up sessions thus:

There is *nothing specific for your subject*, they have the general training which you have to go to every single year regardless of whether you’ve been before but it’s the *same generic training as you have had the past two years*, for one. Number two, when you have your tutor feedback sessions whatever – ‘ve also stopped going to that because it’s useless, they do nothing but they say ‘what have you been experiencing?’ and you say, ‘ ‘ve experienced this’ and then we all bitch and moan for two hours and then we leave, like there’s nothing...it’s like ‘this is very interesting to hear’, and then next time you go, it’s the same bitch and moan ... ‘this is very interesting to hear’ and then you

go back, it's useless, it's not tutor development, *there is no development* at all (interview with a tutor focus group from Department A).

Some tutors in other departments (for example, in Departments D and E) however, did feel that they had benefited from the generic tutor training to some extent, particularly when it was treated just as a foundation to the more detailed subject-specific training given internally within their own department. Where tutors were given this subject-specific training in their departments, their understanding of the purpose of the tutorial was closer to the concept of providing epistemological access to the specific discipline than in other departments where no internal training was given apart from the generic training provided by the university's tutor unit.

Other tutors (from Department B) reported that they found the generic tutor training and 'check-ins' useful because they gave them an opportunity to interact with tutors from other departments who would have different points of view on "how to tutor".

One of the academic developers interviewed conceded that because the tutor unit is small, they are not able to conduct very detailed training in the four hours that they have; however, she felt that "it's at least an attempt to try and prepare the tutors for what's coming". The faculty administrator acknowledged that there had been some unhappiness on the part of senior tutors with the kind of compulsory tutor training offered by the tutor unit and she had some ideas on how these problems could be addressed:

We're changing the system for the senior tutors slightly from next year on, where it will be more a peer discussion group ... I specifically asked that we have something different for them, and I'm also proposing to use some of the better senior tutors to also become involved in the training of the first-time tutors ... we look and see what happens the previous year and see what the problems are, and then try and respond to that (interview with faculty administrator).

Although the faculty administrator here does indicate an awareness that the generic nature of the tutor training needs to be improved in order to better address the needs of the senior tutors, she does not, however, seem to be

specifically calling on an understanding of the tutorial as a space of support for epistemological access and therefore underscoring the need for discipline specific training.

While generic training no doubt provides useful support for the tutors in terms of managing groups, engaging the students, and how to conduct themselves in a professional manner in the classroom, this kind of training on its own was not shown in the data to sufficiently prepare tutors for their role in supporting epistemological access. Different disciplines have different knowledge structures and different literacy practices (see discussions in Chapter 2). It is doubtful whether generic training by those who are not themselves members of the target discipline can fully address this.

The tutor unit in some ways seems to serve to enable tutorials by taking up the tedious but essential administrative tasks associated with the training of the tutors as well as giving support to departments who are setting up a tutorial system. However, the potential danger of having a tutor unit that takes on this responsibility is that academics may view the existence of the unit as meaning that they themselves do not need to take any responsibility for the role of tutorials in their department. One of the academic developers responsible for the generic training said she hoped that the tutors “don’t just get our training, but that the lecturers are also making some kind of input in their training as well” because the training given by the tutor unit just “looks at the most basic skills that you would need, to be an effective tutor”. She added that:

We make the assumption that there will be *other training that comes from the department’s* side which will be *more content based* (interview with an academic developer).

Another academic developer described the generic training as “just a gesture to train the tutors” but felt that it was important that:

Staff members working with tutors need to *utilise them intelligently* and you really need to optimally think how they’re going to help and *enable students and enable that staff member* ... one of the key problems with tutoring is that staff is not invested, they feel they have to run a programme because they’ve

been given the money to, but they're not really understanding how that programme can be *integrated into the curriculum* to make a difference (interview with an academic developer).

The data findings indicate that the extent to which tutors are supported in unpacking the epistemologies of the subjects they tutor by the academics within the departments in which they work can serve to enable or constrain the tutorial in terms of supporting epistemological access for students. Given that acquiring academic practices occurs within disciplines (Jacobs, 2007; Underhill & MacDonald, 2010), it is impossible for the tutor unit to do much to enable a conception of tutorials as being about the enhancement of epistemological access but can nevertheless enable a smooth administrative side to the tutorial system.

4.7 Tutorial Support Structures

In certain departments, structures have been created which serve to support tutors with regard to responding to their expressed needs, as well as to enable tutors to perform their function more easily. Department D, for example, appoints a tutor representative who, at the end of each semester, submits a written report with suggestions or problems encountered, to the tutor co-ordinator, based on the results of an anonymous questionnaire filled in by the tutors. This academic from Department D saw this as being an important way not only to improve the tutorial system but also to show tutors that they are valued and respected in the department:

What works really nicely, is because we've got the tutor representative ... the tutors would come in and say, you know, don't you think this would work better, so I think in that way they feel respected, they feel they are *an important part of this department* (interview with an academic / tutor co-ordinator, Department D).

The tutors in department also mentioned what they called a weekly 'tutor review' in which they would email the lecturer their thoughts about the tutorials, lectures or the tests which would then be discussed in the weekly

group meeting. All of the departments investigated did hold some form of weekly meeting with the tutors.

The faculty administrator also mentioned a newly formed 'first-year support forum', which would consist of a regular meeting every semester, between herself and other senior members of faculty, with the first-year student representatives of all departments and the tutor representatives. At the time of the interview, this forum had only had one meeting, in which the venue that had been booked proved to be too small, so the plan was to schedule future meetings of this forum (which would take place in the UJ Council Chambers) by formal inclusion on the official university calendar. The idea behind the structure of the first-year support forum was to provide an official feedback mechanism through which both students and tutors could have their voices heard by management structures. In this way, this structure was constructed as something to enable the establishment of an on-going communicative relationship between those with the power to make changes to the system, and those directly affected by the tutorial system.

All of the above-mentioned structures were set up to give support to tutors. These structures also served to enable the effective running of the tutorial system. This was because they allowed the tutors to exercise a certain amount of agency in their role, since these structures gave them the opportunity to voice their concerns to the more senior members of the department and faculty.

In addition, most departments included in this study gave their tutors some form of documentation or written guidelines on how to conduct tutorials. In some cases, this was given out on a week by week basis at the weekly meeting. In Department A for example, the study guide for each module that was produced for students also contained a breakdown of the syllabus which included a schedule of tutorial activities for the semester. Several departments produce a 'tutor guide' in the form of a manual which is given out at the beginning of the module. Other departments provided a general guide for tutors on a weekly basis related to that week's activity. In Department B, tutors referred to their manual as a "tutoring bible":

They tell us how to be a tutor, how not to be, what you should do, what you shouldn't do, and also more, like we got given a *tutor manual*, for that kind of work, like your bible, your *tutoring bible*, so it would give you activities and how to do administration, because there's a lot of administration that goes into tutoring also, so they give you tips on how to do administration and how to run your class, how to manage, discipline in the classroom (interview with a tutor focus group, Department B).

The above reference to the tutor manual as being like a "tutoring bible" indicates the high esteem in which this documentation is held. In other cases, such as in Department D, tutors are given a detailed manual in the form of a tutor handbook at the beginning of the semester setting out their duties and responsibilities for the module.

How this works for the tutor in practice is described below:

It show(s) what the tutor needs to do every week and what is envisaged for that tutorial they're going to present that week; whether they're going to have to do any admin, whether they're going to be doing any marking and it's worked out in terms of hours, so that we're *not abusing our postgrad students* by not telling them what they're going to do, when, so they know when they open that little book, okay that week three is going to be really bad, week five is going to be wonderful, I can plan my own studies around that, so that works quite nicely; and then on top of that we have a *weekly meeting*, where we say, right, in your tutor manual on page six is what you're going to be doing this week, have you gone through it? Have you got the transparencies, the PowerPoint, the pictures, the little tests (interview with an academic / tutor co-ordinator, Department D).

The documentation related to the running of the tutorial functions is a structure that serves to enable tutors to plan for the tutorial activities and manage their time more efficiently. In the above extract, for example, it was interesting to note that there was also a concern not to take advantage of (abuse) the tutors who are (postgraduate) students themselves and need to manage their own time and studies apart from their responsibilities to the first-year students whom they tutor.

The documentation also serves to enable the tutor because it clearly delineates the content of the course and reflects the way in which the tutorial system is constructed in that particular department. If a tutorial is about enhancing students' access to the epistemologies of their programme, it is important that tutors are provided with structure to do this. The provision of support structures in the form of documentation and tutor guides enables epistemological access by specifying the departmental and disciplinary expectations (even while limiting the tutors in terms of the departmental approach towards teaching and learning). All tutors sign a generic code of conduct after attending the tutor training with the tutor unit, which is aimed at encouraging professionalism in tutor behaviour and attitude. Some departments adapt this to suit their individualised requirements, in which case, tutors would be signing two codes of conduct. For example, in Department D, the tutor handbook contains the departmental code of conduct, which includes the following regulations:

Tutors should:

- Offer subject-specific support and development.
- Understand the model of tutoring utilized by your department.
- Be sensitive to the diverse nature of the student body with particular emphasis on language, culture, gender, nationality and religion. Value the opinions of students.
- Support and develop students into self-directed and motivated learners by instilling confidence and being enthusiastic about the tutored subject.
- Facilitate learning and guide students through the process of knowledge construction in the discipline by creating a positive learning environment. Encourage student participation in tutorials.

(Tutor Handbook, 2011 Department D)

The regulations exemplified above indicate an understanding from the departmental level that a purpose of the tutorial is to help students to gain access to and learn how to construct knowledge in the particular epistemologies of the discipline. Tutors can of course exercise agency to a lesser or greater extent in the way in which they actually run their tutorial classes.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, it was explained that structures are mechanisms that can serve to constrain or enable those who interact with them. I therefore examined the different ways in which the various structures of the university itself as well as the systems within it, serve to enable or constrain the construction of tutorials as being for epistemological access. I firstly looked at the policy around open access and how increased access has had the unintended consequence of straining the university resources. I then discussed how while the tutorial system is being enabled by the university management system in terms of its construction as being a mechanism to improve throughput, the tutorial system is nevertheless constrained by the budgetary system and the related issues of venues.

Other structures that I examined were the official university policy documents. It was found that many of these documents, such as the teaching and learning strategy – incorporating the ‘learning-to-be’ philosophy – as well as the UJ tutor policy were constructed to enhance the provision of epistemological access. However, it was also noted that in some respects there were contradictions in the procedural guidelines of the tutor policy where there were recommendations for prioritising the use of tutors for the ‘at-risk’ modules where elsewhere in the documentation tutorials were defined as being integral to UJ’s general teaching and learning approach.

This chapter also discussed the over-riding structural constraints of funding and the allocation of funds with regard to the provision of sufficient and appropriately located tutorial venues to avoid over-crowding or student discomfort. The importance of including tutorials on the formal timetable was also emphasised.

I then looked at the Unit for Tutor Development as a structure to support the effective running of the tutorial system. It was noted that the generic foundational training provided by this unit needed to be supplemented by more detailed subject-specific training by each department. The extent to which tutors were able to unpack the epistemologies of their subjects for students very much depended on the level of support they were given by the

academics in their departments. Finally, the study looked at the ways in which certain tutorial support structures such as tutor guides, the weekly tutor meeting or tutor review, the use of tutor representatives and the first year support forum all served to enable the tutorial system.

Other structures affect the ways in which cultural aspects manifest at UJ. For instance, specific departmental structures will determine the way in which tutors are selected, trained and supported. These structures pre-suppose certain approaches to teaching and learning, which can also be seen as an indication of the 'culture' of the department. will deal in more detail with some of the cultural emergent properties (CEPs) that were identified in the data in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings – Culture

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is the second of three chapters in which I discuss my findings within the domains of structure, culture and agency using Archer's notion of 'analytical dualism'. In Chapter 4, I discussed my findings in the domain of structure. In this chapter, I discuss my findings in the domain of culture – that is, the ideational aspects – focusing on how these enable or constrain the construction of tutorials for epistemological access at UJ.

As Archer writes:

Any socio-cultural action, wherever it is situated historically, takes place in the context of innumerable interrelated theories, beliefs and ideas which had developed prior to it, and ... exert a conditional influence on it. (1996:xxi)

As outlined in Chapter 3, all the ideational aspects in a particular context constitute the cultural domain. In the context of higher education the cultural domain emerges in the different ways that people express or enact their ideas, beliefs, values and understandings of issues such as the purpose of higher education, approaches to teaching and learning and even what constitutes knowledge. People express cultural ideas through their discourses which because of their causal powers or CEPs have effects on events and experiences.

Approaches to teaching and learning and how students are constructed in the university are often reflected in how tutors see their students and their own role as teachers in the context of the tutorial classroom. In terms of critical realist theory, these different discourses can be characterised as cultural mechanisms emergent from the level of the real and having causal properties and powers (CEPs) that affect or transform social practices. Fairclough, Jessop and Sayer (2004) argue that different discourses are influenced by "semiotic factors" which can feature in processes of social transformation through the "emergent semiotic properties within orders of discourse" (Fairclough et al., 2004:7). They ascribe to 'semiosis' (or meaning making) the ability "to generate variation, have selective effects and contribute to the

differential retention and / or institutionalisation of social phenomenon” which they elaborate by listing some of the “semiotic conditions” involved, including:

The *selection* of particular discourses (the privileging of particular discourses over others available internally and/or externally) for interpreting events, legitimising actions, and (perhaps self-reflexively) representing social phenomena. Semiotic factors operate here by influencing the different resonance of discourse. Some resonant discourses will subsequently become retained (e.g., through their inclusion into widely accepted hegemonic projects or their inclusion into an actor’s habitus).

(Fairclough et al., 2004:5)

The discourses that are activated in a particular context emerge at the actual level and are experienced at the empirical level. It was my intention in this study to try to identify what these discourses were and what cultural emergent properties these might have in the tutorial system. In conducting this study, I explored the institutional context in which the tutorial system operates at UJ in order to understand the interplay between the broader discourses in higher education and those of the various role-players in the study.

Janks (2010) directly relates the use of discourse to issues of power in her discussion of ‘domination’ in literacy. “Language is not a neutral form of communication” (Janks, 20 0:60) or “an autonomous construct” (Fairclough, 1989:vi) rather, language is imbued with discourses carrying ideological or semiotic power. In the context of teaching, or in the tutorial system, these ideologies are powerful ways to construct a particular view of reality. Discourses, in terms of a social realist framework, are spaces of ideology replete with emergent properties, in the domain of culture (Fairclough et al., 2004).

In this chapter I look at evidence of the beliefs and ideas that management, academic developers, academics, tutors and students held about the tutorial system, particularly with regard to their understanding about teaching and learning that emerged in the data. It is through examining these discourses that an understanding can be gained of how they inform the practice of those involved with the tutorial system. Since it is not possible to interrogate fully every idea, value or belief that was evident in the data, I will instead engage

only with the dominant discourses that emerged. It should also be noted that as with Archer's analytical dualism, in which items are artificially separated for analytical purposes so as to examine their 'interplay', so within the various categories of discourses that were identified in the data there is a certain degree of overlap and contradiction. Discourses tend to 'rub up' against each other in terms of the various constructions of teaching and learning evident in the data.

5.2 Parents and Partnerships

Relationships between various role-players in the study were frequently referred to in the data. Two key discourses about relationships were identified as 'parents' and 'partnerships'.

The parental discourse constructed first-year students as children or 'kids'. This discourse was called upon by both academics and tutors. The discourse centred on the notion of teaching and learning as parenting, both in terms of lecturers and tutors playing a nurturing role and in terms of lecturers and tutors needing to ensure control over the class. One of the tutor co-ordinators mentioned that the first-years were in need of 'nannying'. Examples of this discourse from tutors in each of the five departments I investigated are as follows:

The *kids* actually don't know how to cope (Department A).

[The tutorial] is more relaxed, you can make the *kids* more relaxed (Department B).

It's almost *like a mother*, somebody who is there, who helps, who is strict, who moans, who complains, who says good, good, ja. It's really somebody who runs around helping the students to catch all the balls, you must remember this, remember this [tapping on desk], you know? Do you still know about this? It's very much a *mother role* and they see it, mean they don't necessarily like you, but they'll come to you running if something goes wrong (Department C).

Some *children* write very well and some *children* don't, I just didn't think that *children* at a lower kind of level got into university (Department D).

You have to be patient, you have noisy students who will annoy you to the core and you need to be able to keep your cool and *speak to them properly like adults* and tell them to keep quiet, very, very politely, and you need to be caring, you need to understand where they're coming from you know, it's very sad to look *a child* in the face and see that they're not understanding. (Department E)

The CEPs of this discourse can be that of enabling epistemological access in as much as students are being constructed as in need of support from someone who has already 'cracked the code' (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988) and is thus in a position to guide the novice towards an understanding of the epistemologies of the discipline in a compassionate manner. However, this discourse may also give some cause for concern if it constructs the student as being under-developed or diminished in capacity. As a result of this construction²³, tutors may be tempted to over-simplify the course material to remove any perceived difficulties being experienced. Enabling the acquisition of epistemological access does require the 'unpacking' of complex concepts and 'making visible' tacit academic practices. However, a strong parental dynamic could have the unintended consequences of excluding students from more concept-independent, complex theorising. The parental discourse could reduce epistemological access by only giving access to what Wheelahan (2009) terms "context-dependent" versions of complex, abstract theory. She maintains that if "knowledge is decontextualised from the system of meaning in which it is embedded ... knowledge becomes tied to the contextual. Students do not have access to the criteria they need to select knowledge and use it in new and creative ways, and knowledge is not under their control" (Wheelahan, 2009:15).

As Morrow (1994:80) has pointed out, this would be doing a disservice to those students in terms of their ability to achieve epistemological access, and this parental discourse could therefore also act as a constraint. Furthermore, a parental discourse suggests a significant power differential between the student and the tutor / lecturer.

²³ This is a claim based on what was stated to me during the tutor focus group interviews and not based on any direct observation of practices in the tutorial.

There was also a discourse in the data around the notion of a 'partnership' between lecturers and tutors. This was sometimes expressed in terms of the importance of having a good level of communication between the tutor and lecturer. For example:

They have to have good *consultation with the lecturer* – but that's a *two-way street*, because if the lecturer's not involved, then they really are hanging out there by themselves with no support ... we do say to the first-year lecturers, can you come on board, but there's definitely a *stigma attached to the idea of 'lowering' yourself to deal with tutor issues* (interview with an academic / tutor co-ordinator, Department C)

While all the tutors spoke of the need for a close partnership with the relevant academic if they were to ensure meaningful tutorial content, the academics had mixed views. Most of the academics interviewed in this study valued the tutorial system and felt that their close partnership with tutors enhanced the benefits of the system for first-year students, but there was also evidence of the notion of there being some kind of 'stigma' and a sense of 'lowering yourself' when it comes to lecturers becoming involved with the tutorial system seems to point to an underlying tension that was evident in the data with regard to a lack of 'buy-in' and support from certain members of the academic staff. It was mentioned several times that some long-time lecturers either show an unwillingness to change their traditional approach to teaching and are not willing to recognise or understand the potential value of the tutorial system, or alternatively feel that they are too busy (perhaps with what is seen as being more 'important' research work), to undertake what could be seen to be an additional and time-consuming responsibility. There was therefore some resistance to the notion of the lecturer-tutor relationship being a partnership.

Nevertheless, the partnership discourse was frequently called upon to describe an 'ideal' lecturer-tutor relationship. One of the academic developers maintained that for tutorials to work there needs to be "a collaborative effort between the staff, the lecturer and the tutor" which needs to be initiated by the lecturer. This discourse was also expressed by another academic developer in terms of a working relationship between the lecturer and tutor which she believed to be one in which they "work together, they work in tandem ... the

lecturer's the expert, the tutor will basically ... on a level that's more understandable for the students, explain a concept or give them a practical example ... so they really complement and supplement each other".

The lecturer / tutor co-ordinator from Department C called on this discourse when she talked about the importance of a "proper working relationship" between the first-year lecturers and their tutors – which she saw as impacting on the pass rate:

I think that ... if all first-year lecturers – had a *proper working relationship* with their tutors then think that we'd have a greater throughput rate – a pass rate ... tutors need the support and they need to know that there's acknowledgement, that the lecturer knows how *valuable* they are, and I think that needs to be stressed more. Because I think that the link between the lecturer and the tutor is *not acknowledged* enough (lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, Department C).

The FYE co-ordinator felt that there needed to be "a partnership between the lecturer and the tutors to try and achieve very specific goals", which he saw as being "better academic success and better academic integration of the student".

The Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) also seems to have drawn on the partnership discourse. The faculty administrator reported that future initiatives suggested by this committee should include the promotion of a mutually beneficial relationship between lecturers and tutors through a reward system and "to make departments aware that we see lecturing and tutoring as a partnership".

The partnership discourse was also used in a collaborative project that took place between the UJ Academic Development Centre (ADC) and a particular department. In this project, the AD practitioner suggested to the academic staff that it was important for them to form partnerships in the form of "mentorships" with their tutors.²⁴ The thinking behind this is that in order for tutors to be able to guide their students into an "engagement with the discourse" by establishing "a learning community", tutors first have to be able

²⁴ This project has been documented by Underhill and MacDonald (2010).

to function as members of such a community themselves (Bruffee in Underhill & MacDonald, 2010:101).

There was thus a view that the power dynamic between lecturers and tutors (themselves senior students) needed to be one that could enable a partnership if lecturers and tutors were to share an understanding of the tutorial system as facilitating access to knowledge. The CEP of this discourse seems to be enabling of EA, but there were also reports of academics resisting a more egalitarian relationship between themselves and tutors.

One discourse in the data that initially seemed unrelated to the focus of this study may help to account for the resistance, by some academics, to involvement with the tutorial system. There was regular reference by academics interviewed in this study to the increased emphasis at UJ on research output. This discourse suggested a dualism was being constructed between research and teaching.

The FYE co-ordinator maintained that many of the lecturers “feel overwhelmed” and “pressured specifically in terms of research output” and that “to set up tutorials will take extra time” – “for many people, that’s just too much”. Because of their workloads and other pressures, it is evident that many lecturers were not open to the idea of becoming actively involved in the tutorial system in their departments. One of the academic developers felt that “generally there’s resistance” by academics to become involved in the tutorial system because they are “overwhelmed, they’re undervalued, they’re disinterested, it’s yet another thing they have to do”.

An example of “constraining contradictions” at the cultural level is the “situational logic” (Archer, 1995) that is created by two competing discourses. At UJ, the data suggests that there is an on-going tension between the discourse around the value of conducting research as opposed to the discourse related to the value of teaching. There is an issue that the pressure to conduct research might detract from a lecturer’s interest in becoming actively involved in the tutorial system.

The “situational logic” (Archer, 1995) that is set up by the institutional structure and culture which relate to issues around research versus teaching can create

what Archer refers to as a “core contradiction” for university lecturers. The data indicates that academics experience an emphasis on conducting research by the university management structures. Academics in this study felt that the weight of this expectation is so great that they themselves undervalue their role as teacher. The contradictory (structural and cultural) conditioning is created because the management structures of the university give conceptual support to the tutorial system, while at the same time the experience of academic participants in this study was that there was a disproportionate focus on the importance of research. There was reference in the data to the great financial reward given to academics who publish, for instance. This was felt to send a message to the lecturing staff that their involvement in teaching and learning (and by implication, the tutorial system) is less valued.

There is no real pressure, *no real reward*, no real opportunity for them to get professional development *in terms of becoming better lecturers* (interview with FYE co-ordinator).

5.3 ‘Tutor as Content Expert’ versus ‘Tutor as Empathetic Struggler’

The construction of tutors in the data comprised two competing discourses. On the one hand, tutors were seen to be the content experts; on the other hand they were valued for their ability to understand the difficult experiences of students.

Most departments called on a ‘strong student’ discourse of tutors as being top-performing students. It was argued that “better students have better time management skills” as well as having “a better grasp of the syllabus” than those students who may themselves be struggling with their own studies (faculty administrator).

However, it was suggested by the FYE co-ordinator that it was important to also involve students who may not necessarily be seen as the best performers, but suggested that “the ones who start at a low base, who really struggle to adapt and then make it” make good tutors. He felt that the better-

performing students might sometimes find it difficult to facilitate learning because the work “just comes naturally” and the ability “to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge” is not straightforward, since often “the more intelligent someone is, to some extent ... the less likely you are, because it comes easily to you”.

This discourse of the ‘empathetic struggler’ making a better tutor was expressed by several academics and academic developers who thought that the ‘top student’ might not be as empathetic to the struggles of a first-year and might be unsympathetic or impatient because they themselves found the subject easy, compared to the tutor who had struggled and overcome these difficulties. This discourse suggests that the best tutor is not only academically knowledgeable about the particular subject that is being taught but should also be able to adapt their approach to suit the needs of a first-year student.

Some tutors also contested the official policy of appointing the top-performing students. For instance, tutors from Department E expressed their views about the selection of tutors based on academic performance:

Getting distinctions and stuff is one thing, and having to actually explain that out, is another.

Yes, your marks show, but can you explain it, do you understand it?

The ‘empathetic struggler’ discourse seems to acknowledge that perhaps those students who have overcome challenges in a particular discipline may in some respects be more aware of the peculiarities of that discipline’s epistemology (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988).

The tutor as ‘empathetic struggler’ discourse was quite often used by tutors themselves who identified with the “struggles that [students] have” because they had also struggled with similar issues and had overcome them. For example, a tutor from Department D felt that by telling his students how he had struggled with the course in his first year, but had overcome the challenges and was now an honours student in the subject, he was acting like a role-model for his students, motivating them to try harder and giving them hope that they too could “make it”.

