First-Year Students' (Pre)Writing Experiences: Knowledge Schema and Authorial Identity

A Research Report Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of Master of Education

By

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Declaration

In terms of Rule G9.8 of the Wits Humanities (Education) Rules and Syllabus (2020), I, Knowledge Rajohane Matshedisho declare that this Research Report is my own, unaided work. I submit it for the Degree of Master of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I did not submit it before for any degree or examination at any other University. The research ethics clearance number is 2019ECE023M.

Signed on this **08th day** of **June 2020** at Mayfield Park, Johannesburg.

Abstract

Academic writing is one of the major challenges that confront first-year undergraduate students. This challenge is most evident in writing-intensive courses like sociology. This study explores the writing experiences of first-year health sciences students enrolled in Sociology as part of their basic sciences curriculum. It tries to find out how the students understood and experienced the process of writing the reflective essay from the pre-writing to the writing process. The study used tutorial response papers and interviews to collect the data. Document and thematic analyses guided the data analysis. The academic literacies framework guided and framed the study. Findings suggested that students' writing experiences are mediated by uncertainty about how to write at university compared to how they used to write in school. This uncertainty is explained through the 'interim literacies' concept. Students draw on their interim literacies and a range of resources and strategies as they grapple with academic writing and begin to develop authorial identities suitable for academic writing, some more successfully than others. In considering and conceptualising the findings, the argument of this research report is that a theoretical conversation between academic literacies and the social-realist perspective suggests that the two perspectives should not be polarised but instead seen as mutually supportive with implications for improving writing pedagogy for first-year students.

Keywords: knowledge schema, authorial identity, student writing, medical education, academic literacies, undergraduate writing, interim literacies, social realist perspective.

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Chapter One

Student Writing: An Academic and Institutional Imperative

In an unequal society like South Africa, massification[1] of higher education does not necessarily translate into epistemological access for students at university. That means as more non-traditional students enrol at university (massification), these students do not easily acclimatise to the culture of expect academic thinking, content, and writing (epistemological access [2]). Academic development (preparing students to cope with understanding academic content, writing and conventions) and, later, academic literacies research and pedagogy (contextualised learning and writing) try to find ways to ease epistemological access, especially for students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. Consequently, academic literacies practitioners also question the nature of university education. The identity and purpose of universities have changed from those of medieval institutions, which taught theology and philosophy, to currently teaching conceptual knowledge and academic skills to an increasingly young and diverse student population (Council on Higher

[1] Massification of higher education in South Africa is discussed in relation to academic development in Chapter Two.

[2] Epistemological access is discussed extensively in Chapter Two.

Education, 2016). In South Africa, academic writing is one of the skills taught to undergraduate students. Undergraduate academic writing is a contentious concept because of the different ways it has been conceptualised and implemented since the late 1980s.

In the 1980s, historically white and liberal universities began offering academic development programmes to foster equity and equality for an initially small number of black students. As academic development programmes grew exponentially with the massification of higher education in the 1990s, so did the debates about their impact. The contentions surrounding these programmes emerged from labelling the students as 'disadvantaged' or 'underprepared' for university (Boughey, 2010). Haggis (2003) comments on this view by demonstrating how international literature on 'deep' and 'surface' learning (i.e. superficial vs. engaged approach to learning by students) presupposes and reproduces an elite model of the aims, purpose, and culture of liberal universities. This model disadvantages students from other cultural backgrounds that classify and frame knowledge differently (Bourne, 2003). By implication, 'a slightly different way of viewing the model could be as an articulation of the aims and values of higher education, which in turn reflect the value positions of wider class and social structures' (Haggis, 2003, p. 97). A revaluation of this model requires a different theoretical lens for academic development.

Haggis (2003) contrasts the elite model with the 'academic literacies' research, which investigates the interactions of task, context and power in a range of higher educational learning activities. Academic writing is one of these key tasks and it is the subject of this research report. Whereas discreet academic development programmes were underpinned by the deficit model (whose purpose was to assist students to read and write at university), academic literacies research – as introduced by the germinal work of Lea & Street (1998) in the UK - challenges these conceptions by suggesting that writing is a discourse and practice. Academic writing and the teaching thereof are processes and products of specific contexts, power relations and ideological configurations at university. Hence, the challenging identity and purpose of universities now is awareness and preparedness for diverse and multiple ways of students' meaning-making, knowing and writing. It is a shift from academic support to academic development and now institutional development (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004).

Problem Statement

In accepting the shift from academic support discourse to institutional development, we must engage with its assumptions about student writing. The key assumption is that student writing is contextualised and embodied. This embodiment is demonstrated in the shift of teaching writing discourse from generic writing skills to 'writing across the curriculum' (students' opportunity to write, revise and discuss work from first year to graduation) and 'writing within the

curriculum'[3] (embedding writing, revision and discussion within a module) in which students learn best to write when the writing subject matter is relevant to them (Kolb, Longest & Jensen, 2013). Thus, students' writing can depend on the relationship they have with the subject matter. Hence, literacy studies research contends that students come to university with different discourses about writing and the difficulty that they face is the transition from their biographical discourses to ones expected by the university (Paxton, 2007). In thinking about this tension, I then ask myself, do university students ever think about how they undertake a written assessment task?

This question arises from teaching first-year undergraduate health sciences students. The students belong to the Heath Science Faculty but take courses in different faculties, including the Humanities. While this group of students might be typical of first time first-year students, it differs in one key characteristic. The students come to university expecting to study only biomedical sciences but are resistant to a curriculum that includes medical sociology in which they learn the social determinants of health, disease, and illness. Thus, the students' challenge includes course switching (between sociology, biology, physics and chemistry),

[3] Writing across and within the curriculum are discussed in Chapter Five.

low epistemological development in sociology and substantial content details in a limited learning time (Bitran et al., 2012; Weurlander et al., 2016; Maharajan, Rajiah, Tam, Chaw, Ang, & Yong, 2017). For sociology students, writing is a key learning and assessment activity, which they find useful but intensive.

If sociology is new and writing intensive for health sciences students, then it is important to find out how these students understand and experience the process of writing at university. The knowledge could assist lecturers in bridging the epistemic writing gaps to improve the knowledge and quality of student writing. To arrive at this knowledge, perhaps a good starting point is to investigate how students undertake a writing process. Hence, this research reports on first-year health sciences students' writing experience of a reflective essay about a field trip.

Research Question and Sub-questions

How do first-year undergraduate students undertake and experience the writing process for a reflective essay?

Sub-questions:

1. What learning resources and strategies do students use to generate ideas in the pre-writing phase?
2. What challenges do students face in the writing process?
3. How does the process shape their identities as writers?

Aims and Objectives

This research intends to analyse what students say they do and experience in the process of writing a field trip reflective essay in sociology. It is an analysis of students' perceptions and experiences of academic writing.

Objectives of a research proposal are statements about actions to achieve the aims. This research will identify conceptual resources[4] that students employ to think about writing. It will also identify academic writing identities that students bring into the process of writing their field trip reflective essay. The objectives of this study are to demonstrate how students' writing knowledge schemas[5] (extent of knowledge frameworks) and authorial identities develop through writing the reflective essay. These objectives will have implications for a theoretical conversation between academic literacies and the social realist perspective[6] (arguing for access conventional academic knowledge and expectations) in further improving writing pedagogies. It is about balancing the focus on students'

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[4] Conceptual resources are forms and variety of knowledges, references and interactions from which students draw in the process of academic writing. These will be discussed in Chapters Two and Five.

[5] Knowledge schema is the mental organisation of knowledge. This concept is discussed in Chapters Two, Four and Five. lie

[6] The social realist perspective is discussed extensively in Chapters Two and Five.

experience and identity, and access to rigorous disciplinary knowledge (Mendelowitz & Dixon, 2016).

The Significance of Study

Four issues make this study significant. Firstly, the history of student support in South Africa has shown that critical understanding and response to student diversity are important for academic and institutional development. Part of this critical development is to contextualise and construct learning activities as ideological, situated, and embodied (Boughey, 2005). This study tries to unpack and demonstrate how students' different knowledge and experiences of writing before coming to university mediate their writing. As earlier studies demonstrate, if we know what schoolchildren say they do not understand, then we can intervene differently using those very misconceptions (Eaton, Anderson & Smith, 1984). However, unlike earlier studies, our interventions do not assume the neutrality of writing but rather expose its ideological and situated nature. Hence, knowing how health sciences students experience writing in sociology would enable lecturers to heuristically (process of discovery by oneself) communicate and demonstrate writing expectations to students.

Secondly, writing is a process and not a product. It is important to socialise students into writing as a recursive (or recurrent) process (Chimbganda, 2001). However, we cannot assume that students do know that but instead we need to

find out how much they know about the process of writing. A pre-academic literacies comment on freshmen writing observes:

> The pre-writing process is largely invisible; it takes place within the writer's head or on scraps of paper that are rarely published. But we must understand that such a process takes place, that it is significant, and that it can be made clear to our student (Murray, 1978, p. 381).

The pre-writing process seems to have been abandoned in contemporary debates about writing. However, as I demonstrate in the literature review, the New Literacy Studies did not abandon pre-writing but rather subsumed it within the holistic writing pedagogy (Ivanič, 2004). This study begins its attention to pre-writing as an integral part of the writing experience. It is important to work with what students already know or what they say they do not know instead of assuming a weakness in writing. This study demonstrates how the situatedness of students enhances or hinders their ability to prepare for writing.

Thirdly, in shifting away from the deficit model, Baden (1974, p. 430) suggests:

> If we would assume instead that college students **can** write, we would certainly change our methods of writing instruction, we would be forced to change the syllabus, different terms might be necessary to describe what happens, the objective of making a student capable of a minimal written response might become one of allowing, encouraging, and helping him to use the skills he has, and experienced teachers might again be tempted to spend time with the freshman writing program.

Similarly, postgraduate students come with established ways of thinking and writing that they developed from their undergraduate studies (Thesen, 2013). Thus, the value of the study also lies in its recognition of the importance of pre-writing and writing instead of relying only on students' finished texts.

Finally, there is an epistemological advantage in working from students' knowledge about writing so that we can infer its impact on the finished essays or formulate implications for learning in cross-faculty writing-intensive assessments. This study opens a theoretical conversation between the academic literacies perspective and the social realist perspective with implications for writing pedagogy set out in Chapter Five. The social realist perspective argues that knowledge has a social basis but needs to stand on its own to be critiqued and evaluated to produce further knowledge (Young & Muller, 2010). The argument of this study is that the experiences of students when writing demonstrates the need for epistemological access (Mendelowitz & Dison, 2016) and to heed Jacob's (2013) suggestion to return *knowledge* in academic literacies studies. I will argue that the findings of this study suggest that academic literacies and social realist perspectives are not mutually exclusive but rather imply each other. Separating the two perspectives results in over-socialised approaches to knowledge versus decontextualised approaches to knowledge (Young & Muller, 2010).

Chapter Outlines

This chapter gives the background to the study by explaining the purpose, problem statement, research questions and significance of the study. It also outlines the subsequent chapters. Chapter Two critically discusses authorial identity and knowledge schema within the academic literacies perspective to suggest a dialogue with social realist perspective on education. Chapter Three justifies the research design of qualitative content analysis of 257 students' tutorial papers and six interviews with students. Chapter Four presents the findings in descriptive detail. Chapter Five uses literature to discuss and conceptualise the findings to make a case for a theoretical conversation between academic literacies and the social realist perspective of education. Chapter Six presents a summary of the study and makes some recommendations based on the literature review, findings and argument of the study.

Conclusion

This chapter provided the background to the study by explaining the purpose, problem statement, research questions and significance of the study. It also outlined the subsequent chapters. The next chapter reviews literature to critically discuss *knowledge schema* and *authorial identity* within the academic literacies perspective and the implications for a social realist perspective on education.

Chapter Two

Knowledge Schema and Authorial Identity – An Academic Literacies Perspective

Introduction

This chapter critically discusses authorial identity and knowledge schema within the academic literacies perspective and the implications of the discussion for the social realist perspective in education. Three models of writing research and pedagogy are used to frame the discussion on authorial identity and knowledge schema. The three models are '(1) study skills model, (2) academic socialisation model, and (3) academic literacies model' (Lea & Street, 2006). These writing research and pedagogy models function within discourses of writing and have implications for research framework (Ivanič, 2004) that frames and guides this study. The study is located within Ivanič's (2004, p. 241) 'holistic and comprehensive writing pedagogy' and Jacob's (2013) call for the return of knowledge in academic literacies. Jacobs (2013) argues that it is not enough to expose students to the contextual and ideological nature of academic knowledge but to use the teaching opportunity to give students access to rigorous disciplinary knowledge through collaboration between academic literacies practitioners and disciplinary specialists. It is in heeding Jacob's call that I include the social realist perspective of education to open this conversation further than she did. To reach that conversation, I begin with the study skills model

to demonstrate the intellectual journey towards the academic literacies perspective.

