

Understanding the reading practices of Fort Hare students

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By CATHY O'SHEA

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Abstract

Universities world-wide are battling to offer access to far greater numbers than ever before. The University of Fort Hare, specifically, is also part of a troubled South African education system and is located in a disadvantaged, rural area. The main aim of this study was to understand Fort Hare students' reading practices, as reported by the students themselves.

This thesis used a framework of New Literacy Studies, which views student learning as a process of mastering discipline-specific, socially constructed norms and values, and sees the adopting of a literacy as including the adoption of an identity. Since discourse, in the NLS tradition, has been found to be a mediating mechanism in the social construction of identity, a critical discourse analysis was adopted to begin understanding aspects of Fort Hare students' reading practices and the links between these and their identities. Critical realism is the ontological underpinning of this thesis. This means that the study aimed to identify the tendencies of certain mechanisms – in this case, Discourses – to affect students' reading practices, by analysing interview transcripts of focus group discussions held with 30 students. Frameworks and tools provided by Fairclough and Gee were applied to interview data analysis.


The 'We blacks' Discourse was one of one of the prominent Discourses that interviewees drew on when talking about their reading practices. It was closely allied to the 'Resistance to reading' Discourse, as participants explained that they tended to disregard books and did not enjoy reading for leisure. The 'We blacks' Discourse in this way homogenised class and other differences between black students, and indicated the ways in which their experiences were outside of academic Discourses. This Discourse served as a constraining mechanism for some, and indicated that those who used it tended not to identify with the academy. There was an evident link between the 'We blacks' Discourse, the 'Resistance to reading' Discourse and the 'Better than us' Discourse, in which students who enjoyed reading were called names for supposedly being conceited.

Two opposing discourses (with a small 'd') emerged when students talked about literacy sponsors like parents and lecturers. Some used the 'Our parents don't chase us' discourse to depict family members who were not encouraging, overlapping with the 'We blacks' Discourse. The contrasting 'Go read anything' discourse described more encouraging

teachers and relatives. This discourse was also used to describe educators who had forced them to read, with several interviewees describing corporal punishment as being a necessary part of school-based literacy practices.

It also became clear that Fort Hare's institutional identity played a role in some interviewees' self-identities, as the 'Resistance to reading' Discourse was linked to the 'Why bother?' Discourse. The latter seemed part of a defensive positionality that arose partly because some students see Fort Hare as a university with relatively low academic standards.

However, the implication is that lecturers and others can work towards changing Discourses and so endeavour to enable reading practices. Educators could also take steps to address resistant attitudes and encourage reading.

INFORMATION	
Student No: 601O0793	Student Title: Ms
Student Name: Catherine Mary O'Shea	
THESIS INFORMATION	
Thesis Title: Understanding the reading practices of Fort Hare students	
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Contents

Abstract.....	i
Chapter One: Context.....	1
1.1 The international context.....	1
1.2 The national context: South Africa	2
1.2.1 School education	5
1.3 Specific context: University of Fort Hare.....	6
1.4 Reading.....	9
1.5 Conclusion	11
Chapter Two: Literature review	12
2.1 Introduction.....	12
2.2 New Literacy Studies	12
2.2.1 Early case studies	15
2.3 Critiques of NLS	21
2.4 Academic literacy	29
2.4.1 Academic literacy in the National Benchmark Tests (NBTs).....	34
2.5 Historical influences on the NLS movement	37
2.6 Conclusion	40
Chapter Three: Reading and identity	41
3.1 Introduction.....	41
3.2 Defining ‘reading’	41
3.2.1 From ‘ESL’ to academic literacies.....	43
3.2.2 The ‘social practices’ view of reading.....	51
3.3 Reading practices of South African children	56
3.4 New technologies and their impact on reading practices.....	58
3.5 Reading problems.....	65
3.6 Identities.....	67

3.7 Conclusion	75
Chapter Four: Methods and methodology.....	77
4.1 Introduction.....	77
4.2 Critical realism.....	77
4.3 Critical Discourse Analysis	82
4.3.1 Orders of discourse	85
4.3.2 Two kinds of discourse	86
4.3.3 Data collection.....	90
4.4 Ethics	100
4.5 Conclusion	102
Chapter Five: The student as a social being	103
5.1 Introduction.....	103
5.2. The Discourse of 'We blacks'	103
5.3. The 'Better than us' Discourse	110
5.4 The 'I did it on my own' Discourse	116
5.5 'Our parents don't chase us'	119
5.6 'Go read anything'	120
5.7 The Discourse of 'Individualism'	128
5.8 The Discourse of 'No time'	133
5.9 Conclusion	136
Chapter Six: Discourses constructing institutional identity.....	138
6.1 Introduction.....	138
6.2 'This is not Wits'	138
6.3 'Most students here don't read'	145
6.4 Conclusion	149
Chapter Seven: Language and learning	151
7.1 Introduction.....	151
7.2 The 'Model C was better' Discourse.....	152

7.3 'English to fit in' Discourse	159
7.4 The 'Books have benefits' Discourse	165
7.5 The 'Books are boring; technology is fun' Discourse.....	171
7.6 Conclusion	178
Chapter Eight: Conclusion	180
8.1 Findings	181
8.2 Limitations of this research	185
8.3 The future.....	186
References.....	188
Appendix 1: Demographic details of interviewees.....	214
Appendix 2: Interview stimulus piece	215
Appendix 3: Core interview questions	216
Appendix 4: Excerpt from transcript	217
Appendix 5: Ethical clearance	223

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Chapter One: Context

This thesis investigates the reported reading practices of a group of South African students. My interest in the topic came about when I noticed that the Social Science students I teach appear to struggle with the literacy practices required of them at university level. At the same time that I was beginning to wonder what could be done about this struggle, colleagues repeatedly told me that “students do not read”; and even a non-academic friend, a parent of three young adults, later joked that my thesis would necessarily be a short one. These observations prompted me to want to find out: presuming that students do read *something*, *sometimes*, what is it that they read? And why? Similarly, could it be true that they would rather not read – and if so, why not? What, if anything, could be done by educators at university level to help struggling students to improve their literacy practices – and perhaps even instil a love of reading?

This relatively brief chapter outlines the context in which my study was carried out.

1.1 The international context

The broad context of this study is higher education (HE), at a time when student numbers are generally increasing world-wide, along with the social diversity of the student population (Hyland, 2009, p. 4; Case, 2013, pp. 17-18). In fact, HE is undergoing enormous changes globally, including financial pressures, massification, changing accountability structures, and pressure to demonstrate excellence (De Courcy, 2015). On top of these pressures, access to information, and to education, is being dramatically transformed in some quarters by Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), social networking technologies and other technological advances (Brown, 2015, p. 228). So much information is available that knowledge no longer lies in the hands of experts alone, and what was known as knowledge production could now be called knowledge configuration (Brown, 2015, p. 230).

Universities used to be viewed as places where only an elite segment of the population would receive a higher education (Case, 2013, p. 3). However, any notion of students being only young, white, middle-class and male has been disrupted by a large increase in students from diverse backgrounds entering university (Read, et al., 2003, p. 261). Participation rates in developed countries is now 70 to 80% of the 20 to 24-year-old age group, with BRICs

countries at 37.5% and Africa at only about 6% (CHE, 2016, p. 10). This development has in many cases led to “unprecedented theoretical and cultural concern” (Scholes, 2013, p. 359) about literacy, because literacy is linked to social justice: those with a particular set of literacy skills have access to employment and economic participation. To put it plainly, what is needed for success in the new world, which constantly requires innovation, is proficiency in understanding academic language and an association with school-based values: yet this is a great obstacle today for many poor young people globally (Gee, 2004, p. 109).

The idea of higher education as a public good is widely held, which means that the trend towards increasing student numbers is centred on ideas of fairness, social development and transformation and growth (CHE, 2016, p. 12). These ideas have had particular resonance for higher education in South Africa in 2015 and 2016, for reasons given below.

1.2 The national context: South Africa

There are 11 ‘traditional’ universities in South Africa, of which Fort Hare is one. These are the universities that offer a range of formative and professional programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. There are also 6 ‘comprehensive’ universities that also offer vocational courses, and 6 ‘universities of technology’, previously known as ‘Technikons’, which offer mostly undergraduate courses in vocational and professional programmes (CHE, 2015, p. 99). There are now almost a million students attending public universities – double the number registered in 1994, when South Africa became a democracy (CHE, 2016, p. 6).

Although the higher education sector is more unified in some respects than it was in the early 1990s, it is also still marked by racial inequities as far as student success rates go, and disparities in institutional efficiency (CHE, 2016, pp. 5, 6). In 2015, when I conducted most of my interviews, national student protests were occurring around the country. South Africa at the time was experiencing a “negative moment”, which most African postcolonial states have experienced, characterised by fractures in ideas about what ‘blackness’ is (Mbembe, 2015). The very notions of ‘blackness’ and ‘black consciousness’ were fracturing, too (Mbembe, 2015). At such a time, history shows, there is a need to demythologise the history of the nation (e.g. by removing statues of people who arguably did more harm than good), to

demythologise whiteness, and to demythologise public spaces – the latter being inseparable from the democratisation of access, and decolonisation of the classroom (Mbembe, 2015).

Once Nelson Mandela was released in 1990, there was an understanding that an ANC government would eventually have to break away from the legacy of colonialism and apartheid by changing social relations such that access to resources changed too (Lange, 2014, p. 6). In particular, the call for ‘decolonising the classroom’, which grew enormously at the time of writing this thesis, is strongly linked to issues of language and linguistic identity. Articles on local news websites, such as Menon in *The Conversation* (2015), called for attention to be paid to both the medium of instruction and the content of syllabi in South African universities. The languages of post-colonial South Africa are English and Afrikaans – and in other African universities, English, French and Portuguese – with the discourse of the university inaccessible to most African people, resulting in a “linguistic curtain that shut the people out” (Mamdani, 1993, p. 11). This state of affairs, and even the very notion of formal education, was the result of a historical process that began with colonisation (Mamdani, 1993, p. 11). Still today, commentators have noted that South African universities tend to emulate “the likes of Harvard and Oxford” in both their form and function (Kamanzi, *Daily Maverick*, 28 April, 2016).

Williams, De Rassenfosse, Jensen and Marginson (2013) provide an insight into the standing of the South African HE sector, according to some selected variables, at least. They ranked the performance of 48 countries’ higher educational systems, using 20 variables. These variables were grouped into four broad categories: Resources (public and private expenditure on teaching and research), Environment (diversity of type, policy and regulatory regime), Connectivity (with the rest of society and other nations), and Output (research performance, participation rates, graduate levels, with an acknowledgement that no global measure of teaching quality exists). South Africa comes 44th out of 48 countries, with the top five being the United States, Sweden, Canada, Finland and Denmark. The compilers of this list do note that they omitted many poorer countries from Africa and Latin America, since they “cannot expect their systems to reach the levels of our top-ranked countries” (Williams, et al., 2013, p. 10). While one might bridle at the ‘us and them’ dichotomy, it is difficult to argue with the analysts’ claim that to do well, a country’s HE system needs a favourable environment, as well as connections with HE institutions in other countries and adequate funding (Williams, et al., 2013). The South African HE system, then, is not

perceived as particularly good in these respects. Later in this thesis, the notion of ranking is raised again, as students refer to the QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) international ranking of universities. While four South African universities – University of Cape Town, University of Witwatersrand (Wits), Stellenbosch University and University of Pretoria – have done well according to these criteria, it appears that teaching and learning factors, such as staff-student ratios, are generally not perceived as strong in local institutions, while research and reputation are strong elements (CHE, 2016, p. 224).

However, there are certain kinds of problems that exist globally in higher education, two of these being problems with access and equity (Dhunpath and Vithal, 2014, p. 4) and in South Africa particularly, the higher education sector is troubled in this regard too. Its performance is described as “not meeting national needs” (Scott, Yeld and Hendry, 2007, p. 19). In 2012, the rates at which young people were participating in higher education in the country were still skewed along racial lines: only 16% of 20- to 24-year-old black people were enrolled in higher education institutions, compared to 14% ‘Coloured’, 47% Indian, and 55% white people in the same age group (CHE, 2016, p. 68). Throughput rates by race for three-year degrees, with the year of first enrolment being 2008, show that by 2013, 55% of black students had graduated, but 45% had dropped out; 51% of ‘Coloured’ students had graduated, while 49% had dropped out; 61% of Indian students had graduated, while 39% had dropped out, and 65% of white students had graduated while 35% had dropped out (CHE, 2015, p. 63). Excluding the University of South Africa, which offers distance education, in the main degree programmes fewer than 30% of all students, and fewer than 15% of black students graduate in regulation time (Scott, 2014, p. 29).

Internationally, differentiation of higher education institutions is seen as desirable (Singh, 2008, p. 245). However, at the time of the first democratic elections in 1994, SA’s higher education field was divided in multiple ways, with an “overwhelming panoply of exclusionary differentiation” (Singh, 2008, p. 253): for example, into universities and technikons (the latter providing vocational training), urban versus rural locations, and further divided on the basis of race and language. After 1994, a long-term strategy was needed to begin addressing the resultant problems. Even many years after democracy, gaps in quality and capacity exist, meaning that plans for any new kinds of differentiation need to be thought through very carefully (Singh, 2008, p. 261).

And from 1994 onwards, although the government's ideology changed, the social structures generally did not, due to what Soudien (2012) calls the "obdurate social topography articulated by race and class" (p. 168). The higher educational system remains uneven, with historically black universities (HBUs) particularly plagued by funding and staffing problems (Bozalek and Boughey, 2012). Fort Hare is an HBU, and as such was seen under the apartheid system as producing graduates who could contribute to a segregated labour force (Bozalek and Boughey, 2012, p. 691). They were also constrained in their spending and in the programmes they could offer, whereas historically white universities were not (Bozalek and Boughey, 2012, p. 691). This way of functioning continues to impact HBUs many years after the system of apartheid ended.

In the course of writing this thesis, the #FeesMustFall movement developed and grew, becoming an important part of the context of higher education in South Africa. Coming to the fore in 2015, it comprised protests and disruptions intermittently throughout the country, continuing until the time of completing this thesis at the end of 2016. Analysts have pointed out that South Africa's wealth, and the benefits that come with it, are concentrated heavily in the top 20 per cent of the population, which of course has enormous implications for access to higher education (Hall, 2016). The government has increased its spending on its loan scheme for students, from R1.3-billion in 1996 to R9-billion in 2014, but the amount awarded per needy student is below the cost of study (CHE, 2016, p. 8). South Africa's system of funding higher education is therefore unfair, and unsustainable, and, experts warn, "until the financial causes are addressed, the crisis will continue to escalate, with significant long-term consequences" (Hall, 2016). It seems that South Africa, like many countries, will have to make major structural changes to its higher education system in order to meet both student demands and the future needs of its economy (Hall, 2016).

1.2.1 School education

It is important to acknowledge the troubled schooling system in South Africa, since most students in the university system emerge directly from South African schools. After democracy, it was realised that students who had been characterised as 'underprepared' would soon constitute the majority of students at university (Boughey, 2007, p. 7). The imbalances in the school system, ranging from poorly resourced schools to poor career guidance, caused by the country's history of apartheid (Case, 2013, p. 7; Pym and Kapp,

2011, p. 2), continue to exist twenty years later. In fact, the South African schooling system has been accused of performing “abysmally” (Bloch 2009, p. 10).

In 1990, schools that had been for white children only were allowed to admit black learners. These schools were known as ‘Model C’ schools: a term that is still widely used to refer to historically advantaged schools despite new legislation that eradicates the old models and associated nomenclature (McKenna, 2004a, p. 160). ‘Model C’ schools are seen as places of excellent learning, but are situated in largely white suburbia with largely white teachers (Bloch, 2009, p. 130). Most Fort Hare students – the focus of this study – attended former Department of Education and Training schools (DET) schools. These were, under apartheid, meant solely for black pupils and were purposefully under-resourced (Hendricks and Quinn, 2000, p. 450).

The South African government describes its own basic education system as one of the weakest in Africa (DHET, 2011, p. 25), and this problematic schooling system, from which many potential students emerge unprepared for university education, means that the quality of teaching and learning at HE institutions in this country is “severely compromised” (Carrim and Wangenge-Ouma, 2012, p. 13). Yet problematic schooling is only part of the problem, as the entire South African education system is inequitable.

1.3 Specific context: University of Fort Hare

The specific context of the study is the Alice campus of the University of Fort Hare (UFH), which is situated in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. UFH has two other campuses, one in the nearby town of Bhisho, and one in the small city of East London. However, the plan is that Alice is to remain the largest campus, with nearly two-thirds of its students in residence (UFH, 2009, p. 46). Universities in remote rural areas such as Alice tend not to be among the high-performing institutions in the country. They are, for example, less likely to attract highly qualified staff than their urban counterparts, while the best qualified school leavers also tend to be attracted to urban areas (Bozalek and Boughey, 2012, p. 692). The location of many SA universities overlaps with unequal income distributions, meaning that universities in rural areas, which are largely poor, draw their students from those same areas, and such students often struggle to pay fees (CHE, 2016, p. 69). In the past, such rural areas were the most disadvantaged in terms of racialised inequalities (Hendricks, 2004, p. 110). Even in

contemporary times, rural children often have nothing to read, and community libraries are rare (Hendricks, 2013, p. 2). On top of this, such rural universities themselves tend to be historically disadvantaged (CHE, 2016, p. 69). Many Fort Hare students grew up in the poor, rural areas of the Eastern Cape. Alice is a fairly typical small town servicing a large rural area with an under-developed economy (Aspire, 2011, p. iv). Only 8% of its working-age population is employed – but this is at least partly due to the large percentage of students living in Alice (Aspire, 2011, p. 2). It has poor infrastructure, a very limited number of high-income employment opportunities, and the retail and service businesses cater for a low-income market (Aspire, 2011, p. 8). Even the streets are poorly maintained and badly lit, with inadequate security, meaning that the potential to develop an active student night-life is constrained (Aspire, 2011, p. 8).

Founded in 1916, UFH has had a turbulent history, and publicly admits that it is “still some way from being the financially stable and academically excellent institution its stakeholders envision” (UFH, 2009, p. 16), while many of the 5500 students registered on the Alice campus come from poor socio-economic backgrounds (UFH, 2009, p. 20). And as an HBU (historically black university), Fort Hare is one of those that “tend to be constructed in especially negative ways because of poor throughput, graduation and success rates” (Bozalek and Boughey, 2012, p. 698).

Yet students at Fort Hare, as far back as 1960, rejected the ethnic identities assigned to them by the apartheid government “in favour of a self-proclaimed, universal Black identity” (Johnson, 2014, p. 39). Years later, when its first black vice-chancellor, Sibusiso Bengu, was appointed in 1991, he declared in his inaugural address, “The University will pull out all the stops to stimulate the growth of Black intellectuals... [and] make bold interventions to stimulate the growth of the Black intellectual” (Bengu, 1991, in Johnson, 2014).

Fort Hare is well-known in South Africa and internationally for its rich history. Nelson Mandela, Robert Mugabe, and Oliver Tambo (president of the African National Congress for many years) are alumni, among many other African leaders. Pointing out that Fort Hare both influenced South African history, and was influenced *by* that history, Massey (2010) outlines several possible reasons for its role as a “hotbed of nationalism, producing political leaders throughout Southern Africa” (p. 243). One reason could be that for decades, it was one of the few places where black South African students could pursue higher education

(Massey, 2010, p. 242). Other reasons could include the politicising that some students experienced in the mission boarding schools they attended in the 1960s and 1970s; the history of apartheid and segregation itself; and even the geographical location of Fort Hare. The Eastern Cape is a region with a “complex and often radical political tradition” (Massey, 2010, p. 244). In 1990, ‘Bantu education’ – named after the Bantu Education Act which enforced racially segregated education – ended at Fort Hare, and Oliver Tambo was appointed chancellor (Underprotest.net). He commented that Fort Hare has always been “a site of epic battles between forces of democracy and those opposed to it” (Underprotest.net).

Recently, the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) divided the 22 contact universities in South Africa into three clusters, named ‘red’, ‘blue’ and ‘green’ according to particular input and output variables (CHET, 2010). UFH was classed as a ‘green’ university, i.e. formerly disadvantaged (CHET, 2010), but with the potential to move into either the ‘red’ (high research output) group or the ‘blue’ (providing access and job-oriented qualifications for poor South Africans) (Bozalek and Boughey, 2012, p. 697). This classification occurred after UFH published its strategic plan for 2009 – 2016, so it is unsurprising that its ‘green’ status is not mentioned in this plan. Instead, the university’s main goal is expressed as “positioning Fort Hare as a first choice university and as a learning community for staff and students” (UFH, 2009, p. 31). In terms of quantity of research output, Fort Hare sits roughly in the middle, with an average of 0.39 ‘units’ published per staff member in 2009, improving to 0.72 in 2013 (CHE, 2015, p. 98). While not much is said about current teaching and learning practices in the strategic plan, one short sentence tucked into a section on the strategic development of its campuses is particularly meaningful: “In addition there should be a focus on improving undergraduate teaching and learning” (UFH, 2009, p. 45).

Muller (2001, p. 13) developed a matrix describing the general kinds of institutional responsiveness shown by South African universities to the pressures of policies and the market, while noting that no single institution can be said to fit *completely* into one category of the matrix. The two main characteristics mapped by the matrix are intellectual capital and managerial capital. Using Muller’s matrix, together with the agendas and minutes of Fort Hare Senate meetings from 2009 to 2013, Johnson (2014, p. 346) concludes that Fort Hare generally fits into the “domain-protecting” part of the matrix. This means that the university’s management can be described as being resistant to change, and over-

accommodating of internal interests (Johnson, 2014). Political struggles between the various trade unions on campus, plus relationships based on patronage, have hindered both UFH's intellectual revival and its efforts to implement an efficient corporate culture (Johnson, 2014, p. 348).

Given the above scenario, one could be justified in describing the context of Fort Hare as a university struggling to improve in nearly every facet, in an educational sector that is also contending with manifold problems. The current vice-chancellor of Fort Hare, Dr Mvuyo Tom, notes the challenges that faced the university in 2009: striving for academic excellence; an inadequately resourced higher education sector; equity and access challenges; and the quality of schooling (Tom, in Massey, 2010, p. 256).

1.4 Reading

Since one of the practices vital to studying is reading, much research has been carried out into children's language competencies, reading practices, and writing abilities.

One of the main differences between the market for books in the industrialised North and other parts of the world is the balance between textbooks and supplementary reading materials. In the majority of classrooms across Africa, textbooks are the main learning resources: often the *only* learning resources (Edwards and Ngwaru, 2010). One of the defining characteristics of the children's book publishing industry across Africa is the very heavy dependence on the schools market. South Africa is no exception, and 74% of all locally published books are aimed at the schools market (Edwards and Ngwaru, 2010, p. 7). Of course, this begs a question about root causes. While there are many contributing elements, the result is that most children in South Africa do not have books available for leisure reading, which is fundamental to a sound education (Edwards, 2013, p. 2). There is evidence from across the world, provided by the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) 2009 survey, that teenagers from poor backgrounds read less than those from more affluent families (OECD, 2010, p. 96).

The Systemic Evaluation of Intermediate Phase learners conducted in 2005 showed that 63% of the South African pupils surveyed had not achieved the language competence needed in their grade. This is perhaps not surprising when it is taken into account that the school system to a large extent does not promote reading and still strongly relies on oral modes of

information transmission, as well as on rote learning and the verbatim recall of information that children might not often fully understand (Pretorius, 2003, p. 105).

It was this 2005 result, among others, that led to the Department of Education unveiling a National Reading Strategy in 2008, which focuses on primary school education with the aim of helping to ensure that all children can read basic texts by the end of Grade 3. Some of the challenges listed in the document outlining the strategy include the lack of well-stocked school libraries; many homes and classrooms containing no books at all; and the lack of books published in African languages (Department of Education, 2008, p. 4). These challenges were of particular interest to me, as I expected that my own interviewees would mention them as constraining circumstances in their own development as readers.

A careful re-reading of the National Reading Strategy, though, reveals a frustrating lack of precise goals. There is no way to measure the effectiveness of the strategy; and no time frame for implementation. A few years later, the 2013 Annual National Assessment (ANA) of South African children in Grades 1 to 6 and Grade 9 in public schools reveal that the average score for First Additional Language assessment for learners in Grades 4, 5, 6 and 9 was 41%, while the Home Language average score was 52% (Department of Basic Education, 2013). Although there were small improvements in the results since the 2012 assessment, the poor results are alarming. The 2016 revised strategic plan does not mention previous plans and strategies, such as the 2008 National Reading Strategy. However, Basic Education minister Angie Motshekga revealed a new Read to Lead Campaign that aims to ensure that “by 2019, all learners are able to demonstrate age appropriate levels of reading” (Department of Basic Education, 2016, p. 5). She also described the “1 000 School Libraries per year Project” that was launched in schools that had space for libraries (Department of Basic Education, 2016, p. 5).

With a troubled school system, it is unsurprising that the sector of higher education in South Africa is “not well-prepared for meeting contemporary South African needs” (Scott, 2014, p. 27). The problems are systemic, meaning that they lie in key areas of the higher education system itself, namely, “its assumptions, curricular frameworks and teaching practices” (Scott, 2014, p. 33).

This premise of this thesis, then, is that it is vital that students frequently engage in reading, and that it is helpful to educators to understand those reading practices. With this in mind, I hoped to discover what processes constrain or enable some Fort Hare students' reported academic reading practices. Since identity is central to literacy practices, I also planned to conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis of interview transcripts to better understand the link between the students' identities and these practices.

The editors of *Reading Research Quarterly* call for further understanding of literacy and its characteristics, pointing out that there is still "so much to learn about reading and writing" both inside and outside of educational institutions (Neuman and Gambrell, 2013, p. 6). Hoping to understand some aspects of literacy as practised in my place of work, the two research questions governing this study were:

1. What mechanisms, in the form of Discourses, constrain or enable the emergence of Fort Hare students' reported academic reading practices?
2. What do the Discourses used by Fort Hare students reveal about their identities both as members of the academic community and outside the academic community?

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the problems and challenges inherent in the field of higher education, as these form the background against which research was carried out. Some of these problems and challenges, such as poverty, the history of apartheid, and poor schooling, were mentioned by interviewees, so are picked up again in later chapters.

Chapter Two and Three continue by reviewing some of the literature on New Literacy Studies and the notion of 'academic literacy', reading and identity. Chapter Four outlines the method and methodology used in this thesis, while Chapters Five, Six and Seven form the heart of the analysis. Chapter Eight concludes by presenting an outline of the major arguments.

Chapter Two: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

Beginning with a discussion of New Literacy Studies (NLS) and its precepts, the chapter continues by looking at one of the key concepts developed by NLS theorists, namely, ‘academic literacy’. Since acquiring a new literacy involves adopting a new identity, in the NLS view, it seems artificial to look at these two strongly interlinked concepts of literacy and identity separately. However, for the sake of clarity, that is what I have done, so ‘identities’ is discussed in the following chapter.

2.2 New Literacy Studies

By the time I had taught for five years in the Communication Department at the University of Fort Hare, I was used to hearing lecturers comment, “Students don’t read”. This view seems to be commonly held by lecturers about students generally, and Fort Hare students in particular. For several years, I assumed that this lack of reading – and little else – was to blame for my students’ apparent lack of essay-writing ability. If only you would read more, I told students, your English, and therefore your writing, is sure to improve.

My own research subsequently taught me that my assumptions were typical of the ‘autonomous’ view of literacy – so named by one of the leaders of the New Literacy Studies (NLS) movement (Street, 1984, p. 1). The autonomous view sees language as a neutral conduit, separate from meaning making. It is based on the assumption that literacy in itself, autonomously, will affect other social and cognitive practices, and in this way obscures the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it (Street, 2009, p. 23). This was a strong view held by influential academics such as anthropologist Jack Goody, classicist Walter Ong, and psychologist David R Olson, who all seemed to regard alphabetic literacy as underpinning crucial cognitive and social differences (Brandt and Clinton 2002, p. 339). Ong (1982, in Prinsloo and Breier, 1996) in particular claimed that writing has the ability to restructure thought, and expands the potential of language beyond measure. This view, often held by those with good intentions, includes the idea that introducing literacy to poor people would naturally lead to these people improving their economic circumstances and make

them better citizens, regardless of the conditions that contributed to their ‘illiteracy’ in the first place (Street, 2003, p. 77).

Some views of literacy are often accompanied by a conscious or unconscious desire to marginalise others. The autonomous view of literacy, for example, disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it, making them appear universal and neutral (Street 2009, p. 23). This autonomous model is part of a “powerful discourse”, which rationalises student failures and maintains that language ability, and reading/listening skills, are central, and so decoding the encoded concepts are all that students need to succeed (McKenna, 2004a, p. 3). Street (2003) points out that this is akin to Paulo Freire’s depiction of the ‘banking’ model of education – the notion that a context-free set of skills can be imparted to children regardless of cultural knowledge (p. 84). Generally, those who adhere to the ‘autonomous view’ make grand claims about the significance of the ability to read and write, and polarise the oral and literate modes (Street and Lefstein, 2007, p. 115-123). Assuming a direct link between being a competent academic writer and a competent reader (and vice versa, as in my case, that it was because they were poor readers that my students were by definition poor writers) is characteristic of such an autonomous view of literacy (Thomson, 2008, p. 88).

Yet there is another, ‘ideological’ view of literacy (Street, 1984), which I now prefer, and which informs my research. Because this view, emerging from the NLS movement, is central to this thesis, this section of the chapter discusses some of the central notions of the NLS movement, beginning with an explanation of the ‘ideological’ view of literacy, and tracing the studies that have been influential in the field, from Scollon and Scollon (1981), to Scribner and Cole (1981), Heath (1983), Gee (1990), Street (1984), Barton and Hamilton (1998).

According to the ‘ideological’ view of literacy, the meaning of ‘literacy’ and the meaning given to literacy practices depend on the social institutions in which the practices are embedded (Street, 1984, p. 8). The ideological model of literacy conceives of literacy as a social practice, always entrenched in socially constructed epistemological principles, and so always contested. It is the ideological view that literacy is not separate from its political and social forms; and the processes involved in teaching reading and writing are what construct the meanings of reading and writing, and the ways in which these practices are valued

(Street, 1984, p. 8). This social practices view developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s to challenge the views held by Good, Ong and Olson (Brandt and Clinton, 2002, p. 339).

On one level, thinking about literacy as a social practice can be seen as unremarkable (of course, school is a social construction and literacy is practised in social contexts), yet it is also profound (because that means literacies vary, with important implications for education) (Street, 2003, p. 79). Literacy researchers drawing on the ideological model suspend judgement as to what constitutes literacy for the people they are working with, until they can understand what 'literacy' means to the people themselves, and from which social contexts reading and writing take their meaning (Street, 1996, p. 2-3). Prinsloo and Breier (1996) for instance, present case studies of many different groups of people who might be labelled as 'illiterate' according to the autonomous model, but who actually do engage in literacy practices, dealing with bureaucratic and church documents, among other records and official papers (Street, 1996, p. 3). From a social practice of literacy perspective, what students do are not attributable to skills, but "complex combinations of aspects ... of literacy, some of which students might value and identify with, and some of which they will not" (Ivanič, et al., 2009 p. 92).

NLS developed as part of a movement away from focusing on the individual and instead studying the 'social', and so takes the view that reading and writing need to be studied in the context of the various practices of which they are a part – be they social, cultural, political or economic practices (Gee, 2000a, p. 180). NLS is an interdisciplinary movement, combining work in linguistics, social psychology, anthropology, and education (Gee 1990, p. 49). It is also occasionally referred to as the sociocultural study of literacy (Gee, 2004, p. 91), illustrative of its roots. Fundamental to the NLS movement are concepts of (a) context and (b) eradicating clear distinctions between orality and literacy (Street and Lefstein 2007, p. 173). For example, prominent NLS theorist James Gee (1990, p. 53), looks at early anthropological and linguistic works to point out the dichotomies that were created at one time, from "primitive vs civilised" to "concrete vs abstract" and "orality vs literacy" (where "literacy" means simply the ability to read and write). He critiques these, noting that there is some confusion about what "orality" actually is (p. 55). Street also strongly disagrees with the idea that literate people are somehow more intellectually and culturally advanced than non-literate people (Street, 2003).

2.2.1 Early case studies

One of the earliest works to have a strong impact on NLS was Scollon and Scollon's (1981) *Narrative, literacy and face in interethnic communication*. The authors note that miscommunication had occurred between members of various groups in Alaska and northern Canada which led to frustration, conflict and racial and ethnic stereotyping (p. 11). Aiming to address this problem, they wished to supply three kinds of information: the dynamics of interpersonal communication between members of different ethnic groups; an understanding of discrimination against Alaska Natives to help policymakers; and information about interethnic communication that was aimed at Alaska Natives themselves who want to know more about this field (p. xi-xii). Scollon and Scollon focus on Athabaskan languages and oral performances (p. xii), while examining what literacy is – to the Athabaskans – and its relation to discourses (p. 9). The main problem leading to the miscommunication between the groups, the authors learnt, was not grammar (which “gives the message”), but the discourse system (which “tells how to interpret the message”) (p. 12). The authors conclude by depicting the human communicative system diagrammatically as including a large variety of elements, including discourse patterns, power, self-identity, personality and body placement (p. 196). In this way Scollon and Scollon link discourse, world view, language use, and social epistemologies (Gee, 1990, pp. 62-63), and went on to be highly influential in a number of fields. For instance, their influence is noted in overviews of intercultural communication (such as Kiesling and Paulston, 2008) and interpersonal communication (such as Fussell and Kreuz, 2014). They have also been acknowledged in local and international NLS works, such as Gee (1990), Boughey (2002), and Thomson (2008), among others, and so their work has indirectly influenced mine.

Scribner and Cole's (1981) *The psychology of literacy* also had an impact on the work of many NLS theorists, such as Street (1984; 1994), Gee (1990), Barton and Hamilton (1998) and Brandt and Clinton (2002). In their research into the literacy practices of the West African Vai people, Scribner and Cole found that formal schooling, rather than literacy itself, was the variable that influenced cognition (Kalantzis and Cope, 2012, p. 338). Scribner and Cole introduced the idea that there are many forms of literacy, each linked to a different domain of practice (Pahl and Rowsell 2012, p. 9). They therefore hold a ‘social practice’ view of literacy, but are more strongly influenced by psychological theories than

NLS, which deals with discourse and power and is embedded in social theory (Street and Lefstein 2007, p. 115).

Also strongly influencing NLS was Heath's (1983) *Ways with words*, in which the author investigated children's language acquisition and use. Street and Lefstein (2007) describe this work as "probably the earliest of the social studies of literacy, and certainly one of the most influential" (p. 240). Heath carried out an ethnographic study from 1969 to 1978 in the Piedmont Carolinas, mostly in two small working class communities. In neither case did the community's ways with the written word adequately prepare their children for school (Heath, 1983, p. 235), whereas the middle class children to whom she later compared the working class children were taught how to talk about printed material, and how to negotiate meaning in book-reading before they themselves read (Heath, 1983, p. 256). One of Heath's findings was that patterns of language use in any community are in accordance with, and reinforce, other cultural patterns, such as group loyalties, and problem-solving techniques. *Ways with words* also corroborates aspects of Scribner and Cole's work, as Heath provides further evidence of the diversity of literacy, and challenges the oral-literate divide (Brandt and Clinton 2002, p. 339).

Street's (1984) ideological view of literacy, influenced by Heath (1983) and Scribner and Cole (1981), became one of the premises of the New Literacy Studies movement. It was in 1994 that Street noted that "we can no longer talk about Literacy... Researchers as well as practitioners now refer to 'multiple literacies' (p. 11). This has become a key tenet of NLS: 'literacy' is always "a matter of *literacies*" (Lankshear and Knobel 2011, p. 32) because literacy practices vary, depending on context (Street, 2003, p. 77). This has an important bearing on my thesis, which investigates students' social practices of reading, both as part of their 'academic literacy', and as part of other kinds of literacies.

Adherents of NLS also often refer to Gee's (1990/1996) work, *Social linguistics and literacies*, with its focus on "situated meanings in language and education", and Barton and Hamilton's (1998) *Local literacies* (Pahl and Rowsell 2006, p. 1). Gee (1990) maintains that the focus of literacy studies should not be on language, or even traditional forms of literacy, but rather on social practice (1990, p. 137) because literacies emerge from such practices. This belief underlies Gee's position that any useful definition of literacy has to be couched in terms of Discourse (p. 153), which is discussed further in later chapters.

Barton and Hamilton's (1998, 2012) *Local literacies* also contributed to changing the direction of literacy research with its emphasis on local contexts and cultures that give literacy its meaning (Brandt, 2011, in Barton and Hamilton, 2012). Their three-year ethnographic study regards literacy practices as both situated in a particular community, and linked to broader social patterns. The context of the research, conducted mostly in 1990, was 'Springside', a fictional name for a real neighbourhood in the largely white, working-class town of Lancaster in England (Barton and Hamilton, 2012). Part of seeing literacy as a social practice is to note the ways in which literacy practices are influenced by power relationships and institutions (Barton and Hamilton 2000, p. 8), and the 'Springside' research certainly does this, locating various literacy practices firmly within the relationships and institutions of the neighbourhood.

Barton and Hamilton (2000) produce a table in which they list the important themes associated with the idea of literacy as a social practice (p. 8). I have presented these themes as numbered points that are illustrated in their study:

1. Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices, which can be inferred from events that are mediated by written texts. For example, someone reading a recipe while making an evening meal is engaged in a literacy event that has particular practices associated with it.

This point is illustrated frequently in Barton and Hamilton's study, such as meetings of the local Allotment Association (p. 214); two men who met once a week to discuss the local newspaper and occasionally compose letters to the editor (p. 82; and a woman filling in a multitude of forms after a burglary (p. 233) – to mention just a few.

2. Different literacies are associated with different domains. This means that people have varied sorts of literacy practices tied to particular areas of their lives, which they select from and switch between.

Hamilton (2012) identify the domains in their study as being households, neighbourhoods, communities, and the various institutions in them, such as schools, families, and religions (p. 9).

3. Literacy practices are influenced by power relationships and institutions, so that some literacies are more dominant and visible than others.

This is exemplified in *Local literacies* by the story of a student researching betting shop literacy in Lancaster, who found that he could not learn anything about the practice simply by entering a shop and observing what occurred, as there were no obvious instructions about what to do (p. 281).

4. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social and cultural practices.

This was particularly evident when the authors explored ‘meetings literacies’, noting what texts were used, what people did with them, and what these actions revealed (pp. 215-216).

5. Literacy practices change and new ones often acquired through “informal learning and sense making”.

While many residents benefited from using a range of networks to attain information, support and various kinds of social action, networks can be “constraining as well as supportive”, as they exclude and control (Barton and Hamilton, 2012, p. 16).

6. Literacy is historically situated, so practices change over time.

Looking back at their 1990 research experiences, the authors note, “It was that point in time, that brief window in history, when a word processor was used for the local newsletter, but it was treated as if it were just a typewriter” (pp. 55-56). An understanding of the social practices that are described in this work thus depends on understanding the history of the place, and of the time (Barton and Hamilton, 2012, p. 56).

The points above delineate the ways in which reading and writing can be characterised as social practices, and so have guided my thinking about students’ reading practices too.

When the time came to plan interviews for my own study, it was important for me to include questions about interviewees’ reading and the ways in which it links to various events, domains, institutions (from formal educational institutions to informal friendship networks), power relationships, social contexts and historical changes.

Writing in the new introduction to the 2012 second edition of *Local literacies*, the authors also comment on their work, *Situated literacies* (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič 2000), which

show how qualitative methods and detailed local studies can deepen understandings of literacy by identifying particular practices in various domains (Barton and Hamilton, 2012, p. xix). This is similar to what my own study aimed to do; only my study focused on what students *said* about their reading, and so concentrated on discursive mechanisms that seemed to impact on students' reading practices.

To return to a more general discussion of New Literacy Studies: Gee describes NLS as being part of a "social turn" that many movements in the last decades of the twentieth century took from individual behaviour and cognitivism towards a focus on "interaction and social practice" (Gee 1999c, p. 1). He lists 14 of these areas, from ethnomethodology and conversational analysis to post-structuralist and postmodernist work on discourses (Gee, 2000a, pp. 180-183). As part of this social turn, NLS theorists began to move away from the conception of 'student problems' (Jones, Turner and Street, 1999, p. xv), also known as the 'deficit model'. This model privileges the kinds of literacy practices valued in middle class education, in this way constructing students not inducted in such practices as being deficient (Breier and Sait, 1996, p. 78; Boughey, 2000). In South Africa, when academic development first grew as a field in the 1980s, programmes tended to be rooted in the deficit model (McKenna, 2014, p. 51). More recently, the issue of 'disadvantage' has become a social justice issue, and the majority of academics have realised the futility of continuing to blame the school system. Instead, it has been recognised that educators in the HE sector need to improve whatever aspects of HE they can to increase success rates (McKenna, 2014, p. 52).

Illustrating the NLS point of view about the inadequacy of the deficit model is one of the earliest series of studies in the NLS tradition carried out in South Africa, *The Social Uses of Literacy* (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996), mentioned earlier. Although not focused on a higher educational context, this work was part of the new approach to literacies and looked at how South Africans reflect various reading cultures. Dick (2012, p. 6) says this sort of research, plus records from libraries and media groups, challenges myths that African culture was purely oral, reminiscent of Gee's (1990) critique of the 'orality/ literacy' divide described above. In one of these studies, it was found that people who were unschooled did not necessarily see themselves as lacking, so it is "problematic to describe people without literacy skills as necessarily being in deficit" (Mpoyiye and Prinsloo, 1996, p. 187). Literacy is complicated, with no universal meaning, the authors conclude. Instead, its meaning is embedded in institutional, historical, economic and geographical "sites" (Mpoyiye and

Prinsloo, 1996, p. 194). Literacy classes aimed at adults need to understand the contexts of those adults' situated literacy practices. And in South African higher education particularly – the context of which is sketched in Chapter One – it is vital to move past a discourse of deficit and blame and instead collaborate on improving student retention rates (Clarence, 2011, p. 10).

It is disheartening to note that traces of the deficit model are still to be found, perhaps because it was so widespread for so long. For example, students at one South African university were described fairly recently as facing problems that the author frames as *their* problems, not that of the institution: the students “find their background knowledge to be deficient ... most of them show maladjustment to university living ... they do not work consistently” (Matlou, 2009, pp. 5-6). This quote is not an anomaly, however: a large number of academic practitioners still draw on this ‘deficit’ view (Boughey, 2010, p. 4) and even those working in academic development “continue to cite factors inherent to the individual alone” (p. 6). This particular practice lingers as new lecturers continue to enter the field of academic development and draw on 1980s’ ways of thinking that ‘make sense’ to those who have not been introduced to critical social theory (Boughey, 2010).

In another example of South African adult literacy studies, namely, literacy education classes in one Cape factory in the early 1990s, an important feature of literacy teaching was observed. Researchers note that workers were not encouraged to bring texts to class, nor to discuss issues on their minds (Breier and Sait, 1996). Because of this, acquisition of knowledge happened slowly, if at all. One senior worker, however, devised a way of enabling the workers to understand the relatively complex targets set by management. The authors point out that, similarly, it can be helpful for educators to engage with the everyday communicative practices of the people they are teaching when introducing new concepts (Breier and Sait, 1996, p. 78). This is something I need to bear in mind in my own teaching currently: a point, for example, that has led to my questioning the suitability of some of the readings that I prescribe for my own students.

A volume of NLS studies that calls for an appreciation of the relationship between local and global (Pahl and Rowsell, 2006, p. 5) includes a South African ethnographic study of three girls and their families living in and around Johannesburg (Stein and Slonimsky, 2006). Drawing on the NLS tradition of ethnographic study, the authors also make use of “new

theorisations of literacy as fundamentally multimodal”, noting that each literacy event is a multimodal communicative event (p. 119). The literacy practices of all three families are imbued by the parents’ values, aspirations and ideas about what literacy practices are, and what they are for. The authors conclude their study by expressing their fears for the poorest of the three children, pointing out that freedom and democracy have limited impact when parents cannot afford to feed their children. This study, like Heath’s (1983) work, illustrates how class plays a large part in shaping literacy practice. It also reveals that different socio-economic groups have different literacy practices and that these home literacy practices – as well as wider social realities like income levels – can enable or constrain access to the multiple literacy practices of formal education.

In summary, the above presents the key theoretical point that NLS has contributed to the study of literacy, language and pedagogy. On the other hand, it should be noted in the interests of a balanced approach that the NLS movement has been critiqued on a variety of fronts.

2.3 Critiques of NLS

Heller (2008) criticises NLS for failing to engage with the political, economic and social bases of literacy, arguing:

Until we can provide analyses of why we even bother with the concept of literacy, and why certain kinds of socially situated actors take the positions regarding literacy they do, we cannot fulfil the NLS agenda of understanding how literacy is bound up in the construction of relations of power (p. 64).

Janks (2010), who sees herself as belonging to the ‘critical literacy’ camp rather than the ‘NLS’ camp (evidenced by her criticism of NLS), agrees with Heller. She notes that literacies are not equally valued and do not offer equal access to economic and symbolic capital (p. 119). It is not sufficient to merely document vernacular literacies, she says, maintaining that it is vital to explore the relationship of ‘home’ literacies to more dominant literacies (Janks, 2010, p. 119). However, she does acknowledge that the “best work” done in NLS does explore the notion of social and political relationships to language, and does provide a critical perspective (Janks, 2010, p. 120).

Some earlier NLS studies could be said to fall into the ‘documenting’ camp rather than the ‘mapping relationships’ camp. Barton and Hamilton’s (1998) *Local literacies*, for example, focuses so closely on local practices that their relationships to more dominant practices are difficult to track. However, the point of at least some of these studies is that educationalists began to realise they needed to take account of students’ vernacular literacy when teaching ‘school literacy’ (Street, 1994, p. 15). This was an important breakthrough at the time.

Street and Lefstein (2007) make the point that it is important when investigating literacy practices in ethnography studies to ask what social and semiotic resources the participants bring, and to examine the role of literacy in social differentiation (p. 193). Therefore, to say that NLS scholars as a body have failed to engage with social, political and economic bases of literacy seems to be putting it too strongly. Similarly, Street (2009) asserts that questions about power relationships, resources, and ways of challenging the dominant notions of power should all be part of any literacy programme. And Gee (1990) goes as far as to say everything people say in conversation is a social act, formed to honour the “face demands” of speaker and listener, and so social, cultural and ideological questions of who has more power, who is in ‘my group’ and who is entitled to politeness are all inextricably linked. Literacy has become an inseparable part of capitalism, he maintains (p. 138). Janks herself says that many researchers in the field of academic literacy “work at the interface of access, diversity and power”, citing Ivanič, 1998; and Lillis, 2001, among others (2010, p. 123) – so Heller’s (2008) criticism seems a little harsh. Then again, outlining the insights gained while producing the NLS work *Situated Literacies: Reading and writing in context*, Tusting, Ivanič and Wilson (2000) say that the authors felt they “should be braver – making our attacks on power structures more explicit – particularly with reference to institutional literacies” (p. 212). Perhaps this statement, read in conjunction with Heller’s criticism, indicates that the issue of power sometimes, in some NLS research, is not fully addressed.