It has been argued that while the senior and postgraduate students who tutor are knowledgeable and proficient in their subjects, this can often be associated with “a ‘blindness’ as to how ‘learned’ the discourse of their discipline is, as it seems so ‘natural’ to them” (Clark, 1998). Airey and Linder (2006:2) argue that learning is a “coming to experience disciplinary ways of knowing as they are represented by the disciplinary discourse through participation”, and that a great many aspects of these “disciplinary ways of knowing are often taken for granted by university lecturers in their teaching” (Airey & Linder, 2006:3). Similarly, Northedge (2002:256) feels that there is a tendency by academics not to realise “the socio cultural groundings of meaning”, because “their thoughts are so deeply rooted in specialist discourse that they are unaware that meanings they take for granted are simply not construable from outside the discourse”. He further argues that “what undermines newcomers’ efforts to understand ... is the backdrop of unspoken assumptions, which provides the frame of reference within which it is meaningful” (Northedge, 2003b:172).

As Northedge (2003b) argues, the discourses of disciplinary practices or ways of knowing in particular disciplines can become so embedded in the minds of academics or lecturers as to be almost unconscious and taken for granted. It would therefore be possible that the ‘stronger’, more academically successful students who become tutors might also not have a conscious awareness of the disciplinary norms and values. This could especially be the case if these tutors have themselves come from advantaged educational and socio-economic backgrounds which would give them easier access to the norms of academia. Literacy practices have been characterised as being social practices that are specific to socio-cultural contexts (Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984, 1993, 2003; Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 2007). A student who has grown up in an environment where the literacy practices are more closely related to those valued by higher education institutions will find the transition into academic literacy less problematic than one whose literacy practices are not so closely aligned to those of the academy. There is a wealth of international literature linking socioeconomic status to higher education success (for example Sewell and Shah’s seminal 1967 article and

much recent research such as Walpole, 2003). While students from disadvantaged backgrounds have been given increased physical access to university since the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, their epistemic access is still limited due to “a legacy of poor secondary schooling”, which means that they “may not necessarily have access to the cultural knowledge-making practices of higher education” (Underhill & Mc on ald, 20 0:93).

It was unfortunately not possible to discover the backgrounds of all of the tutors who were interviewed for this study, but it was evident that all of the tutors were selected on the basis of their academic proficiency in the particular subject that they were tutoring. The UJ Tutor Policy encourages the selection of tutors to be based on a senior students’ expertise in the discipline as indicated by their performance in terms of gaining excellent marks, but it does not mention the selection of tutors on the more unquantifiable basis of having an awareness of the underlying disciplinary norms and practices. There is an assumption that successful students have not only accessed the epistemology leading to their own success but have insights into how they did so and are able to support the students who are undergoing a similar process.

The discourses about tutoring also did not draw on the notion of pedagogical expertise to any significant extent. According to Griffiths, Houston & Lazenbatt (1999 cited by Cook et al, 2006:8), small-group teaching is “among the most difficult and highly skilled teaching techniques”, which means that tutors who are working in smaller groups are being expected to show competency in a very specialised area of teaching. At the same time, it has also been argued that in order to be able to enable students’ gaining epistemological access, those responsible for university teaching need to be able to do much more in the classroom than simply impart information or teach skills (Boughey, 2005a). This implies that tutors would need to be able to develop insight and appreciation of the different understandings of and approaches to teaching and learning that their students arrive with and cannot take a ‘one size fits all’ approach. It also would require tutors to be aware of the diversity of their students and accept that their students might not gain understanding of the discipline area in the same way that they (the tutors) did, given their different backgrounds and beliefs. It was not evident in the data that the discourses

being drawn on for the selection of tutors always takes into consideration the tutor's potential to be open to these different understandings and approaches.

The following table from an analysis of the student questionnaires indicates what qualities the students think a tutor needs:

Table 14: Qualities students think a tutor needs

What qualities do you think a tutor needs?		
1.	Communication skills	38.4%
2.	Patience / tolerance	35.9%
3.	Knowledge of the field	32.1%
4.	Kind/ respectful/ friendly/ helpful	25.2%
5.	Understanding	17.3%
6.	Passionate/ energy/ enthusiastic/charismatic	8.0%

This was an open-ended question. The responses were therefore not standardised for every respondent, and also this means that each respondent may have cited multiple issues. The open responses were then coded into the six emergent categories.

It is evident that the students value the tutor characteristics that would lend themselves to a nurturing relationship such as patience, tolerance, kindness, friendliness and understanding. 78.4% of the 1,460 students who completed the questionnaire referred to these sorts of issues. 70.5% of the student respondents indicated that they value tutors' communication skills and knowledge of the field. For the purpose of coding, the quality of helpfulness was placed in the same category as kindness, respectfulness and friendliness, but it could equally apply to the ability to give academic support. In other words, students appreciate both support for themselves as people as well as support directed specifically for their academic work. This indicates that both the discourses of the tutor as 'content expert' and the tutor as 'empathetic struggler' are being drawn on and valued by the students.

Another view of the qualities that a tutor should possess, from the perspective of a lecturer / module co-ordinator, was the following:

First and foremost, a tutor needs to be *organised*. I think the tutor needs to have a sense of good *time management*, the tutor needs to be *approachable*, the tutor needs to have really good *inter-personal skills* because, let's face it, you know, 50, 60% of the time you're dealing with things that you really wouldn't want to deal with, in terms of *person to person stuff instead of just work things* (lecturer / module co-ordinator, Department A).

Here the lecturer also constructs the tutors as having to deal with more than just the academic work but also the personal "stuff" that students bring with them. The importance of ontological issues with regard to tutoring students was highlighted throughout the data. Associated with the issue of the ontology (and related identity) of the students, there was also the discourse that because students and tutors were "more or less the same age group", that students would relate more closely to them and talk to them about problems that they might not feel comfortable about discussing with their lecturers or senior members of the academic staff in the department. For example:

We rely on tutors for many things and many more things than we have in the past ... It is part of the job description that we provide departments with, is that *tutors can be used to refer students with problems* to Psychad points – so identifying students with specific needs, even identifying students who are in need of food (interview with faculty administrator).

The above indicates that the faculty administrator has an awareness that the role of the tutor has transformed such that the tutor needs to be able to do much more in the classroom in terms of extra-curricular issues. This cultural construction or discourse of the role of the tutor and the qualities that a tutor needs to have would seem to be taking into consideration the ontological as well as the epistemological needs of students. The effect of this discourse as a mechanism enables the tutorial system in terms of the expectation (in theory) that tutors need to consider their students as 'whole persons'. However, my findings indicate that this approach to students does not always translate into the way that tutors say that they conduct the tutorial or their construction of their role and the purpose of the tutorial in practice.

5.4 Nostalgia for the Past

In this discourse there was a sense of nostalgia for an idealised past in terms of how a tutorial was traditionally understood.²⁵ For example:

When I think about the *original function in the past* around tutorials, my feeling was it was to create a space for high levels of critical engagement, *let students think for themselves* ... let's disagree, let's get a little bit of passion and interest in the course – if it's in a discursive space you're not going to get in lectures – so push the boundaries a little bit ... maybe bring in a new concept that wasn't covered in lectures ... to fill in their own abilities in critical thinking ... and this is a very different discursive space to the one in which you're pushing students further than they used to be, allowing open dialogue ... that they don't even get examined on, like *to create a passion for ... scholarship*, we're certainly not creating that in our tutorials (interview with a tutor focus group, Department A).

The effect of this discourse seems to be a certain amount of frustration and dissatisfaction on the part of the individual tutor. In several instances, it was apparent that tutors and some of the academics interviewed were aware of how much things had changed since they were themselves first-year students or members of a tutorial group:

Well, back in the day, well, you'll remember yourself, as a student, I remember going along ... and indeed being a tutor when I was a young lecturer, and you'd go in, sort of, an hour before the tutorial you'd go and roneo – because there was no photocopier, you'd roneo off [some text] and you'd walk into the class and you'd present the [text] to the class and read it and then *you'd say, so, what do you think? You know, and that would be the conversation* – Can't do that now, there's just so much more that our students require. They require to be *equipped with the skills for answering that question, it can't just be assumed*. Also, our tutorials, twelve in a class? Now we're talking about forty, if we're lucky, forty is ideal (interview with an academic / HOD, Department A).

It would seem in these constructions of the tutorial system that the current constructions of tutorials are not seen as spaces enabling epistemological

²⁵ A description of the 'ideal' form of a tutorial as epitomised by the Oxbridge tutorial is given in Chapter 1.

access to their particular subjects. This is seen to be due partly to the high numbers of students in each tutorial, the different needs of today's student body and the type of interventions that are perceived to be needed in order to get students to pass. The issue of broadening access and increased diversity was found to bring additional challenges to accessing the epistemologies of academia and this was nostalgically experienced as a loss.

When I was a pre-grad you had these 'intellectual' group discussions during tutorials. That can't happen anymore. *The students' needs are so, so different. We have to go back to 'plain old teaching' to help them to cope with what's happening in the lecture hall* (interview with head tutor, Department C).

The extent to which the idealised tutorial as a critical space was ever a norm in the past can be contested, but this nostalgic discourse was evidenced in the data as a means of critiquing the current situation.

5.5 Improving Throughput

Most of the academics and academic developers, as well as the faculty administrator, indicated that they thought the tutorial system played an important role in helping first-year students at UJ achieve academic success.

We did a bit of a correlation study, if students attend their tutorials and they hand in all the work that they are meant to hand in, for example assignments and their tut assignments and things like that ... *they generally do better than students who don't attend tuts and obviously don't hand in their designated work ... so we have found that it does have an impact* (interview with an Academic Developer).

If you compare previous years where we weren't actually doing these structured, focussed, weekly tutorials and then having the opportunity for students to come for private consults, *you can actually see that the students' marks have improved* (interview with an Academic, Department D).

Looking at the results from the survey, the tutors argument is that the students benefit greatly from it ... *I think after the first year and the tutorials, I think a lot of them feel confident to carry on to a second and a third year* (interview with Faculty Administrator).

This discourse about the role of tutorials as improving throughput emerged from the data in two ways. Firstly, there was a rather instrumentalist ‘teach to the test’ component, which could be a constraining CEP in terms of the provision of epistemological access. Within this discourse the underlying purpose of the tutorial was constructed as being to support students in their efforts to pass the course – in whatever form this would take. In this construction there does not seem to be an explicit concern with students’ epistemological access.

My role is obviously to *follow the instructions* that ‘ve been given by the authorities and *fulfil those requirements*. The role is *to facilitate them passing* the subject (interview with tutor focus group, Department A).

Unfortunately what’s happened ... is that the tutorials have turned into a *‘this is your exam or assignment question’* effectively, – sometimes they have the decency to change a word or two, but this is your essay question, we’re going to give you the answers for it and say how to answer it so that when you go to the test next week you’ll know exactly what’s going to happen ... which not only provides *a summary of lectures, it provides a clear cut series of answers for the exact questions* you’re going to get (interview with a tutor focus group, Department A).

Another tutor from e partment A felt that tutors “were not really agents of change or really important cogs in the system of education”, but were rather just “employees of a ... faculty that has a *push through* rate, and that’s very disheartening”. In this instance, the data illustrates a cynical construction of the purpose of the tutorial, which is expressed by referring to what is normally termed “throughput” as really being a “push-through” rate.

The second way in which the improving throughput discourse emerged was in terms of unpacking concepts for understanding to enable passing. This second improving throughput discourse may be an enabling CEP for supporting epistemological access. The tutorial was often constructed as being a way to give students practical examples of how to apply the more theoretical content of the lectures. In this discourse, tutors were constructed as needing to ‘fill in the gaps’ where students were seen to be struggling to understand what was dealt with in the lectures. In these instances, the tutorial

was constructed as being a 'bridging' device – to further 'unpack' course content.

We discuss what chapters we are going to do for the week ... we're following the text book basically (interview with a tutor focus group, Department B).

It is apparent that in this particular department, learning was understood as being a syllabus to be covered. The tutorial was thus largely a matter of explaining the content of the chapters in the text book – and ensuring that all of the content was "covered".

Similarly, in Department C, tutorials, especially at the beginning of the year, were described by tutors as an opportunity to "clarify" and "unpack" the lecture by "re-giving" it "in much simpler terms" to give students the opportunity to "supplement their [lecture] notes" so that "some kind of understanding takes place". In this case, some access to the epistemology of the discipline was provided in the tutorial such that students could make sufficient sense of the content of the lecture to help them to pass. The weekly tutor meeting, held in all departments, was another way in which the 'improving throughput rate' or 'academic success through pass rates' discourse was expressed. At this meeting, the work that needed to be 'covered' for the week would be discussed with the tutors so that the syllabus could be taught systematically and efficiently.

This discourse was also evidenced by the lecturer / module co-ordinator from Department A, who saw the purpose of the tutorial as being "to get the students more comfortable with the material that they are dealing with in lectures ... to give them practical examples of concepts, perhaps discuss, and to give them the opportunity to discuss and apply those concepts". She saw the value of the tutorial from the students' perspective as being "a space that ... is made conducive to asking questions, ... to deal one on one with the actual issues students have" and that the tutorial's benefit lay in its ability to "look at the little places in the lecture that perhaps the lecturer can't address because of sheer numbers". The idea of being able to go into more detail about the broader concepts ties in with the concept of 'unpacking' the course content that was mentioned by other research participants.

The faculty administrator drew on this discourse when she recognised that there were diverse approaches to how departments were using the tutorial system, such as using tutorials to “reinforce the content” from lectures, or to “put in practice some of the principles, the skills” involved, as well as “an enrichment environment” to discuss interesting issues in more depth, or for the improvement of communication.

It would seem that within the discourse of tutorials as being for better throughput, tutors call on different understandings about the purpose of a tutorial, depending very much on how tutorials have been constructed in their particular department. For example, in Department D, where teaching is understood to take the form of imparting certain ‘skills’ such as “writing skills, conceptual skills and abstract reasoning”, tutors saw the benefit of tutorials as being “a much smaller more intimate environment where a tutor can see which of those skills students lack and where they need improvement”. Although in this example, in Department D, discussion and opinions were sought from the students, this was very much done in the context of the curriculum of the course, and because the focus was more on imparting skills rather than on critical or reflective thinking about the knowledge of the discipline itself, it was unlikely that students in this context would develop the “ability to ... challenge and change existing discourses” (Janks, 20 0:25).

An academic developer described how one aspect that seemed to be gaining most emphasis in many departments was using the tutorial to serve “the role of academic language and literacies ... and learning development”; also in some departments it was being used as an “extra lecture space” or “for extra skills development”. In other words, these kinds of tutorial activities would not be compatible with Janks’ notion of ‘design’ as being the production of ‘texts’ or the generation of new knowledge – which it could be argued would be essential to enable students gaining epistemological access.

In the ‘improving throughput’ discourse, academic success or achievement was generally linked to students’ marks and ability to pass their examinations. Therefore, the effectiveness of the tutorial system to support academic success was evaluated by the respondents in terms of the discourse that had to do with the marks that were being achieved. In the absence of any other

form of measurement, marks and the throughput rate are still an important (and possibly the only) method of evaluating the efficacy of the tutorial to increase student academic success. A tutor expressed it thus:

When you see a mark change and you see a child improve, that to me is my validation, that I have done something, whether it is they've gone up from % or they've gone up 20% so knowing that you do make a difference in your own way, even if it's though it's most minute (interview with tutor focus group, Department A).

The lecturer / tutor co-ordinator in Department E spoke about the fact that she had collected her own data over the last few years for student cohorts who all had the same entrance requirements (which had included firstly a 'control group' who did not have tutors, and then for two years in a row, students who did have tutors), and she concluded from her data that "on average, the tutor increased the semester mark by about five percent".

The connection between tutorial attendance and academic success was also emphasised by the head tutor from Department C:

Not only do the people pass but all the students with high distinctions all attended the voluntary tutorials, whilst all the at-risk students have never attended tutorials ... from a statistical viewpoint the tutorial system ... is a huge, huge, success. We are out of the 'at-risk' danger, we have a very acceptable failing rate (interview with head tutor, Department C).

The marks are very different for those students who don't attend ... they're not doing them very well ... it's typical for them to get out of 20 for something (lecturer / module co-ordinator, Department A).

From my experience there is a direct correlation between tutorial attendance and the marks (interview with tutor focus group, Department A).

I know I couldn't do without them – because I feel like if we do away with them right now, ... don't know if we'd get the percentage we do passing, and it's low 45, the average pass rate, but I think it would be much lower without tuts ... wouldn't do away with them – think that they're vital (interview with lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, Department C).

The data clearly shows a discourse in which academic success (as indicated by improved marks) was directly attributed to the students' attendance of tutorials. Much of the evidence for the effectiveness of the tutorial system and the connection between attendance of tutorials and the achievement of improved marks was anecdotal (in as much as both tutors and students who were surveyed by the tutor development unit at UJ felt that tutorials had been helpful in this regard). It is virtually impossible to state categorically that there is a direct causal relationship between tutorials and an increased throughput rate, although, as indicated, many participants in this research do believe that such a causal relationship exists.

An interesting perspective on marks and student academic success has to do with the university's drive to increase the throughput rate. This is a result of the Department of Education (DOE) adjusting the funding formula for public higher education to include graduation rates in order to ensure that there is a greater focus on student success in higher education (Department of Education, 2004:7). The strong institutional discourse could act as a powerful force to motivate university departments to enact certain interventions, such as the tutorial, to help students to improve their marks and to pass their examinations. Thus this discourse could be an enabling mechanism for institutional support for the tutorial system. On the other hand, this could also lead to the creation of a learning environment that is more concerned with 'getting students through' and giving them only the most basic skills and competencies rather than facilitating access to the ways of making knowledge in the discipline.

It was interesting to see that most of the role-players in the tutorial system, from the academics to the tutors, the faculty administrator and the students themselves, are generally in agreement that tutorials are helpful. Some seem to feel that any contact is better than none, and given the size of the cohorts at UJ, there is a dominant discourse in the data that the tutorial system, flawed as it may be, is still the best option to improve students' chances of academic success.

For example, the lecturer / tutor co-ordinator from Department C was adamant that judging from the responses of the students in a survey (that was done

together with the tutor unit), who were asked if they found tutorials to be helpful, that “the overwhelming majority (says) yes – it helps”. As she put it:

It has to help – if all these students say yes, it can't just be a few token people who think it's good, because it has *too many people saying, 80% saying that it helps* (lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, Department C).

Furthermore, a lecturer / module co-ordinator from Department A felt that because of the size of the first-year student cohort in her subject, the course would not work without the tutorial support:

Because we have such masses of students in the actual lecture room at any given time, it's what, 600 students, 650 at a time in a lecture room ... and mean it's proven that when students are in smaller groups you can *do more activities that will, you know, reach them easier*, so in the big lecture you sort of 'teach' a little bit more than you should, and then *in the tutorials, it allows you to interact* with the work a bit more and to perhaps *reach more students on a one-to-one basis* (lecturer / module co-ordinator, Department A).

It was the view of one of the academic developers that at UJ “because of the monster that it is, ... any contact is better than no contact”. She pointed out that while particular departments were running effective and “excellent [tutorial] programmes”, and that the impact of these to enhance student learning in terms of their marks had “definitely been proved”, this was not necessarily the case throughout the university tutorial system in every department. It appears from the data that there is an understanding that says that the tutorial system at UJ is only as good as the people who run it. In departments where there is ‘buy-in’ from the academics and where the tutor co-ordinators are ‘invested’ in the development of the tutors and the appropriate use of the tutorial, the system seems to be “having a very positive impact” according to one of the academic developers.

It can thus be argued, as I have done, that the ‘improving throughput discourse’ has the potential to lead to a fairly instrumentalist approach to the tutorial system, but within this same discourse there was also evidence of the tutorials being constructed as places of content reinforcement that facilitates student academic success. Although it could be argued that this latter approach is fairly enabling in terms of giving students sufficient access to

allow them to pass the course, it may not always go far enough to give students real access to the epistemology of the discipline. As Northedge (2003a) argues, “if higher education is to offer genuine opportunities to diverse student audiences, we cannot persist with models of teaching as ‘knowledge transmission’”.

5.6 The Autonomous Learner

As discussed in Chapter 2, Street (1984, 1993, 2003) critiqued the ‘autonomous’ model of literacy, which focuses on its so-called neutral and intrinsic qualities, which would imply that access to literacy simply entails access to skills involving neutral “encoding and decoding processes” (Boughey, 2000:297), regardless of a person’s background and socio-cultural context. In reaction to this dominant understanding, Street’s ‘ideological’ model presented literacy as a “set of social practices, rather than as a set of skills” (Boughey, 2000:297).

Similarly, the ‘autonomous learner discourse’, a term coined by Boughey, (2009; 2010), constructs the student’s chance of success as autonomous of context. In other words, this construction does not consider the context in which the learning takes place, the norms and values of the university system or the social context from which the student comes, but rather focuses on characteristics that are supposedly inherent in the individual student, such as intelligence and motivation.

According to the CHE (2010a:vi), “the construction of students as autonomous subjects who, by virtue of having access to higher education, are going to actualise their potential making the most of the opportunities offered to them, is common to many universities in the country”. As Boughey (2007) argues, this notion of the autonomous learner does not help provide a meaningful student experience but instead impedes students in the process of achieving epistemological access. The ‘autonomous learner’ discourse thus conflates the concept of granting ‘formal’ access to students with that of ‘epistemological’ access, since it constructs the granting of ‘formal’ access as

being sufficient to lead to a student's success, provided the student has the appropriate inherent attributes.

When tutors talk about helping their students to pass a course by understanding the course content, they tend to do so uncritically – in other words, without contesting the nature of what they are required to teach, 'normalising' it, and at the same time often unconsciously positioning their students as autonomous learners. The discourse of the autonomous learner often takes the form of 'common-sense' assumptions about student teaching and learning. Assumptions become 'common sense' when "the uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world ... has become 'common' in any given epoch" (Gramsci 1971:322). Some of these assumptions can be illustrated by such general statements that conflate 'good' or 'bright' students with being 'hard-working' or 'attentive'. In this discourse, the success or failure of a student is constructed as being vested in the decontextualised attributes of the students themselves rather than understood as a result of many complex sociological factors and mechanisms, including, for instance, the students' literacies and socio-economic backgrounds, the ethos of the university, the knowledge structures of the different disciplines and the discipline-specific practices.

An example of 'common-sense' assumptions about what level is 'expected' of a 'normal' first-year student was evident in the data in terms of how shocked and surprised some tutors were when they first began tutoring to realise how much 'foundational work' they had to do in terms of helping students with language use. This tutor, from Department C, constructed 'writing skills' as being something 'simple' – which indicates a 'taken-for-granted' or 'common-sense' understanding that has been constructed in terms of her own prior experience as a first-language English-speaking student:

It was quite a *surprise* when I got into a class and there were really tons of students that needed actually one-on-one consultations to help them understand the work and also *simple things like writing skills* and that sort of thing. And it was quite a *shock* to experience how tutors were actually needed a lot more than I realised to guide students and basically *hold them by the*

hand through their first year (interview with a tutor focus group, Department C).

In the data there was also the implication, through what different tutors and academics had to say, that all that is needed to 'fix' the students who are not passing their courses, is to sort out the 'language problem'. In other words, if students can use the English language 'correctly' and 'appropriately', then they would automatically do better and succeed academically. This discourse is also associated with a 'skills-based' discourse that emphasises the importance of developing certain 'competencies' in students. This discourse was explained by an academic developer in terms of the ways in which some departments were using the tutorials "to enhance academic development practice in students" such as reading and writing skills and "simple things like understanding how to take notes effectively, how to study effectively ... all the assumed tools that we think students come into university with" but "don't necessarily have", as they "are not necessarily equipped in the way that they need to be, to cope".

A similar discourse was evident in the description of tutors, by the lecturer / tutor co-ordinator from Department C, as being key to helping students to "read and write properly" because "they are the ones that see the students ... so they're the ones that see how badly they write ... to the point where they're going to have to take a test question and say, do you understand what 'explain' means and 'discuss' means and 'define' means, ... because they don't understand the question and they don't know how to answer the question".

A tutor from Department A felt that tutors needed to receive more training in language-teaching skills which would make them "more qualified". This tutor had done a TEFOL²⁶ course elsewhere and felt that this would be a good thing for UJ's tutors to be trained in as he saw the 'language problem' as being the basic obstacle for first-years for whom English was not their mother tongue. As he explained:

²⁶ TEFOL stands for "Teaching English as a Foreign Language",

The TEFOL course teaches you *a way of teaching with cognisance of the fact that it is the person's second language*, so with the idea that modern teaching really involves a lot of participation and not rote form, and *so you learn skills too*, and you get taught how to use games as a way of learning (tutor, Department A).

The effect of the language problem discourse is that the 'problem' is constructed as being located within the student only, with little understanding of the wider socio-cultural context. Furthermore, language itself is seen as an autonomous set of skills separate from the context in which it is used or the values and norms it draws from. In 1993, Bradbury suggested that labelling student difficulties as being about language and suggesting that language competency was a set of neutral skills rather than a complex of contextual norms and values was expedient because it meant that the education system would then not need to look to itself to account for major discrepancies in pass and failure rates between different groups. While Bradbury's argument is twenty years old, the power of the 'autonomous learner discourse' remains strong and associated with it is the idea that language is simply a set of neutral skills. The 'autonomous learner discourse' constructs the lack of student success as being largely attributable to problems inherent in the student. Assumptions are made about students being in deficit "in a context of an assurance about the 'rightness' of the practices which characterised the institutions into which they had been admitted" (Boughey, 2005b:2). Thus, there is no critique of the institutional practices themselves, but rather a construction of entering students as needing to have the missing 'bits' in their knowledge or 'gaps' filled in.

The faculty administrator pointed out that "we rely on the tutors to help us bridge the gaps that we identify". The understanding that a key role of tutorials was to fill gaps was fairly common, and it referred at times either to the gap between what students had learnt at high school and now needed to know at university, or at other times to the gap between what students had been taught in lectures but had not necessarily understood and which now needed to be explained or 'unpacked' by the tutors:

It is first year and yes we're *bridging a gap*, not just *between ourselves and lecturers*, but *twelve years of schooling which was inadequate* to the expectations of what they should be getting out of the course (interview with a tutor focus group, Department A).