The Study Skills Model

The pre-academic literacies thinking about college students' writing was fixated on mastering the grammar and syntax in composition. It is a product-oriented approach and a pre-cursor to the writing skills model. For the writing skills model, the ability to write means correct grammar and syntax (Slotnick & Rogers, 1973), use of exemplars in essay anthologies (Stewart, 1969) and transitional markers in written papers (Hagen, 1971). Woodward & Phillips (1967) went as far as concluding that socio-economic conditions (such as father's occupation and lack of reading material at home) and personal habits positively correlate with writing ability. Some authors had a problem with this approach because of its assumption about writing as a stable and transferable skill.

For example, Stewart (1969) is critical of exemplars in anthologies. He agrees that anthologies can expose students to good writing, but that they cannot teach students how to produce good writing. Similarly, Zamel (1985) is critical of the writing skills product approach and argued that writing is a creative process that generates meaning and that proficiency in grammar does not mean proficiency in writing (Zamel, 1967). Archer (2010a) argues that writing is not a neutral skill that can be transferred from one discipline to the other. Nonetheless, this approach persists today and is used as part of teaching students and professionals how to

improve their writing skills for essays and scientific journals respectively (Barroga & Mitoma, 2018; Espéret, 1991; Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007).

The limitation of the study skills model approach is that it attempts to 'fix' problems with student writing as underpinned by behavioural psychology, viewing writing as technical and instrumental. From this perspective the author is invisible and has no agency. Knowledge schema and prior knowledge are not considered. Instead, the student must learn the new mechanics of writing and erase authorial presence. Notwithstanding the limitations of the study skills model – and as I will later show – the criticism is not saying that it is wrong to acquire knowledge of college or academic writing but rather it is problematic to decontexualise the writer. This oversight seems to have channelled writing research and pedagogy towards the discussion of the contextual and discoursal nature of writing. Improving on the assumptive and discursive limitation of the study skills model is the *socialisation model* of writing.

Socialisation Model of Writing

There are some precursors to the socialisation model of writing. Cohen (1973) and Sanders & Littlefield (1975) suggest that the context of test essays could improve student writing. Stallard (1974) adds a dimension of behaviour of good student writers to include (a) a greater amount of time completing the task; (b) revising meaning rather than grammar and syntax; (c) thinking and reading their compositions; and (d) concern for clear purpose for writing. Dilworth, Reising and

Wolfe (1978) demonstrate how '[t]eachers in the sample tend to value those papers which convey the extent of syntactic complexity with degree of ideational complexity' (Dilworth et al., 1978, p. 105). These resonate with contemporary research on discipline-specific ways of encouraging good writing that considers learning and context.

Contemporary views such as those of Carless (2015) discuss the promotion of student engagement with assessment tasks and he uses written assignments as one of his examples. Like the reflective essay that the student in this study wrote, 'extended pieces of writing involve students in a number of competencies: locating, evaluating and synthesising information, analysing, thinking critically, communicating through a written language, and using referencing conventions' (Carless, 2015, p. 49). He also cites a study of History students' perceptions of essay writing. The study identified three conceptions of essays, namely, argument, viewpoint and arrangement. Argument involves the use of data as evidence and interpretation of an ordered argument. Viewpoint refers to an ordered presentation of views but with sparse evidence. Arrangement is the layout of a series of thoughts without integration. Carless (2015, p. 50) infers that for students who view extended writing as argumentation, essays have the potential to encourage a deep approach to learning, whereas those who view it as arrangements, may display a surface approach to writing essay. Note how Carless (2015) uses 'deep' and 'surface' learning without taking into account Haggis' (2003) critique of how international literature on 'deep' and 'surface'

learning presupposes and reproduces an elite model of aims, purpose and culture of liberal universities. So, just because student writing is contextualised, does not mean it is free from ideological bias.

The three aspects of extended writing become complicated when Carless (2015, p. 50) cites a study in which students in a Faculty of Education were asked what they understood by higher-order thinking such as 'synthesis' or 'critically evaluate'. More than half of the students were unable to answer the question adequately. The findings were concerning because critical evaluation is key in essay writing. Students not only need to present evidence but integrate it from a variety of sources. Carless (2015) concludes that there is a need to model critical evaluation for students and support them to develop it and enhance their writing skills.

Perhaps as an example of modelling, Baker (2016) suggests the importance of peer review to improve student writing. The study was conducted from a peer-reviewed assignment conducted over three years in upper-division, discipline-specific courses. It included formative assessment and feedback from other students. Lecturers did not grade students on the quality of their draft assignments but on the quality of their feedback. Baker (2016) concluded that these strategies force students to begin writing earlier in the semester and help their students to revise their drafts before submitting the final paper.

The socialisation process of writing has led to research on how teachers/lecturers can use students' writing ideas and identities to socialise students into academic

writing (Budd, 1969; Hudd, Sardi & Lopriore, 2013; Twagilimana, 2017; Zemelman, 1977) with an intention of making explicit ways of writing that are specific to a genre, course and discipline. Similarly, Zamel's (1982) study spearheaded the shift into how students create meaning and discover ideas as they write. She conducted eight one-on-one interviews with ESL students who were proficient in writing. The study reveals students' awareness and experience of their writing process. She concluded: 'We must allow them to experience the process of discovering what they want to say through writing' (Zamel, 1982, p. 205). Hence, Hayes and Flower (1986) saw the process of writing in three phases, namely 'the planning process', 'the sentence generation process' and 'the revision process'. These phases are complex, interrelated and driven by different disciplinary requirements. These complex tasks require more than intervention towards good student writing.

While the socialisation model rightly calls for helping students into new practices of writing, it fails to see writing as a social practice, which evokes multiple identities, epistemologies and feelings. Hyland (2002) demonstrated through focus groups how writing is not simply a production of ideas but also authorial representation in which students resist some conventions in writing and insist on their creativities within the academic writing conventions. Pittam et al. (2009) showed how student writing identities can be conceptualised through confidence in writing, knowledge of avoiding plagiarism and understanding authorship. Murray and Riaza (2018) discussed pre- and post-writing processes and implications for

teaching academic writing. By way of summing up and caution, Clarence and McKenna (2017) argued that literacy practices are not the same things as disciplinary knowledge structures. Instead, academic literacies can be used to access disciplinary knowledge. If academic literacies work confuses the two, then it obscure the structures from which literary practices emanate. This once again shows the focus of academic literacies research and pedagogy. However, what I will argue later is that the social realist perspective and academic literacies need not be mutually exclusive. They both can offer us a framework to teach writing as part of disciplinary knowledge at university. The academic literacies model first explains this framework.

The Academic Literacy Perspective

The academic literacy perspective is currently the dominant framework for disciplinary writing. The perspective 'views student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialisation' (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 159). Writing is viewed as a social practice in which 'the text and the process of composing it are inextricable from the whole complete social interaction which makes up the communicative event in which they are situated, and meaning is bound up with social purposes for writing' (Ivanič, 2004, p. 234). For example, Hudd et al.'s (2013) study demonstrated the dual nature of teaching sociology students how to write. From interviews with sociologists, they demonstrated how the sociology lecturers engage in the process of giving

effective feedback that considers both the development of writing ideas and technical writing skills. They argue for a sociological writing shift from 'writing as a skill to be developed' to 'writing as a process for generating thought and clarifying thinking' (Hudd et al., 2013, p. 42). As I will argue later, the findings from this study suggest that lecturers must communicate and demonstrate this knowledge to students. Furthermore, the findings speak directly to the relationship between knowledge schema and authorial identity, which form the two core concepts of this research.

Authorial Identity

'Authorial identity is the sense a writer has of themselves as an author and the textual identity they construct in their writing' (Pittman, Elander, Lusher, Fox, & Payne, 2009, p. 154). In the study skills and the socialisation models, authorial identity is either stable or needs to be socialised into some genre conventions while the academic literacies model proponents argue for the multiplicity of identities in the writing process. Writers draw on socially constructed resources and therefore have to represent the world in particular ways. Writing happens within a sociopolitical context in which conventions and ways of writing are not accessible to everyone. 'Hence writers are not entirely free to choose how to represent the world, how to represent themselves, what social role to take, and how to address their readers when they write, but these are to some extent

determined by the sociopolitical context in which they are writing' (Ivanič, 2004, p. 238).

Although this study defined authorial identity according to Pittam et al. (2009), it did not measure it like they and Ballantine et al. (2018) did. They have developed a scoring questionnaire to measure authorial identity. However, Pittam et al.'s (2009) definition did not arise from the questionnaire but from their focus group interviews with students. The scoring questionnaire developed from the focus group. Ballantine et al. (2018) adapted the questionnaire, which in my view incorrectly conceptualises (authorial) identity as a fixed and measurable construct. Rather, identities are shifting and 'literacy practices are one means through which identities are constructed' (McCarthey, 2001, p. 125). Furthermore, writing is not just a technical activity but a discursive one in which voice is not homogeneous but pulled in multiple directions and given meaning by authoritative discourses (Bakhtin 1986). In fact, '[t]he writer is a person who is able to work in a language while standing outside language, who has the gift of indirect speaking' (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 110). Thus, writing is a social practice that also produces several identities.

Several studies demonstrate the importance of identity in student writing. McKenna (2004) was critical of the notion of student motivation as a function of success. Rather, she argued that when literacy practices are so different to students' ways of being, they leave them feeling alienated and erasing their 'own

voices' because 'for many students, the language required for academic literacy is not the primary language at home' (de Kadt & Mathonsi, 2003, p. 93). Furthermore, Twagilimana (2017) cautioned that feedback is not enough to improve students' writing. His study demonstrated how 'feedback practices foregrounded by lecturers are based on hierarchical and didactic relationships and do not appear proper to engage students in the authorship of their writing' (Twagilimana, 2017, p. 94). He concluded by suggesting a dialogical approach, which 'advocates a writing pedagogy where students will be empowered for taking over the authorship of their writing' (Twagilimana, 2017, p. 97). Drennan (2017) demonstrated how writing centres can enact this dialogical approach through mediating between content lectures and students. She argued that writing is about identity formation and shift in thinking for students and thus provides a social space to negotiate and express meaning as students may not be familiar with academic literacies (Shalem, et al., 2013).

The implication for authorial identity is to make these literacies explicit to students (Jacobs, 2013). Zakaria and Malik (2018) demonstrated the importance of authorship in studying interactional and interactive metadiscoursal student writing. They argued for writing pedagogy that recognises cultural identities in teaching students to identify metadiscoursal markers. This requires not only a change in writing orientation but also its pedagogy. Mendelowitz (2017) demonstrated the power of imagination in student writing. She argued for an interrelationship between imagination, criticality and critical writing pedagogy. Such writing

pedagogies indirectly speak to the role of cultural identities as facilitators of knowledge in student writing.

Knowledge Schema

Knowledge schema refers to the information on which students may draw for their writing (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Luo, 2018). This partly returns us to the skills discourse of writing and part of the objective of the proposed study. We partly return to skills because:

> The models are not mutually exclusive … Rather, we would like to think that each model successively encapsulates the other … The academic literacies model, then, incorporates both of the other models into a more encompassing understanding of the nature of student writing within institutional practices, power relations and identities' (Lea & Street 1998, p. 158).

However, thinking within the academic literacies model, a knowledge schema is not just a set of skills but a conceptual resource.

By conceptual resources, I mean that a set of interconnected concepts, and hence interconnected people, which provides the framework in which the social functions of knowledge acquisition, knowledge transmission and social coordination are possible. That is, one can only acquire knowledge insofar as one is able to situate a concept within an interconnected web; transfer knowledge insofar as knowers are able to draw the same inferences between concepts; and

coordinate action, thought, and affect insofar as there is mutual understanding that when a concept is deployed that certain behaviour is expected from those to whom the concept applies. Further, there is a community of thinkers and speakers that sustain and maintain the concepts that acquisition, transmission and coordination are dependent on (Podosky, 2019, p. 145).

We can infer the consequence of conceptual resources from students' written work. Slonimsky and Shalem (2010) conducted a study to understand the 'epistemic means' that students adopt in investigating and object of enquiry set up by an essay question. They used the revised SOLO taxonomy and overlaid it with Bernstein's rules of framing and foregrounded their study with the concept of 'text-based realities'. Citing Wretsch (1991), Slonimsky & Shalem (2010) argued that the key condition of knowledge practice is engagement with 'text-based realities' which has three characteristics: de-personalisation, systematisation and semantic boundedness. De-personalisation means that the author and reader are not present to each other at the time of writing. Writers need to anticipate a range of readership and work with concept at enough levels of abstraction, generalisation and contextualisation for readers at different temporal and spatial settings. Systematisation refers to the internal structure and logic of texts. Semantic boundedness requires texts to simultaneously open meaning to possible multiple meanings and interpretations, and delimit what is outside the boundaries and focus of the text. According to Slonimsky and Shalem (2010), engagement with text-based realities involves complexity of ordering ideas. They argue that

students need to be socialised into these ways of thinking and writing so that they can gain epistemic access. By extension, Gennrich and Dison (2018) showed that students struggle with writing-intensive assessments because of difficulties with the genre of academic writing, vocabulary and critically positioning themselves in relation to the theory.