While describing themselves as “two admirers of the social-practice paradigm”, Brandt and Clinton (2002, p. 338) also criticise aspects of it, claiming that the paradigm goes too far in granting local contexts the power to set the forms that literacy takes. Instead, they maintain that literacy is *not* entirely produced or reproduced in local practice, but rather contributes to it (p. 353). The authors want to grant literacy the status of a “thing”, an object, and so to replace ‘the literacy event’ as the primary unit of analysis with ‘literacy-in-action’ (p. 349). Brandt has used the concept of the ‘literacy sponsor’ as a way of linking micro and macro

levels of social structure in this regard (p. 349). Sponsors are the agents, whether nearby or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach and model, recruit, or regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy – and gain from it in some way (Brandt, 2001, p. 19). For university students, for example, ‘literacy sponsors’ could be anything from parents to libraries; or from lecturers to educational policy makers. Street and Lefstein (2007) provide a counter-argument to Brandt and Clinton’s critique, when they explain that the terms ‘local’ and ‘global’ are merely heuristics and do not exist in reality (p. 187). (However, some years earlier Street (1994, p. 9) did state that there is a tension between the local and the global, referring to these as the “two dimensions of literacy practice”.) ‘Local’ contexts are never separate and isolated from a larger, international context, so ethnography, for instance, will always take into account ‘the global’ (Street and Lefstein 2007, p. 182). Similarly, my study, although not ethnographic, is an exploration of some of the reported conditions affecting the reading practices of a small group of students in one semi-rural campus. Yet while asking students about those local conditions, I cannot ignore global patterns such as the increasingly high status of English (Hyland 2009, p. 5) and the global changes occurring in the field of Higher Education.

For these reasons, Gee’s (2000a) definition of ‘local’ is useful when discussing what he called ‘the Lancaster School’, a group whose work became a well-known, distinctive approach within NLS (p. 194). Although he does not name the members of this group, it is clear from the context that he is referring to David Barton, Mary Hamilton, Gee himself, and Roz Ivanič, among others. He states that the Lancaster School focuses on local, situated literacies, and says that in this context, ‘local’ takes on a special meaning of being the site at which “people – in tandem with words, deeds, objects, tools, symbols, settings, times, and ways of being, doing, thinking, and valuing” do their work, which includes “projects that flow at them and to them from close and far” (Gee, 2000a, p. 194). I would break this down further to say that the “words, deeds, objects, tools, symbols” and so on are *project elements*, which might themselves “flow at them and to them from close and far”. Gee’s particular, NLS-endorsed meaning of ‘local’ is therefore appropriate for a site-specific study (e.g. the University of Fort Hare) which nevertheless is affected by both the material products (e.g. cell phones; books; computers) and non-material practices (e.g. teaching; parenting; earning a living) from other locales.

There are other critiques to be levelled at the movement which seemed to begin surfacing in the mid-1990s. Street (1996) addresses some of these in the preface to *Social Uses of Literacy*. Yet while reading his comments, I found myself debating the points made by Street. For Street (1996) outlines the criticisms levelled at NLS as falling into three camps: criticisms of “Relativism, Romanticism, and Relevance – the three Rs” (p. 2). Firstly, detractors could accuse the NLS of relativism, saying that it promotes local practices that do not fit with contemporary conditions. But Street says this argument ignores the fact that all genres of literacy are socially and historically constructed, and to focus on access to dominant forms disguises questions about how they came to be, and remain, dominant (p. 4). On the other hand, the dominant forms *remain* dominant. This point raises its head again in the argument between Gee and Snow as described below. And, says Street, the ideological view of literacy is premised on the notion that varying literacy practices are based in power relations and that although the ‘rules’ of formal, schooled literacy appear innocent and ideology-free, these qualities help to disguise the way power is maintained through such literacy (p. 5). The focus is on change, and research based on the ideological view should lead to policy changes, establishing as it does which forms of literacy are important to people and bearing in mind that formal, schooled literacy “will not lead to empowerment, will not facilitate jobs and will not create social mobility”. This kind of literacy is based on the autonomous model (p. 6) and has made it easier for only *some* people to gain power, whereas the ideological model asks for education that deals with social complexity. So the ‘social practices’ approach does not relativise in the sense of judging all literacy as equal; it relativises in the sense of contextualising “policy and educational requirements”.

Next, Street deals with the accusation of Romanticism. Some have accused the ‘social practices’ approach of romanticising local practices by implying that they are free of tensions and contradictions, while suggesting that such practices are rich with opportunities. Not so, says Street, because those taking this approach are not committed to preserving the status quo, but to changing it (p. 6). But – to play devil’s advocate – it is not clear how many interventions and research practices taken by NLS supporters actually effect change, in the form of new policies and institution-wide changes. In South Africa the take-up of NLS has been very patchy.

The last R is for Relevance, since some critics maintain that NLS is not relevant. This criticism emerged from the other criticisms that it is also ‘romantic’ and ‘relativist’. Yet this

last critique is not valid, Street maintains, because research examining the social uses of literacy is “more realistic and grounded” (p. 8) – investigating what people judge as ‘relevant’ for themselves – than programmes that are based on assumptions about what people ‘need’. Street’s point does appear to be the salient one about NLS: its supporters aim to establish how people need to practice literacy, and use that as a starting point for literacy programmes. If only it were a routine approach taken by educators everywhere.

A further dispute occurred when Gee (1999b) took issue with a report written by Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998), about reading difficulties in young children. This gave rise to what has been described as a critical point in the history of literacy (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012, p. 8). This report was produced for the National Academy of Sciences, a US non-profit organisation. Gee describes the report as “an official report to the government” (1999b, p. 357), which was clearly intended to be of strategic importance. I was unable to obtain a complete copy of this report, so have had to rely on the following: an extract of the report by Snow, et al. (1998) in Street and Lefstein (2007); Gee’s original response (1999b); the subsequent debate between Gee (2000) and Snow (2000) in a journal; and a book review by Gredler (2002).

Gredler (2002) describes the report by Snow, et al. (1998) as aiming to help children become better readers, while covering a variety of topics, from the process of reading, to predicting success, preventing reading difficulties before kindergarten, and ways of helping children with reading difficulties. In response, Gee made the point that there was a lack of studies that take a ‘social practices’ view of children’s literacy (1999b). For this reason, he wanted not to critique the report, but to reframe it from an NLS perspective (Gee, 1999b, p. 356). For, as he puts it, reading “always and only occurs within specific practices and genres in the service of some purpose or content” (Gee, 1999b, p. 365).

In the later debate between Snow and Gee, one of Gee’s main points is that public-sphere documents such as the report by Snow, et al. (1998) tend to emphasise technical and individual-type solutions to social problems, rather than exploring issues of social and economic change (Gee, 2000b, p. 122). Snow, however, maintains that the report fully agrees with Gee that an attempt to address children’s school-based literacy struggles should attend to their social conditions first, and that the report does not confine itself to issues of schooling (Snow, 2000, p. 114). This proved to be a caveat to me as I began to construct this

study. It was tempting to rush into questioning individuals about their reading practices. Yet it was vital to keep in mind that such practices are, in the NLS view, *social* practices, and as such rooted in wider social issues, which also need to be discussed.

Gee (2000b, p. 125) also denies Snow's accusation that he, Gee, thinks of NLS as "more moral" or "more authentic" than other approaches, although he concedes that he does think NLS is broader in its scope and connected to language in a different way than that advocated in the report. This point is key to understanding much of Gee's work and that of the NLS generally. His main concern is that the report emphasises the measurement of a certain "social English", i.e. a specific kind of English, fit for certain practices, and *linked to particular identities* (Gee, 2000b, p. 123). He points out that there are other abilities that predict future success in reading, and that he wants to encourage a different perspective than an emphasis on phonemic awareness (Gee, 2000b, p. 124).

Snow makes a particularly stinging point in this debate when she writes that the original report does embrace the NLS position, despite not quoting NLS theorists, and maintains that of course literacy practices are vitally connected to "social, cultural, political and institutional practices", and to claim this is "rather unexceptional" (2000, p. 116). She continues with an acerbic remark about Gee's position and, by implication, New Literacy Studies:

If Gee really wishes to promote the impact of the New Literacies approach, he would do well to invest his time in conducting the sort of empirical research that proponents of phonological awareness have produced, rather than simply arguing for his position as the politically and morally correct one (Snow, 2000, p. 116).

On the contrary, Gee replies, NLS theorists *do* engage in empirical research, but not the "psycholinguistically based laboratory or controlled-classroom research" that Snow seems to regard as vital (Gee, 2000b, p. 125). Instead, NLS theorists take a broader view of what constitutes valid, empirical evidence (p. 126) and he indicates that his view is laid out in *An introduction to discourse analysis: theory and method* (Gee, 1999a, 2005). Presumably his view is summed up in the conclusion of the latter work when he states that discourse analysis is not about achieving abstract understandings, but by dealing with "practical problems in the real world" (Gee, 2005, p. 181).

There is also a theoretical clash, Snow argues, between the NLS and the perspectives of the report, which lies in the inability of NLS “to account for, even to talk sensibly about, development – a failure associated with their unwillingness to accept a view of literacy as involving subskills” (2000, p. 117). Gee and NLS researchers “pretend to be oblivious” to the fact that participating in literacy events is very different for children at different stages of development (Snow, 2000, p. 117). Instead, she argues strongly for a specific, cognitive skills-based recognition of the different ways people participate in literacy events, which should lead to “particular, and differentiated, strategies for supporting the literacy development of those participants, in ways that the New Literacy approach leaves unspecified” (Snow, 2000, p. 118). However, Gee says that NLS theorists do not deny that stages of development play an important role in literacy (2000, p. 126). The whole point of NLS, he says, is that language or literacy in a generic sense does not exist: there are only multiply situated social practices that should be studied *in situ* (Gee, 2000b, p. 126). Linked to this issue is another one about the definition of reading. Snow refutes Gee’s view that the report defines ‘real reading’ as “decoding, word comprehension and literal comprehension” (Snow, 2000, p. 117). Snow says the term is used to contrast with ‘emergent reading’ or ‘literacy knowledge that precedes the capacity to decode’ and that it certainly is not the end point of literacy acquisition, but that there does exist a point at which a child is ‘really reading’ while being unable to read certain texts independently. This is because he/she is not yet at the point of development when he/she can “control the process of forming phonological representations based on print” (and not because of a lack of access to school-based discourse) (Snow, 2000, p. 118). Gee counters by saying that he did not take a position on the issue, but was simply suggesting that it was potentially problematic to take a set of skills and label it ‘real reading’ without examining the role of language in social situations and the way children’s identities and values are at stake in those situations (2000, p. 127).

Despite the Snow and Gee’s strongly worded argument, Snow concludes by saying that the recommendations of the original report (1998) have something in common with Gee’s work, as they are carefully compiled with a view to reducing school failure and improving the lot of people who are poor and disenfranchised, which is Gee’s interest too (Snow, 2000, p. 119).

The earlier two points – about whether there is such a thing as ‘real reading’ and NLS’s contention that what is important is to understand and acknowledge a variety of social practices – link to two larger concerns about the NLS approach. The first is that NLS could be accused of ‘knowledge blindness’ (Maton, 2013). It fails to see the power that the structure of the knowledge itself has on the form of literacy practices.

This point about ‘knowledge blindness’ came up again when I read the following argument by Street. He contends that while ‘literacy practices’ is a term suitable for research, it is important to use the plural form of ‘literacies’ when discussing strategy and policy, to avoid ‘autonomous view’ assumptions that literacy is the same anywhere and can be simply transplanted from one context to another (Street, 2003, p. 80). While I agree with him in this regard, his subsequent point gave me pause for thought. The implications for education, he says, is that pedagogical models, plus curricula and assessment, need to take into account the complex and varied nature of literacy practices (p. 84). Teachers need to give value to learners’ various home literacies (p. 85). However, as a result of the focus of NLS on out-of-school literacy, “many teachers and theorists are armed with cogent historical and political analyses of literacy but do not possess the research methodology they need to study what is most effective in practice” (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener, 2004, p. 80). Also, giving value to a home-based literacy practice in a formal educational setting could lead to confusion if not done with great care. In other words, in academia, there are powerful understandings of how knowledge is constructed, which means that essays, theses and proofs are required to take certain forms. There is no such thing as ‘anything goes’.

The other concern, despite Street’s (1996) endeavour to dispute the point, is that literacy research could fall into the postmodern camp and so could be seen to be entirely relativist – where all literacy practices are seen to be socially constructed and therefore ever-changing and relative. In other words, the ontological character of literacy practices has been ill-defined. However, I will take a realist position, influenced by Fairclough, which is discussed further in Chapter Four.

It is clear from the above that New Literacy Studies is not without its flaws. Yet it offers a framework for understanding literacy practices as ideologically laden and socially embedded, in a way that is free from patronising undertones and middle-class bias. As such, NLS is extremely useful to analyse the literacy practices of students, and to begin to

understand the mechanisms affecting students' academic reading practices – with the ultimate aim of helping students achieve academic literacy.

2.4 Academic literacy

Globally, the growing concern with diversity and access to higher education has been accompanied by debates on literacy and language (Lillis and Scott, 2007, p. 8). The NLS framework dominates research into literacy (Thomson, 2008, p. 59), while 'academic literacy' is a notion which developed from the NLS movement (Lea and Street, 2000, p. 33), and which sees academic literacy as one of the many kinds of literacy that exist. The development of academic literacy should be one of the outcomes of all university courses if curricula are underpinned by the view that learning is socially constructed and knowledge is contested, negotiated and changing (Quinn, 1999, p. 112). Because academic literacy is therefore a concept that is fundamental to my study, it is discussed and explored at some length in this section.

There are numerous examples to be found of successful academic development efforts that follow the 'academic literacy' model (after Lea and Street, 2000), and some which explicitly address reading practices. The way the field of Academic Literacies research has developed in the UK is similar to the way it has developed in South Africa, but differs from the US in two aspects. In the UK, it has developed specifically in the field of academic disciplines accompanied by empirical observation; whereas in the US it tends to emerge from 'writing spaces' (such as composition classes and the teaching of rhetoric) and transformation remains at the theoretical level (Lillis and Scott, 2007, p. 13). However, indications are that this is changing. WAC (writing across the curriculum) programmes began in the 1980s and by 2012 over half of US colleges and universities had such programmes (Condon and Rutz, 2012, p. 364). The University of Minnesota adapted the ideas successfully to become what they call a Writing-Enriched Curriculum (WEC) project, which recognises that different disciplines require different kinds of writing and inevitably leads to curriculum reform (Condon and Rutz, 2012, p. 376). While the WAC and WEC initiatives do not seem to fall precisely into the Academic Literacy camp – developing as they did in a different time and place, and *not* including notions of identity – there are similarities, as can be seen in the discussion below on AL's emphasis on discipline-specific skills.

Reading and writing practices incorporating academic language is “one family of literacy practices” (Gee, 2004, p. 91). To achieve academic literacy is to master discipline-specific “norms, values and conventions for *reading and writing* as a means of exploring and constructing knowledge in HE” (Jacobs 2005, p. 485, my emphasis). However, it is important to note that academic literacy does not comprise a neutral, unproblematic set of skills, but a multi-faceted, complex and contested set of social practices (Ivanič, 1998, p. 109) – one of which is reading. Researching academic literacy should include an exploration of “the constellation of literacy events” in which students engage (Ivanič, 1998, p. 63), because language is never seen in isolation. Instead, in the NLS framework, literacy is viewed as “actions around events” (p. 62). As an aside, it is interesting to note that what must be one of the first examples of a course with an ‘academic literacy’ slant was developed at Flinders University of South Australia in the 1980s for adults who were returning to formal education. Its explicit aim was to develop academic literacy, as students wanted “initiation, not remediation” (Beasley, 1988, p. 50). The module was perceived as successful, revealing that educators need to be clear about what ‘academic literacy’ means and how it can be developed (p. 52).

It should be noted at this point that ‘literacy events’ and ‘literacy practices’ are concepts central to literacy research (Brandt and Clinton, 2002, p. 342; Pahl and Rowsell, 2012, p. 4). Heath’s *Ways with words* (1983) focused on literacy events – where writing is part of an occasion, part of an interaction and its interpretation – but Street expanded this concept into ‘literacy practices’, which is both broader and more abstract, to include both the behaviour of reading and writing and the “social and cultural conceptualisations” giving meaning to their uses (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996, p. 18). Literacy events are therefore particular instances of the use of reading and writing (Ivanič, et al., 2009, p. 21); “observable actions or groups of actions in which text plays a role” (p. 20), such as paying bills (Purcell-Gates, et al., 2004, p. 32); whereas ‘literacy practices’ are the ways of using reading and writing which people draw upon in a literacy event (Hamilton, Barton, and Ivanič, 1994, p. viii). The notion of ‘literacy practices’ extends the idea of literacy events, referring to habitual ways of doing things with texts (Ivanič, et al., 2009, p. 21). Clark and Ivanič (1997) explain that they prefer to talk about writing ‘practices’ to talking about ‘skills’, in order to emphasise the social nature of writing, stating that practices are “not just what people do, but what they make of what they do, and how it constructs them as social subjects” (p. 82). Practices are culturally conditioned, including not only physical behaviour like going to the

library, but also making linguistic and discursal choices (Ivanič, et al., 2009, p. 83). My thesis focuses on literacy practices too; in particular, students' perceptions of the mechanisms that constrain and enable their reading practices. This is in the hope that understanding such mechanisms will enable me to help my students achieve academic literacy.

Lea and Street (2000, p. 33) describe the academic literacy approach as one of three approaches that are commonly taken to study student learning, with each reflecting a different theoretical and ideological position on the concept of 'literacy'. The other two are the 'study skills' approach and the 'academic socialisation' approach. Rather than being a discrete set of skills that educators might move through in a linear way, these approaches encapsulate each other (Clarence, 2011, p. 2). Firstly, the 'study skills' approach regards literacy as a "set of atomised skills which students have to learn" (Lea and Street, 2000, p. 34). Any difficulties that the students encounter in this regard are seen as problems that need to be fixed, with the ultimate goal being surface correctness of writing. Secondly, the 'academic socialisation' model, on the other hand, focuses on the need to immerse students into the new culture of academia. But in this model, issues of institutional practices, change and power are under-theorised (Lea and Street, 2000, p. 35), and it is assumed that students simply need to learn the necessary norms and practices and they will have access to the whole institution. Gee (2004) points out that while academic language is acquired at school, it is facilitated at home "by families with a good deal of mainstream educational and cultural capital" (p. 91). Many University of Fort Hare students do not come from such backgrounds.

This model also does not consider the extent to which such norms are *hegemonic* and exclusionary. The notion of hegemony, as espoused by Gramsci, has had a bearing on the work of prominent NLS theorists, such as Clark and Ivanič (1997), sociolinguists such as Rampton (2006) and discourse theorists such as Fairclough (1995b). Indeed, Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis "combines a Bakhtinian theory of genre (in analysis of discourse practice) and a Gramscian theory of hegemony (in analysis of sociocultural practice)" (1995b, p. 2). Fairclough (1989, p. 49) explains Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony as being "a form of social domination in which the dominant or *hegemonic* group (actually a dominant class and those associated with it) wins the consent or at least acquiescence of other groups to the practices and ideologies which constitute its domination". Hegemony is useful in analysing orders of discourse (Fairclough, 2003, p. 207) and sociocultural analysis

needs to address issues such as power relations that “underlie the emergence and continuity of particular discourse types” (Fairclough 1995a p. 78). Critical ways of thinking aim to free people from hegemony and enable them to examine the structures of society, and to see how educational systems privilege some and disadvantage others in overt and covert ways (Boughey, 2010, p. 5). It is crucial to critical ways of thinking to see that structures such as education only *appear* to be fair (p. 6). Yet hegemony is not something that can be definitively achieved, and stability might be achieved in some domains and not others. Hegemony suggests that many forms of dominance appear to be jointly produced by both the dominant group and those dominated, with the result that discourse analysis does not always lead to an obvious distinction between perpetrators and ‘victims’ (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 302). Critical Discourse Analysis, though, can reveal more about power relationships (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 302).

The academic literacy approach, by contrast, builds on the academic socialisation model, but “views student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialisation” (Lea and Street, 2000, p. 35). In this approach, taking on a literacy is about taking on a role or an identity (Street, 1994, p. 15), and that particular literacy is in turn constructed by various discourses (McKenna, 2004b, p. 269). Jacobs (2005 p. 477) says one of the conclusions to be drawn from the NLS-inspired notion of academic literacy is that the latter is “best acquired by students when it is embedded within the contexts of particular academic disciplines”. This is because one of the basic tenets of NLS is that literacies are situated within specific social practices, embedded in discourses. Both of these concepts – identities and discourses – are discussed in more detail later; identities in Chapter Three, and discourses in Chapter Four.

Lea and Street (2000, p. 35) describe the academic literacy approach as seeing student literacy practices and learning as occurring “at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialisation”, that is, drawing on the ideological model of literacy rather than the autonomous model. Morrow (1992), writing about the South African higher education sector just before the new democratic era dawned, coined the phrase “epistemological access” in relation to students entering university. He explained that access to education has two dimensions: access to the institution itself (“formal access”), and access to the ‘goods’ it distributes. Because these ‘goods’ are knowledge, the latter can be called “epistemological access” (Morrow, 1992, p. 39). At the time of Morrow’s writing, in the early 1990s, a strong

argument was developing – which of course still holds sway – to increase formal access to South African universities, to help redress past wrongs, to hopefully enable at least some people to increase their living standards, and to enhance quality of lives. There was also the argument for development; that more education for more people would hopefully lead to a more peaceful, just society. However, Morrow says, some people expressed alarm, asking whether expanding formal access might not have a deleterious effect on epistemological access (Morrow, 1992, p. 41). Morrow disagrees, saying that this question draws on what he calls a “hothouse” picture of teaching – the ideal in which a lecturer has 15 students with whom she frequently engages face-to-face. Morrow is adamant that educators need to eschew this “hothouse” picture and instead concentrate on just how they can offer epistemological access to large classes (1992, pp. 47-48). His opinion has resonance nearly 25 years later, as educators and others can still be heard expressing dismay that the “hothouse” ideal no longer exists.

Presenting her perspective on the issue of epistemological access, Boughey (2005) analysed the essays and written feedback of students in a first year philosophy class at a South African HBU (historically black university), which was taught by a white, middle-aged lecturer. Although it became clear that students were trying to “develop academic literacy and thus gain membership of academic discourses” (Boughey, 2005, p. 240), it also became apparent that students were drawing on a different cultural context to the lecturer. Boughey (2005) therefore notes that providing epistemological access is not about trying to introduce students to a set of skills, but about “bridging the gaps between the respective worlds students and lecturers draw on” which requires time, deep engagement with content, negotiation, mediation, and making the rules overt. The latter point is particularly important because researchers in South Africa (such as McKenna, 2004b) have repeatedly found that academic writing conventions have remained implicit; a situation in which privileged students remain privileged, as Gee (1990, p. 24) has pointed out in the context of American classrooms. In Britain, too, Lillis (2001, p. 74) refers to the “institutional practice of mystery” in Higher Education, which works to exclude student ‘outsiders’. Paxton (1998, p. 145), writing about University of Cape Town students, says that educators need to make explicit the discourse of the discipline they teach, or there is a risk that high-status jobs and roles remain inaccessible to most. And Clarence found in her work with two departments at the University of the Western Cape that questioning the lecturers about the writing practices required in their disciplines helped to create a “more explicit and methodological induction”

of new students into the particular ways of reading and writing required of them (2011, p. 5). This was necessary to overcome the assumption that educators often have that our ways of knowing, talking, reading and writing are transparent and easily acquired (2011, p. 10). Similarly, McKenna's (2004b) study of students at the Durban University of Technology concludes with her observation that lectures need to analyse what practices are expected of students, so that they are able to then engage with those practices once they are no longer "mysterious or alienating" (McKenna, 2004b, p. 277). At this point it seems apt to point out that one drawback of AL research generally, is that it tends to be conducted on a small scale, which could threaten to impede developments in the field (Lillis and Scott, 2007, p. 21). And although it has been vital to focus on social practices, detailed analyses of texts can also yield valuable insights for educators, with Lillis and Scott (2007) calling for researchers to "bring the text back into the frame" (p. 22).

'Epistemological access', then, is a concept drawn on by many educators working in the field of academic literacy, as the two concepts can be linked. My ultimate aim in completing this study is to move closer towards making it easier for my students to gain epistemological access and thus acquire at least one kind of academic literacy.

2.4.1 Academic literacy in the National Benchmark Tests (NBTs)

Academic literacy is a concept that has recently become much more familiar to many of those working in the field of HE in South Africa. This is exemplified by the National Benchmark Test (NBT), which was introduced as a placement measure for South African universities. The National Benchmark Tests Project (NBTP) operated fully for the first time in 2009 with eight institutions participating (Yeld, 2010, p. 5), increasing to 49 institutions in 2013 (Sebolai 2014, p. 132). The purpose of the NBTP is to assess students' proficiency; assess the relationship between school outcomes and HE requirements; provide extra information to HE institutions about students for the purposes of placement; and to provide information for those designing foundation courses and curricula (Griesel, 2006, p. 4). The scores of the NBTs are "compared to described performance on agreed standards (or benchmarks)" set by first-year lecturers. Results are divided into three "benchmark levels": proficient, intermediate and basic. The NBTP consists of three tests: Academic Literacy (AL), Quantitative Literacy, and, for those whose university courses include it, Mathematics (Rankin, Schöer, Sebastiao, and Van Walbeek, 2012). The point of testing AL in the NBT is

to establish whether students can cope with the demands of academic study in the context of higher education (Scholtz, 2012, p. 48). Academic literacy is now clearly viewed as a “core underpinning knowledge and skill domain for higher education study” and most formal education. It is closely aligned to the outcomes on which the National Senior Certificate is based (Yeld, 2010, p. 6).

The NBTP has not been without controversy, though. Firstly, the results have caused consternation. *University World News* called the 2009 results “shocking”, with only 47% scoring in the proficient AL category, 46% falling into the intermediate category, and 7% in the category of having basic academic literacy (MacGregor, 2009). The results from the 2010 tests were even worse, showing that 71% of the students – many of them applicants, though, so not all of whom would even have been accepted into higher education – would need some form of extra help with regard to Academic Literacy; while 42% of the total number who wrote scored in the low intermediate and basic categories, which Yeld (2010) describes as “staggering” figures (p. 7).

Secondly, the nature of the tests themselves has attracted debate and dissent. Some have expressed unease about the fact that the tests are conducted in English (Koch, 2007, in Yeld, 2007), but Yeld (2007) points out that there is not much point in conducting them in other languages when the majority of HE lectures and assessments are conducted in English. Moreover, in the HESA (Higher Education South Africa) document that introduced the NBTP in 2006, Yeld says that the fact that the tests are in English “does not imply uncritical support for the hegemony of English in formal education in South Africa” (more about this in Chapter Seven) and notes that the tests could be translated into any language that might in future be the medium of instruction at a particular university (Yeld, 2006, p. 18).

Correlating the results with subsequent first year Maths results showed that the NBT results were indeed good predictors of future success (Yeld, 2010, p. 8). Similarly, Scholtz (2012) aimed to establish whether the generic academic literacy abilities tested by the NBT actually matched with the first year reading and writing practices required by a discipline, concluding that the NBT is a valid, useful test, with a statement to the effect that the findings seem to indicate “a distinct need for students to develop academic literacy competencies that aligned with the NBT specifications” (p. 54).

Sebolai (2014), though, detected a problem with the NBTP. He claimed that the same group of test takers should perform differently on the AL and QL tests. However, the basis of this claim appears very vague, as Sebolai simply states, “Given the differences in how their domains and constructs are defined, it is necessary that the three tests possess discriminant validity” (p. 133) without exploring exactly what these differences are, or why this would by definition mean that applicants should perform differently on the two tests. Sebolai then concludes that the AL and QL tests “possessed convergent as opposed to discriminant validity”; in other words, they seem to be based on constructs that greatly overlap. So applicants would be justifying in asking why they are required to write *two* tests, he says (p. 144). The causes of this lack of discriminant validity could not be investigated, though, since Sebolai did not have access to data at item-level (p. 144).

However, years earlier, Yeld did say that each test might well include “specifications” that overlap with the others (Yeld, 2006, p. 31). “Specifications” are what applicants would need to demonstrate as a benchmark of performance for a particular domain (Yeld, 2006, p. 23). As she indicated that aspects of both tests are interconnected, Yeld could be said to have forestalled Sebolai’s argument. Besides, perhaps it is reasonable to surmise that since test takers would have been taught aspects of AL and QL in the same context, i.e. the school they attended, it is more likely that test results for these two domains would correlate than not. On a similar note, Rankin, et al. (2012) were interested in predicting the success of first year Economics students. Their reason for this was that the change in school-leaving assessment from the Senior Certificate to National Senior Certificate in 2008 created some uncertainty about the credibility of school-leaving marks (p. 565). Interestingly, they found that combining National Senior Certificate results with *both* the Academic and Quantitative Literacy components of the NBT are useful predictors of success. There does therefore seem to be grounds for saying that the border between AL and QL is not a solid one, and that academic literacy is probably necessary for success in subjects that superficially seem to require mathematical abilities above all else, but it also seems a bridge too far to conclude that Sebolai (2014) is correct in suggesting that two tests are unnecessary.

The NBTs are therefore an indication that educators recognise that there is such a thing as ‘academic reading’ and ‘academic writing’, and that it is helpful to understand what competencies students have in this regard before they are placed in a course which might not suit their abilities.

The preceding discussion has centred on academic literacy, both in relation to the NLS movement and in relation to the notion inherent to AL that student learning occurs at the level of epistemology. It does sometimes appear that while the notion of AL has become almost commonplace, epistemological access is not as firmly on the South African HE agenda. Yet there is a strong caveat to be borne in mind about the term ‘academic literacy’: the term is often “appropriated and colonised in South African curricula” as the ‘politically correct’ term for add-on language classes at Foundation level, even where these classes focus on general language and technical skills and not at all on literacies and underpinning value systems that are specific to disciplines (McKenna, 2010, p. 11). On a similarly cautionary note, Thomson (2008, p. 279) says that instead of debating ideas about academic literacy, she feels that investigating the facilitation of epistemological access is more useful. Doing so would avoid tensions about whether educators should focus on students’ reading practices, or genre knowledge, or grammatical rules, and so on. Instead, she maintains, focusing on epistemological access would encourage educators to think more holistically about what Discourses constitute a discipline (Thomson, 2008, p. 279). The notions of ‘academic literacy’ and ‘access’ will also recur throughout this study as being the goals that educators are, arguably, striving for. Indeed, this thesis is about students’ reading practices mainly because, like most other educators, I hope to help students achieve academic literacy and gain access to a degree course that is both challenging and valuable.

Having spent some time discussing the concept of academic literacy, which can be traced to the NLS movement, I will now briefly consider the origin of some of the ideas inherent to NLS.

2.5 Historical influences on the NLS movement

It might be useful to acknowledge some of the scholars from fields outside that of education and literacy whose ideas have nevertheless had a considerable impact on NLS researchers. Bourdieu, Foucault and neo-Marxists Althusser and Gramsci are among the theorists who are especially influential to this thesis.

Much educational research has been influenced by Bourdieu’s ideas of habitus, structure, and agency (Barton, Ivanič, Appleby, Hodge, and Tusting, 2007, p. 21). His concept of habitus, particularly, was highly influential in the shift in the 1970s towards seeing writing

as a social practice, a social act, taking place in an institution with a history, culture, values – a person writing in a particular context, writing as cultural capital (Quinn, 1999; Lillis, 2001, p. 31; Archer, 2006; Clark and Ivanič, 1997; Miller, 2004; McKenna, 2004a; Fairclough, 2003, Norton, 2013). I will briefly explain the term ‘habitus’, and then ‘cultural capital’.

Habitus, as Bourdieu uses the term, means “the degree of cultural attainment (the degree of legitimate competence in legitimate culture) by which not only the dominant but also the dominated classes tend to recognise the ‘cultivated man’” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p. 35). Maton (2008) explains habitus as the way our thoughts, feelings and actions are influenced by our histories, dispositions and contexts (p. 52). Bourdieu and Passeron explain that pedagogic action entails pedagogic work, which is “a process of inculcation which must last long enough to produce a durable training, i.e. a habitus, the product of internalisation of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable of perpetuating itself after [pedagogic action] has ceased” (1977, p. 31). Bourdieu does not define the term ‘cultural arbitrary’ (Sullivan 2002, p. 147), but does indicate that some elements of what is seen as the correct way to teach are simply an instance of the dominant culture, arbitrarily imposed (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Habitus is something people acquire in their families and at school, and certain kinds of institutional systems give rise to a certain kind of habitus, which generates practice. This generative practice is said to be exhaustive, as it completely reproduces the principles of a group’s cultural values (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

This brings to mind Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital, mentioned above, which was part of his “attempt to move away from a narrowly materialist conception of power and inequality.... Power and dominance derive not only from possession of material resources but also from possession of [valued] cultural and social resources” (Crossley, 2008, p. 88). Examples of some of the facets of cultural capital include education – so that having a degree would mean in some circles that you possess some cultural capital – and ownership of cultural goods, such as owning a number of books (Crossley, 2008, p. 91, 92). Another example, illustrating how the concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘cultural capital’ are closely linked, is that of the Bauhaus school of art and design in 1920s and 1930s Germany (Moore, 2008). It aimed to expose consumers to a habitat, a style of life (that is, cultural capital), which would cultivate a certain sensibility or taste, so that the ‘outer’ became the ‘inner’. In this way the individual would acquire the habitus and cultural capital of Bauhaus modernism, its predisposition, its ‘rules of the game’ or ‘habits’, thus illustrating how “capital is objectified

as habitus, and is embodied and realised in practice” (Moore, 2008, p. 111). Bourdieu’s ideas appear again and again in the works of those who have strongly influenced this thesis, such as Fairclough (1992, p. 7); Barton, et al. (2007, p. 21); Clark and Ivanič (1997); and contributed to Gee’s notion of Discourse (1999a, p. viii). It is not difficult to see that the idea of academic literacy is a kind of habitus; that lecturers hope students will understand the rules of the academic ‘game’.

The works of Foucault are highly influential too, especially on the NLS perspective of language and literacy as discourse practices (Lillis, 2001, p. 34). One branch of academic literacies is rooted in sociolinguistics and language teaching, but another group has been influenced by Foucault (*The archaeology of knowledge*, 1969), focusing on how knowledge is framed and expressed, which enables students to enter a discourse community (Hoadley-Maidment, 2000, p. 168). My thesis has its roots firmly in the ‘sociolinguistics and language teaching’ terrain, and the next chapter explains further how this study draws on Fairclough and Gee’s ideas about Discourse, but I feel it is important to acknowledge here the impact Foucault’s ideas have had on this field, which has been considerable.

Firstly, Foucault’s emphasis on power is important (Parkin 2009, Janks 2010). In the 1970s, Foucault’s ideas, along with the feminist movement, underpinned some of the challenges to anthropology itself, as he revealed how social and psychological sciences could be viewed as “constructing, rather than objectively studying, their subjects” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain, 1998, p. 23). These developments affected ethnographers’ writing, so that ethnographic accounts are now read for their portrayal of the relationship between anthropologist and subject (p. 25). One of the results is that anthropology is now less willing to regard the “cultural discourses and practices of a group of people as indicative of one underlying cultural logic” that applies to all group members (p. 26). The situatedness of those who are studied is now taken into account, for Foucault also focused on how power operates within what he calls an institutional apparatus and its technologies, or techniques (Hall, 2001, p. 75). Discourse, or discursive theory, as Foucauldian and related understandings are sometimes called, has given rise to a new concept of the self as socially constructed (p. 26). Chapter Four will further discuss Foucault’s notion of discourse, and the ways in which Fairclough’s ideas depart from it.

Secondly, it is possible to question domains of knowledge (or ‘knowledges’) as both Foucault and neo-Marxist Althusser do; interrogating their historical conditions, their effects, what interests they serve, and what relations of power they uphold (Macdonnell, 1986, p. 67). Gee (1999a, p. 38) credits Foucault’s notion of discourse, among others, for contributing important ideas to his own idea of Discourse, while Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis, which is a method that this study draws on, owes many of its underlying concepts to Foucault (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 7-9).

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with some theories and notions that are pivotal to New Literacy Studies research. NLS provided a new, ‘ideological’ way of conceiving literacy: rather than ‘skills’, literacy is seen as a set of practices that are contingent upon and embedded in social institutions. The Academic Literacies approach is a concept that is introduced in Chapter Two, because it grew out of NLS and sees literacies as social practices, and so views student reading, writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities (Lea and Street, 2000, p. 35). These ideas are central to my research, and the AL approach is discussed further in Chapter Three as I trace the way the concept of ‘reading’ has been conceived of by several different groups.

Chapter Three: Reading and identity

3.1 Introduction

Since this thesis is an exploration of reading practices, Chapter Three examines definitions of ‘reading’, and discusses some studies that looked at the reading practices of South African children, before continuing to explore the impact of technology on reading. This is done with a view to devising a definition of ‘reading’ that works for this study. Later sections pick up on the concept of ‘academic literacy’ and, because identities are central to that concept, examines the notion of identity, focusing particularly on the critical view of the social construction of identity, and drawing once again on the work of several prominent NLS theorists to do so.

3.2 Defining ‘reading’

Gee (2011, p. 103) makes a point about situated meanings, explaining that these are “the specific meanings words and phrases take on in specific contexts of use.” His definition made me think immediately of the way in which the word ‘reading’ has another layer of meaning at Fort Hare: as well as holding the standard definition of “the process of gaining meaning from print” (Gibbons 1991, p. 70), it also means “to learn”, as when a Fort Hare student wrote “Many of us read only when necessary (tests and assignments)”. The same phenomenon was noted by Parry (2010 p. 16) as occurring in the Ugandan community library that she helped to establish: “So close is the association between schooling and literacy that many Ugandans use ‘reading’ as a synonym for ‘studying’.” I subsequently learnt that ‘funda’ means ‘learn’, ‘read’ and ‘study’ in isiXhosa, the home language of many Fort Hare students, and in Zulu. (This use of the word is reminiscent of the British use of ‘reading’, as in, “She’s reading for a BA.”) On an international scale, it is interesting to note that definitions of ‘reading’ vary, both between organisations and over time. For instance, the International Reading Association has a PISA-PIRLS Task Force that publishes the PISA results every three years and the PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) results every five years. PISA is an international study launched by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1997. While South Africa does not participate in PISA studies, the definitions drawn on by this study are worth mentioning, to

illustrate the surprising fact that there is no universally accepted definition of ‘reading’. I will also explain the definition that I will draw on for my own thesis.

Since I adopted a social practices view in my study, there were various implications I needed to consider. Firstly, the notion of agency became important. This was illustrated in Barton and Hamilton’s (2002) study when non-elite groups in the fictional English town of Springside were seen to resist literacy practices associated with dominant groups (p. 341). For example, although those with money and power generally dominated the public visual space of the city, this domination was frequently disrupted by others who sprayed graffiti or stuck posters on the walls (p. 42), exercising their own ‘agency’ by rebelling against the norms. The second implication to consider is that it becomes impossible to construct a single definition of ‘reading’, because of the huge variety of practices that make up reading (Stierer and Bloome, 1994, p. 9). A variety of definitions of ‘reading’ will be considered in the course of this chapter.

In a document explaining the goals of the PISA for 2015, the OECD notes that the definition of reading – now called “reading literacy” – has changed over the years and for the purposes of the PISA study is expressed as follows: “Reading literacy is understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate in society” (OECD, p. 9). Taken at face value, this definition has broadened even in the last few years, as the “and engaging with” part has been added since 2000. It is certainly more inclusive than the understanding of reading as simply ‘decoding’, yet the normative elements of ‘reading is for development’ and ‘reading leads to good citizenship’ are striking. What is more, the OECD’s definition of *literacy* still appears to fall in the ‘autonomous’ camp. While literacy is no longer viewed as an ability acquired only during childhood, the OECD views it as a “set of knowledge, skills and strategies” rather than a social practice (2013, p. 9). It is therefore clear that the ‘reading is a skill like any other’ approach is still widespread, with the implication that in many contexts, reading is probably taught in a way divorced from the manner in which people *need* to read.

By contrast, the 2013 PIRLS definition of reading literacy, as constructed by Mullis, Martin, and Sainsbury (2013), is as follows:

Reading literacy is the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Readers can construct meaning from texts in a variety of forms. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment (p. 14).

The purpose of including the last sentence is hard to fathom, as it seems to circumscribe the purpose of reading in narrow ways. It also seems to exclude those who are *not* participating in communities of readers and who are *not* reading for enjoyment or learning: individuals reading grocery lists, checking ingredients on the back of cereal boxes, and examining electricity bills, for instance. But if that sentence were omitted, the rest of the definition is at least broader than that of the OECD, as it allows for some individual agency.

Reading in the broadest sense of “making meaning from print” (Gibbons, 1991, p. 70) has the advantage of not imposing any ideas about contexts and purpose, and as such is a vital part of academic literacy.

While my own study is rooted in the ‘social practices’ view of reading, it might be useful to acknowledge research with other emphases, as the various approaches can shed light on each other to some extent. Ideas about reading and language pedagogy are many and varied, but here I have concentrated mainly on developments in South Africa. The approaches outlined in the paragraphs below evolved historically, and while the roads leading towards NLS can be traced here and there, the trail begins somewhere quite different.

3.2.1 From ‘ESL’ to academic literacies

It used to be the case that English second language (ESL) reading was regarded as a passive, “bottom-up” process, in which meaning was decoded from the ‘bottom’ (letters and words) to the ‘top’ (phrases, clauses and sentences) (Carrell 1988, p. 2). But reading research has revealed that there is a difference between ‘decoding’, which is translating symbols and letters into language, and ‘comprehension’, which is understanding the text overall (Bohlmann and Pretorius 2002, p. 196). So another view gradually developed, which was that much of the information readers attain from reading actually comes from that which is implied by the text, or from the ways it is understood it to be linked to other things previously mentioned in the text, or in the readers’ long-term memories – which is inference (Pretorius 2003, p. 102). This view, introduced by Goodman in the early 1970s, was known as the “top-down” processing perspective.

Both top-down and bottom-up processing are now seen, in the domain of psycholinguistics, as necessary to fully understand *second language* reading comprehension (Carrell 1988, p. 4). Schema theory aims to unite both types of processing by explaining the role of background knowledge in reading. Schemas are previously acquired knowledge structures, which readers activate to interpret the text consistently. This means that “much of the meaning understood from a text is really not ... in the text ... but in the reader, in the background or schematic knowledge of the reader” (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1988, p. 76). Understanding these schemas depends on cues, where general language processing skills are important (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1988, p. 81). So it can be seen that schema theory and its acknowledgement of the context of the reader connects it – perhaps somewhat loosely – to the ‘social practices’ view. Indeed, Street and Lefstein (2007), in their graphic representation of scholars working in the field of literacy, place Goodman on the ‘Ideological / Situated literacy practices’ side of the literacy debate, rather than the ‘Autonomous / Decontextualised literacy skills’ side (p. 11). Purcell-Gates, et al. (2004), take this point even further, arguing that there is a relationship between the cognitive and the social perspectives: “a nested relationship, with the cognitive occurring within the sociocultural context” (p. 81). While the latter argument is outside the scope of this thesis, it is an intriguing one, pointing to a potentially rich area of further research.

However, it bears repeating that the above insights about schema theory come from the study of English as a second language (ESL), with Carrell and Eisterhold (1988) concluding that the obvious relevance of the above for the study of ESL reading is that background knowledge is often culture-specific (p. 89). Yet ‘ESL’ is an entire approach to the teaching of English – with its roots in the 1940s and beginning to be established in the late 1950s – whose underpinnings are very different to the New Literacy Studies. Nayar (1997) points out that apart from anything else, the mere labelling of a language as a ‘second language’ indicates the “Anglocentricity” of the discourse, since it makes monolingualism the norm (p. 12). She describes the “self-important intellectual condescension” that is sometimes apparent in ESL theorists’ attitudes towards non-English speakers (p. 20), and that creating and reifying ‘ESL students’ as a group of people “has fostered and sustains an unhealthy binarism not unlike the proverbial ‘us’ and ‘them’ attitude” (p. 21). Indeed, Janks (2010) maintains that the English First Language/Second Language divide was “fundamental to segregated education under apartheid” (p. 16), while the ESL approach generally can be linked to Street’s ‘autonomous’ approach, outlined in Chapter Two. This link between ‘ESL’

and the autonomous approach can be illustrated by a brief look at how universities' academic development programmes in South Africa have changed in focus and ideological slant in the last few decades, from what might be called an 'ESL phase' to an emphasis on academic literacy. So it can be seen that the understanding and conceptualising of students' reading and writing practices has changed in only the last few decades, in a way that has been inextricably linked with broader social and political changes.

The field of academic development in South Africa has been characterised by staff mobility and ideological fragmentation, and much of its history is untraceable (Niven, 2012, p. 139). Despite these complexities, however, there is a discernible movement from what might be called an 'ESL phase' in which literacy was seen as autonomous to an incorporation of an NLS-influenced notion of academic literacy.

Academic development has been understood and implemented in a variety of ways. Also known as extended curriculum or foundational programmes, academic development courses were initially provided at some universities in the 1980s to increase access for capable but disadvantaged students – and they have succeeded in doing so for thousands of students (Scott, 2014, p. 36). When they were first introduced, such programmes tended to take the form of 'add-ons' to mainstream courses, and were rooted in the deficit model (McKenna, 2014, p. 52).