In contrast, one tutor from the department A criticised the notion of “bridging the gap” as being a loosely applied concept which did not really clarify the function of the tutorial and felt that it was “a cliché” and really served to suggest “how ill-defined our function is”.

First-year students do have to make transitions from their prior literacy practices to the academic literacy practices of the university in order to achieve academic success. Paxton (2007) has described the writing practices of first-year students going through this transition from school and home literacy to that of the academy as entailing the taking on of “interim literacies” (Paxton, 2007:46).

Furthermore, Boughey (2005) has argued that the provision of epistemological access does involve “bridging the gaps between the respective worlds students and lecturers draw on ... making overt the ‘rules and conventions’ (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988) that determine what can count as knowledge” (Boughey, 2005a:240). Although the data shows that tutors are aware that students need help in order to succeed academically at university, the data suggests that tutors often view students in an autonomous way, which seems to indicate a lack of recognition that, firstly, literacy practices are socially situated and not neutral autonomous skills that can be taught, and, secondly, that the process of acquiring the new literacy practices of the academy is a transitional process which also has ontological aspects in as much as the student’s identity or way of being changes over time.

The ‘student deficit’ discourse was often tied to concerns about students’ ‘inferior secondary education’:

To my horror, it was to discover that I am dealing with students who had a very *inferior secondary education* and I had to change my whole mind-set. Nothing was as I had expected it to be (interview with head tutor, Department C).

UJ's main drive was access, and ... so because of that, they've, and rightly so, they've kind of opened their doors to a much more *wider range of students, a diverse range of students* and because of that, you cast a very large net, you're catching a lot of students who are coming in from *a sort of ill-equipped secondary school system* and are coming into tertiary education (interview with academic developer).

The head tutor from Department C also referred to the need for tutors to "bridge that gap" until such time "when we have a very good secondary education system again".

Associated with the concern about students' secondary education was the frequent reference to students being underprepared for tertiary education. The head tutor in Department C noted how the role of the tutor has had to adapt to address the particular needs of the kinds of students who are now entering university. She saw these students as being 'unprepared' because of inadequate prior engagement (at high school) with what she saw as being 'normal' academic practices.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, many of the first-year students who are now entering university have been described as being 'unprepared' or 'under-prepared' because of their disadvantaged home and school backgrounds. Boughey (2005:235) argues that many students come to university with "reproductive conceptions of learning" rather than "constructive conceptions" of learning, where the former focuses on remembering and repeating work that has been taught and the latter on being able to build on and transform existing knowledge with any new knowledge that is learnt. Because of the inadequacy of the state of school education in South Africa at present, most first-year students will not have had extensive access to forms of learning other than the reproductive kind described above, and will find engagement with the academic practices at university extremely challenging.

As Bradbury and Miller (2002) write, many students are 'under-prepared' because their prior learning has taken place in contexts that make different epistemic assumptions about knowledge, so this notion of 'under-preparedness' does not accurately describe the shortcomings of individuals who need to be 'fixed', but rather can account for academic failure in terms of

socio-historical processes and understandings. Nevertheless, there seems to be no argument with the fact that the majority of first-time entrants to university are 'under-prepared' in some way for university studies because of their prior schooling. Ironically, the tutor from Department C herself felt 'unprepared' for her role as she mentions at the end of this extract:

t's mostly being *not prepared* for university, and the tutor comes into the system thinking 'm going to explain the work to them, 'm going to *unpack* the lecture for them, and then eventually you realise you are giving a grammar lesson, you are giving computer lessons, you are telling them to open a text book, to go to the library. They do not understand that they have to engage with actual books, they think that what is in the study guide is going to be sufficient for the exams. There's *no realisation of the consultation of many research articles or text books, taking notes in class, to not only think in a theoretical manner but to apply*, but I mean it goes way more *basic* than that. That's what you walk in with and you end up doing something that you haven't imagined in your wildest dreams and *you feel quite unprepared* for it (interview with head tutor, Department C).

The fact that the head tutor in the above extract admits to feeling 'unprepared' herself for what is expected of her in terms of helping her students underscores the argument that "it is not only students who are poorly prepared for higher education, but also universities and academics who are not adequately prepared to receive them" (e Kadt, 2012:6).

The dominance of the student deficit discourse could have a rather constraining effect on the provision of access to the epistemologies of the disciplines. This would be the case if there was a widespread belief that focusing on epistemological access is futile or impossible because of the sense that students are beyond help. This discourse would also constrain epistemological access if there is a belief in the university structures and agents that they bear no responsibility for student failure.

Janks's (20 0) notion of the theme of 'diversity' (see 2.5) can refer to today's students in terms of their diverse language and literacy practices and how they can become marginalised by the dominant discourses they encounter at university. In dealing with the issue of diversity, in order to avoid this

exclusionary effect it could be argued that those responsible for teaching and learning need to enable epistemological access for all students, and not just for those students whose 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1994) is valued by current structures and whose prior literacies more closely align with those of the target disciplines. I was therefore curious to discover in this research, to what extent tutors were aware of, or acknowledged the prior learning and literacies of their students.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, students entering university in South Africa today, because of their diversity in terms of language, socio-cultural background and educational advantage, have diverse understandings of and approaches to literacy and meaning-making. It has been argued by Lea and Street (1998: 58) that the 'skills-based' and 'deficit' models of student writing speak to an underlying dominant discourse which marginalises other forms of writing practices and privileges a particular understanding of what is 'appropriate' or what it means to be 'academically literate'. They suggest that the notion of 'academic literacies' (in the plural) is a better way to frame an understanding of students' many and varied writing practices. It would seem that the 'student deficit' discourse serves to a certain extent to constrain the facilitation of epistemological access in the tutorial system.

The notion of the under-prepared student and the deficit model forms part of the autonomous learner discourse because of the way in which it attributes the power for success and failure in the individual student in ways that are decontextualised from the context in which the teaching and learning occurs.

The frustration that several tutors expressed when constructing their students seemed also to stem from their perception that the majority of students these days are somehow not as 'engaged' and (by implication) as motivated as they themselves were as students:

I think we just look for something different, *like when I came to university, like I wanted to learn* and didn't really know what I wanted to do after university, but like *I was engaged* and everything and there are students like that in my tutorials, but not everyone's like that. So, I think like *we're looking for those kinds of students because those are the kind of students that we were, for whatever reasons* (interview with a tutor focus group, Department A).

I find it interesting to note that the tutor, in the above extract, does not appear to understand or to engage with the possible reasons for the students she is tutoring being different from how she and her colleagues were, when she says “for whatever reasons”. She also ‘others’ the students when she refers to “the kind of students that *we* were”, in which the use of the word ‘we’ in this context sets up an implied opposition to the students as ‘they’. Another tutor, from Department C, compares today’s students with how she used to be as a first-year:

When I would come to a tutorial, *I prepared my work and I think maybe that’s how I’ve just been as a student ...* there’s some students, that, for lack of better words, they *simply don’t really care*, or a tutorial’s a waste of time for them, or university’s not a top priority, and there are *very few students who thought like me*, and I had to really change my mind-set in that (interview with tutor focus group, Department C).

This discourse of the ‘unmotivated student’ was expressed by a tutor in department A in terms of students being described as being ‘lazy’ or having ‘attitude problems’, where ‘they’ expected the tutors “to do the work for them” and “to pass them when they don’t deserve it”. Another tutor from the same department felt emotionally drained by her students and was surprised by how much of her time they needed and “took” from her, complaining that although “the students want to do well, but they just don’t put the effort in”. Other tutors talked about “the level of disinterest” that students show and the fact that students were “not putting in any effort”, “don’t prepare”, “don’t participate” and “don’t answer any questions”. One tutor complained that students sit and look at her “with a blank face”, which makes her want to tell them to “rather get out ... don’t even bother coming, you’re just sitting here wasting somebody else’s oxygen”. The level of anger expressed here is a reflection of the depth of frustration that this tutor felt in the face of being powerless to change what she perceived to be ‘disinterest’ and a lack of engagement or motivation on the part of her students. Another tutor in this department put it this way:

I sometimes compare myself to when I was in first year and how I was very afraid of not meeting deadlines, I knew there were consequences if I didn’t do it – I mean my parents were on my case because they were paying money for

me to be here and to repay them back by not pitching up to class, by not taking the study seriously, like that's how see it. *Some of them don't care, so the sense of entitlement like they just come here and they expect to get a degree without the work* put in (interview with tutor focus group, Department A).

A similar discourse was also evident in the data from a tutor in Department D, who spoke of students “who are serious enough about the work” who “engage with the material” and “try to pick up the skills that we're offering”, who take responsibility for their own learning by coming to see their tutors, as compared with those students who were perceived to be less engaged in the tutorials, and whose poor marks for their assessments which they would mark in the tutorial reflects what he sees is a lack of motivation on the part of the students who just “expect to be given stuff passively”.

Associated with the ‘unmotivated’ versus the ‘motivated’ student discourse, there was also another discourse in the data which conflated the concept of students being “the brightest” with being “harder workers”:

You can easily catch on who are the *brightest kids* in the class, now, you know, who are the *harder workers* in the class (interview with a tutor focus group, Department E).

The effect of the ‘unmotivated student’ discourse is that it can set up an underlying construction of the student that could serve to constrain the ability of the tutor to facilitate epistemological access, since the student is seen as ‘the problem’ rather than recognising that perhaps it is the approach to teaching that needs to be transformed to suit the differing learning needs of a diverse student body. In this construction, motivation can be seen to be “vested in the student as an individual attribute, rather than a factor of the broader context” (McKenna, 2004a:269). McKenna argues that “motivation is given as the primary reason for success because of its dominance as a discourse and because of a lack of alternative discourses to account for what is perceived as ‘bad attitude’ on the part of the student” (2004:273).

The ‘student deficit’ discourse, coupled with the idea that there is a ‘language problem’ that can be ‘fixed’ and which will then somehow automatically result in students achieving academic success, has been shown to be fundamentally

misconceived. As discussed in Chapter 2, Mckenna (2004b:148) argues that it is important to be open to different kinds of discourse and to question our 'common-sense understandings' of what is constructed as being a 'student problem' in order to find alternative ways or to approach teaching and learning to improve student success. However, there was in the data occasional evidence of some insight that was shown by a tutor into the possible reasons why it was thought that students would find the English language a barrier to success at university:

What I find students have difficulty with is around the English language because *for many of them English is like their second or third language*, and maybe they were using the vernacular in their high school years, now they have to *write and analyse stuff and critique in English, so that's also like a challenge* for them (interview with tutor focus group, Department C).

In the data it was also evident that the discourse around students' lack of proficiency with the English language, or the 'language problem' discourse, was not generally seen in a broader context in terms of the South African educational landscape, but was rather more often seen as being a limitation in terms of the individual student's abilities and thus as a barrier to doing the work in the syllabus itself. For example, one of the tutors in Department C explained that the 'language problem' was:

as basic as sentence structure ... 'll write a sentence on the board and when I mark it 'll see that many students copied it wrong off the board, and *if they've got to take a sentence that's got a question in it they can't even understand what they've got to answer, it's as basic as that*.

She added that "you can understand the sort of mountain you need to climb first" before students can do more complex written activities such as "unpack a source or find sources". Indeed, the 'language problem' discourse tends to naturalise what is considered to be appropriate academic writing so that any student who presents as having a different kind of discourse is deemed to be 'less than' competent. In this way, students who have different literacy practices from what is constructed as being the 'norm' are excluded by those who privilege the dominant discourses as being 'common sense' (Janks, 2010).

Given that English is the predominant language of teaching and learning at UJ, and that the majority of first-years are not first-language English speakers, this construction can have a constraining effect on the provision of access to the epistemologies of the different disciplines because of the perceived need to focus primarily on the neutral 'language problem', which is seen as a barrier to a deep understanding of the course content or the underlying disciplinary knowledge.

The 'student deficit' discourse was expressed by several of the tutors in terms of their perception of their students as lacking in ability to think critically, for example, rather than an acknowledgement that such practices draw on specific sets of cultural values. This was often also conflated with the 'unmotivated' or 'lazy' student discourse. In many instances, tutors showed little understanding about how to approach these students differently from the way in which they themselves (who had benefited from coming from advantaged educational backgrounds) had been taught:

There is a definite *lack in the ability to think critically* with these students. They are *not interested* in thinking critically, they want you to give them the answer ... and it disconcerts me, because here you are, in this academic space, a higher level of education than schooling or anything like that and you're having to *try and wrench critical thinking out of somebody who is not displaying the ability* and it comes up like, well how do I get you to think critically, how do *get you to engage* with the topic without you expecting me to give you the answers (interview with a tutor focus group, Department A).

The cumulative effect of these various understandings within the discourse of the autonomous learner is one that is constraining to the provision of epistemological access in the tutorial system. It suggests that difficulties in acquiring the epistemology of the target disciplines, along with their associated literacies, arise because of deficits inherent in the student, rather than arising from a complex of structural, cultural and agential properties of the whole university context.

5.7 Tutorials as Epistemological Access

I have argued in this thesis (see 2.2) that epistemological access (EA) is a core function of higher education. In terms of UJ's official teaching and learning policy, EA has been constructed, albeit without the use of this term, as being central to the structuring and conceptualisation of the tutorial system. In this section, I will look directly at the extent to which EA was evident as a discourse constructing the purpose of tutorials. To some extent this has already been touched on in the discussion of the 'improving throughput discourse', where the idea of unpacking and reinforcing the course content suggests that tutorials are understood as a place to support epistemological access.

There are different constructions of what is the purpose and value of tutorials. These different discourses suggest a variety of understandings about learning. These include the following discourses: learning as being a set of facts to be uncovered; learning by participating in the discourse of the discipline; learning by practically applying the conceptual knowledge; and learning by practising skills; and needing small supportive environments to enable this to take place.

Because the discourse of the academy may be complex and abstract for many students, it has been argued that tutors can play an integral role in ensuring epistemological access for these students (Paxton, 1998). However, for a tutor to help induct students into the Discourse of a discipline (Gee, 1996) and to "internalise the conversation of the academy", and to help them "decode the boundary between the knowledge communities that they belong to and those that they aspire to join" (Bruffee, 1993), tutors also need to be inducted into the discipline-specific discourse themselves, which involves intensive training of the tutors in terms of the departments' "practices, attitudes and values" (Gee, 1996).

The EA discourse can apply not only to students but also to the tutors themselves in several ways. For instance, it has been argued that tutorials have an impact not only on undergraduate students who attend them, but also on the development of the senior and postgraduate students who become tutors. For example, Lötter (2012: slide 77) maintains that tutoring plays a

positive role for the development of the tutors themselves in terms of which he sees a return to 'foundational work' as enhancing their own work. The EA discourse was drawn on in relation to the academic development of the tutors, with many academics expressing the view that incorporating senior students into the tutorial system is a way of grooming senior and postgraduate students for a potential future career as academics in the department in which they are tutoring. Many of the tutors indicated that one of their reasons for wanting to become tutors was that they saw it as a possible career path into academia. Tutors may "learn by teaching" (Topping, 1998:50) and through this process may "become better students themselves or may even develop into academics" (Underhill & Macdonald, 2000:94). This notion has also been discussed by Clark (1998), who argues that one of the enduring advantages of investing time and resources in the development of tutors is the fact that they may well turn out to be the next generation of academics.

Other ways in which the EA discourse seems to be drawn on in relation to the tutors themselves has to do with their expressed desire for more support from the academic staff, and this relates to the 'partnership' discourse discussed earlier. For example, In Department A, the HOD had recently conducted a survey with all the tutors in which they were asked for suggestions for how they thought the tutorial system could be improved. She reported that they had asked for more support in terms of: "mentoring, moderation, a clear syllabus to follow, [and] a syllabus that doesn't just mimic what's happening in lectures". One of the tutors in Department A expressed some of the challenges in this way:

I don't know if it's my job to come up with stuff that I must do, because if it is, I think that could be more clear, but then I often feel like I can't, like I don't have the authority to make up my mind about what I want to do in my tutorials (interview with tutor focus group, Department A).

From this and other remarks of tutors interviewed in the various focus groups across several of the departments, it seems that many tutors draw unconsciously on an EA discourse when they express their desire for a certain amount of structure in terms of support and clear communication in terms of the values of the disciplines and the ways in which tutorials can facilitate this.

They ask for this to be provided by the lecturing staff and course co-ordinators – in other words, for them to be told more explicitly what the department expects of them in terms of their approach to teaching and learning:

I would like it that the lecturers become more involved in the tutorials in the sense that they provide you with what they want to have covered also in the tutorials – because sometimes what you say in the tutorials and what was said in the lecture are two different, clashing ideas or explication ... lecturers should tell the tutor what they want and then we ... cover that concept in class ... if we're not presenting the same ideas as the lecturer then ... the students get different ideas (interview with tutor focus group, Department B).

Where tutors were given clear instructions on how to work with students, it appears from the data that tutors felt more confident about what they were supposed to be doing in the tutorials.

The EA discourse was also drawn on by the academic developers, when they argued that not only tutors but lecturers also need academic development in terms of their understandings and approaches to teaching and learning. The epistemology of a discipline can be opaque to experts in the field. Airey and Linder (2006:3) believe that “many dimensions of ... disciplinary ways of knowing are often taken for granted by university lecturers in their teaching”. It has also been argued that university lecturers do not always appreciate “the socio-cultural groundings of meaning”, because “their thoughts are so deeply rooted in specialist discourse that they are unaware that meanings they take for granted are simply not construable from outside the discourse” Northedge (2002:256).

One of the academic developers stressed what she saw as the importance of also developing staff in terms of helping them to understand how to set up and effectively use the tutorial system in their departments:

When I say staff development, I mean we really are starting from scratch, you know, people don't even know how to select a tutor, or what a tutor can be, or who a tutor is, so the development really is from the ground up, so we've got a lot of battles on our hands, we've got people not understanding what tutorials are, and then when they have them, not utilising them, and then them being too big, things like that (interview with an academic developer).

The construction of the tutorial as being about enhancing the acquisition of disciplinary epistemologies was evident in the descriptions of tutorials as providing space and scaffolding for students to access the expected practices of the discipline. Lötter (2012: slide 77) sees the value of tutorials for undergraduates in the holding of discussions with peers in a “safe, small, and friendly environment” in which students are helped to “develop their ‘own voice’” and also emphasises their role in “students’ acquisition and development of the vocabulary and discourse of a subject”. This view is congruent with the construction of the tutorial as being for epistemological access and was a fairly typical one in the data:

Helping students to make, to construct good arguments, because [the subject] is more about argument, design argument, conclusions, premises, so when they come *in a small setting* they are able to *practise that skill and you can correct* them (interview with a tutor focus group, Department D).

[The tutorial] would give them an opportunity to actually *voice in a forum where they didn't have to feel shy* and it wouldn't be in front of 500 people and in that way you can actually troubleshoot, you can actually *see where it is that they're going wrong* (interview with a tutor focus group, Department D).

The *tutor classes can make a big contribution there in terms of teaching and learning and understanding* of the students and give them the *opportunity you know, to grow, develop, to adjust* (lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, Department E).

There was a common discourse around the benefits of the relatively small size of the tutorial classroom compared with that of the large impersonal lecture theatres, which could possibly provide the opportunity for the enabling of epistemological access. In general, most participants in this study saw the value of the tutorial in terms of its size (as constituting a ‘small’ group)²⁷ and its relative intimacy as a ‘safe’ and supportive environment with a tutor who is usually quite close in age to them. This discourse assumed that the tutorial could encourage students to feel confident enough to engage in discussion or to ask questions which they would be too fearful or embarrassed to do in the

²⁷ As already described, the optimal size of the tutorial was said to be 25 students, but in practice because of large first-year cohorts, in certain departments the tutorial class could consist of up to 50-60 students.

context of a large lecture theatre with hundreds of other students and with what they might see as a rather imposing or 'scary' lecturer or professor. This discourse was expressed quite succinctly by one of the academic staff members in Department D:

I think the main thing is to provide a *small, a safe space* for students to be able to have their *voices heard* and to discuss the work that we're dealing with in class, I think, you know, in a massive lecture theatre with 540 students, maybe ten students max might have an opportunity to say I think this, or this is how I interpret that ... whereas in the tutorials ... *they come out of their shells*, they ask their questions; so I think the purpose of a tutorial is varied, but it's to *build confidence* in the students in their own ability in a *safe and comfortable environment* with someone who's *closer in age* to them, rather than these 'old fogies' who sit here! (interview with an academic, Department D).

This kind of construction of the tutorial was also implicit in the following description by the lecturer / tutor co-ordinator of Department E. She saw the tutorial as offering a more "personalised way of teaching", which was closer to the previous experiences that students have had at school in terms of the size of the groups, which made it easier for them to adjust to, as opposed to the adjustment required of them in the "big classes" (lectures).

It was evident in the data that due to the large numbers of first-year students, individual students sitting in a large lecture hall can become quite overwhelmed and depersonalised. As an antidote to this, there was the discourse that the tutorial offers a potentially more enabling environment for a student to be inducted into the discipline and a space in which the student could 'try out' the new practices being expected of them. It was suggested in the data that when used appropriately tutorials are a good way to help new students to integrate socially into the university environment. It has also been argued that "in circumstances in which new students can get lost in large anonymous modules the use of small group teaching can promote a feeling of identity with the course on which a student is enrolled" (Cook et al., 2006:10).

The FYE co-ordinator also acknowledged the value of having small group interactions in helping to address some of the "challenges our students are

facing” and the challenges that departments are facing “to get these students to succeed”. He maintained, however, that “just having tutorials won’t correlate with academic success, if you just say, ‘ve got it, and it’s on your books there, tutorials”. The view of the FYE co-ordinator seems to reflect the discourse that achieving student academic success has less to do with simply having tutorials, and more to do with the way in which the tutorials are actually run in practice, in terms of using active learning methods in which the content of the course would be related in an interactive way to the students’ own life experiences, which would give them better access to the epistemologies of their particular subject. Similarly, a tutor in Department C saw the value of tutorials in terms of the extent to which students made use of them:

I think tutorials are as *effective for the students as what they make it to be*. We’re here, we’ve got the consultation times, we have the tutorials, we’re willing to help, and I think the *students that really have embraced that, it’s really effective for them and they’ve grown* (interview with a tutor focus group, Department C).

The findings show that many of the academics interviewed are aware of the purpose of the tutorial as going further than simply re-giving the lecture or imparting skills, facts or information and do see the effectiveness of the tutorial as being dependent on the ability of the person running the class, whether this is a tutor or a lecturer. These understandings do serve to enable the construction of the tutorial as being for epistemological access.

While there was evidence of the tutorials being discursively constructed as spaces for enhancing the acquisition of target epistemologies, the data showed that other discourses such as the ‘throughput discourse’ as well as the ‘student deficit’ and the ‘autonomous learner’ discourse tended to rub up against the EA discourse in terms of how people understood the purpose of tutorials.

The EA discourse was implicit in the way that tutors constructed their role as helping students to understand the course content in order to prepare their students to answer questions in the examinations and to pass the course. For example, there was much talk about giving students insight into various “shortcuts” which they, as former first-years, had discovered for themselves –

in other words, providing strategies for coping with the course and with 'varsity life' in general in order to gain a measure of access to the disciplinary practices (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988). Associated with this was the idea of passing along practical 'tips or tricks' to students in order for them to pass a particular module more easily. For example, a tutor from Department E had this to say:

Because most of us are in 3rd year or honours, so *along the way we picked up certain insights* that you might have learned from other courses that you may have been taught so I teach my students a lot of *short cuts*, a lot of different ways of tackling issues that took me years to accomplish so to give that *extra insight* also to be related to let them know, yes this might be a difficult subject but it's very do-able, *I've done it, and this is how you do it* (interview with a tutor focus group, Department E).

The data generally seems to show that tutorials are working in terms of offering crucial spaces for students to tackle the norms and values of the discipline. As Northedge indicates, "access to knowledge is gained through participating in knowledge communities, and that participation presents both intellectual and social challenges to newcomers" so teachers (or tutors) need to "provide opportunities for supported participation in the relevant knowledge community" (2003a:31).

In Department E, where students were challenged through games and activities in which they were asked to generate their own solutions to problems around the particular topic they were studying, it would seem that tutors were trying to provide the kind of support that could be construed as supporting the provision of epistemological access. However, the data also indicates that the introduction of the games was not unproblematic, because in some cases students were not receptive to the games and often had 'a negative attitude' unless they were persuaded to participate because it was 'for marks'. The data shows that even when the department introduced active learning methods in order to allow students to engage more meaningfully with the course content and to make their own connections that would relate to their own experiences, the extent to which students themselves were prepared to participate in these alternative approaches depended on the level

of enthusiasm and ability of the tutor to actually convince them to engage with and to play the interactive games. The tutorial as a space of epistemological access seems to rub up against some students' notion of the tutorial as simply a mechanism to ensure throughput.

Similarly, in Department D, the EA discourse was drawn on when some tutors seemed to be more cognisant of the need to engage students to allow them to generate their own knowledge (say, through debates where they would be encouraged to voice their own opinions and justify arguments) – because this was seen as pertinent to the kinds of practices valued in that particular discipline where 'critical thinking' was needed as well as the ability to argue and develop their own opinions. This construction of the tutorial seems to be an enabling one in which students were given the opportunity to practise the disciplinary discourse of the 'knowledge community' of the subject. As Northedge (2003a) argues:

Academic novices ... need to develop identities as members of the chosen knowledge community, so that they 'think' and 'speak' its discourse ... they must learn to use the discourse to make meaning of their own (deep learning). Through generative participation students internalise the underlying goals towards which discourse within the community is directed, learn to value questioning and debate, and pick up the appropriate discursive style. Out of all of this a workable identity gradually forms.