For this study, knowledge schema includes explicit recognition of how students engage in several activities and consultations during the writing process. During the pre-writing phase, the frequently cited strategies are sequences of brainstorming, graphical representations, planning, and organising (Baroudy, 2008). This field of research tends to focus on two areas: firstly, to demonstrate the effectiveness of pre-writing activities to enable children to develop writing skills at a later stage in their schooling (O'Mealia, 2011); and secondly, to demonstrate effectiveness of pre-writing strategies (academic support) on the students' enthusiasm and quality of writing (Barloon, 1953; Bloom, 1981; Goldstein & Carr ,1996; Brockman et al., 2010; Crocker 2018; Scott et al., 2017; Servati, 2012; Walshe, 1979). While these studies inform us about the formats and effectiveness of pre-writing strategies, they do not tell us about students' knowledge of writing and the ideas that students bring into these strategies in generating ideas for writing. Hence, the study's findings begin by reporting students' pre-writing strategies and then later the actual writing experience.

The actual writing process has its own demands for which students need support through available academic and human resources. Several authors discuss South African first-year students' academic writing challenges due to students' linguistic and literacy backgrounds (Cekiso, Tshotsho & Somniso, 2016; Mbirimi, 2012, Pineteh, 2014; Tanga & Maphosa, 2018). They recommend academic and human resources to assist students towards academic writing proficiencies. Although not the subject of this research, postgraduate students face similar challenges in their writing. Part 3 (*Writing and Research Identities*) of a book edited by Badenhorst and Guering (2016) critically discusses journeys and tensions in postgraduate writing demands and writer identities in Europe. Similarly, Dowse (2013), and Oluwole et al. (2018) discussed postgraduate writing challenges and strategies in South Africa. Schulze & Lemmer (2017) make similar arguments but focus on English second-language speakers in South Africa and argue for postgraduate students' writing support through communities of practice. Regardless of focusing on undergraduate or postgraduate students, the findings have implications for students' knowledge of writing practices. Later I suggest that these implications could be discussed as a response to Jacobs' (2013) call for the centrality and return to knowledge in academic literacies research on student writing.

Some studies have (indirectly) begun responding to Jacobs' (2013) call. Clarke (2015) demonstrated how students' social purposes in writing could be used to help them learn academic writing in science. Karlen and Compagnoni (2017) investigated the relationship between implicit theory of writing ability,

metacognitive strategy knowledge and strategies used in academic writing. They found that students who had a malleable view of their abilities tended to be aware of their writing strategies and improve in their writing skills compared to those who thought they had fixed abilities. In their method, they had a pre-study-1 (pre-action questions) and pre-study 2 (metacognitive use of writing strategy). Ramoroka (2017) demonstrates how context reflects students' different values and beliefs about academic writing within their interactional meta-discourses. She argues that this may pose a problem for English for Specific Purposes (EAP) lecturers who prepare students for writing in various disciplines. Al-Shaer (2014) performed an experimental study about students' concept maps at the pre-writing stage. He concludes that the experimental group showed improvement in ability to generate better argumentative essays. Murray and Riazi (2018) discussed pre- and post-writing process and their implications for teaching writing. They concluded that focus on differences in language proficiency should not preclude us from making strategy choices in student writing. Hence, this study discusses findings on authorial identity and schematical strategy in the writing experiences of a reflective essay by first-year health sciences undergraduate students.

A Social Realist Perspective

The social realist perspective is a theoretical orientation that argues for the centrality of knowledge in the curriculum. This theory critiques the positivist,

empiricist and postmodernist treatments of knowledge. It takes issue with the positivist view of knowledge as absolute and the empiricist view that knowledge can only be acquired by verifiable facts. While it agrees with the postmodernist view that knowledge is socially constructed, it disagrees with its focus on only the sites of knowledge production.

Postmodernism is a collection of philosophical and research ideas that critique the fixity of knowledge, language and meaning that is found in structural theories such as functionalism and Marxism. They view knowledge as socially produced in sites of inequal power relations (Kattakayam, 2006). Critical literacy studies extend this critique to literacy pedagogy which treats literacy as a set of fixed, discreet, linear, and sequential and transferable skills (Vasudevan et al., 2015). Instead they see literacy as situated in local contexts of power.

While power is important for social realism, the social realist perspective argues that it is not enough to only identity sites of power and knowledge production, but to achieve access to such knowledges. Hence, the social realist perspective shares an epistemological orientation with critical realism which argues that (a) reality exists independent of human experience; (b) all knowledge is humanly produced and fallible; and (c) knowledge is open to revision through critique (Moore, 2014, pp. 32-36).

Pedagogically, social realism builds on social constructionism but critical of its stance of over-socialised approach to knowledge in which there is too much

emphasis on the knower, experience and practices (Young & Muller, 2010) by foregrounding knowledge as relative, power-laden and discursive. Instead, social realism argues that knowledge has structure, method and criteria.

In other words, rational objectivity in knowledge is acknowledged as itself a fact (we do actually have knowledge) but it is also recognised as a social phenomenon (it is something that people do in socio-historical contexts) and it is fallible and relative, rather than absolute. This allows knowledge to be seen for itself, and not only as a reflection of either some essential truth or power relations, but as something in its own right. Hence, knowledge is the very basis of education as a social field of practice (Maton & Moore, 2010, p. 2).

This does not mean that power relationships are absent in educational situations.

In the sociology of education, social realism does not negate power and the social construction of knowledge. Rather it makes three key claims. Firstly, social structures are not always negative and oppressive but can enhance agency and autonomy to engage with knowledge. Secondly, knowledge is systematically produced and transformed and not simply constructed and reproduced. Finally, knowledge production happens in a historical context that is extensive through time and space. For social realists then, these characteristics of knowledge constitute what they term 'powerful knowledge'.

Muller and Young (2019) differentiated 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge'. Knowledge of the powerful refers to production of rational knowledge but whose access is limited to a few. Postmodernists tend to focus their criticism on the knowledge of the powerful. However, powerful knowledge is rational knowledge that is made accessible to all. It is emergist, generative and transformative. That means it emerges within a historical context; it is socially generated; and it makes the 'unthinkable' to be thinkable. Powerful knowledge has possibilities for the development, reconfiguration and imagination of new forms of knowledge. It enables epistemic access and is thereby responsive to equity and justice in education. Hence, social realists suggest that the aim of the curriculum should not only be knowledge but 'powerful knowledge' as explained above. What then, are the possibilities for powerful knowledge in undergraduate student writing?

Perhaps Paxton's (2007) concept of 'interim literacies' can offer us the possibility of opening a theoretical dialogue between the academic literacies perspective and the social realist perspective. Paxton (2007, p. 40) uses the concept of 'interim literacies' to describe first-year student writing practices and to account for the 'heteroglossic nature of their texts'. By that, she means the relationship between students' intertextuality and voice that reflects their transition from home to academic literacies. Multiple voices and styles in students' writing not only indicate transition from the autobiographical self to academic writing, but also resistance to it. Considering some of the findings in Chapter Four, I think that some

of Paxton's observations on students' voice, intertextuality and resistance can be taken further to open access to powerful knowledge for first-year undergraduate students.

Paxton's three illustrations of interim literacies in students' texts could open a theoretical dialogue for powerful knowledge and pedagogical strategies for lecturers to consciously elicit and work with interim knowledge as ways into disciplinary knowledge. This could be done in four different ways on which I elaborate in Chapter Five. Firstly, students from more privileged backgrounds acquire the new academic discourse more quickly than working-class ones. This is where the social realists' distinction between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge' can make some contribution in conceptualising and managing the transition. Secondly, the hybridity of students' texts highlights and indirectly questions the dominance of essayist discourse at university. For social realists, essayist discourse is as much a social construction as other discourses that students bring into university. However, students cannot challenge essayist discourse if they do not first have epistemic access to it. Conversely, students would need to view their discourses as fallible and open to criticism too. Thirdly, engaging with students' intertextuality illustrates multiple and diverse ways of meaning-making by students, and offers several opportunities for curriculum transformation. For social realists, that transformation should enable all students to access powerful knowledge and transform their minds so that they can see how disciplinary knowledge makes the 'unthinkable' thinkable. This could normalise

resistance and transformation of knowledge in the everyday classroom (Lim, 2017).

Finally, even though Paxton (2007) coined the concept of 'interim literacies', note that earlier than Paxton (2007), Orr (1995, p. 189) stated that: 'Mastering a discipline at tertiary level is as much a matter of acquiring the language of the academic community as it is of learning the content'. She went on to show how students are overwhelmed with academic discourse and writing. Thus, there could be a possibility of a theatrical dialogue between academic literacies perspective (on writing) and the social realist perspective (in education). For the purpose of this research, I suggest in Chapter Five that students' knowledge schemas and authorial identities are not only reflecting their interim literacies, but also desire to access knowledge and conventions of academic writing. However, 'interim' and 'desire' do not have to be mutually exclusive. I will argue in Chapter Five that a theoretical dialogue between such two elements could transform and develop student writing, thereby improving their autobiographical selves.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to critically discuss authorial identity and knowledge schema within the academic literacies perspective and the implications of the discussion for the social realist perspective in education. It has demonstrated how

it is located within Ivanič's (2004, p. 241) 'holistic and comprehensive writing pedagogy' and tried to respond to Jacob's (2013) call for the centrality and return of knowledge in academic literacies. The concept of interim literacies could offer possibilities for the return of knowledge in academic literacies.

Chapter Three

Discussion of Research Methods

Setting

This study focuses on the experiences of student writing of a reflective essay for a medical sociology course for first-year health Sciences undergraduate students studying towards Pharmacy or Medicine. The assessment required students to attend a field trip for about three hours. Students were placed in different groups to visit a site in Kagiso or Munsiville, which are townships in the Krugersdorp area of West Rand in Gauteng Province. The purpose of the field trip was to give students an impression of the social determinants of health, illness and disease. During the field trip, students were expected to observe sites, take notes and ask questions of guides. The reflective essay assessment requires students to describe their observations, explain and frame their observations with relevant sociological concepts and reflect on how the trip had transformed their thinking about health. The purpose of the field trip was to respond to national and international trends for universities to produce socially conscious health-care practitioners and develop professional identities at undergraduate level (Antwi et al., 2013; General Medical Council, 2009; Goldie, 2012; Mylrea, Gupta & Glass, 2017; South African Pharmacy Council, 2010).

Research Design

This study is a qualitative research design and thus, an interpretive paradigm. The study design is necessary for the research question because the 'interpretive paradigm allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants' (Thanh & Thanh, 2015, p. 24). However, as Tuffour (2017) noted, interpretive phenomenological analysis is limited in four ways. Firstly, it ignores how language is used, and takes language as neutral rather than discoursal. Secondly, the researcher and the participants may not necessarily have the communication skills to communicate nuances of experience. Thirdly, interpretivist design only seeks to understand experience but not why it occurs. Finally, the interpretivist design claims meaning-making but does not consider cognition.

Tuffour's (2017) observations are relevant for my study for two reasons. Firstly, participants come from different language backgrounds, which could influence how they read, interpreted and responded to my tutorial questions and interviews. Secondly, as a lecturer, researcher and writer, I have my own interpretations of my research questions and my findings and thesis statement are influenced by my own interpretation of students' responses. The closest I have come to making this study credible is by methodological triangulation (tutorial papers and interviews), describing the research setting and explicitly stating that I hope the

study could open a dialogue between academic literacies research and the social realist perspective in education.

Data Collection and Analysis

There were two data collection methods for my study. The first was students' written tutorial papers. This method is document analysis – 'a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents ... Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge' (Bowen 2009, p. 27). As part of the study, students submitted their responses to four tutorial questions asking them what they did before writing the reflective essay. The tutorial questions were:

1. Explain at least four steps that you undertook before actually writing field trip reflection piece. (The order of the steps is not important).
2. What challenges did you encounter in each of the four or more steps?
3. How will you do it differently for your next Sociology assignment? Why?
4. What assistance would you have liked to receive in writing the reflection piece?

These pre-writing questions, similar to Karlen and Compagnoni's (2017, pp. 51-52), follow these pre-study questions to students: 'What do you do before you start writing an academic essay?' This question aimed to identify students' strategic

behaviour before starting to write. The next question ('What kinds of things do you do to stay on track while writing your academic essay?') focused on students' strategic behaviour during the action phase. The last question ('How do you proceed when you revise your academic essay?') aimed to determine the extent to which students revised their work. The usefulness of their study is how they categorise responses into cognitive, metacognitive and resource management strategies, which speak directly to the knowledge schema that I explained in Chapter Two.

I analysed 257 tutorial papers (127 from the MBBCh group and 130 from the BPharm group). At 75%, there was data saturation in terms of data size and depth (Fusch & Ness, 2015) to convince me of the emerging patterns. However, I analysed all of them with draft themes in mind and searching for suitable quotes for illustrations for Chapter Four.