Boughey (2014) analyses the ideological trajectory of the academic support programme according to Archer's belief that structure, culture and agency are vital to understanding society. In the framework of 'culture', then, an analysis shows that academic support in the 1980s was generally underpinned by a set of liberal values, as academic support was seen as attempt to compensate for the poor education provided by the apartheid government (Boughey, 2014, p. 67). As far as 'structure' goes, the emphasis in the same stage of development was on language as an instrument of communication, while reliance on donor funding had the effect of failing to develop a strong team of practitioners (Boughey, 2014, p. 69). 'Agency' was assigned to students, with no account taken of the system in which students were expected to succeed, or how "understandings of knowledge ... might work to include some at the expense of others" (Boughey, 2014, p. 69). The theories informing Academic Support teaching practice viewed learning and teaching, not as social practices, but as "culturally disembedded" (Boughey, 2014, p. 67). This is similar to what Street

(1984) calls the 'autonomous' view of literacy, and the ideological slant is similar to that of ESL teaching. Looking back, this way of thinking is apparent at several institutions. For instance, the Durban University of Technology (DUT), went through a phase in the 1990s during which English was taught in a disconnected way, focusing on grammar and language use, which students resented (McKenna, 2004a). At much the same time, Boughey (2000) noted the tendency at the University of Zululand to label the problems that students encounter as 'language problems', and Rhodes University was offering a course called 'English Language for Academic Purposes' (Niven, 2012). Clarence (2010) later maintains that to say that students entering university have 'a language problem' is "at best, a very partial and reductive" observation, as students actually need to become familiar with several languages, each related to a particular discipline (p. 20). In this she is in agreement with Boughey (2000), who suggests that such problems are more usefully formulated as those of conceptions of learning, negotiating 'voice', conceptions of writing, and rules for producing knowledge (p282). But at the time, the emphasis on academic development was clearly on improving students' English language ability in the belief that this would enable them to cope with academic work.

Although some changes occurred elsewhere, this 'ESL/autonomous view' way of approaching academic development continued at many HE institutions. At DUT from 1999 to 2001, 'English for Academic Purposes' was a course aimed at students who had been identified as weak, and was highly skills-based, with little transfer to different domains (McKenna, 2003, p. 67). At this time, while students were saying "no more school English", indicating clearly that they needed help in writing their assignments and reading textbooks, lecturers were saying that there was a need to "go back to basics of spelling and grammar" (McKenna 2003, p. 61). The lecturers' discourse was a prevalent one at the time, as if merely providing grammatical instruction would mean that the students would become successful students. The lecturers themselves noted that the ESL tutorials did not have much impact on students, as during this phase, students could write a good essay introduction for their EAP class, but then would not be able to do so for a mainstream assignment (p. 63). This approach is alien to the NLS, but still very similar to the autonomous approach to literacy as described by Street and Lefstein (2007), where literacy is seen as "a separate, reified set of 'neutral' competencies, autonomous of social context" (p. 92). Yet even today, students and academics still often think of their difficulties as being related to language – for instance, 'English for Academic Purposes' was taught at the University of Fort Hare until

recently. In fact, Geisler (1994, in McKenna, 2010) calls the autonomous model of literacy a “driving myth” and McKenna contends that it is “a myth which underpins much foundational provision in South Africa” (McKenna, 2010, p. 11). If student battles are understood as being battles with academic literacy, this calls into question the kind of intervention programmes that focus on the grammar and vocabulary of English (Boughey 2002, p. 296).

An enormous ideological shift occurred in some universities in the domain of culture between the Academic Support phase and the Academic Development phase as the 1980s turned into the 1990s. Ideas of ‘disadvantage’ and ‘underdevelopment’ changed, as educators began to note that rather than students carrying some deficit with them, it was the universities that were ill-equipped to carry out their functions in a democratic South Africa (Mehl, 1998, p. 17 in Boughey, 2014, p. 73). It was at this point that the work of Gee (1990) and Street (1984), among other theorists, such as Bourdieu and Vygotsky, came to be highly influential and AD experienced a ‘social turn’ (Boughey, 2014, pp. 73-75). These ideas challenge the practices which had dominated AD in South Africa, because if, as these NLS authors believe, literacy is not learned but acquired, then:

... the development of learning appropriate to academic discourses needs to be conceived as a process which takes place over time through exposure to mainstream teaching, which attempts to make overt both the practices and the values and attitudes which underpin them, rather than in adjunct classes and tutorials (Boughey, 2014, p. 74).

These ideas were taken up by some South African universities. There is a strongly critical aspect to the body of AD work as a whole, with NLS being part of this critical tradition, including Fairclough and his CDA being used by scholars at UCT and Rhodes in the 1990s and 2000s (Niven, 2012, p. 137). The ideological stance towards students and their literacy practice is, in AL research, transformative rather than normative (Lillis and Scott, 2007, p. 12). And in 1988, the Academic Development Centre of the University of the Western Cape (UWC) was just starting up, staffed with left-wing intellectuals who had fought apartheid and were working with the idea of transformation (C. Boughey, personal communication, in Niven, 2012). The conditions were conducive there for the adoption of the progressive, critical NLS ideas, and there was an enthusiastic response at UWC to the work of Gee and others soon after Gee’s (1990) publication of *Sociolinguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses* (Niven, 2012, p. 141). NLS influence can also be seen in UCT’s 1998 *Access to*

success, which refers to Gee extensively, and in publications emanating from staff at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (pp. 144-145). At DUT the English for Academic Purposes phase was gradually replaced in about 2001 by the ‘Academic Literacy’ phase, where lecturers moved away from thinking about language teaching with an ESL approach – and instead focused on inducting students into the literacy norms of each discipline, as well as on questioning those norms. Students who had been through this programme reported that they found it very effective (McKenna, 2004a, p. 134).

Niven (2012) says that academic development in South Africa, because of its political history, also has “an unusually strong *normative* orientation” (p. 119). Part of the shift occurring in the 1990s was that the institutions themselves began to be critiqued. During the 1990s and early 2000s, NLS and others challenged the ‘deficit’ model of student learning and drove much AD research (Niven, 2012, p. 132). This understanding gave rise to the realisation that extended curricula and new teaching practices were required, rather than one-year, bolt-on courses. More recently, many of the educators working in the field are hopeful that academic development programmes will be seen as a mainstream and continuing issue linked to a national transformation agenda (McKenna, 2014, p. 56).

A more recent (2009) development at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, among other universities, has been the introduction of a four-year, integrated degree in which Academic Literacy and English Language Development have been replaced by a course called Exploring Literacy in the Humanities, influenced by NLS practitioners such as Lea and Street 1998, plus Gee 1999 (Niven, Jackson, and Tyson, 2014, p. 136). Early indications are that students are performing much better in the extended curriculum than mainstream students on the whole. Although there is the drawback that this model is more challenging to implement, sustain and monitor than the previous curriculum, this seems largely due to institutional and budgetary constraints (Niven, et al., 2014, p. 145). Challenges could be overcome given time and institutional recognition and accommodation of the programme.

And although there have been increasing attempts to address the issue of changing the curriculum structure, extended programmes still mostly provide alternative courses and teaching approaches at entry level only. Extended programmes in themselves have never been seen as a sufficient response to the key problem of curriculum (Scott, 2014, p. 37). They are diverse in many respects, which is necessary, since contexts are diverse – which is

one of the reasons why summarised accounts of success rates are not meaningful. Another reason is that the influence of the conditions in particular programmes and institutions is far-reaching (Scott, 2014, p. 39). Systematic limitations include the rigidity of the mainstream curriculum, which makes it hard to achieve the essential “steady increase in level of difficulty and workload” (Scott, 2014, p. 41); stigma and marginalisation; problematic selection and placement of target students; and the cyclical nature of governmental funding. A range of aspects seem to contribute to success of extended programmes, “from affective elements through various academic literacies to disciplinary teaching based on educational expertise” (Scott, 2014, p. 44), plus giving students who are under-prepared extra time; matching expectations to students’ abilities; and – vitally – a facilitative curriculum framework (Scott, 2014, p. 44).

Academic development is a field that has undergone much change over the last few decades, drawing on a range of disciplines, and is an “emergent, contested and relatively unstable profession”, without clear epistemological foundations and boundaries (Niven, 2012, p. 155). That the work of Academic Development is seen as a way for institutions to improve their efficiency has meant that the final phase, which Boughey calls Higher Education Development, is characterised by discourses – dominated by terms such as ‘throughput’, and ‘success rates’ – related to institutional efficiency (Boughey, 2014, pp. 77, 82). So NLS is one of many theories/fields/studies that has left a mark on AD, but perhaps not as deeply as its supporters would like, and certainly to varying extents. The reasons for this appear to be widespread and complex. For instance, the UWC group gradually dispersed during the 1990s, due at least partially to a lack of institutional support (Niven, 2012, p. 141). What is more, legislation has led to structural changes that impacted Academic Development, as when the National Plan for Higher Education (2001) prescribed the restructuring of universities (Niven, 2012, p. 74). The resulting merger in 2004 of several universities affected the Academic Development community of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, for instance, and what had been a dynamic community of practice became fragmented, losing its coherence (p. 148). And much of the NLS work of the last 20 years came close to being lost and forgotten, either because many of the local journals of the 1990s had a short lifespan, or because of the inherent structural instability of professional positions in academic development (p. 133).

Evidence that NLS theorists did not make as much impact nationally as they did at certain individual universities can be found in Garraway's (2009) overview of successful AD programmes. Here there is no mention of Lea, Street, Heath or Gee, and very little discussion of 'discourses' (which Gee and other NLS researchers see as vital to the understanding of literacy practices, which I will discuss in the following chapter). As mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, evidence of the deficit view can also still be found, as the problems that students encounter are described in one case as their own "maladjustment" to university life, and as their own inadequate background knowledge and work habits (Matlou, 2009, pp 5-6, in Garraway, 2009). Yet many contributions from a variety of HE institutions in the same book (Garraway, 2009) do mention 'academic literacy', which I would argue is a legacy of the NLS movement. Examples include the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of the Western Cape, which incorporates 'Academic literacy for business' and 'Economic literacy' as part of its four-year programme for Foundation students. Those who complete the two-year programme have a "reasonable to high pass rate" (Arendse, 2009, p. 28). University of Limpopo provides a module on Multilingual Academic Literacy and generally, the Foundation students who attend the course perform better than mainstream students (Sepota, 2009). Stellenbosch University's Extended Programme includes "a broad and solid base of generic skills and literacies" needed (Young, 2009, p. 32). Part of the University of Fort Hare's own Teaching & Learning Centre is concerned with "facilitating students' access to academic literacy" (UFH, 2014).

However, the term should not be taken at face value. Lillis and Scott (2007, p. 16) describe a particular UK university's website that explains its academic literacy programme in a way that is clearly attempting to shift that university's deficit discourse. Nevertheless, many traces of a predominant deficit discourse can be found in the language used (Lillis and Scott, 2007). Similarly, it could be that although the term 'academic literacy' is adopted in the South African examples mentioned above, a 'deficit' view of student learning persists in some quarters.

Yet as mentioned elsewhere, it is also clear that some educators at UCT, CPUT and Rhodes continue to be influenced by NLS ideologies. One example is the work carried out, using the academic literacies approach, at the University of the Western Cape in which the writing centre collaborated with lecturers in Law and Political Science (Clarence, 2011, p. 2). The

aim was to make the disciplinary norms overt, and to teach students to write in a way that fit those norms. The results were “very positive” (2011, p. 2). Although the main focus was students’ writing, in the Politics department collaboration, the first element of essay writing identified was that of reading with understanding. For this reason, first year students were given reading/summarising tasks to do in their tutorials. Eventually, after much discussion and redesigning of assessment tasks, the department’s view moved from regarding essay writing as a set of skills to that of seeing essay writing as an “epistemological practice” that students need to be inducted into (p. 5).

So it can be seen how ideologies in Academic Development in South Africa have changed and shifted. Understandings of language and literacy have been an enormous part of that change, with many educators – albeit at varying times and impelled by a variety of forces – moving away from emphasising generic ‘language skills’, as ESL practitioners would have it, to incorporating notions of academic literacy into teaching and learning theories.

There is a caveat, though. Wheelahan (2010), notes that social inclusion and social justice are not identical. It is vital, she says, to bear in mind that mere access to higher education does not equal social justice. Instead, it is access to theoretical knowledge that is key. Paradoxically, although education is meant to prepare students for the knowledge society, “the modern curriculum places less emphasis on knowledge, particularly theoretical, disciplinary knowledge” (Wheelahan, 2010, p. 3). For this reason, Wheelahan (2010) argues that educators need to pay attention to the structure of knowledge in curricula.

This discussion, which began by focusing on various approaches to reading and academic literacy, has come to focus on content, and the ways in which educators can understand students’ reading practices with the aim of helping them to comprehend, analyse and build on that content.

3.2.2 The ‘social practices’ view of reading

The above discussion began with the schema theory of reading, which is linked to the ESL approach to language teaching. While schema theory can give educators insights into students’ reading practices (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1988), the broader framework in which ESL theorists work is very different to the NLS and its ‘social practices’ take on literacy.

The ‘social practices’ view rejects the idea that a single definition of reading is possible, because reading practices vary so much. For instance, particular social groups tend to share assumptions about how to read. Stierer and Bloome (1994, p. 9) give examples of lawyers reading contracts in a certain way; cooks reading cookery books in a particular way; and church group members reading the prayer book during a church service in yet another way.

Gee (2004) gives a slightly different view of the various approaches to reading, as he concentrates on the ways in which theorists view the process of learning to read and acquire language (pp. 10-12). First, he describes the traditional, skills-based approach that emphasises phonemic awareness, phonics, practice, and comprehension, with each stage supposedly guaranteeing the next (p. 10). Reading in this view is seen as an instructed process. Second, there is an approach that emphasises meaning-making, which is more progressive and which Whole Language theorists like Goodman have advocated, which sees language acquisition and literacy practices lumped together as abilities that are acquired naturally, by being immersed in talk and action with others (p. 10). This is supported by the work of Chomsky who argues that language acquisition is a kind of instinct, supported by our biology (p. 11). Gee, however, says that while language acquisition might be a natural process, reading “cannot be ‘natural’”, pointing out that written language has been in existence for too short a time for us to have evolved biologically to support it.

Instead, Gee’s view, which is one that I support, is that learning to read is a “cultural process”, much like learning to cook, or to become a physicist (p. 12). He explains that he is not using the word ‘culture’ in the classic anthropological sense, but in a broader sense, as a practice that is passed on to an individual in a variety of ways when that individual wants to become part of a particular group (p. 12). Learning happens via someone who has mastered that practice by collaborating with them, with information given precisely when the learner needs it, and extended information about the task given after learners have had the relevant experience. Gee compares it to students acquiring *deep* knowledge of physics – “not just ‘getting a grade’ or ‘doing school,’ but as part and parcel of taking on the emerging identity of being a physicist” (p. 13). So, he says flatly, referring to the ‘instructed process’ approach to language and the Whole Language approach, “They are both wrong, since learning to read is neither like learning one’s native oral language nor like learning physics.” Instead, children who become successful readers do so because “learning to read is a cultural and not primarily an instructed process ... [with] long roots at home” (p. 13).

One of the studies conducted through the NLS lens that reveal some of these “long roots at home” is the previously mentioned ethnographic study conducted in the 1990s in Springside, Lancaster by Barton and Hamilton (1998, 2012). The authors wanted to focus on the significance and characteristics of different types of reading, how literacy is related to social activities, and what motivates people to read. They conclude that there were two sorts of reading: one where it is the main goal and would be described as such (‘I’m reading’) and is understood as a quiet, personal activity; the other was when reading was functional, a means to some other, non-literary end (Barton and Hamilton, 2012, p. 152).

The authors investigated how locals read a variety of media, from medicine labels to newspapers, noting who read what, where and when. Their interviewees’ ambivalent and sometimes self-deprecating attitudes about reading tabloids were recorded, for instance, as well as the “cultural habit” of sharing newspapers (Barton and Hamilton, 2012, p. 153). Another distinct reading practice was that of reading aloud to someone else, often children, and sometimes couples, reminiscent of Clark and Ivanič’s (1997) point that literacy practices are culturally conditioned (p. 82). One or two people reported reading aloud as a family activity, but this was not common. More usual was people reading short items to each other because they felt strongly about it. “Many people reported a time and a place for reading. It was incorporated into the regular rhythms of home life ... These practices relate to public and private spaces within the home” (p. 155). People reported different ways of engaging with text, from being immersed in a book, to glancing at a newspaper (p. 155). There were also many activities that, while they involved reading, would not have been described as such by the participants. Examples include checking mail, grocery shopping, and filling in forms (p. 156). Reading, for these Lancaster locals, was not a matter of making sense of print, but of “figuring out meaning in a broader semiotic context” (p. 158). Part of what I planned to interview students about in this study was their own experience of reading at home, to discover how their own reading practices were ‘culturally conditioned’ when they were younger.

Yet New Literacy Studies would say that “there is, alas, no such thing as reading per se, or at least, if this [decoding, recognising words, and comprehending literal meaning] is what reading is for you, you’re in trouble” (Gee, 1999b, p. 371). Decoding, word recognition, and understanding of literal meaning is completely ineffective when it is decontextualised from social practices (Gee, 1999b.) Examining reading practices through the lens of NLS,

however, means one is able to see that in the academic context, students have to learn a particular kind of reading. “Students are taught... to ‘read’ in a different way from that of everyday practice” – for example, they have to know how to use the index, contents page and chapter headings, and to move backwards and forwards until they select what they need (Street 1984, p. 75). Researchers have found that what is regarded as ‘appropriate’ reading practices tend to vary from subject to subject (Kirkpatrick and Mulligan, 1996, in Mann, 2000, p. 298).

A case study of four UK women students found that what made academic reading different from reading for pleasure for them is that the latter is a private activity, while academic reading is made public by means of evaluation. For these students, part of the meaning of academic reading was that it was work, beyond the students’ control, and so to be gotten out of the way as quickly as possible (p. 314). Another part of its meaning lay in its potential impact on their view of themselves as reflected in the judgement of others (Mann, 2000, p. 313). In other words, they read knowing that they would be assessed on their understandings of what they read. For these students, this particular social practice therefore meant worry, stress and even panic.

Ivanič, et al., (2009) offer an example of two lecturers in the UK who, like me, assumed their students did not read much. However, after careful research, they realised that the students’ literacy practices were more wide-ranging and complex than they had assumed. They used literacy in their everyday lives to send cell phone texts, email, MSN messenger, and even employed the ‘old-fashioned way’ of writing and reading letters, greeting cards and notes (p. 33-35). They also organised and documented their lives; retrieved information, and used various kinds of texts to learn things (including how to use technology, such as when some acquired new phones) and pursue leisure interests (pp. 36-43). These practices are often invisible to lecturers, though (p. 27). When it came to books, most students considered reading fiction to be a “highly valued cultural practice and value statements were often made in relation to the books being read” (p. 43). Some students read children’s books, but marginalised these as not being ‘real books’ in the way that adult fiction is (p. 44). Generally, students did not value their home-based literacy practices as much as they did ‘school’ literacy (p. 46).

This research provided me with some fresh material to think about when planning my own interviews. While I had suspected that students engaged in practices that were “invisible in college” (Ivanič et al., 2009, p. 27), I had not thought to ask about students’ attitudes to *books*, as opposed to their attitude to reading, and asking about children’s fiction had not crossed my mind. Before conducting interviews, though, I had also suspected that students’ attitude to reading fiction was mainly one of disinterest, rather than seeing it as a highly valued cultural practice as some British students did. (That said, Davis (2007), like other researchers, found that the UK working-class children in her study were more likely to describe reading as ‘boring’ or ‘difficult’, while Lin (2001) found that a class of high-school students whose first language is Cantonese used the word ‘boring’ often, generally, and particularly to describe the reading lessons in their English classes.)

In 2002, Pretorius noted “an absence of close empirical investigation and ... meaningful debate and discussion... as to the nature of reading problems” and what should be done about those reading problems (p. 98). However, since then a South African journal devoted to writing and reading practices (*Reading & Writing*) has been established. Both *Language Matters* and the *Journal of Education* are also South African journals that regularly publish articles on reading research.

3.3 Reading practices of South African children

Studies of children's reading practices in the recent past seem bound to illuminate those of university students at the time of writing this thesis in 2015. Machet (2001), Snyman (2006) and Rasana (2006) are among those who have conducted research in South Africa about children's attitudes to reading. Using a questionnaire, Machet (2001) surveyed 2 280 South African school children in primary and secondary schools about their reading. A limitation of the survey, she points out, is that it sampled only children attending urban schools in Pretoria (p. 2). Also notable is that 56% of the respondents are actually teenagers, in the 13 to 16 age group; plus over 17% of the high school respondents are Afrikaans, which is not representative of national demographics. One of Machet's key findings is that the respondents enjoy adventure stories, but that religious and school stories are even more popular (Machet 2001, p. 7). Machet speculates on the reasons for these choices, partly by looking to the recent history of Christian National Education (p. 8), and partly by drawing on Appleyard (1991). The latter constructs a schematic description of a child's reading development: for instance, he explains that adventure stories appeal to children between seven and twelve because this matches their conceptions of the world (Appleyard, 1991, p. 85). However, he comments (1991, p. 15) that it is not a universal scheme, as it rests heavily on a particular literary culture: mostly Western and middle class. I note this here not as a criticism of Machet's research, but to illustrate the potential difficulties of conducting such studies in South Africa, where Western and middle class frameworks would normally need to be considered carefully for suitability in contexts that are African and working class.

Rasana's (2006) research of the reading preferences of learners in eight Grahamstown secondary schools sampled a different cross-section of South African children from Machet's, as isiXhosa speakers make up the majority of her respondents. However, her findings differ in one respect: that a mere 3% of the children in her study mentioned comics at all, as opposed to the 75% in Machet's (Rasana 2006, 186). Rasana concludes by stating that the learners she interviewed had little exposure to literature of reasonable quality, but that educators and librarians should take heed of the learners' stated preference for newspapers, magazines and topics focused on love, sport and politics. She also notes the limitations of her methods, namely, questionnaires and focus group discussions, outlining the need for more in-depth, observation-based research, commenting on the lack of

information both in South Africa and internationally about what children prefer to read (Rasana, 2006).

Snyman (2006), on the other hand, was particularly interested in establishing the reading habits and attitudes of Afrikaans children and surveyed over 3 000 children in six different schools. Such a comprehensive and structured investigation into the reading habits of Afrikaans children had never been done before (p. 145). Her research yielded the unsettling result that 84% of the children professed not to enjoy reading; yet this figure did not match the 31% who actually did read one book per week or more. Snyman (p. 176) gives possible reasons for this (although it is not clear what the source of this information is): parents not being involved in children's reading; teachers who do not read enough stories to the children; and a lack of new and suitable books in schools and at home. And while the vast majority of younger children (aged 9 – 10) preferred to read in their home language, the older group of children (aged 13 – 15) preferred to read in English – not surprisingly, Snyman says, given that Afrikaans literature for this group is practically non-existent (p. 155). I noted these constraints, wondering if my interviewees would mention the same or similar limitations.

Source of books for the children in Snyman's study were the library, the school, home, presents and borrowing, presumably from friends. External factors affecting children's reading choice (which varied depending on age) included teachers, friends, parents, television, the appearance of the cover, the thickness of the book, the author, the logo, and the illustrations (p. 163). The school itself played a big role, in other words, what was prescribed by the school was what the children would read. Internal factors affecting children's reading choice were boredom, happenstance (that is, they simply happened to get hold of the book somehow) and seeking a solution to a problem. Snyman conceded that it was a pity that the option of 'I choose a book simply because I want to read' was not included (p. 166). The elements that children were attracted to were: humour, plenty of action and excitement, a happy ending, scary elements, ease of comprehension, and the chance to learn something new (pp. 172-174). In terms of characters, popular characteristics were that they were the same gender as the reader, and one of a group of friends. Many children were attracted to fantasy characters (p. 174). Such detailed research is unusual and means that I could draw on it when asking about my students' reading history. Although my interviewees were young adults, it appeared to be advisable to ask them which books they

read appealed to them when they were growing up. After all, if the books they were exposed to were unattractive or incomprehensible, I surmised that this could affect their reading practices at university level.

However, the research carried out by Machet (2001), Rasana (2006) and Snyman (2006, 2014) constitute rare examples, as they themselves indicate. Reading research is a domain in its own right, yet it also straddles several disciplines; chiefly linguistics, psychology and education (Pretorius, 2002, p. 96). Despite this transdisciplinarity however, and despite clear indications that many South African children and young adults struggle to read, there seems to be a lack of research output that engages with the nature of reading problems and sheds light on reading practices (Pretorius 2002b; Rasana 2006). South Africa is not alone in this regard, with scholars in other countries also indicating that more research is needed. For example, Clark (2012, p. 18) writing about the National Literacy Trust's survey of young people's reading in the United Kingdom, says that a longitudinal subsample was set up in the annual literacy survey. This was done in the hope of revealing more information about any potential causal links between reading achievement, attitudes and enjoyment. Therefore, strong indications are that simply not much is known about the relationship between these variables.

3.4 New technologies and their impact on reading practices

The practice of reading, some say, is being transformed by digital media (Liu, 2005, pp. 701, 702). And as much as Clark (2012), as noted above, implies that we need to know more about the links between reading attitudes, enjoyment and reading, others argue that new technologies are raising yet more questions. For instance, not enough is yet known about young people's reading format choices, says Moyer (2010), writing about research conducted in the US. What research there is seems to be published in journals more concerned with technology than language or literacy, such as *Computers in Education*, *Journal of Educational Computing*, and *Journal of Educational Computing Research*. This appears to indicate a gap in educational research that I hope will be filled shortly, as some surprising and contradictory findings have already been made.

Online audio books are one of these relatively new platforms. Naxos AudioBooks, for example, produces about 30 new titles a year and concentrates largely on literary classics

and educational themes. The online Naxos Spoken Word Library offers Naxos AudioBooks' full range of recordings, many of which can also be followed with the texts on screen. The recordings are streamed to listeners via the Internet from servers in Hong Kong. A search engine enables audiences to select and listen to the spoken word content through their computers, using headphones or speakers (Naxos Spoken Word Library, 2015). However, Lo (2009), in his study of 260 11- and 12-year-olds in Hong Kong, concluded that this particular electronic resource did not seem to have an effect on young children's motivation to read, and the content needed to be more diverse to appeal to a wider audience.

Another study conducted in the US garnered the opinions of a mixture of postgraduate students and professionals working in various organisations to report on general changes in their own reading behaviour that they had perceived in the previous ten years (Liu, 2005). In other words, he asked them to compare their practices of reading print media to their practices of reading electronic documents or digital media. This researcher is one of the few who notes that the results of his study could be extended by being conducted in a variety of cultural contexts (p. 710). 83% of the respondents in this study said they were spending increasing time reading electronically (p. 705). While maintaining his interest in the effects of the arrival of digital media and increased access to information, Liu notes that changes in reading behaviour are driven by social forces as well, such as greater workloads and anxiety about competition in certain contexts (p. 705). Because of the former changes, respondents said they spend more time browsing, scanning, spotting keywords engaging in selective and "one-time reading" (i.e. reading a document once only) (p. 706). And because of hyperlinks attracting readers to other documents, respondents reported more non-linear reading (i.e. jumping about) and less sustained attention. Pop-up windows, graphics and multiple open windows tend to distract readers too (Liu, 2005.). Participants also reported that they enjoy annotating documents, so would if necessary print out digital copies in order to annotate them (p. 708).

Ebooks are another format that students can read these days, and can be defined as "texts that are digital and accessed via electronic screens" (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Courduff, Carter and Bennett, 2013, p. 260). A study gathered the opinions about ebooks from 91 students at a particular university – presumably in the United States, given the brief biographical information about the authors (Woody, Daniel and Baker, 2010). The main conclusion drawn by the authors was that the sampled students preferred to use printed textbooks rather

than ebooks – in fact, the authors referred to an apparent “aversion to ebooks on the part of undergraduate students” (p. 947). More investigation is needed to identify the reasons for this. A wider survey, the Campus Computing Project, obtains opinions from “senior campus IT officials” – not students, then, but staff on 451 campuses across the US (Green, 2013, p. 2). Over 90% of participants in this survey agreed strongly that ebook content would be an important resource in years to come. However, they were less enthusiastic than publishers are about ebooks, and were generally “still waiting” for ebooks to deliver on added value and lower costs than print books (p. 21).

Another study reflected the advancements in technology that had taken place between Liu’s (2005) findings – which revealed that students preferred to print out pages from ebooks in order to make notes – and about eight years later, as it was subsequently found that those who used e-textbooks were three times more likely to make notes in the text than print users were (Rockinson-Szapkiw, Courduff, Carter and Bennett, 2013, p. 264). Reviewing literature about ebooks and their impact on academic results and students’ experiences made the authors conclude that still more research is needed to understand and generalise from the benefits of the various kinds of formats on the learning process (p. 261). These authors therefore surveyed 538 undergraduate and postgraduate students at a university in the US. The authors distinguish between two kinds of e-textbooks: page fidelity e-textbooks, which are simply scanned versions of print books, and have no special digital features, and reflowable e-textbooks, which have a layout that can be modified to suit the user and include dynamic media, active web links and the like (Rockinson-Szapkiw, et al., 2013). E-textbooks can usually be accessed by static technology (i.e. a computer) or a mobile device. The former kind might soon be obsolete, because newer mobile delivery technologies are more viable. But limited research exists on reflowable e-textbooks and newer mobile technologies. This study focused on reflowable e-textbooks and 90% of participants said they accessed them on mobile devices like e-readers, tablets or laptop (2013, p. 261). Participants in this study reported that they chose print textbooks because of their portability (interestingly, this is the same reason given by 16% of those who used e-textbooks!), familiarity, and the ease of making notes and dog-earing relevant pages. What is more, printed books that were bought second-hand online were often cheaper than the digital version, while some still found it difficult to read onscreen (p. 263). Yet, also reflecting the advancements in technology, those who used digital versions gave similar reasons for their choice: portability; price; as well as simply wanting to try a format that was new to them.

Both groups tended to use their books in similar ways. The results of tests conducted were that neither students' grades, nor their perceptions of their learning, were affected by the textbook format they choose (p. 263). Also, this study confirmed others that showed that those using digital formats have more positive attitudes towards the studies than those who do not (p. 264).

The authors conclude that e-textbooks are still in their infancy and some features that improve accessibility are also still developing and are bound to improve the reading experience. This study confirms the (somewhat limited) research that when reading textbooks in new electronic formats, students reported increase in affective and psychomotor learning – in other words, “they learned actively and they liked it” (Rockinson-Szapkiw, et al., 2013, p. 265).

Social network sites like Facebook are enormously popular with university students, many of whom use such sites every day (Jaffar, 2014, p. 199). 2016 research revealed that Facebook was used by 14-million South Africans, while YouTube had 8.7-million users, Twitter's users increased to 7.7-million, LinkedIn users numbered 5.5-million, and Instagram's users increased by 32% up to 3.5-million (World Wide Worx, 2016). One of the most significant trends detected is that 85% of Facebook users access it via mobile devices, indicating that the mobile phone has become the primary form of accessing social media (World Wide Worx, 2016). Facebook use is discussed further in Chapter Seven, as this was the only social network specifically mentioned by students.

Anecdotal evidence from other academics had led me to believe that most students preferred reading on their phones or computers. Yet I should have paid closer attention to written evidence. At the end of 2014, in an informal survey I carried out of 16 postgraduate students I had taught, four students spontaneously mentioned that for them, eye-strain and related visual problems were drawbacks when reading online, just as students did in the research by Woody, Daniel and Baker (2010) and Rockinson-Szapkiw, et al. (2013).

I had wanted to entice students into developing their academic reading practices painlessly by introducing them to ebooks and online journals, but it seemed clear that it would not be particularly easy. I should have borne in mind that the ways people use new media are affected by a range of issues “related to economic resources, employment, health, education,

housing, recreation, culture, and civic engagement” (Snyder and Prinsloo, 2007, p. 171). In South Africa, it is the elite minority who have easy access to computer equipment, and the poorer majority who do not and a general lack of infrastructure to teach digital skills (Kajee and Balfour, 2011). Most of the 20 participants in a South African study of students using digital technology at university did not have access to computers or digital equipment at home or at school, and agreed that it was difficult making the transition to using digital technology at university (pp. 190, 191). Even the university’s provision of computer centres for students’ use was not really sufficient, as these spaces were often overcrowded and used as teaching venues too (p. 192). The authors therefore warn against talk of ‘the digital divide’, saying the gap between those who are adept at using laptops and so on and those who are not adept is not purely digital, but also shaped by a myriad of other kinds of social resources that are unevenly distributed (p. 194). After all, NLS practitioners have emphasised the ways in which language and communicative practices work – sustained and changed by people as part of their collective social practices – so it cannot be assumed that ‘new literacies’ are universal and generalisable, because digital practices happen in “differentiated, situated and enculturated ways” (Snyder and Prinsloo, 2007, p. 172).

Having outlined some of the formats available for *some* students to read, explained the influence of New Literacy Studies and the concept of academic literacy, and outlined some research carried out about the reading habits of young South Africans, I wanted to devise a definition of reading that would be appropriate for this study. Perhaps a definition that simply states that reading is “a social practice in which one makes meaning from print” leaves the context and purpose of reading wide open. This statement can then incorporate Barton and Hamilton’s (2000) ideas about literacy as social practice and apply these ideas to students reading academic texts. My understanding of this definition is that it implies that reading is mediated by written texts; that there is a kind of reading that is associated with the domain of the university, which is influenced by power relationships with lecturers and the university itself; that it has a purpose because it is embedded in the broader social practice of academic reading/writing; and that the practice of reading changes over time, due to the influence of formal and informal channels; and it is historically situated, changing as social conditions change.

Students who have problems with this particular practice, though, are dealing with a “tremendous handicap” in a context of learning that still, despite rapidly developing digital

technologies, relies on print-based material (Pretorius, 2003, p. 103). Nevertheless, students across the globe *are* struggling with academic literacy, and South Africans' particular problems with reading have been documented by such as Pretorius (2002); Pretorius and Bohlmann (2003); Niven (2005) and the recent Annual National Assessment (2013) of South African school children (Department of Basic Education, South Africa, 2014).

'Multimodality', mentioned earlier, was brought to prominence by a group of colleagues, which included well-known NLS theorists Norman Fairclough and James Gee. Together they were known as the New London Group, coining the term 'multiliteracies' in 1996. This was an attempt to cover traditional approaches to reading and writing – although the authors did not agree with these – and to include the new ways people make meaning in the twenty-first century (Kalantzis and Cope, 2012, p. 1). The term 'multiliteracies' is meant to cover two concepts: *social diversity* (that is, different conventions of meaning-making) and *multimodality*. The latter term refers to the ways in which “written-linguistic modes of meaning interface with oral, visual, audio, gestural, tactile and spatial patterns of meaning” (p. 2). At about the same time, *Reading Images* (1996) by Kress – one of the New London Group – and Van Leeuwen became known as a “ground-breaking text” about the semiotics of visual images, drawing on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, and arguing that “the new multimodal world... requires new analytic frameworks” while offering such a framework (Street and Lefstein 2007, p. 244). Kress and Van Leeuwen themselves, in a preface later (2006) included in the second edition, see *Reading Images*, not as a definitive work, but as “an early attempt... beginning to make inroads into understanding the visual as representation and communication – in a semiotic fashion” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, in 1996 p. vii). In it they describe the term 'multimodal' as being equivalent to “composite”; that is, visuals combining text, image and perhaps other graphic elements on a page or screen. The authors' stated aim is to “look at the whole page as an *integrated* text”, to find one language to talk about both language and image (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 177).

Kalantzis and Cope (2012) identify seven modes of meaning which are interconnected in communication and representation practices: oral (live or recorded speech and listening to such speech), written (writing and reading print), visual (making still or moving images), gestural (using the body), tactile (making experiences and things that can be discerned via the senses: everything from temperature to artefacts, cooking and Braille), spatial (landscape

and positioning of the self), and finally audio (communication using music and sounds, including hearing, listening or imagining sounds) (pp. 191, 193). To neglect multimodality, Kalantzis and Cope (2012) maintain, is to detract from creating “engaging and effective learning environments for children” (p. 196). The original New London group also proposed the idea of a metalanguage of multiliteracies based on the concept of ‘design’, rather than grammar (1996, p. 9). Kalantzis and Cope (2012) describe this metalanguage as “a way of talking explicitly for the purposes of learning about the form, structure and social purpose of meaning-making” (p. 199).

While maintaining that educating young people in ‘traditional’, school-based maths, reading and writing is still important: “perhaps even more important” in this multimodal world, Kalantzis and Cope state that this new theorising is vital in contemporary times when “we now have to learn how to navigate the myriad different uses of language in different contexts” (pp. 4, 5), new cultures of contribution and collaboration are developing, and “our students” all have “smart devices, connected to the new social media” (p. 8) and have become used to being characters in video games, writing their own endings. Students these days continue to learn beyond the classroom, critically reflect on their learning, give feedback to their classmates, and are comfortable players in environments where intelligence is collective and writing is collaborative, the authors say (p. 11). New forms of text – such as multimedia books and tweets - and media for displaying such texts – such as iPads and Kindles – have developed, which could in turn offer new possibilities and challenges for readers (Singer and Alexander, 2017, p. 155). The authors note that the literature records a preference for digital media by young people, but also that research has not clearly revealed whether digital reading offers benefits (Singer and Alexander, 2017, p. 166).

Street and Lefstein (2007) point out that mixing modes of communication is not really a new phenomenon. They illustrate this by noting that even ancient Bible manuscripts and passages of the Qur’an used multimodal forms of communication, because rich illustrations and calligraphy were employed to impart meaning, as well as the written word. They also argue that illustrations in children’s books and in advertising are well-known aspects of communication systems and have been for a long time (Street and Lefstein, 2007, p. 236). However, the work of the New London Group does illustrate the major contribution made by the NLS to traditional approaches to literacy: namely, the recognition that what is understood by ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ varies across cultures, time and space; and that the

meanings associated with them vary for participants, being rooted in social relationships, including relationships of power (Kress and Street in Pahl and Rowsell 2006, p. viii).

3.5 Reading problems

As mentioned above, the PIRLS survey is one of the more well-known reading studies. A global study that has included South Africa, its 2006 survey of 441 South African schools produced data with a mixture of positive and negative implications. These data were generated by means of a questionnaire, using a 4-point Likert scale. The good news was that in line with their international counterparts, South African Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners indicated that they had “moderately positive to very positive” *attitudes* to reading (Howie, et al., 2008, p. 35). However, the reading *performance* of those Grade 4 and Grade 5 pupils was the worst of those surveyed in 40 other countries (p. 56). Half of the households surveyed in the same study owned fewer than 10 books, and major problems in the local education system were revealed – such as a lack of libraries, insufficient time spent on reading activities, and problems in the supply of textbooks (p. 57). (Although this information is dated now, it is not out of date, as many of these problems unfortunately continue at the time of writing this thesis. For example, there were reports in the media from 2012 to 2014 –as in *Mail & Guardian*, 30 July 2012; News 24, 18 April 2013; eNews Channel Africa, 2 April 2014 – about the South African government delivering textbooks to schools up to seven months late, if at all.) The PIRLS Report took a ‘snapshot’ of a particular generation of children, some of whom were at university at the time my study was carried out in 2014/2015. It was interesting to see whether these issues mentioned by Howie, et al. were perceived by the students to have hampered aspects of their academic literacy. At the time of writing this thesis, the 2016 PIRLS had been conducted, but the results not yet published.

A follow-up of the 2006 PIRLS Report discussed the poor PIRLS scores, indicating that “the implications for further education and the economic development and contribution of these pupils to the country are considerable and warrant immediate intervention” (Howie, Venter and Van Staden, 2008, p. 559). South African academic Hilary Janks added her socio-cultural perspective to explain the poor PIRLS results, concluding that children need to be able to explore, produce and analyse texts, rather than simply decode them (Janks, 2011).

Worryingly, tests conducted since 2006 do not indicate that any improvement is being made. South African Grade 5 pupils in PIRLS 2011 did perform better than those in Morocco, Oman and Botswana, but this is probably more indicative of problems in those three countries than of any improvement locally. South African children again performed poorly, averaging below the centre point of 500. The key point is that there was no difference in performance in 2011 PIRLS compared to 2006 PIRLS (Zenex Foundation, 2011). The 2014 Annual National Assessment (ANA) of South African children in Grades 1 to 6 and Grade 9 in public schools reveal that the average score for First Additional Language assessment for learners in Grades 4, 5, 6 and 9 was 42. Although there were small improvements in the results between the 2013 ANA and the 2014 version, the poor results are alarming. The Department of Basic Education has committed itself implemented its relatively new Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, which includes a focus on reading (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

When it comes to measuring the quality of South African primary and secondary education, there are many facts, figures and international comparisons to draw on, whether PIRLS or TIMMS (Third International Mathematics and Science Study) or SACMEQ (Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality) (Bloch, 2009). In his discussion of these data, Bloch (2009) notes that:

For many of the figures, it is up to a point a case of which ‘facts’ you choose, how you arrange them, and how you decide to tell the story of education. Yet all the stories in these pages [*The Toxic Mix: What’s wrong with South Africa’s schools and how to fix it*] attest to the single fact that the vast majority of South African schools are underperforming abysmally (p. 10).

Given this ‘toxic’ backdrop, it is unsurprising that a brief overview of studies done at South African universities discussed below reveals that reading problems exist nation-wide. A group of Unisa students were found to be performing at what has been called “the frustration level” of reading, with less than 50 percent comprehension accuracy (Pretorius, 2000). Similarly, an analysis of the reading and comprehension abilities of a group of first-year Potchefstroom University students found that their average reading comprehension was at about a Grade 9 level (Nel, Dreyer, and Klopper, 2004). A survey of medical students at the University of Cape Town, who are among the highest performing school-leavers in the country, indicated that many students found the reading prescribed for their first-year course, not impossible, but certainly frustrating, demoralising, contradictory and confusing (Van

Pletzen, 2006). The Unisa study ends with an urgent call to educators to pay attention to improving reading levels of undergraduate students, concluding grimly that, since many students in South Africa underperform, “leaving them to their own devices in the hope that problems will sort themselves out amounts to an abdication of educational responsibility” (Pretorius, 2000, p. 45).

Pretorius’s opinion is shared by many educators. Hendricks (2013) examines whether teachers who graduated from Rhodes University’s Bachelor of Education and Advanced Certificate in Education were able to sustain and promote the reading programme that they themselves took part in during their studies at Rhodes. She found that fewer than 10% of alumni could provide evidence of “promoting reading for pleasure with their learners” (Hendricks, 2013, p. 2). She points out that not only teacher enthusiasm is required, but also government support; plus a dedicated librarian is necessary for a school library to flourish, and professional associations to provide support for literacy initiatives. Clearly, these resources are not easy to come by in the troubled South African educational system and could be expected to be among the constraints on early reading experiences that my interviewees report on.

Earlier, I discussed the notion of epistemological access as being a way of thinking about student learning: of assisting students to cope with the demands of university-level reading and writing. Yet Barnett (2008) says that more than epistemological access, students need to develop an *identity* as a university student. This, then, is the focus of the final section in Chapter Three.

3.6 Identities

Discourses of identity call attention to diversity of identities and so to the pressures to conform to socially approved identities, the benefits of doing so, the costs of not doing so, and who determines which identities are approved and who provides the benefits and exacts the costs and how (Lemke, 2008, p. 22).

Specialist languages, such as academic language, are linked to socially situated activities and identities, which will be acquired only if they are seen as desirable and attainable (Gee, 2004, p. 93). People’s identities “cannot be separated from the ways they engage in literate practices”, because our pasts and our present positioning in certain places and spaces have

an enormous impact how we make sense of texts (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012, p. x). So the concept of 'identity' gives theorists a way to link lived experience with cultural and social systems of beliefs, values and meaning-making practices (Lemke, 2008, p. 21).

I am discussing this concept in some detail, because various identity issues came to the fore almost as soon as the interviews began and it makes sense to unpack the notion of identity before examining the identities that students claimed for themselves – some overtly linked to their reading practices, and some more tangential.

The notion of identities, then, was a central concept as I analysed transcripts. Discourse is one of the key features of an individual's identity which influences academic success at university (Leibowitz, et al., 2005, p. 26). Its significance is perhaps predictable, as the very notion of academic literacy on which this thesis rests means that, as Saltmarsh and Saltmarsh (2008) elegantly put it, education itself is seen as playing "a significant role in processes of 'becoming'" (p. 622). And students, particularly those who are young people in their late teens and early twenties, often tend to experience mutable identities as they undergo these processes of becoming.

NLS has made many language experts realise that identities are multiple, and that students have to learn to negotiate different discourses of identity (Moore, Paxton, Scott and Thesen, 1998, p. 13). Many theorists now agree that our identities are multiple and ever-evolving (Ivanič, 1998; Moore, et al., 1998; Gee, 2000a; Van Heerden, 2000; Siegel, 2003; Giampapa, 2004) as it has become accepted that most people play a number of roles and assume a number of identities along with those roles. Indeed, individual writers can shift their identity within one piece of writing (Ivanič, 1998, p. 295).

This thesis draws on critical theory, yet there are overlaps between the post-structuralist paradigm and the critical paradigm of understanding identity. Post-structuralist theories examine the way in which language constructs reality, whereas critical theory regards language as representing ideologies (McKenna, 2004a, p. 37). Both regard language use as important; both highlight power relationships. And both view as unavoidable the influence of the researcher's identity on the research process, which means that the researcher needs to expose her own prejudices in her writing when dealing with human perceptions (McKenna, 2004a, p. 36). This I have done at various places throughout the thesis.

Post-structuralist theories of identity foreground the role of language when analysing the relationship between individuals and society, as language is seen as constructing our subjectivity (Norton, 2013, pp. 3-5). In this paradigm, language constitutes the identity of the ever-changing, frequently contradictory individual and his/her relationship to power. Such theories are liberating in some ways, as they challenge “dominant theories of knowledge and text” (Norton, 2013, p. 5), but they also raise some issues, such as when students occasionally want to assert that their identities are actually unitary and homogenous, rather than multiple. An example is the #FeesMustFall movement, discussed in Chapter One. Here a large number of students have adopted a unitary identity as ‘we students who all demand free education’, refusing to recognise that some are more able than others to pay fees.

However, since this thesis employs critical theory in the form of Critical Discourse Analysis and a framework of critical realism, I am going to draw on a critical view of the social construction of identity, as it recognises the power that dominant ideologies have to control and constrain people’s sense of themselves, while recognising that people are able to struggle for alternative definitions (Ivanič, 1998, p. 13). Ivanič’s writings about identity (1998, and Clark and Ivanič 1997) as well as those of Gee are therefore influential in this study, as both draw on critical theory when doing so.

When Ivanič began working with mature university students, she discovered that they often said things about their writing which she saw as being issues of identity (Ivanič 1998, p. 6). Clark and Ivanič (1997, p. 136) regard the three aspects of writer identity as being the discoursal self (representations of self through the discourses they use), the authorial self (the extent of their authority and authorial presence evident in their writing) and the autobiographical self (their personal histories). I anticipated that the same would be true when students talked about reading, predicting that their discoursal and autobiographical selves would become apparent when they talked about their reading practices, while their authorial selves would not be foregrounded here.