(Northedge, 2003a:20)

It would seem from the data that the potential for the tutor to be an instrument in the process of enabling epistemological access is significant. However, from my findings it appears that the extent to which this is actually happening across the different departments is far less than could be the case if tutors were given proper in-depth subject-specific training in addition to the generic tutor training that they currently receive. Since first-year students are "confronted by unexpected conceptual challenges that inhibit their fluid grasp of the discipline-specific discourse" (Underhill & MacDonald, 2010:95), it has been suggested that it would be helpful if tutors are trained in such a way that they are equipped with the appropriate strategies to help "enable them to develop critical reading and thinking in their students" (Underhill &

MacDonald, 2010:95). In order for tutors to play a key role in supporting the development of students, it has been suggested that they need to be supported and receive effective training themselves (Sutherland, 2009). In other words, the tutors also need to be given epistemological access.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter examined the findings of the research in the domain of culture – with regard to people’s beliefs, values and understandings, to discover to what extent these ideational aspects enable or constrain the construction of tutorials as being for the provision of epistemological access. Dominant discourses with regard to these understandings that were expressed by the key role players in the tutorial system were examined in this chapter.

One of these was a ‘parental’ discourse where students were often constructed as being like children. This was found to be an enabling discourse where students were seen to be in need of nurturing and support. However, it could also be constraining to EA if students were seen as being under-developed where the temptation could be to over-simplify learning material and thus deprive students of the opportunity to fully engage with the epistemologies of the discipline.

Another discourse was that of ‘partnership’ – specifically between tutors and lecturers – which was seen to be an enabling mechanism that could enhance the effectiveness of the tutorial. It was also noted, however, that some academics were resistant to becoming involved with the tutorial system and engaging in any form of partnership with tutors. One of the reasons for this that emerged from the data was that the tutorial system was under-valued by some academics and they would rather spend their time on research which was valued more by the Academy.

Competing discourses around what kinds of students make better tutors, were also discussed. One discourse saw the top performing students as being ideal tutors because they were seen as ‘content experts’, but their mastery of the subject could also cause them to become ‘blind’ to the difficulties experienced by novice students. The other discourse viewed those students who had

themselves overcome difficulties as 'empathetic strugglers' as being ideally placed as the kind of tutors who could give students the kind of support they needed.

There was also a discourse in the data that saw the broadening of access and increased diversity as creating increased challenges to providing EA in the tutorial of today compared with that of the past, and this was nostalgically experienced as a loss.

The discourses around improving throughput were also discussed. There were two types of discourse found in the data: an instrumentalist 'teach to the test' throughput discourse that was somewhat constraining of EA, and a discourse that focussed on 'filling the gaps' in student understanding of the work and which was slightly more enabling of EA. There was also a discussion around improved marks as an indicator of increased student academic success as a result of tutorial attendance.

An important discourse that emerged from the data was that of the 'autonomous learner' (Bouhey, 2009; 200) in which commonsense assumptions were made about students' chances for success by focussing on their supposed inherent qualities and ignoring the wider socio-cultural context. This discourse did not recognise that literacy practices are not neutral autonomous skills that can be taught, but are socially situated and context dependent.

Finally, the data showed various different discourses around tutorials as being for EA. These depended on different conceptions of learning. For instance: as a set of facts to be covered; by participating in the discourse of the discipline; by practical application of theory; by practising skills or by needing small enabling spaces. Furthermore, it was found that the 'throughput' discourse as well as the 'student deficit' and the 'autonomous learner' discourse rubbed up against the EA discourse with regard to how the purpose of tutorials was understood and discursively constructed.

In the next chapter, I examine in more detail how agency is enabled or constrained through the ways in which the tutorial system is constructed.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings – Agency

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is the final of my findings and discussion chapters in which I separately analysed the data using Archer's social realist methodology. In Chapter 4, the data was analysed in terms of the domain of structure. In Chapter 5, it was analysed in terms of the domain of culture. Together these domains of structure and culture constitute what Archer called 'the parts' (Archer, 1995).

In this chapter, I will now move to consider 'the people' by focusing on how agency is enabled or constrained in terms of how the various role-players construct the tutorial system. As Archer writes:

It is part and parcel of daily experience to feel both free and enchained, capable of shaping our future and yet confronted by towering, seemingly impersonal constraints (Archer, 1996:xii)

As outlined in Chapter 3, according to Archer, agency indicates the ways in which people are able to exercise some sort of influence over their structural and cultural contexts by virtue of their social roles and positions and their ability to activate their 'personal emergent properties and powers' (PEPs) in those situations. Whereas structures dictate the conditions in which people live and work, agency "provides the effective causes for what happens in society – only human beings can act" (Anermark et al., 2002:12). Archer argues, moreover, that "the kind of agents that they start out being, without any choice, due to parentage and social context, profoundly influences what type of actor they can choose to become" and that "certain opportunities and information are open to the privileged and closed to the non-privileged" but that "options are not determined but the opportunity costs of attaining them are stacked very differently for the two groups" (Archer, 2000:285).

As I have argued in Chapter 2, while people may be enabled or constrained by the uneven ways in which interests and resources may have been distributed due to socio-cultural and historical circumstances, they have

'internal conversations' and are able to use whatever cultural and material resources they have in creative ways by activating their PEPs (Archer, 1995:70). It is therefore important in research to examine not only what the enabling and constraining factors in a particular context are, but also to discover what motivates people to act as they do and how they are able to exercise agency and activate their PEPs (Sayer, 2000:26). Agency emerges within social interaction, so as a researcher it is important to examine how people are affected by their contexts.

In this chapter I will discuss the ways in which, according to the data, management, academics, tutors and students are enabled or constrained in their ability to exercise agency in terms of the tutorial system.

6.2 Agency of Institutional Management

The data suggests that the effective running of the tutorial system depends to a great extent on the availability of funds for venues and tutors. These funds ultimately have to be approved by the DVC Finance in terms of the overall university budget. Thus, management has a great ability to indirectly and directly exercise agency in terms of enablements or constraints with regard to the tutorial system. However, it should also be noted that from my research it would seem that even the management of the university is constrained to some extent in its ability to exercise agency with regard to the funding of the tutorial system. As I argued in Chapter 4, the institution is to a certain extent being conceptualised as a corporation according to business principles. The shift to a business model entails ensuring the best returns on investment. According to the logic of the marketplace, the tutorial system (and all other institutional processes) should run in as financially streamlined a fashion as possible and be measured by the extent to which it benefits 'the bottom line', in this case, student throughput.

Apart from promoting "academic matters and research, innovation and advancement" UJ management needs to consider the overall "strategic and institutional planning, finance, human resources and operations" of the university as an organisation (UJ website). This means that decisions with

regard to all economic matters are subject to vigorous debate. There are various executive committees which, along with the vice-chancellor and principal, form the senior executive management team of the university, and so decisions are made collectively and have to be compatible with an overarching development plan for the whole institution, which has long-term financial implications. In addition, there would also be some constraints to management's ability to act or exercise agency as a result of the pressures brought to bear on the university's resources in the form of increased and more open access in terms of the drive for transformation in accordance with government policy.

Unsurprisingly, there are some very strong individuals within management structures, such as the vice-chancellor, the principal and the various deputy vice-chancellors, who by virtue of their roles and positions can be characterised as being 'social actors', who individually are able to exert a large measure of agency. According to Archer (2000), social actors can be defined as being "role incumbents" where "the roles themselves have emergent properties which cannot be reduced to the characteristics of their occupants" (2000:283). This is made clear in circumstances where the roles endure over time despite a change in occupancy and the fact that "the relatively autonomous powers of constraint and enablement which are lodged in the role, not the occupant ... can be lost (or shed) with loss of occupancy" (2000:283).

Because of the nature of corporate governance policies, these individual social actors exercise their agency in terms of the effective running of the university. Archer (2000) argues that "human beings have the powers of critical reflection upon their social context and of creatively redesigning their social environment, its institutional or ideational configurations, or both" (2000:308). The agency of management, then, is such that it would be in a position to use its "powers of critical reflection" to enable or constrain the tutorial system in terms of decisions regarding the building of new venues and the allocation of higher budgets to employ sufficient tutors.

6.3 Agency of Faculty Management

The data indicates that the ability of faculty management to exercise agency to influence the implementation of the tutorial system is constrained by institutional management in terms of the amount of funding that is granted. On the other hand, the data shows that faculty management does have the freedom to exercise its agency in terms of how it distributes these allocated funds to the various departments. In the case of the faculty administrator interviewed for this study, she too can be viewed as a social actor, by virtue of her senior position in the university as a vice-dean academic, and the concomitant ability to exercise agency to transform aspects of her work environment. In this case, she has the agency to make certain executive decisions related to tutorials. For instance, it was her decision to focus primarily on first-years for the implementation of the tutorial system.

You see that is a *choice that I had to make*, and that is, I decided with the money that I have available that we will focus on the first-years (interview with a faculty administrator).

This faculty administrator was committed to the concept of the tutorial system as being very helpful to first-year students by increasing their prospects for academic success and, as such, she used her agency to effect change. To illustrate how she exercised agency as a social actor, she argued for a higher tutor budget from the dean of the faculty and the DVC Finance. In addition, she initiated innovative projects such as the notion of having collaborative partnerships between tutors and lecturers, and started the first-year support forum in which regular meetings between student and tutor representatives with academics and senior members of faculty would be held (see 5.2). She also promoted the idea of compulsory tutorials for all students in the faculty, as well as enforcing compulsory (albeit generic) tutor training. She took an active interest in tracking the academic progress of those students who were identified as being 'at-risk' and from her office sent letters / emails and SMSs requesting those students to meet with the academic support structures to try to address their problems. More recently, she has started a process in which the 'top tutors' for the year (as voted for by students) are recognised as such and duly given awards at an official ceremony. Moreover, the faculty

administrator was mentioned by several of the lecturers / tutor co-ordinators as being the person who had been instrumental in getting their tutor budgets raised so that they could employ more tutors in their departments.

From the above, it can be seen that the presence in a faculty of a social actor who actively promotes the tutorial system through exercising agency in this regard indirectly also serves to enable the opportunity for the enhancement of epistemological access.

6.4 The Agency of Academics

UJ does not prescribe any particular model of tutorial, and instead, according to an academic developer, the official tutor and tutoring policy “allows for different types of models” and so different departments “pick the model that suits” their purpose. This also means that the implementation of the tutor policy in all departments across the whole university is very difficult. While in many faculties departments are still able to choose whether or not to have a tutorial system, in certain faculties, and increasingly so, the data shows that it is now being made compulsory by faculty management for all departments to have tutorials. This means that the ability of a department to exercise agency in terms of having the authority to decide whether or not to have a tutorial system is gradually being removed.

Furthermore, once academics begin to implement the tutorial system, according to the data, their agency is also limited by budgetary constraints and the structures and administrative procedures that need to be followed. For example, the HOD has to make a formal application to faculty for tutor funding and needs to motivate and justify the amount required in terms of the number of tutors considered necessary relative to the size of the student cohort. Once the application for funding is approved, faculty informs its departments as to how many tutors they can appoint.

So with the funds that the faculty administrator allocates to the different departments, the HODs, as social actors, can in turn exercise a certain amount of agency in how they actually distribute these funds. They can, for

instance, choose to supplement the tutor budget from their general departmental funds, or they can allocate some of it to second- or third-year tutorial classes if deemed necessary.

The Head of Department A, for example, while able to drive and promote the tutor system in her department in terms of encouraging 'buy-in' from the academic staff and by supporting the module and tutor co-ordinators, explained how she is constrained by the departmental budget and has to spend much of her energy trying to justify to faculty the amount of tutor funding that is sought.

Where work, principally it's in *arguing for tutor budgets with the faculty* ... I see my job as promoting the tutor system within the faculty, arguing for a bigger budget ..., and trying to drive tutor policy once again, conceptually (interview with HOD Department A).

While the data shows that the promotion of the tutorial system is being supported conceptually by the university management, such that faculties are increasingly making tutorials compulsory for all of their departments, there still remain significant constraints for departments to contend with in terms of funding for tutors, as well as the availability of venues. Departments have to exercise agency to overcome these constraints in order to run the tutorial system as best they can with their available resources (both human and material).

The data findings also indicate that constraints to the exercise of agency can also arise in a department when senior lecturers are resistant to the idea of becoming involved in the tutorial system. This appears to be for several reasons: they may feel too pressured already to take on the extra responsibility because of their own prior research or teaching commitments, or it has been suggested by various respondents that perhaps they undervalue or do not understand the potential role that tutorials can play in supporting teaching and learning. As a result, when the department undertakes to implement tutorials, the responsibility for this often falls to first-time lecturers, who are not always able to exercise the required level of agency in the effective running of the system because they may feel overwhelmed or may

not have the necessary insight and understanding of how tutorials can best be put into practice. As stated by an academic developer:

I do also think *they don't really understand the role*, they just simply get given this portfolio and often as said, it's junior lecturers who're just coming into the system, they've still got to get to grips with being a lecturer, with how the whole academia works and now they get given this additional portfolio (interview with an academic developer).

Nevertheless, the data would indicate that key role-players in individual departments who take up the responsibility of implementing a tutorial system have a certain amount of agency which they are able to exercise in terms of their department's general approach to teaching and learning. I examined the various approaches in terms of the commonly held ideas, beliefs and values that manifest as the dominant discourses in detail in Chapter 5. These dominant discourses – such as the 'autonomous learner' discourse for example – will have a direct impact on how the department constructs the role and purpose of the tutorial. Whether the department's approach is that the tutorial is for imparting skills, facts and information in order to 'bridge gaps' so that the student can be equipped with the basic competencies needed to pass the course and increase the throughput rate, or whether it constructs tutorials as being for epistemological access where students can grapple with the kinds of knowledge valued in the discipline and the ways in which such knowledge is constructed, this approach will be communicated to the tutors, who as 'agents' of the department will have to execute their mandate. In other words, the agency of the academics in the department in terms of their approach to teaching and learning is exercised in the tutorial by the tutors.

Moreover, the data shows that there are certain individuals at departmental level who are more able to exercise agency than others because of the role or position they occupy in the department. I have already argued that the HOD as a social actor can for instance exercise agency with regard to the way in which the budget is distributed. Other strong individuals who are key role-players in the tutorial system at departmental level, such as those academics (lecturers) who are module or tutor co-ordinators, are also social actors who can influence the approach taken to teaching and learning in the tutorials.

One lecturer / tutor co-ordinator in Department E, who was a senior academic (a professor) and had previously been HOD, could definitely be described as a social actor. Using her personal emergent properties and powers (PEPs), she was able to develop an innovative approach to the running of the tutorials through the incorporation of activities and games. She explained what motivated her to become actively involved in the tutorial system as follows:

I've decided to take on this challenge because I feel strongly about active learning and a different way of learning ... so I feel it's important that a student has the opportunity of a smaller group and to grow and develop at their own pace; and if they need to attend three tutor classes per week, by all means, you know, then you do that (interview with lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, Department E).

In the interview with this lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, it was evident that even though there were certain structures and constraints that had been put in place by the university management regarding, for example, the compulsory attendance of 80% lectures and tutorials, she exerted her agency in expressing her objection to this rule, questioning its fairness and whether the students were adequately informed, and choosing to adapt it to suit the circumstances with regard to the way in which she ran the tutorial system in this department.

The Dean says, well it must be 80% of tutor classes but I'm still not, I'm still debating whether this is policy and whether the students were informed, it was definitely not, the rule was not applied in the first semester, so they can't apply it in the second semester, the student needs to grow into this whole thing (interview with an academic / tutor co-ordinator from Department E).

This tendency to waive the 80% compulsory tutorial attendance rule was also mentioned by one of the academic developers interviewed, who understood that many departments, even though they implemented a tutorial programme, sometimes chose to implement this rule only partially or not to implement it at all because:

They say it's a little bit impossible to get everybody there and at the end of the day you're going to be disadvantaging the student because it might be a very

good student who doesn't necessarily attend tutorials and then will not qualify for the exam (interview with an academic developer).

Structural constraints such as venues, the timetable, budgets and the compulsory attendance policy all impact on the implementation of the tutorial policy at UJ. It is thus up to those individuals who have a certain amount of agency to adapt and work around these constraints in order to achieve their educational goals within the tutorial system.

6.5 Tutor Agency

The data findings show that tutors are able to a limited extent to exercise agency in the way they approach the running of their tutorials, but as I have discussed, this is largely determined by the departmental approach towards teaching and learning and how the role of tutors and the purpose of the tutorials are constructed within that particular department, or with relevance to the subject that was being taught. If as I have discussed, on the one hand, the department constructs the tutorial as being for students to have skills, facts and information imparted to them in terms of a student deficit discourse, or on the other hand, as an opportunity for students to participate in deep discussion and engagement with the course material, this will greatly impact on the extent to which tutor agency could be exercised.

Nevertheless, whatever the departmental approach to teaching and learning, the tutor is the person who actually has to enter the tutorial classroom and deal directly with the students, and so in their role in the actual classroom, tutors can also be social actors by virtue of their assigned role and position in the department and in relation to their students. In addition, they need to react to whatever happens in the classroom and by their actions can exert influence over what happens there. As one tutor remarked:

We as individuals experience differently, we have different experiences, like nothing can prepare you for some of these students (interview with tutor focus group, Department B).

In Department D, tutors spoke about being given some freedom in the way they could run their tutorials, but this pre-supposed that certain specific outcomes would be reached during each tutorial:

The department does give us a tutor guide for every term which has certain outcomes they want for specific tutorials ... there's a lot of *leeway for you to do sort of your own thing* as well but you have to *reach a certain outcome*, and sometimes that means having discussions, sometimes it's just theoretical explanations or looking at their writing, *it depends on what their needs are and what the outcomes are* (interview with tutor focus group, Department D)

For example, in Department C, although they would have a weekly meeting in which tutors would be told what the lecturer “wanted to have happen”, tutors were still expected to use their own initiative in how they would present the tutorial activity for the week, as was expressed by the lecturer / tutor co-ordinator in Department C:

They've got to have *their own initiative* ... you can't always go according to the structure, so we let them do what they want as well, we give them leeway ... as long as by the time the test rolls round they have *covered certain things* ... it's important to give them an opportunity – tutors really develop, they grow (lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, Department C).

On the other hand, according to the data, some first-time tutors find that being given too much freedom to exercise their agency in the classroom causes anxiety, and they would prefer to have more support structures in place. Here are two comments from tutors in Department A:

I think that it would be better for the students if the structure was more conformed to because then you know what is expected of you like, a new person, don't know what to do, like in classes where *you can do whatever you want like, it's a little bit unnerving*.

We're *left on our own* to try and figure out, not, I mean the content is there, we're given content – what we should tutor about, but we're left on our own to make it interesting.

In Department E, the lecturer (and ex-HOD) had not only created uniformity in terms of the structural support mechanisms so that the tutors all knew what

was expected of them, but also encouraged her tutors to exercise their 'agency' in establishing a rapport with their students. As one of the tutors stated:

Prof ... encourages us – because we have different personalities, she encourages us to *portray our different personalities* in class so don't just stand there and act like she would act, put a bit of your personality (interview with a tutor focus group, Department E).

In contrast, the data showed that in Department B tutors were not given a great deal of structured support in the form of clear on-going communication from the lecturer. As a result they were to a large extent 'left to their own devices', which was in some ways a constraining factor. This was because tutors often were confused as to "what angle to take" with the content that was required to be taught as well as which sections of the text book were less important in terms of the examinations. However, the data also indicated that there was an unexpected benefit gained from the freedom given by this lack of direction from the lecturers. This was that the tutors had to exercise their own agency in order to overcome the structural and cultural constraints in the context of the tutorial and they often came up with quite individual and creative approaches to the way they ran their tutorials – in order to get the students to participate and engage with the content. Here are several innovative examples from tutors:

My students will be more proactive and more involved in the process because when you're involved you actually learn more ... I also have *games* like 30 seconds, then the next week you let them do a crossword puzzle, the next week they must do mind maps for that chapter or they must come with a whole play for the class ... and then present that ... or in the form of a *dance or a song* – I actually have them do songs for me (tutor, Department B).

You can't just teach it to them straight because that would be boring ... I did a summary, like I do a diagram for them but I would only fill out the headings on the board and then they would have to fill out the rest – like you guide them, and ask them – like a puzzle (tutor, Department B).

'll have specific questions about the work that's been done during the week and 'll ask the students and if they don't answer ok then *I spin the bottle* and whichever way it lands on you have to answer (tutor, Department D).

It was evident in the data that sometimes there were structural constraints like overcrowded classrooms, and in these situations it would be up to the tutor to exercise agency to manage these constraints. For example, tutors in Department C ran their tutorials in the departmental seminar room and often students might have to sit on the floor along the sides of the room when all the chairs around the central table were already taken. A tutor explained that this posed problems for discussions, because "someone would be talking down there and they're a bit soft and the people over on this side can't really hear them", so she had to "overcome the challenge" by creating a system "where you'd have to stand up when you speak".

Another tutor from Department B explained how the structural constraints of a small venue in which the desks were fixed made it very difficult to do group work because it required students to sit on the desks facing each other and students "want to fool around because they say, okay we're sitting on tables". This tutor exercised her agency and overcame the challenge of motivating students to pay more attention to the work by setting up a competition in which the winner would get her notes for that day. Another tutor in Department B also exercised agency and overcame the lack of direction from the lecturer in terms of how far they had gone in the chapter for that week in lectures by secretly approaching the students themselves to discover what had been covered.

The data also showed that there was another kind of structural constraint that tutors had to exercise agency to overcome, which was the timetabling of the tutorials at 8:30 on a Monday morning (see 4.5). Because of the large numbers of students in the first-year module in Department B, this was the only time that the timetabling system could only allocate sufficient venues. This caused many difficulties in terms of the practicalities around student transport problems as well the kind of situation that a tutor described as follows:

You had to work to get the life into them ... we have to make it interesting, and it's on a Monday morning, you know, we need to wake them up!

(interview with tutor focus group, Department B).

As can be seen from the above examples from the data, some of the tutors in Department B, through the force of their own personalities and determination, were able to exercise their agency and PEPs in overcoming some of the structural and cultural constraints set up by the way the tutorial system was being handled in their department. The data shows that they took an innovative approach to dealing with the course material with their students to avoid being 'boring' and also being bored themselves, by devising entertaining games, competitions and activities that they felt would encourage more participation. It was the view of the lecturer / tutor co-ordinator from Department B that "you can't be prescriptive about how somebody is going to handle things in the class situation ... how they conduct the tutoring they are left very much to their own devices. They have to use some kind of creativity". It was evident from the data that this approach to the running of the tutorial system resulted in tutors having to exercise a great deal of agency.

An example of a tutor using creativity and exercising his own agency to try to be a more effective tutor, was also evident in the data where a tutor in Department A tried to incorporate what was to him a 'new' teaching method that he came across when reading an Education essay. He explains it thus:

think it was called 'white board learning' and thought, you know never knew this ... maybe can use this, see if it works or it doesn't, incorporate it into a sort of hybrid – *a personalised hybrid, for facilitating learning* (interview with tutor focus group, Department A).

It was clear from the data that although the use of games and an interactive approach to running the tutorial was not being driven by the lecturer or tutor co-ordinator (as was the case in Department E), according to what they said that they were doing in the tutorials, it would appear that tutors in Department B seemed to find their own way to exercise their agency and overcome their structural and cultural constraints in order to try to provide a measure of support for epistemological access using their imagination and the available

resources. One of the tutors described the importance of being able to adapt the style of teaching to suit the needs of individual students as follows:

You have to be able to *adapt the way you're teaching*, some people like it very visual, and some people like you to tell you how it is, and some people just like to see it in the text book, word for word – and not in your own explanations and examples, so you've got to kind of incorporate everything in your tutorial (interview with tutor focus group, Department B).

It would seem that the ability to adapt teaching styles and methods to suit the different students' learning needs is an indication of a tutor's ability to exercise agency with regard to overcoming the constraints or difficulties associated with the induction of first-years into the discourse of a discipline.

From the data it was apparent that tutors exercised agency by keeping things interesting and varied every week. For example, a tutor in Department E described how they would “do a game maybe every three or four weeks then we vary between the games, like group work or ... a mini lecture ... it varies each week ... you come with something fresh every week”. Another tutor from Department E took her own initiative of giving her students homework to do. One of the tutors would use the register to call out names of students to get them to answer questions, participate and pay attention. Another tutor explained how if a student asked a question that she could not answer, she would tell the student: “ I am not sure what the answer is but 'll go and find out for you and then 'll come back and explain it the best way that I can”. A few of the tutors expressed agency in specific ways in the way they approached their teaching. For example, one tutor in Department E said that he felt a tutor needed “a bit of emotional intelligence ... to pick up expressions on people's faces – like this one is not ... following, so without directly picking on that person, you repeat the work then make eye contact”. Another tutor in this department explained his approach in the following words:

Sometimes you have to relate it to their experience, and sometimes if you know the township lingo (tutor, Department E).

It was evident from the data that tutors in Department E, because they had a great deal of support from the 'hands'- on' approach of the lecturer / tutor co-

ordinator, exuded a great deal of confidence in the way they spoke about tutoring. It was also evident that they were still able to exercise a fair amount of agency in their tutorials through their individual approach and use of their own personalities, even though they did have to work within the boundaries of the departmental approach to teaching and learning.

In trying to locate how agency was being exercised by the tutors, it was interesting to see how some of them saw their own role as being an agent of change:

You've got the opportunity *to mould the minds of students* – and these are the future leaders of the country, ... so for me it's ... pursuing my goal to change the world. 'm given a bunch of people which *I could influence and they could go out and influence the world* so in that way I would be achieving my goal (interview with a tutor focus group, Department E).

The above tutor constructed herself as occupying a role or a position which gave her “the opportunity to mould the minds of students” and to exert “influence” over them – which she saw as “empower[ing] them”. It is interesting to note how she conflates what she sees as empowering her students with her own ability to mould and influence their thinking. This attitude could possibly constrain the provision of epistemological access, as it reflects an uneven power dynamic between the tutor and the student, which is probably not very conducive to enabling understanding or reflection on the core concepts of the discipline. A similar viewpoint with regard to being a potential agent for change was expressed by a tutor in Department A who saw himself as being in “the frontline of education of this country and literally the people who are passing through these corridors will be the people that help this country go forward”.