Six face-to-face interviews followed the analysis of students' tutorial papers using an open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix B). The purpose of the interviews was an in-depth elaboration on some of the themes that emerged from the tutorial paper responses. Tierney and Dilley (2001) argued for the importance of interviewing students to gain their insights into the learning process. It is important because educational research tended to ignore student views until the early 20th century. McGrath, Palmgren and Liljedahl (2019) provided indicators on interviews as powerful tools to collect data in medical education research. In the

case of this research, interviews have been helpful in gaining some insights into students' experiences of writing the reflective essay. However, postmodernists are critical of how interviews are depersonalised and their data decontextualised. 'The researcher uses the dead, decontextualised monads of meaning, the tightly boundaried containers, the numbing objectifications, to construct generalisations which are, in the modernist dream, used to predict, control and reform, as in educational practice' (Scheurich, 1995, p. 241). They are not against interviews per se but rather suggest embodied ways of conducting and analysing interview data. Whereas my research does not claim a postmodernist design, I am fully aware that the words are students' and the interpretation and framing are mine. Like any scholarly text, my interpretations and framings are open to criticism and transformation in how I think about student writing.

The choice of the six students did not in any way represent a sample size like in quantitative research but rather looked for depth in each interview. The intention was to interview 10 students randomly selected from a class list. However, by the third interview, there were signs of data saturation on at least two points: (a) what students do before writing an essay; and (b) if students were able to put their emotion into words. Data saturation signals that the researcher should consider stopping the interviews because of redundancy of information. I decided to stop at the sixth interview to avoid redundancy. Redundancy is 'the process of sequentially conducting interviews until all concepts are repeated multiple times without new concepts or themes emerging' (Trotter, 2012, p. 399).

I used Sonix AudioText Editor™ to transcribe my interviews. Sonix is an automated transcription software that converts audio files into text. It has at least 95% conversion accuracy, which drastically decreased transcription time to three minutes for a 30-minute interview. My role was to edit the transcript through its synchronised text and audio playback. This makes obsolete the typical and established suggestions that interview transcriptions are time-consuming (McGrath et al., 2019).

For data analysis of tutorial papers and the interviews, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method for tutorial papers and transcribed interviews. It has six steps: (a) familiarity with data; (b) generating initial codes; (c) discovering themes/searching for themes; (d) reviewing themes; (e) definition and naming of themes; and (f) writing up the analysis.

Thematic analysis guided the process in which I performed an iterative reading and coding of the tutorial papers. Data collection and analysis is premised on the assertion,

> that we can safely abandon questions about meaning and, instead, look at reference. Better to ask questions as, 'what is it that is referenced within documents?' than to ask, 'what does this mean?' (Prior, 2003, p. 122).

By reference, Prior (2003) argues against the imposition of meaning (as though texts and utterances are transparent with pre-defined meanings) and in favour of what texts or respondents refer to in a particular socio-cultural context.

The method suits the intentions of the study (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999) whose objective is to understand students' initial descriptions and explanations as part of their authorial identities in a particular socio-cultural context. The findings emerged from the students' comments. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, there are limitations to interpreting qualitative data. Furthermore, knowledge schema and authorial identity (within the academic literacies framework) guides my interpretation and conceptualisation of the findings in Chapters Four and Five respectively. In Chapter Four, I provide a detailed analysis of data using knowledge schema and authorial identity as my guiding concepts. In Chapter Five, I use the findings to suggest a theoretical conversation between academic literacies framework and the social realist perspective on education (which I discussed in Chapter Two).

Ethical Considerations and Clearance

The research process must protect the integrity of participants and not expose them to risk or harm. That means informed consent must be obtained when the risks of the research are greater than the risks of everyday life. Informed consent must be obtained even where the researcher thinks the research involves modest risk or harm to participants. Hence, I am required by the university to apply for ethics clearance. I was granted ethics clearance by the Wits School of Education Ethic Committee. The research ethics clearance number is 2019ECE023M.

The participants' information and informed consent forms are in Appendix C.

Nevertheless, Beckmann (2017) warns that ethics clearance does not guarantee protection against liability. He recommends that ethics reviewers and researchers must be trained in the tensions of ethics, morality and the law. He suggests that the training could minimise exposing the researcher or university to be held liable or vicariously liable for wrongful actions or negligence during fieldwork. Best source I found to learn about ethics in research is through the Wits School of Education research design course and an online Training and Resource in Research Ethics Evaluation (TREEE) at https://elearning.trree.org. The site is ranked in the best top five by a small-scale study on usefulness of online ethics training (Ntseane et al., 2019).

Conclusion

This chapter discussed document analysis, interviews and thematic analysis to justify them as methods for my study. The research methods were justified through the relevant literature and my consideration of best fit for my study. The next chapter presents the findings.

Chapter Four

Findings: 'In what tone should I write this?'

In this chapter, I present findings in two forms. Firstly, I present frequent responses to the four tutorial paper questions on the students' pre-writing actions. The second part uses both tutorial responses and interviews to present nine themes, namely (1) interactive pre-writing; (2) (dis)organising concepts; (3) drafting against time; (4) writing as thinking; (5) ticking the checkbox; (6) writing for university; (7) navigating emotions; (8) 'tone (in writing)'; and (9) three writer identities. I present the themes in way that enables me to argue in Chapter Five how knowledge schema, authorial identity and interim literacies can help me to suggest a theoretical dialogue between the academic literacies perspective and the social realist perspective towards thinking about writing pedagogy.

Tutorial Responses

The following responses were the most frequent ones to the four open-ended questions. I interpreted and thematised the responses and presented them in frequency tables. As stated in Chapter Three, the number of tutorial papers was 257. I either interpreted students' different responses from direct sentences or in the context of their paragraphs. Thus, these items and response are not absolute but approximately what I think the student meant in the context of their pre-writing actions, and the challenges and assistance that they needed. In the

second part of this chapter, I use the same responses to discuss the interview findings.

Table 4-1: Steps taken before writing reflection piece

1. Explain at least four steps that you undertook before actually writing your field trip reflection piece.

Item	Responses	%
Read background history of site	169	66
Mind mapping	156	60
Make field trip notes	117	46
Research relevant concepts	117	46
Brainstorming	104	40
Interacting with classmates	39	15

The above question was designed to elicit information about some pre-writing actions that students undertook before writing their field trip reflective essay. The purpose of the question was to ascertain the extent to which students considered such actions. Most students (66%) seemed to focus on reading about the historical background of the site and then creating mind-maps (60%) in preparing to write. What might explain this high frequency of historical background reading is that the reading material were pre-uploaded onto the student's learning management system and thus easily accessible. Nonetheless, the rest of pre-writing activities – such as brainstorming – were cited by 40% of the students. It was also interesting to note that 15% of students interacted with classmates,

friends and senior students to discuss the challenges of writing the reflective essay. The next table lists some of the challenges.

Table 4-2: Challenges encountered

2. What challenges did you encounter in writing the reflection piece?		
Item	**Responses**	**%**
Link observations to concepts	169	66
How to structure the reflective essay	117	46
Eliminating unnecessary information	78	30
Linking observations to site context	39	15
Taking notes on site	26	10
Referencing	26	10

The most-cited challenge was linking site observations to course concepts. Sixty-six percent of the students found it difficult to interpret their observations through sociological concepts on the social determinants of health and diseases. Consequently, a number of them (46%) struggled to structure the reflective essay while they grappled with content. Others (30%) were overwhelmed with information and could not easily decide which information to exclude. A few (10%) mentioned taking field notes and referencing as a challenge. Those who mentioned the last two challenges said that they found it difficult to observe too many things at the same time. So, they simply wrote 'everything' that they saw. On referencing, they simply said that it was new to them and that they were

prepared to learn more about it. The above six challenges were not surprising because the reflective essay was the students' first assessment after four weeks at university. Hence, bearing in mind these challenges, the students were asked how they thought they would differently attempt their next sociology essay. The next table lists their responses.

Table 4-3: Different approaches to sociology assignment

3. How will you do it differently for your sociology assignment? Why?		
Item	**Responses**	**%**
Time management	156	61
Structure an essay better	52	20
Submit a draft beforehand	39	15
Ask for exemplars	26	10
Use the rubric to focus on expectations	26	10

Surprisingly, most students (61%) felt that the main cause of their challenge was lack of time in preparing for the field trip. They did not say that there was no time but rather that they started to prepare late for the essay. Then 20% of the students stated that they would structure their next essay better than the reflective essay. A few (10% to 15%) stated that they would submit a draft, ask for exemplars and use the assessment rubric to focus on essay expectations. What might explain the above frequency table is that after the field trip, there were lectures and tutorial discussion to help students to think about how they would approach their

reflective essay. Thus, students received some ideas and strategies to tackle the assessment, but they did not implement them in time for submission. Even though students received some assistance, it was in the context of a large classroom and tutorial discussion. The assistance was not directed to individual needs but covered general ideas and themes. Hence the last question asked students about assistance that they would have preferred.

Table 4-4: Types of assistance needed

4. What assistance would you have liked to receive in writing your reflection piece?		
Item	**Responses**	**%**
Synthesise information	78	30
More field trip discussion	78	30
Provision of exemplars	54	21
How to reference	39	15
Writing a conclusion	13	5
Receive feedback on draft essay	13	5
How to understand the rubric	13	5

From the table, fewer than 40% of students indicated a need for assistance. Nonetheless, of those who needed assistance, the most cited items were synthesis of information (30%) and more discussion about the field trip (30%). Fewer than 30% of the students added other items such as exemplars, referencing, writing a

conclusion, feedback from drafts and understanding the rubric. What might explain these finding could be that most of the students who missed lecture and tutorial discussions cited the very items that were included during the discussion. Perhaps the small minority of students that indicated a need for more support are the ones who did not attend lectures and tutorials that discussed the reflective essay.

The next part of this chapter uses both tutorial responses and interviews to present seven themes, namely (1) interactive pre-writing; (2) (dis)organising concepts; (3) drafting against time; (4) ticking the checkbox; (5) writing for university; (6) navigating emotions; and (7) writing as thinking and a summary theme, 'tone (in writing)'. I begin with interactive pre-writing.

Interactive Pre-writing

Students seemed to be aware of the pre-writing phase and the steps that needed to be taken in the process. More than 90% of the tutorial responses indicated that pre-writing included consulting lecture notes, reading background information about sites, revising tutorial papers, using textbooks and making mind-maps. A typical response to actions that students took before writing the field trip was,

> *'I read all my notes that I took from the field trip and analysed the pictures that I took, e.g. landscape, housing and people … I also checked my notes with those I made in the post-field trip lecture … I then made a mind-map*

of all the ideas that I had and my observations and put them under specific headings according to what the reflection piece had to contain … I went through all the field trip readings and the readings in our pack selecting the information that I thought to be applicable.'

A key feature that emerged from pre-writing is that it was interactive, whereby students consulted peers, lecturer and tutors. A post-field trip lecture and tutorial were designed for students to give feedback on their field trip experiences and ask questions about the process of writing the reflective essay. Students who benefited from these activities typically wrote:

'I believe the lecturer provided us with plenty of information during the lecture allocated for the discussion of the reflection piece. I therefore think that all the assistance provided then was sufficient.'

Some students used more than the post-field trip lecture and tutorial to think about the reflective essay. They included peers in the process as exemplified by a student who wrote,

'I remember speaking with some students to see if they had noticed anything that I hadn't taken down, anything that I hadn't, as well as the exercise in the lecture where the lecturer put everyone's ideas and thoughts from the experience onto one sort of mind-map that we could refer to.'

While some students used peer help and the post-field trip lecture and tutorial, others seem to take cumulative help in which they conceptualised the reflective essay each time the lecturer mentioned it in other lectures. From one of the interviews a student named Tshepo[7] said:

> *'Honestly, I did not [ask for help] but every time we went back to class, I believe I absorbed the help that I needed. I didn't necessarily ask because every time our lecturer spoke about something related to the field trip, I kind of absorbed everything … as the lecturer was busy going through the content, I realised, oh, I can link this to this. So, I didn't necessarily ask for help, but I absorbed it in possibly the best way.'*

These examples indicate that pre-writing interactions are not limited to specific times and places but could be varied and extensive in time.

From the tutorial paper responses, few students (5%) had no idea on how to proceed during this phase. Judging from their responses, these students had two things in common. Firstly, they used pre-writing, planning and drafting interchangeably. For them, pre-writing seemed to mean first getting the essay

[7] I use pseudonyms throughout this chapter. Tshepo is a black African first-year male student. During the interview, he also mentioned that he attended public school in the townships.

answer correct in their minds and then start writing. They did not mention activities such as mind-maps and consultation with peers, tutors and lecturers. They found this phase difficult because they did not know how to proceed in planning the reflective essay or execute the guidelines that accompanied the assessment question. Secondly, they did not mention the post-field trip lecture and tutorial in which students gave feedback on their field trip observations and the lecturer or tutor answered questions and concerns about writing the reflective essay. Such students were identified from their responses about the kind of help they would have liked to receive in writing their field trip reflective essay. From their tutorial paper responses, the following two typical responses suggest that these students did not attend the post-field trip lecture and tutorial or were influenced by their prior knowledge of essay writing in school:

> *'I was very unsure on how to begin the final draft. I wasn't sure of the format I should use … I even tried looking up for sociology essay formats online and they were of less help than I had anticipated. I ended up drafting it how I thought was best and typed the draft two days before submission date. I would do with a bit of a format of how to draft the essay in a sociological way, if there is one, and maybe a brief outline on the task.'*

Another student wrote:

> *'I would have liked more guidance on how to go about writing this essay. I felt like I had done everything on my own and that a little guidance*

would've helped me to be more confident in the completion of my reflection piece.'