Some of the ideas that Ivanič (1998) says should form a framework for thinking about identity, are (a) a critical view of the relationship between identity, social conventions and power; (b) identity as multiple, historically situated, negotiable, changeable; and (c) the role

of ‘discourses’ and ‘literacies’ in making up identities (p. 19). These ideas do indeed form a part of this study, as explained later in this chapter.

While students sometimes want to identify themselves in at least some way with the academic world, it is common for them to be inconsistent in laying claim to the identities they felt they were conveying (Ivanič, 1998). Students she worked with frequently mentioned a feeling of floundering, of having a sense of what is expected of them while feeling unsure and annoyed about it: “What do they expect of you? It’s very difficult,” says one student. Perhaps as a result of this confusion and complexity, cynical self-representation, alienation, deception, and rejected identities were not uncommon among the students (Ivanič, 1998, pp. 229-244), and I expected to hear similar feelings expressed by Fort Hare students. In fact, in some written, anonymous feedback given to me at the end of an Honours degree course I taught in 2013, one Fort Hare student wrote, “The challenge is writing as perfectly as they [lecturers] do. It’s really hard, and how can you not write as a student, it’s totally impossible.”

Ivanič herself interviewed a student named Rachel, who constructed an identity that she herself did not entirely believe in, pretending that she had read certain books that in reality she had not, and commenting: “I just feel it’s a game and ... I can’t take it serious ... It’s conveyor belt stuff, it’s going through the motions” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 167). Rachel also saw herself simultaneously as ‘a reader’ and as ‘someone who could not read’, probably as a result of being treated at school as someone who was unable to read. This treatment had been a surprise to her, as until then, outside of school, she defined herself as someone who could read successfully. Ivanič found Rachel’s story to exemplify the “complexities of the discursal construction of identity” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 170) and its relationship to academic literacy, because students need to establish an identity for themselves as readers and writers (Ivanič and Simpson, 1992, p. 142). Ivanič (1998, p. 73) portrays identity as “constructed by the practices associated with writing as well as the linguistic choices writers make”. My own thesis argues that identity can also be constructed at least to some extent by practices associated with reading.

Ivanič also maintains that our identity is constructed by our membership of and identification with one or more communities and quotes Bartholomae (1986) who makes the point that for a student, mastering academic discourse involves taking on the identity of a

member of the academic community, i.e. someone with a particular kind of authority (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 6). Several students interviewed by Ivanič saw themselves as having a ‘real self’, which can be swamped by academia. They also had a ‘desired self’ – someone they would have liked to be, but were not yet able to be (Ivanič, 1998, pp. 218, 225). For university lecturers, there is continuous tension between the need on the one hand to develop the students’ knowledge of the academic conventions and on the other, the students’ right to express their own identity as they wish (Clark, 1992, p. 135).

When it comes to understanding emerging student identities, academic literacy practitioners have noted that Gee’s work on identities is still a useful resource to draw on (Thesen and Van Pletzen, 2006, p. 12; Thomson, 2008, p. 57). Gee (1990, 2005) explains the link between identities and language use. When he ‘decodes’ the warning on a bottle of Tylenol aspirin (1990, p.45), he points out that it contains implicit generalisations about drug abuse and medical knowledge, among other topics. He maintains that any way of reading the aspirin bottle, or any text, therefore involves apprenticeship to some social group, leading to the deduction that in a ‘literacy’ program the teachers or lecturers always need to ask themselves what sort of social group they intend to apprentice the learner into. In this way, it can be said that the educators exercise their ‘authority’ mentioned above (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 6). Since Gee also maintains that it is through different social languages “that we enact, perform, and recognise different socially situated identities” (2005, p. 147), he makes it clear that the concept of identities is another vital link in the chain of understanding literacy practices.

At the Durban University of Technology, the discourse of motivation as being vital for student success was drawn on extensively by both students and lecturers (McKenna, 2004a). Yet this discourse did not explain student success or failure. McKenna’s conclusion was that if student behaviour was instead understood as the result of investing (or not) in the sort of *academic identities* that lecturers value, a more “complex and satisfying” picture emerged of their behaviours (McKenna, 2004a, p. 184). This view has taken hold, and some AD programmes explicitly include identity work as part of their curricula. The University of Cape Town has a successful AD programme in the Commerce faculty, with an underpinning belief that developing “social connectedness, identity and agency” is the key to academic success (Pym and Kapp, 2011, p 7), agency being the individual acting intentionally (Case, 2013, p. 31). A wide variety of strategies are employed to assist students, with the

programme designed to help them see that their identities are mutable and do not determine their futures. For the educators involved, the main challenge is to recognise students as individuals, and make use of their experiences, so that they can “create new subject positions and develop as reflexive learners” (Pym and Kapp, 2011, p. 11).

Leibowitz, et al. (2007), brought together two groups of South African fourth-year Psychology students to talk about identity and difference. One group was from a well-resourced, traditionally white, Afrikaans university (Stellenbosch University), and the other from a less well-resourced, mostly black university (University of the Western Cape, known as ‘UWC’). The findings revealed that students in both groups used a variety of strategies to discuss difference, showing the multiplicity of ways in which attitudes to race and difference are entrenched in the thinking of people in the divided society of South Africa (Leibowitz, et al., 2007, p. 715). And in a country with eleven official languages, language is another aspect of identity that has been found to play a role as a “source of affiliation in the lives of lecturers and students” (Leibowitz, et al., 2005, p. 34). It is particularly important in contemporary South Africa to investigate the relationships between language, identity and teaching at the level of higher education, because these relationships intersect in many ways, and have implications for social justice (Leibowitz, et al., 2005, p. 34). I asked my interviewees about how they see themselves, as students and as readers, in an effort to link their reading practices with their identities. Their answers are unpacked in Chapters Five to Seven.

In August 2014, two white students from the University of Pretoria made news headlines after they were photographed dressed up for a party with black paint on their faces, exaggeratedly padded derrieres and clothing associated with domestic workers. They seemingly perceived the identity of ‘black domestic workers’ as sufficiently ‘other’ to be entertaining to the people at the party. Illustrating a polar opposite view, SA Students Congress president Ntuthuko Makhombothi said, when commenting on the incident, “They are reinforcing racist stereotypes about our mothers” (Sapa, 2014a). This episode caused enormous controversy, with some members of the public dismissing it as youthful folly and others condemning it as insulting and racist. The students themselves were expelled from their residences and further investigation was planned, both by the university and by the South African Human Rights Commission (Sapa, 2014b). The incident illustrates Bloch’s (2009) view that “Division and conflict are written into the history of colonial dispossession,

of segregation and apartheid. We should not be surprised that strands and strains from the past persist and reproduce and mutate as ‘legacy effects’” (p. 55) – meaning, as this event and reactions to it illustrate, that for some South Africans, race persists as a divisive marker of identity. Similarly, Soudien (2001) after interviewing 50 South African school pupils in the early post-apartheid years, found that although they claimed that race was not an important identity marker for them, race still “pervaded the students’ everyday worlds” (p. 318). While the *aim* of many South African ideologies was to fix stable identity markers, terms like ‘black’, ‘white’, and so on are not stable. Soudien (2001, p. 325) draws on Hall (1988) to explain that ‘blackness’ is a politically, culturally constructed term, and so lacks an essential definition. This lack of stability means that the *effect* of the discourses is also “to provide opportunities for those categories to subvert themselves” (Soudien, 2001, p. 325).

Yet, years before the incident at the University of Pretoria, Thesen (1997) criticises the “stereotypical” categories of race, class and gender that tend to be assigned to people (p. 504). In her interviews with University of Cape Town students, Thesen found that when the students talked about themselves an additional range of identity markers came up, such as religion, politics, and even peer-group gym culture. For this reason, it is vital, she maintains, to establish what people say about themselves and their activities to find out what new identity categories might emerge (Thesen, 1997, p. 505). And since *writing* practices “depend on the multiple identities that writers bring to them” (Clark and Ivanič, 1997, p. 158), it stands to reason that *reading* practices do too. Whether racial identity was something that impacted Fort Hare students’ reading practices was something I wanted to investigate in this study.

Badenhorst and Kapp (2013) describe how 13 black first-year medical students who failed the first semester of 2009 at a mostly ‘white’, English-speaking university managed their changing self-identity. Class, language and race were issues for many. Across the globe, including South Africa, “working-class students experience various forms of alienation within the middle-class environment of higher education” (p. 473). The students in this particular group ended up falling silent in class and resorted to the learning habits that worked for them at school. As they negotiated their new identities as ‘failed students’, they positioned themselves in terms of deficit, as outsiders. But, the authors point out, in South Africa at the time, around 2009 was (as 2014/5 still is) a time of transition that offers many students new possibilities for upward mobility and at such a time, it is vital to “question the

‘taken-for-granted’ institutional culture” (p. 474). While it would seem unlikely that the University of Fort Hare, as an HBU, would be as alienating for black students as the previously ‘whites-only’ university in which the authors conduct their research, “the emotional toll of negotiating identity and learning is considerable” for many students, no matter which university they attend (p. 474). This is yet another reason for including the notion of identity as one to be investigated in this exploration of students’ reading practices.

In addition to academic literacy and identities, discussed earlier in this chapter, a notion central to the NLS movement is that any useful definition of literacy has to be couched in terms of Discourse (Gee, 1990, p. 153). Ivanič (1998), for one, maintains that discourse is the mediating mechanism in the social construction of identity (p. 17). Fairclough, Gee, and many other theorists mentioned in this chapter, such as Gramsci and Foucault, espouse what Boughey (2010) calls “critical orientations to knowing”, and some of these theorists have come to rely on the construct of discourse in the application of such orientations to knowing. For instance, when educators talk about students or the curriculum or assessment, they are involved in discourse and their talk “structures what it is possible to do or not to do in the way of education” (p. 5). Similarly, students’ talk about their reading constitutes discourse(s) that can be analysed to gain an insight their reading practices, and to investigate what links exist between their self-identity and their reading practices.

At the beginning of this research process, I had several questions about the identities of the students I taught. Firstly, I wondered about their ‘reading identities’, for it seems that, for some people, a ‘reading identity’ is easier to adopt than a ‘writing identity’. This was the finding in a survey of 80 children and adults in the US in the early 1990s, which asked how respondents learnt to read and write. Many respondents described themselves as “quite a reader”, or “reading all the time” or as coming from “a family of readers” (Brandt, 2009, p. 60). Secondly, being an undergraduate student is one of those times in people’s lives where identities are fluid, since being a student is a time when “possibilities for self-hood” seem to present themselves at every turn (Ivanič, 1998, p. 237). Key questions for educators are the following, says Lillis (2001, p. 169): What kinds of identities should be encouraged in higher education, and why? What kinds of identities are privileged through existing practices? Once these are identified, how can traditionally excluded identities be included in learning, teaching, and meaning making? For instead of educators assuming that they know what students need to be taught, they would do well to listen to the challenges and demands

that students face (Ivanič, 1998, p. 115). Academic literacy, then, is about more than reading and writing; it also involves thinking critically and taking action and so is related to identity development (McAlpine, 2012, p. 359)

The significance of academic reading is related to what the student understands ‘being a student’ to mean, which in turn relates to how they see themselves, what aspirations they have (Mann, 2000, p. 311). So discovering how Fort Hare students – undergraduate and postgraduate – describe *themselves* in relation to reading, as opposed to how the lecturers describe them, is central to this study.

3.7 Conclusion

For the purpose of this thesis, ‘reading’ is defined as ‘a social practice in which one makes meaning from print’. Although ‘reading’ is still seen in many quarters as a skill, rather than a practice, this chapter has shown that an understanding of reading as being skills-based alone is linked to the ‘English as a second language’ (ESL) approach, which in turn has clear ties to Street’s autonomous approach to literacy. Over time, academic development programmes in South Africa have moved from such ESL approaches to incorporate understandings of academic literacy that are strongly influenced by New Literacy Studies as part of a ‘social turn’. Gee, in particular, is an NLS theorist who maintains that learning to read is a cultural process that begins at home, and includes taking on an identity as ‘a reader’.

The ‘deficit’ view of student learning also persists, but NLS has left its mark in programmes designed to offer access to higher education for as many South African students as possible. It is vital for educators to bear in mind, though, that access to higher education does not equal social justice.

Taking an NLS view of reading means that the changes in reading practices brought about by technological developments such as ebooks and social networks need to be seen in context. The ‘new literacies’ are not universally practised, because the social resources connected to such literacies are unevenly distributed.

Several theorists have pointed to a lack of information about aspects of reading practices, both in South Africa and internationally, but surveys, studies and media reports have made it clear that reading problems exist across South Africa.

In the NLS tradition, literacy practices are seen to depend on the multiple identities that people bring to those practices, and discourse is a mediating mechanism in the social construction of identity. Given that this study is a Critical Discourse Analysis, it seemed evident that identity would be a significant concept throughout.

Having outlined some core ideas and underpinning notions of my thesis in the last two chapters, the following chapter moves on to explain the methods and methodology employed in the analysis.

Chapter Four: Methods and methodology

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology of my own research and how discourse analysis was used within it.

On the one hand, New Literacy Studies is informed by the sociology of knowledge, anthropology and, as indicated in Chapter Two, critical discourse studies, particularly in the approach taken by Fairclough (Lillis and Scott, 2007, p. 11). On the other hand, one of the main methodologies used when drawing on an ideological model of literacy is ascertaining participants' perspectives on practices (Lillis and Scott, 2007). Bearing in mind these two points, and the fact that this study attempts to understand students' own perspectives on their reading practices, it seemed clear to me from the start that a discourse analysis of students' own words would be a vital part of the research.

My aim in this study was to uncover a variety of discursive mechanisms, using the method of Critical Discourse Analysis. This chapter therefore unpacks the terms 'discourse' and 'Critical Discourse Analysis' and traces some of the ways in which CDA is compatible with critical realism. Although CDA can be carried out from a variety of ontological positions, critical realism is the approach used by Fairclough, and underpins this study too. CDA allowed me to identify discourses only and not the full range of mechanisms, enabling me to analyse the ways discourses functioned as mechanisms enabling and constraining events (Actual) and experiences (Empirical). 'Mechanisms', 'actual' and 'empirical' are terms used in the sense that critical realists use them. So the first part of the chapter will outline how I use critical realism in this study. Later, I will explain how the theories of Gee and Fairclough have guided the way in which I carried out the CDA to enable me to understand aspects of the reading practices of the students who participated in this study, and to show how these practices link to the students' academic and other identities.

4.2 Critical realism

'Ontology' is a blanket term for ideas about the notion of the world, for existence (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen and Karlsson, 1997, p. 206). These ideas underpin our basic

understandings of what science and social science are, and what they should do (Collier, 1994, p. 31). The ontological orientation of this study is critical realism (CR), which is a branch of philosophy emanating from the work of Roy Bhaskar, who used the term ‘ontology’ to equate with what reality must be in order for science to be possible (Danermark, et al., 1997, p. 206). To put it another way: Bhaskar aimed to establish what sort of thing society must be in order for knowledge to be possible, and what sort of knowledge is possible (Collier, 1994, p. 160).

Often, research is concerned with identifying what causes a particular phenomenon to occur as it does. Critical realism is a theory that aims to explain the causes of a phenomenon, while being a counterpoint to what Bhaskar saw as the inadequacy of ‘actualism’ (Collier, 1994, p. 7). Actualism is an approach to science that holds that events cause things to happen, so it is assumed that A causes B, because when A happens, B happens (Collier, 1994, p. 7). Scientists strive to prove these so-called ‘constant conjunctions’ via experiments, but they do not readily occur outside of controlled settings, such as a laboratory (Wight, 2004, p. 289). In this study, for example, I was interested in what students’ reading practices consist of, and how their academic reading practices, particularly, affect (and are affected by) their identities as students and as young people. To achieve these research aims, experiments in a laboratory setting would not have been suitable, as the social world cannot be investigated in the same way as the natural world (Fairclough, 2005, p. 922).

Fairclough (2003, 2005, 2009) applies various tenets of critical realism in his work. Critical realism is a highly complex philosophy – but I used it in this study simply as an ‘underlabourer’ (to use Bhaskar’s (1998) term) to clearly state the nature of reality as understood in this study. For this reason, I discuss only the two main principles of critical realism below, as used by Fairclough: (a) causal mechanisms; and (b) three domains of reality (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999; Fairclough, Jessop and Sayer, 2001; Fairclough, 2003 and 2005).

a) Causal mechanisms

Revealing the causal mechanisms that produce social phenomena – that is, explaining social processes and events – is the main aim of critical realist research (Danermark, et al., 1997, p. 1; Fairclough, 2005, p. 927). Critical realists maintain that when we ask about a structure

generating a particular power, we are asking about a mechanism generating an event – a generative ‘mechanism’ not being a ‘machine’, but the operative part or process in a system that produces a result (Wight, 2004, p. 288). Such mechanisms tend to act when triggered (Collier, 1994, p. 63). The word ‘tend’ is important here, drawing attention to the exercised but unrealised tendencies. Both things and humans will exercise a tendency only when circumstances are appropriate (Collier, 1994, p. 125). For this reason, critical realists argue that what have been called ‘laws’ in social science should instead be called ‘tendencies’ (Danermark, et al., 1997, 74). In my own study, this would mean that I do not aim to identify laws governing students’ reading practices, but rather the tendencies of certain mechanisms to affect those practices.

In any social phenomenon – competition, for instance (Wight, 2004), or child rearing practices (Bunge 2004) – a huge number of mechanisms can come into play. We can deduce that words, and therefore language generally, can also be mechanisms, because words have causal power to affect material things (Archer, 2000). Discourses exist in the world as material realities (Gee, 2011, p. 39). This can be understood if we think of the way in which people engage in recognition work; in other words, trying to make visible to themselves and to others who they are and what they are doing (Gee, 2011, p. 37). Recognition work and Discourse create each other, and such processes become visible when we judge what is ‘acceptable’ and what is not (Gee, 2011, p. 37).

Discourse, then, is an example of a causal mechanism: Sayer (2000: 45) maintains that discourses can have an effect – such as when we treat people as if they were X, this can sometimes, and to some degree, *make* them X. This concept is vital to my thesis, as it provides the rationale for doing a Critical Discourse Analysis at all.

The aim of this study, then, is to uncover a variety of Discourse-as-mechanisms, using the method of Critical Discourse Analysis. However, given what is argued above about tendencies, any critical realism researcher, once she has identified causal mechanisms, will need to acknowledge that in other contexts, other causal mechanisms might come into play, and a different course of events would then emerge. This means that the insight that results from any research is always fallible (Danermark, et al., 1997). That is, we know that any new theory aiming to explain our social or scientific world might later be proven to be wrong; in fact, we know that in the history of science, ontological claims have often been

proven wrong, which keeps science sceptical and therefore critical (Wight, 2004). Collier (1994) describes this aspect of critical realism – that it regards all theory as fallible – as “potentially emancipatory” (p. 15), as all researchers are freed from the responsibility of attempting to make eternal claims about reality.

b) Three domains of reality

Another vital element of critical realism is the acknowledgement that we do not and cannot know about every aspect of the world –that there are objects existing in the world that are waiting to be discovered (or not). Critical realists explain this by saying that we can divide reality into three domains. There is the ‘*empirical*’, which is the part of the real and the actual that we experience. Then there is the ‘*actual*’ (the domain of events and processes). Lastly, there is the ‘*real*’, which is the domain of structures with the associated generative mechanisms (Fairclough, 2005). Bhaskar’s kind of transcendental realism claims that mechanisms, those underlying causes of experience that we do not directly experience, can be shown to be real, whether we experience and recognise them or not (Collier, 1994). This study aimed to explore students’ reports of their empirical experiences, as I attempted to uncover the mechanisms in the level of the real. However, as Fairclough (2003) points out, one of the implications of the domains of reality is that what we know about reality is not reality itself, so whatever analysts discover in CDA research is partial, selective, and never utterly definitive or fully objective.

The ontological position that processes, events and structures occupy different strata of social reality – the material, the living, and the rational – with different properties is called a ‘stratified ontology’ (Fairclough, 2005, p. 922). Each stratum of reality represents something new and different, although it has been formed by underlying strata. When the powers and mechanisms of underlying, lower strata combine, new objects come into existence, each with its own particular structures, forces, powers and mechanisms, at a higher level. For instance, it is partly the combination of developments that occur at the levels of physiology, in the brain, eyes, mouth and ears, which give rise to the ability to use language, with language occupying its own stratum (Collier, 1994, p. 116). Bhaskar discusses the relationship between mechanisms of higher-level strata and underlying mechanisms in terms of ‘rootedness’ and ‘emergence’ (Collier, 1994, p. 110).

The new strata are *completely* new, and so cannot be analysed in terms of the underlying strata; in other words, the new, higher strata cannot be ‘reduced’ to the underlying ones, which is why critical realists say they are ‘irreducible’ (Danermark, et al., 1997; Archer, 1995). When this occurrence of combination and new development begins, it is called ‘emergence’, and we say that an object has ‘emergent powers’ (Danermark, et al., 1997). This ‘emergence theory’ allows us to imagine reality consisting of real, irreducible wholes, which are made up of parts that are also irreducible wholes, “with each level of this hierarchy of composition having its own peculiar mechanisms and emergent powers” (Collier, 1994, p. 117). Listening to a parent reading from a newspaper is an example of an event at the level of the actual, which is experienced at the level of the empirical. Over time, such events and experiences may lead to a particular *understanding of texts* emerging. This understanding of texts is not reducible to the individual events from which it emerged, but it has emergent powers at the level of the real, from which future reading events and experiences might emerge.

In social scientific analysis one is searching for mechanisms, or causal powers, in the social realm – although they might be inferred from other levels (Danermark, et al., 1997, p. 199). In my study, the mechanisms that I looked for in the realm of language could have originated in the physiological realm, if a student had problems with her vision, for example, or they could have emerged from the psychological realm, if her feeling of alienation on campus causes her to have difficulty in focusing on reading. Critical realism says that open systems (that is, systems that are not controlled and contained as might happen in a laboratory) are multiply determined. For this reason, one can explain them in terms of multiple mechanisms belonging to many different scientific realms, which means that all the disciplines of the social sciences can logically regard each other as separate, with their own explanatory powers (Collier, 1994). It is in this way that – as Collier neatly puts it – critical realism maintains that “the republic of knowledge has a federal constitution” (1994, p. 214).

Many critical discourse analysts, like Fairclough, are realists. The idea that there are underlying real causes and patterns to social relations encourages their political engagement, and they see their main political task as clarifying these real states of affairs (Wetherell, 2001, p. 294). Such discourse researchers also find critical realism valuable because it seems to avoid relativism, the conception that “truth is always contingent or relative to some

discursive and cultural frame of reference” (Wetherell, 2001, p. 393). Instead, description is partly about what is *really* the case.

To reiterate, my research questions were the following, using a framework of New Literacy Studies, and with critical realism as my ontology:

Main question

What mechanisms, in the form of Discourses, constrain or enable the emergence of Fort Hare students’ reported academic reading practices?

Sub-question

What do the Discourses that Fort Hare students use when discussing their academic and leisure reading practices reveal about their identities both as members of the academic community and outside the academic community?

One of the differences between the social sciences and natural sciences is that social science has as its subjects not just things, but beliefs about those things. This makes it possible for social science to offer ‘explanatory critiques’, that is, very good descriptions of a social situation containing value judgements – which one is free to dispute. The theory of ‘explanatory critique’ in critical realism explains how a study can discover values (Bhaskar, 1998, p. xviii). Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) view CDA as a kind of explanatory critique. In fact, their framework for doing CDA, expounded on below, is modelled on Bhaskar’s explanatory critique (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999, p. 60; Fairclough, 2003, p. 209), again illustrating the link between critical realism and CDA.

So having explained some notions of critical realism important to this thesis, I now unpack what Fairclough, Gee and others mean by ‘discourse’ and ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’.

4.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

The term ‘discourse’ is used and understood in different ways. Fairclough maintains that ‘discourse’, when used as an abstract noun (that is, discourse in general rather than a ‘count noun’, in the plural), is “a notoriously problematic and confusing term” (Fairclough, Jessop and Sayer, 2001, p. 1). He describes discourses as being characterised by vocabulary,

semantic relations, assumptions, and grammatical features; as well as the way processes, people, objects and relationships are represented, grammatically as well as lexically (Fairclough, 2003, p. 133). For some theorists, ‘discourse’ could simply mean the study of language as it is used (Wetherell, Taylor, and Yates, 2001, p. 3), but on the other hand, many poststructuralists and those influenced by the work of Foucault use the term so broadly that according to Wetherell (2001, p. 390) “there are no clear demarcations where discourse stops and the rest of social life begins”. However, Fairclough is not one of them. Although he argues that employing some form of discourse analysis is a productive way of doing social research, because language is “an irreducible part of social life”, he firmly maintains that this is *not* the same as holding the position that “everything is discourse” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2).

As I have indicated, my study draws on the work of Gee, Fairclough, and other discourse theorists. As established earlier, I did this in an attempt to uncover what representational meanings students are drawing on when they discuss their reading practices; and how students identify themselves in relation to the academy and outside groups, both with regard to their reading practices and in other ways. Specifically, I applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is an analysis of the dialectical relationships between discourse and other elements of social practice (Fairclough, 2005, p. 205). Fairclough’s approach is called ‘dialectical-relational’ because semiosis is an element of the social process that is dialectically related to others (Fairclough, 2009, p. 163).

One of the differences between the social sciences and natural sciences is that social science has as its subjects not just things, but beliefs about those things. This makes it possible for social science to offer ‘explanatory critiques’ – which one is free to dispute. The theory of ‘explanatory critique’ in critical realism explains how a study can discover values (Bhaskar, 1998, p. xviii). Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) view CDA as a kind of explanatory critique. In fact, their framework for doing CDA, expounded on below, is modelled on Bhaskar’s explanatory critique (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999, p. 60; Fairclough, 2003, p. 209), again illustrating the link between critical realism and CDA.

Much of what I say here was raised in earlier discussion on key features of political work done in the New Literacies Study movement, but it is important to draw attention again to certain aspects. CDA is an approach to analysing text which is allied to critical language

study. The latter is an orientation to language, with important contributions by Voloshinov, Bourdieu, Foucault and Habermas (Fairclough 1992, p. 7). CDA can be characterised by these theoretical propositions: language use shapes and is shaped by society; discourse helps to constitute and change knowledge and its objects, social relations, and social identity; and discourse is shaped by relations of power and invested with ideologies (Fairclough 1992). In this way, Fairclough (1992) sees CDA as analysing text in context. His view of discourse makes this clear:

Every discourse instance has three dimensions: it is a spoken or written language *text*; it is an *interaction* between people, involving processes of producing and interpreting the text; and it is part of a piece of *social action* – and in some cases virtually the whole of it (p. 10).

Another way of expressing this idea is to say that CDA aims to show how language is used to convey power and status in present-day social interactions, and how texts realise, articulate and disperse ‘discourses’ as ideological positions (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996). So CDA aims to provide a way to ‘read between the lines’ of what is said, to gain a sense of whose interest might have given rise to a particular text, and perhaps to gain a sense of the possibility of an alternative view (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996).

However, Gee argues that *all* discourse analysis needs to be critical “because language itself is ... political” (2011, p. 9). Whatever Gee and Fairclough call their approaches to discourse analysis, though, it is clear that they share very similar ideas about the role of text in society and its intrinsic links to power, ideology and identities.

Bourdieu was one of the first people to link habitus, education and discourse theory, maintaining that whatever habitus is instilled in someone, formal education generates a discourse that tends to systematise the principles of that habitus and make them explicit (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p. 59). Ivanič (1998, p. 19) also links discourse analysis with academic literacy, declaring that taking a ‘discourse’ perspective when researching writing and identity draws on methodologies from Linguistics, while taking a ‘literacy’ perspective draws on methodologies from Anthropology. Ivanič (1998, p. 33) mostly takes a Linguistics perspective, but takes a literacy perspective too, commenting that linguistic evidence is helpful to those working in the field of academic literacies, since Linguistics offers useful tools for the analysis of writing.

4.3.1 Orders of discourse

For Fairclough, ‘orders of discourse’ is an important concept, which he explains this way: “The Critical Discourse Analysis approach thinks of the discursive practices of a community – its normal ways of using language – in terms of networks which I shall call ‘orders of discourse’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 55). The order of discourse of a social institution or social domain is made up by all the discursive types that are used there. The point of this concept is to highlight the relationships between different types in such a set. There are various orders of discourse, such as those of the school and the home. Analysing the order of discourse is not simple, because the relationship between institutions and discursive practices can be messy and complex – there is a variety of relationships between different kinds of institutions and their discourses (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 63). True to Fairclough’s description, the analysis of the orders of discourse for these interviewees revealed a complex discursive network of Conversations between discourses of race, culture, education, sociocultural status and relationships with English. ‘Big C’ Conversations are “all the talk and writing that has gone on in a specific social group or in society at large around a major theme, debate or motif”, e.g. global warming, or terrorism, or abortion (Gee, 2011, p. 29).

CDA is particularly concerned with social change and “how it connects with social relations of power and domination” (Fairclough, 2000, p. 158). A CDA is the analysis of three facets of an event: the text, the practice, and the sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 1995, p. 57).

In a particular order of discourse, some ways of *making meaning* dominate; others are marginal or oppositional (Fairclough, 2003). There are two levels to making meaning, says Boughey (2005), whose analysis of student writing used Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics as a framework, which Fairclough (1995a, 1995b, 2003) also draws on. The two levels of meaning making are the context of culture, defined as institutions, institutional roles, and their associated concepts and ideologies (Boughey, 2005, p. 232) which constrains the choices made about language; and the context of situation. The context of situation is about the environment in which the meaning is made, and is made up of the *field* of a text (what is being spoken or written about), the *tenor* of a text (relationship between language users) and the *mode* of a text (role that language plays in the situation) (Boughey, 2005).

In these interviews, the field, tenor and mode were guided by the fact that the conversations mostly belonged to the ‘group interview’ genre, and were mediated for the students by me, their lecturer, which required the students to speak English. This particular mode was sometimes a stumbling block. However, scrutinising the transcripts revealed that popular ways of making meaning included mutual help, as students clarified points for each other and helped each other finish sentences, as when Sibabalwe struggled to make his point in English:

Like, like – I can’t put into words – like/
the way we roll the English/
[Others: Mm; Nceba: The accent]/
... the accent ja//

In this way, they illustrated the point that “building with language is a *mutual* process” (Gee, 2011, p. 103), and indicated that the tenor of the conversation was often friendly and supportive.

4.3.2 Two kinds of discourse

As my analysis progressed, I found I made use of the work of Gee (1999a, 2014) even more extensively than that of Fairclough. Although Gee is not a critical realist, he (2003a) has himself noted the similarities between his approach and that of Fairclough, pointing out that their two models are very similar (Gee, 2003a, p. 19). Although Fairclough uses the term ‘discourse’ in his earlier works, such as *Media discourse* (1995a), generally in his later works he prefers to use the term ‘semiosis’ instead. However, I find ‘semiosis’ too broad for my purposes, as it includes a wide variety of meaning-making, such as body language and visual images (Fairclough, 2003, p. 205), which I have not foregrounded in my study. For this reason, I draw on the work of Gee (1999a, 2005, 2011), as he divides discourses into two types. I found that in the interview analyses I drew extensively on Gee’s concept of ‘discourses’ with a small ‘d’, meaning “language-in-use or stretches of language (like conversations or stories)” (Gee, 2005, p. 26). These ‘discourses’ form part of ‘Discourses’ with a capital ‘D’. Gee (2011) describes Discourse with a capital ‘D’ as a “sort of kit” (p. 40). This ‘kit’ might consist of words, objects, clothing, values, attitudes and so on, from which we can build meanings, involving performance and recognition of identities. Gee (1999a) also describes Discourses as ways of identifying oneself as a member of a particular group, i.e. “acting-interacting-thinking-valuing-talking-(sometimes *writing-reading*) in the

‘appropriate way’ with the ‘appropriate’ props at the ‘appropriate’ times in the ‘appropriate’ place” (p. 17, my emphasis). This explanation also brings to mind part of Caldas-Coulthard and Iedema’s definition of identity; that it is “the things we say, do, gesture, posture, wear, possess, create and so on” (2008, p. 6). There are so many overlaps between this definition of identity and Gee’s definition of Discourse that using the term Discourse in Gee’s (1999, 2005, 2011) sense, rather than the even broader ‘semiosis’, is fitting in this particular study, which has the intersection of identity and literacy practices as one of its concerns.

Discourses work to display membership of a social group – they function like clubs, with many unspoken rules about who belongs and who does not, and why (Gee, 1990, p. 142 – 143). They are therefore ideological, and point to the relationships between people and the distribution of social goods (Gee, 1990). Similarly, Fairclough (1992) draws on Foucault to explain that what sociolinguists have seen as the rules of a speech community are what Foucault sees as “the taming and mastery of discourse” (p. 50). So a statement like “language variety *x* is (not) appropriate in context *y*”, which is something students are frequently told when they write essays, for example, expresses a “historically specific relationship between people ... as a timeless relationship between things: between a variety, and a context” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 51).

While there are many academic discourses, with a small ‘d’, (Ivanič, 1998, p. 281), Tusting, Ivanič and Wilson (2000) draw on Gee’s notion of Discourse, with a capital D, to describe the traditional academic Discourse as a “configuration of literacy practices ... including working alone at a desk, using a computer and paper to produce lines of uniform, black text, usually with few graphics, containing high lexical density, few social actors, and little reference to emotions and senses” (p. 214). Yet the way in which these configurations become presented and recognised as actors, events, activities, practices, and Discourses is always debatable and so requires work that is very often variable and can be challenged (Gee, 2000a).

Ivanič (1998) performed a linguistic analysis of students’ English essays, drawing on Halliday’s Functional Grammar (1994) as a tool. She examined essay extracts in terms of lexis, nouns and nominalisation, clause structure, verbs, and tense/mood/modality and found that even in second year, students have adopted a voice “which is shaped by academic community practices, and implicates its users in these practices” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 262).

Characteristic of the language use is: “Long nominal groups, embedded clauses, and a high proportion of lexical words ... in which ideas are compacted, often as a result of slow, premeditated composition practices” (p. 268). Also typical are the Graeco-Latin words that largely make up the general vocabulary of the academic community: words such as ‘argument’, ‘objectivity’, ‘embodies’, ‘interpersonal’, ‘analysis’, and ‘nurturing’ (pp. 270-271). Students need to know what can be left implicit; what sort of evidence to use; and how to structure essays so that their middle sections present an argument or a solution to a problem. Also, students have to take part in discourse practices like “problem-solving, generalisation, argumentation, elaboration and the maintenance of coherence” (Ivanič, 1998, pp. 276-279). Similarly, Gee (2004) analyses characteristics of academic discourse, and finds that there is an ‘assumed other’ – as there is for all language – who in this case has the same characteristics as the voice or author, in that his/her distinctive personal traits are placed in the background, as the author’s attitudes, interests and values are omitted (Ivanič, 1998, pp. 92-93).

Ivanič (1998) went further, maintaining that particular fields of study, or ‘disciplines’, have particular ‘knowledge-making principles’: particular objects of study, bodies of knowledge, values, beliefs and practices (Ivanič, 1998, p. 282) that make up the Discourses of the disciplines. The students in my study are Communication students, whose subject can be said to overlap slightly with those of Literature, Media Studies and Cultural Studies in some instances. So Ivanič’s analysis of Literature and Cultural Studies’ students’ writing is likely to be relevant to my own students. Here, among other features, she found examples of the characteristics of the discourse of literary and related studies, such as the occasional use of colourful language often found in professional writing and journalism courses; and names of specific texts, their authors and/or other creators as the first element in a clause (what Halliday (1994) calls ‘theme’) (p. 292). This goes to show that academic literacy is not only a matter of language proficiency, but also of discipline-specific literacies, as students need to be aware of the way in which their own discipline uses discourses (McKenna, 2004a, p. 116).

The implications of the unstable nature of Discourses, and their tendency to be largely uncontested, is that social elites can enhance their power by controlling access to particular Discourses: they can decide who can say or write what, to whom, and in what circumstances, and so seriously impact the lives of many (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 12). I would

add that social elites can therefore also decide what counts as ‘good’ or appropriate reading. So we can see that social relations are partly discursal; and Discourse is partly about social relations (Fairclough, 2003, p. 25).

A paper by Soudien (2001) is of particular relevance here because it sheds some light on the notion of racial identity in South African educational settings – a central aspect of social relations – using Foucauldian notions of discourse. Fairclough (2003) acknowledges Foucault as a strong influence on his work, but differs in that he, Fairclough, wants to look both at language and at social theoretical issues. Soudien (2001) names three discourses prevalent in the field of education. First, there is the *official* discourse, highly contested but dominated by the ruling party. Second, there is the *formal* discourse, adopted by a particular institution towards its educational work. Lastly, there is the *informal* discourse, which is developed by the students/scholars, belonging to their social, cultural, leisure world. The formal and informal discourses can be in opposition to the official discourse, but can sometimes collude with it. Interviewing 50 school pupils, Soudien (2001) found that although they claimed that race was not an important identity marker for them, race still pervaded their everyday lives. There was also the tension of ‘being African’ while living in the city, which often led to the remaking of traditions – described by some as “throwing the traditions away” (Soudien, 2001, p. 322).

Critical Discourse Analysis, then, was my data analysis method for attempting to understand aspects of my students’ reading practices. The CDA of interviews with students was carried out with the aim of investigating the existence of the mechanisms that have a causal effect on their social practice of reading. Discourses with a capital ‘D’ are the mechanisms I focused on. This was a limitation of this study, in that it focused on Discourses only and not the myriad other mechanisms at play in students’ experiences of reading. But some boundaries are necessary, and, as argued here and in section 4.2, Discourses are a very important causal mechanism.

Next, I explain in detail how I collected the data on which to perform the CDA, before concluding the chapter by discussing the ethical concerns involved in such a study.

4.3.3 Data collection

For this study, non-probability sampling was used, meaning that not all students had an equal chance of being selected for research interviews (Du Plooy, 2009). Instead, I could accommodate only those Communication students who (a) were in class at the time of my asking for volunteers; (b) were free and willing to participate on the days of the interviews; and (c) signed up in time to join a group, since no more than eight could fit into my office.

However, this part of the research process did not go as planned. Firstly, class numbers had shrunk dramatically, so that the 2015 class of Honours students numbered only 17 students instead of 30 as it had in 2014. Secondly, because I had recurrent bouts of flu in the first semester, I could not interview the third-year students then, when I taught them. Instead, I had to approach them in the second semester, which meant asking a colleague whether I could interrupt one of his lectures to do so. Graciously, he agreed. I had imagined that every student would co-operate enthusiastically, but this turned out to be a naïve expectation, as only 4 students of the 17 volunteered to take part. To increase the response rate, I asked second-year students as well.

Focus group discussions

Fairclough (2003) suggests that a textual analysis should begin by clarifying the kind of social event or social practice that the text helps to constitute. He also explicitly states that interview transcripts can be defined as ‘texts’ (Fairclough, 2003, p. 3). So, in the interest of clarification, it is worth stating clearly that all the text analysed in this thesis originated from either a group or individual interview. The interview is an example of a genre which is specialised for particular social practices. It is also an example of a disembedded genre, because it has been lifted out of those networks of social practices where it initially developed (Fairclough, 2003, p. 69); in other words, the interview originally developed in semi-formal settings such as job interviews, political interviews, and so on. This ‘social technology’, then, proved to be a useful means of asking students about their experiences and opinions of reading, as well as about the contexts in which their reading took place.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) have the advantage of providing naturalistic data and conversation among participants (Grudens-Schuck, Lundy Allen, and Larson, 2004). Focus

groups usually consist of 6 to 12 people who are selected using purposive sampling (Du Plooy, 2009). I planned to have five focus groups consisting of six students each. The participants simply volunteered to be interviewed, since I thought that if they self-selected their groups, they would be more likely to feel comfortable. However, I found that during the first group discussion, a couple of students did not talk at all, despite my efforts to draw them out. Subsequently, smaller groups signed up for discussions, which I thought would be easier to manage. I was concerned that this would mean that my methodology was somehow intrinsically altered. Yet this worry proved unfounded. It is becoming increasingly popular to conduct research with “mini-focus groups”, or small focus groups comprising 4 to 6 participants, because they are easier to recruit, easier to host, yield more in-depth insights, and participants find them more comfortable (Krueger and Casey, 2000, pp. 73-74).

In total, I interviewed 30 students in eight interviews. These were held in my office during lunch times in August 2015 and April/May 2016. I suggested the times, since I knew students were likely to be free during lunch, and students readily agreed. While my office was perhaps not an ideal venue, with its connotations of officialdom, it gave us more privacy, quiet, and suitable furniture than any other place on campus I could think of. Table 1 below provides an overview of the dates, numbers of participants, and their level of study. Appendix 1 provides further demographic details of the interviewees.

No.	Date of interview	No. of participants	Level of study	Notes
1.	13 August 2015	6 students	2 nd year	
2.	17 August 2015	1 student	Honours	Chatunga took part in this interview and Interview 4 as well.
3.	19 August 2015	8 students	2 nd and 3 rd year	
4.	21 August 2015	4 students	Honours	
5.	8 April 2016	2 students	2 nd year	Adaoha took part in this interview and Interview 7 as well.
6.	12 April 2016	4 students	3 rd year	
7.	22 April 2016	4 students	2 nd year	
8.	9 May 2016	3 students	Honours	

Table 1: Interview details

A problem that occurred throughout was that not all the participants arrived on time. In Interview 3, for instance, I ended up interviewing Nomlanga on her own for about ten minutes, before the rest of the students began to arrive. For Interview 2, none of the four students who had signed up for the interview actually appeared at all. Because I had bought

pizzas and soft drinks, I tried to solicit students passing by to take part in interviews, but they were all on their way to tutorials. This is the reason that I interviewed Chatunga twice: I had his phone number, he was on campus, willing to take part in Interview 2, and our one-one interview was fruitful, if intense. He surprised me by arriving with three of his classmates for Interview 4 as well, but I made a quick decision to accept this. Similarly, Adaoha surprised me by taking part in Interview 7 after she had taken part in Interview 5, but again I could not think of a reason why she could not do this. Both Chatunga and Adaoha are lively, talkative people whose contributions were valuable.

A research practice which has become common is to use stimulus material to encourage discussion (Liamputtong, 2011). In this case, I used quotes by students collected from studies done by De Kadt and Mathonsi (2003) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal on student identities, and by Pretorius (2005) on University of South Africa (Unisa) students' reading practices. (See Appendix 2.) These extracts were selected carefully in an attempt to avoid directing responses. This stimulus provided a topic – students' lives and learning – with which everyone was familiar, and so could be used as a reference point (Denscombe, 2010). The focus group discussions generally began once most participants arrived. After the students had read and signed the Request for Permission forms that I had prepared, I briefly explained about the stimulus quotes and handed a copy to each participant. I then asked if I should read the extracts out loud, to which the students readily agreed. It was at this point that I turned on the recorder.

The extracts proved to be an invaluable ice-breaker, which was especially useful in the third interview, when only one student arrived on time. With the aid of the stimulus material, the first student and I were able to begin the discussion immediately and continue until the other seven arrived.

During the discussions, I acted as a moderator, using a guide of planned, open-ended questions which I could stray from to ask follow-up questions (Du Plooy, 2009). I asked questions about students' daily lives, as well as past and present reading practices and identities, as I was seeking data about the “network of practices” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 209) in which their reading practices are situated.

I found that the conversation flowed well in some groups, but was more stilted in others. It is hard to analyse why, and in retrospect I have to put it down to the personalities of the participants. Interview 3, for example, included two women who were extrovert and voluble, contributing to much loud debate and laughter. Interview 8, by contrast, was conducted with three quiet, introverted Honours students who tended to keep their answers brief and low-key, however hard I worked to draw them out.

I kept a printed list of interview questions nearby, and referred to them from time to time. These questions changed slightly from interview to interview, but a core list can be found in Appendix 3. Generally, after about an hour, I found that FGDs came to a natural close, as energy levels flagged. At that point, I thanked everybody for their time, and switched off the recorder.

Individual interviews

Focus group discussions are often combined with individual interviews (Du Plooy, 2009). I planned to use an interview guide, during these individual in-depth interviews containing open- and closed-ended questions, as I did for the FGDs (Du Plooy, 2009, p. 196). The plan was to conduct semi-structured interviews, allowing respondents to interact with me, and allowing me to ask follow-up or probing questions (Du Plooy, 2009, p. 198). My aim was to interview them about particular aspects of their literacy practices, identities and daily lives that hopefully would shed further light on the Discourses constraining or enabling those practices. As it turned out, I interviewed only one participant individually: Chatunga, in Interview 2. Chatunga participated willingly, and (as described above) helped me with the dilemma of what to do when a scheduled FGD could not take place when other students had not arrived. However, I was left with the feeling that I had interrogated the student and the interview was not as relaxed and comfortable as most of the FGDs were. Later, after having conducted seven FGDs in total, I felt that I had a substantial body of data to draw on. For these reasons, I did not pursue further individual interviews.

Data analysis

As mentioned above, Fairclough (in Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999, and Fairclough, 2003) uses a framework for doing CDA that is modelled on Bhaskar's explanatory critique. I

drew substantially on this framework to structure the CDA. These guidelines are discussed further below, but first, Fairclough's framework can be summarised in five steps, as follows:

Step One

Begin with a social problem which has a semiotic aspect. In my study, this social problem has two aspects. First, there is the lack of clarity about what constitutes students' reading practices; and second, the academic reading practices, whatever they are, often do not seem to lead to students developing the necessary academic literacy to succeed at university (Pretorius, 2000).

Step Two

Identify obstacles to this social problem being tackled by analysing the network of practices within which it is located. This entailed identifying Discourses, as the relationship of Discourse to other elements with the social practice is analysed. The aim here was to understand how the problem arises and how it is rooted in the way social life is organised. Step Two is key, as it is where the most in-depth analysis is required. For this part of the research, I drew on Gee (2011), plus some strategies suggested by Danermark, et al. (1997), both of which are explained below.

Step Three

Ask who has an interest in the problem *not* being resolved. In the case of this study, it was hard to think of who would actively not wish students to develop academic literacy. Perhaps the only people would be a sub-group of students themselves: those who might not agree that their reading practices should be of any concern or interest to any educator. If students did think this, they would be free to not participate in the study, or to ignore any sort of educational intervention I might think of making as a result.

Step Four

Identify "hitherto unrealised possibilities for change" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 210). Although it is beyond the scope of this study to offer a thorough discussion of possibilities for change

and all mechanisms, I hoped to at least identify some of the causal discursive mechanisms, as identified by students themselves, giving rise to their reading practices.