This viewpoint of being an agent for change contrasts strongly with another view evident in the data – of being disempowered and lacking any agency – a view expressed by another tutor from Department A. This tutor felt that tutors “were not really agents of change or really important cogs in the system of education” but were rather just “employees of a ... faculty that has a push through rate, and that's very disheartening”.

It can be seen from the above quote that when a tutor feels constrained by the structural and cultural conditions such that there is a feeling of being disempowered and unable to exercise much agency at all, this results in a level of despondency and disillusionment on the part of the tutor, which has the potential to compromise his or her level of commitment and motivation.

Another tutor in Department A also expressed a feeling of powerlessness (a lack of agency) or the ability to effect real transformation when she realised how little impact she was able to have on her students in terms of their “education”:

When you get to the end of the year and you assess it and *you realise just the low level of impact* you actually are having on students’ education where ... many of them can’t construct an English sentence and then they pass, and that is very demoralising (interview with tutor focus group, Department A).

If tutors do see themselves as being ‘agents’ of their particular department, the data suggests that it is often mainly in terms of them being there to do a certain job – that of helping students to pass the course. They need to work within the cultural and structural confines of a tutorial system which has been set up by the university management structures and have to function within the constraints of their particular department in terms of the syllabus and approaches to teaching and learning. As previously discussed, the data shows that often they may have been made aware of the fact that the module in which they are tutoring may well have been constructed as being ‘at-risk’ and that it is incumbent upon them, as representatives or agents of the department, to try to ensure student academic success – which is perceived to be indicated by an increased ‘throughput’ rate. In these situations, the data suggests that this can affect the kind of interaction that takes place in the tutorial.

For example, the head tutor in Department C in which the first-year module had previously been constructed by faculty as being ‘at-risk’ explained that her approach to a tutorial on any given day was dependent on what she judged to be the most important need at the time. In this case, the data seemed to

indicate that this tutor had a great ability to exercise her agency and adapt to the situation as she found it “there and then”. As she put it:

The way we do our classes will depend on the tutor themselves. You walk in and *you decide there and then how you're going to do it ...* I don't prepare a structure at all, I have the broad outcome in my mind ... establish what are major issues, and if those major issues is punctuation, or starting a sentence with a capital letter then that's what you focus on (interview with head tutor, Department C).

However, it would seem from the data that if the departmental discourses about teaching and learning were around the imparting of facts, skills and information purely for the purpose of passing an examination, this could constrain the provision of true epistemological access. The data findings show that the ability of tutors to exercise ‘agency’ in terms of bringing about real change to their environment (the tutorial classroom) is restricted by the teaching and learning discourses in the cultural domain. For example, a tutor from Department A complained about what he perceived to be constraints to his creativity in the classroom when he said:

Where's your room for creation? *Where's your room to put something that you understand in your own way* that you haven't been told to speak about ... room should be there for the tutor to develop themselves but at the same time in a manner that is beneficial, and mind-provoking, so to say, to the students (interview with tutor focus group, Department A).

On the other hand, the findings would indicate that the act of tutoring itself was often quite empowering to the tutors. In other words it often served to boost their self-confidence such that after some time they were able to exercise more agency not only as tutors, but also in their own final year or postgraduate subjects. Many tutors talked about overcoming the constraint of shyness or a lack of confidence through running tutorial classes. For example, a tutor from Department B explained that before she became a tutor she was a shy person, but, after experiencing tutoring, she is more confident to talk in front of others, so much so that she said “when get up to my tutorials, I kind of own the place!” She added that becoming a tutor “really helped me to blossom and just to find my own confidence and now in presentations for my

own classes even, 'm able to do much better than when was all nervous". Similarly, a tutor from Department A also spoke about how tutoring had helped her to "improve the way speak in front of people, because 'm a very shy person so that was a very beneficial experience for me".

It would appear from the data that when the relationship between the lecturer and the tutor is one of mutual respect – or a 'partnership' (see 5.2) – the ability of the tutor to exercise agency is enhanced. For example, a lecturer in Department D explained that in their weekly meeting they would talk about the tutorial activities and sometimes "do a little bit of a rehearsal" with the tutors to prepare for any difficult sections which may need special explanation and the tutors would often be quite inventive in their suggested ideas and approaches:

I had one tutor who came and said, can we please use these images in this tutorial? I think it would work well ... and said brilliant, we'll set it up, we got the projector working and we used those and it had a huge impact on the students, from their comments on Edulink (interview with lecturer, Department D).

The data seems to suggest that tutor academic development may also help develop tutors' ability to exercise agency in the classroom. With increased agency, it appears that tutors also grow in confidence, which would more likely equip them to better support their students in their achievement of epistemological access. However, the difficulty of exactly how much agency or authority can be exercised by the tutor was expressed quite succinctly in this remark:

Being a tutor is sort of like being in that *awkward place between like being in authority and like being a student*, sort of somewhere in the middle ... (interview with tutor focus group, Department D).

6.6 Student Agency

It would be understandable to make the assumption that the students have the least amount of agency in terms of the tutorial system. Indeed, Archer would classify students as primary agents who have little say over their

actions or the expectations placed on them (Archer, 1995). Since they are at the lowest rung of the hierarchy in the university, the first-year student in particular is probably the least equipped to challenge the structural and cultural systems of the university. However, because even first-year students are capable of having “internal conversations” (Archer, 200), they are also able to exercise a certain amount of agency in terms of how they respond to their particular structural and cultural constraints. One of the most obvious ways in which they can exercise their power over their conditions with regard to the tutorial system seems to be whether they choose to actually attend the tutorial or not.

Secondly, if they do decide to attend, which the data suggests is more likely in those departments where tutorials are compulsory, they can then often make choices as to which tutor they would prefer to have on the basis of either what they have heard from other students, or from their own experience of attending a particular class. This phenomenon was explained by an academic developer:

You get feedback, you hear students you know – ‘Oh, wouldn’t recommend this tutor to anybody’, and you also get personality clashes at the end of the day, and then students don’t want to go to the tutorial or whatever the case may be (interview with an academic developer).

The data indicated that in most departments students ‘sign up’ on Edulink or on the departmental notice-board for tutorials based on a certain time slot. However, it was also evident in the data that if they decide later that they do not like that particular tutor, they may exercise their agency and change to another group. Below are two extracts that illustrate how Department E responds to the issue of student agency:

At the beginning of the year *they simply choose* ... time slots, but then they hear from their friends, ‘This tutor’s better’ and ‘prefer that tutor’ ... The students ... *chop and change* – then they come with excuses and say ‘Yes, well, ‘ve got transport problems’ or ‘had to go to work’, you know also, can’t say ‘No, you don’t have transport problems’ (interview with tutor focus group, Department E).

We've learnt that you don't sign up a student, but *they can sign up whenever they want to* ... they can come and write up their names – and the times are there and they can check it with their timetable and make sure (interview with lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, Department E).

Because of the realisation that students do have the tendency to exercise their agency by changing their tutor if they are not happy, in Department C they took an approach of asking students to move to another group only at the beginning of the second semester:

We will not force a student to go to a tutor with whom they are not comfortable, but we do ask from them, in terms of semester, to stick with your tutor and not to migrate ..., but in the second semester, *students have the opportunity to re-sign up and maybe go to another tutor* (interview with tutor focus group, Department C).

In addition, it was evident in the data that students can exercise agency in terms of what day they decide they will come to campus to attend classes. In order to overcome their own financial constraints, for instance, they may try to manage their timetable, including their tutorial time, to suit their own economic purpose. As suggested by the lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, Department C:

Because students *don't want to come in an extra day*, because they have lectures on one day and they're not going to pay taxi fees or whatever just to come in for a tutorial so *they cram everything into the one day they're on campus, or the two days* (lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, Dept C).

Another way in which students may exercise agency is by making the effort to consult with their tutor out of the tutorial time or else to attend more than one tutorial if this is allowed by the department. For example, in Department E:

A student will come in to the department and say I need help with something, then they will ask them who's your tutor? And then say the next tutorial when he or she will teach is this period – do you want to go to the class? And a lot of them do that ... We had one of the guys that left, was very popular with the students he was really excellent so his groups were just tending to grow bigger and bigger – all his classes, you know ... *They can go wherever they want* (interview with lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, Dept E).

However, in Department A there was an issue raised about the way in which students were being allowed too much freedom to exercise their agency to the point where it was felt that this was undermining the authority (and agency) of the tutor:

We establish rules in place, students approach us, we give them the decision based on where we are at that particular moment, and it gets overruled like this [snaps fingers] by someone who co-ordinates the course and I find it very demoralising ... *the ease with which a student effectively overrules our decision* on something ... and 'm not saying there shouldn't be space for appeal to a course co-ordinator or whatever ... they just go and talk about their feelings and they are *given the opportunity to do anything they want* (interview with tutor focus group, Department A).

From the above extract from the data it can be seen that allowing students to exercise too much agency can set up a tension between the students' desire to take control of their own situation and the effect on the authority of the tutor. The data also indicates that students were seen to need to exercise their own agency for successful learning to occur:

Becoming a good student, *it comes from them*, can't teach them how to do that because I had to learn that for myself. Okay, there're excellent tutors but... it's just something you have *to develop on your own*, like first year sucks and whatever but you *learn how to do it for yourself* (interview with tutor focus group, Department A).

The notion that first-year students can take control of their own development path (by exercising agency) and do better academically at university if they make the effort to attend tutorials and do all their assignments was expressed by an academic developer in this way:

If students attend their tutorials and they hand in all the work that they are meant to hand in, for example assignments and their tut assignments and things like that and on Edulink and things like that, *they generally do better than students who don't attend tuts* ... so we have found that it does have an impact and they [the students] speak very highly of the tutor system, they're very positive towards it (interview with an academic developer).

The data suggested that because tutorials are held in a 'small, safe space' this affords students an opportunity to exercise their agency much more than is the case in the large impersonal lecture theatre, because in the smaller tutorial group the students are actually able to have a "voice" and express their opinion and "actually get the opportunity to say ... maybe that didn't understand this, but more importantly, this is how I feel about this" (tutor, Department D).

It has been argued that epistemological access is *acquired* rather than taught (Morrow, 1994:78; Gee, 1996:139; see 2.2), which indicates that while structures and culture can constrain or enable epistemological access, the exercise of agency is central. The importance of tutorials as spaces in which students can exercise agency through asking questions was evident in the data generated by the student questionnaire. The data shows that 77.8% of the students who completed the questionnaire thought that the purpose of a tutorial was to aid understanding of the course work or for the lecture to be reviewed and / or explained. This was also supported by the fact that 80.5% of the students also thought that the role of the tutor was to aid understanding or to answer questions. When asked if they found their tutorials to be helpful, 87% answered yes, with 60.6% citing as the main reason for this that the tutorial aids understanding. Also interesting in the data was that 89.7% of students said that their tutor encourages discussion, while 87.9% felt comfortable enough to ask questions. The data seems to indicate that, to a large extent, students experience the tutorial as an enabling environment and one in which they are able to exercise agency in acquiring epistemological access.

It has been argued that "the learning group is both the condition for and the expression of the individual agency of the actors" (Brown, 2009:25). In other words, the conditions that exist in the learning environment (or the classroom) can either enable or constrain learning taking place for each learner, since "the possibilities for students acquiring knowledge in a particular environment are enabled and constrained by the total ontology of that environment" (Brown, 2009:20). This means that the extent to which each student is enabled or constrained in expressing agency is reflected in his or her ability to

acquire knowledge or learn. Furthermore, because learning environments (such as the tutorial classroom) could be said to be 'open' systems in which "multiple causes [are] operating", it is important to note the diverse ways that different students learn, engage with or respond to the content of the curriculum, assessment tasks, approaches to teaching and even the nature of the physical classroom (Brown, 2009:20). As Wheelahan (2007:188) argues, "it is important to take into consideration the extent to which learners' objective positioning in society constrain or enable the development of agency". Different learners are able to express their individual agency in different ways and to varying extents, given their response to the learning environment of the classroom, which may also be shaped by their own life experiences and their "developing sense of identity and agency" (Wheelahan, 2007: 96).

The above notion of student agency as being entwined with the context gives a slightly more nuanced view, but one that I would argue is still fairly congruent with Archer's (1995) conception of agency. According to Archer, "persons" are often involuntarily placed in particular socio-cultural conditions through the "accident of birth", and their capacity to act voluntarily within a particular social context is dependent on their personal and psychological characteristics or social roles. Archer would term such individuals "primary agents" and depending on how they react to their particular circumstances, they could become "social actors" (Archer, 1995).

Although my study was focused on the Auckland Park Kingsway campus (APK), one of the departments I investigated did hold some tutorials on the Soweto campus. One of the tutors involved with these tutorials explained that because the Soweto campus is "a bit isolated" from the main campus (APK) "the students have to take a lot of responsibility themselves because they know that we are only there certain days". She explained that this resulted in the following:

So I have a few, we almost could say 'leader students' who took the lead and then everybody would kind of follow suit because of the *one*, it would usually be *one of the best students* and then they would usually tell me what they struggle with. I think they actually met each other before class sometimes and

spoke about, because they know they only see me sometimes, and also sometimes like that they would come with a certain approach and say we have this problem and we would sort it out (interview with tutor focus group, Department C).

In the above data extract it can be seen, due to the particular circumstances the students were in with regard to the infrequency of visits to the campus by the tutor, that the Soweto students were able to exercise agency in forming a collective group under the leadership of one of the best students in order to achieve their purpose. They were able to overcome the structural and cultural constraint imposed by the way in which the tutorial system was being run on their campus by gathering together around the 'leader students' to create some level of 'corporate agency'. The "one" student referred to in the above extract, who by virtue of being positioned as being "one of the best students" could then be seen to assume the role of a social actor who could then exercise his/her personal powers (PEPs) on behalf of the group.

According to Archer, 'agency' is a term used only to refer to a group of people and "it is only social actors who properly exist in the singular" and possess "unique identity". However, the agency of the collective (in this case, the learning group) is like "the parent of the actor (singular) and facilitates their obtaining a social identity, which may have eluded agents themselves" (Archer, 2000:261). As Archer (2000:284) argues, "through interacting with others in the same collectivity, agents become more articulate about their interests and [are] thus better able to reflect upon the role positions which will further their realisation". In this case, the individual primary agents (the students) were able to articulate and realise their goals more easily by joining together collectively with other like-minded agents, and in so doing, from out of this group of agents emerged a strong agent (the student leader) who was able to create a social identity and become a social actor.

The data also suggests that having access to tutors also has the effect of giving students more ability to exercise their agency in terms of their relationship with the department in which they are studying a particular

discipline. This is because the tutor is seen to be more approachable, closer in age (a peer), and someone with whom they are familiar.

[the students] see the professors and lecturers as intimidating ... so they rather *come here and look for their tutor, try and work through their tutor*, where is my assignment or why did I get such a bad mark? Things like that, I think if there weren't any tutors think we would have had a lot less students visiting the department (interview with tutor focus group, Department C).

The data findings seem to show that when the departmental approach to teaching and learning is such that students are being supported in their acquisition of epistemological access, this is often reflected in the way in which students are able to exercise the agency in the classroom. The data suggests that when the relationship with the tutor is such that students feel empowered and given the opportunity to actively engage with the course content, students can flourish. To illustrate this argument, here is what the lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, Department E, had to say:

We actually also have sort of competitions between the groups as well, where they need to do us a little play or something ..., I always say *you can sing you can dance you can do whatever you want to, but you have to explain to me a certain concept*, and then *you won't believe how extremely creative the students are!* (interview with lecturer / tutor co-ordinator, Dept E).

Luckett and Luckett (2009) argue that dominant theories of learning tend to disregard the importance of developing student agency in the learning process. They maintain that "learning and identity formation are understood as emergent properties that occur through mental and practical communal activity that happen in relationships of desire and recognition, motivated by a search for identity and the need to play a social role" (Luckett & Luckett, 2009: 470). This implies that when students are recognised and supported in the development of agency this can contribute to their academic success. As Archer (2000) argues, it is through the "inner conversations" that people mediate their relationship with the world and their place in it, and "one of the greatest of human powers" is the capacity "to transform the social world and themselves" (Archer, 2000:3 5).

6.7 Conclusion

According to Archer (2000:318), it is through the “inner conversation” that the “personal emergent powers are exercised on and in the world – natural, practical and social ... [and] this ‘interior dialogue’ is not just a window upon the world, rather it is what determines our being-in-the-world, though not in the times and the circumstances of our choosing ... [and which] confronts us with three inescapable concerns: with our physical well-being, our performative competence and our self-worth”. Whether at the level of institutional management, faculty management or academics in a department, or in terms of the tutor or the student, the issue of human agency is always expressed through the relationship between people’s emergent properties (PEPs) and that of structural and cultural emergent properties (SEPs and CEPs) (Archer, 2000:255).

In the context of the tutorial system at UJ, I was able to identify certain individuals who could be identified as having the ability to express their agency or PEPs and who thereby have an effect on their structural and cultural conditioning. To re-iterate, in terms of Archer’s (995) social realist framework, these individuals would be known as social actors who are individuals whose strong social identity can often be connected to their role or position in a particular context. They can exercise agency more easily than other less powerful individuals because of their more powerful position in society or in an organisation (such as a university department).

The social actors in the context of the tutorial system at UJ would include heads of department, faculty administrators and module / tutor co-ordinators. From the data it was evident that other individuals were also able to enact their agency to a limited extent in terms of their role in the tutorial system. These were the head tutors, the tutor representatives, the academic developers and to a lesser extent, the tutors themselves. The students have little agency – unless they are able to mobilise collectively around a particular issue such as a grievance, for example, to exercise corporate agency – which is highly unlikely at first-year level. However, as I described in the data with regard to the Soweto students in e partment C, a ‘strong’ student can sometimes emerge from within a group of students and by virtue of an

assumed role of leadership can take on the characteristics of a social actor for a particular purpose and a limited time (for example, to obtain help from a tutor regarding specific problem areas).

Yet, in all instances, it would seem that the ability to express agency is also constrained, at each level in the hierarchy, by the structural and cultural conditions of the level above. So, even though, for example, the faculty administrator has the power to allocate funds to the various departments for the hiring of tutors, she is also constrained by what the dean is able to provide in terms of the faculty budget – which in turn depends on what the DVC Finance of the university itself will allow.

The module co-ordinators and lecturers, or, in some cases, the tutor co-ordinators, who are responsible for giving direction to the tutors in terms of the approach to teaching and learning, the course curriculum and tutorial activities and thus can exercise much agency in this regard, are also answerable to the departmental head; while underscoring all efforts is always the overriding consideration of the 'throughput' rate (especially for the 'at-risk' modules) and how the pass rate could be improved. From the data it appears that the actions of tutors are considerably constrained by the departmental approach as implemented by their tutor head or module co-ordinator, yet the data shows that tutors are able to exercise some agency in terms of how they actually run their tutorials in practice.

Finally, the students – for whom the tutorial system has been set up – would seem to be the least able to exercise agency, other than, in some cases, to choose which tutor class to attend, or alternatively not to attend tutorials at all, and on the rare occasion when they are able to rally around a 'strong' leader as a collective to exert corporate agency to achieve a particular purpose or in order to overcome some constraining circumstance. It has however been argued (Lockett & Lockett, 2009) that giving students the ontological support and recognition for who they are as human beings can be helpful in the development of student agency and crucial for the acquisition of the epistemologies of the academy.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Overview

My reason for undertaking this study was to understand how tutorials were constructed at UJ and to what extent they were being constructed as a means by which first-year students could gain epistemological access to their disciplines. The research was located at a comprehensive, merged institution in the context of a wider national transformation project.

Against a background of increasing numbers of first-time entrants, in a move to afford previously excluded students the opportunity to gain a university education, it was evident that at UJ tutorials are being constructed as a key intervention to support academic success. Thus, in this research I wanted to discover the ways in which structures, culture and agents at institutional, faculty and departmental level generated enabling or constraining conditions for the implementation of the tutorial system and the provision of support for epistemological access.

As discussed in Chapter 1, it is generally accepted that one of the purposes of higher education is to give graduates access to various professions, so to this end students do need to be given access to the disciplinary knowledge fundamental to their field of study as well as the 'situated knowledge' necessary for practical application of the knowledge (in a future workplace for instance). It has been argued, however, that this access should be such that students would also be able to contribute to the advancement of the knowledge in that field, rather than just to have access to the basic skills and competencies to perform in a particular field of work (Winberg et al., 2012:72). There is thus a need for epistemological access.

My study drew on various theories around the purpose of higher education, universities in the South African context and various approaches to and understandings about teaching and learning. The use of Archer's social realism as a methodological frame, underpinned by a critical realist ontology, helped me to gain a deeper insight into the causal mechanisms from which

the relativist empirical level of multiple experiences emerge. Moreover, I used Archer's analytical dualism to examine the interplay between the 'parts' (culture and structure) and the 'people' (agency) in order to discover what conditions were enabling and constraining the provision of epistemological access in the tutorial system at UJ.

7.2 The Theoretical and Analytical Framework

The social realist approach, because it is underpinned by a critical realist ontology, is one that demands that a researcher investigate a deeper level of reality to uncover the underlying causal powers, processes, structures and mechanisms that generate events and serve to enable or constrain a particular phenomenon. In my study, the phenomenon under investigation was the tutorial system at UJ.

In analytical dualism "there is no suggestion that we are dealing with separate entities, only analytically separable ones and ones which it is theoretically useful to treat separately" in terms of "[their] usefulness ... to the increase in explanatory power" (Archer, 1996:xvi). By using 'analytical dualism', and thereby analytically (and artificially) separating out the conditioning effects of structure, culture and agency (each of which have their own SEPs, CEPs, and PEPs) on the events and practices that surround the tutorial system, it was possible to examine their interplay and thus come to understand what the emergent properties or generative mechanisms were that were giving rise to the constraints and / or enablements in this context. As Archer (2010) writes, "interaction generates emergent properties which must figure in explanatory statements", and that "emergence is embedded in interaction" (Archer, 2010:245). Thus, in this thesis, through analytical dualism, it was possible to examine the interplay and explain the ways in which the interactions in the domains of structure, culture and agency generated events or practices in the tutorial system that were constraining and / or enabling of the acquisition of the target epistemologies.

I would argue that the social realist framework provides a very useful frame for the analysis and explanation of the generative causes of events and practices,

which emerge through interaction between the 'parts' and the 'people'. This methodological approach, which is "analytical, as opposed to philosophical", and in which "dualism is an artifice of convenience" (Archer, 1996: 43), can be applied in many different research contexts and the understanding and insights it provides of the way in which events and practices are generated may also serve to inform future practice in many different contexts.

7.3 The Key Findings

Enabling and constraining mechanisms relating to the provision of epistemological access in the tutorial system were identified in the domains of structure, culture and agency. The key mechanisms were as follows.

The notion of widening access to higher education was identified in this study as an important mechanism at play in the tutorial system. While enabling transformation in higher education by affording those who were previously denied access the opportunity to formally enter university, broadened access has had the unintended consequence of constraining epistemological access in the tutorial system. This is because it has created great pressure on the resources of the university, both human and material. There was evidence of a 'rub' between the enabling mechanism of the tutorial system being constructed as being integral to teaching and learning, on the one hand, and, on the other, the resultant effects of budgetary constraints and increasingly bigger classes. As a result of the constraining mechanism, tutorials were prioritised for 'at-risk' modules, which limited their use to enable epistemological access in modules that were deemed not to be 'at-risk'.

Another structural mechanism that was identified was that of the university management. This structure was found to enable the provision of epistemological access by its overt support for the tutorial system as a mechanism to enable student academic success. However, it was found that the institution follows a strong business model, and that there were, of necessity, budgetary constraints that impacted negatively on the tutorial system by constraining the type and number of venues available for tutorials as well as the number of tutors who could be employed. While managing a

university of the size and complexity of UJ must of necessity require fiscal diligence and scrupulously careful management and oversight, the data suggests that the emphasis on balancing measurable inputs and outputs may constrain the extent to which the tutorial is conceptualised as a space of induction into knowledge creation.

The mechanism offered by the official policy documents about teaching and learning and the tutorial system were found to include both a philosophy and approach that emphasised notions of epistemological access. These included the establishment of a 'Teaching and Learning Strategy' and the 'Teaching and Learning Policy' – out of which the tutorial system itself was created. Although the 'learning to be' philosophy (which has recently been incorporated into the UJ policies on teaching and learning) and the main tenets of these official policies construct the tutorial system as an intervention that enables epistemological access, the ideas contained within these policies were not found in this study to be consistently realised in practice in terms of what tutors were saying about how they conducted tutorials. The practices within the tutorial classroom, as described by tutors, the discourses called upon by many of the role-players to talk about students and how they understand the purpose of the tutorial in the UJ context were sometimes at odds with the notion of 'learning to be'. The enablement of discourses in policies was thus sometimes undermined by constraining discourses in practice.

For example, one cultural mechanism that was identified was the dominant discourse that constructed students as 'autonomous learners', independent of context, with success being determined by inherent attributes rather than a complex of socially constructed norms and values. Similarly, the discourse that constructed students' problems as being mainly caused by their lack of proficiency in language failed to acknowledge the very specific ways in which language is used in the academy and the close relationship between language and disciplinary epistemologies. Using tutorial spaces to improve language, with language understood as a set of neutral, generic skills, signals an understanding that language can be taught independently of context. This 'autonomous learner' discourse was found to be a cultural mechanism that

constrains the tutorial system from providing a space for epistemological access.

It has been argued (see Boughey, 2003:67) that even in recent years in South Africa there has been widespread institutional resistance to making any fundamental changes in terms of curriculum, teaching and assessment methods to adapt to the changing needs of students. While this study provided evidence of certain social actors exercising their agency to good effect in overcoming some of the structural and cultural constraints, and while some of the structures themselves, such as UJ policy and strategy documents conceptualise university teaching as the design and implementation of challenging learning tasks to encourage deep learning, for the most part, traditional approaches to learning and teaching seem to persist.