In summary, what seems to be key for students to know how to proceed with the pre-writing phase is interaction with their classmates, tutors and attendance of the post-field trip lecture and tutorial. This observation came out from both the tutorial responses and interviews with students. However, the pre-writing interaction does not guarantee help for students. The following three written responses on feedback, peer help and post-field trip lecture suggest that more needs to be done in the pre-writing phase: On feedback one student wrote:

'I received feedback from my TA that said I had a good attempt at my essay. In the essay, she located where I was supposed to elaborate further or where I had to neglect an opinion because it wasn't related to the topic. I think I would have preferred if a more detailed elaboration of how I should've elaborated my thoughts, because I thought I had elaborated'

Other examples that could be read as interactive but potentially problematic were when students used information from their peers that could have distorted their field trip observations. The following two quotes illustrate this problem: In the first example, one student wrote,

'I was unable to recall certain events that had taken place … Hence I had to ask friends what was said about a particular aspect.'

While this could be interpreted as triggering memory on the student, it could also falsely give them information that was never part of their field trip observation. The second example was when another student wrote,

> *'I tried asking colleagues what they saw and how they interpreted the field trip. I thereafter only began to write my essay.'*

On one hand, this example could be interpreted as assistance in modelling a reflective essay. On the other hand, it could distort the other student's interpretation of their own observation if they tried to mimic the content instead of the structure of the other student's reflective essay. Nevertheless, these were some of the ways in which students approached their pre-writing. During the pre-writing phase, most students reported being challenged to link ideas for their mind-maps. The next theme illustrates the challenge.

(Dis)organising Concepts

The key requirement of the reflective essay was that students should frame their observations and reflections with a choice of five concepts from the coursework. The requirement aimed at avoiding descriptive accounts devoid of engagement with course material. The assessment rubric also listed conceptual application as one of its criteria. Most students thought that conceptual application was the most challenging aspect of planning and writing the reflective essay. As part of the pre-writing experience one student wrote:

'When writing the mind-map, I found it difficult to link a particular scenario with a concept.'

Another student elaborated on the challenge by writing:

'Understanding and applying the concepts we discussed in lectures was another challenge. Recognising the way that they relate to health in a realistic setting outside of the readings which could have been themed/categorised according to each concept making it easier to relate the scenarios with specific concepts. I experienced this for the second and third steps [that is pre-writing and writing steps].'

Similarly, another student echoed similar views but emphasising desire to know how by stating:

'I found that I struggled with applying the sociological concepts when explaining my observations. I felt as though I was in the dark and would have appreciated a little bit of assistance with practically applying the knowledge gained in lectures to a real-world example.'

To sum up this challenge, the students were not saying that they did not understand the concepts, but that they found it difficult to use them to frame the field trip observations. However, this does not include students who were aware that they struggled partly because of not reading or understanding the readings. Most of such students did confess in writing that *'relating the topics and my*

observations to the reading was a challenge because I didn't finish and understand a number of my readings.'

Other students thought deeper than the challenge of linking concepts as one wrote:

> *'The challenge I faced with planning my essay was linking the concepts I used to anything other than the apartheid regime. I feel as though my reflection was about apartheid because it appeared that all the root causes of these concepts were apartheid.'*

This student understands the concepts but seems to be worried about the apartheid thread. Whereas a 'golden thread' is key to academic writing, unbeknown to him, he saw it to be a disturbing repetition that made it difficult for him to make a mind-map.

Some students seemed to have used interactive pre-writing to resolve the challenge of conceptual framing. They mainly consulted their peers or 'friends' to discuss the challenge of conceptual framing. One student wrote:

> *'I further discussed the concepts and their applications with friends, additionally discussing how to approach the reflection piece using the rubric.'*

Another student '*consulted with friends and discussed the task'*. He described the process and outcome as follows:

'The problem I faced on the third step is the fact that my colleagues and I didn't exactly see eye to eye on some of the things that we discussed, there are some aspects of the task where we all had opinions of our own on how we thought it should be completed, each with a strong belief on their own idea.'

Regardless of the outcomes of peer discussions, the findings indicate that all the six students (in the interviews) engaged in discussions with their friends and classmates (even though only 15% of students from the tutorial paper responses said that they engaged in such interactions). They formed informal but friendly discussions to try and organsise their thoughts in what they saw as an otherwise disorganised pool of concepts that they had learnt and now had to select and use for the field trip reflective essay. Once students finished their pre-writing activity, the next step was the actual writing process. However, a few mentioned drafting but not as a key stage in beginning the writing process.

Drafting Against Time

Drafting is an important stage of writing in which the first attempt is made to weave together ideas generated from the pre-writing stage. Drafting starts to pull together ideas from brainstorming, mind mapping and planning into a sequence of sentences to communicate the development of ideas. In this study, neither the tutorial question nor the questionnaire directly asked students if they had written a draft for their reflective essay. Instead, the general questions aimed at finding

out if students would mention drafting their reflective essay as part of their writing experiences. The findings suggest that students either mentioned or did not mention drafting. However, a holistic reading of student responses suggests a more nuanced experience of drafting in which time and resources seem to be key factors.

Few students mentioned drafting as part of their writing experiences. Those who mentioned drafting described it convincingly like the following student who wrote:

> *'As the week went on, I made small drafts and composed rough paragraphs hat I felt would be relevant in my essay. I consulted the rubric and essay guidelines from brainstorms and rough copies of the content included in my essay. Eventually of these proved to be of great assistance when I was composing the final copy of my reflection piece.'*

Those who mentioned drafting seemed to understand it. Drafting the reflective essay seemed to be a stage in which students were comfortable with organising their ideas into writing. However, the majority of students did not seem to have experienced this stage.

Most of the students either did not mention drafting or by implication, said that they did not have enough time to start planning and writing the essay because

of either workload pressures or poor time management. Some students did not have the time and their wish was,

> *'I would like to have completed a first draft of the assignment with enough time afterwards to read through and edit it as well as seek out help from tutors and/or lecturers if I am struggling.'*

Where students did not mention drafting, the following quote was typical:

> *'I would also like to manage my time better, so that I am not rushed to finish the assignment and so that I am able to produce the best work rather than something which did not have the most effort put into it.'*

Time mismanagement seemed to have been a hindering factor and the student did not mention drafting in her responses.

Another student mentioned that time was not only the problem but access to computers too. This combination seemed to have had a knock-on effect as in the following quote:

> *'The problem with the draft was structuring it, as well as getting access to a computer in order to type it, because I don't have the necessary resources. I had to miss the lectures and type the essay during the lecture times. This is actually a big challenge because I missed out on important information on other subjects.'*

The student went on to say that next time she would take time to write her essay and not start doing it a few days before submission date.

The theme on drafting was constructed to not just identify the process and describe how student went about doing it. Rather, 'drafting against time' is trying to suggest that after reading all the student tutorial responses and interview transcripts, there is no evidence to suggest that absence of mentioning drafting means ignorance about it. Instead, the theme tries to suggest that some drafting happened but it was constrained by time and resources. Consequently, most students seemed to have short-circuited this crucial aspect of writing. Nonetheless, constraints to writing did not mean that students did not produce any ideas as they wrote. The interviews suggest that once students started to write, ideas emerged. The next theme describes this process.

Writing as Thinking

The idea of writing as thinking is common in literacy studies. It refers to the process in which writers develop ideas as they actually write. It is contrary to the once conventional ideas that thought precedes writing. It goes further to argue that, learning to write is learning also learning to think. Writing as thinking emerged from the students' interview even though students could not explain how it happened.

Most students said that they were nervous before writing the reflective essay. During the interviews, John[8] – a white male student – said he was

> *'a bit anxious because I am trying to figure out how I am going to structure the whole thing and include concepts at the same time.'*

Sandiswa[9] – a black African female student – added

> *'I felt a bit overwhelmed because it was my first formal writing assignment at university, and I was nervous to see the standard of marking.'*

Such sentiments appeared in several tutorial papers, but students clearly expressed the actual writing experience during the interviews. A black African male student (Motome[10]) mentioned that he was nervous,

> *'but also confident once the creative juices are flowing. Concepts come and I find a way to link them. They appear and trigger up my memory.'*

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[8] John indicated that his first language was English and that he attended a Catholic school.

[9] Sandiswa indicated that she attended a private school

[10] Matome attended a township public school.

I asked students to elaborate on this process, but they found it difficult to do so, except one students who ventured:

> *'There are more thoughts as you are writing. I don't know how to put it but the course, my knowledge, the field trip and personal experience back home just come together as I write.'*

By '*personal experiences back home*' the student meant the observations from the field trip that were similar to his rural village back home.

Therefore, these moments of writing as thinking try to demonstrate that even though students were drafting against time, they developed ideas as they wrote. However, most of them could not explain it but only describe it. Perhaps in drafting against time and worried about getting the reflective essay 'correct' that experience did not mean much to them. One explanation could be that students seemed to be concerned with getting the reflective essay right and meeting its assessment requirements. This concern brings me to the next theme of 'ticking the checkbox'. The findings suggest that students' concern was to get things right by 'ticking the checkbox'.

Ticking the Checkbox

Students' tutorial responses indicate some level of revision done to their reflective essays. However, most students (80%) wrote that they did not revise their reflective essays per se, but only checked for 'spelling errors' before submission. They said

that they either did the spellcheck on their own or asked other students to check for spelling errors. None of them mentioned spellcheck by computer word processor. It seemed that all spellchecks were done manually. Perhaps editing came up in student responses not because they saw it as a necessary part of writing but because it was part of the reflective essay brief. The brief indicated that students would be penalised for incorrect spelling and incomplete referencing. So, during data analysis, it became clear that students reworked their reflective essay according to the checklists for the essay. Although the checklist was presented as a guide, students stuck to it; hence, the theme of 'ticking the checkbox' instead of revision to rework their ideas and direction of the reflective essay.

The purpose of the revision seemed to be to ensure that it followed guidelines or ticked the checkboxes. One student succinctly wrote,

> *'I read it once or twice. I didn't revise a lot, to be honest … It was probably when I revise it … I look at the question, I did facts or information, and then I believe that all guide me. Then I write all the essay and then I read again to try and see if this fits with the questions.'*

Indeed, students were required to follow the guidelines but from the findings, it seems that the guidelines acted more as hindrances than frameworks within which students were required to produce their own reflection.

Another checkbox constraint that almost every student mentioned was word count. It created problems for many students because they thought it was too little for the task. Of the 30% who mentioned revision, most of them complained that during revision, they were not sure of 'what to leave out or delete' because they felt that all their information was relevant. Whereas this is a common problem for any writer, the worrying observation in this study was that most of the reflective essays repeated ideas but with different words. One outstanding quote that reflects almost every other student's concern explained at length:

> *'So, the word count is also a limiting factor. And the standards, it's like mandatory in every essay. There needs to be a word count. But with me, I can confidently say, yes, I was able to put down everything that I thought, everything that I felt, even though the word count was limiting. But at least I made sure that due to the word count being a constraint, the best thing that I can do is to take everything that I felt and thought and summarise it. So summarising was just for the benefit of the essay, but it was a disadvantage to me because now I had just like size everything down to the most important thing that I saw, which I honestly don't feel like there's anything less important than the other.'*

Given such views from the above quote, and thinking about some of the scripts, it seems that the students were concerned with quantity rather than quality of reflection. It seems they thought that the more they wrote, then the better their

essay would be. The previous quotes on revision and word limit indicate that the students knew what revision entailed. However, their concern was not about re-working ideas but ensuring that the reflective essay 'sticks to the word limit' or 'fits with the question'. The expressions of 'fitting into the question' or 'sticking to the word limit' provided another way of reading and interpreting the data. It emerged that students were writing within confines rather than frameworks in which they had some flexibility. However, writing within the confines does not mean that the students were stuck as they wrote. It was from this way of data analysis that the next four themes – 'writing for university', 'writing as thinking', 'navigating emotions' – emerged. The next theme is 'writing for university'.