Step Five

This last stage did not form part of Bhaskar's explanation, on which Fairclough largely bases his framework. However, it is important that the analyst reflect critically on the analysis, and on how she is socially positioned (Fairclough, 2003). The reason for this is that interpretation is complex, often involving judgement and evaluation as much as understanding (Fairclough, 2003, p. 11), meaning that the analyst's subjective perceptions will come into play.

Following Step Two above has the potential to uncover a bewildering array of mechanisms to consider. To pare down this cornucopia, I used a framework developed by Gee (2011). He does not refer to mechanisms, but lists what he calls "building tasks" – so called because people "use language to build things in the world and to engage in world building" (Gee, 2011, p. 16). Gee (2011) maintains that that these aspects of what a speaker says will signal to the analyst what the relevant parts of the social context are. Using what the speaker has said and implied, the discourse analyst needs to ask questions about seven areas of the context. These questions help the researcher to focus on the "network of practices" (Fairclough, 2003) in order to begin to analyse the complex causal mechanisms. Although not all mechanisms are discursive, I chose to focus on Discourses due to their power and significance. These seven kinds of questions (all drawn from Gee, 2011, p. 102) are based on what the speaker or writer has said or written, and are as follows:

1. Which things and people in this context are relevant and significant and how? How does the speaker give significance to things?
2. What practices are relevant and how are they being enacted?
3. What identities (for the speaker, the listener, and others) are relevant?
4. What relationships are relevant and how are they being enacted, recruited, and used?
5. What social goods are relevant and how are they being distributed; how is their distribution viewed?
6. What are the relevant connections and disconnections between things and people and how are these connections or disconnections made?

7. What are the relevant sign systems (e.g., languages or social languages) and forms of knowledge (ways of knowing) and how are they used and privileged, or not?

Using Gee's (2011) questions above helped me to identify causal mechanisms in the speaker's or writer's context, in the form of Discourses and discourses. However, by the time I came to begin the analysis, I found that Gee (2014) had expanded on these seven questions and added 19 more tools, calling them all "tools of discourse analysis", each 'tool' being a question that the analyst can ask of the data. He named Question 1 above, for instance, the "Significance Building" tool, while Question 2 became the Activities Building tool, and so on. He also included the identification of "Big 'D' Discourse" and "Big 'C' Conversation" as two of these tools. I found many of these tools very useful in the unpacking and initial analysing of interview transcripts.

Asking these questions helped me to achieve the tasks that Fairclough (2003) outlines as Step Two of his CDA. In this case, Step Two would be to describe the social practices of student reading, and to identify the obstacles to tackling the 'social problem' of students appearing to battle with academic literacy by analysing what students say about the network of practices within which their reading is located. To put it another way, I aimed to explain an aspect of some Fort Hare students' literacy practices. In critical realist terms, this means describing and conceptualising properties and causal mechanisms that generate and enable events, and then describing how different mechanisms manifest under particular conditions (Danermark, et al., 1997).

Yet there is an important proviso here. I conducted research in English, in a context in which English is my home language, but was not the home language of the Fort Hare students who participated in my study (though they were all senior students who have studied through the medium of English). Because English was not their home language, I did not use those building tools of Gee (2014) that focused on grammar – such as the Topic Flow tool, which asks analysts to look for the way the topics of main clauses are linked together. Although I was at first concerned about using only some of his tools of analysis, Gee himself says (2014, Kindle location 191) that some will be more useful than others. Kettle (2005, p. 2) notes that when interviewers and interviewees do not share a home language, it useful to supplement Fairclough's framework with principles from SLA (Second Language Acquisition) research, particularly communication strategies. She draws on work by a range

of linguistic and educational theorists who show that participants in such an interaction make meaning together, using communication strategies such as paraphrasing, code switching, circumlocution and appeals for assistance (Kettle, 2005). When analysing the interview transcripts, I found that this happened frequently. One example occurred in a group interview, where two students in the group had been telling me about their difficulties in understanding English lecture notes and exam papers. I found that I summarised what they said by commenting, “So – you’re constantly – you’re constantly *guessing*?”, supplying my own term (“guessing”) for what I understood the students to be saying:

Kettle warns that even when the interaction proceeds smoothly, the CDA should “engage with the close relation between power and the ways that access to linguistic resources contextualise and impact on the interaction” (2005, p. 12). When the interaction does *not* proceed smoothly, and language forms are problematic, the analyst will not simply be focusing on linguistic features of the text, but will be involved in mapping how the interview participants make meaning together, by recognising the strategies employed and identifying when resolution is reached (Kettle, 2005). Negotiation is required so that both participants resolve a common meaning – which is “the extra dimension to CDA” when the interviewees are not first language English speakers (Kettle, 2005, p. 13).

To further unpack Step Two of Fairclough’s CDA (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999, and Fairclough, 2003), I planned to use four complementary kinds of inference – deduction, induction, abduction and retroduction – to help me arrive at this ‘network of practices’, as these types of inference form a vital part of scientific method and scientific reasoning (Danermark, et al., 1997). In the end, though, I found that I used only induction, abduction and retroduction. Inductive logic functions to draw conclusions about a larger number of phenomena than we have observed. For example, when I heat water in a particular kettle to 100 degrees on three different occasions, and on each occasion it starts to boil, I can use inductive logic to conclude that this water in this kettle will always boil when heated to 100 degrees (Danermark, et al., 1997, p. 85).

The second kind of logic is abductive logic, which detectives use to reconstruct crimes within various scenarios, and which doctors use to link diseases to particular symptoms (Danermark, et al., 1997, p. 91). Abduction shows how things might be. It moves us from one conception of something to a possibly more developed or deeper conception of that

thing (Danermark, et al., 1997). So, because I have heard both students and staff describe Fort Hare's residences as unsatisfactory, I could use abductive logic to imagine, for instance, that those students who live in residence might find it difficult to find a quiet, comfortable place to read.

Third, there is retroduction, which Bhaskar explains as "exploiting analogies with already known phenomena, to possible explanations of the behaviour" (1986, in Collier, 1994, p. 163). In the *Possibility of Naturalism*, Bhaskar explains retroduction more fully as building an explanation (or producing knowledge of the mechanism of production) of a phenomenon, by building a model of a mechanism using analogy and metaphor, which if it existed and acted as described, would account for the phenomenon in question (Bhaskar, 1979, in Collier, 1994). The fundamental question underpinning retroduction is, "What makes X possible?" This can be answered by referring to structures and conditions of varying abstraction, such as socially and culturally acquired ways of being that shape our actions (Danermark, et al., 1997). Here I would ask: What makes it possible for students to adopt these particular reading practices? The answers contributed to Step 2 of Fairclough's framework outlined above. Typically, the social sciences deal with systems that have many interacting structures and mechanisms, which can lead to mistakes in which effects are attributed to the incorrect mechanism (Sayer, 2000, p. 16). To avoid this, the analyst can ask questions that distinguish between what *can* be the case and what *must* be the case (Sayer, 2000). Whatever such an analysis would uncover, I was aware that in the critical realist tradition, claims are always "open to refutation by further information" (Collier, 1994, p. 6), so I did not make any definite claims about having found definitive answers. Retroduction was one of the guiding force behind my investigation.

Data from the focus group discussions and interviews were analysed, and I used NVivo software to assist in storing and coding this data.

I recorded the discussions using my own digital voice recorder. I then transcribed these recordings, and coded them, using the analytic frameworks devised by Fairclough and Gee, as described below. Gee (2014, Kindle location 204) notes that no recording can capture *all* the details of speech. Transcripts can range from being 'narrow', meaning very detailed, to 'broad', or less detailed (Gee, 1999a, p. 117). An excerpt from my transcript can be found in Appendix 4. While I did transcribe any long pauses and marked variations in tone, I would

consider the transcription to be more broad than narrow. This is because none of my interviewees were first language speakers of English. There were often many hesitations of various kinds (pauses, repetitions, and fumbling for words) that did not seem to have any meaning other than someone searching for the correct word. Also, my aim was to identify discursive mechanisms enabling and constraining reading practices, so I felt the important features of the discourse would be in the themes and issues of what was said, rather than grammatical features. While Gee (2014, Kindle location 210) recommends transcribing more detail than may ultimately be needed, he also notes that it is the purpose of the analyst that will determine the level of detail that is transcribed.

I used the *utterance*, generally defined as a stream of speech falling within one intonation contour (from high pitch to low pitch), beginning and ending with a pause, and forming a semantic unit (Crookes, 1990, p. 187), as my unit of data analysis for spoken text. This unit has been described as the best prospect for second language (SL) discourse analytic purposes (Crookes, 1990, pp. 192, 194). It reflects some of the psychological processes involved in SL language production, as indicated by pauses and intonation, across languages. However, in real speech, final intonation contours sometimes occur at points that would not be the ends of sentences in a written text (Gee, 2014, Kindle locations 638-641). Following Gee (1999a, p. 118), I have used a double slash (//) to indicate final intonation contours. My own practice was to also use a single slash (/) to indicate a pause, or where a comma would go in ordinary prose. I reinforced this with a line break. Gee describes the way a listener from one culture or language group would often expect to hear final contours in certain places when listening to a speaker from another group, only to find that they do not occur (Gee, 2014, Kindle locations 990-992). I certainly found this to be the case, as when this student described those who had encouraged her to read during her childhood:

So she also encouraged us /
 every time we went to the library she'd recommend books that she'd think we'd like //
 So I think that /
 Um /
 it was my friend /
 and I just generally had a love for books and also /
 her /
 and at home they'd always encourage us for studying purposes //
 to read /
 cos you had to pass or whatever but /
 I think it was a love /
 I had //
 For books //

The CDA was thus done by analysing interview and focus group discussion transcripts, in terms of Fairclough's CDA framework, incorporating Gee's building tasks. These helped me to analyse how students' reading practices are rooted in particular aspects of their daily lives and to understand the Discourses at play. I also anticipated that applying these two analytical tools, together with critical realism's ontology, as discussed above, would lead me to respond to the research questions in a meaningful way.

4.4 Ethics

Permission to conduct research was sought both from the institution of Fort Hare and later, the students themselves. Letters from Fort Hare and from Rhodes University granting ethical clearance can be found in Appendix 5. I asked students to sign consent forms just before every interview began. These forms made it clear that I have respect for students' dignity and for their rights to privacy, and informed them that they had the right to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the interview process at any stage.

This research was conducted in the institution where I work. Such 'endogenous research' carries some benefits, such as being able to use Critical Discourse Analysis more easily than an outsider, since one is familiar with the institutional culture (Trowler, 2011). Yet endogenous research can also carry its own ethical risks, particularly maintaining institutional and personal anonymity (Trowler, 2011). However, as has been clear in previous chapters, I decided not to obscure the identity of the University of Fort Hare, where I work and conducted research. The reasons for this were that, firstly, it would be easy for most readers to identify Fort Hare because of the institutional characteristics needed to give readers context. Secondly, there did not seem to be any ethical reason to attempt to protect Fort Hare's identity, as this study is not an evaluation of the university, nor of the student.

To protect the anonymity of students, I have used pseudonyms.

Whether to offer incentives or not was another ethical consideration. Some researchers compensate student interviewees for their time. However, I decided against this, given my own financial constraints, and the fact that I wanted to interview dozens of students. Later, given the rather haphazard way students responded to planned interview times, I was glad I made this choice. Some students did not arrive for the interviews as arranged; others arrived

very late; and one or two arrived without having signed up for the interviews beforehand. Arranging payment under these circumstances would have been very tricky indeed.

So rather than money, I decided that ‘compensating’ the students would take the form of food and drink. Here I was following the example of Krueger and Casey (2000, pp. 84, 85), who found that very few people would participate in their first focus groups. They subsequently learnt that their mistakes included overlooking the time demands on some participants, and not offering incentives. They concluded that, “Food is magic. Pizza, snacks, and soda make the discussion more comfortable, relaxed, and enjoyable” (Krueger and Casey, 2000, p. 180). Similarly, I found that I had no shortage of volunteers after I told students that pizza and their choice of soft drink would be provided for each participant.

Another ethical risk is that of interview bias. It is always easy to assume that what interviewees say is a direct reflection of their lived experiences (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). However, it was possible that students had preconceived ideas about my expectations, which might have affected their responses (Trowler, 2011). I also needed to consider the ethical implications of interviewing those with less power than me, because issues of power and status affect all stages of the research process (Clegg and Stevenson, 2013). For instance, in most interviews, students called me “Ma’am”. This respectful form of greeting speaks volumes about the power relationship. I also suspect that when I asked students in Interviews 1 and 2 whether they wanted to continue on to postgraduate study, it was my status as an older person and a lecturer that led all the interviewees to agree enthusiastically that yes, they did want to do Honours degrees. When I said, in Interview 2, “You don’t have to say yes!”, my comment was met with loud laughter, which said to me that in some ways, the students *did* feel they had to answer affirmatively. The only way to ameliorate this limitation was to try to encourage a friendly, relaxed atmosphere in the focus group discussions, and to encourage conversation, rather than ‘yes/no’ answers, in the hope that this would help to counter-balance the power dynamics of the interview.

In the interests of integrity and academic professionalism, I took care in the way I represented students and selected quotes carefully to ensure that they were, in fact, representative of what was said. Such reflexivity and self-awareness can help to ameliorate some ethical risks, as can stressing the partial and situated nature of research accounts (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). On the other hand, a CR approach does include an

acknowledgement of research fallibility (Collier, 1994; Danermark, 1997), as discussed above.

While writing this thesis, I kept careful records of the research process and avoided plagiarism, making sure to acknowledge all sources fully.

4.5 Conclusion

This thesis, then, used Fairclough's CDA – which is based on critical realism's notions of explanatory critique (Bhaskar, 1998) – augmented with Gee's (2011, 2014) 'tools of analysis' and drawing on Kettle's (2005) 'communication strategies'. This was the framework that guided the interview guide, the interviews and discussions themselves, and the analysis of the transcripts.

Having discussed methods and methodology in this chapter, I now move on to Chapter Five, which is the first of three chapters of analysis results. Here I focus on Discourses and discourses that arose as interviewees talked about their identity as black students and their relationships with peers, parents and other adults who had an effect on their reading practices.

Chapter Five: The student as a social being

5.1 Introduction

Discourses act as *causal* mechanisms, as discussed in Chapter Four. A ‘big D’ Discourse, as Gee (2011) sees it, is a sort of ‘kit’, which can involve multiple identities – and is what some call a cultural community, or even a practice (Gee, 2011, p. 40). In fact, critical realists say, the term ‘discourse’ could be replaced by ‘practice’ (Laclau and Bhaskar, 1998, p. 9). Given that reading is a social practice, embedded in other social practices (Street and Lefstein, 2007), in this chapter, I analyse the Discourses at work in the interview transcripts, focusing on those that represent the student as a social being interacting with others in a network of social practices. The vital aspect of Discourses is that they involve situated identities, which in turn involve behaving in ways that others recognise as belonging to a certain ‘type’ (Gee, 2011, pp. 35, 40).

The chapter begins by focusing on a strong Discourse that emerged in the data: that of ‘We blacks’. This emerged as an identity marker that was constructed by the students as being linked to practices that constrained school-based literacy practices. The chapter then moves on to examine other Discourses and discourses that centred on students’ relationship with others: peers, parents, teachers, and lecturers.

5.2. The Discourse of ‘We blacks’

Fort Hare was described in some detail in Chapter One. As an HBU, Fort Hare has always occupied a very different space to historically white universities, so I was keen to explore the issue of race. In the focus group discussions, students frequently drew on identity discourses in which they constructed themselves as ‘We blacks’. This, I soon came to see, was more than a ‘small d discourse’, which, as indicated in the previous chapter, is simply a way of talking about things (Gee, 2011, p. 205). Instead, it was a powerful, ‘big D Discourse’ in which interviewees positioned their identities. The participants often conflated this construction with “our culture”, as if to be black means to have one, unified cultural practice. For example, Silumko said, “With a black child – we get home, we throw our books away.” This identity construction could also serve to signify what they saw as their ‘otherness’ from me, their white interviewer. This is perhaps not surprising, as such

discussion in South Africa about transformation in higher education is difficult because of the “profound racialisation” in our discourses. Racial assumptions are completely embedded in nearly everything people say and do, with the effect of limiting what the vast majority of South Africans can see and imagine (Soudien, 2010a, p. 225).

For the students I interviewed, then, ‘We blacks’ is a Discourse that was frequently used. Sibabalwe, in the first group interview, was one of those who drew on this Discourse. It was also the first example that occurred in the interviews of an identity Discourse that I eventually named the ‘Resistance to reading’ Discourse. Some have used the term ‘anti-intellectual’ to describe students’ seeming lack of engagement with their studies; also claiming that anti-intellectualism is a feature of American culture (Elias, 2008). While analysts have noted the influence of American popular culture on South Africans – most notably Bill Keller (1993, no page), who, writing for *The New York Times*, described South Africa as “a country awash in American consumer goods, colonised by American pop culture, and obsessed with American celebrities” – other academics warn against making sweeping generalisations. Lack of engagement or achievement should not be confused with a lack of interest in, or undervaluing of, education (Cokley, 2003). Since ‘anti-intellectualism’ has been defined as not simply a lack of interest in intellectual pursuits and critical thinking, but also as having disrespect for these things (Elias, 2008), I decided to use the term ‘resistance to reading’ for what the students in this section have described:

Sibabalwe:

Another thing is that we as [pause]/
[quietly] blacks/
I think we as blacks/
we develop a culture of/
where we come from/
when we are coming back from school we throw away our books and FORGET/
completely forget school//

Yet Sibabalwe was so tentative when discussing this aspect of racial identity that in the audio recording, he noticeably lowers his voice to the point that he is barely audible when he says “blacks” in the phrase “we as blacks”. Some South African students tend to express unease with racial terms (Leibowitz, et al., 2007), even when discussing identity and difference, so what I perceived as Sibabalwe’s initial unease at referring to “blacks” is not uncommon.

The point that Sibabalwe made about how “blacks ... throw away books” once the school day is done was echoed a little later by two other students in the same group interview. Silumko maintained that the important difference between white families and black families is that the former “sit down and they do homework as a family”. Luzuko explained to me, “You run away from books [as a black child].” Together, these three matter-of-factly equated ‘black childhood’ with being active, outdoors, and communing with other children, rather than spending time with parents. They also constructed ‘black childhood’ as being the opposite of ‘white childhood’ – so much so, that white children are taught “from a very young age” (Silumko) about the importance of reading, learning and doing homework, whereas black children “go and play outside, and that’s it” (Silumko). In a later discussion, Uuka said casually that he came from “an illiterate community ... needless to say”. In this way these students drew on discourses that suggest that to be black is to ‘not read’, to ‘not have parental support in your schoolwork’ – in other words, to *not* perform academic literacy practices in the home.

However, in another part of the first focus group discussion, Silumko explained that he grew up in a house filled with books. So while he has witnessed family life in which it is normal for children to simply ignore schoolwork once they are at home, this is unlikely to be true of *his* family. In this way Silumko – as he did in another part of the interview when discussing the drawbacks of government schooling – presented himself as a spokesperson for the group, acting as the intermediary between his peers, all black students, and me, his white lecturer, as he explains to me what the norms are.

On the same note, Nceba (in the same interview as Sibabalwe) also identified herself as one of ‘We blacks’:

And another thing that, um [pause]/
like, blacks are left behind so many things//
Like I’ve come up with this new thing, referencing, here//
I never knew how to reference/ [Chuckles from others]
and, and, and I only knew how to reference when I was in varsity//
And then a lecturer told me like, “Guys, don’t do plagiarism: reference!”//
And I was like, “Okay, WHAT is he on about?”//
And they were like, “No, you write, you, you, you write the lec- the author’s book -”//
and I’m like, “I don’t know how to DO that”//

It is clear from the extract above that Nceba was not taught the rationale behind ‘referencing’, other than simply being a way to avoid plagiarism. Nceba is not alone in this

particular struggle. Plagiarism is a global and increasing phenomenon (Ellery, 2008), but not a simple one. Ivanič (1998), for example, has drawn on Fairclough's work on intertextuality to argue that plagiarism is, in her view, a literacy practice arising from a struggle to become a member of the academic discourse community (p. 197). Bearing out this view, one South African academic noted that up to 40% of assignments she received were plagiarised, but that many students seem perplexed as to the nature of plagiarism as well as the conventions of referencing, despite receiving some explicit instructions about it (Ellery, 2008, p. 511). Difficulties in referencing seem to come from the *linguistic* problems that occur when students use their own voices, as well as the *conceptual* problem of working out whether it is the author making a claim or whether the author is reporting a claim made by others (Hendricks and Quinn, 2000, p. 453). Students seem to regard knowledge as 'something out there', not constructed, but presented on the printed page of a textbook as an authoritative, untouchable voice (Hendricks and Quinn, 2000, p. 451-452). It seems clear that acquiring academic discourse(s) is an onerous and long-term process, requiring sustained intervention by educators (Ellery, 2008, p. 514). The need for referencing also needs to be made explicit: that it is not just about avoiding plagiarism, but a way of building an argument and constructing knowledge (Hendricks and Quinn, 2000, p. 455). The teaching of referencing should be made part of the curriculum, and integrated into the discipline, since each discipline constructs knowledge in slightly different ways (Hendricks and Quinn, 2000, p. 455). This is just one example of how the literacy practices expected of students in higher education, rather than simply comprising technical skills, are complex and value-laden.

But there is an even bigger picture to look at here. Deficit discourses ascribed to South African working class learners and their parents construct them as having limited (if any) resources to draw on (Felix, Dornbrack, and Scheckle, 2008, p. 111). In the above quotation, the student draws on this discourse as she identifies herself as one of the "blacks" who are "left behind" in many ways. It is unlikely that Nceba is being literal when she says no black students are aware of how to avoid plagiarism. Perhaps she is taking her cue from Sibabalwe, who introduced the idea of racial disparities in the group interview in which they both participated. This idea is part of a 'Big C' Conversation (as discussed in Chapter Two); in this case, about South Africa's apartheid history. Nceba obviously expects both me and other participants to know what she means when she states that "blacks are left behind"; she is referring to the way that the discrimination of the past has had an enduring effect. The Discourse of 'We blacks' here refers to the multiple ways in which the poor and uneven

schooling system has let students down: the myriad ways in which our schooling system leaves black South African in particular ill-prepared, as discussed in Chapter One.

While the inequalities are particularly stark within the SA racialised system, the literature show us the ways in which universities consistently privilege middle-class ways of being, making the transitions easier for middle class students. Researchers such as Nomdo (2006, p. 199) in South Africa and Heath (1983) in the US have noted that middle class students tend to make an easier transition to using academic discourse, but the working class students tend to lack the necessary linguistic and cultural capital.

These complexities of socio-economic class and racialised access to quality education can all be read into the use of the ‘We blacks’ Discourse by the participants in this study. For instance, Sibabalwe made an observation that has since come to haunt me with its succinct depiction of an issue with the books he had been introduced to as a child:

In primary schools/
I mean we are not taught Xhosa literature// [Cathy: Ja]
AFRICAN literature//
We are always taught books/
like day-by-day/
English books and we are encouraged to do those books rather than our OWN [Someone else:
Our OWN] cultural books//
where you would find them interesting and relate to those kinds of stories//
We are always taught about white children playing in the snow//
[...] Not the way we live in our actual situations//
like Xhosa literature/

Gee’s (2014) Identities Building tool of discourse analysis asks what socially recognised identities a speaker is enacting. Using it to analyse the above extract helps in understanding how Silumko has a strong affiliation to the Discourse of ‘We blacks’, closely tied to being an “African”, generally, and being Xhosa, particularly. Here I can draw on the counterfactual thinking of critical realism to ask: Can I imagine a Xhosa child from the rural Eastern Cape reading fiction that was *not* about the social practices of, say, British or Canadian children? The answer is, of course, that yes, I can, largely thanks to Silumko’s depiction of a fictional world so different from his own. Silumko positions himself as one who experiences an enormous, unbridgeable gap between his own interests and those of “white children playing in the snow” and implies that he found such stories about white children uninteresting and hard to relate to. For him, it is necessary for children’s books to

represent “our actual situations”. Not all students I interviewed agreed with his position, but it is clear that this student did not see his identity and social practices reflected at all in the books he was expected to read. Instead, they reflected a group of identities and practices he associated with whiteness, Englishness, and British/European ways of representing childhood. This indicates a desire not simply for new stories, but for recognition and validation of a way of life. That is not to say that learners and students should read only about people like themselves. However, curricula should include the voices and preferences of a diverse range of learners in order to encourage learning (Athanases, 1998). Part of the call to ‘decolonise the classroom’, which became stronger and stronger in 2015 and 2016, is to challenge the kind of reading curriculum the student mentions, both at school and at university, and to question “the dominance of dead white men in university literary studies departments” as one news article put it (Mkhize, Pett, and Mangcu, 2015).

Uuka, in one of the final focus group discussions, had one or two similar points to make to Silumko. However, when I asked his class of third-year students for volunteers to be interviewed, he told me that he was “an avid reader of English novels”, which made him unusual from the outset. Then, what was notable during the interview itself was the oratorical style of his speech, with much repetition and formality:

The system is conniving against black people/
 first and foremost/
 and it shouldn't go/
 any further/
 LOOK at the system//
 LOOK at the system/
 If you give a book to a black child/
 it's Charles Dickens/
 but we do have leaders/
 we do have African writers//
 so it's a matter of the curriculum/
 that subconsciously drifts their focus/
 that subconsciously lowers/
 that subconsciously kills their desire to read//
 for their interest//

Although Uuka never identified himself this way, the identity of ‘literary warrior’ was the label that I thought fit the best. Asking not only about what socially recognised identities Uuka is enacting (Gee 2014), but also how he positions himself with regard to other people's identities, helped me to pinpoint this identity. His depiction of himself as fighting against

white people and wanting to “hit them” with his language abilities is what led me to label one of his identity Discourses in this way:

I read books/
to master the language/
to master the language of the settlers/
and master the language of the colonisers/
[...]
I see it as a mission/
to go out there/
head-to-head with the colonisers/
head-to-head with the white people/
I know where to hit them/
I know where to hit them you know the best/
In his OWN language//
He will get a taste of his own medicine//

Some of the things he said also had clear links to the ‘We blacks’ Discourse. For instance, he later said that “in the black community [...] if you mention a book, they will say, ‘Oh that book is too long to read’”. However, his use of ‘they’ positioned himself as outside of “the black community”. In this way the discourses he used when he talked about *himself* did not correspond with the ‘We blacks’ Discourse. So it is that Uuka seems to indicate that he sees himself as a solitary literary warrior, with frequent self-references and assertions of his own abilities.

His self-identity is a strong enabling mechanism for Uuka’s reading practices, as he sees literacy practices and education as aligned with one purpose: to fight with “the colonisers” and make them listen to him. Gee’s Politics Building tool can be applied to show how words can be used to build or assume what counts as a ‘social good’: that is, “anything a social group or society takes as a good worth having” (Gee, 2014, Kindle Location 3167). This helps to reveal that Uuka sees himself as one of the few who has the knowledge and power – ‘social goods’ – to “go out there” and “hit” people who still, by implication, have power over the black majority. Books, particular literacy practices, education and mastering English are, as he depicts them, the social goods, or ‘weapons’ that he will draw on, revealing his anger and frustration. The Discourse used by Uuka seems to me to be similar to that of scholar Frantz Fanon. In particular, Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) is a study of decolonisation that expounds on the need for violence to overcome colonial rule (McCormack, 2009, p. 280). Just as Uuka talks about his “mission ... to go head-to-head with the colonisers ... I know where to hit them”, Fanon (1961, p. 9) talks about “silencing

the arrogance of the colonist ... [the colonised subject is] determined to fight to be more than the colonist” and “Each generation must discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it, in relative opacity” (p. 145). I do not know for certain that Uuka has read Fanon, and these similarities are fairly superficial. However, Uuka is drawing on *a particular variety* of the ‘We blacks’ Discourse, which appears to be influenced by Fanon or similar postcolonial scholars.

Nevertheless, I have quoted Uuka at length here because he exemplifies the critical realist notion of identity implying “an agential act of affirmation or negation”; that is, a recognition of “being one thing and not another (the ‘not I’)” (Sánchez, 2006, p. 41). In the course of his group’s interview, he acknowledged differences between himself and, variously, the academy, his peers, and white “colonisers” (the “not I”, or agential act of negation). On the other hand, he seemed to find affiliation with “friends... who are also literary enthusiasts” and certainly “the black community” (agential acts of affirmation), even though he saw himself as being unusual in this community.

The Discourse of ‘We blacks’, then, works on two levels; homogenising all differences between black students to represent their literacy practices in certain, uniform ways, and at the same time indicating the ways in which the experiences of many South Africans are outside of what is regarded as ‘normal’ by the Discourses and practices of the academy.

5.3. The ‘Better than us’ Discourse

As a teaching and learning strategy, the value of peer learning, especially to those acquiring an additional language, has been well documented (Gibbons, 2006, p. 242). Peers are recognised to be a key source of reading materials amongst young people (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer and Morris, 2008, p. 13). It would be logical, then, to anticipate that the students I interviewed would mention peers in relation to their reading practices. This they sometimes did, but not always in the way that I expected.

This depiction of peer influence was first mentioned in the first focus group discussion, where participants discussed the perception that it is ‘normal’ to “throw” books aside when arriving home from school.

Silumko: If, like, you are doing the opposite/
 coming back from school and reading books/
 we see you as a nerd//
 [Sounds of agreement from several other students.]
 Nceba: And it's a joke, like, "Ja you're a nerd!"
 Sibabalwe: They're joking about it//
 Luzuko: "Oooh/
 Book freak!"// [laughter]
 Nceba: Ja//
 It is horrible//
 Sibabalwe: You are seen as a/
 if you are from a public school/
 you are seen as making yourself/
 Silumko [interrupting]: Better than us now/
 You think you're better now
 [Someone else: Ja!]

So it was that peers were represented in this Discourse of 'Better than us' as teasing those who might want to read once the school day is done, calling them names and accusing them, especially if they are from a 'Model C' school, of having inflated egos.

Another example of 'Better than us' came up when, looking back on her childhood, Lulama revealed that she had not ever had friends with whom she could visit the library and talk about books.

Lulama: I still don't even today//
 I've always been a/
 My friends used to describe me as a bookworm//
 In high school they would say that I'm a coconut//
 [...]
 I used to hate it/
 Until Grade 7//
 They used to call me a coconut so much that/
 This other time I was so tired of them calling me a coconut/
 That I went to report them//
 I was leaving/
 And I went to report them to the matron/
 And the matron was like "No/
 When they call you a coconut/
 They are actually saying that you are two steps ahead of them academically/
 And in other places//
 Because what you know they don't know//
 Isn't it that they consult you for homework and stuff?"//
 I'm like, "Yes"//
 "So you should actually be happy that they are calling you a coconut"/
 And so
 I was then just accepting it and saying/
 "Okay, call me a coconut because it means I'm two steps ahead"//

Black school children frequently use the label ‘coconut’ to refer to someone who speaks mostly English, or speaks a particular kind of English, or whom they consider to be ‘acting white’ (McKinney, 2013, p. 25), which of course draws on “essentialist and static” discourses of race, as if ‘black’ or ‘white’ are homogenous categories (McKinney, 2007, p. 18). While some young people resist the condemnatory and excluding ‘coconut’ label, others learn to embrace it. This Lulama appeared to do the latter, as she was taught to reverse the meaning of the label. Yet the implicit linking of whiteness with being a “bookworm” and achieving academic success at school indicates the “ongoing normativity of whiteness” (McKinney, 2013, p. 23). What is more, here is another example of an identity discourse that can be tied to the Discourses of ‘We blacks’, as well as ‘Resistance to reading’, because again ‘blackness’ is equated with ‘not-reading’. It is also an example of the ‘Better than us’ Discourse, Lulama’s peers were letting her know that her practice of reading books was making her different to them.

One of the group interviews began in fits and starts because students arrived late, so for the first 10 minutes or so, I interviewed the first arrival, Nomlanga, by herself. During this one-on-one part of the interview, Nomlanga happily discussed the many books she has read. Yet later, when everyone had arrived for the interview and I asked students whether they were keen readers, Nomlanga suddenly seemed hesitant to reveal this aspect of her identity in front of the other group members:

Cathy [to Nomlanga]: It seems to me/
 ...that you read a LOT//
 So would you say/
 “I’m a reader”?//
 Would you identify yourself that way?//
 Nomlanga: [Making doubtful noise]: Hmm-mm//
 In a way//
 Ja//
 Cathy: In a way?//
 Nomlanga: [sighing] Yes/
 I would say I’m a reader/
 I wouldn’t boast or anything/
 but yes, I read a lot//

Here I had to use the retroductive logic of critical realism (Danermark, et al., 1997) to ask: What makes it possible for Nomlanga to be so reluctant to identify herself as a reader in front of a group of students, equating the ‘I’m a reader’ identity with boastfulness? The answer came from the descriptions by Students 2 and 3 of how those who came home from

school to openly read were seen as “better than us”. While it could not be argued that Nomlanga’s attitude revealed a constraining mechanism – it quite clearly did not function this way, as Nomlanga was one of the most prolific readers interviewed for this study – it did tie in with the ‘Better than us’ discourse, which *did* seem to be a constraining mechanism. This might explain Nomlanga’s unwillingness to identify herself as “a reader” to her peers (as reported by the students in the above extract); that is, to value reading is to be perceived in some communities as being a “freak”; a “nerd”, as “making yourself better than us”. And while this is sometimes perceived as “a joke”, it can also be experienced as “horrible”. To be accused of “thinking you’re better [than us]” is presumably also “horrible”, as the one who enjoys reading becomes identified by others as big-headed, a “coconut”, thinking him- or herself as superior but simultaneously denigrated by others for being an outsider, ‘less than’.

Adaoha, contrasting her reading practices with those of her friends, revealed an example of a potentially constraining discourse that appeared to exercise no causal effect. She described how her friends, seeing her reading in the library, would assume that she was learning for a test, and would be amazed when she informed them that she was reading for its own sake. A recurring theme in much of Adaoha’s interview is that she sees a large gulf between herself and other Fort Hare students. Her father is an academic, which she revealed at another point, and that when she achieves academically, his quiet pride spurs her on. So it seems clear that the discourses of her peers are mediated by the discourse of academic achievement that her father provides.

So it was that peers were most decidedly not always the enabling mechanism for reading practices that I expected them to be. Instead, this discussion revealed further instances of the ‘Better than us’ and ‘Resistance to reading’ Discourses, in which to be ‘a reader’ was equated with boasting, as giving oneself airs, or behaving in a way that was ‘not black’. This Resistance to Reading Discourse is also associated with students who come from rural areas, with schooling they identify as unsatisfactory in various ways, and who battle with English. This Discourse also has clear links to the ‘We blacks (who are left behind)’ Discourse.

In fact, traces of the “We blacks” Discourse were to be found in the same group interview in which Nomlanga reluctantly admitted to being a reader. A fellow group member revealed

that her mother, while encouraging her children's reading practices, "used to say we wanted to become like white people ... she encouraged it [reading], but joked about it a lot".

Some students, however, related more positive stories about their peers. Closer analysis of the transcripts reveals that several times, students mentioned young cousins or school friends ("A friend of mine gave me the book...") who also fostered their reading practices in one way or another, or tried to.

Relevant literature shows that when reading tasks also involve the building of interpersonal relationships (whether in the form of discussion or other kinds of peer work), the level of engagement increases (Guthrie and Klauda, 2014, p. 405). Although studies have found a gendered aspect to peer pressure on literacy practices, since reading is often associated with feminine identities (Scholes, 2013), I did not notice such a pattern in my interviews. What was noticeable, however, was that peers were seldom given credit by the interviewees for the role they played, perhaps because of their perceived lack of power in relation to the adult figures mentioned. For instance, Nkokheli said that "I was not exposed to reading ... I was not encouraged ... I'm not used to reading"; and so he began reading for leisure only in his second year of high school. It was only when I questioned him about how this came about that he said it was simply because he "saw other students were doing it" and so decided to give reading a try. Educational psychologists work with a notion called 'academic self-concept', defined as knowledge and perceptions of the self in an academic context (Bong and Skaalvik, 2003, in Janssen, Wouters, Huygh, Denies, and Verschueren, 2015, p. 159); and the literature suggests that a self-concept for reading in an additional language is certainly affected by peers, and changes depending on how well individuals do in relation to their peers (Janssen, et al., 2015). Nkokheli's peers, then, while they did not actively encourage him, provided a gauge for him to judge his own performance as 'a reader' when he was at school. His mention of peers is significant, because to talk about a 'culture of reading', which is what my colleagues have suggested is missing from Fort Hare, is to talk about shared behaviour (Behrman, 2004).

Similarly, Qaqamba, while claiming that no-one overtly encouraged her to read, was first exposed to the idea when "everyone at school had library cards and it was exciting, so we also wanted to go get library cards". Then when she went to high school, she found that her friends were what she called "nose-in-book fans", with the result that "*ja*, that was it" – in

other words, those were the elements that helped to cement the formation of her reading practices.

In the face of being challenged by her peers, Nceba had to pay extra attention to what she learnt (presumably via lectures and reading) in order to recall it later and answer her peers' questions:

It's like/
okay fine now, I have to be a student/
and I have to, like, learn things//
[...] because when I go home to my cousins/
they'll be like "Okay/
so now we learn about THIS and that and that and that what did YOU learn about?"//

Here, issues of identity intersect with those of peer pressure. Using the Intertextuality tool (Gee, 2014) to ask how words are used to refer to words that others have said or written illuminates the intensity of the perceived challenge, as Nceba's peers themselves build their own identities ("we" versus "you") in terms of who has learnt what at their respective institutions. Nceba had said earlier in the interview that she often finds she has forgotten what she has studied, because "you read just to write a test". Yet in the face of this provocation by her peers, which includes an implicit challenge to her identity ('Are you one of us?'), Nceba has to consciously "be a student", in other words, *not* simply read for the purpose of passing, but enact the identity of one who needs to "learn things"; that is, absorb and retain knowledge to prepare for the upcoming inquisition by peers at home. So it is that Nceba is illustrating how reading is a social achievement connected to social groups, meaning that everyone reads in different ways when they read as members (or as if they were members) of different groups (Gee, 2003b, p. 3). For this student, then, her peers have become one of the mechanisms at play for a range of academic literacy practices. She is not unique, as the literature indicates that students often feel some pressure from their peers to read or not read certain things (Ivanič, et al., 2009, p. 66), a finding endorsed by this study.

However, peer influence to read is not always successful. Luzuko mentioned an incident where a friend gave him a book to read, an act which I would usually quickly label 'an enabling mechanism'. Yet in this specific instance, Luzuko refused the offer, saying, "You can keep your book – I'll wait for the movie!" In other circumstances, for another student, a friend offering a popular novel could well lead to that student being encouraged to read that

novel, and perhaps even other books. But for Luzuko, the lure of the film version was too strong (or perhaps it was his desire to avoid reading that was a mechanism at play here). His identity as a ‘non-reader’ would presumably have consequences for his academic activities, if much of our knowledge acquisition and production in higher education is on the basis of reading. This was born out by his academic record which shows that his average mark for the year in which the focus group discussion occurred was only just above a pass.

5.4 The ‘I did it on my own’ Discourse

‘Motivation’ of various kinds was identified by several of my interviewees as being an enabling mechanism for their various literacy practices, which I have labelled the ‘I did it on my own’ Discourse. McKenna’s (2004b) interviews with South African students uncovered a strong discourse that motivation played a vital role in student success. However, McKenna (2004b) concludes, ‘motivation’ in reality did not sufficiently explain student success or failure despite its dominance as an explanatory discourse. In the case of my focus group discussions, ‘motivation’ was sometimes implied. For example, Qaqamba said with a small laugh that “no-one ... absolutely no-one” encouraged her to read, attributing her initial reading experiences simply to “curiosity”. Qaqamba’s use of repetition and emphasis serves to highlight the student’s belief that her love of reading was entirely self-developed. Her small laugh does the same, as she seemed to find the idea of being encouraged to read an amusingly incongruous one. However, I would argue that Qaqamba’s implied assertion that she developed a love of reading simply out of her own independent ‘motivation’, while it certainly reflects her own belief, does not, in my view, reflect the more complex reality that is clarified in the light of similar claims made by other students.

Sibabalwe paints a picture of himself as a younger brother who decided on his own to do well at school in order to study further. His older brother, the first one in the family to pass matric, attended university but completed only his first year. This spurred Sibabalwe on to achieve more than his brother:

Sibabalwe: My bigger brother went to university /
and only did first year [Cathy: Okay] //
which was when I was encouraged to do MORE than him//
But he was in the only one in the family who has passed matric and [inaudible]//
Cathy: So who was it that told you to be better than your brother – who said that to you?
Sibabalwe: I told myself//

Yet, as indicated above, “I did it on my own” is a complex Discourse. Such ‘self-motivation’ seemed to be a phenomenon that came in varying guises; some of them being interest, curiosity, and a desire for success or excitement. And some students tended to attribute the development of their reading habits to their own, independent action and intrinsic motivation (as when Sibabalwe said at another point in the interview, “I never went to a Sunday school to read Bibles and stuff like that, and so, I wasn’t encouraged... I only encouraged myself to do it”). Yet, like all mechanisms, this discourse was never experienced in isolation from other mechanisms at the level of the Real in those students’ contexts.

However, this way of thinking about learning as being entirely the business of the individual is a common one. South African researchers have found a discourse of the ‘decontextualised learner’, with its concepts of education as asocial, acultural and apolitical, and of success in education as dependent on characteristics inherent to the individual (Boughey and McKenna, 2015). This discourse is exemplified by attributing a “lack of motivation” to students, without recognising that demonstrations of motivation depend on social convention (Boughey and McKenna, 2015, p. 9). The implication of this is that some SA universities explicitly focus their attention on creating environments in which students can be self-directed in their learning, without considering that some students might find the processes of knowledge construction completely foreign (Boughey and McKenna, 2015, p. 9). It seemed that several of my interviewees also saw themselves as ‘decontextualised learners’, as they attributed their reading practices only to their own efforts.

However, applying some of the tenets of critical realism helped me to understand this phenomenon as I shall now briefly explain. Mechanisms are stratified, linking to each other across domains, and are difficult to isolate in most kinds of social research. And while *horizontal* explanations are those that look to underlying mechanisms to explain events, *vertical* explanations explain one mechanism by another, more basic mechanism (Collier, 1994, p. 48). In this way, the progress of science is a process of deepening researchers’ understanding, because they are continually digging into layers of mechanisms (Collier, 1994, p. 49). And so it is in this case: only a vertical mechanism will suffice to explain the links of causation, because although several students drew on the ‘I did it on my own’ Discourse to account for their own reading practices, it is important to realise that self-motivation would not be the only or even the main mechanism from which the event emerged. Another way of testing this would be to use the strategies of critical realism of

comparing different cases, as well as counterfactual thinking (Danermark, et al., 1997, pp. 101, 105) to ask: Can I imagine that the students mentioned above would develop a love of reading without the other mechanisms they described? For instance, despite Qaqamba's insistence that no-one encouraged her to read, this does not mean that her intrinsic motivation was the only enabling mechanism that she encountered. For this student, the mechanisms she encountered included the motivating desire for excitement and escape from humdrum reality; the library in Qaqamba's neighbourhood, and her peers exhibiting excitement at owning library cards. For Qaqamba, these three mechanisms would have acted alongside many others. For Sibabalwe, although he sees his motivation to study as coming from within, that motivation was prompted by his brother's success (and, using retroductive logic, presumably also by seeing the benefits that came with that success, such as, hypothetically, family pride, or accolades from teachers).

In other words, although 'motivation' can be a mechanism, the *discourse* of motivation can be problematic in the way it disguises other issues at play. Student problems can then be ascribed to 'lack of motivation' instead of problems with context (Boughey and McKenna, 2015). One example was when Ntando said, when asked about the perceptions of Fort Hare as not being as prestigious as some other universities, "Fort Hare has nothing to do with it – it depends on the individuals."

But other Discourses and Conversations might also play a role here. The inclination of some students to attribute their reading practices to their own motivation alone, rather than depicting those practices as arising at least partially from particular opportunities and networks, can be linked to a Discourse model that other researchers have found when interviewing South African students. This was the 'no problem' Discourse model, which students used to make themselves feel better about struggling with their Engineering course, with phrases such as "everyone struggles with that"; and "it's just a matter of getting priorities right" (Case and Marshall, 2008, p. 205). This could be linked to a Discourse of self-actualisation and individual success that is common in popular culture, which involves messages such as 'Reach for your dreams' and 'Don't give up' (Case and Marshall, 2008, p. 205). The 'no problem' Discourse model is problematic in that it allows students to justify their learning failures in simplistic ways, such as "forgetting", rather than failing to understand (Case and Marshall, 2008, p. 205). This Conversation seems to incorporate Discourses about what success is and how to achieve it, with a strong emphasis on

individual agency. That could explain the inclination of some students to explain their academic successes as something they have attained entirely on their own, with neither encouragement nor hindrance from anyone or anything.

5.5 ‘Our parents don’t chase us’

In the first focus group discussion, talk turned to school days, and again the Discourse of ‘We blacks’ who “throw away our books and forget school” was used. Nceba picked up the point, presumably referring to parents or other figures of authority when she says “They” in the first line below. This was the first occurrence of a discourse (with a small ‘d’) about uninvolved parents.

Nceba: They even ask, “Do you have homework?”//
“NO! We don’t!”//
Whereas we have homework/
we just don’t...//
Silumko: Our parents, too, are like that//
[Someone else: Ja]
They don’t, like, chase after us to read books after school//

So in this discussion, Nceba refers to a parent or guardian who would check whether homework was done, but was presumably satisfied by a denial. Silumko continued to draw on the ‘We blacks’ Discourse, depicting people whose academic or school-based literacy practices are not paramount in their daily lives. Instead, such literacy practices were constructed as being confined to the world of school, within school hours. This brings to mind the Trackton parents in Heath’s (1983) research, who believed that “the young have to learn to be and do, and if reading is necessary for this learning, that will come” (Heath, 1983, p. 234). In other words, both the parents in Trackton (Heath, 1983) and the parents described by Students 1 and 2 above are depicted as having an uninvolved, hands-off approach to their children’s reading and writing practices.

Nceba painted a picture of her childhood literacy practices. She could make use of the public library nearby, but “I didn’t grow up with that foundation of my mum reading to me”. A Figured World is “a picture of a simplified world that captures what is taken to be typical or normal”, and which varies, depending on context and the groups that people belong to (Gee, 2014, Kindle Locations 4490-4491). In the Figured World (Gee, 2014) depicted by Nceba, the vital missing ingredient was a parent who read to her even before she could read herself.

This is an idea supported by the literature, as researchers from a variety of disciplines – to mention just a few: Heath (1983), Rose (2004, in Thomson, 2008), Snyman (2006), and Grabe (2009) – have found that parents play a vital role in a young child’s acquisition of literacy practices. These writers concur that when parents are themselves seen by their children to read, when they read an array of texts to their children, talk to them about what they read, and use a variety of oral and written languages with them, it helps prepare children for Western, middle-class education.