The timetabling structure was identified as a mechanism that serves to both enable and constrain the tutorial system. It enables the efficient management of the allocation of venues, and, in some cases, formalises the role of tutorials in the curriculum, but its inflexibility was identified as a constraining factor when tutorial venues are allocated at unsuitable or inconvenient times for students in terms of their transport difficulties. In addition, it was evident in the data that tutorials need to be seen as integral to the course curriculum, and where they were not included in the timetable code structure, they were viewed by students and others as an 'add-on' and not taken seriously.

The Unit for Tutor Development was identified as a mechanism that enables the efficient administration of the tutorial system by supporting departments in the setting up of tutorials and providing basic tutor training. However, the generic nature of the tutor training provided by this unit was found to undermine the idea of tutorials being discipline-specific spaces where students could be supported in acquiring the target epistemology. The presence of this unit can be a constraint if, as was sometimes found to be the case, academics distance themselves from the task of tutor training and support, seeing this as the role of the unit. Where this occurred, the resultant divide between the discipline experts and the tutorials decreased possibilities

for the tutorials to be tied to the development of discipline-specific forms of knowledge.

Associated with this was the discourse around the notion of partnership between academics and tutors, working together in collaboration. This was identified as being a way to equip tutors to support students in their acquisition of epistemological access. The enabling of epistemological access necessitates a certain kind of teaching and engagement with the content of the syllabus in such ways that students are themselves able to generate academically appropriate knowledge; it entails teachers (or in this case, tutors) understanding that their role extends much further than merely imparting so-called autonomous 'skills' or 'strategies' to cope with the practices of the academy (Boughey, 2005a:240). This study found that in departments where there is a 'hands-on' approach by the tutor co-ordinators and on-going support to the tutors provided by the academics, the tutors seem to be more confident and clear in their understanding of their role and purpose in helping students to understand and access the disciplinary knowledge.

However, some academics resisted the idea of a partnership with tutors for various reasons, including their undervaluing of the tutorial system, and their sense of pressure placed on their time and energy by the dualism created by the university between teaching and research, with the latter being valued more. This was seen to be associated with a business model understanding of the institution, where some academics pointed out that research outputs accrue more kudos for promotion etc. than do engagement with teaching and learning.

The ideal tutor was variously constructed as a 'content expert' or an 'empathetic struggler'. While disciplinary expertise was valued, the 'content expert' tutor, as a top-performing student, was seen to potentially view the discipline as unproblematic, normal and easy to understand, and so be less able to make the epistemological norms and practices overt for students. In contrast, the tutor who has struggled and overcome difficulties to become a successful student was perceived to be more understanding of the needs of

the student and thus this construction of the ideal tutor could potentially be an enabling one.

An important mechanism identified in the domain of culture was the discourse around 'improving throughput'. This discourse underpinned the institutional support for the tutorial system as an intervention to improve the student pass rate. It was an enabling mechanism where tutorials were used to unpack and reinforce the course content, making the epistemologies of the discipline more overt to students. However, the data also revealed a tendency to 'teach to the test', and simply to impart skills, facts and information because of pressures to get students through the system. This instrumentalist discourse, which was often a reflection of a departmental response to a low pass rate in a particular module, was then enacted in the tutorial classroom by the tutors.

While tutors are for the most part motivated and eager to help, and see themselves as providing a useful service to first-year students, this is quite often done in a rather patronising way – in which students are constructed as being 'children' or 'kids' who are lost and need a 'big brother' or 'big sister' to show them the way. While this construction of the students by tutors might indicate a nurturing relationship, it can result in an undue emphasis on the students' lack of proficiency and a tendency to oversimplify the content of the course – which would exclude students from access to deeper engagement with the epistemologies of the discipline.

The exercise of agency at all levels, including institutional and faculty management, academics, tutors and students, was seen in the data as being an enabling mechanism where people used their PEPs to work around the cultural and structural constraints. The presence of social actors at every level was found to be especially enabling of the tutorial system, with some departments and faculties having a tutorial system more focused on epistemological access than others as a result of the presence of such agents.

At the institutional level, social actors could act to constrain or enable the tutorial system with regard to the building of new venues and the allocation of budgets to employ more tutors; at faculty level, a social actor was seen to

initiate projects and processes designed to enable the effectiveness of the tutorial system and provide more support to tutors. Where there were social actors amongst the academics, who took a 'hands-on' approach to the tutorials, this was enabling of the system and gave the tutors much support. Tutors could become social actors in their tutorials by using agency to find creative, innovative approaches to teaching and learning in order to overcome structural and cultural constraints.

The exercise of agency by students is particularly key to their acquisition of epistemological access. Wheelahan (2007, cited in Lockett & Lockett, 2009:476) argues that it is important to consider the extent to which students' objective positioning in society can constrain or enable the development of agency. According to what was said by academics, academic developers and tutors, the data showed that students find tutorials to be an enabling environment in which they are more able to express fledgling academic identities when compared to large, impersonal lecture theatres.

All of the key mechanisms identified in the study, some of which have been briefly reiterated above, whether structural, cultural or agential, are activated in an *interplay* with all of the other mechanisms that are emergent from all three domains in a particular context. Structural and cultural mechanisms (the 'parts') enable or constrain the agents (the 'people'). These emergent mechanisms can only be activated by people, and the extent to which people are able to overcome or to work within the structural and cultural constraints or enablements produced by those mechanisms is determined by the strength of their agency or personal power (PEPs).

It has been argued that pedagogic practices emerge from other structures (international, national, institutional, faculty or departmental) that have endured from the past and that can condition the actions and practices of agents in the present, which can in turn affect the experiences and condition student action (Kotta, 2010:22). Because there may be different emergent mechanisms at play, activated by a different set of agents, the tutorial system in other contexts may take on a different kind of emergence.

Events ... are caused by (actual) interactions between the real causal powers of the entities involved ... they are 'multiply determined' or co-determined by a variety of interacting mechanisms, which may be attributable to entities at various levels in the hierarchy of composition (Elder-Vass, 2007:232).

Nevertheless, all tutorial systems in all contexts have one purpose in common, and that is to enhance student learning. Although there can be a "complex ensemble of causal mechanisms that enable and constrain learning" involved in different contexts, "the critical emergent property of the learning environment is learning" (Brown, 2009:3).

If we accept that all students admitted to a university education deserve access to its powerful knowledge, then we need to ensure that we tackle issues of epistemological access. At UJ, the tutorial system has been constructed as being a key intervention, particularly in the case of first-year students, to mitigate against the high failure rate. While the introduction of compulsory tutorials for 'at-risk' modules has been reported to have helped to reverse the trend towards massive academic failure, I have argued that merely using tutorials to uncritically rehearse the work covered but not fully understood in lectures will not sufficiently enable epistemological access. In addition, by prioritising the tutorial system as being for those modules deemed to be 'at-risk', it is possible that sufficient recognition might not be given to the fact that *all* first-year students at all levels of preparedness need access to the epistemologies of their disciplines.

I agree with Amory et al (2008) when they argue that there are ways of seeing and practices that are implicit and taken for granted by those who are familiar or expert in a particular knowledge domain, and that educators in a university context need to find ways to identify these implicit practices and develop "teaching and learning tasks that embed the effective ways of seeing in different situations, which are then explored with students" rather than to simply impart "more information than usable knowledge" to students who are often seen as the 'consumers' of information instead of the 'producers' of knowledge (2008:16). Furthermore, "merely acquiring information does not mean that learning has occurred" and "creating learning opportunities that

require active engagement of students” is an essential part of higher education (2008:16).

Unfortunately, the increasing focus on creating curricula which promote the idea of graduates being prepared primarily to take their place in the workforce, in line with the increasing marketisation of higher education, has sidelined debates about what it means to provide epistemological access (Boughey, 2003:65), and this shift of focus effectively diminishes the potential to develop graduates of the highest calibre. The current approach to work done in tutorials may indeed succeed in boosting throughput rates, which is undeniably pleasing, but I would argue that the data indicates strongly that part of the policy which deals with the idea of ‘learning to be’ is not currently being dealt with as fully as it might be in the tutorial system.

7.4 Recommendations

The main research question addressed by this study was: How are tutorials constructed for first-year university students at UJ? The sub-questions I asked were: What are the structural, cultural and agential factors or conditions which enable and/or constrain the provision of support for epistemological access for first-year students in the tutorial system at UJ? Through the use of a critical realist ontological position and a social realist methodology, I was able to identify some of the intersecting causal mechanisms that gave rise to certain activities, events, practices and approaches taken in the implementation of the tutorial system for first-year students at UJ. This led me to make the following recommendations.

At the *structural* level, there would seem to be a need for a wider and more general understanding that granting formal access is not the same as granting epistemological access. The former is more involved with physical access to the university as a way to transform the higher education sector and redress previous exclusionary policies. I would argue that given the increased physical access brought about by the drive for increased access, UJ needs to find ways to address the problems caused by a lack of sufficient venues as well as sourcing the funds to employ and train more tutors. With regard to the training

of tutors, it is recommended that an official policy should be implemented in which departments would be required to provide detailed discipline-specific training to tutors to supplement the generic training currently provided by the Unit for Tutor Development. Related to this, it is also recommended that more focus is placed on the development and training of academics and lecturers in terms of the tutorial system so that its usefulness for the provision of epistemological access can be better understood and implemented.

In addition, the timetable system needs to be revisited so as to take into consideration the constraints around students' dependence on public transport so that intensive academic support interventions like tutorials are timetabled properly and as far as possible at times that are most accessible to the majority of students.

At the *cultural* level, many of the beliefs, ideas and assumptions evidenced in the dominant discourses about teaching and learning need to be interrogated. I concede though, in line with Archer (1996), that the persistence of CEPs means that shifts in the cultural domain are the most difficult. While official UJ policies and strategies about teaching and learning appear to have been created with due consideration for the provision of epistemological access, these policies are not always being implemented in practice. For example, many tutors and academics are still constructing students in terms of the 'autonomous learner' discourse, which I argue constrains the provision of epistemological access.

Opportunities need to be made for everyone involved (from management, administration, HODs, lecturers, module co-ordinators, tutors and students) to engage more fully in discussion about the need for epistemological access, in terms of UJ's aims as outlined in its official Teaching and Learning Policy as well as in its Mission and Vision statement, and to consider the role tutorials might play in this process.

At the *agential* level, the ability of all the role-players to exercise their PEPs to overcome constraints so as to make the tutorial system more enabling should be considered. It was evident in this research that people at all levels of the hierarchy were able to some extent to make the most of the enablements in

their structural and cultural conditioning by using their PEPs. For example, at the level of the university management there were many social actors, who by virtue of their individual roles and positions in the organisation were able to exercise agency in favour of the tutorial system. Because of the function of corporate governance in the institution, the data indicated that management as social actors tend rather to act with a shared vision for the effective running of the university. It was also noted that faculty's ability to exercise agency is constrained by the need to justify funding requests from management, but how a social actor within faculty could effect change in terms of the tutorial system by introducing innovative projects and programmes was also revealed.

At departmental level, the various social actors who were identified by their roles and positions as HOD, lecturer, module and tutor co-ordinator were to some extent able to overcome constraints in exercising agency with regard to tutorials. Tutors were also able to exercise some agency with regard to innovative approaches to teaching and learning. It can be argued that student agency could be further enhanced through a pedagogical approach which explicitly acknowledges student identity and the importance of careful consideration of the profiles of students. The development of agency was shown to be key to the acquisition of target epistemologies, and tutorials were seen to be potential spaces in which this agency could be developed.

I would argue that the innate ability of people through their 'internal conversations' to draw imaginatively on their PEPs needs to be encouraged. Primary agents (such as students and tutors) need to be given the opportunity to develop their PEPs further in order to acquire the epistemologies of their disciplines.

7.5 Reflections and Study Limitations

Because of time constraints, it was impossible to investigate the construction of the tutorial system in all departments, faculties and on all campuses. This study was therefore limited to the Auckland Park, Kingsway (APK) campus, which is one of the four campuses that make up the University of

Johannesburg. This campus was chosen for the study firstly because it is the main campus on which the majority of students are registered. Secondly, because I teach on this campus, it was easier for me to gain access to the five departments across three faculties chosen for the study, as well as to the academic developers, the FYE co-ordinator and faculty administrator, who are all located on APK.

The five specific departments were chosen because they were all identified as having a large first-year student cohort and were all using tutorials as an intrinsic part of their curriculum for their first-year modules. Departments A, C and D were all from one faculty, while Departments B and E were from two other faculties. Data emerged that indicates that other campuses, such as the Soweto campus, experience specific constraints related to their context, but these issues were not interrogated because data was not collected from these campuses and this is a study limitation.

There was only one initial obstacle to the research process: the faculty administrator expressed concern about the study and the fact that it could perhaps “show UJ up in a bad light”. However, when the dean of that faculty was given all the relevant information such as the letter of authorisation from UJ, the ethical clearance letter and the approved research proposal from the Higher Degrees Committee at Rhodes, he was satisfied and gave me written permission to continue with my study. It was never the intention of my study to provide an evaluation of UJ’s tutorial system or any other aspect of the institution. Rather this study acts as a case study to present findings about the interplay of mechanisms in the realms of structure, culture and agency in any tutorial system.

While studies such as this do not offer simple generalisations to other contexts, and this is a limitation of the study, the findings should be of wider significance than this case study. I have, according to critical realist tenets, attempted to identify mechanisms that serve to enable or constrain the functioning of tutorials as vehicles for epistemological access. While these mechanisms might play out differently in different contexts, because tutorials exist in an ‘open system’ (Bhaskar, 1989) and the activation of causal

mechanisms are contingent on context, the findings should be pertinent beyond the immediate UJ context because the identified mechanisms may well be at play in different but similar settings.

An initial constraint to the study was identifying which departments were actively running a tutorial system as part of their curriculum. I was already aware of a number of departments that had very large first-year student cohorts, including my own department, so the information obtained through interviews with the academic developers and the faculty administrator was helpful to me in identifying other departments which could potentially provide rich data with regard to the construction of the tutorial system. Once the other departments were identified, through email correspondence I was able to further identify the role-players in each department who could help my research. My meetings with the various senior role-players from other departments helped me then to communicate with their tutors to set up group meetings with them. Setting up meetings with the various key role-players in my own department, as well as with the tutors, was unproblematic.

The focus group interviews gave tutors a forum through which to engage in lively discussion, and this interaction yielded very rich data. The individual interviews were also very useful and provided many insights. Because of the one-on-one nature of the individual interviews, it was possible to gain an in-depth understanding of the main concerns. The private nature of a personal interview allowed individuals to speak quite freely in describing their experiences and giving their opinions. In both group and individual interviews, the challenge for me was to realise that I needed to select only the most pertinent extracts to highlight the main issues and that I could not include all the rich data available to me in this thesis.

A limitation of this study is the fact that I did not interview any students. Because of the numbers involved, I decided to use a questionnaire format to access the student data. However, I was still able to give students a 'voice' because the questions in the questionnaire called for them to create their own categories in their answers and there was also space for any additional comments they wished to make. The open-ended questions, however, posed

some challenges for the effective coding of the data, because sub-categories had to be manually created from the large variety of possible answers provided. If a further study is undertaken, perhaps having a list of specific categories from which to choose (rather than total free choice) could overcome this problem and prove to be a more useful way of accessing the student data.

With regard to the distribution of the questionnaires, the only constraint was finding an appropriate time. After obtaining permission from the departmental authorities concerned, I was able to arrange with the various first-year lecturers to distribute the questionnaires at the start of the lecture period. This proved to be a little more time-consuming than anticipated, but fortunately because the timing of my data collection coincided with the last remaining lectures of the semester, the lectures were being used for revision purposes only and so no new work was being taught. It also meant that the lectures were reasonably well-attended, because students were using them as preparation for the coming examinations.

There were a number of difficulties in the analysis of the data from these various sources. As I was using analytical dualism, following Archer's social realist methodology, I needed artificially to separate out what Archer terms the 'parts' from the 'people'. Since Archer herself sometimes barely makes a distinction between the constituents of 'the parts', deciding whether to allocate an identified mechanism to either structure or culture was often quite difficult to do.

It was noted, however, that although the various units for analysis were artificially separated out for the purposes of analysis, in reality these elements are very much inter-related and overlapping. As a social realist researcher, it was important for me to examine closely the interplay between culture and structure and agency, since in terms of the methodology suggested by analytical dualism, this can give an "explanation of why things social are so and not otherwise [which] depends upon an account of how the properties and powers of the 'people' causally intertwine with those of the 'parts'" (Archer, 1995:15).

7.6 Final Thoughts

Although this study was conducted on one specific campus at a particular university, I would argue that the findings of the research could be useful in other institutional contexts, and not only in the South African context, but in any context where there are similar challenges in terms of non-traditional students needing to gain access to the discourses of the academy and the epistemologies of their disciplines.

One of the main lessons I learnt from undertaking this study was to realise the gap between policy and practice, as well as the need for policy implementation to be well resourced and adaptable to complex realities. At UJ, there are a number of good policies around teaching and learning, and the tutorial system as an intervention for facilitating student academic success, particularly in the first year of study, receives support from the highest level of institutional management. However, the ideals with regard to teaching and learning and the potential pedagogical role of the tutorial contained within the official policies are not practised throughout the university as effectively as they could be. This mismatch between policy and practice seems to be a result of the various constraints that were identified at the level of structure, culture and agency in the construction of the tutorial system.

It could be argued that at the first-year level the needs are slightly different from the needs of students who are about to graduate into a chosen profession. At first-year level, perhaps, students' need for epistemological access may be more usefully served by providing the kind of support that takes into account not only their prior ways of making meaning (developed through their school and home experiences) but also by being more cognisant of who the students are (ontologically), accepting the fact that first-year students are in an on-going process of transition into a new way of being and doing appropriate to that of the academy and their chosen disciplinary field. To this end, tutors, and those responsible for tutor training and support, should perhaps foreground even more clearly the ontological as well as the epistemological issues of the classroom.

I have specifically focused in this study on the need for epistemological access to be supported in the first year of study, and the potential that the tutorial system holds for this. However, I would also argue that this needs to happen throughout every stage of a student's academic journey. This would entail enabling access to the ways in which knowledge is constructed in various disciplines at ever-deepening levels as students progress over the course of their degree, such that these students would one day be able to engage critically with these forms of knowledge, and perhaps by adding their own voices to the disciplinary field begin to contribute to the knowledge and even to question some of the norms and values of that field.

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Appendices

Appendix 1a – Student Questionnaire

Dear students

My name is Delia Layton and I am a lecturer in the English Department. I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a PhD in Education at Rhodes University. My area of focus is the tutorial system and I wish to research what role it plays in support of the teaching and learning experience of first-year university students. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and anonymous. Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to a larger body of knowledge about the role of tutorials in support of teaching and learning.

Questions for students on the tutorial system

1. Are you in your first year of study at UJ ? (Yes/ No)_____
2. Are you repeating the first year? (Yes/ No)_____
3. What is your home language?_____
4. Which campus are you on? _____
5. What degree or diploma are you studying for?_____
6. What subjects that you take have tutorials?_____
7. How many tutorials are offered each week for each subject?_____
8. How many tutorials do you actually attend a week for each subject?_____
9. How many students usually attend with you in your tutorial?_____
10. How long is the tutorial usually?_____
11. What sorts of venues are used for the tutorial? (E.g. lecture hall; small classroom, with fixed desks or moveable desks)_____

12. How do the venues affect the way you experience the tutorial? _____

13. What do you think is the purpose of the tutorial? _____

14. What usually happens in a tutorial? _____

15. Are your tutorials helpful? If so, how? If not, why not? _____

16. What qualities do you think a tutor needs? _____

17. Does your tutor encourage discussion in the classroom? _____

18. Are you comfortable enough to ask questions or raise issues in your tutorials? Please give reasons for your answer. _____

19. What do you think is the role of the tutor in tutorials?

20. What further comments or suggestions would you like to make about the tutorial system? _____

Appendix 1b - Interviews with Lecturers / Academics / HODs

1. Please identify yourself, your dept, faculty and campus.
2. What is your professional title, role or position in the dept?
3. How many tutors are there in your department?
4. Do you take any tutorials yourself? If so, how many?
5. How many tutorials does your dept offer each student each week?
6. What is the average size of a typical tutorial class in your dept?
7. How long is the tutorial?
8. What sorts of venues do you use for tutorials?
9. Why does your dept offer tutorials?
10. What generally happens in a tutorial?
11. How effective are tutorials and why?
12. What is your approach to the running of a tutorial?
13. What qualities do you think a tutor needs?
14. What kind of guidance or support does your dept give to your tutors?
15. What do you think is the purpose of tutorials?
16. What is your role as a lecturer / academic / HOD with regard to tutorials?
17. What impact does the tutorial system make in your dept.?
18. From your experience can you offer any further insights into the role of tutorials with regard to teaching and learning in the UJ context?

Appendix 1c - Interviews with Academic Development staff members

1. Please identify yourself, your unit and the campus where you work.
2. What is your professional title, role or position at UJ?
3. What is your interest in the tutorial system?
4. What do you think is the purpose of tutorials?
5. Do you think the tutorial system is effective at UJ?
6. Are you involved in the training of tutors?
7. What kind of guidance or support does your unit give to tutors?
8. What qualities do you think a tutor needs?
9. What is your approach to the way in which a tutor should conduct a tutorial?
10. What is your role as an academic developer with regard to tutorials?
11. What are the average sizes of tutorial classes in the various depts. that you work with?
12. How long are the tutorials?
13. What sorts of venues are used for tutorials?
14. In what way do you think the size of classes and /or types of venues affect tutorials?
15. Why do you think that some depts. offer tutorials and not others?
16. What impact does the tutorial system make in at UJ?
17. What do you think usually actually happens in tutorials?
18. From your experience can you offer any further insights into the role of tutorials with regard to teaching and learning in the UJ context?

Appendix 1d - Interview with Administrative staff member

1. What is your professional title, role or position at UJ?
2. What is your interest / role in the management of the tutorial system?
3. What do you think is the purpose of tutorials?
4. Do you think the tutorial system is effective at UJ?
5. What is UJ's policy or position with regard to the tutorial system?
6. What are the challenges you face with regard to the tutorial system?
7. How does UJ a) select and b) train its tutors?
8. What is the optimum size of tutorial classes?
9. What are the actual sizes of tutorial classes?
10. How does UJ manage tutorials in terms of:
 - a. The time-tabling of tutorials (how many per week, for how long)?
 - b. Tutorials as being part of the university curriculum (time-table)?
 - c. Venues offered?
11. What qualities do you think a tutor needs?
12. Why do you think that some depts. offer tutorials and not others?
13. What impact does the tutorial system make in at UJ?
14. From your experience can you offer any further insights into the role of tutorials with regard to teaching and learning in the UJ context?

Appendix 2 – Letter of Consent for Use of Data for Research Purposes

Dear tutors

My name is Delia Layton and I am a lecturer in the English Department. I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a PhD in Education at Rhodes University. My area of focus is the tutorial system and I wish to research what role it plays in support of the teaching and learning experience of first year university students. To this end, it would be extremely useful if I could chat to you and draw on your experience of and insights into the tutorial system within the UJ context.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you would be free to withdraw at any stage. If you do choose to participate, your name will not appear in any of my published research and I will use a pseudonym to keep your identity confidential. The interviews should be about an hour long.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to a larger body of knowledge about the role of tutorials in support of teaching and learning.

Please sign this letter of informed consent to indicate your willingness to participate and be recorded.

Best wishes

Delia Layton

Signed: _____ Name: _____

Date: _____ Place: _____

Appendix 3 – Email Letter to Prospective Research Participants

Dear....

My name is Delia Layton and I am a lecturer in the English Department. I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a PhD in Education at Rhodes University. My area of focus is the tutorial system and I wish to research what role it plays in support of the teaching and learning experience of first-year university students. To this end, it would be extremely useful if I could chat to you and draw on your experience of and insights into the tutorial system within the UJ context.

My research will be conducted on the Auckland Park campus of the University of Johannesburg during the month of October 2011. I would like to conduct a series of interviews – some of which will be on an individual basis, and others to be conducted in small focus groups. I will be interviewing students, tutors and lecturers from several departments, as well as members of staff who are responsible for the administration of the tutorial system.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you would be free to withdraw at any stage. If you do choose to participate, your name will not appear in any of my published research and I will use a pseudonym to keep your identity confidential. The interviews should be about an hour long.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to a larger body of knowledge about the role of tutorials in support of teaching and learning.

Please will you respond to this email to indicate your willingness to be interviewed and I will contact you to arrange a meeting.

With thanks

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Appendix 4 – Summaries of Statistics from Student Questionnaire

What usually happens in a tutorial?	
Discussion / ask questions	48.8%
Tutorial activities	34.3%
Revision / reviewing work done	29.6%
Tutor interaction	26.9%
Class tests	14.7%
Learning (additional) skill development	13.8%

What qualities do you think a tutor needs?	
Communication Skills	38.4%
Patience / tolerance	35.9%
Knowledge of the field	32.1%
Kind/ respectful/ friendly/ helpful	25.2%
Understanding	17.3%
Passionate/ energy/ enthusiastic/charismatic	8.0%

Are you comfortable enough to ask questions or raise issues in tutorials?	Yes: 87.9%
Reasons:	
Not overcrowded/ few students	31.4%
Tutor attitude / ability	31.0%
Student – tutor relationship	21.5%
Intimate/ familiar surrounding	17.6%

Are your tutorials helpful?	Yes: 87%
Reasons:	
Aids understanding	60.6%
Allows questions to be asked	15.5%
Tutor helps/interacts/more attention	14.2%
Gains familiarity with coursework	10.4%

What do you think is the purpose of a tutorial?	
Aids understanding of coursework/review lecture/ explain lecture	77.8%
Ask questions	18.8%
Additional learning skills	15.8%
Tutor interaction	9.4%
Discussion	5.5%

What do you think is the role of a tutor?	
Aids understanding / answer questions	80.5%

What sorts of venues are used for the tutorials?	
Small Classroom	95.5%
Lecture Hall	1.2%
Both	3.1%
Computer Labs	0.2%

How do venues affect the way you experience tutorials?	
Small	41.7%
Allows tutor communication / interaction	23.4%
Able to ask questions / encourages participation	21.7%

What kind of furniture/equipment is in the venues?	
Moveable desks	53.9%
Fixed desks	26.5%
Both	18.5%
Computer	1.1%

Affected by size of venue		
	positive	62.6%
	unaffected	25.2%
	negative	12.1%
Tutorial is held in small venue		95%
English is NOT home language		82%
Tutorials are helpful		87%
Tutor encourages discussion		89.7%
Comfortable to ask questions		87.9%
Classroom has moveable desks		53.9%
Tutorials satisfactory or better		40.9%

Appendix 5 – UJ Teaching and Learning Strategy Policy Document

Document SEN 252/2008(5)

This Teaching and Learning Strategy document takes as its goal the development and presentation of the strategies which will allow for full implementation of the UJ Teaching and Learning Policy, and thereby make a substantial contribution to Strategic Goal 3: Excellence in Teaching.