Writing *for* University

Writing *at* university is a correct expression to explain that academic writing must be clear, coherent, analytical, purposive and persuasive. Students in this study were aware that university required different forms of writing. As Matome said,

> *'Sociology has its own language. In school, we were using simple layman language.'*

Steven[11] – a white male student – expounded:

> *'In school we were given a choice of descriptive essay, creative essay or argumentative essay. Most of us did not like argumentative essay and here they now want argumentative essays in which you describe, research and add sociology.'*

All the students in the interview viewed writing at university as constraining because, as Matome explained,

> *'School essays did not include specific concepts; they were more creative and gave "writers freedom". Here we are boxed-in by concepts and rules.'*

Don, a white male student, clearly stated the transition by observing:

> *'I need to learn how to because it's basically our first year. We never did academic pieces of writing. We always did the creative essays. So I feel like everyone who is writing an essay basically know what they have learnt in high school but it's now transition between moving from creative writing to academic writing.'*

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[11] Steven's first language is Afrikaans and he attended a Model C school.

Therefore, students were aware that writing at university was different from school. They found the differences to be constraining because they felt that academic writing did not allow creative expression. Furthermore, Tshepo explained where he learnt some these ideas when he said:

> *'Essay writing has always been a strength of mine … I felt that the reflection essay was a mixture of both a descriptive essay and a research essay, which we were always taught to never mix or confuse with each other at school level.'*

This could suggest that the student was writing *for* school and now *for* university.

Nevertheless, students had the desire to understand and write academically. They wanted not just to write *at* university but also to write *for* university. I say writing for university because all the students were aware that the reflective essay was a new style of writing. However, they were insecure about doing things right for the lecturer as stipulated in the reflective essay brief and rubric. They were aware of the transition but not sure how to write academically. Returning to the tutorial responses, students reflected the insecurity in three ways.

Firstly, when asked about challenges they faced and assistance they needed with the reflective essay, 30% of students mentioned 'structuring of an essay', referencing and exemplars as areas for assistance. It was typical for responses to state:

'I found it difficult to construct my essay, as I was not sure about the structure and voice needed to write my reflection and how the concepts I learnt during lectures should be used to reinforce and explain my observation.'

This does not mean that students could not write essays but that they were looking for essay structure and format fit for the university. One student wrote,

'I do know the basics of structuring an essay, but I am unsure as to whether the methods and style I used in high school is acceptable and correct by this university's standard.'

Secondly, students also mentioned referencing as a challenging requirement for academic writing. The challenge was how to reference properly. Most students were aware that the post-field trip lectures discussed the format and style of academic writing. However, such students did not think the lectures were enough. Instead, they suggested that exemplars would have assisted them too. Therefore, the students did not want only a class discussion but to see how previous students wrote and referenced their reflective essay.

Finally, the students did not seem to have thought about how the reflective essay experience influenced how they wrote their second assignment in sociology. In all the six interviews, the students seemed baffled by the question that asked them *'What changes did you think you made in writing your second essay in sociology?'*

The answers were general and focused only on the differences in scope and content between the reflective essay and the second essay. They viewed the second essay as longer than the reflective essay and that it needed no reflection. The only connection they all made between the reflective essay and the second essay was that by the time they were writing the second essay, they were familiar with writing an essay. However, none of them specified any aspect of the reflective essay that helped them to write the second essay in terms of at least applying sociological concepts to frame experiences of health and disease. Hence, I am suggesting that students were writing for university by trying to adhere to the convention of academic writing. The most illustrative part of writing for university is how students interacted with their emotions in writing the reflective essay.

Navigating Emotions

A reflective essay requires writers to write about or refer to their feelings. In the case of the reflective essay, the students had to reflect about social determinants of health, disease and illness. Part of this study was to discern students' emotional experiences in writing their reflective essay. Different levels seemed to emerge from the interviews. They ranged from surface reading of their emotional experiences to a deeper reading in which emotions and writing navigated each other to produce the reflective essay. Three illustrations try to show the navigation of emotions. Firstly, a surface reading stated that it was wrong to include emotions

in an academic writing. It was not about managing emotions but that they should not feature in academic writing. Matome said:

> *'Concepts involve logical thinking; therefore emotions take a backseat. Every idea is logically based because you are too worried about marks, not the beautiful mess that emotion is.'*

Sandiswa seemed baffled by the question of emotions in writing the reflective essay. She asked for clarity on how emotions could be part of academic writing. Then she eventually responded: '*For me thoughts and feelings are the same thing when I write. I was taught at school "don't get emotionally involved when you write."'* It was this expression of 'thoughts and feelings are the same thing when I write' that I had to re-read interview transcripts to think through what it could mean for the students.

In re-reading the interview transcripts on emotions, I came up with the second layer, which suggested that students actually brought emotions into both the field trip and writing the reflective essay. However, they used the emotions to shape their observation and choice of conceptual framing. Don explained at length:

> *'If you're reading about drug use and other and other things, you get it because of your how you felt when you read that and when you when you experienced first-hand what you saw. You look through that literature with the same understanding as you gained from your experience, and you look*

at the literature with a more empathetic view and more personal view as opposed to just statistics. Obviously, in your essay, you are going to be quoting those statistics, but you do that in an academic professional, but purposeful manner that includes perspective you gained from your emotional experiences in trying to understand what is happening in community action.'

What is significant about this quote is that it shows how some students might be embedding emotions in their writing even though they might not be using words to express those feelings. It seems as though some students oriented their reflective essay according to how they felt during their observations. This could also situate another student who explained that he found it difficult to express his emotions but enjoyed writing fables in school. Therefore, I probed and asked him how he could enjoy writing fables when they were full of emotions. He answered:

But they are not mine ... I know what emotions should be. So I can write other emotions. My own emotions I struggle to articulate.'

It thus became clearer that for some students it was enough either to empathise or to use the empathy to orientate their reflective essay.

Tshepo articulately explained the intersection of emotions and writing, thereby suggesting another way in which emotions and writing navigated each other to produce the reflective essay. He thoughtfully explained:

'But with everything that I saw, it was just straightforward. I knew what I was going to write. Hence, I did not actively start with the essay because I felt like I needed time to digest everything and understand: what is it that I saw? What is it that I felt there because I believe that in a reflective essay you do not just readily write, because that will throw you off because you write what you saw, but it won't be reflective anymore because you are intellectualising, and so with the term reflective. I just thought, OK, I will see, I will feel and then after that I will reflect.'

Of course this was one the few students who was able to *'integrate academic writing with reflective writing'*. The three above quotes suggest a very nuanced way in which students tried to navigate their feelings, and how feelings navigated the direction of the reflective essay in terms of choice of observations and concepts. This could mean that all students' reflective essays contain emotions. Students express these either clearly as part of the text or embedded in the planning but erased in writing the reflective essay. So, the themes of 'writing for university' and 'navigating emotions' lead us to the concluding theme which also summarises the chapter and its subtitle, *'In what tone should I write this?'*

Tone (in Writing)

During one of the interviews, Don mused: *'In what tone should I write this?'* The student was replying to a question about difficulties he experienced before writing the reflective essay. He included 'tone' through this response:

'I don't I there's massive difficulties. It's just because I've never written an essay like this based on research or something that we've done. So, that was something different for me. In what tone should I write this? What should I actually talk about? But I feel like, yah, that's a difficult point for me.'

This response seems to summarise the findings of students' experiences in writing the reflective essay. Students' responses suggest five summary observations.

Firstly, there was a desire to meet the reflective essay guidelines and rubric. There was also a general desire to meet the standard of academic writing. Secondly, the desire created tension between how students wrote in high school and how the university expected them to write. Thirdly, the unclear place for emotions in writing and reflecting illustrates parts of the tension between writing in school and at university. Fourthly, while students seem to be aware of the tension, time pressure and time mismanagement only allow them to think about the next submission and forget about previous ones. Hence, most students could not think about how the reflective essay helped them with the second essay. Finally, given the findings and the four points above, students made a decision about the reflective essay in moments of uncertainty about how to write and context of transition about what it means to write at university.

In these moments of uncertainty, students are trying to compose tones for their reflective essay. By tone, we mean the expression of the writer's attitude towards the reflective essay, the lecturers who will mark it, and the self. Hence,

the student's quote about tone is this chapter's subtitle and concluding theme. It suggests that the tones guided the experiences of writing the reflective essay. The tones were not easy to find in the process of field trip observations, note taking, pre-writing, interactive discussions, drafting and emotional navigations. Hence, looking for tones was not easy for students. While these tones try to summarise the students' experiences of writing, they also have implications for writer identities that emerged from all the eight themes. It is from these themes that I suggest three writer identities as the last theme from the findings.

Three Writer Identities

As I have observed in Chapter Two, there is a difference between authorial identity and writer identity. This research focused on authorial identity (through the reflective essay). It is from the students' experiences of authoring their reflective essays that I interpret and suggest three writer identities that I think characterise the findings. These writer identities do not suggest permanency or fixed categories. Rather, they describe authorial experiences of students while they were writing their reflective essays. They also reflect a transitory phase within students' writer identities from school to university.

The first one is the '**struggling writer**' identity in which students struggle with understanding the expectations of writing at university. This category is characterised by negative views of their inability to comprehend the writing task. Consequently, these students focus largely on course content as their barrier to

writing because they are looking to write a 'correct' reflective essay. Struggling writers are unaware that part of their struggle lies in their lack of attendance at lectures and tutorials that discussed their reflective essay. Students who attended these discussion sessions were able to resolve some of the problems, insecurities and misunderstandings that they had about the reflective essay. Struggling writers' main barrier to writing is lack of understanding of course content and assessment expectations.

The second one is the '**novice writer'** identity. These students are aware of the writing expectations at university. However, they face the challenge of transition from school to university writing. They feel that university writing stifles their voices, imagination and creativity because they have to follow the academic conventions of writing. Consequently, these students are trying to find their voices and styles in academic writing. They are aware of creative possibilities but not sure how and where to begin. These students found it hard to include argumentation and emotions in their reflective essay. They insisted that an essay should be either argumentative or creative. Even though they tried to navigate their emotions through their reflective essay, they still found academic writing stifling. Novice writers are unaware that through some of the 'contradictions' they are actually continuing on an endless journey of a writerly identity.

The final type of writer identity is the '**tickbox writer**'. Like the novice writers, tickbox writers are aware of university writing expectations and the transition from school

to university writing. However, unlike the novice writers, this category of student is eager to shed their school writing genres and experiences. They just want to be academic writers and follow the conventions as stipulated in their course outlines and assessment rubrics. These students maintained that there was no place for emotions in academic writing. Hence, the reflective essay posed a dilemma for them because it included argumentative and emotive aspects of writing. The main concern for these students was the audience for which they were writing. They were anxious to write on a level that would be agreeable to the lecturer who would mark the essay. Tickbox writers want to fulfil assessment requirements and expectations. For them, that is what seems to be an academic writer.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed presentation of data from students' tutorial paper responses and the six interviews. It thematised the findings to try to answer the following research sub-questions as stated in Chapter One:

1. What learning resources and strategies do students use to generate ideas in the pre-writing phase?
2. What challenges do students face in the writing process?
3. How does the process shape their identities as writers?

The chapter presented the ways in which students proceeded with pre-writing actions such as brainstorming, mind mapping, drafting and idea development. It

also presented the nine themes to show how students' embodied experiences such as emotion, identity and tone mediated their writing during their interim literacies phase. The implication of these findings culminated in a suggestion of three writer identities in which students seemed to be positioning themselves as struggling, novice and tickbox writers within academic discourse. The next chapter conceptualises these findings by proposing an argument for a theoretical conversation between the academic literacies perspective and the social realist perspective on education.

Chapter Five

Interim Literacies and the Social Realist Perspective: A Theoretical Conversation

Introduction

This chapter tries to conceptualise the findings and demonstrates the need for a theoretical conversation between academic literacies and the social realist perspective. It begins by conceptualising the findings and then outlining antecedents to my suggestions. The closing section uses the findings to demonstrate implications for the social realist perspective. Before I suggest the conversation, I begin with a discussion that conceptualises the findings from Chapter Four.

Conceptualising the Findings

This section does two things. Firstly, it pulls together the findings in terms of knowledge schema and authorial identity as discussed in Chapter Two. Secondly, it discusses the implications of the findings by deconstructing the assessment rubric of the field trip reflective essay to show the extent to which it required multiple academic literacies from students. Figure 5-1 below diagrammatically summarises the conceptualisation of the study. I constructed Figure 5-1 and the subsequent paragraphs explain it.