Silumko said instantly, in reply to my asking whether students’ parents read, that yes, his father did, as a school principal, and so there were always books in the house when he was growing up. However, after Silumko had finished describing his background, I pointed out to the group that “when I first asked the question [about whether your parents read], there was a lot of shaking of heads”, at which several students laughed, and Nceba said, “Ja”. I took this to mean that on the whole, students’ parents do not read in their leisure time.

Silumko’s depiction of parents uninvolved with the children’s literacy practices do not necessarily contradict Nceba’s assertion that parents enquiring about homework. Together, these students depict a world in which parents are largely uninvolved with their children’s literacy development, and who at the most would enquire about homework, and leave the matter if children deny that they were given any. This partly illustrates the ‘Matthew effect’ (Stanovich, 1986, in Pretorius, 2003), where those who struggle to read at a young age, whose parents and teachers do not encourage or expect much of them with regard to reading, and whose schools are not well-supplied with books, are stuck in a negative cycle of not developing the skills needed to cope with reading at a later age. For South African children who have to learn to read in a language that they do not speak at home, these difficulties are compounded (Pretorius, 2003).

5.6 ‘Go read anything’

In Chapter Two I mentioned Brandt’s notion of ‘literacy sponsors’: those agents, “concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way” (Brandt, 2001, p. 19). I was particularly interested in the role played by adults in students’ reading practices, and whose influence was noted by interviewees.

Such literacy sponsors were mentioned when interviewees credited adult relatives such as parents for encouraging their reading practices as children. This was the ‘Go read anything’ discourse (with a small ‘d’) that was attributed to those adults who encouraged various kinds of reading practices. For example, Fadziso said that every day after school, her parents would ask her, “Do you have homework? Do your homework. Study.” Here Fadziso (from Zimbabwe) represents her parents’ approach as being fairly distanced and authoritarian, focusing on school-based literacy (as opposed to an imagined alternative scenario in which they might talk to their child about what they were reading for pleasure or discuss their own reading with them). In this case, I can use abductive logic to imagine how things might be (Danermark, et al., 1997), and could surmise that Fadziso’s parents equated studying with economic and social achievement that might otherwise be very difficult to achieve in Zimbabwe. After all, this is a country that the World Bank (Zimbabwe Overview, 2015, n.p.) describes as having “enormous potential” for growth and poverty reduction, but which has been “battered” by economic crises to the point where poverty rates rose to over 72% in recent years.

One student poignantly spoke about her grandmother, “who only had Grade One – she only knew like how to write her name and sign documents and stuff”. Yet this grandmother “pushed me to read” and encouraged the student to do her homework and read out loud, even though she herself could not do so. The same student had an uncle who presented her with a dictionary and encouraged her to use it – and she was one of the most enthusiastic readers that I interviewed. Together, these students illustrated the point that literacy is part of “an ecological system that includes the family, the community, and the broader culture” (Currin and Pretorius, 2010, p. 24).

More than family members, by far the most frequently mentioned adult literacy sponsors were school teachers. This brings to mind the ground-breaking findings by Heyneman and Loxley (1983) that in developing countries, family background has less influence on pupil achievement than school factors (such as resources, teacher qualification, and class size). My interviewees acknowledged teachers as the ones who promoted reading generally. Mostly, teachers were depicted as encouraging latent abilities, as for Bhutana, who described his reading practices as beginning in high school, when a teacher brought books to a group of five learners and asked them to write reports about what they had read. “It was not seen as something for school, but just for reading,” he said.

Other participants mentioned teachers offering straightforward verbal encouragement; asking class members to “go read anything, then [...] just come and tell us which book you read”; taking them as school pupils to Rhodes University’s “Writing is Fun” courses; and asking good readers to read to their peers; to showing a film of a novel before the class tackled the reading of the novel itself. Nomthandazo described how one of her junior school teachers, upon realising that Nomthandazo and her friend loved the English language, brought them books to read, took them to the municipal library, and later asked the girls to report back to her what they had read.

Less often, students mentioned university lecturers whose ideas and encouragement had affected their reading. For example, Qaqamba reported that a lecturer lent her a book she found interesting. Khanyiswa quoted another lecturer as saying, “You do not study for your degree; you read for your degree”, which Khanyiswa used to illustrate her argument that it is vital to have a solid foundation of reading ability built at school to enable sound academic literacy practices at university. The participants described how one lecturer I shall call Mr A, encouraged his students to start a book club. The students’ reaction to Mr A’s suggestion is further discussed in Chapter Six.

Literacy sponsors for my interviewees, then, included parents and other adult relatives, librarians (Aphiwe said, “Every time we went to the library she’d recommend books that she’d think we’d like”), as well as some teachers and university lecturers. In this way they were similar to the adult learners in the US-based Literacy Practices of Adult Learners Study who talked about their sources of support and motivation as including supportive teachers and family members (Purcell-Gates, et al., 2004). Another facet of pedagogical practices that students described, however, came as a surprise to me.

The third group interview involved four postgraduate students who seemed to be friends, or at least familiar enough with each other to tease each other and make comments on each other’s literacy practices. Three were Zimbabwean, and one South African. I asked them to tell me about the people who encouraged them to read, expecting to hear more of the ‘Go read anything’ discourse attributed to kindly grandmothers and supportive teachers, as described by the previous groups. The South African student did indeed offer a description of visiting the library with a friend, but the conversation took a different turn when Fadziso

from Zimbabwe made a statement which took me aback, and which was soon elaborated upon by the other Zimbabweans in the group:

Fadziso: [Hesitantly] And also/ [p]
Yeah/ [p]
in Zim/
it's quite/
the teachers that really FORCE you to study// [p]
If you didn't do your homework/
you'd get [mimes, and whispers] spanked//
Cathy: REALLY?//
Mudiwa [together with Fadziso]: A beating/
A beating//
[Mudiwa chuckles]
Fadziso [louder and more animated]: So/
you'd not [p] ever think of not going...
Mudiwa: [inaudible]...using a walking stick/
Fadziso: ... not going – not doing your homework//

Although corporal punishment was banned from South African schools in 1996, it is not uncommon for local teachers to use beatings as a way of instilling discipline (Morrell, 2001; Govender and Sookrajh, 2014). At least part of the reason for this is that teachers frequently report feeling overwhelmed, having to cope with larger classes and more administration, with serious disciplinary issues to contend with. As a result, some teachers report that they see nothing wrong with beating school children, and even some government ministers have called for corporal punishment to be reinstated (Morrell, 2001). There also appears to be a strong correlation between school and domestic modes of discipline, with working class parents depending more on physical punishment than middle-class parents (Morrell, 2001). Teachers, too, report that when they were school children, it was 'normal' to be hit, so it is perhaps not surprising that they struggle not to continue this practice (Govender and Sookrajh, 2014).

Nevertheless, I was shocked to hear students talk about beatings so casually. My reaction made the students laugh, but they were also at pains to explain this Figured World (Gee, 2014) to me. They spent several minutes justifying corporal punishment, first pointing out that in Zimbabwe it was not illegal to beat a child, and that such beatings were not done to hurt the children, that for some the fear of the beating worked to motivate them to study. Applying the Significance Building tool (Gee, 2014) to ask how words and grammar are being used to increase or lessen the significance of certain things shows that the three students worked hard to minimise the significance of such beatings to convince me that

corporal punishment was a normal and necessary part of education. In the course of this discussion, the students also linked corporal punishment to a network of social practices involving parenting and education. (In the first sentence below, “you” refers to the school teacher.)

Chatunga: Because you’re the parent away from home//
So/
if my son fails/
the first port of call is you/
the teacher//
“Why is he failing?”//
[...]
In Zim we take that proverb that says/
a child is raised by a whole village/ [Cathy: Ja]
they take that LITERALLY// [Chuckles from others]

Chatunga painted a picture of a Figured World (Gee, 2014) of adult literacy sponsors in which school teachers are essentially parent figures, and in which even neighbours have the right to discipline children. Both he and Mudiwa emphasised that parents, teachers and other adults were in constant communication with each other, ensuring that disciplinary practices were commonly agreed upon by the adults involved, with the beatings a natural, normal part of childhood. In this way, Chatunga particularly depicted such beatings as a Zimbabwean-specific cultural practice, when he says, “In Zim we take that proverb ... they take that *literally*”. The shift from “we” to “they” could be read as an attempt by Chatunga to distance himself from the practice of beatings, even as he explains it.

My initial question had been “Who was it who encouraged you to read?”, yet the subsequent discussion really answered the question, “Who was it who forced you to do your school work?” This response could be an indication that, despite the fact that this group of postgraduate students comprised several keen readers, they still equated ‘reading’ with school-based literacy practices.

Aphiwe, the only South African in this group interview, went on to present some of her own experiences of school discipline, commenting, “I can’t relate to that” (i.e. the tales of beating). She maintained that she would not be happy if a child of hers was beaten, since she knew there were other ways of maintaining discipline at school. The example she gave of these ‘other ways’ was of a teacher who had forced her, Aphiwe, to give a speech in isiXhosa to the class. This was after the student had struggled to prepare the speech and so

had not wanted to do it, presumably out of fear of failing in front of her peers. Yet the teacher “made me stand up there... and I cried in front of everyone”. She related this anecdote in an unemotional, matter-of-fact way, framing it as an example of a teacher “who would push us”, and concluded that “we had respect for her, at the end of the day”. For this student, being coerced into doing something she felt she was not ready for, to the point of emotional upset, was a better alternative to beatings. She builds this particular teacher’s identity as that of a reasonable, respectable educator, whereas someone else given the same information might portray this teacher as a bully, or, more generously, as perhaps a harassed, overworked educator who did not have the time to help her learner to prepare adequately for an onerous assessment task.

The Figured World (Gee, 2014) of school for the South African student, then, is similar to that of her Zimbabwean peers. Both worlds include teachers who force pupils to perform literacy practices, using similar methods to coerce children into certain behaviours. Also in both stories were depictions of parents and school teachers forming a unit, doing whatever was necessary to ensure that their children performed the tasks prescribed to them.

Later in the same interview, the group recounted an example of a Fort Hare lecturer (who I shall call Mr B) who prescribed a book that they all found problematic.

Chatunga: We found it difficult//
 So basically reading/
 for the four of us/
 if we get a prescribed reading/
 we do try//
 read and understand what it/
 what it is talking about//
 But if you don’t understand it/
 that’s the work for the lecturer//
 Because at times you can see that/
 okay/
 the more I’m going into this reading/
 the more I’m getting confused/ [Cathy: Mm]
 so/
 why should I continue? [Cathy: Ja]//

The students repeatedly emphasised that they had attempted to tackle this particular book, but found it impenetrable. It appears that Chatunga is building an identity of a conscientious student, not only for himself, but for the other interviewees too, as he describes how they were united in the struggle to master this particular textbook. In this way he indicates they

share an identity of motivated, hard-working students. Only once this is established does he move on to asking “Why should I continue?”

To illustrate the construction of a Figured World, Gee (2014) gives an example of a student saying to a professor, “It’s your job to help me, I need to learn” (Gee, 2014, Kindle Locations 4524-4525). In the extract above, Chatunga does something very similar in stating that “if you don’t understand it [the prescribed reading], that’s the work for the lecturer”. Gee (2011) differentiates between various kinds of Figured Worlds. Chatunga’s statement functions partially as a “world-in-(inter) action” (p. 90); that is, a way of looking at the world that guides people’s actual actions and interactions, because this student’s way of understanding a lecturer’s job ultimately guides his reading practices. If he finds a reading incomprehensible, he will eventually cast it aside with a feeling of hopelessness, which he expects a lecturer to address by clarifying the meaning of the book. In other words, he anticipates that the lecturer will assist him in his literacy practice and will offer some sort of explanation.

This Figured World of Chatunga’s is also an evaluative world; in other words, stories and other ways of looking at the world which are used to judge ourselves and others (Gee, 2011, p. 90). Here the student is essentially judging what a lecturer’s job is. There is a judgement of Mr B here, but it is half-obsured, as Chatunga did not complete the anecdote, and so did not make the judgement clear. Instead, Fadziso picked up on this point a few minutes later in the interview, when the discussion had moved on somewhat to focus on difficult textbooks generally, and how an off-putting textbook can affect students’ attitudes to an entire subject, and “really does affect your performance” (Aphiwe). At this juncture, Fadziso suddenly returned to the topic of Mr B and the textbook he had prescribed:

Fadziso: You know/
I think [Mr B] realised it/
that it was a hard book//
And he was just saying/
“You just have to learn it//
You just have to learn it//
Just read it/
just learn it!//
And get over it.”//

This was followed by a muffled giggle from Aphiwe in the same group.

While Fadziso seemed to want to give the lecturer some credit for perceiving that the reading he had prescribed for his course was “a hard book”, the words she attributed to him depict an impatient, angry person who would rather tell his class dismissively to “just learn it” (that is, the content of the book) and “get over it” than to explain or elucidate the ideas that the book presented. In this way, Fadziso follows up on Chatunga’s point about “the work for the lecturer”: Mr B did *not*, it seems, do his job in the Figured World discursively constructed by the students in which lecturers should explain difficult readings. This could be seen as a variety of the ‘Go read anything’ discourse, which could perhaps be called ‘You have to go read this book’.

The giggle that followed this part of the discussion could be because there was an element of performance in the way Fadziso injected an impatient note into her voice and attributed to the lecturer the repeated use of “just...” to convey an academic who is expressing exasperation and annoyance at what he perceived as his students’ problem. The giggle could also be from a sense of daringly transgressing a perceived boundary, for here a student was essentially gently criticising Mr B to me, another lecturer.

So it was that for these students, teachers’ particular educational methods (which many would label as abusive) were mechanisms for their literacy practices. It seems that while some participants see the beatings they received from school teachers as enabling mechanisms, with positive results that persisted into their university studies, they did not view Mr B in the same light. The eventual fate of this “difficult book”, which the lecturer said the students should “just learn ... and get over it” was that the students simply packed it on their bookshelves and gave up on it, resorting to reading book reviews on the internet in an effort to understand the book’s central concepts. (As Mudiwa put it, “The best way to understand it – okay, it’s something I realised recently – is to look for the academic reviews.”) Mr B’s approach in this instance, then, was a constraining mechanism, in combination with what the students experienced as the baffling nature of this particular book.

Yet on the whole the students gave credit to a variety of adults for developing their latent abilities at school and, to a lesser extent, at university. Mostly, the students I interviewed looked back at their childhoods and remembered relatives, librarians, and above all, school teachers, who encouraged them in a variety of ways, some more orthodox than others.

Within the framework of Brandt's (2001, p. 19) definition of 'literacy sponsors', that is, of agents who enable, support and teach literacy, as well as those who regulate and suppress it, while somehow benefiting, all those mentioned by students in this context had an interest in encouraging the students' reading and other literacy practices, and so were certainly a particular type of literacy sponsor.

I begin the next section by discussing some interviewees' individual identities as they presented them, and the links between those identities and their reading practices.

5.7 The Discourse of 'Individualism'

A Discourse that sometimes played out subtly was that of 'Individualism', when an analysis of some participants' words revealed that they stood out from the group in some way. Khanyiswa, for instance, found that not many people around her shared her love of reading. She was one of the few who, without being 'led' in the form of probing interview questions, used the same terminology as the participants in the US survey described in Chapter Two. In that US survey, many respondents described themselves as "quite a reader", or "reading all the time" or as coming from "a family of readers" (Brandt, 2009, p. 60), and Khanyiswa did the same:

From a very, very young age/
from the MOMENT we could hold a pencil/
it was reading and writing and all that stuff so/
reading's always been a very big part of my life//
Even now I still consider myself a big reader//

In this way Khanyiswa enthusiastically embraced the identity of being a reader, crediting her family for encouraging her literacy practices. This identity was affirmed when she was still at school: she later described how her high school English teacher would ask her to read to other classes ("because no-one [in the class] can read"), presumably to inspire the others to improve.

Applying Gee's (2014) Politics Building tool – that is, how words are used to construct what counts as "a good worth having" (Kindle Location 3167) – to this particular section of the group interview reveals that Khanyiswa is not only proclaiming her identity as a reader, but constructing the ability to read as a social good that she possesses and which many others

lack. As she acted out the lack of reading ability that she witnessed at school, and her own response to it, her anger and frustration was very clear in the fierce tone of her voice:

And you'd see people reading//
this person would be in maybe Grade 9 or Grade 10/
and would be like: "The – dog – is..."/
I dunno!// [A few students laugh.]
I mean it just GRATES my CHEESE//
Just to look at someone that/
"WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?"//
Like, "How did you get here, and you can't read prop-"/
I think it's just very frustrating for me/
seeing people that don't read/
and just seeing how much enjoyment it gives to me// [p]

Despite the fact that in the last two lines above, the Discourse of Individualism is strong as Khanyiswa attributes her anger to frustration that others do not share her enjoyment of reading, frustration does not, I believe, fully explain the intensity of her response. Instead, her words, addressed to the imaginary school children in her past, "What are you doing here? How did you get here?", indicate that she is angry at the perceived injustice of someone who has reached "Grade 9 or Grade 10" without, apparently, having the required literacy. Khanyiswa had experienced attending a 'Model C' school first, and then moving to a school "that was not Model C". Although she did not explicitly blame anyone or anything for her fellow pupils' inability to read, I could surmise from her later words ("What happened to story time [in junior school classrooms]? There was a time for all these basic things that built up [...] that's the foundation") that she found fault with the educational system generally, and particularly of the school "that was not Model C". She also made reference to the mores of her generation ("we're the generation of instant gratification"), implying that books might not provide such gratification, but they have enduring value. As shown in the following section, she describes books as "providing an experience" and clearly views reading as vital to a sound education.

Khanyiswa's structurally determined position, I would surmise, is different from many of her peers at the University of Fort Hare, which is part of her Discourse of Individualism. She had attended a 'good' school, however briefly. This, plus her use of English and competence in school-based literacies set her, on what I would call the 'class continuum', closer to middle class than working class. Her positionality, or relationship to that positioning (Sánchez, 2006, p. 38), appears to be a mixture of matter-of-fact acceptance, including a

clear view of privilege and lack, plus the anger mentioned above. It seemed to me that her identity as ‘a reader’ was sufficiently strong, as was her perception that reading is vital to academic success, that she was outraged to come across those whose literacy practices were not sufficient for the level of schooling they had reached. I could conclude, then, that an identity as ‘a reader’ that had been adopted with such fervour had to be an enabling mechanism for her in her various literacy practices. (Further aspects of this student’s identity are explored in Chapter Seven.)

Reading identities are complex, context-dependent, and embodied in a variety of literacy practices (Compton-Lilly, 2009). Such identities can be contradictory – but the closest I came to spotting any sort of contradiction or equivocation in the students’ reading identities occurred with Chatunga, in one of the few one-on-one interviews I conducted:

Cathy: Would you describe yourself to a friend or relative as being ‘a reader’?//

Chatunga: [p] Well [p]//

I think that question depends//

If I’m to compare myself to the people who are known as readers/

I’d say I’m not//

But/

if I’m to be compared to people that/

are in line with people in my field/

or at my level/

I’d say yes, I am a reader//

Upon further questioning, he confirmed that he sees himself as ‘a reader’ compared to most other students, but would not label himself as such when compared to, say, professors. But the extract above can be read as Chatunga saying, in a roundabout way, “Sort of... sometimes, maybe”. Hedging expressions like ‘sort of’ and ‘kind of’ (and, I would argue, ‘that depends’) is where the work of setting up equivalences and differences is being done (Fairclough, 2003). So the Discourse of Individualism appeared again, as it seems that Chatunga sees himself as different from his peers – a stronger, more enthusiastic reader – but as not yet equivalent to those with power in academia. Both Chatunga and Khanyiswa, then, are in their own ways commenting that they perceive a lack of ability in and enthusiasm for reading, which was borne out by other students at times overtly and at other times implicitly.

Chatunga’s identity is a multifaceted one, as he sees himself primarily as a sportsman. Not only does he say that he was “the sporting kid” in the family, but later, when asked about his

ambitions, his first one was to “continue my sporting career”. Yet when he joined his peers in a group discussion, I learnt further that he is confident enough in his literacy practices to publish a blog of his writing, with some friends. Publishing a poem he had written garnered hundreds of positive responses, he told me. Given that he is one of the few students who mentioned that he enjoys a multiplicity of literacy practices, and given my ‘insider’ knowledge that he regularly achieves academic results that place him within the top 10% of the class, it seems safe to conclude that his identity as a reader is also an important part of his multi-faceted self-image. Clearly, then, Chatunga was one of those whose love of reading set him apart from many of his peers. He exemplifies the counter-current to the discourses and Discourses that were not pro-reading. In critical realist terms, part of his structurally determined social position is that of a middle-class male, and being middle class has afforded him the privilege of acquiring school-based literacy practices at an early age. His positionality (Sánchez, 2006) is, I think, slightly uneasy. The Discourse of Individualism was evident once more when he spoke about his family. He comes from a family of doctors, teachers and accountants, but sees himself as, to some extent, the odd one out (“And here I am, you know, I was more the sporting kid”). He also found himself an outsider when he first arrived at Fort Hare and found he was one of the few students who did not speak Xhosa and so struggled to communicate (“the first few months, it was quite a problem cos I had to adjust and learn the Xhosa language”).

He talked about his identity with confidence, although I was left with the impression that as a young person who was, at the time of the interviews, still studying, his identity was mutating. For instance, when I first interviewed him, he said he was “planning on doing ... my Masters ... and PhD”. But later, in the focus group discussion, he indicated that he would not study further, but would focus on “my sporting career”, indicating that the ‘sportsman’ aspect of his identity had strengthened. Similarly, but to a less obvious extent, it seemed at times that other students had self-identities that were primarily that of something other than students. For instance, Akhona explained that her main ambition was to “do my cattle ranching things”. When I asked for clarity – “Your primary interest for a while was farming?” – she replied, “It was. It still is.” Both of these students, as described elsewhere in this chapter, enjoyed reading and performed well in class – but perhaps not as well as they might have done had their self-identity been *primarily* that of post-graduate students. So it could be argued that in these cases, the ‘non-student’ aspects of their identities functioned as constraining mechanisms (to varying degrees) on their academic literacy practices.

The notion of hybrid identities is often seen as a way for people to avoid role identities that are prescribed for them, but hybridity is actually a compromise for people dealing with multiple forces wanting to control their identities (Lemke, 2008, p. 32 and p. 33).

Educational institutions, for example, tend to “make us over in their image of the good student or the good teacher” (Lemke, 2008, p. 32, 32). Yet society is changing, its control slowly dissolving, so that many people are less and less convinced of the legitimacy or necessity of many of these institutions or the conventions, norms, values, discourses, identities and practices associated with them (Lemke, 2008, p. 36). I would suggest that this could be the case for students like Chatunga and 15.

Luzuko stood out from the other participants in his group interview. He provided one of the strongest examples of the Discourse of Individualism, as his identity of “performer”, he was clear, precluded being a reader. And so the following part of this section on individual identities moves on to those students whose enthusiasm for reading was non-existent – or tempered, in the case of those who claimed they “have no time” in the last section of this chapter.

This student used repetition, vocal patterns, gestures and explicit explanation to build his own identity as that of a performer and artist, rather than a reader or a student. When he began speaking the words transcribed below, he spoke more slowly and soberly, on the whole, than he had earlier in the interview, when he was talking about his preference for watching films to reading books. This measured, serious tone also added to the sense that he was imparting something important and personal to me and the group:

When I grew up nê/
my mother was a performer//
And so my father was a performer [so I?] didn't have time for books//
All I have time for is to go on stage and watch them performing//
... So we go to the theatre and just watch [Mimes watching a busy scene.]//
That's ALL//

[Much later in the interview]: Oh [my story is] completely different from these guys//
Cathy: Oh really, tell us//
Luzuko: [laughs] Okay like //
growing up /
my mother and father were performing//
And then I had a sister//
... [My sister] would like reading//
I don't do reading//
I'd just do performing or watching//

While it is difficult to say *definitively* that his ‘performance’ identity is a constraining mechanism for his reading, it seems obvious that this identity, as he expresses it, is not aligned with academic literacy practices. Although Sánchez (2006) mentions class, gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation as the aspects that determine structural positioning, I would argue that the nature of one’s and family’s employment can be such an aspect too. It certainly seems to be for Luzuko, as he depicts his family’s activities as being centred on performing. At another point, he explained how at his school, ‘Reading Hour’ was also the time to play sport or participate in the performing arts, and that his choice was obvious to him:

You go to performing art/
or sport/
or sit down in class and read so I would go performing// [Cathy: Okay.]
“No sorry Ma’am/
I can’t read today// [Chuckles from the others, and from him.]
I’m late!//
I’m going to perform!”//
That’s the thing//

Like Uuka, the ‘literary warrior’, Luzuko’s positionality is to embrace his own difference from those around him, secure in his identity – in this case, as one who tells or watches or creates stories, rather than reading them. In stark opposition to Chatunga’s ‘I’m a sportsman and a reader’ identity, Luzuko constructed for himself an identity of ‘I’m a performer, not a reader’.

5.8 The Discourse of ‘No time’

The Discourse of ‘No time’ (to read) was prevalent, with lack of time mentioned on at least 11 occasions during the various group interviews. The most interesting and frequent mentions of time constraints came from Aphiwe, in the third group interview, who appeared to contradict herself twice within one discussion. The three extracts below, from her input at different places in the interview, illustrate these contradictions:

I still read occasionally/
but I hardly ever find the time. ...

Um/
I think I read as well/
most of the time//
Um/

ja/
 a lot on the internet/
 reading a blog or some website/
 I have a few websites that are my favourites//
 It's either reading or I'm writing something//
 [...] I don't get out much//

 ...I have a book shop at home and, it just/
 like if you could give me ANY birthday present/
 any book would just do it//
 So I, I definitely like to read/
 but there's not enough time//
 There's never enough time to read//

Aphiwe seems keen to present herself as a reader, presenting this information, albeit rather cautiously, in a series of main clauses (“I still read ... I think I read as well ... it's reading ... I definitely like to read”). Yet these main clauses are in each case tempered by subordinate clauses that mention a lack of time. This is a Discourse because it combines language, ways of thinking, identity and practices. This student in this way positions herself as one who is so busy with her studies that she does not “get out much”, nor does she have time to read. So it is that this Discourse is implicitly tied to identity, because to state, “I have no time” is to state, “I am a person with many demands on my time”. How one spends one's time is a function of social structure and individual agency, after all. Aphiwe might mean that she can no longer page leisurely through a book for enjoyment because other activities require her attention – yet these other activities include “watching something” and reading blogs. These other distractions are smoothed over and minimised, though, perhaps because they indicate that she *does* have leisure time, but now has media other than books competing for her attention. It therefore seems as if this student constructs ‘no time’ as a constraining mechanism on her reading practices.

There is a strong possibility that Aphiwe might find that reading blogs and other websites is a less demanding activity than her university studies have become, which is why she has less time to read books and, perhaps, why she might find her work takes more time and energy than it used to. The cognitive demands of the kinds of advanced reading that senior students are expected to do are considerable, involving ever-more complex concepts, language and content (Pretorius, 2003). This is particularly true of those who need to read such texts in English, when English is not their home language (Pretorius, 2003). Aphiwe was not alone in this, as in a later focus group discussion Fezile said:

I think we [neglect] books/
because most of our time/
we spend on social media/
even when we are about to sleep/
we take our phone and -/
so we don't have the time to just read//
And I don't think we should blame someone and say/
no because of our past/
our parents were illiterate/
so they couldn't encourage us to read/

Fezile's argument was paradoxical. He actually made the above argument twice: once near the beginning of the group interview, and then again right at the end when I asked if there was anything that the students thought I had overlooked. On the one hand, he was insistent that it was up to individuals to see the value that lies in books, and to cultivate their own reading habits, while avoiding blaming the previous generation or anyone else. On the other hand, he did see social media as providing a distraction. So he too used the 'No time' Discourse. Analysing the Discourse reveals an identity of a student who regards himself as a product of his own, younger generation: not interested in reproaching his elders, but rather seeing himself as having the agency to make his own choices.

Overall, though, it seemed to me that, in the case of young people whose family responsibilities have not suddenly changed (due to child rearing, for instance), the Discourse of 'no time' cannot be taken at face value as providing an adequate explanation for an increasingly negative attitude towards reading, nor for a decrease in the frequency of students' reading practices. Perhaps, for South African students who do not speak English as a home language, the truth lies at least partly in language issues. This was the explanation that some interviewees pointed to, as they described the difficulty of using English and struggling with its vocabulary. Luzuko described the panic of trying to formulate test answers: "You are finding it difficult to understand the word, and whilst you're thinking of the word, time goes." For these students, the social practice of reading is a fraught one, involving struggle and feelings of inadequacy, and they seem doubtful that they would ever enjoy reading as a leisure practice. The Discourse of 'No time' neatly covers these difficulties and helps to relegate reading to the status of one more demand on their day that they cannot accommodate easily. Applying Sánchez's (2006) critical realist notions of positioning and positionality here, it seems that these students' *positionality* is that of ignoring and/or resisting the *position* that their race, home language, and (I would argue) their place and time in South Africa's social history, has constructed for them.

5.9 Conclusion

Chapter Five presented some of the results of the CDA with a view to pinpointing discursive mechanisms that arose from students' social networks. The social contexts of students' home lives, plus their current university contexts, as well as their past school experiences, provide students with a complex set of social relationships, including several kinds of literacy sponsors. In this chapter, I have attempted to illustrate how Discourse is, as Laclau and Bhaskar (1998, p. 12) put it, "a type of efficacious mechanism which operates on the world, and is embedded in the world", while the world in turn impacts on Discourse. I have shown how students drew on the Discourse of 'We blacks', and how it seems that this Discourse is indeed a mechanism that, for some Fort Hare students, constrain their reading practices, as students linked their blackness to a habit of *not* reading. It was at this point that the 'Resistance to reading' Discourse first came to light. Such resistance and its link to race, as students portray it, might arise at least partly out of South Africa's apartheid history, reinforced today by a variety of social structures (such as the problematic school system) and within certain personal relationships. The Discourse of 'We blacks' incorporates discourses of deficit and lack (Felix, Dornbrack and Sheckle, 2008), and so students seem to blur class distinctions, as wealthy, privileged people are subsumed into the category of "We blacks" who are "left behind".

What I had to remember during the course of the analysis was that Discourses and discourses overlap, meld together, exist as hybrids, and sometimes split – because people are always changing, creating new Discourses and pushing the boundaries of existing ones (Gee, 2011, pp. 36-38). So it was that the Discourse of 'We blacks' can be seen as overlapping with the 'Resistance to reading', the 'Better than us' Discourses and the discourse about 'Our parents don't chase us', as well the Discourse of 'No time'. Discourses, after all, are far from being individual units, but are more like "co-ordinations ... [or] a dance" of people, places, times, things, and language, which signal certain identities (Gee, 2011, p. 39).

Now I turn to those discursive mechanisms that construct the institutional identity of the University of Fort Hare, as revealed by a CDA of interview transcripts. When I talk about the 'culture' of Fort Hare I intend it to have a similar connotation to 'climate', used in the sense of 'organisational climate' (Muller, 2005). Here the 'Resistance to reading' Discourse emerged again.

Chapter Six: Discourses constructing institutional identity

6.1 Introduction

For critical realists, it is important to link identity to social positioning (one's location within a set of economic, political, and cultural structures) and positionality (one's perspective on, or imagined relationship to, that position) – but also to analyse how identities are expressed (Sánchez, 2006, p. 42). This is the aim of Chapter Six.

The identity of the university itself was an aspect that I had not considered at all until students began mentioning it in their interviews. Specifically, it is *institutional culture* that was highlighted in some interviews: the difference being, I would suggest, that the *institutional culture* is that which is experienced by those working inside the institution (including students), while this culture is inextricably part of its *identity*, which is the way in which it is perceived by both those people, and those outside the institution.

It has been argued that in choosing to study at a university where there will be many others of the same 'non-traditional' ethnicity or class, students are actively aiming to position themselves more centrally in the world of the academy (Read, et al., 2003, p. 274). However, in South Africa although the 'non-traditional' student constitutes the majority, this might not be the case. Either way, this argument raises questions about what it is that attracts students to specific universities, Fort Hare in particular.

6.2 'This is not Wits'

In the second focus group discussion, Qaqamba explained how one of her lecturers had wanted to establish a book club. She described her peers' response in this way:

My lecturer once mentioned this/
He's like uh he wants to start, open a book club/
where people will read and blah blah// ...
And THEN he's like "You should talk to people"//
And then I went back to my peers and I'm like "Guys/
Mr [A] wants to start a book club"//
And they were like/
"Oh! Does he think this is Wits//
This is not Wits!" like // [Loud laughter from group]
"Oh you know what guys you just gotta read a book every two weeks or something like that/

and then discuss it”/
 and it’s: “Ah//
 This is not Wits/
 this is Fort Hare/
 we don’t DO that//
 Give us a magazine and okay/
 we can talk about THAT”// [Giggling from others]
 You know?//

This is one of the clearest examples of what Gee (2014) would describe as both identity building work and the depiction of a Figured World. Here the student quoted by Qaqamba depicts Fort Hare as utterly unlike the University of the Witwatersrand, where her lecturer Mr A had previously worked. At the time of writing, in 2015, the well-known QS rankings rate the University of Cape Town as being the ‘best’ in South Africa, with Wits (the University of the Witwatersrand) mentioned by the student the second ‘best’, and Stellenbosch University coming third (QS University Rankings, 2015). So Qaqamba’s friend sees Fort Hare as a place where students do not habitually read, and would take no interest in reading – unless magazines, rather than books, were the medium in question. And of course magazines, along with comics and cookbooks, are not typically perceived as academic literature (Moss, 2007, in Scholes, 2013, p. 364).

The laughter that constituted the group response to this story said to me that they recognised this Figured World; that Qaqamba’s story rang true for them.

The concept of an institutional culture is complex, and Hodkinson and Bloomer (2000, p. 189) point out that it will inevitably be bound up with the wider context in which it is located. Here I concur with Tierney’s (1988, p. 4) point that institutional culture can be identified through “stories, special language, norms, institutional ideology, and attitudes” emerging from the behaviour of individuals and the organisation, which is based in shared assumptions. Drawing on Geertz’s (1973) well-known definition of culture as “webs of significance”, Tierney (1998, p. 4) summarises institutional culture as webs of significance within the institution, requiring an anthropological-type of analysis of the ‘clan’. Some analysts maintain that universities do not have an organisational culture (Silver, 2003), in the sense in which Barnett (1990, in Silver, 2003, p. 159) uses it, anyway: a taken-for-granted way of life, in which it is clear that there are ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. Yet others disagree, as do I, pointing to discourses employed in a range of media and other outlets that construct what it means to be a student; in particular, a student of *that institution* (Read,

Archer and Leathwood, 2003). That seems a sound way to explain why it is that some students feel they ‘belong’ at one university but feel they do not ‘belong’ at another, whether because of their class, gender, age, or ethnicity (Read, et al., 2003; Archer and Hutchings, 2000). Cross and Johnson (2008) talk about *campus climate*, and how student integration leads to a feeling of *campus membership*. The positive educational experience reported by the learners at one UK college could best be understood as the effect of the college culture, rather than particular teaching styles or institutional policies (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2000). From the time that students enrolled, this college offered a cohesive identity, partly thanks to an enrichment programme that all first-years followed, and partly because the college enjoyed a high status as a fairly elite, selective institution. This identity was fostered by the positive disposition to studying shown by both staff and students, while the influence of home, family, peer groups and employment prospects was also detectable (Hodkinson and Bloomer, 2000, p. 200).

Similarly, some universities are perceived as ‘friendly’ and inclusive; others as snobbish and elitist (Read, et al., 2003). In the UK, it tends to be the largely white, middle-class universities that are perceived as ‘good’ (Reay, Davies, David, and Ball, 2001). In South Africa, when technikons became degree-granting universities of technology in 1993, they had to work hard to promote “a research culture” (Muller, 2005, p. 89) – which demands encouraging innovation and career development, among other things – and, in turn, a new identity. The various ways in which university representatives interact with members of the public, such as campus tours, can serve as rituals that help cement a particular identity for an HE institution by conveying its particular beliefs, traditions and values (Magolda, 2000). Even the university prospectus can play a role, as pointed out by a black student as she described the prospectus of a university as featuring only white people (Archer and Hutchings, 2000).

Since the students in the third focus group discussion were postgraduate students who had mostly been at Fort Hare for nearly four years, I asked them why they thought the students would respond to the idea of a book club as Qaqamba described. Fadziso answered in this way:

This thing of/
this university rating//
You find out that maybe the University of Fort Hare is being rated/

as maybe lower than other universities/
you'd be like, "Ah no/
I'm not at Wits/
I'm not at Stellenbosch/
I'm not at... [p]/
So why would I bother doing all this?"//

As discussed in Chapter One, university rankings are paid a great deal of attention by some academics, and Fadziso's words could be understood as referring to those. Even if Fadziso is referring to a more general judgement by the public, rather than official ratings, applying Gee's (2014) Intertextuality tool (how words are used to allude to words that others have said) shows that Fadziso is representing the words of other students to reveal the feeling of inadequacy and resentment she says she sees around her, repeating the words "I'm not at [a top-rated university]" to emphasise the notion of lack. According to Fadziso, Fort Hare students are well aware that their university is not highly regarded by many, and so have not adopted the identity of those whose practices would include "doing all this"; i.e. putting effort into joining a book club, reading books for leisure, and discussing what was read. In the previous chapter, Chatunga voiced a similar sentiment when he said that at times, he thought to himself, "The more I'm going into this reading, the more I'm getting confused, so, why should I continue?" Using critical realism's abductive logic to show how things might be – as explained in Chapter Four – led me to think that Fadziso's perceptions could well be a significant part of how some Fort Hare students see themselves in relation to learning in general, as well as in relation to the national higher education system and to reading and writing practices in particular. In other words, I began to suspect that the "Why bother?" question might be a strong Discourse in itself. In the case of Fadziso above, this Discourse is tied to the identity of Fort Hare being "*not* Wits... *not* Stellenbosch" (to rephrase Fadziso's words slightly). This brings to mind the extract discussed in Chapter Five, in which students quoted others saying that, in their communities, if someone is from a 'Model C' school and is seen to enjoy reading books, "It's a joke like 'Ja you're a nerd!' ... 'Oooh! Book freak!' ... 'You think you're better [than us] now'". So it would seem that both students and, as they describe it, certain peers in their communities, react to their structural positioning with a particular kind of defensive positionality (Sánchez, 2006), which has become cemented into Discourses that tie being black and working class to a resistance to reading and, to some extent, anti-academic practices.

In another group interview, I again told the story of ‘the book club that wasn’t’, wanting more student input. Once more, I noticed this story being greeted with some amusement; in this case, from Funeka:

Cathy: Is there some anti-reading culture at Fort Hare/
That I haven’t spotted yet?//
Or/
Is it everywhere in South Africa?//
What do you think?
[Funeka], you were laughing when I told that story..? [with a small laugh]
Funeka (with a laugh): It’s everywhere//
But then Wits/
and that sort of high academic - /
and Rhodes and UCT I think [inaudible]
There are those high academics/
those kids they were always believing that/
you must read/
you must study/
you must do this/
and then everything must be on point/
and then HERE/
[p] most of US are here to get a degree/
and go and work and/
ja//
we’re done//
but at Wits/
or UCT/
they’re there to learn/
and keep what they’ve learnt from university/
and use it in the workplace/
and so on//
for the rest of their lives/

The retroductive logic of critical realism asks, ‘What qualities must exist for something to be possible?’ (Danermark et al., 2002). When analysing the above extract, I found it striking that Funeka, a second-year university student, depicted such a Figured World (Gee, 2014) to me, a university lecturer, in the context of an interview in a university office. She clearly sees nothing ironic or inappropriate in implying that while students attending Rhodes, Wits and UCT believe that “you must read, you must study”, and “they’re there to learn”, Fort Hare students construct their university experiences in a different way. Here is where the ‘Resistance to reading’ Discourse was used again, constructing the universities of ‘Wits, Rhodes and UCT’ as places where students maintain ‘you must read’, but Fort Hare as a university where this does not happen. So to answer the question, ‘What conditions must exist for Funeka to say these things in this way?’, one possible answer is that in this student’s Figured World, Fort Hare is *a completely different kind of institution* to the other

universities she mentions: it has a different purpose, a different rationale, and offers a different educational experience. Given her matter-of-fact tone, Funeka appeared to expect this Figured World to be uncontroversial common knowledge.

One focus group discussion was essentially a ‘focus paired discussion’, because three participants did not arrive. Yet Lulama and 20 did not seem constrained by the fact that there were only three of us, and happily shared their opinions. They were different from the majority of interviewees, as they were middle class, with academic parents. Adaoha was Nigerian and this, plus her fervent desire to learn and read, put her outside the norm. When I asked her about her perceptions of Fort Hare, she described a Figured World (Gee, 2014) in the following way:

Adaoha: Well personally/
I think it is like/
should I say/
the majority of the people are here just to pass/
and get a degree// [Lulama: Mm]
They go through university/
The university doesn’t go through them//

Adaoha was at first a little hesitant. While her hesitation could be read as a strategy used to ‘buy time’ while she collected her thoughts, I suspect that it was also a way of distancing herself from what she was about to say, as the Figured World she presented in the extract above is evaluative (Gee, 2011), and is not a positive evaluation. In other words, she has a taken-for-granted ‘story’ about how the world works (Gee, 2011, p. 76), and is using it to judge others (p. 90). She clearly thinks that there is more to academia than aiming “just to pass”, and does not hold a high opinion of her fellow students’ attitudes to it.

In an extract discussed in Chapter Five, Nceba recounted the sort of pressure that her friends brought to bear, revealing that these “friends from other varsities” – that is, peers who attended universities other than Fort Hare – challenged her thinking on certain topics. When I later asked Nceba about the institutions her friends/cousins attended, she explained that those who were at university were at NMMU (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in the Eastern Cape city of Port Elizabeth). Fezile said in a later group interview, “There is this perception that if you are rejected from Rhodes or NMMU, you are taken here at Fort Hare.” So it appears that NMMU is sometimes seen as a more elite institution, with higher standards, than Fort Hare.

Some argue that it is macro-level developments that affect institutions and shape their identities at a micro-level by setting up discursive parameters at this micro-level (Small, Smith, Williams and Fataar, 2011). But I would argue that (in agreement with Tierney, 1988), for higher education institutions particularly, it is internal forces with their roots in history, and the values, processes and goals held by the key players of the organisation, which play a larger part in defining institutional identity.

But my concern was that some of my interviewees seemed to construct the University of Fort Hare as one where students could not be expected to read for enjoyment. One way to examine facets of a university's identity is to analyse its approach to teaching and learning. Using Archer's social realism, which extended elements of Bhaskar's critical realism, it can be concluded from an examination of 2008 documents (self-evaluation reports by the university; the Higher Education Quality Committee's audit data; and the audit panel's report) that there are problems with Fort Hare's teaching and learning, in the domains of culture and structure (Boughey and McKenna, 2011). To understand the domain of culture in Archer's framework, one examines discourses. Two kinds of discourses are discernible in the portfolio of UFH documents: those related to UFH's role in SA history; and discourses related to renewal and resilience (Boughey and McKenna, 2011, p. 14). The latter began to emerge after 2004, a few years after the appointment of a new vice-chancellor, and the acquisition of an urban campus in East London. Contesting and problematic discourses can be noted, while little evidence of institution-wide evaluation, needed for critical self-reflection, can be spotted in the documents (Boughey and McKenna, 2011). What is more, it is clear that UFH's approach to teaching and learning involves a separation of the teaching of academic writing from the disciplines themselves, as well as a discourse suggesting that the involvement of academic staff is not perceived as being necessary to the students' development. So there are distinct limitations to the efficacy of UFH's teaching and learning in the cultural domain, which in turn limits the potential for structural change (Boughey and McKenna, 2011). Structural challenges include the location of UFH in one of the poorest provinces in the country (Boughey and McKenna, 2011). Funding is another structural challenge (Boughey and McKenna, 2015, p. 4). As indicated in Chapter One, historically black universities (HBUs) did not have the same freedom as other universities to manage their budgets, and so did not build up financial reserves. What is more, the expected 'redress funding' to address historical inequities did not ever appear, and this, on top of the 2004 funding policy that depends on throughput rates, penalises the HBUs, who struggle to

achieve the same throughput rates as some historically white universities (Bozalek and Boughey, 2012, p. 694).

Examining the history of Fort Hare also reveals the changing ways in which it has been perceived. Around 1990, it became known as the *alma mater* of many members of the African elite, including Nelson Mandela, and so “was suddenly the world’s favourite university” (Johnson, 2014, p. 321). Yet by the 1990s, financial problems were so severe that Fort Hare became notorious for its internal disorganisation, and many staff members were lost through retrenchment (Johnson, 2014, p. 323). And in the first decade after democracy (1994 to 2004), internal power struggles combined with a lack of attention to detail and little organisational capacity meant that it battled to be a productive and efficient organisation (Johnson, 2014, p. 330). Fort Hare campus, situated as it is in an impoverished area, does not tend to attract many wealthy students, and students regularly protested either against fee payment regulations, or against the condition of the residences, resorting to anti-apartheid-style demonstrations such as barricading entrances and burning tyres. These particular protests began in the mid-nineties (Johnson, 2014), and I witnessed similar protests occurring almost annually during the years of my employment, from 2008 to the time of writing this thesis in 2014 to 2016.

The aspects mentioned in this section, then: Fort Hare’s international ratings, the way it is perceived by some students as being in some respects as ‘less than’ certain other universities, the ‘Why bother?’ Discourse, as well as Fort Hare’s own challenges and limitations, contribute to its culture (experienced internally) and its identity (perceived by those internal and external to the organisation). These aspects, in turn, link to the university’s reading culture, or lack of it, as perceived by some interviewees.

6.3 ‘Most students here don’t read’

Reading is a social phenomenon (Yandell, 2012) that takes time to develop and has “deep roots in the traditions of a given society” (Johnson, 2003, p. 8), which is why some people talk about ‘a reading culture’, which involves shared behaviour (Behrman, 2004). It has been suggested that a ‘reading culture’ could be found in a place where reading is a significant priority, where there is a focus on reading, modelled and supported by educators, and where the learning environment is conducive to literacy practices (Daniels and Steres, 2011). But

as discussed in the previous section, many students I interviewed did not seem to regard reading as a significant priority.