Developmental process followed

On the advice of the MEC, a Task Team was convened in November 2007, to take up the development of a Teaching and Learning Strategy during the course of 2008; this Task Team has met regularly during the past months.

Membership of the Task Team was as follows:

Prof Derek van der Merwe, Convenor
Prof Angina Parekh
Prof Saartjie Gravett
Prof Rory Ryan
Prof Elizabeth de Kadt
Prof Jane Spowart
Dr Riette Smit

Work began with the identification of the following core themes, which would underpin the Strategy:

- Delivery modes, contact time and tutorials
- Language policy and implementation strategy
- Professional staff development (including a Postgraduate Centre)
- Teaching workload model
- Accommodating student diversity (academic development and support)

Sub task teams, each led by a member of the Teaching and Learning Task Team, were constituted, with broader and representative membership, and with the task of developing a framework document around each theme.

As these groups undertook their deliberations, several adjustments took place.

Firstly, it was agreed that the Teaching Workload Model, while extremely important, belonged rather in the HR domain, and that work should continue on this matter as a separate initiative.

Secondly, initial consideration of delivery modes led to the emergence of an encompassing position paper on 21st century learning, from a discussion group led by Profs Gravett and Ryan and including colleagues in the Faculty of Education. It was agreed that this matter was of such importance that the position paper should be workshopped in all Faculties and in the Division of Academic Development and Support, to obtain responses from staff involved in teaching. Most Faculties have now participated in this process. Thirdly, it was agreed that the Academic Development and Support

Framework document, which had been developed by the Executive Director in a separate initiative, should form part of the Teaching and Learning Strategy documentation.

The sub task teams submitted the following reports or framework documents during June / July 2008.

- Delivery modes, contact time and tutorials
- 21st Century Teaching and Learning at the University of Johannesburg
- Language policy implementation strategy. In view of the urgent need for implementation planning for 2009, this document was approved by Senate at its July meeting.
- Proposed Academic Staff Development Strategy
- Establishing a Postgraduate Centre at UJ
- Accommodating student diversity
- ADS Framework document

On August 25th a Teaching and Learning Strategy Workshop took place, which was attended by MEC members, all Executive Deans, and Faculty representatives. This Workshop generated core agreements as to the content of the Teaching and Learning Strategy. In particular, workshop participants were supportive of the proposed new teaching and learning philosophy, summed up as ‘learning to be’; the implications of this philosophy would still need to be addressed in subsequent work.

After some further discussions, the Draft Teaching and Learning Strategy is now presented for consideration.

Structure of the Strategy document

The Strategy document is structured in two Sections and one Appendix.

Section 1 presents the principles underpinning the Teaching and Learning Strategy. Section 2 identifies one core strategic objective and a number of associated operational objectives, and develops a series of strategies through which the University will seek to realise each objective. It also lists associated performance indicators and responsibilities. The Appendix presents, in the form of a position paper entitled: “Teaching and Learning at the University of Johannesburg”, the teaching philosophy that underpins the Teaching and Learning Strategy. This position paper seeks to situate university education in the complex world of the 21st century. It both responds to current insights into processes of learning, and shows ways of accommodating the needs and learning habits of our 21st century students. For these reasons this teaching philosophy has been chosen to underpin the UJ Teaching and Learning Strategy.

SECTION 1

PRINCIPLES OF A TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGY FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF JOHANESBURG

1. The University of Johannesburg (UJ) accomplishes one of its strategic goals, namely excellence in teaching (Goal Three), by developing and sustaining an

enhanced learning and teaching environment that contributes optimally to the education of its students.

2. UJ recognizes the complexity and rapidly changing nature of the social, economic and intellectual environment for which its students are being prepared. It is imperative, therefore, that teaching and learning at UJ should transform from a primary concern with the transmission of knowledge (*learning about*) to a primary concern with the practices of a knowledge domain (*learning to be*). Therefore, in its teaching and learning activities and in the design of its modules and programmes, and within the parameters of reasonably practicable implementation, it recognizes the need:
 - 2.1 for teaching to be concerned with the enabling of learning that supports social and individual knowledge construction;
 - 2.2 for learning to be concerned with the transformation of information into knowledge, and for such knowledge to encompass more than mere learning about the facts, concepts systems and processes of a particular knowledge domain, but to equip students with an enquiring mind;
 - 2.3 for students to engage meaningfully and willingly with learning content that is part of a learning task within a learning environment that supports collaboration, and for its students to act purposefully in such an environment;
 - 2.4 for teaching and learning to nurture the traits of thinking and the various practices of a particular knowledge domain;
 - 2.5 for students to experience knowledge not as a mere static product of information production and consumption, but as a process and instrument of inquiry to solve problems; such problem-solving tasks to be acquired through the completion of carefully constructed learning tasks that achieve pre-defined learning outcomes; and
 - 2.6 to recognize and discount the diverse social, cultural, economic and linguistic backgrounds of its students in the learning environment; and
 - 2.7 to research the practices of teaching and learning for continuous reflection and improvement.
3. Teaching and learning within an academic programme encourages students to reflect on and prepares themselves for an active citizenship role in society, in which they embody and display the constitutional values in their interaction with other citizens.
4. The teaching and learning that takes place within academic programmes encourages and facilitates life-long learning.
5. Learning occurs in a variety of modalities and in or at many locations (both formal and non-formal) and students should be subjected to a range of modalities of learning in different locations that will optimize the learning experience. The university therefore – within reasonable limits – provides the infrastructural, human and financial resources required to facilitate learning in recognized modalities and in or at recognized locations.
6. It is recognized that, for effective teaching and learning, there needs to be sufficient time for students to engage with teaching staff and with learning materials. In principle, formal contact (i.e., lecturing and tutoring, but excluding

“practicals”) should, in the case of undergraduate modules, preferably not be less than 150 minutes per week, and should also preferably not exceed 250 min per week, unless approved by Senate. The formal contact time for each module is determined by the respective Faculty Boards, in consultation with the Registrar (to determine venue availability).

7. The language(s) of teaching and learning is determined with reference to the Language Policy of the university and such implementation strategies in respect of this policy as determined by Senate (upon the recommendation of the Senate Language Committee) from time to time.
8. Only appropriately qualified academic employees teach in an academic programme. The University therefore commits itself to the continuing professional development of its academic staff, such that all permanent and fixed-term contract academic staff shall have at least a master’s qualification appropriate to the discipline within which the staff member teaches, and such that all academic staff shall undergo continuous professional development that enhances their ability to optimally employ the different modalities of learning appropriate to the module being taught.
9. The University recognizes that postgraduate students also require support, and is committed to ensuring that a nurturing environment and a network of support are provided.
10. The University recognizes the importance of Information and Communication Technology to the teaching and learning process described in 2.1-2.4 above, and is committed to providing dedicated academic development and support to lecturers in respect of technology-assisted learning within modules, through the Centre for Technology-Assisted Learning (CenTAL).
11. Quality assurance and quality promotion underpin all teaching and learning activities in the institution. Academic quality assurance and quality promotion activities are the responsibility of every teaching academic and such responsibility is fulfilled within faculty-specific as well as central quality structures.
12. A Senate Committee for Teaching and Learning is hereby established. The purpose of this Senate Committee is:
 - (i) to ensure implementation of the strategy, to monitor the progress of such implementation, and to refine the Strategy from time to time;
 - (ii) to provide advice on the resources required for the full implementation of such a strategy;
 - (iii) to ensure regular and dedicated engagement on issues of teaching, learning and assessment, so that best practice is reflected in the teaching and learning activities of the institution; and
 - (iv) to align teaching and learning support structures and practices to the teaching and learning principles.
13. Each faculty shall develop a dedicated focus on teaching and learning and embed this into faculty structures and processes.

SECTION 2

Implementation Strategies

The following table presents the UJ Strategic Goal ‘Excellence in Teaching’ as an overarching strategic objective for the Teaching and Learning Strategy, and then translates this into seven operational objectives. For each of these, several implementation strategies are listed, together with an indication of where the responsibility for each strategy will primarily lie. Performance indicators, through which the impact of the specific strategy can be assessed, and a timeframe for implementation, are also indicated.

These strategies are envisaged as being realized over a three-year period (2009 – 2011), with an annual review towards the end of each year allowing for any necessary refinement of strategies for the following year. At the end of the three year period, progress will be assessed, and revised or new objectives developed, as appropriate.

While many of these strategies are currently being implemented on a limited scale, the intention of the Strategy is to extend their implementation and impact across the University as a whole. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that the University of Johannesburg’s nine Faculties represent a wide diversity of disciplines, and as such have very different needs and may draw on markedly different approaches to learning. The challenge is therefore to implement a coherent strategy framework, while still respecting Faculty diversity.

The Strategy proposes the establishment of a Senate Teaching and Learning Committee, which should commence its meetings as a matter of urgency. One of its first tasks will be to develop a detailed implementation schedule for 2009 (indicating, for instance, rollout within each Faculty).

Strategic objective	Performance indicators	Implementation Strategies	Responsibilities	Timeframe
<i>Improve the quality of the student learning experience and strive towards excellence in teaching and learning</i>				
Operational objectives				
<i>1. Roll out the ‘learning to be’ teaching philosophy</i>	Senate approval for statement of teaching philosophy Salience of philosophy	Table document for Senate approval Set up an ongoing series of workshops to	MEC	2008

	<p>in curricula, learning materials, teaching methodologies</p> <p>University-wide ICT Committee</p> <p>Increased use of ICTs in learning delivery</p>	<p>drive implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ at Faculty level ○ at discipline level <p>Establish a University-wide ICT committee to advise on use of ICTs in the academic environment, including the development of a plan for the roll-out of ICTs in learning environments</p> <p>Deliver ongoing professional development of lecturers in the innovative and optimal integration of educational ICTs</p>	<p>Faculty of Education, Division of Academic Development and Support (ADS)</p> <p>DVC Finance, DVC Academic</p> <p>CenTAL</p>	<p>Ongoing from 2009</p> <p>2009 Ongoing with expanded focus from 2009</p>
<p>2. <i>Improve student access, retention and graduation rates</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improved attrition rates ○ Improved UG success rate ○ Improved graduation ratios ○ % improvement in Student Experience survey 	<p>Achieve better selection and placement of entrants through entrance and placement testing</p> <p>Conceptualise and implement a First-Year Experience programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop a concept FYE document for Senate consideration and approval ○ Integrate academic literacy and skills development into core mainstream first year curricula ○ Track student performance and identify at risk students ○ Extend and monitor use of tutors and mentors ○ Institute and support some learning communities (in Residences, Day Houses) <p>Address the needs of senior students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify blockages through performance data, and implement targeted interventions ○ Advanced writing support and development ○ Career counseling to prepare students for job searches <p>Implement systematic enrolment management</p>	<p>ADS, Faculties</p> <p>ADS, with involvement of all University sectors</p> <p>ADS in conjunction with Faculties</p> <p>CAD, with campus Writing Centres, in conjunction with Faculties</p> <p>PsyCaD</p> <p>ADS in conjunction</p>	<p>2009</p> <p>To be piloted in 2009, with full implementation from 2010</p> <p>Ongoing, with expanded focus from 2009</p> <p>Ongoing, with expanded focus</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Systematic monitoring of student performance at all levels ○ Identify at risk modules, implement interventions, monitor results 	with Faculties	from 2009
<i>3. Enhance professionalism of teaching staff</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increase in staff qualifications ○ Continuous academic staff development programmes ○ Regular teaching and module evaluations 	<p>Increase opportunities for staff academic professional development, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure that all teaching staff have at least a Masters degree ○ Ongoing programmes of staff professional development workshops, including the integration of a variety of educational ICT approaches ○ Expand and enhance induction for new members of staff ○ Ensure regular evaluation of teaching by students and peers ○ Promote and support research into teaching, learning and assessment ○ Develop and workshop methodologies for effective large group teaching ○ Teaching and Learning/TAL Fellowships ○ Institute a PGCert in Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment 	ADS, in conjunction with Faculties and Postgraduate Centre	<p>By 2011</p> <p>Ongoing activities, with expanded focus from 2009</p> <p>Focus for 2009</p> <p>To be implemented from 2010/2011</p>
<i>4. Improve the student learning environment and provision of facilities and services both within and beyond the classroom</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased contact Time ○ Enhanced student satisfaction with facilities 	<p>Prioritise high-risk and first-year modules, ensuring adequate provision for tutorials and suitable teaching venues</p> <p>Faculties to recommend appropriate formal teaching periods, in keeping with the principles of the Strategy</p> <p>Faculties, Academic Affairs and Operations to develop implementation plans as to appropriate teaching contact time for full range of qualifications</p> <p>Plan for adequate provision of tutorial and teaching venues on all campuses, with timeframe</p> <p>Plan for adequate provision of learning and social spaces for students on all campuses, with time-frame</p> <p>Ensure adequate learning facilities within Residences</p> <p>Plan for longer-term rollout of ICT strategy with resource implications</p>	<p>Academic Affairs, Faculties & Operations</p> <p>‘Space planning’ task team</p> <p>Student Affairs</p> <p>ICT Committee</p>	<p>2009</p> <p>Gradual implementation of policy on increased contact time</p> <p>Ongoing planning in terms of campus development and available resources</p>

<p>5. <i>Promote and cater for student diversity on campus</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased numbers of students studying through Afrikaans medium of instruction (MOI) ○ Increased numbers of international students Integration of academic development into formal curriculum ○ Diverse teaching methodologies ○ Support to accommodate multilingual background of students 	<p>Continue catering for and promoting Afrikaans as MOI in designated programmes, as approved by Senate</p> <p>Enhance internationalization; with appropriate back-up support for students</p> <p>Continue to offer a diverse and relevant range of programmes and qualifications</p> <p>Promote the success of all students through targeted academic development and support</p> <p>Accommodate differences in learning styles through use of diverse teaching Methodologies</p> <p>Ensure that all students are adequately competent in their MOI</p>	<p>Faculties, ADS & Advancement</p> <p>Advancement</p> <p>Faculties</p> <p>ADS</p> <p>ADS & Faculties</p> <p>Faculties & ADS</p>	<p>Ongoing, with expanded focus from 2009</p>
<p>6. <i>Curriculate citizenship in all qualifications</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Faculty-specific Citizenship modules approved by Senate for implementation 	<p>Develop and implement a citizenship module in each undergraduate curriculum, as best aligned with the respective curriculum, or receive credit for existing module, should such a module exist</p>	<p>Humanities Faculty (in conjunction with other Faculties)</p>	<p>To be implemented in 2010</p>
<p>7. <i>Create an enabling environment and improve throughput rates of postgraduate students</i></p>	<p>Increased registration and graduation rates of Postgraduate students</p>	<p>Establish a centralized Postgraduate Centre with decentralized Faculty functions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conduct an analysis of the needs of postgraduate students ○ Implement the functions of the Postgraduate Centre in a phased approach ○ Centre to serve as an information centre for Postgraduate students, including international students ○ Focus on PG student development, and especially on academic literacy, research skills, and project management ○ Provide a supportive environment ○ Ensure adequate provision of facilities to advance Postgraduate study ○ Conduct workshops for supervisors 	<p>Research Office</p>	<p>Rollout from 2009, in a phased approach</p>

8. <i>Set up committee structures to support implementation</i>	Effective decision taking forum, effective flows of information	Institute a Senate Teaching and Learning Committee, with task teams / subcommittees as necessary (eg. Information Technology, Space planning, RPL) Institute Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees	DVC: Academic Executive Deans	2009
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Concluding remarks

The Teaching and Learning Strategy is underpinned by a number of framework documents (see appendix).

Investment in the Teaching and Learning Strategy

Several of the strategies proposed for 2009 are already accommodated in the 2009 budget; this represents a considerable investment in teaching and learning.

Proposed strategy	2009 budgetary allocation
Staff academic professional development	R1.5m
Staff qualifications project	R7.35m
Provision of additional tutorial venues	R10m
UJ tutorial budget 2009	R7m
Postgraduate Centre	R1.7 m
TOTAL	R27.55

Appendix

Teaching and learning at the University of Johannesburg: a position paper

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1. Points of departure

In this position paper we focus on four components of teaching and learning at the University of Johannesburg. We begin by situating university education in the complex world of the 21st century. We introduce the notion of “learning to be” – a view of higher

education that conceptualises learning as becoming a practitioner of a knowledge and professional domain. We also argue that an information-oriented view of teaching and learning in a university context is not conducive to optimal learning. Coupled with this we introduce the idea of approaching teaching as the design and implementation of “learning tasks”. We then focus on how current Information and Communication Technology (ICT) features in this setting, suggesting that it should extend contact teaching in digitally rich and innovative ways. Lastly we argue for ICT management that supports free access and optimal utilisation.

1.1. Preparing students for a rapidly changing world: “Learning to be”

We live in a rapidly changing world, a world of “supercomplexity” in the words of Barnett (2000). This is a “world without stable meanings; it is a world in which the handling of uncertainty, ambiguity and contestability come to the fore” (Barnett & Hallman, 1999: 145). Studying at a higher education institution should prepare students for this complex future. Therefore, learning that can be regarded as significant is learning that, above all, will enable students to act purposefully in situations they are going to encounter in the future.

Preparing students for such situations in the future implies primarily developing their capabilities for “seeing” and thinking in effective ways in their specific domains of knowledge and its practice. For example, a student learns to “see” the financial world, the world of the chemist, the world of the teacher, the philosopher, the mathematician, the sociologist, and so forth. With this “seeing” the education environment also needs to nurture the traits of thinking of practitioners in these different worlds. The type of learning that is required for this is referred to by Jerome Bruner as “learning to be”. Bruner (as cited in Brown & Duguid, 2000) distinguishes between two types of learning, namely *learning about*, which comprises most of the learning in education institutions, and *learning to be*. Arguably, *learning about*, which involves learning of facts, concepts and procedures, is an important part of university learning. However, on its own this type of learning is not *sufficient* for developing effective ways of “seeing”. What is required for “seeing” the world as a specific knowledge practitioner is a deliberate focus on *learning to be*. Learning to be requires learning of the practices of the knowledge domain (discipline or profession) which includes the principles, dispositions, attributes, competencies, activities, skills, procedures and values of the knowledge domain. This type of learning also requires how to best utilise the conceptual frameworks and/or theories of the domain to identify and solve problems or interpret and address everyday issues. It furthermore includes attention to the practices of inquiry of the knowledge domain. Bruner (as cited in Candy, 1991: 282) expresses this idea as follows:

A body of knowledge, enshrined in a university faculty and embodied in a series of authoritative volumes, is the result of much prior intellectual activity. To instruct someone in these disciplines is not a matter of getting the student to commit results to mind. Rather, it is to teach him or her to participate in the process that makes possible the establishment of knowledge. We teach a subject not to produce little living libraries on that subject, but rather to get a student to think mathematically for himself or herself, to consider matters as an historian does, to take part in the process of knowledge-getting. Knowing is a process, not a product.

This view of teaching and learning contrasts sharply with the transmission-of-knowledge or delivery view of teaching and learning. “Seeing” teaching and learning like this, is

(still) prevalent at many higher education institutions. It “assumes that knowledge comprises discrete, pre-formed units, which students ingest in smaller or greater amounts until graduation or indigestion takes over. To become a physicist, such a view suggests, you need to take in a lot of formulas and absorb a lot of experimental data” (Brown and Duguid, 1996: 417). We agree with Brown and Duguid, who criticise this conception of education arguing that “knowledge is not a static, preformed substance: it is constantly changing. Learning involves active engagement in the processes of that change.” Learning is thus, we would suggest, also learning to “be(come)”. They further maintain that people do not become physicists by learning formulas any more than they become football players by learning the rules of football. “ In learning how to be a physicist or a football player – how to act as one, talk as one, be recognized as one – it’s not the explicit statements, but the implicit practices that count” (2000: 144-145), in other words, ways of “seeing” underlying the explicit practices.

The implicit practices or “ways of seeing” are usually taken for granted by experts in a knowledge domain. The challenge for university teachers is thus to identify the ways of seeing implicitly in the knowledge domain, and develop teaching and learning tasks that embed the effective ways of seeing in different situations, which are then explored with students. We agree with Lee Shulman (as cited in Hutchings, 2000:3) that “teaching is best understood not as a technique, but as an enactment of the teacher’s understanding of what it means to know a field *deeply* – and how that understanding develops.”

1.1 From information to knowledge

In some higher education contexts education is viewed, albeit unwittingly, as production and consumption of information, with teaching as “info-delivery”, learning as “infoconsumption” and assessment as “info-replication”. This type of education does not encourage “deep learning”⁴ which is lasting and commensurate with the ideals of higher education. Teaching at a university should focus on learning that is “rich with connection making” needed for “insight and for the lively and flexible use of knowledge” (Perkins, 1991: 5).

Many students leave the university with more information than usable knowledge. Weigel (2002: 4) reminds us that learning content (as information) is the “medium for knowledge construction and the springboard for learning.” And we would add that merely acquiring information does not mean that learning has occurred. Learning takes place “when students act on content, when they shape and form it. Content is the clay of knowledge construction; learning takes place when it is fashioned into something meaningful.” Similarly, Apps (1994: 170) explains the difference between knowledge and information as it applies to education as follows: “My knowledge becomes your information and your knowledge becomes my information until we have wrestled with it, analyzed it and attempted to apply it.” This highlights the importance of creating learning opportunities that require active engagement of students.

The example of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is worth considering. This university has recently made coursework and learning material freely available online. This act of information distribution illustrates the point that teaching should not be equated with the dissemination of learning content. MIT argues that it distinguishes itself not only through excellence of learning material, but in particular through the *learning experience* that the University offers to students by way of its teaching.

1.3. Teaching as design and implementation of learning tasks

We would argue that university teaching may be best conceptualized as learning task design and implementation. Within this view, the role of the lecturer is not to ‘deliver’ information but to design *challenging learning* tasks for students with a view to foster “deep learning”, which is, also according to Jerome Bruner, “learning to be” (thus a practitioner of knowledge and skills).

When designing learning tasks, the following should, among others be taken into account:

- Students’ existing knowledge and academic dispositions
- Task-based collaboration among students themselves, and lecturers and students
- The everyday practices of the knowledge and profession domains
- Progressive support for students with regard to conceptual development and discourse literacy

Learning tasks could include lectures and varying interpretations of content, explanations, questions to students, comments on students’ contributions, discussion of student questions, narrative demonstrations of procedures, peer learning and review, case studies, defining and solving of ill-defined contextual and complex problems, engaging with experts, development of artefacts, modelling, coaching, simulations, problem based learning, and so forth. A lecture, as an expert’s exposition of a topic, can be a platform for an effective learning task for students. For it to be effective it should be designed to *engage* students optimally in the performance of the task. It has to solicit response from students. It has to invoke “issues and questions in a way that invites an active reinterpretation of meaning from multiple standpoints among the listeners” (Burbules & Bruce, 2001: 1105). It should ideally demonstrate the “ongoing working of a scholarly mind” (Biggs, 1999: 99).

1.2 Assessment of and for learning

Student learning research (Ramsden, 1992; Barnett, 1992) suggests that the single most important influence on student learning is their perception of assessment. Students deem that which is required of them in assessment tasks (assignments, tests, examinations, etc.) as the “*true curriculum*”. Therefore they focus their learning to comply with the assessment requirements that they anticipate (Ramsden, 1992; Barnett, 1992). According to Brown and Knight (1994:12) assessment plays such a significant role in the academic life of students “... that it is not the curriculum which shapes assessment, but assessment which shapes the curriculum and embodies the purposes of higher education. ”

University teachers lament this fixation of students on assessment. However, they can turn this to their own advantage by designing assessment tasks with outcomes that encourage deep learning, coupled with engagement in the knowledge and practice domains.

Assessment that supports such learning:

- Shows congruence between, teaching approach, learning goals (outcomes) and assessment tasks
- Utilises a variety of assessment methods
- Includes tasks that test transfer of knowledge and skills from the coursework to professional practice

- Provides feedback to students to support learning
- Provides opportunities for peer and self-assessment.

1.5 Contact times – how much?

We would argue that the current debate at the UJ about optimum contact time that is required with students needs to be informed by the approach to teaching adopted by University teachers. If one approaches teaching as “info-delivery”, and learning as “infoconsumption,” and assessment as “info-replication” – then it makes little sense to increase contact time. Information can be distributed much more effectively in other ways than through personal contact in a lecture room. Contact time should not focus on information delivery, but should add significant value to the learning experience of the student. Otherwise it serves little purpose. It has to support students to learn the practices of the knowledge domain – to learn to “be(come)” a historian, or an accountant, or a chemist. If teaching is approached in this way it makes sense to provide for optimal contact time with students.

First-year students, we argue, need more contact time than seniors. The rules of practice of the university as institution have to be learned while they are learning to “be(come)” specific knowledge practitioners and inquirers. The way of life at university differs from the life at school and first-year students have to experience the shift from school culture to university culture as soon as possible.