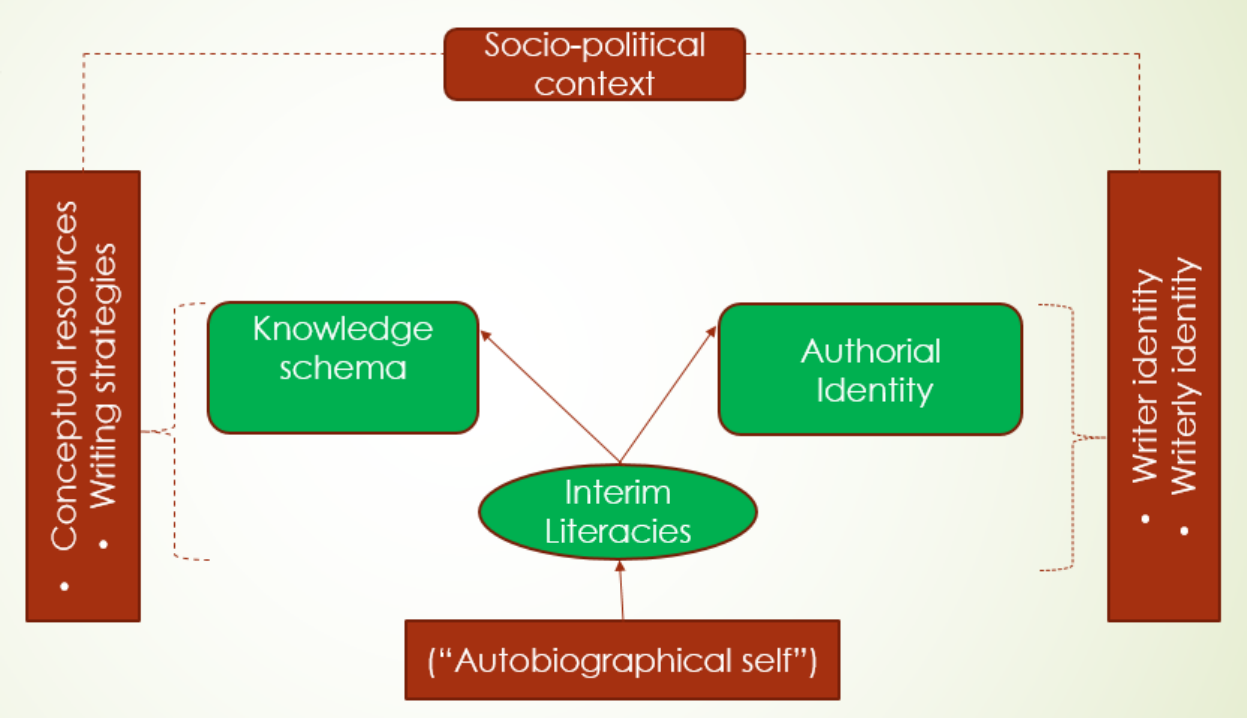

Figure 5-1: Knowledge schema and authorial identity as interim literacies.

To conceptualise the findings, we begin by reading Figure 5-1 from below from the 'autobiographical self'. When explaining the types of writer identity, Ivanič (2004) begins with the 'autobiographical self' which, for this study, is the identity which students bring to any act of writing. Students bring that immediate identity to writing the reflective essay. Key to this identity are primary and secondary discourses that they bring into reading and writing at university. When students compared university and high school, they were actually comparing the primary and secondary discourses to the new ones at university. Students come to university being used to narrative and personal writing prompts from school. Furthermore, the students in the study came to university knowing how to write an essay but not the first type of an essay (reflective essay) they wrote for assessment

in sociology. Therefore, the attitudes and expectations that they had of writing were what they called 'creative writing' (i.e. fictional writing or personal experiences and opinions about a topic). Moreover, all students in the interviews said that they did not like 'argumentative essays' in schools. They felt that university required them to write only argumentative essays when they were used to 'creative' writing. That created tensions in how they viewed writing at university. It should be noted that reflective and argumentative writing are included in CAPS (SA Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements) as two of the writing genres that should be taught but clearly it seems that the argumentative genre was not covered at most of the students' schools.

Academic literacies studies indicate that students experience this tension because of the new exposure to secondary discourses at university. Even though students may not be aware that their discoursal selves are changing, it does not mean that there are no literacy changes. So, even though some students' responses said little about challenges that they faced in writing the reflective essay, that should not be construed as though there were no tensions. Academic literacies studies demonstrate that students experience and respond differently to the tensions. Social identities, such as race, class, gender and culture mediate the extent to which students experience and respond to university demands (Brayfield, Alder & Zablotsky, 1990; Hlatshwayo & Fomunyam, 2019; Kalantzis & Cope, 1988; McKenna, 2004). For some students the transition is harder than for others as they bring different cultural and linguistic capital to their tertiary studies.

Hence, Paxton's (2007) concept of interim literacies is the second element in Figure 5-1.

Interim literacies conceptualises first-years' writing by demonstrating the relationship between students' intertextuality and voice and how it reflects their transition from home and school to academic literacies. The findings of this study did not analyse students' texts but rather infers interim literacies from the students' responses to their experiences of writing the reflective essay. Interim literacies can explain the challenges that students face in the process of writing the reflective essay. Two key elements are the themes on 'writing for university' and 'tone' (in writing). Students knew how to write but they were not sure how to write the reflective essay. They could not reconcile academic writing with reflection because – as they said – reflection was personal, not academic. Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, for students, academic writing was not the same as 'creative' writing. Interim literacies, thus, provide a conceptual tool to understand transitional tensions that students face from home and school to university. It also provides an understanding of how cultural capital (from home and school) helps or hinders students in responding positively to the transitions (Dixon, 2007; Jaffer & Garraway, 2016; Kalantzis & Cope, 1988; Takavarasha, Cilliers & Chinyamurindi, 2018).

The distinction that students made between reflective and academic writing seemed to have affected their knowledge schema and authorial identities. These

are the two elements which split from 'interim literacies' in Figure 5-1. I will begin with knowledge schema. Knowledge schema refers to the information from which students may draw for their writing (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Luo, 2018). The interactive pre-writing theme suggests how students drew pre-writing knowledge from various sources such as high school knowledge, tutors, lecturers and peers. For students there were interactions as part of information-seeking behaviour. Academic literacies would conceptualise these activities as illustrations of social sharing of information facilitating transitioning from primary to secondary discourse. However, in as much as these activities are social, the aim of students was getting the reflective essay 'correct' (typical of a school mindset). They knew what the reflective essay guidelines and rubric expected but they did not know how to proceed. It was a classic case of 'knowing what' vs. 'knowing how'. Students' challenges were to 'know how'.

In Figure 5-1, the issue of knowing how to write a reflective essay is represented by the leftmost elements of 'conceptual resources' and 'writing skills'. As mentioned in Chapter Two, conceptual resources refer to a set of interconnected concepts, people and a framework that makes possible the social functions of knowledge acquisition, transmission and coordination. When students said that their challenges were 'how to structure an essay' or 'make paragraphs flow from each', they were not only referring to just generic skill. Rather, they were pointing to some lack of conceptual resources and skills to write a reflective essay, which they had not written before. As I will argue later, academic literacies practitioners

provide part of the conceptual resources to assist students to write. Clarence and McKenna (2017), Jacobs (2013) and Richards and Pilcher (2018) imply these conceptual resources when they lay intellectual foundations for further thinking and research into the impact of academic literacies pedagogies.

In thinking about this study's findings on knowledge schema, perhaps Jacobs (2013) would be looking for common ontologies for academic literacies research. Clarence & McKenna (2017) would be looking for ways in which the findings could inform lecturers and academic literacies practitioners to collaborate to teach pre-writing literacies. Richards and Pilcher (2018) would perhaps be looking to teach students attributes and dispositions for writing at university. Institutional expectations of students' writing attributes and dispositions affect student's authorial identity. This point moves us to the category of authorial identity in Figure 5-1.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, authorial identity is the sense that a writer has as an author and producer of text in their writing. This study was interested in authorial identities of students because:

> The self as author is particularly significant when discussing academic writing, since writers differ considerably in how far they claim authority as the source of the content of the text, and in how far they establish an authorial presence in their writing (Ivanič, 1998, p. 26).

For students in this study, authorial identity becomes an issue as the university expects them to write differently from the way they did at school. The key finding is that for students, writing at university means erasure of writing conventions and authorial identities developed from schools and adoption of new writing conventions and identities at university.

Students felt that they had limited authorial authority and needed to master a new set of conventions that included structure, tone and complex conceptual moves. Students were not aware that they already had writer identities because they have been writing since school. Furthermore, students were not aware that transitioning to university did not mean erasure of their writer identities but rather that it was a process of developing a 'writerly identity'. Of course, the students are incorrect as reflected by the rightmost rectangle of Figure 5-1 (writer identity and writerly identity). *Writer identity* refers to a writer's signature in terms of processual, stylistic, normative, imaginative and emotive blends. A *writerly identity* is the process of conceiving and making of imaginative spaces to occupy as a writer (Bosanquet & Cahir, 2016).

While students were concerned with authorial identity as tense moments and experiences of writing the reflective essay, academic literacies would argue that these tensions develop students' writer and writerly identities. Hence, interim literacies would explain that first-year students' heteroglossic texts reflect transition within a spectrum of writerly identity. However, if the university manages the

transition poorly, then it can negatively affect students' writer identity as shown by the findings. Academic literacy practitioners can successfully harness students' heteroglossic writing into critical thinking about academic writing (Mendelowitz & Dixon, 2016).

McCabe (2011) emphasised context, and the study's key findings on knowledge schema and authorial identity recognise the sociopolitical context (which is the overarching element in Figure 5-1). As mentioned in Chapters One, Two and Three, this study is within the South African context. This context is characterised by an uneven but rich academic literacy history from the academic support era to academic development era until the current academic literacies era (Boughey, 2010). It is a sociopolitical history that originates in the 1980s with the aim of improving access and throughput for mainly black, rural and disadvantaged students into the current era that recognises that every first-year students faces challenges (though differently) in transitioning into university (Boughey, 2005). In the context of the study, the students were in the Health Sciences Faculty, at a historically white university that has admission criteria that take into account race, social disadvantage and school quintiles.

At classroom level, the purpose of the field trip was trying to respond to national and international trends for universities to produce socially conscious health-care practitioners (Antwi et al., 2013; General Medical Council, 2009; Goldie, 2012; Mylrea et al., 2017; South African Pharmacy Council, 2010). With this context in

mind, we now turn to the next section to suggest how the rest of the findings (emotions, reflections and argumentation) could be conceptualised through deconstructing the assessment rubric for the field trip reflective essay. This deconstruction is another way of conceptualising and pulling together the findings through the academic literacies framework.

Literacies in the Rubric

Another way to conceptualise the findings of the study is to analyse and deconstruct the assessment rubric for the reflective essay (see Appendix A). This section will show how the assessment rubric is implicated in how students perceived and experienced the writing of the reflective essay. The assessment rubric listed the expectation and criteria for judging the quality of the students' written work. While the reflective essay asked students to observe, apply sociological concepts, and reflect, the rubric seems to have asked for more than that. The rubric asked for argumentation through framing, emotive expression and reflection. Thus, this section will argue that the rubric is not just a SOLO criteria document but a power-laden one too.

The observation about the reflective essay rubric is that it required framing. Framing refers to ways in which knowledge is selected, sequenced, paced in communication, or writing (Bernstein, 2000, p. 27). The entire assessment rubric requires students to frame their reflective essay according to specific criteria. It also uses the SOLO taxonomy to judge the quality of the framing. SOLO is an

acronym for *Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes*. The SOLO taxonomy is a five-tier assessment too which classifies students' learning outcomes from incompetent (*pre-structural*) to complex (*extended abstract*) understanding. "In SOLO, understanding is conceived as an increase in the number and complexity of connections students make as they progress from incompetence to expertise. Each level is intended to encompass and transcend the previous level" (Potter & Kustra, 2012, p. 9). I used the SOLO to structure the assessment criteria for the reflective essay and some of the findings in Chapter Four indicated students' challenges with progression from simple to complex learning outcomes.

The findings in Chapter Four indicated that the two most-cited challenging aspects of writing for students were conceptual linkages (66%) and structuring the reflective essay (46%). Furthermore, the interviews with the six students indicated how argumentative writing was challenging for students. The interim literacies concepts explained why first-year students would face these challenges. However, in this section I add that the assessment rubric itself demanded these literacies before students started even thinking about writing their reflective essay. Thus, the assessment rubric is a both a factor and context that affects how students experience writing.

This writing experience also extends to emotive expressions required by the assessment rubric. The second observation is that the rubric expected students to observe, smell and feel during their site visits. The rubric expected students to use

their senses to capture social determinants of health and diseases and by implication exclude seemingly irrelevant aspects. As indicated above, the two most cited challenging aspects of writing for students were conceptual linkages (66%) and structuring the reflective essay (46%). The most cited reason for this challenge was that there was too much information and that students could not decide what information was irrelevant for the reflective essay. Hence, the three most-cited assistance items that students said they needed were: (a) How to pull information together (30%); (b) more discussion about writing the reflective essay (30%); and (c) to be given exemplars (21%). During the interviews, students expressed this challenge by stating that they could not find a place for emotions in academic writing.

While Chapter Four shows how students tried to navigate emotions, the SOLO criteria of the rubric seems to disregard emotional expression. Moreover, one of the key challenges that students faced in orientating their reflective essay was tone in writing. They were not sure how to interject themselves into academic writing. They found it difficult to write their emotions and reflections, not because they had none of those, but because they thought they were 'un-academic'. Effectively, the students were saying that academic writing was erasing their authorial identity in favour of objective writing. This 'objective' writing is writ large in the assessment rubric and academic literacies would be critical of it.