In Chapter Five, I analysed a part of a focus group discussion in which students talked about how, if young people choose to engage in literacy practices in the home environment, “we see you as a nerd” (Silumko). A positive attitude towards reading was found to be a significant dimension in reading achievement (Brooks, 1996). Conversely, a peer group culture that is not pro-reading can constrain the frequency with which children read (Scholes, 2013, p. 364); and applying inductive logic here means I can conclude that this is true of students, too. The peer group culture described here, then, is clearly a constraining mechanism on the reading practices of Fort Hare students. It is not an isolated culture, of course: it has been noted across the globe that young people do not seem to read as much as previous generations. For example, several extensive surveys in the US reveal that young people are reportedly reading less, and enjoying reading less in the early years of this century than they were in the 1980s (McKenna, et al., 2012, p. 287). And in the international PISA survey, comparing the 2009 figures with those of 2000 revealed that the numbers of 15-year-olds who read for enjoyment decreased in 22 countries (OECD, 2010, p. 88). (Unfortunately, South Africa did not participate in this survey.)

Perceived support from parents and friends is more important than gender, grade level and reading achievement in contributing to children’s reading practices and to positive orientations to those practices (Klauda and Wigfield, 2012, p. 30). An even more engaged relationship can also be beneficial, as in peers and adults who are models. Models might be those who demonstrate their learning practices to others, or they might be part of a co-operative group (Schunk, 2003, p. 169). The idea is that learners would then pattern their thoughts, beliefs and behaviour as the model did (Schunk and Zimmerman, 2007, p. 11). Modelling certain learning behaviours has been found to be important in promoting learning (Schunk, 2003): in particular, an effective way of teaching reading strategies (Schunk and Zimmerman, 2007).

If there is perceived similarity in age, gender, ethnicity and competence between the model and the learner, there will be a greater probability of achieving good results, which means that peer modelling in certain circumstances is more effective than teacher modelling (Schunk, 2003, p. 163). Yet if the majority of students at Fort Hare feel as the majority of

my interviewees did – that reading involves a tedious struggle, and that “this is not Wits – we don’t *do* that [reading literature for fun]”, then the chances are that what is being modelled at Fort Hare is a culture that tends to be resistant to reading. This was indicated by Adaoha when she said:

What I’ve found HERE/
is that most students don’t read for leisure// [Cathy: Mm-hm]
I read a LOT/
like when I sit in the library reading/
I see my friends asking/
“Are we having a test tomorrow?”/
“You can READ without having to prepare for a TEST”//
“Nah/
I don’t do that”//

Studying the culture of reading at an educational institution involves examining the integrated pattern of reading behaviour, practices, beliefs, and knowledge, and understanding how the staff and students actively create and maintain this pattern (Behrman, 2004). This would involve studying the physical space, the shared activities, and the individual behaviours and beliefs of the participants as they related to reading (Behrman, 2004). The individual beliefs are (at least partially, and on a small scale) revealed by my interviews, but rigorous analysis of the other aspects listed by Behrman (2004) is beyond the scope of my study. Yet a brief, anecdotal description might yield some insights. For instance, I can report that the Fort Hare library on Alice campus, as with most physical spaces on the Alice campus, is a little run-down. I have found that books listed as available on the electronic catalogue are often not on the shelves, and book budgets (as with all budgets) are ever-shrinking. In short, the library is not the efficient, appealing place it needs to be to attract students to work there. However, it does offer useful services, such as librarian-led workshops in which students are taught how to find information online. Every year, I book my third-year class for such a workshop, and every year, am uncomfortably aware that this seems to be the first time that the students are being exposed to online research practices.

Similarly, Chatunga said in his individual interview that Fort Hare “doesn’t have this ... environment where you can relax and, you know, just think, explore, just be yourself”. He went on to describe how younger students, tending to be noisy and disruptive, have been

assigned rooms even in university residences designed for doctoral students. When I queried this, he explained:

It's – I think it's a lack of [p] management//
The management side, you know, is – //
Most of these students are allocated residence at the last minute//
Like, after registration, you'll find some students telling you/
"I don't have a place to stay and this and that"/
hence the mix-up//
They mix everybody in one res and that/
that becomes a problem//

Chatunga here identifies another constraining mechanism, outside of discourse. This was borne out by Students 19 and 20, who agreed that while residence rooms can be noisy, especially on Friday evenings ("like *yoh*, mm-mm, you can't find peace of mind"), they can also be quiet places, conducive to reading. In the subsequent discussion, Lulama was explaining to me that the conditions in her residence room were pleasant, in her view:

My roommate is also lenient because/
When I'm studying she knows/
She must be quiet and also keep her squatter quiet//
And when she's studying/
I also have to be quiet//
Cathy: Your, your, your roommate has a squatter?//
Lulama: Yes//
Cathy: Is that common?//
Both students: It is common, at Fort Hare it is common//
Lulama: It is acceptable//
Cathy: Okay//
Lulama: Because – due to lack of places/
Adaoha: Accommodation//
Cathy: So you get strangers sort of like sleeping on the floor?//
Adaoha: No, they share the bed//
Lulama: Sometimes you get a stranger/
But like my roommate's squatter is not a stranger to her//

Here the students together present a typical Figured World (Gee, 2014): a picture of a simplified world that, quite overtly, captures what is taken to be normal on Fort Hare campus. However, the students' "prototypical simulation" (Gee, 2011, p. 105) of a university residence room, or what they perceive to be 'normal', was sharply contrasted with my own prototypical simulation – hence the amazement evident in my tone as I stumbled over my words: "Your – your – your roommate has a squatter?" They assured me that it was a common practice for students to share beds in official residences because of a lack of accommodation, whereas in my conception, it is 'normal' to have a room of one's home, or

perhaps to endure sharing a two-bedded room. This over-crowding of residence rooms, mixing of younger with more senior students, and intermittent noise most decidedly constitute constraining mechanisms to reading practices in the lives of Fort Hare students. The drawbacks described here also contribute to the identity of the institution as being less than idyllic, and as such begin to make sense of the ‘We blacks (who are left behind)’ and ‘Why bother?’ Discourses.

6.4 Conclusion

The CDA presented in Chapter Six focused on students’ discussion of the identity of the University of Fort Hare itself, and the links that became apparent between aspects of that identity and their reading practices. It seemed that interviewees constructed Fort Hare as unlike other, highly ranked South African universities. This construction was tied to the ‘Why bother?’ Discourse, which is itself very closely linked to the ‘Resistance to reading’ Discourse. These two Discourses are also reflected in the practices that one mature student described as “what usually happens here”: reading mainly magazines and social media texts, and doing minimal work simply to pass. This illustrates Fairclough’s (1992) point that Discourses are pieces of *social action* – and sometimes even constitute that action (p. 10). (In this case, his point matches what Gee would call Discourses with a capital ‘D’.)

Other interviewees also pointed out that they have heard fellow students state explicitly that Fort Hare is not a place where people join book clubs or spend time trying to improve their English – with both Students 9 and 20 quoting their peers as saying “We don’t *do* that” with regard to these pursuits. In this way elements of anti-intellectualism, as discussed in Section 5.2, are associated with these Discourses.

Scholes (2013) holds that a context where people live and work is influenced by many mechanisms, including the value that stakeholders place on particular literacies, which contribute to enabling or constraining experiences (p. 370). Chapter Six touched on some of those mechanisms, such as structural challenges, funding, and noisy, overcrowded residences.

What is a concern is that some of the Discourses named in this analysis are underpinned, overtly or implicitly, by some kind of lack, of deprivation. The implications of this will be unpacked further in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Seven: Language and learning

7.1 Introduction

In South Africa, with its 11 official languages, the issue of language and social identity is a complex one. Language changes all the time, but people often hang on to the old forms and outdated metaphors because language is not only used to communicate information, but also something to think and feel with, and to signal and negotiate social identity (Gee, 1990, p.78). Language use “both reflects and creates one’s social position and identity in the interaction”, as the interaction affects the language use (Siegel, 2003, p. 183). This view illustrates why the question of what role language should play in education is, for many, a controversial issue in South Africa (Desai, 1994, p. 25). For instance, De Kadt and Mathonsi (2003, p. 101), in research conducted amongst isiZulu-speaking students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, ask whether one can “expect students to ‘own’ the English they are required to use for knowledge telling and knowledge construction”. They conclude that the largely monolingual learning and teaching practice which was entrenched on campus (as it is on most South African campuses) contributes to preserving what the students call ‘mainstream culture’ (De Kadt and Mathonsi 2003, p. 100). The authors observe that if academic staff were to become conversant in at least one African language it would improve communication between staff and students and indicate to students that many languages are validated. (Since this article was published, the University of KwaZulu-Natal has implemented a new language policy, promoting the use of isiZulu.) Language use is a concern on the Fort Hare campus too, where students from all over Africa speak a multitude of languages at home. It simply does not seem fair that all students are required to become academically literate in a language as difficult as English – yet they are.

So perhaps it is not surprising that another theme that appeared over and over again in interviews with students was that of the English language – specifically, students’ perceptions that language abilities, as developed (or not developed) in their younger years played a definitive role in both their reading practices and their abilities to cope with their studies at university level. While I would argue that academic reading and writing practices are not directly and automatically facilitated by having fluent English language skills, I had to put aside that belief as I listened to participants’ views. Analysis of those views revealed links between students’ perceptions of their own identities, language use, and racial politics

of the past and present. This is not surprising. The history of apartheid helped to ensure that language use in South Africa was linked to issues of power and privilege (Buthelezi, 2008) – and still is. For years, English and Afrikaans were the only official languages, while indigenous languages were side-lined (Buthelezi, 2008, p. 181). In 1993, an interim South African constitution was published, officially recognising 11 languages: isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele, Xitsonga, Tshivenda, siSwati, Setswana, Sesotho and Sepedi, as well as English and Afrikaans (De Kadt, 2005, p. 19). However, although these changes occurred years ago, the links between English use, privilege, and power still remain. The following sections expand on these links, focusing first on the Discourses that emerged when Englishes were discussed, then on the competing student Discourses about reading practices themselves.

7.2 The ‘Model C was better’ Discourse

A Discourse about English that became evident almost immediately in the group interviews is one I have called the ‘Model C was better’ Discourse. As explained in Chapter One, ‘Model C’ is the type of schooling in South Africa that is historically advantaged and used to exist mainly for white pupils. It no longer exists, but these schools are still seen as ‘good’ schools, charge higher fees, and tend to be well-resourced.

As the first interview got underway, it quickly became clear that students themselves associate the issue of poor English language acquisition with non-Model C schooling (as it used to be). *They* therefore view both poor language abilities and problematic schooling as constraining mechanisms on their academic and leisure reading practices. This is part of the powerful discourse noted in the previous chapter, a discourse which maintains that language ability and reading are all that students need to decode concepts and succeed (McKenna, 2004a, p. 3). One of Gee’s (2014) 28 tools of discourse analysis is called the “Big ‘C’ Conversation”, which takes the form of a question about whether the communication is carrying out an old or widely known debate or discussion between Discourses (Gee, 2014, Kindle Locations 5096-5097). Much of the first interview could be viewed as part of a “Big ‘C’ Conversation” between Discourses centring on class, poverty and how to succeed in higher education in South Africa. Students drew on the dominant discourse of language proficiency as being surface level correctness and mastery of the grammar, which they regard as being taught well at ex-‘Model C’ schools, rather than seeing it as a powerful practice tied up with issues of wealth, race and class.

For instance, Nceba in the first group interview explained the difference between her schooling and that of ‘Model C’ schooling in this way:

And I think /
for, for, for people who studied in like Model C schools/
I think for them it becomes an advantage in terms of/
knowing/
like, words?/
like sometimes, in a test, there’ll be like a word?//
And then, like, you have to define this word?//
And if you were not taught that word/
you’ll not know it//
But I think to THEM/
it’s like/
they were actually [p] TRAINED?//
to – to –to – to THINK/
okay and to combine English words/
cause some big words are made of small words//

The question marks in the above extract were inserted to indicate the student’s uprisings in intonation, which made many of her statements sound like rhetorical questions. Given the content of what she says here, I surmise that her questioning tone, along with her pauses, hesitations, and very frequent use of ‘like’ is at least partly the result of her uncertainty about expressing herself in English. Here the student constructs those with a ‘Model C’ background as being advantaged because, she says, they have a more extensive vocabulary, which is part of “being trained to think” in a certain way. By implication, Nceba is claiming that she was not taught “to think” in a particular way, which has left her struggling to read academic texts. However, I would argue that language learning strategies are not the sum total of what this student needed. For a start, practising English requires access to networks of people who speak English (Norton, 2013, p. 172). Over and above language issues, poor and educationally disadvantaged students are particularly likely to experience adjustment difficulties – that is, feel overloaded and stressed – when making the transition from high school to university (Petersen, Louw and Dumont, 2009), suggesting that what Nceba lacked might well have been broader than language learning strategies. Universities need to develop in students the ability to critique the societies in which they live, and to create new forms of knowledge, as well as conceptualise new ways of living (Wals and Jickling, 2002). For instance, in the field of media studies, which is part of the curriculum for all the students I interviewed, educators generally aim to open up students’ world views, to encourage democratic outlooks and tolerance, and to develop a critical engagement with the media (Entwistle, 2005). This kind of broad thinking, which often requires engagement with issues

of power, among others, is an approach that should begin at school, but it can be difficult for pupils to access such knowledge when they are struggling to acquire language competence in the medium of instruction.

Language policies have changed over the decades in South Africa, but currently, from the third year of schooling, most assessments are implemented in English or Afrikaans, meaning that little has changed since those two languages were the only official ones in the country (Broom, 2004, p. 510). The reason for this seems to be that parents who speak African languages want their children to be taught in English, above all languages, as they associate their home languages with inferior education (Setati, Adler, Reed and Bapoo, 2002, p. 131). Other reasons for using English are that African languages do not all offer the terminology needed for subject teaching; nor are there sufficient textbooks published in African languages (Probyn, 2009, p. 127).

The result is that those whose home language is an African language continue to be educationally disadvantaged: the schooling system forces them to acquire a form of subtractive bilingualism – which is when learning a second language interferes with the learning of a first language, which, in effect, devalues or even ‘replaces’ their home language (Broom, 2004, p. 510). Research does show that learners who attend ‘government’ schools do not achieve the reading ability needed to cope with English instruction and assessment from Grade 4, which is the common practice in South African schools (Broom, 2004).

Beyond these broad categories, though, the data extract above also represents one of the orientations of difference that both Fairclough (2003) and Gee (2014) set out: rather than smoothing over or bracketing difference, Nceba emphasises difference. Nceba constantly refers to people who have attended Model C schools as “them” – sometimes with emphasis, as in “*them*” – while contrasting those students with students who attended non-fee-paying schools, referring to those students sometimes as “us” and sometimes “you”.

Silumko in the same group interview did something similar:

You see ALL the stuff we learn there in ESP/ [English for Special Purposes]
it's primary stuff school that we, we KNEW//
when WE came here/

we already knew okay this is how this is//
But you find that someone who has never done it before/
and this is the first time they were actually seeing it when they were here//
[Student 1: And it becomes difficult for them, mm]
And sometimes some of them find it difficult/
And some even FAIL//
ESP//

English for Special Purposes, or ESP, is the name of two first-year modules in the Social Sciences & Humanities faculty. Together the modules make up a skills-based, year-long component of the degree programme, which is aimed at improving English competence. ESP is an elective for some, but a compulsory course for those who, like the participants in this study, are studying Communication. Silumko had himself attended what used to be known as a ‘Model C’ school, so refers to such students as “we”, versus one who had not attended such a school and so “has never done it [i.e. introductory English studies] before”, compared to those who knew such “primary school stuff”. But what is interesting is that he is more tentative in his declarations than Student 1. Those who went to a government school he first describes as “someone”, and later tentatively refers to “sometimes some of them”, perhaps because he is representative of one of the fortunate ex-‘Model C’ learners who “already knew” everything that was taught in their English for Special Purposes course. It could be argued that Silumko is positioning himself in several ways: as one who belongs to the group who had the necessary knowledge (as shown by the emphatic repetition of “we knew ... we already knew”); and simultaneously as a spokesperson (“You see ... you find that... some of them find it difficult”) for those who did not receive the required knowledge. It also seems that in using some hedging, tentative pronouns and adverbs (“someone”, “sometimes”, “some”), Silumko is attempting to decrease the significance of the gap between the two groups, even as he explains that while he was part of a group who learnt certain abilities in primary school, others do not manage to acquire them at university level.

Silumko is, then, in the critical realist view of identity, structurally positioned as a privileged person. His education is seen as ‘better than’ that of many of his peers. Yet his *positionality* is a little more complex, for positionality is “discursive and ... contingent upon ... other complementary or competing discourses” (Sánchez, 2006, p. 38). It seems to me that his Discourse of ‘We blacks’ is a stronger identity Discourse, revealing how identity implies “a willing connection to a collectivity” (Sánchez, 2006, p. 41), an agential acceptance of his membership of a group that in a way overpowers his identity as an ex-‘Model C’ pupil – certainly in the context of a group interview, anyway.

The above two extracts perform tasks other than enacting identities and positioning the speakers. Leibowitz, et al. (2007), when studying strategies that South African students use to negotiate difference, found that ‘us’ and ‘them’ was a discourse that students often used, whether to indicate socio-economic difference or linguistic differences. Gee’s (2014) Politics Building tool can be applied to show how words can be used to build or assume what counts as a ‘social good’: that is, “anything a social group or society takes as a good worth having” (Gee, 2014, Kindle Location 3167). In this case, the ‘social good’ is ‘Model C’ schooling, which students perceive as ‘good’ schooling that has taught a certain kind of English that has prepared some of them for higher education, as opposed to their own inadequate schooling, which they feel has not.

Sibabalwe in the same group interview said the following:

Another thing/
 [...] is that, mm, in public schools, you always want to ADAPT to what Model C schools/
 [Nkokheli: Are doing]//
 The way they teach English/
 you want to adapt to the way the accent/ [Cathy: Mm]
 the way in which we communicate/
 like, like – I can’t put into words – like/
 the way we roll the English/
 [Others: Mm; Student 1: The accent]/
 ... the accent ja//
 [Cathy: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm]//
 So we always trying to adapt and trying to keep up/
 [...] And most kids who come from public schools/
 we feel inferior to those who come [Others: Mm; Ja] from Model C schools//
 Cause their English [‘is so good’ ?*inaudible*]//

Sibabalwe’s mention of ‘adapting’ his accent to try to sound like more privileged students who have had better schooling is an illustration of the notion of ‘audibility’. Used in this manner, the term ‘audibility’ was coined by Miller to mean the degree to which speakers sound like, and so are legitimated by, users of the dominant discourse (Miller, 2004). In this way speakers position themselves through their language use, which requires the collaboration of speaker and listener (Miller, 2004). By ‘adapting’ I assume he means ‘changing’; in other words, he acknowledges that he and others consciously attempt to change the way they speak English. Literate practices of communities tend to be woven together with ways of achieving status, among other things (Heath, 1983), and being able to speak English fluently is one way to achieve status among many South Africans. The history

of English in South Africa is initially one of struggle with Afrikaans for power over each other (Kamwangamalu, 2006, p. 159). However, in contemporary times, English now has far more prestige than any other language, including Afrikaans: symbolising the elite and modernity, and linking people in a multilingual society (p. 163). It is the most widely used language in the media, too, and in communication between government departments (Kamwangamalu, 2006, p. 164). Illustrating its status is Hibbert's finding (2001, in Kamwangamalu, 2006) that the percentage of speeches made in South African Parliament in English increased from 87% in 1994, the year of South Africa's first democratic elections, to over 95% in 2001. Phaswana (2003) explains this phenomenon by commenting that those MPs who speak in English are perceived to be better informed and better educated than those who use an African language (p. 126 in Kamwangamalu, 2006, p. 163). Black South Africans, though, often have an ambivalent attitude towards English – using the language can provide access, but it also acts as a barrier, threatening the maintenance of African languages (Kamwangamalu, 2006, p. 167).

The prestige attached to English also contributes to the “normativity of whiteness and [...] othering of blackness” (McKinney, 2013, p. 23). An extension of this is that young people can wield a certain symbolic power by speaking a particular variety of English (McKinney, 2013). I can surmise that Sibabalwe's allusion in the extract above to those who have had government-provided schooling working hard “to adapt and ... keep up” is as a result of their perception of this symbolic power attached to not only speaking English, but to speaking it in a particular way. Yet many parents, perceiving English-language education as desirable, enrol their children in schools offering English as the medium of instruction (Broom, 2004).

The above extract shows that in the ‘Model C was better’ Discourse, students construct ‘Model C’ schools as places that not only teach learners English language more effectively than “public schools” (that is, government schools), but also teach learners how to talk differently and even think differently, and leave the others behind. Research elsewhere found that students at an historically ‘white’, largely English-medium South African university who did not speak English as their home language felt judged and stigmatised as ‘second-language’ speakers (Kapp and Bangeni, 2011, p. 199) – and it seems that similar kinds of judgements (albeit about the *kind* of English spoken) occur at the University of Fort Hare.

The discussion above is an illustration of the complicated discourses in South Africa that link language, education, race, wealth and poverty, and various identities. Young South Africans frequently attach prestige to some kinds of English, but devalue others (McKinney, 2007). Racial categories have played a part in this categorisation, with the kinds of English spoken by white people becoming “a form of cultural capital, or more precisely linguistic capital” (McKinney, 2007, p. 10).

It is possible to speak about “World Englishes”, in the plural, bearing in mind that there are more people speaking English as an additional language than there are speaking it as a home language (Davies, 2012). According to South African census data from 2011 about home languages, English is the fourth-most spoken home language, with 4.9 million speakers, behind Zulu (11.6 million), Xhosa (8.15 million) and Afrikaans 6.85 million (“These Are the Most Spoken Languages in South Africa”, 2015).

At the same time, it should be borne in mind that even those who speak English as a home language do so in a variety of ways; and that so-called ‘standard’ English is a norm that arguably does not correspond with people’s actual language use (Davies, 2012). However, such egalitarian acknowledgement of English varieties does not change the fact that – as mentioned in Chapter Two, where the concept of ‘hegemony’ is discussed – English has a hegemonic power.

Globally, there exists an unfair language system which favours Anglo-Saxon countries (Demont-Heinrich, 2010, p. 289). An illustration of this is that many American students cannot speak a language other than English, which cannot be said of any other nationality (Demont-Heinrich, 2010, p. 296). Hendricks (2004) says simply that “English is the language of power in South Africa”, despite being the home language of fewer than 10% of the population (p. 109). For Soudien (2010b, p. 353) the very definition of “middle class” in South Africa encompasses not only economic factors such as home ownership, but also the tendency of parents to see it as vital that children grow up learning to speak English.

Yet *student* attitudes to English are ambivalent: some say there is a link between English and the ‘circles of privilege’, but others acknowledge that it is a lingua franca and that it has status both in SA and internationally (Kapp, 1998). The issue is being brought up again here

in Chapter Seven because students recognised the powerful role that language played in their educational experiences.

7.3 'English to fit in' Discourse

One way in which this recognition of language's power role played out was when interviewees talked about how they used a variety of Englishes to 'fit in'. Fadziso's home language is Shona. When I asked her whether coming to Fort Hare posed a problem in terms of languages spoken, she said:

It may be because I had conditioned myself/
knowing that university's just English/
so [p]/
I just stayed with English// [Cathy: Right//]
I never really encountered a problem where a lecturer would speak to me in Xhosa [p]/
no/
I haven't// [Cathy: Mm-hm]
It's always English//

For Fadziso, a lecturer who spoke to her in isiXhosa would be "a problem". For the many isiXhosa speakers at Fort Hare, it would probably not be "a problem" – although whether it would help prepare students for the world of work is another issue. So it was that Fadziso actively worked to master English, to 'fit in' with what she perceived as the Fort Hare norm.

Some South African students use another kind of English, known as Urban English, which is a mixture of English, Afrikaans, Kwaito-influenced slang (Kwaito is a local music form), and isiXhosa, suggesting that it is a way of connecting across linguistic and class differences, as well as a way of using English while signalling Africanness (Kapp and Bangeni, 2011). Chatunga told me that Urban English "began when the black community was beginning to differentiate themselves from the rest, and tried to create a certain language code so that nobody could understand them".

However, Fort Hare students see Urban English as a mixture of Americanisms and English slang words, rather than an affirmation of Africanness or blackness. Fadziso first mentioned Urban English as being "this Urban English that they use now [...] I'm too old for that", with Chatunga going on to explain that it is a kind of English that originated in the United States and is now used "worldwide ... globally". Lulama explained how it began with expressions

like, “I’m *gonna* do this; I *wanna* do this”, and abbreviations used when sending text messages via cell phones.

Adaoha is Nigerian and cannot speak isiXhosa, which frequently marks her as an outsider on the Fort Hare campus. At another point she explained how she struggled to find fellow students with whom she had something in common – so she makes sure that the English she speaks enables her to “actually fit in”:

I use them [Urban English words]//
As much as I do use them/
When you’re in a society where everyone uses them/
You just feel like you/
you know/
wanna be involved// [...]
Maybe when you’re around your friends/
Your peers/
and I can actually fit in/
and speak those words//
But when I leave there/
It lives there/
And it stays right there//
But when I go back to my mama/
I gotta speak the right thing!//
[Everyone laughs]

A ‘social language’ is a style of speaking or writing associated with a particular identity (Gee, 2011, p. 212). Adaoha’s remarks here show how adept she is at using social language varieties. In the extract above, Adaoha discusses how she uses different varieties of English to suit her context, and then actually demonstrates a mixing of language in the interview, in the last line. In this way Adaoha is “making visible and recognisable ... different versions of *who* she is and *what* she is doing” (Gee, 2011, p. 48).

In South Africa, by the time apartheid was officially dismantled, only English was regarded as having a high status, and Afrikaans was generally viewed as the language of the oppressor (Hartshorn, 1995 and Kamwangamalu, 1997, in Broom, 2004). Students’ bilingualism or multilingualism brings advantages and richness, but in higher education in a country that fails to recognise and develop all languages, can be challenging (Van Pletzen, 2006, p. 117). Some interviewees recounted the details of their multilingual backgrounds. Several students spoke of how they had moved from place to place as children, found themselves in areas where their home languages were not spoken, and so had to adapt by learning new

languages, or become more proficient in English. Chatunga, for example, is a Zimbabwean who told me that his home language is Shona. However:

There's this thing growing up where [p]/
I used to travel a lot/
around the world with my parents//
So, basically, the language we used the most was English//
[And at my pre-school] we were blacks, coloureds, Indians/
there were a whole lot of diverse groups so/
it was strictly English to accommodate everybody//

In Chatunga's experience, then, the 'English to fit in' Discourse was a norm. However, unlike Fadziso, he found that his English proficiency was of little use when he arrived at the University of Fort Hare and wanted to interact with peers:

Well that/
that was/
it was/
I think it was one of the biggest culture shocks I had in my LIFE//
I met people who couldn't speak English AT ALL//
[...] and I remember like when I was an undergrad/
first year, second year/
my roommate/
when he came through/
he couldn't speak English at all//
Because he was saying where he learnt [at school]/
at times even during Maths or English class/
the teacher would teach them the language in Xhosa//

Chatunga's description of the enormous "culture shock" he experienced at first is an indication of the class and linguistic differences that exist between middle-class students and working-class students at Fort Hare and, presumably, at any South African university.

Although there are no official tallies, anecdotal evidence suggests to me that the Zimbabwean students who attend Fort Hare tend to comprise more middle-class students than their South African classmates do. For the above reasons, I suggest that Zimbabwean Chatunga's "culture shock" was more akin to a "class shock" as he met students for the first time who had emerged from rural schools in South Africa. As discussed above, many South African pupils struggle to learn English. In Hendricks's (2004) analysis of pupils' writing at two SA schools, she found that despite recent language and curriculum policy reform, 'additional language' learners did not demonstrate advanced competence in written English, despite being in their final year of junior school.

At Fort Hare, Zimbabwean students appear to achieve more, and I have grown used to the fact that the top marks of every class I teach are usually attained by these students. I can also use the abductive logic ('how things might be') of critical realism (Danermark, et al., 1997) to surmise that these trends might have at least contributed to the xenophobia that has been noted at Fort Hare (CHE, 2009). In fact, in a report by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) remarked on the "xenophobic attitudes" from local staff and students, and one of the recommendations was that the University investigate the extent of xenophobia and put in place mechanisms to prevent it (CHE, 2009, pp. 11-12). However, these attitudes are not confined to Fort Hare. There is widespread xenophobia in South Africa, with many South Africans perceiving a link between the millions of immigrants in the country and the spread of disease, as well as increase in crime and unemployment (Gordon, 2016).

Chatunga went on to say that because English was not as widespread as he expected at Fort Hare, he learnt to speak isiXhosa ("I had to adjust and learn the Xhosa language within a couple of months"). Here the 'English to fit in' Discourse became the 'isiXhosa to fit in' Discourse. Both, in turn appeared to be subsets of the Discourse of 'Diversity'. Although nobody said, "I feel it's important to speak many languages", for instance, there was a sense of quiet pride that was evident – no doubt encouraged by my positive reaction – when students told me that they spoke a number of languages.

For instance, Khanyiswa, told of how she spoke Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa at home. The texts she read were in English and isiXhosa:

My family's Coloured so we used to speak a lot of Afrikaans/
 and my grandmother/
 my mother's mother/
 is Xhosa//
 so/
 for her/
 she used to go to a Xhosa church so/
 when we used to go/
 we used to go to church we used to read in Xhosa/
 like, we read the Bible in Xhosa/ [Cathy: Ja, ja]
 but at school I'm reading in English/
 and then at home I'm reading in Xhosa//
 But there was like a whole amalgamation of all three languages/
 all at the same time/
 for me//

This is another example of an interviewee drawing on a socially recognised identity to refer to a Figured World (Gee, 2014). In this case, her stated identity is that of a South African “Coloured” (so-called mixed-race) person. Wicomb (1998) notes that the term ‘coloured’ has difficulty in attaining a fixed meaning. The term Coloured, with a capital ‘C’, and without the old ‘so-called’ preceding it, reappeared in the 1990s (Wicomb, 1998, p. 93). Bosch (2008) describes “Coloured” identity as being complex, fluid and problematic. While some refute the term “as being an artificial one imposed on them by the apartheid state ... and prefer to self-identify as black”, others happily identify themselves as Coloured (Bosch, 2008, p. 188), as Khanyiswa does.

The Figured World that Khanyiswa then draws on is one that many South Africans would recognise: that “Coloured” South Africans tend to speak Afrikaans as their home language (Bosch, 2008). Khanyiswa actually goes one step further, implying that to be Coloured *is* to speak Afrikaans. Khanyiswa’s use of the conjunction “so” in “My family’s Coloured **so** we used to speak a lot of Afrikaans” strongly links ‘Coloured-ness’ with the speaking of that language, making Afrikaans an intrinsic part of her identity. However, to equate Afrikaans with ‘Coloured-ness’ is problematic, for in some communities, English was more highly valued (McCormick, 2002, in Devarenne, 2010, p. 393) and the assumption that all Coloured people speak Afrikaans is incorrect. Wicomb (1998) points to the blurring of any differences in language, class and religion in Coloured communities, “in the interest of a homogenous ethnic group” (p. 94), and it could be argued that Khanyiswa’s blithe statement could be a result of this blurring of difference. The more general point to be made here, though, is that it is difficult to make even the most seemingly straightforward statement about language in South Africa without (even unconsciously) revealing things about one’s attitudes to race, power, history and identity.

Nomlanga is an older student, who found that moving around to live in various parts of the country while she was growing up, along with the requirements of the South African school system at the time, had an impact on her linguistic abilities:

I speak Zulu/
 I speak Xhosa// [coughs]
 I speak Sotho// [coughs]
 and Tswana/ [Cathy: Whew!]
 and English//
 and a bit of Afrikaans/

In South Africa, any talk of multilingualism tends to be part of an enormous Conversation about identities, educational access, power and literacy. Walker (2005) examined the life history narratives of South African students, drawing on Soudien's (2001) ideas of three kinds of discourses in education. The official discourse in 2003, the time of Walker's research, was that of South Africa being a 'rainbow nation', a discourse that emphasised freedom, the accommodation of differences, and critical enquiry (Walker, 2005, p. 45) and so could be seen as the ultimate South African Discourse of diversity. Discourses collided with histories and contexts, and student identities and perceptions of race were highly complex. Universities, Walker (2005) notes, are important locations for identity work, since they are "sites where discourses collide, are distorted or articulate" (p. 52). Similarly, I would suggest that there is actually a tangle of mechanisms at work when students discussed the languages they speak, and how they came to acquire them. For young people to talk about the multiplicity of languages they were exposed to could be read as a celebration of diversity. Although the 'rainbow nation' discourse hit a euphoric note in 1995 after SA won the Rugby World Cup, the elation behind it diminished once new challenges in the country arose, at which point the official discourse became one of Africanness and transformation (Botma, 2010). For some years, the 'rainbow nation' identity was necessarily asserted frequently because it had an aspirational aspect (Gqola, 2004). The notion of the 'rainbow nation' has been critiqued for a number of years, with analysts noting that the diversity and expressions of freedom that this identity highlights do not amount to transformation (Gqola, 2004). Given South Africa's democratic constitution and linguistic diversity, it is vital that the issue of language in education is dealt with, rather than simply making glib statements about appreciating diversity (De Klerk, 2002, p. 26). However, researchers noted that the 'rainbow nation' discourse was being used years after the critique began, with students of all races drawing on it to express their investment in the relatively new democracy of South Africa, while simultaneously wishing to assert their group identities as Zulu, Xhosa, or whatever they identified with (Kapp and Bangeni, 2011). The 'rainbow nation' discourse is still in circulation at the time of writing this thesis.

Yet celebrating diversity without paying attention to relations of power means the 'standard' becomes the norm (Janks, 2010, p. 113), and such students indicated that their exposure to multilingual environments led to their adopting English as the lingua franca in several contexts – the University of Fort Hare being one of them. So perhaps the hegemonic power of English, perversely, is an enabling mechanism for some. For according to the students'

accounts in my study, these multilingual environments of the past, while often not conducive to achieving literacy in an African language, sometimes contributed to encouraging them to achieve proficiency in English. By implication, such multilingualism also aided them in developing their reading practices.

This is a weighty issue: entire courses across several university faculties in South Africa are devoted to studying the challenges facing multilingual South African children as they make their way through the schooling system. In this country, 83% of pupils speak African languages, come from poor backgrounds, and are effectively in monolingual African language schools (De Klerk, 2002, p. 25). This is the background to several of the Discourses analysed in this thesis, such as the ‘We blacks’ and ‘Model C was better’ Discourses. Given that English is so highly prized by parents in South Africa, it has been shown that children do best socially and academically when they are educated in their home language, in bilingual schools (De Klerk, 2002).

It cannot be denied, though, that for a few of my interviewees, there seemed to be a chain of circumstances which meant that multilingualism, *for them*, helped to enable their academic literacy practices.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, the analysis moves on from language issues to focus specifically on the Discourses that emerged when students discussed their reading practices.

7.4 The ‘Books have benefits’ Discourse

A few students, who tended to be the ones who appeared to be the most adept at speaking English as well as being the ‘keen readers’ in the various group interviews, told me about the benefits of books and reading as they perceived them. They drew on what I have called the ‘Books have benefits’ Discourse. I have divided this Discourse into three overlapping varieties, because, as students describe them, these benefits appeared to be qualitatively different from each other. First variant is the ‘Books are exciting’ Discourse, in which books, having acquired so many positive attributes in the eyes of keen readers, now engender affection and excitement in and of themselves. Second, there is the ‘Books are educational tools’ Discourse. Strictly speaking, this is a Discourse about *reading*, generally,

and its advantages as students saw them, rather than about printed books as such. Lastly, there is the ‘Print books are convenient’ Discourse, in which books were mostly discussed in terms of printed media, and compared to devices such as cell phones and laptops.

Two students in the second focus group discussion, almost talking over each other in their enthusiasm, explained the pleasure they take in the physical reality of printed books. The extract below gives the impression that this was a group bursting with excitement about reading. However, I should point out that Qaqamba and 12, who did most of the talking in the extract below, were among the most eager readers of all those I interviewed, and were quite voluble and keen to share their views. Yet they were just two in a group of eight interviewees, and a couple of students in that group hardly contributed at all: Akhona, for example, did not say much during the interview other than “No, I’m not a big reader.” I am making this clear to avoid creating a false impression of boundless enthusiasm, because what struck me overall about these interviews is that such positive representations of reading practices were held by a *minority* of students. Students 9 and 12, though, made their positive feelings clear:

Khanyiswa: I always considered a book/
a real book/ [Bhutana: Ja]
to be an experience on its own//
cos it’s like/
when you get a new book and [pretends to smell book] you smell it/
and – I dunno for ME/ [Qaqamba: It’s EXCITING!]
it’s exciting, having a book and you can actually feel the pages in your hand and/
I dunno that part I like/ [Someone else: Mmmm]
Qaqamba: And you can give it to someone//

Similarly, Aphiwe in the third group interview said, “The thought of getting a new book excites me and I could spend a whole day at the book shop.” And so another enabling mechanism is the Discourse of ‘Books are exciting’: in this case, the benefit is the sheer enjoyment of the material nature of the book, which is presumably caused by the reader’s knowledge that the book will create new, imaginary worlds for her. Of course, this Discourse would only be used by those students who already have a positive orientation to reading, and whose enjoyment (as argued throughout this thesis) arises from a host of discursive and non-discursive mechanisms.

But the above quotes also bring to mind Gee’s (1990) observations about the importance of viewing literacy as a social practice. His point has been made by others of course, but for

Gee it is part of an argument about discourse analysis, in which he maintains that while educators can teach students facts and theories, they cannot teach students how to be or behave like model students or an expert in that discipline. Students need to be socialised into various behaviours that can be seen as ‘academic’ (Gee, 1990, p. 147). So what is important, when trying to understand literacy practices, are saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations. In fact, Gee includes all aspects of a social role including ‘lifestyle’, and membership of a social group, making up ‘Discourses’, with a capital ‘D’, which are “always more than just language” (Gee, 1990, p. 142). They are mastered through acquisition, not overt instruction/learning. These points are particularly relevant here, as Students 12, 9 and 18 reveal that they do not simply talk about books admiringly; they do not merely read frequently. Rather, they have acquired an entire combination of practices, including buying books, browsing book shops, and giving and receiving them as gifts. Unsurprisingly, given the links discussed earlier during this thesis between classroom-based literacies and positive orientations to reading, they are known as students who achieve very good academic results.

Literacy practices include not only linguistic and discursal choices, but also behaviour such as physically entering a library (Clark and Ivanič, 1997). Teachers who develop and maintain in-class libraries are providing an advantage for their students (Behrman, 2004). Yet South Africa does not have a large number of libraries: this is part of the problematic contexts in which many students grew up. In South Africa, only 27% of schools have libraries (Pretorius and Mampuru, 2007, p. 41), and there is neither a national policy on school libraries, nor is there funding for school librarians (Paton-Ash, 2012, in Hendricks, 2013).

My interviewees generally saw the presence of libraries, or the lack of them, as playing a meaningful role in their reading practices. Having access to libraries was usually seen as an enabling mechanism. Earlier, I discussed how, for Qaqamba, owning a library card and visiting the library in her neighbourhood were two mechanisms that worked together with her own motivating desire for excitement and escape from reality. Similarly, several other participants across the group interviews talked about teachers who took them to their municipal libraries and introduced them to the system of taking books out. For Aphiwe, it was the combination of access to a library, and an encouraging librarian, and a friend who enjoyed reading as much as she did, that she credits as fostering her leisure reading practices

as a child. Friendship networks and libraries have been noted elsewhere as playing an important role in encouraging book reading (Parry, 2010).

Adaoha told me, “I grew up in a family where I got my library card at the age of five”. Although she made it clear that her parents’ support was the enabling mechanism, being encouraged to use a library rather than simply reading the odd book at home, was significant.

As visiting a library was part of the practice of those who tended to identify themselves also as readers, and a critical realist theory of identity formation should take structural positioning (including class) into account (Sánchez, 2006, p. 35), it should be noted that many of the students who regularly used libraries for enjoyment – that is, Students 8, 9, 12, 16 and 20 – were middle class. Of course, class is not the only positioning that matters, as human beings are all part of many structures and part of a network of social relations (Sánchez, 2006, p. 35). Still, it would seem that for these students, being middle-class and black in South Africa means that they were more likely to end up making use of libraries, which in turn was one of the enabling mechanisms for the particular literary practice of reading.

It might seem redundant to label the Discourse of ‘Books are exciting’ as an enabling mechanism for reading practices, given that those who use it would already be keen readers, but as discussed in Chapter Three, words have causal power to affect material things (Archer, 2000). So, for example, the Discourse of ‘Books have benefits’ used by some students could result in more reluctant readers in conversation with them becoming intrigued by the prospect of reading. At the very least, this Discourse could serve to *reinforce* the attractions of reading for those who actually use the Discourse.

Some interviewees favoured the ‘Print books are convenient’ Discourse. Here students enumerated the advantages of the printed book, with Qaqamba vividly describing how, during long bus journeys, “You [can] read the whole time, the whole eight hours” as opposed to being “busy on Twitter, whatever – and then your battery dies”.

Fadziso and Aphiwe also agreed with each other that reading online was tricky: Aphiwe described how, when reading an ebook, “I find myself thinking, ‘If only I had this book in

print'. I don't know: there's just something about having the pages and having the hard copy." Fadziso went on to point out that reading online can be hard on the eyes, and picked up a piece of paper from my desk, holding it this way and that as if it were a laptop, to demonstrate the difficulty of reading from a laptop in bed. The literature suggests that learning rates are similar for the various formats of ebooks, but that when hundreds of pages are read on screen, consequent eye-strain and mental fatigue might have a negative effect on learning (Rockinson-Szapkiw, et al., 2013), and that such eye-strain and difficulties in navigation were possibly the reasons that ebooks were not more popular with students (Woody, Daniel and Baker, 2010). Some American students were overt in their lack of enthusiasm about e-books, also citing eye-strain as one drawback of the medium (Woody, et al., 2010).

Closer analysis also led to my wondering whether the participants in my study were thinking of the high cost of the technology involved. Fadziso observed that appreciating the convenience of reading online "depends whether you have the gadgets for that": a reminder that such social goods are pricey to buy and to operate, with data costs in South Africa higher than in many other countries (Mzekandaba, 2015).

Seen in context, though, Fadziso was not discounting technology entirely. She clearly regards tablets and other such "gadgets" as a social good (Gee, 2014) that might facilitate certain reading practices. So she was slightly ambivalent about the disadvantages of online media, although maintained that print is easier.

Mudiwa's use of the 'Books have benefits' Discourse was such that she was one of the few who constructed reading and having access to a variety of reading matter as part of a sound educational experience. For her, a sound education is a social good that not everyone has access to (Gee, 2014). She described some of her fellow students at Fort Hare as growing up in "deep rural" areas, and so being deprived of access to reading matter and, for this reason, remaining unaware of the benefits of reading:

Mudiwa: I think personally/
reading for fun improves um my vocabulary// [Cathy: Mm]
So I'd advise a lot of students here to read for fun/
[...]
If they come from deep rural Transkei/
the only thing that they know is a textbook/ [Cathy: Ja]

and newspapers//
They do not know that they can actually get to read novels/
and benefit from them// [Chatunga: Mm-mm]//
So, personally, I would advise them/
especially the first years/
so that they grow with it// [Cathy: Mm]
I advise them to read//

Hints as to the speaker's own identity are also implied here. South Africans would understand her reference to the "deep rural Transkei" as describing an area that is rich in natural beauty, but poor in other resources, with a population that is far from wealthy. Transkei was one of South Africa's 'homelands'. One of the keystones of apartheid was the formation of these 'homelands', also known as 'bantustans', for African people. Millions of Africans were forcibly removed from one part of the country to another from 1960 to 1985, mostly to these 'homelands', which were actually labour reserves for white-owned farms and mines (Ramphela, 1991). These 'homelands' were in most cases in remote, impoverished parts of the country. So this student is drawing on a socially recognised identity to refer to a Figured World (Gee, 2014), which is the Southern African world in which the vast majority of students from rural, disadvantaged areas will have had (and continue to have) inadequate schooling and a childhood in which printed literature does not form part of literacy practices (as indicated by Hendricks (2013), for example, who focuses specifically on the Eastern Cape). By contrast, the student positions herself as one who does *not* come from "deep rural Transkei", and *does* know about the advantages of reading. In this way she illustrates the critical realist point that identity is always agential, and always involves acceptance of a discourse (Sánchez, 2006, p. 41). She then goes on to identify herself as one of the students who, while she still has things to learn, does know how even "reading for fun" has a positive impact on academic literacy practices, and so can "advise" first years about what to do.

It is also notable that Mudiwa's words above appear at first glance to be a response to a question about how senior students might advise junior students. I had to check the transcript carefully to confirm that this was not the case. Rather, her words were in response to my telling the group participants (Group 3) about how I had learnt in the second group interview that students had responded negatively to the idea of a book club ("Does he think this is Wits?"). Following up on this, I first asked Group 3: "Is there an anti-reading or anti-academic culture at Fort Hare?" and then, probing further: "Do you think [...] it's been labelled as 'uncool' to read for fun?" Analysed in this context, Mudiwa's response is even

more clearly a statement of identity. Implicit in the text is a message of “There *might* be a culture that resists reading, but I am not part of that culture, because it arises from a lack of exposure to certain social goods and I *have* had access to those goods.” In this way she distances herself from those Fort Hare students who do not read, and identifies herself as one who does.

The Discourse of ‘Books are educational tools’ has clearly been circulating in some schools for a while, as several students drew on it, obviously familiar with the Conversation of ‘Reading is good for you’. By ‘Conversation’, I mean a long-running discussion in society (Gee, 2011, p. 29). Khanyiswa, for instance, said:

I was always told that, you read, you read fiction [p]/
for vocabulary/ [Someone: Mm, exactly]
like to strengthen your grammar and stuff like that/
and then you read non-fiction for knowledge//
So you gotta have that balance//

In my study, ‘extreme cases’ (Danermark, et al., 1997), which help to highlight mechanisms at play, were the students from a variety of focus groups who clearly are keen readers: Mudiwa, Khanyiswa (“Even now I still consider myself a big reader”), Qaqamba (“[The library was] where I developed a love of novels”) and Chatunga (“That ... depends... But ... I’d say yes, I am a reader”). These students stood out in their declared love of reading, and analysing their words has indeed helped me to identify the three variants of the ‘Books have Benefits’ Discourse.

7.5 The ‘Books are boring; technology is fun’ Discourse

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the difficulties that the students described in the above extracts, many used the ‘Books are boring’ Discourse. While this is not a globally pervasive Discourse, traces of it can be found in the literature: for example, Lin (2001) and Davis (2007). It is also not uncommon for students to describe their time at university generally as ‘boring’ (Archer and Hutchings, 2000). My interviewees all seemed to be in agreement that it was necessary to read in order to succeed as a student, but many stated directly that reading printed books for leisure was not something they enjoyed, with two students talking together in one of the group interviews agreeing that “ebooks and audio books are more interesting than *actual* books”.