Moreover, most students that enter a South African city university like the UJ are English Second Language speakers. They not only have to learn new discourses in the knowledge domains, but also have to do this via the English language. Seligman (2008), who completed a study of literacy development at the UJ found that there are multiple literacy barriers to learning, but that English as medium of instruction is a major obstacle. She recommended that that literacy development takes place in the disciplines and professional knowledge domains. This would require more contact time.

1.6. The “New Learner” and digital technology

Marc Prensky (2001), a digital game-based specialist, expresses amazement that the debate about the perceived decline of education seems to ignore that students who currently enter higher education are fundamentally different from previous generations. They are no longer the students that the higher educational system was designed to teach before the arrival of digital technologies. Current students are not just different from previous generations in terms of their clothes, body adornments, styles, language, or social activities. They are also different because their lifeworlds have changed dramatically. He refers to the arrival and rapid dissemination of digital technology in the last decades of the 20th century. Today’s students represent the first generation to have grown up with this new technology. They have spent their lives surrounded by computers, videogames, digital music players, video cameras, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age. Graduates today may have spent less than 5 000 hours of their lives reading, but over 10 000 hours playing video games, and watching 20 000 hours of television. Computer games, email, the Internet, cell phones and instant messaging are integral parts of their lives. Prensky coined the term “digital natives” for these students, who are “native speakers” of the digital language of computers, video games, the Internet and so forth. This may have implications for university teachers, whom he sees as “digital immigrants” who have migrated to this world and who are not as attuned to a digital

lifestyle as the students. He also says that often the students are much more advanced in the use of the new tools and that this may cause friction.

In this context, we suggest that the New Learner needs “new” learning tasks. This learner is more likely to have been exposed to a complex, multilayered, digital world. They also have a different vernacular – a digital vernacular. Therefore, learning task design needs to engage learners who speak, imagine, navigate, network and share digitally.

2. Conclusion

Central to the position that we are taking in this paper is the notion of *learning to be a practitioner of a knowledge domain* – a person who learns to access and appropriate the discourse of the community of knowledge and of the profession. Also, in order to support student learning optimally the professors and other university teachers⁷ need to consider teaching as the design and implementation of multiple learning tasks in different modes. We furthermore argue for a utilization of ICT’s that enhances, energises and mobilizes conventional higher education practice in creative ways. Also, we point out that the management of technology resources needs to facilitate optimal use and access.

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Appendix 6 – UJ Teaching and Learning Policy

	
<p>Policy: Teaching and Learning</p>	
Document number	
Custodian	Registrar: Academic
Responsible Division	
Status	Approved
Approved by	Senate
Date of approval	25 October 2006
Amendments	
Dates of amendments	
Review date	2012
<p>Related documents</p>	
<p>UJ documents (e.g. Policies, Regulations, Guidelines,</p>	<p>Other (e.g. Legislation, DoE and HEQC</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Contracts)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Policy; • Assessment Policy; • Policy on Higher Degrees and Postgraduate Studies; • Policy on Experiential Learning; • Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning; • Policy on People with Disabilities; • Language Policy; • Programme Policy; • Enrolment Management Plan; • UJ Programme Review Manual; 	<p style="text-align: center;">directives and guidelines)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act (Act 58 of 1995); • Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997); • Ministry of Education: National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa: February 2001; • Higher Education Policy Framework (HEQF): Government Gazette Vol. 481, July 2005); • Ministry of Education: Higher Education Qualification Framework: August 2006; • Minimum Admission Requirements: Government Gazette, No. 27961 August 2005; • CHE: Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) Criteria for Programme Accreditation: November, 2004;
<p>Stakeholders affected by this document (units and divisions that should be familiar with it).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Deans; • Heads: Academic Departments; • Lecturers (Part-time and Full-time); • Heads: Academic Support Units.
<p>Website address of this document:</p>	

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PREAMBLE

The University of Johannesburg offers a wide range of programmes from the formative general and professional to the vocational (career focused), addressing the national imperatives.

The University's commitment to excellence in teaching and learning is encapsulated in its vision, mission and values statement. The vision states the scope and character of programmes offered at the University as "a mix of vocational and academic programmes that advances freedom, democracy, equality and human dignity".

The commitments in the mission statement that have particular relevance for this policy are:

- (a) supporting access to a wide spectrum of academic and technological learning, teaching and research;
- (b) leading, challenging, creating and exploring knowledge.

Against the background of these commitments, the University strives to guide and support students in acquiring:

- (a) a sound knowledge base in the field of study concerned;
- (b) scholarly and/or professional and/or technological dispositions, attributes and competencies appropriate to the field of study and/or future careers;
- (c) academic, professional and employability knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will enable participation in society as high-level human resources with a view to promoting growth and prosperity;
- (d) competencies and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE POLICY

This policy articulates the University's commitment to creating appropriate, meaningful learning opportunities and experiences for a diverse student body, in relation to programme type and National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level of programmes.

The policy also sets out a framework for coordinated decision making regarding learning and teaching activities across the University by broadly describing the principles, aspirations and practices that relate to learning and teaching at the University. It also applies to subsidised and non-subsidised academic programmes.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the:

- (a) Programme Policy;
- (b) Assessment Policy;
- (c) Policy on Higher Degrees and Postgraduate Studies;
- (d) Policy on Experiential Learning;
- (e) Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning;
- (f) Policy on People with Disabilities;
- (g) Language Policy;
- (h) Programme Policy;
- (i) Enrolment Management Plan.

CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

Learning facilitator

The term learning facilitator refers to an appropriately qualified individual who guides, assists, helps, advances and enables learning, for example Lecturers, Tutors, Mentors and Demonstrators.

Contact time

Contact time refers to purposeful, scheduled, face-to-face interaction between students and learning facilitators. This includes on-campus contact or contact during experiential learning.

Learning guide

The learning guide is a module-specific learning facilitation tool serving as a “map” for the students. It contains organisational as well as learning facilitation components.

PRINCIPLES AND ASPIRATIONS

Focus on student learning

Teaching is not an end in itself, as the purpose of teaching is to bring about learning. Consequently, teaching at the University is broadly conceptualised as the creation of meaningful learning opportunities for students. Therefore, the role of lecturers and other learning facilitators entails the guiding, promoting, enabling and supporting of deep and meaningful student learning that will enable lifelong learning.

Deep and meaningful learning is promoted through learning opportunities, and learning and teaching environments in which:

- (a) learning activities are designed to challenge students to make connections between facts, ideas and skills, to identify and solve problems, and to apply their learning in integrated ways in multiple contexts;
- (b) students are afforded the opportunity to engage in authentic learning activities via, for example, experiential learning and simulations;
- (c) learning activities afford students the opportunity to engage in varying ways with the learning content to accommodate a diversity of student needs;
- (d) learning facilitators make learning content meaningful and relevant to students by attending to their perceived learning needs and by contextualising learning content;
- (e) assessment is used continually to provide students with explicit and constructive feedback regarding their progress;
- (f) assessment focuses on the understanding and application of information rather than on merely expounding it;
- (g) teaching and assessment are aligned to support the attainment of envisaged outcomes;
- (h) there are positive relationships and interactions between students and lecturers, and in which students and lecturers are respected and appreciated;
- (i) students are assisted to:
 - (i) grasp the inherent meaning or significance of learning tasks,

- (ii) personalise learning tasks by linking them to their own experience or life-worlds,
 - (iii) place the focus on the “big picture” by consciously trying to link the different components of the learning experience,
- develop innovative and critical thinking skills.

The fostering of independent and lifelong learning

Programmes and modules on the consecutive NQF levels should be carefully planned in terms of the fostering of independent and lifelong learning.

This implies that self-study, as an integral part of all modules, should be explicated in the learning guide, taking into consideration that the level of the supervision and guidance will progressively decrease from first-year to postgraduate studies.

A high premium on the development of teaching competence

Because good teaching is never static, a high premium is placed on the continual development of teaching competence at the University. This includes development opportunities for staff offered by the Academic Staff Development Unit, as well as faculty-based development addressing programme-specific or discipline-related needs. The regular evaluation of teaching for development purposes is encouraged.

The development of teaching at the University also entails the scholarship of teaching. This implies Lecturers investigating the most favourable circumstances to promote and support learning in specific fields of study with a view to developing not only their own teaching competence, but also teaching and learning in general in order to promote and share best practice. Faculties are encouraged to establish forums for exploring effective teaching and learning.

An outcomes-based approach in academic programmes

Learning and teaching at the University are organised in programmes that are generically defined as a series of learning and teaching activities that lead to the attainment of a qualification.

The programmes follow an outcomes-based approach, implying that learning, teaching and assessment are guided and shaped by learning outcomes. Learning outcomes, which are derived from the knowledge base of the field/discipline, the demands of the field/discipline and the needs of the profession or occupation concerned, are described in terms of higher-order knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

A flexible approach to learning and teaching

The University strives to provide for the academic, professional and career-related learning needs of a diverse student body through the creation of learning opportunities using different modes of access and delivery (presentation).

These modes include face-to-face contact between learning facilitators and students, information and communication technology, and experiential learning. The different modes are used complementary to one another and in a way that is appropriate to the student and module/programme profile, as well as module/programme outcomes.

All programmes at the University include a contact component between the Lecturer, other learning facilitators (if applicable) and students. The contact component of programmes makes provision for a variety of learning opportunities such as lectures, block meetings, workshops, seminars, group and individual tutorials, small-group discussions and laboratory explorations. The following applies to contact time:

- (a) The contact time is determined as a percentage of the number of notional hours per programme/module in accordance with Faculty rules.
- (b) The percentage of the contact time is adapted according to the student and module/programme profiles, e.g. more contact time for first-year students or for laboratory work.

Information and communication technologies (ICT)

The University encourages the use of ICT as a means to facilitate student access to and engagement in meaningful learning experiences.

ICT could be utilised in one or more of the following ways:

- (a) as a communication tool with and among students;
- (b) to supplement face-to-face teaching by, for example, making complementary materials and learning activities available via the learning management system endorsed by the University (currently Edulink);
- (c) as a means to facilitate learning through the integration of face-to-face teaching and ICT. This implies that some components of the learning process are facilitated via ICT, and other components are facilitated in the classroom. Lecturers, in collaboration with the Centre for Technology-Assisted Learning at the University, develop modules/programmes that employ such an approach;
- (d) for assessment of learning.

Experiential learning

Experiential learning (i.e. service learning, work-based learning, etc.) forms an integral part of some professional and career-focused programmes in the University, and is done in accordance with professional regulatory requirements, where applicable. It involves different sites of learning such as community, industrial, commercial and clinical settings.

A high premium on improvement of student retention, throughput and graduation rates

While maintaining and improving academic standards, the University strives towards the improvement of student retention, throughput and graduation rates through the creation of an environment that enhances the likelihood that students are successful in their studies and are able to graduate.

Different retention mechanisms are developed and implemented to assist students with various types of issues that inhibit their ability to succeed and graduate. Such measures include:

good induction strategies into the faculty, department and programme;

early identification of under-performing students and students who are at risk;

monitoring and follow-up of poor attendance with appropriate interventions where applicable;

early diagnosis of student learning requirements for basic skills and additional learning support and the provision of such support (e.g. study skills, counselling, tutoring support and mentoring schemes etc.);

recognition and understanding of different learning styles, coupled with a sensitiveness and openness to presenting information in different ways to accommodate different learning styles;

a variety of measures to maintain and improve student motivation (peer support, prizes and ceremonies, target setting aligned with formative assessment and feedback etc.).

LEARNING GUIDES

Learning guides are available for all modules. Guidance is more explicit and detailed in undergraduate programmes. The learning guide should be available as a hard copy and/or electronically, taking into account the module/programme and student profiles.

The learning guide should contain at least the following:

- (a) details of the lecturers and other learning facilitators involved in the specific module and their availability;
- (b) grievance procedures and routes available to students;
- (c) attendance requirements (if applicable);
- (d) module outcomes and assessment criteria;
- (e) assessment information;
- (f) prescribed texts and additional reading lists or sources;
- (g) self-study requirements.

The learning facilitation component of the guide is organised into learning units which could include the following: unit outcomes, a reference to learning content to be studied, activities for students, self-assessment or review questions and assessment information related to the learning unit.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment of students' knowledge, skills, values and attitudes forms an integral part of learning and teaching. The principle of continuous and integrated formative and summative assessment applies.

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

Academic development implies interventions and strategies geared towards the development and enrichment of unprepared and under-prepared students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels as a response to the need for widening access and improving retention and throughput.

Consequently, academic development strategies and interventions should form an integral part of all accredited programmes and modules. In particular, the University encourages and supports the use of tutors and mentors in undergraduate programmes for student support and academic development purposes.

LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The language of learning, teaching and assessment and academic administration is determined by the University's Language Policy as approved by Senate and Council.

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality assurance (QA) of learning and teaching is the responsibility of Heads of Departments and Executive Deans of faculties.

The relevant faculty quality assurance structures for learning and teaching are responsible for the development of a faculty policy and its implementation, as well as the monitoring of practices.

Executive Deans report to the Senate Academic Planning and Quality Committee (APQC) on quality assurance of learning and teaching. The same requirements apply to divisions outside faculties that offer non-subsidised academic programmes.

The relevant faculty structures are also responsible for programme reviews as required by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC).

Senate is the highest decision-making body in the University overseeing matters of learning and teaching.

FACULTY POLICIES ON LEARNING AND TEACHING

A faculty must ensure that the faculty's learning and teaching practices are in accordance with this policy.

DISSEMINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

On Senate approval of this policy, the policy will be submitted to the Office for Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) for quality assurance purposes. The Registrar: Academic delegates the responsibility to the Central Administration Division for inclusion of the policy in the University policy databases, and makes it available on the University intranet. The OIE, in cooperation with the appropriate Senate Committee and/or policy custodian coordinates and aligns the development of academic Faculty policies.

On Senate approval of the Faculty Teaching and Learning Policy, the Faculty is responsible for the communication of the policy to its students and staff members.

Supporting information related to learning and teaching at the University is available on the Intranet.

REVIEW OF THE POLICY

Regular review of the policy will be done in line with the approved University Policy on Policy Development. This will take place in consultation with the relevant quality assurance structures at faculty and institutional level (i.e. the APQC), and under the auspices of the official custodian of this policy, namely the Registrar: Academic.

Approved by Senate: 25 October 2006

Appendix 7 – UJ Tutor and Tutoring Policy

POLICY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG ON TUTORING AND TUTORS	
Document Number	
Custodian/Responsible Executive	Executive Director: Academic Development and Support
Status	Approved by Senate
Date of approval	30 September 2009
Amendments	
Date of Amendments	
Review date	2013
Related documents	

<p>UJ documents</p> <p>(e.g. Policies, Regulations, Guidelines, Contracts)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UJ Policy on Teaching and Learning • UJ Teaching and Learning Strategy • UJ Quality Policy • UJ Assessment Policy • UJ FYE Proposal 	
<p>Website address of this document</p>	<p>Intranet</p>

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1. PREAMBLE

This Policy has been developed in the context of the UJ Teaching and Learning Policy and the associated Teaching and Learning Strategy, both of which represent UJ's commitment to excellence in teaching and learning.

The Teaching and Learning Strategy identified the importance of tutorials as a key means of facilitating student learning, by allowing cooperative interaction in a relatively safe learning environment, and time for reflection on and application of core academic practices and concepts within the disciplines being studied. In particular, tutorials offer scope for the learning tasks prioritised by the 'learning to be' teaching philosophy, which contribute to transforming information into usable knowledge.

2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to formulate a framework which will facilitate a coherent institutional approach to the development and implementation of a tutorial programme at the University of Johannesburg.

2.1. This policy should be read in conjunction with the:

- a) UJ Policy on Teaching and Learning
- b) UJ Teaching and Learning Strategy

- c) UJ Assessment Policy
- d) UJ Quality Policy
- e) UJ FYE Proposal

3. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy, unless otherwise stated, the following definitions shall apply:

3.1 *Tutorial*

A tutorial is defined as a session of intensive tuition led by a tutor. It aims to promote an enabling learning environment which facilitates the development of discipline-specific skills and enhances the academic success of students.

3.2 *Tutor*

While it is accepted that members of the teaching staff may on occasion take on the role of tutor, this Policy focuses on the sound management of senior students who are appointed as tutors.

A tutor, therefore, is defined as a senior student who has performed well academically and is competent and equipped with knowledge, skills and values which will enable him/her to assist and guide students in their academic studies.

4. PRINCIPLES

This policy is informed by the following principles:

- a) In order to succeed, a tutorial system must be adequately funded.
- b) Responsibilities for the implementation of tutoring are shared by Faculties, Departments, the Tutor Development Unit within the Academic Development Centre, and CenTAL.
- c) Attendance of students at scheduled tutorials is compulsory, and penalties for non-attendance must be clearly spelled out.
- d) The tutorial programme must be integrally related to the other modes of teaching and learning used in the module.
- e) Tutorials are an extension and not a repetition of formal lectures.
- f) A tutorial system provides an interactive environment which enhances the academic engagement of students and facilitates co-operative learning

- g) Tutorials offer opportunities for students to understand that knowledge is a mutually constructed and dynamic process, and to develop and explicitly reflect on their own learning processes.
- h) Methodological innovation and variety, such as are most easily possible in tutorials, enhance successful learning.
- i) The tutor's facilitative role is central.
- j) Both generic and subject-specific training for tutors are a requirement for employment.
- k) Tutors function as role models by behaving professionally at all times.
- l) Ongoing quality assurance, which includes evaluation and feedback, is essential to maintaining a high-quality tutoring programme.

5. TUTORIAL PROGRAMME MODELS

The following models are available for the implementation of tutorial programmes within faculties:

5.1 *Group Tutorial Session*

The traditional tutorial, which is usually compulsory for students, takes place in a structured group. The tutorials are conceptualized as supplementing the formal lecture and as developing discipline-specific skills, which facilitates the understanding, clarification and application of central concepts dealt with in the larger classes.

5.2. *Supplemental Instruction*

One form of group learning is Supplemental Instruction (SI), which is a pedagogical intervention that has been shown to facilitate student performance and increase rates of success. Fundamental features are that it is voluntary, student driven, involves peer mentoring, and has a focus on high-risk courses rather than high risk students. SI facilitators offer regular, out of class, peer facilitated sessions after attending the lectures, thereby integrating content with learning skills and study strategies.

5.3 *Cooperative Learning*

A further type of group tutorial is Cooperative Learning, which is characterized by students working collaboratively, under the guidance of a project leader, to complete a joint learning task, in order to maximize their own and each other's learning of the information, skills, or resources necessary for the highest possible quality presentation.

5.4 *On-line Tutorial Session (Electronic Facilitation)*

Increasingly, on-line tutoring is being made available to students in the multi-modal learning environment available at UJ. Tutors can draw on a variety of tools and techniques in this environment in order to facilitate learning. Communication tools can be used to build and maintain an on-line learning community. On-line tutorials offer easy access, on-line socialization, and the opportunity for information exchange, and increase student motivation.

1.1. *One-on-one Tutoring*

In certain circumstances and only when financially feasible, Departments may include one-on-one tutoring (individual consultations), which can be of benefit to 'at risk' students. Individual consultations should normally be implemented as supplementary to one of the above approaches to tutoring, as a carefully management and monitored component of the Departmental tutoring programme.

5.6 *Mixed models*

In some cases tutors may work collaboratively with a lecturer within a large class (such as a studio application session), and in this context deliver tutoring to individual students and/or groups of students.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1 *Lecturing Staff*

Departmental lecturing staff, working in collaboration with the Unit for Tutor Development, are responsible for the design, development and delivery of the tutorial model/s most responsive to students' learning needs. This includes selecting tutors for appointment; ensuring the adequate and ongoing training of tutors, both generic and subject-specific; weekly meetings with tutors for feedback and guidance purposes; and the full integration of tutorials into the other modes of teaching and learning utilized in the module. Where possible the lecturer should also act as tutor, which will ensure complete familiarity with requirements and processes. The regular collaboration with the Unit for Tutor Development should, especially in large Faculties, be managed through a designated Faculty representative.

6.2 *Faculties*

Faculties (and/or Departments) are responsible for both the administrative and financial management of the Faculty tutorial programme, including the formal employment of tutors, the appropriate use of available tutorial funding, and quality assurance.

6.3 *The Unit for Tutor Development*

The Unit for Tutor Development, which is located in the Academic Development Centre in the Division of Academic Development and Support, is responsible for ongoing collaboration with Faculty representatives and/or Departments and the provision of expert guidance with regard to the continuing development and implementation of the tutorial programme. The Unit also provides the compulsory generic tutor training and ongoing monitoring of tutors, to ensure that tutorial programme goals are being met by both academic staff and student tutors.

6.4 *CENTAL*

CenTAL is responsible for the use of technology around the delivery of online tutorial programmes to the Faculties and academic departments. Some tutors will require assisted technology online training, which will complement the generic and specialized tutor training offered by Tutor Development.

7. PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

Detailed guidelines for the appointment, payment and management of tutors are found in an Attachment to this Policy, which will be updated regularly.

8. QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance of the tutorial programme is the joint responsibility of Faculty staff and members of the Unit for Tutor Development/CenTAL.

9. FUNDING

In order for the tutorial programme to succeed sufficient funding must be allocated for both the development and payment of tutors.

The tutorial budget allocated to Faculties is ring-fenced and may be used for the payment of tutors only.

10. POLICY REVIEW

The policy will be reviewed regularly in accordance with the approved University Policy on Policy Development.

APPENDIX TO THE POLICY

PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES

1. It is the Dean's responsibility to include provision for Faculty tutor funding in his/her budget application. This provision should be derived from and supported by a detailed outline of the proposed Faculty programme, which indicates how tutorials will interface with other modes of teaching and learning offered in the Faculty.
2. Given that tutor budgets are likely to remain constrained, Faculties will need to prioritise their use of tutors, to ensure that 'at risk' modules are accommodated.
3. Tutorials are compulsory, and this must be monitored via attendance schedules; there must be incentives and penalties attached to tutorial attendance. (For instance, assistance with set assignments; short assignments or tests written during tutorials and which contribute to the semester mark.)
4. Collaboration between Departments and the Unit for Tutor Development should be conducted in terms of the *Guidelines for departmental involvement and cooperation*, developed by and available from the Unit for Tutor Development
5. Tutor appointments should be finalized by the end of term in the preceding year, so that training can commence before the start of lectures. (This presupposes that the tutor budget is, in turn finalized promptly.)
6. Only senior students (third year upwards) who have demonstrated adequate success in their studies and who have good interpersonal skills should be selected as tutors. Applications should be supported by a CV, including a certified schedule of their results to date. It is advised that tutors undergo an interview process. The Unit for Tutor Development can assist with this process.
7. Tutor appointments per Department must reflect the diversity of our student body.
8. In addition to time spent in the classroom, tutor appointments should include at least one hour per week for preparation/meeting time.
9. It is highly recommended that tutors attend lectures. Tutors must be informed of typical problems in classes, can help with discipline in large classes, and get to know students (and vice versa) better.
10. Full time staff should be allocated to supervise the tutorial programme, to ensure adequate and regular preparation of tutors.
11. Tutors must be paid at the specified UJ rates.
12. Appointment processes must comply with the due dates specified by HR. Late payment of tutors, due to late submission, is not acceptable.
13. On appointment tutors should sign both the *Code of Conduct* available from the Unit for Tutor Development and a terms of service agreement/work description with departments to ensure that tutor responsibilities are clear and adhered to. The terms of service should also specify procedures should a tutor wish to resign.

14. If a tutor is not performing adequately, s/he should be given first a verbal and a then a written warning in each case explaining the reasons for unsatisfactory performance. If there is no improvement, a letter of dismissal will be sent. A detailed explanation of the circumstances should be forwarded to both the HOD and the Dean.
15. All staff working with tutors must be aware of the terms of service agreement. Tutors are not to perform the function of a student assistant.
16. The generic tutor training offered by the Unit for Tutor Development is compulsory for all appointed tutors, as are the subsequent feed-back sessions organized by Tutor Development. Faculties and Departments must make plans to supplement this with subject-specific training, as appropriate. (Training is not remunerated, but is rather to be seen as the gift of the University which will equip students with general facilitation skills and allow for future employment. Thus, this training must be supported and valued as an investment in future academics by departments.) Students only become qualified for employment at UJ as a tutor, once they have committed to completing the training programme.
17. Departments must also stress the importance of attendance at the supervision/feedback sessions offered by the Unit for Tutor Development. These give value to the work of tutors and assist them in belonging to a UJ tutor community. Reports on their tutoring experiences are handed in here which offer valuable insights and opportunities for research.
18. The Unit for Tutor Development also offers specialized academic language and literacies training. Departments who may require this training should contact the Unit.
19. Assistance with marking should not be the main function of tutors! However, tutors who are required to assist with marking must be fully briefed and properly supervised, and their marking thoroughly moderated. Such marking should be undertaken on a group basis, with a staff member present to deal immediately with queries. This also allows for comparative marking and standard-setting. Faculties should decide on acceptable time-rates for marking (eg. X scripts per hour), with payment at UJ hourly rates.
20. Teaching staff must meet regularly with tutors (as required by the tutorial schedule), to ensure that tutors remain cognizant of the progress of the module and able to integrate tutorials.
21. A proper monitoring system must be in place, to ensure that tutors undertake the tutorials specified, to the requisite standard. If, for any reason, tutors are unable to conduct a tutorial or attend a scheduled meeting, they are required to give prior notification.
22. Tutorials should be included in the student evaluation of teaching.
23. Tutors should be asked to evaluate the Departmental arrangements concerning tutorials.
24. The academic practice workshops for new staff which are offered by Staff Professional Development should include a focus on tutorials.
25. The Unit for Tutor Development can be called upon to workshop the role of departments in utilizing the tutor system, tutor mentorship, development and training.

Appendix 8 – Table of First-time Entering Cohorts at UJ

Table 15: General academic first B-degrees: All first-time entering students at UJ

	Entering Cohort
2005	3315
2006	3368
2007	3923
2008	4572

Table 16: Professional first B-degrees: All first-time entering students at UJ

	Entering Cohort
2005	661
2006	658
2007	804
2008	932