Nceba depicted the way in which books for her are frequently an intimidating presence, and she was bewildered by the notion that reading novels could be an enjoyable or relaxing activity. She recounted how she suggested to her more bookish cousin that the cousin should take books out of the library. After this, she – the cousin – could describe what she had read to Student 1. This, to Student 1, would be a more enjoyable option than struggling through a library book (one of which she described as “scaring me ... you know, like three hundred and something *pages*”). This student gives significance to the length of the book, and the time in which her cousin expected her to complete the book (“I’ll be like, ‘In a *week*?’ [pause]”). She frequently used rhetorical questions as she described this incident to the group, revealing her bewilderment at the notion that reading such a weighty novel could be construed as enjoyable (“You expect me to read this? ... Why? ... What’s the use of me reading this? ... What am I gonna tell her?”). In this way, she drew on both elements of the ‘Books are boring’ Discourse and the ‘Why bother?’ Discourse to make it clear that the appeal of books eluded her.

Khanyiswa said the advantage of her newly acquired tablet was that she could download Kindle as an app:

Cos sometimes it’s not always practical to think/
 okay/
 I want to get myself a book now//
 So I have to get up/
 get dressed/
 go to the library/
 think/
 do I have my student card/
 okay/
 if I don’t have my student card/
 go back and get my student card/
 then sitting there and then looking through all the books and trying to read all the synopses of
 all the books and [Laughter.]
 I think that also is a bit/
 ... tiring?//
 So I think that’s what kind of pushed me to the whole... ebook thing?/

Although Khanyiswa later went on to say that she would always choose a printed book over an ebook, in the above extract she explains why she nevertheless enjoyed having access to ebooks, representing the process of going to the library as a burdensome chore. The question marks in the above quote depict her rising intonation at the end of her last two sentences, which gave an uncertain, enquiring tone to her words. It was as if she was working out for

herself, for the first time, just what it was that made ebooks attractive every now and then. Khanyiswa uses a string of verbs to build a picture of the significantly demanding list of tasks involved (from “get up, get dressed...” to “sitting... looking... trying to read”). There was also an element of performance to this representation, a slight exaggeration of how onerous the practice of borrowing library books could be. However, the laughter of her peers suggested that, while recognising the performance, they also recognised elements of truth in what she said, and agreed with her point.

I set up a counterpoint to Khanyiswa’s argument, when, immediately after she had finished speaking, I turned to Nomlanga, who looked as if she did not agree with Khanyiswa, and said, “I know you feel differently...”. Nomlanga first explained elements of her own identity to the group, slightly apologetically (“I’m more of a traditional reader I’m not a very technological person”) before expressing her own viewpoint about the benefits of libraries:

And you know?/
 The whole battery thing?/
 That what gets to me/
 A bit of a problem//
 The whole data thing?// [“Mm-hmm” and “Ja” from several others]//
 It’s a bit of a problem//
 There are a whole lot of PROBLEMS with technology ... [compared to] just getting something
 very traditional and going to the library and taking a book and reading it for two weeks and
 returning it/
 or taking it again//

Just as Khanyiswa set up an “ebooks vs. library books” binary, Nomlanga does too, but argues the opposite case. First, Nomlanga uses rhetorical questions and repetition of the word “problem” to describe to the others how she perceives the use of technology as onerous, rather than the “traditional” approach of borrowing library books. These rhetorical devices were used successfully, as the sounds of agreement from the other students indicate. Gee’s (2014) Significance Building tool can also be used to show how words and grammar can *decrease* the significance of something, and Nomlanga here builds the case for libraries by reducing the tasks involved in visiting them to a brief “going to the library and taking a book and reading it”, using simple verb forms in the present continuous tense to represent a straightforward, easy process. It is notable that this description is one of the longest and most fluent I transcribed, with no hesitations or pauses discernible, from “There are a whole lot of *problems*” to “returning it”. This might be an indication that Nomlanga is particularly fluent and confident in her use of English; however, it might also indicate Nomlanga’s

familiarity with this issue. As a keen reader, she might have found herself thinking about or discussing the merits of going to the library with friends or family.

Nomthandazo in the second focus group discussion drew directly on the ‘Books are boring; technology is fun’ Discourse:

Um/
books are BORING// [Laughter]
Ja/
I don’t feel enthusiastic when reading a book//
No//
And when you’re reading online it’s like/
[Whispers] Yeah!//

Nomthandazo’s reverent whispering of “Yeah!” indicates that online reading is very exciting to her. What is important to note about this Discourse is that many of those who used it felt, like Nomthandazo, that it was not necessarily the practice of reading itself that was ‘boring’ as much as it was the medium of print, clearly stating their preference for other media. Students mentioned the advantages of the electronic media offering colour on or around the text (“Colour just does something psychologically to you”, said one student), the advantage of not having to turn pages (“flipping pages is really not something you want to do all the time”), and Nomble said that reading from her phone was easier “than carrying a book everywhere”. In another group interview, two students raised the issue of watching films rather than reading, as Nceba first said:

And even now /
things are made easy for us /
books are made into films// [Sounds of agreement.]
So *Twilight* /
if there’s a book of *Twilight* I’ll wait until there’s a movie about that /
and then I’ll watch it and I’ll understand better//

Luzuko followed up Student’s 1 point with a story of how a friend had tried to persuade him to read *Fifty Shades of Grey*:

I was like, “OKAY//
It’s fine, no, you can keep your book/
I’ll wait for the movie”//

For this self-confessed performer and artist, then, stories are much more easily absorbed via the medium of film than via books, adding another layer to his identity (discussed in Chapter

Six) as that of a performer who happens to be studying at university. It should also be noted here that although the two series mentioned were wildly popular, the writing in *Fifty Shades of Grey* has been labelled “laughably bad” by *Times Higher Education* (Bradford, 2015) and “terrible” by *The Telegraph* (Ward and Brown, 2015), while the *Twilight* series was called “trashy” by *Horn Book Magazine*, a journal in the field of young adult literature (Gershowitz, 2013, p. 84). *Twilight* was also described as “undemanding” (Gershowitz, 2013, p. 85). Yet clearly, they appealed to these students for a variety of reasons.

Despite the fact that discussions about the newer media revealed a *constraining* mechanism on reading practices – for the purpose of being literate in a discipline, anyway – it became clear that this was not a one-way street. Cell phones, tablets, laptops, and the media available via these devices, such as social networks, ebooks and audio books, provide more enjoyable ways of reading for some students than printed books. Facebook is particularly popular with students. It has been said that Facebook literacy has become a component of the two kinds of economies that many people live with: the information/knowledge economy, and the economy of commodity production and exchange (Lankshear and Knobel, 2011, p. 49). One study of the out-of-school literacy practices of Latino immigrants, between 17 and 20 years old, in US schools, found that reading and writing in Facebook is their most common out-of-school literacy practice (Stewart, 2014). They used Facebook to maintain their identities, learn English (which in turn they perceive as bringing economic benefits to themselves and their families), and stay connected to their home countries. Despite their dexterity with multiple languages and literacies, and straddling a variety of real and perceived borders, these learners were not likely to graduate from high school. This is because they lack the necessary school literacy, leading the author to call for educators to “revolutionise our definition of literacy” (p. 369).

Facebook diaries are a genre that students made me aware of only a couple of years ago. These ‘diaries’, published on Facebook as if they were Facebook entries, attract thousands of readers. To me, these ‘diary entries’ appear very similar to the plots and dialogue of soap operas, and are clearly not ‘true’ at all. During a previous research project in 2013, I drew up a questionnaire for one of my classes about students’ reading habits and decided to include a question asking whether they read these Facebook diaries. 11 out of 26 respondents said yes, with a further 5 indicating that they had some knowledge of them, and so had at least tried reading them. So it was that in the third group interview, I raised the topic of Facebook

diaries. Although the ‘diaries’ I had read a year or two previously were written in English, interviewees told me that most are written in isiXhosa. Mudiwa, who had earlier told me that she comes from Zimbabwe and that her home language was Ndebele, explained her enjoyment in this way:

Mudiwa: I like them [Facebook diaries] for the fact that they make me like isiXhosa [...]//
Like there are those letters ‘k-r-a’ [Someone: Mm]/
and ‘n-k-q’//
I can now pronounce those words//
Because of those diaries [...]//
I take my tablet and I ask someone in my corridor/
“Please pronounce this” and they can tell me//

Using the Figured World tool to ask what elements are taken for granted as typical or normal in everyday life (Gee, 2014) as depicted in the above quote, reveals a few aspects of what it is like to be a student at Fort Hare. Firstly, Mudiwa’s description shows that is important to be able to speak isiXhosa at the university. Her words reveal that she was prepared to put in considerable effort in order to do so: she read text in a language with which she was not very familiar; approached her peers; asked for their input; and as a result grew to appreciate a particular genre of writing because it helped her to acquire this literacy. Secondly, I noted that this student mentioned having a tablet, which in other circumstances might be regarded as a desirable ‘social good’ in the sense that Gee (2014) uses it, that is, anything a social group sees as desirable. Yet Mudiwa herself does not construct her possession of a tablet in this way; instead, it is speaking isiXhosa that is the ‘social good’ here.

The above extract also illustrates some of the concepts that are intrinsic to the idea of literacy as social practice. One of these central concepts is that literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social and cultural practices (Barton and Hamilton, 2000) and Mudiwa’s quest to not only read, but also to speak isiXhosa, was certainly both those things. Her use of Facebook and face-to-face interaction with her peers helped her to acquire a particular knowledge of a language which she could then draw on as a lingua franca on campus. Another concept central to the idea of literacy as social practice is that new practices are often acquired through “informal learning and sense making” (Barton and Hamilton, 2000, p. 8), and students chatting to each other about Facebook is certainly that.

In another focus group discussion, asking students what they read in media other than books provoked a lively response. Even Student 1, who had recounted in some detail how she finds

books intimidating, off-putting and often difficult to read, described how she would happily read Facebook posts day and night, with Sibabalwe chipping in to say that because he found reading easier on his cell phone, reading had become “more interesting” to him. So it was that the Discourse that I have called “Books are boring; technology is fun” proved to be an enabling mechanism *for some*. This illustrates the point that leisure reading in the 21st century does not automatically equate with prose fiction, as there are new kinds of multimodal texts available electronically, which young people often relate to, using new practices (Love and Hamston, 2004, pp. 371-372). Having said that, it is vital to find out exactly *how* young people are engaging with new media, as simply having access does not guarantee anything (Snyder, 2009, p.145). All media have their drawbacks, and what Gee (2013) calls “the digital participation gap” rather than the “digital divide” cannot be closed by simply supplying gadgets, for it is not gadgets that play the vital role in education, but what use is made of the media and with whom (p. 10). Mentoring, meaningful discussions, practice and familiarity with styles of language are necessary for learning to occur through digital media, just as they are necessary for book learning to occur (Gee, 2013, p. 14).

In the context of the above discussion about reading in a variety of media, the conversation recounted below was also revealing:

Silumko: Even sometimes you can just put a USB plug/
 plug it in your car/
 and then a reader will [Someone else: Audio books] read the book to you while you're driving
 your car to wherever/
 to Cape Town or wherever/ [Cathy: Ja]
 you finish the book in like what?//
 an hour or so you see?/
 So//
 that's what actually makes it easier and more enjoyable than to read the book itself//
 Khwezi: And, er, ebooks and audio books are more interesting than ACTUAL books//
 [Sounds of agreement from others]
 Silumko: Because someone is actually reading for you in audio books, you see/
 you don't have to read yourself//
 Student 1: Ja//
 Cathy: Less hard work//
 Student 1: Ja//

It was notable that when students discuss reading, it quickly becomes obvious that in 2015/2016, despite the ‘digital divide’ that for many years meant most South Africans could not access the internet and electronic media, many students now seem to have access to a variety of such media via their cell phones or computers. (However, it would be premature

to claim that this problem is in the past. Sipho Maseko, CEO of Telkom (the national telecommunications provider in South Africa) commented that the digital divide is alive and well on the African continent (Mzekandaba, 2015). Another indication is that South Africa's broadband penetration reached only 13.64% in 2014 (Analysys Mason in Mzekandaba, 2015). Such was Student 1's enthusiasm for Facebook that she concluded: "You know, if books were sort of like Facebook and stuff, I think we would pass more." Facebook and other social networks are a type of 'affinity spaces': those websites or 'real-life' places where people organise themselves to actively produce things around shared interests and goals (Gee, 2013, p. 8). Although learning with the help of digital tools and related "affinity spaces" can be effective, it can also be problematic, and some people over-romanticise the potential of these media (Gee, 2013, p. 9).

So it was that the Discourse of 'Books are boring; technology is fun' shed light on some students' leisure reading practices. Although it is clear that simply using digital media in the lecture halls will not offer a miraculous improvement in academic literacy, this Discourse *perhaps* hinted at the form that could be taken by potential new curricula for Fort Hare students.

7.6 Conclusion

During focus group discussion, interviewees tended to link their reading practices to language issues, and the quality of school education that they had received. So it was that 'Model C was better' was a prominent Discourse across most of the focus group discussions – even though 'Model C' schooling does not officially exist any longer. This Discourse corresponds with 'We blacks (who are left behind)', the 'Why bother?' Discourse and the Resistance to Reading Discourse is the 'Model C was better' Discourse. The connecting feature of these Discourses is the notion of some kind of educational deficit which, while not new, is dismaying to find in 2016, so many years after democracy. Some of the implications of these Discourses will be addressed in Chapter Eight.

This chapter has shown that a substantial enabling mechanism was that of the 'Books have benefits' Discourse. One variety of this Discourse, 'Books are educational tools', is part of the larger Conversation about language development in education that says 'Reading is good for you'. This 'Books have benefits' Discourse clearly co-exists at Fort Hare with its

opposites – the ‘We blacks (who are left behind)’ Discourse; the ‘Why bother?’ Discourse; and the Resistance to Reading Discourse analysed in previous chapters – illustrating Fairclough’s (1995a) point that the relationship between institutions and discursive practices is not a simple, straightforward one.

‘Books are boring; technology is fun’ is a Discourse with potentially contradictory effects. On the one hand, some students use it when justifying their disdain for the medium of print and preference for reading ebooks. On the other hand, some use it (with the emphasis on ‘Books are boring’) when discussing their preference for reading Facebook or watching the film versions of popular novels.

Another range of complex discursive mechanisms came into play when students discussed their multilingualism, using the Discourse of ‘Diversity’. As they did so, they tapped into South African Conversations about identity, race, and education. These Conversations overlap with each other, forming what Walker (2005, p. 51) calls a “nexus of competing discourses”. In some ways, this thesis is situated in the middle of this nexus.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The main research aim of this study was to uncover a variety of Discourses acting as mechanisms at the level of the Real that constrain and enable students' reading practices, as reported by the students themselves.

To answer the questions of 'What mechanisms, in the form of Discourses, constrain or enable the emergence of Fort Hare students' reported academic reading practices?' and 'What do the Discourses used by Fort Hare students reveal about their identities?' I began by sketching the context in which these particular students are pursuing degrees. Thus, Chapter One described how South African universities, like universities world-wide, are battling to function as equitable institutions offering access to far greater numbers than ever before. Fort Hare, although celebrating a centenary of illustrious history in 2016, is also a historically black university that is still struggling with some of the after-effects of apartheid education, at school level as well as university level. To illustrate some of these difficulties, and to introduce the main focus of this thesis, Chapter One also took a look at some of the reading problems that exist in South Africa.

Chapters Two and Three continued by discussing the notions of academic literacy and identity, which are central in answering the research questions. Both of these notions have been central in what became known as the New Literacy Studies, so Chapter Two explored NLS in some depth. Academic literacy was described as one of the many kinds of literacies that exist, and as an approach that views student learning as a process of mastering discipline-specific, socially constructed norms and values. 'Literacy practices' is the term that covers reading and writing behaviours, and adopting a literacy is about taking on an identity (Street, 1994, p. 15). Chapter Three therefore focused on the concept of 'identity', linking it to reading practices by way of tracing some of the historical development of the concept of Academic Development in South Africa. For my own study, reading was defined as "a social practice in which one makes meaning from print", which is a definition strongly influenced by New Literacy Studies. Picking up the threads begun in previous chapters, Chapter Three concluded by discussing some the literature that has linked identities to student learning, particularly in South Africa, where racial identities, as well as class and language identities have all been shown to link to academic literacy practices. Since discourse, in the NLS tradition, has been found to be a mediating mechanism in the social

construction of identity, it became clear that a discourse analysis would be one way to begin understanding aspects of students' reading practices and the links between these and their identities.

Chapter Four went on to describe my research methodology by explaining the terms 'discourse', 'Discourse', and 'critical discourse analysis', as well as 'critical realism', which is the ontological underpinning of this thesis. This means that, within the framework of New Literacy Studies, I sought to identify the tendencies of certain mechanisms – in this case, Discourses – affecting students' reading practices, by analysing interview transcripts. Another way of saying this, in critical realist terms, is that the study aimed to explore students' reported empirical experiences as I tried to uncover the mechanisms in the level of the real. This was done by conducting focus group discussions (and a single one-on-one interview) with 30 students, recording what was said, and, with the help of Nvivo software, analysing transcripts using frameworks and tools provided by Fairclough (2003) and Gee (2011, 2014). The chapter concluded by acknowledging ethical concerns inherent in conducting research, generally, and endogenous research, specifically, as well as the need to take special care when representing the views of others.

8.1 Findings

Chapters Five, Six and Seven, then, presented the analysis. Adhering to Gee's (2011, 2014) view that 'discourses' are simply ways of talking about things, while 'Discourses' incorporate identities, I argued throughout that 'Discourses' were the causal mechanisms affecting students' reading practices. Chapter Five opened by discussing the 'We blacks' Discourse, one of one of the prominent Discourses that interviewees drew on when talking about their reading practices. It was closely allied to the 'Resistance to reading' Discourse, as participants explained to me how "we blacks" tended to "throw away our books", be "left behind" and "are not taught Xhosa literature". The 'We blacks' Discourse in this way homogenised class and other differences between black students, and indicated the ways in which their experiences were outside of academic Discourses. In answer to the research questions, it could be said that this particular Discourse served as a constraining mechanism for some students, and indicated that those who used it tended not to identify with the academy at all. There was an evident link between the 'We blacks' Discourse, the 'Resistance to reading' Discourse and the 'Better than us' Discourse, which students used

when describing the effects of their schooling, as students who did enjoy reading became labelled as “freaks”, “nerds”, and conceited, thinking themselves “better than us”. There also appeared to be an overlap between these Discourses and the ‘No time’ Discourse, most usually used when interviewees explained why they do not read much for leisure, or not as much as they used to when they were younger, concealing any difficulties they *might* have with the practice of reading.

Several students who did enjoy reading drew on the ‘I did it on my own’ Discourse, in which they often implied that it was their own intrinsic motivation that prompted them to read. However, the literature has explained that discourses of self-motivation are a way of depicting the student as decontextualised – and, in the view of critical realism, self-motivation would not be the main mechanism from which the literacy event of reading would emerge. On the other hand, the Discourse of ‘Individualism’ played out for a handful of students who saw themselves as different from their peers, either because they were enthusiastic readers in large groups of struggling readers, or in one case, because the student’s identity was that of a performer, which he saw as completely incompatible with a ‘reader’ identity.

Two opposing discourses (with a small ‘d’) emerged when students talked about literacy sponsors like parents and lecturers, with some drawing on the ‘Our parents don’t chase us’ discourse to depict family members who were not encouraging (overlapping with the ‘We blacks’ Discourse), and the contrasting ‘Go read anything’ discourse used to describe teachers and relatives who had urged their pupils or family members to read. This discourse was even used to describe educators who had forced them to read or do their homework, with several interviewees describing corporal punishment as being a necessary part of school-based literacy practices at times.

When investigating the second research question about what Discourses revealed about the students’ identities, it became clear that Fort Hare’s institutional identity played a role in some interviewees’ self-identities. Chapter Seven argued this point, stating that institutional culture is experienced by those, including students and lecturers, who work in an institution, while institutional identity includes that culture, but is perceived by both those ‘insiders’ and people outside the institution. For some interviewees, then, the culture and identity of Fort Hare incorporates the ‘Resistance to reading’ Discourse and seems strongly tied to the ‘Why

bother?’ Discourse. The latter seems part of a defensive positionality that arises at least partly because the identity of Fort Hare, the way some students describe it, is that of a university with relatively low academic standards. Other drawbacks of the institution include noisy, overcrowded residences, which appear to contribute to Fort Hare’s negative identity and form part of the ‘Resistance to reading’, ‘Why bother?’, and ‘We blacks’ Discourses.

Language and learning were the themes presented in Chapter Seven, which mostly analysed the Discourses and discourses at play when participants discussed various Englishes, schooling, and reading practices. The ‘Model C was better’ was a prominent Discourse across most of the focus group discussions – even though ‘Model C’ schooling no longer exists. Here students explained how a certain type of fee-paying schools appeared superior to the type of schooling that many of them had experienced, and depicted these schools as teaching language skills to some of their peers, thus ensuring a successful university education for those peers. (This would not be how an NLS theorist would explain successful student learning, but is how some participants represented this aspect of education.) The ‘Model C is better’ Discourse also corresponds with ‘We blacks (who are left behind)’, the ‘Why bother?’ Discourse and the ‘Resistance to reading’ Discourse.

A substantial enabling mechanism here was that of the ‘Books have benefits’ Discourse. One variety of this Discourse, ‘Books are educational tools’, is part of the larger Conversation about language development in education that says ‘Reading is good for you’. On the other hand, ‘Books are boring; technology is fun’ is a Discourse used by students when justifying their preference for reading ebooks, while others use it to explain their preference for Facebook or watching films.

Another range of complex discursive mechanisms came into play when students discussed their multilingualism, using the Discourse of ‘Diversity’, tapping into South African Conversations about identity, race, and education.

In summary, the Discourses this analysis pinpointed were:

- the ‘We blacks’ Discourse, the ‘Better than us’ Discourse and the ‘Resistance to reading’ Discourse, which all overlapped, as well as the ‘No time’ Discourse and the Discourse of ‘Individualism’ (in Chapter Five);

- the ‘Why bother?’ Discourse; and the ‘Resistance to reading’ Discourse (in Chapter Six); and
- the ‘Books have benefits’ Discourse; the ‘Books are boring; technology is fun’ Discourse, the Discourse of ‘Diversity’ and ‘Model C was better’ Discourse (in Chapter Seven).

Some of these Discourses could be called Discourses of Deficit (that is, the ‘We blacks’ Discourse, particularly the ‘We blacks who are left behind’ variety; and the ‘Model C was better’ Discourse). It seems that while academics in the field of education have moved away from such Discourses – as discussed in Chapter Two – students are using them regularly.

Most of the others could be grouped together and called the Discourses of Not Reading. These could be arranged on a continuum. One could start with the ‘Books are boring; technology is fun’ Discourse, because even keen readers used this Discourse at times – but then, so did those who battled with English, disliked reading, and simply wanted to spend time on social networks. Next could be the mild ‘No time’ Discourse (which on the face of it could simply indicate that students are over-committed to extra-curricular activities, but which also functions like the Discourse of self-actualisation and success in that it masks a variety of difficulties the students might have, from the cognitive demands of studying to ambivalence about their identities as students or postgraduate students). After that on the continuum could be the stronger ‘Books are boring’ Discourse and the thoroughly disheartened ‘Why bother?’ and the rebellious, even defiant ‘Resistance to Reading’ Discourse.

And so it was that I found that not only are some students quite open about not being readers (they appear to see nothing wrong with it), but it is part of their identity as young black people, and as Fort Hare students. It is part of who they are, and not far from being *necessary* to who they are and, for some, is tied to their perception of the identity of Fort Hare itself. This, then, is the answer to my second research question of what the Discourses used by Fort Hare students reveal about their identities both as members of the academic community and outside the academic community.

It is worrying for two reasons. First, using the inductive logic that critical realists draw on means I could draw conclusions about a larger number of phenomena than I have observed (Danermark, et al., 1997, p. 85). This means that I can surmise that, given that educators

nationally and internationally have noticed a trend of younger people reading less than they used to, it might be that students around South Africa and perhaps around the world are using similar Discourses and have similar identities. Second, this finding is also worrying because of the long-term implications: it is not clear how educators could help students progress and develop their learning experiences if those students have adopted an identity that is, essentially, ‘We are the kind of people who do not read to learn’. The mere fact that pupils and students are positioned as they are could harden into a *positionality*, an adopted identity, and social practice of ‘I am the kind of student who does not learn more than I am forced to.’

The critical realist tenet that Discourses can be mechanisms brings extra meaning to the finding that students are using Deficit Discourses – implying that it is the *notion* that they are somehow lacking that might be holding students back from the social practice of reading, just as the *social structures* of their contexts might be.*

8.2 Limitations of this research

The ‘stimulus material’ I used to break the ice at the start of focus group discussions might have directed the discussion more than I realised at first. It was helpful to have the pieces to focus the conversation and provide a topic with which everyone was familiar (Denscombe, 2010, p. 352). However, the summarised texts by De Kadt and Mathonsi (2003) and Pretorius (2005) did ‘set the agenda’ to some extent. The former article in particular analyses the way some students felt that ‘Africanness’ and academic literacy practices are in opposition to each other, and links the issue of language and identity, probably shaping much of the discussion that students then had in the interviews about English. On the other hand, the second article describes how many Unisa students were at a disadvantage because they did not come from backgrounds in which school-based literacy practices were the norm. This might have contributed to the setting up of the Discourses of Deficit that occurred in the interviews.

A major limitation, of course, was the small scale of this research. Ideally, research should move beyond descriptions of individual projects to synthesise many descriptive accounts; detail specific achievements; and test different models in different communities “to examine academic outcomes for students” (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004, p. 170).

The fact that I am a white person, interviewing black students, was also a limitation. Not only is ‘social desirability bias’ believed to cause interviewees to put on a performance for interviewers when answering attitudinal questions, but ‘stereotype threat’ can come into play, meaning that interviewees can feel that they are being judged in terms of a stereotype when questioned by someone outside of their group (Davis and Silver, 2003, p. 34, 35). So some students might have felt pressure to demonstrate that they do not fall into a perceived stereotype about black people and their relationship to reading. For similar reasons, it is possible that students who were not voluble during the interviews might have been protecting their identities.

8.3 The future

In the critical realist framework, social sciences generally cannot be predictive (Danermark, et al., 2002, p. 69). Relationships between various mechanisms are not constant, and open systems apply to the studying of human beings, so it is not possible to make certain predictions about students’ reading practices, nor to control them (p. 68). However, human behaviour constantly influences and changes the mechanisms (p. 68), so the implication is that lecturers and others can work towards changing Discourses.

Mbembe (2015, no page) comments that there seems to be “hardly any agreement” about what a future university would look like, nor what its function would be, but at the same time says it should be “a classroom without walls ... capable of convening various publics”, in order to distribute “various kinds of knowledges”. Yet to my mind, one aspect vital to the university of the future is that a ‘reading culture’, as discussed in Chapter Six, be cultivated. In a humanities class, “we are not so much teaching texts as creating a reading society” and it is the lecturer's job to create meaning, to create the attitude that, for example, Plato is important and so reading him should be interesting (Johnson, 2003, p. 20). My own teaching practice has changed as a result of this research, and will continue to change, as I hope to activate the ‘Books have benefits’ Discourse in and out of class.

It seems that a combined approach of supporting learners’ engagement with the text, strategy instruction, and a self-selection of readable, appropriate texts measurably improves the learners’ comprehension of the subject matter (Guthrie and Klauda, 2014, p. 405). One approach to making literacy learning meaningful for students is to include more authentic

literacy tasks and activities (Gambrell, 2015, p. 260). ‘Authentic’ here means reading and writing tasks that are similar to those that people come across in their daily lives, outside classrooms and lecture halls. Gambrell is talking about children, not university students, but I would argue that as much as students “need to read the classics in [their] field” as Paolo Freire said (in Freire and Shor, 1987, p. 83), many of the students I teach would benefit from such authentic literacy tasks being incorporated into the curriculum, as long as they are relevant and engaging.

Educational institutions create social contexts, and both my thesis and the research of others (such as Scholes, 2013), suggest the need for further examination of the social processes that influence students’ engagement with reading. There also appears to be a clear need for educators to engage with the kind of resistance that students have talked about, such as labelling book lovers as “nerds”, and to try to provide enabling conditions for reading.

There is also a need for a variety of books, especially novels and light reading of various kinds, to be published in a wide range of South African languages. Hopefully this could lead to more young people to regard reading as enjoyable, and tied to their identity.

The ‘critical’ aspect of Critical Discourse Analysis means that such an analysis needs to “speak to... social or political issues, problems, and controversies... [and generally] apply ... to the world in some fashion” (Gee, 2011, p. 9). In this case, I hope I have managed to carry out the CDA in such a way that it has indeed spoken to the social problem of some of the struggles of South African university students.

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Appendix 1: Demographic details of interviewees

Interview 1	Level of study	Gender	Ethnicity
Nceba	Second year	Woman	Xhosa
Silumko	Second year	Man	Xhosa
Sibabalwe	Second year	Man	Xhosa
Nkokheli	Second year	Man	Xhosa
Luzuko	Second year	Man	Xhosa
Khwezi	Second year	Man	Xhosa
Interview 2			
Chatunga	Honours	Man	Shona
Interview 3			
Nomlanga	Second year	Woman	Xhosa
Qaqamba	Third year	Woman	Xhosa
Nomthandazo	Third year	Woman	Xhosa
Nomble	Third year	Woman	Xhosa
Khanyiswa	Second year	Woman	Xhosa/So-called 'Coloured'
Bhutana	Third year	Man	Xhosa
Buhle	Third year	Woman	Xhosa/Zulu
Akhona	Third year	Woman	Xhosa
Interview 4			
Mudiwa	Honours	Woman	Ndebele
Fadziso	Honours	Woman	Shona
Aphiwe	Honours	Woman	Xhosa
Chatunga	Honours	Man	Shona
Interview 5			
Lulama	Second year	Woman	Xhosa
Adaoha	Second year	Woman	Igbo
Interview 6			
Fezile	Third year	Man	Xhosa
Funeka	Third year	Woman	Xhosa
Daluxolo	Third year	Man	Xhosa
Uuka	Third year	Man	Xhosa
Interview 7			
Fundani	Second year	Man	Xhosa
Cebisa	Second year	Woman	Xhosa
Malibongwe	Second year	Man	Xhosa
Adahoa [again]	Second year	Woman	Igbo
Interview 8			
Ntando	Honours	Man	Xhosa
Khunjulwa	Honours	Woman	Xhosa? (Not sure)
Ntombentsha	Honours	Woman	Xhosa

Appendix 2: Interview stimulus piece

Extract 1 from Pretorius, E. J. (2005). What do students do when they read to learn? Lessons from five case studies. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 19 (4), 790-812

One student, Sibongile, said she found it easier to read in English than in Zulu, her home language: “We were not taught big Zulu words at school, and I don't know them when I see them in Zulu books or magazines. When I read a magazine in Zulu I must ask questions all the time about the meanings of the words, and once my parents told me to stop reading in Zulu so that I would stop asking so many questions always!”

[Another student said that although] she found Psychology interesting, it was hard work and complicated:

It becomes so difficult when I read that book. When you study at home, with no-one to talk to about the work, it is very difficult. When you look at our family background, no-one is working and there are lots of us at home. Sometimes when I'm reading, when I've finished a chapter, I can't remember a thing that I have read, not even a word. University studying takes lots of reading, more concentration, more time. Teachers just spoon feed you at school, and now you have to look for information yourself.

None of the students had had much exposure to book reading outside of their school textbooks, none had been taught any reading or comprehension strategies at school, none of them went to libraries or read books for leisure, and none of them came from families in which the reading of books, magazines or newspapers played any significant role on a daily basis. They sometimes read a newspaper or magazine, but not regularly.

Extract 2 from De Kadt, E. & Mathonsi, N. (2003). Writing in English with an ‘African voice’: ownership, identity and learning. *Journal for Language Teaching* 37 (1), 92-102

The majority of these students felt that it was impossible, or at least difficult, to be an “African student” at the University of Natal.

Most students felt that they were required to accommodate to the mainstream western culture, “to leave our cultures”, as Thabo put it.

This impossibility is to a considerable extent felt to be an issue of language, due to the fact that English is the medium of instruction. “I do not think there is that space for me to express myself. I should be allowed to express myself in Zulu. But lecturers are white and you can go to them and start talking to them in Zulu – you come across a problem. Same thing applies with regard to writing” (Mpume). “If you want to be an ‘African’ student, you can be, but one has to consider the roles in terms of the language and the UND culture. There is not enough space; you have to use the western language” (Sithembiso).

Can this awareness of being an African be reflected, or expressed, in academic writing? The question, as to whether students write “as an African”, and if so how, produced a wide range of responses. Firstly, many respondents felt that lecturer expectations make this impossible. “My lecturers are English. You are penalised for expressing yourself as an African” (Musa). “African ideas are suppressed by western ideas. I rely on western books” (Thabo). “No, you write what you think the lecturer is asking from you. You do not write with your own voice. If you wrote with your own voice you would not write what the lecturer is expecting from you” (Takelani).

Appendix 3: Core interview questions

1. Do you enjoy reading? Why?
2. What do you feel about books?
3. Growing up, what kind of access to libraries (municipal and school) did you have?
4. How does the above compare with your environment now (Res? Renting a place? Staying with family?)
5. Is there a comfortable place for you to read and work in now?
6. What books did you enjoy reading when you were young, and why?
7. Who encouraged you to read, when you were younger?
8. What do you understand by a 'good student'?
9. Would you call yourself a 'reader'?
10. What do you think about the readings prescribed to you during your Fort Hare studies (in terms of volume, difficulty, language used)?
11. If lecturers say, "You need to read XYZ", do you make sure you do that?
12. Do you have family pressure to pass/do well?

Appendix 4: Excerpt from transcript

Interview 1 (6 second-year students) – 1pm to 1.40pm 13 August 2015

To the left of me: Luzuko, then Silumko, then Khwezi, then Nkokheli, then Sibabalwe, then Nceba (opposite me)

[First, I read the ‘stimulus pieces’, first one about Unisa students and their reading; and the second one about students writing at UKZN]

04:56

Cathy: Does any of that sound familiar to you?

Silumko: Yes!

Cathy: Do you want to elaborate, Silumko?

Silumko: That part ma'am when/
the/

student said she can't write, she can't read Zulu books/
because at school/

I went to a Model C school//

Cathy: Yeah

Silumko: So /

We were taught very simple Xhosa basically there// [Cathy: Okay]

Even today /

at this age /

I can't read big words //

I can't read Xhosa at all //

[Cathy: Okay]

So I kind of agree with her /

what she says about the /

big words and not being able to understand them

05:24

Cathy: Does anybody else have the same experience?

Nceba: Um /

to me /

it's the second one / [reading]

which is the English one

Cathy: Ja

Nceba: Since I went to public school /

you are, taught, uh, simple English //

not, uh, more, big words /

and so now I find it very hard when I come across big words /

and, um, I find it very difficult to understand them //

And um, I prefer my home language since I was taught in my home language /

Cos teachers in my school /

[inaudible] they were like /

even if they were [would] tell you an English word /

they would put it in your-your-your, in your place of understanding /

like Xhosa // [Cathy: Mm]

And they were like, no man /

it's somewhere like this [gesture, as if to similar word] //

And you understand it more//

But now /

when I come across, like, a textbook anywhere /

and I have to read it on my own? //[Cathy: Mm]

Then I'll be like, okay, fine//

Then I ask [?] /

and, like, take a long time /

and first translate it //
 into my own understanding /
 and in my own language //
 And then I'll understand it //
 But if I just read it /
 there'll be some big words /
 that I don't understand? [Cathy: Ja]
 Because I know simple English /
 because we were taught simple English /
 cos of they wanted us to understand /
 what is being asked /
 than like, broader view of like, other words//
 So I – uh – I agree with the second one [reading] //
 Cause I feel the same when it comes to studying especially when you're studying /
 when you're given a textbook /
 and you're supposed to do something /
 or an assignment //
 Cause I, uh, I think books are written by people who – who have broader – uh – broader mental
 Silumko: Knowledge
 Nceba: Knowledge, ja//
 So now, when I have to do an assignment and I have to come across big words /
 and I'm like, okay fine, I don't understand these words? //
 but anyway, I'm gonna write it anyways /
 and I hope the lecturer will understand it because I – cause I DON'T//
 and that becomes a – becomes a problem to me//
 Cathy: Yeah Cause surely you read a lot of technical terms /
 and you're not going to KNOW the Xhosa for that [Someone else says: Mm!]
 Nceba: Ja // [General sounds of agreement from others]
 Cause then you are, like, I think it's going THEEERE /
 so then I think /
 ja maybe I think it's RIGHT /
 so I must write it, so [Cathy: Mm] So I don't have to be like /
 okay fine /
 what's this word /
 okay, like, I mustn't write the whole thing // [Is Nceba talking about avoiding plagiarism here?]
 If I don't write it /
 there are no words like, no more simple words /
 that I could find /
 in the-in the-in the book /
 that will help me, like, write that assignment clearly //
 I just have to write these big words /
 I hope that they mean, they mean
 Cathy: What you think they mean
 Nceba: Ja, they mean, ja
 Cathy: Yoh Okay
 Nceba: [laugh]
 Cathy: Anyone else have a similar kind of approach?
 Khwezi [I think]: To add, and to add /
 in most cases, you always assume /
 what is he or she trying to say, because
 you have to cross-check / [just check?]
 and read the sentence //
 Cathy: Yeah
 Khwezi: What is he or she trying to say out of those [inaudible]
 07:55

Cathy: So you're trying to, kind of, look at the context and think w- okay, judging from the bigger picture, I think [noises of agreement] he's talking about that

Khwezi: Yes, yes

Nceba: Yes

Cathy: Okay

Luzuko: And in addition //

It's a challenge for students like us /

when we come from public schools //

because /

when you come to – when you have an exam /

or you have an essay like this [gestures to the article] [Cathy: Mm] /

You try to study/

You try to figure out /

what is the lecturer trying to say /

and then /

you're not giving the answer /

you are giving what you THINK it IS//

but not the answer //

[Cathy: Mm, okay]

because you are finding it difficult to understand the word //

and whilst you're thinking of the word /

time goes

Cathy: So you're constantly – you're constantly GUESSING

[Sounds of agreement]

[Luzuko:] Most of the time we guess //

And then you come across this word /

and you don't know what it is and you panic /

and you guess, and you go /

okay, okay /

let me try and read it again //

Read, read, read, read – okay //

I THINK //

[Cathy: Mm]

Nceba: And I think /

for, for, for people who studied in like Model C schools /

I think for them it becomes an advantage in terms of /

Knowing /

like, words? /

like sometimes, in a test, there'll be like a word? //

And then, like, you have to define this word? //

And if you were not taught that word /

you'll not know it//

[Cathy: Ja]

But I think to THEM /

it's like /

they were actually [p] TRAINED? //

to – to –to – to THINK /

okay and to combine English words /

cause some big words are made of small words //

[Cathy: Ja]

It's like big, it's like small, small words and then you combine and then

But to US it's /

you were not taught about that /

you will not know it //

But to them they were taught that/

okay fine /
 when you put a spoon /
 and a little spoon /
 it's like a teaspoon //
 and then it'll be oh wow /
 and for THEM it, it's, they will be able to think broader like no man /
 if you put this and this //
 if you separate these words, they mean this /
 so if you put them together /
 I think they mean this /
 But to US it'll be like /
 oh gosh, I don't know that//
 And we're gonna leave it like that

09:50

Cathy: Okay So a word like inter – cultural [gesturing to explain separation and joining the words]
 [Nceba and others: Ja, ja, mm]

Nceba: So for THEM I think it comes an advantage of being learn- /
 of, of how they were taught /
 of how to, to, to learn /
 and how words are going in terms of vocabulary and grammar and stuff //
 I think for them it comes in easier [?}] than people who were taught in public schools, in government schools ja//

Silumko: And to add what she's saying, Ma'am /
 if you think about it /
 there's also a module here at school called ESP [English for Special Purposes] //

[Cathy: Mm-hmm]
 with all the first year students //

[Cathy: Ja]
 You see ALL the stuff we learn there in ESP /
 it's primary stuff school that we, we KNEW //

[Cathy: Oh dear]
 when WE came here /
 we already knew okay this is how this is //
 But you find that someone who has never done it before /
 and this is the first time they were actually seeing it when they were here //
 [Nceba: And it becomes difficult for them, mm]
 And sometimes some of them find it difficult /
 And some even FAIL //
 ESP //

[Cathy: Ja Silumko: Ja]

10:36

Cathy: So when you talk about a public school, Luzuko, are you talking about a government school?

Luzuko: Yes

Cathy: As opposed to a private school?

Nceba and Luzuko: Ja Mm

Cathy: Okay, okay All right

Sibabalwe: Another thing /

Ma'am /

is that, mm, in public schools, you always want to ADAPT to what Model C schools [Nkokheli: Are doing] //

The way they teach English /
 you want to adapt to the way the accent [Cathy: Mm] /
 the way in which we communicate /
 like, like – I can't put into words – like /
 the way we roll the English [Others: Mm; Nceba: The accent] /

the accent, ja [Cathy: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm] //

So we always trying to adapt and trying to keep up /

so we always [fades out]

Cathy: So that's interesting So you're saying that you can HEAR when someone's been to a Model C school and you try and almost copy the way they [Someone: Of course] speak – that's seen as a good thing

Nceba and others: Mm

Silumko: It's almost like when someone says, "Oh wow, he speaks so well" /

that type of thing, you understand? [Cathy and students: Mm; ja] //

You can say that when someone says they they're surprised when someone speaks so well /

they've been to a Model C school//

Cathy: Ja

Sibabalwe: And most kids who come from public schools /

we feel inferior to those who come [Others: Mm] from Model C schools [Cathy: Okay] //

Cause they ['cause their English is so good' ?inaudible]

Cathy: By the way, please help yourself to more pizza Okay, that's interesting [Pause] Another thing I read is that there's a researcher who interviewed students in Southern Africa, I think it's Lesotho, and he said that he found that some students had what he called 'negative cultural views' about reading So the students somewhere down the line had been taught that if you read too much, it's bad for you, for your mental health, and to read in public is really not a good thing It's – it's seen as rude, or something Have you come across anything like that?

Silumko: To read in public is rude?

Cathy: Ja To read in public shouldn't be done, shouldn't be doing that And if you read too much it's actually bad for your brain

12:26

Nceba: I've heard that, that, if you read too much /

you're gonna go, like //

[makes 'cuckoo' motions; Cathy laughs, Nceba laughs, someone else says "Ja!"]

The thing that I've heard people will, like, say /

people who study a lot go crazy and end up, end up losing their mind and stuff, okay //

The thing is /

I'm not sure about that /

I won't say it's true or it's not /

but it's something I've come across, like, I've heard //

Reading in private, in public /

I don't talk in public /

but I don't think it's rude //

If you have the confidence to do so /

and you have the right material to, to read /

I don't think there is something to hold you back to doing so //

[Someone else in agreement:] To doing so //

Ja /

it's like if you feel like reading /

out loud //

like, READ //

[When transcribing, I realise there's a misunderstanding here]

If that's your way of being able to understand it /

and to, to, to make other people understand what you're talking /

it's fine //

you don't have to hold back yourself cos of – cos people will think that this is rude /

or something like that, no//

Nkokheli: And to add on what she's saying //

reading in public /

is also a part of /

training yourself //

on how to communicate //

Ja//

Cathy: Okay

Nkokheli: So I don't find it strange to read //

aloud//

Cathy: Ja I never heard of that before so I wondered if it was particularly Lesotho students? Because I think this guy was writing about, um, Lesotho students – or if, if it was a general perception [Students shake their heads] Okay, clearly not. Okay I also wanted to ask you about growing up. Did everyone grow up with books in the house?

Silumko: Yes

Cathy: Did your parents read?

Silumko: Yes, my father /

My father was a principal//

[Cathy: Okay]

So we always had books in our house//

He STILL HAS IT NOW//

Lots of encyclopedias /

um /

he used to teach Maths /

so there were lots of Maths textbooks in the house //

[Cathy: Okay]

Silumko: Ja//

Cathy: But when I first asked the question there was a lot of shaking of heads

[Laughter from several people, Nceba says “Ja”]

Nceba: When I grew up /

there was no reading /

and I grew up not reading /

Even now I DON'T read //

I DON'T like to read //

I DON'T have time to read //

That's what I told myself /

I don't have time to read but it's not that /

it's because /

I didn't grow up reading //

Appendix 5: Ethical clearance



University of Fort Hare

OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR

Alice (main) Campus:

Private Bag X1314, King William's Town Road, Alice, 5700, RSA
Tel: +27 (0) 40 602 - 2501 • Fax: +27 (0) 40 602 - 2577
Email: nmabindisa@ufh.ac.za



August 08, 2014

Ms. C O'Shea
Communication Department
coshea@ufh.ac.za

Dear Ms. O'Shea

Approval from the Registrar's Office to Conduct Research

Having consulted the Chairperson of the Research Ethics Committee, I hereby grant permission for Ms. C O'Shea to conduct research relating to her thesis "Understanding the reading practise of the University of Fort Hare Students".

We look forward to reading the research report.

Kind regards

M M Somniso (Prof)
Institutional Registrar

Bhisho Campus:

P. O Box 1153, KWT 5600, Independence Avenue, Bhisho, 5600, RSA
Tel: +27 (0) 40 608 - 3407 • Fax: +27 (0) 40 608 - 3408

East London Campus:

Private Bag X9083, EL 5200, 50 Church Street, East London, 5201, RSA
Tel: +27 (0) 43 704 - 7000 • Fax: +27 (0) 43 704 - 7095
V/C Dial Up: +27 (0) 43 704 - 7143/ 7144

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16 July 2014

To whom it may concern

Approval of PhD proposal and ethical clearance:

Cathy O'Shea (Student number: 60100793)


Provisional Title: Understanding the reading practices of University of Fort Hare students.

Supervisors: Professor Sioux McKenna and Doctor Carol Thomson

This letter confirms the approval of the above proposal at a meeting of the Faculty of Education Higher Degrees' Committee on 26 June 2014.

In the event that the proposal demonstrates an awareness of ethical responsibilities and a commitment to ethical research processes, the approval of the proposal by the committee constitutes ethical clearance. This was the case with this proposal and the committee thus approved ethical clearance.

Yours sincerely



Prof S. McKenna
Chairperson of Education Higher Degrees' Committee
s.mckenna@ru.ac.za