Academic literacies would of course argue that the students could not be more wrong. Writing is a social practice. Emotions and reflections are part of any academic writing. One does not need a reflective essay to reflect in one's writing. They are the author's tone, framing and orientation of the text. Academic writing is an expression of the discoursal self and writer identity. This is another example of how the assessment rubric affects the ways students could have perceived and experienced the writing of the reflective essay.

Consequently, the rubric seems to have affected how students prepared and wrote the reflective essay. Students had to reflect on their sites through sociological concepts and argumentation. The third and final observation is that the rubric required multiple competencies and literacies. It is now clear from the findings and rubric analysis that reflection is a practice that is multilayered (Campbell, 2018; Cook-Sather, 2011) and therefore needs scaffolding (Chang, 2019; Coulson & Harvey 2013;). These three observations suggest that the lecturer confined students' writing within certain expectations. Furthermore, students experience different texts and writing expectations across the university (Lea, 2017). Regardless of the merits of the expectations, the rubric signifies a document that guides but also ideologically directs 'correct' forms of writing and thinking within a particular context. This context needs consideration in conceptualising the findings of the study.

Considering the findings and the multiple demands of the rubric in just one assessment, one has to refer and reflect on Goodfellow and Lea's (2007, p. 5) assertion:

> Literacy is not a unitary skill which, once learnt, can be transferred with ease from context to context. Literacies take on a particular significance and form depending on the social relationships between the participants involved in a specific context and the texts, which are involved. Importantly, literacies embed relationships of power and authority and are concerned with who has the right to write (or read), what can be written about and who makes these decisions.

In the context of this study, the above quote summarises three things. Firstly, what the first-year health sciences students learn in sociology is not necessarily transferrable to other courses at university. By implication, interim literacies rightly point out challenges that come with the transition from school to university writing. Secondly, sociology has its ways of thinking, knowing and arguing with which first-year students are not necessarily familiar. By implication, learning sociology is not just about content but sociological literacies too. Finally, these literacies (though tacit) are embedded in assessment rubric criteria. The criteria are subjective and laden with ideological values of what constitute good forms of writing at university. More often than not, there is a gap in students' versus lecturers' expectations of university education (Hassel & Ridout, 2018; Wong & Chiu, 2019). It is in considering this gap and the conceptualisation of these findings that I propose a theoretical

conversation between academic literacies and the social realist perspective of education.

A Theoretical Conversation

The social realist perspective argues that access to 'knowledge of the powerful' is limited to a few, but 'powerful knowledge' can be accessible to all. The conversation that I would like to open is language and tools to talk about the balance between academic literacies and disciplinary knowledge in writing pedagogies. When findings suggest that students do not know how to structure an academic essay, should we then be teaching them the academic writing conventions or also giving them access to knowledge about these conventions in the context of their discipline? Putting it in another way, should we be teaching students how to write or how to write in the context of sociological debates, theories and concepts? This question is common but important for this research because these are first-time, first-year students who will not proceed to second-year sociology. So, given McCabe's (2011) argument about context, how then do we teach writing to these kinds of students? To answer this question we first turn to the debate about embeddedness of academic literacies pedagogy.

The interim literacies concept reminds us of students' challenges in transitioning from school to university. It also helps us to understand and improve on students' heteroglossic writing. The academic literacies perspective reminds us that writing is contextual, ideological and characterised by power relationships. Hence,

academic literacies pedagogy advocates for an embedded academic writing approach. This embeddedness implies knowing how to write within and across the discipline as discussed below. An embedded approach tries to find a balance between discoursal writing and disciplinary knowledge. It is in finding this balance that academic literacies (with its focus on discoursal writing) needs a conversation with social realism (with its focus on disciplinary knowledge).

As I have indicated in Chapter Two, Jacobs (2013) suggested a shared ontology within academic literacies research. By that, she means that academic literacies researchers and practitioners should include disciplinary knowledge structures in their quest for students to be 'literate' within and across different disciplines at university. Jacobs (2007) argues for a collaborative pedagogy in which academic literacies practitioners work with disciplinary specialists to contexualise students' learning activities (i.e. embedded academic literacies). Jacobs (2013) hopes that a shared ontology could develop a common future research and practice in academic literacies perspective.

Not everyone shares Jacobs' (2007 & 2013) ideas about embedded academic literacies. There is an ongoing debate about generic versus embedded academic literacies at universities. The generic academic literacies pedagogy teaches academic skills to first-year university students in a separate course with the hope that the skills would be transferrable to other courses. The embedded academic literacies uses discipline-specific learning content to teach academic

skills at university. Those who suggest an embedded academic literacies pedagogy argue that it facilitates epistemological access (Dison and Moore, 2019; McKay & Simpson, 2013; Mendelowitz & Dison, 2016; Olivier, 2016; Zamel, 2006).

Other authors agree with embedded academic literacies pedagogy but also suggest an alternative view. McCabe (2011) and Khumalo & Maphalala (2019) made a case for generic academic literacies for black students with rural school backgrounds. McCabe (2001) argues that such students hardly have English proficiency and thus need generic academic literacies before they attempt disciplinary literacies. However, McCabe (2011) did not reject embedded academic literacies. Rather, she suggested five choices of academic literacies pedagogy and argued that the context of each university should guide these choices. For example, Sefalane-Nkohla and Mtonjeni. (2019) viewed their campus writing centres as potential spaces for developing students' critical abilities across disciplines. Similarly, Khumalo and Maphalala (2019) found that students benefit from a separate academic literacies course.

In this debate, Butler (2013) warned:

> At this point, the main challenge for all practitioners who want to improve their own practices is that there seems to be an oversupply of studies that are largely descriptions of and theoretical justifications for interventions. There are too few studies that report on the real successes or failures of such interventions (pp. 83).

He went on to show that not only are these studies few, but that they are neither broad nor deep enough to show impact.

It is through reading Butler (2013) that I also realised that the studies that make a case for embedded literacies are mostly not researching impact, but the conditions and processes that make the pedagogy possible. Even though the studies mention epistemological access, they only hope that the access will happen if there are successful collaborations for embedded academic literacies pedagogy. It is from the above debates that I am suggesting a theoretical conversation between academic literacies and the social realist perspective. There seems to be either an academic literacies or social-realist pedagogy divide in the debate. I argue that they are not mutually exclusive but rather imply each other as I show in Table 5-1 below.

The social-realist perspective neither replaces nor improves academic literacies pedagogy. Instead, it offers it some tools and language to research and claim evidence for students' epistemological access. Social realism argues that, if knowledge is either viewed as an authoritative empiricism (i.e. realist ontology and objective epistemology) or reduced to simply 'knowing' (i.e. relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology), then knowledge is stripped of its properties as a category to study (Ellery, 2017). The basis of education is knowledge. Therefore, it would be extreme to simply reduce knowledge to context or classify it as authoritative. Social realism agrees that knowledge is social

but also views knowledge as an objective reality to study, critique and generate more knowledge. Hence, social realism would require academic literacies to state the *type* of knowledge it generates through its pedagogies and how it accounts for that knowledge through research. As Butler (2013) noted, it should not just be about descriptions and theoretical justifications, but evidence of epistemological access.

Clarence and McKenna (2017) developed Jacobs' (2007 & 2013) idea further by suggesting how academic literacies could use Maton's (2014) legitimation code theory (LCT) to decide on the types of knowledge that an academic literacies class claims to provide. The LCT refers to teaching practices that make explicit the 'grammar' that underlies academic language. Clarence and McKenna (2017) outlined three studies, which have used LCT to demonstrate how an analysis of different disciplinary knowledge structures can help us to develop and effectively use academic literacies. They used Maton's (2014) knowledge quadrant in which they choose the 'specialisation' dimension to demonstrate how the 'specialisation plane' can help us understand the relationship between knowledge and students. These quadrants are: (1) a **knowledge code** (in which what one knows is emphasised and legitimated), (2) a **knower code** (in which the emphasis is on who one is vis-à-vis knowledge); (3) an **elite code** (in which emphasis is on both the knowledge and knower); and (4) a **relativist code** (where neither is emphasised).

For Clarence and McKenna (2017), if academic literacies practitioners and lecturers work together using the LCT, then they could help students to develop literacies at university. However, Clarence and McKenna are concerned that this collaboration could distract academic literacies practitioners and researchers from the ideological and social nature of the production of knowledge.

I agree with Jacob's (2013) call for a common ontology, and Clarence and McKenna's (2017) inclusion of knowledge structures in teaching academic literacies. What I would like to add and suggest corresponds to Richards and Pilcher's (2018) argument that non-textual elements are important too towards students' success. Their argument arose from interviews with design and nursing lecturers from which they concluded that non-textual elements such as 'empathy', the 'visual', the 'non-verbal' are literacies that are necessary parts of disciplinary knowledge. Similarly, multimodal pedagogies are an integral and well-researched part of literacies research including academic literacy (Archer, 2006; Engelbrecht, & Genis, 2019; Stein & Newfield, 2007).

Richards and Pilcher's (2018) argument is not new, but built upon the social realists' view such as Winch (2014) who argued that helping students to crack the academic code dispels the myth of authoritative and value-free knowledge. Students can learn both tacit and explicit knowledge of a discipline and experience epistemic ascent. Similarly, Luckett (2009) proposed an

'epistemologically diverse curriculum' in which different types of knowledge (propositional, practical, experiential and epistemic) are recognised.

It is in considering such developments that I use this research's findings to argue for a theoretical conversation between interim literacies and the social realist perspective. How then can we consider the implications of these debates in thinking further about academic literacies pedagogy – especially for students who might not proceed to the second level of the same disciplinary knowledge? The next section uses a table to juxtapose five elements of academic literacies and social realist perspective in terms of this study's findings to try to open the theoretical conversation to suggest that the two are not mutually exclusive but rather imply each other from both ontological (nature of being) and epistemological (nature of knowledge) standpoints. Table 5-1 below tries to summarise my argument.

Table 5-1: Mutual implications of academic literacies and social realist perspective

Ontology (academic literacies)	**Epistemology (social realist)**
1. Writing as discoursal	1. Writing as specialised
2. Power relationships	2. Powerful knowledge
3. Writerly identity	3. Writing competence
4. Affect & reflection in writing	4. Reflexivity
5. Communities of discourse	5. Communities of practice

Looking at Table 5-1, what seems to be the problem in the debates is that each perspective seems to emphasise one element over the other in the philosophy of knowledge. Academic literacies research focuses on ontology (nature of being) with less emphasis on the epistemology (nature of knowledge). Instead, they focus on the *context* of the production of knowledge. Social realist research focuses on epistemology with less emphasis on ontology. Instead, they agree that knowledge is contextual, but then focus instead on the merits of knowledge itself. The debate ends up being about which side is more plausible than the other side, instead of seeing the benefits of mutual implications. Hence, I have identified the five thematic elements from both the literature and this study's findings to suggest a theoretical conversation between academic literacies perspective and the social realist perspective.

The **first element** is about the nature of writing. Academic literacies proponents argue that writing is discoursal (Ivanič, 1998). The social realist perspective argues that writing is a specialised practice (Slonimsky & Shalem, 2010). Whereas the debate seems to be polarised, we seem to have forgotten that Lea and Street (2006) argued that the study skills model together with the academic socialisation model and the academic literacies model are not mutually exclusive. Instead, the first two models are embedded in the academic literacies model. This argument is evident in the findings of this study wherein students' writing experiences of the reflective essay included their writing skills, content of sociology and the contextual demands of the assessment rubric. In other words,

students experience both the discourse and specialisation of writing a reflective essay in sociology.

The **second element** is the nature of power in the writing process. The academic literacies framework argues that writing is characterised by power relationships. They focus on who has the right to write and read (Goodfellow & Lea, 2007). The social realist perspective argues that knowledge of the powerful can be accessible and turned into powerful knowledge for every student (Wheelahan, 2010). One view is about multiple knowledges and the other is about studying knowledge in its own right. Whereas the debates seem to be polarised into whether there are one or more knowledges, Wheelahan (2010) emphasised that knowledge is social and that we need to be critical of it – both its context and content. Thus, common to both perspectives is criticality about knowledge. Looking at the findings of the study, the deconstruction of the rubric is a good example of power relationships versus powerful knowledge. The discussion of the study's findings suggests that the rubric imposes power, criteria and forms of writing on students. The conversation cannot end here. There are other ways of creating an assessment rubric to minimise power relationships and demystifying criteria. For example, co-creation of an assessment rubric can improve students' self-regulation and self-efficacy (Fraile, Panadero & Pardo, 2017) and sustainable learning (Gulikers & Oonk, 2019) thereby creating what social realists would term powerful knowledge about assessment criteria.

The **third element** in Table 5-1 is identity in writing. In academic literacies perspective, *writerly identity* is the process of conceiving and making of imaginative spaces to occupy as a writer (Bosanquet & Cahir, 2016). By implication it is through continuous writing competence (knowing *how* to write) that one develops writerly and professional identity (Anerback, Englund & Solbrekke, 2017). However, writing competence is not just a knowledge skill but also involves power relationships (Garska & O'Brien, 2019). The findings of this study indicate that students felt that their authorial identity (during writing) does not exist at university. They felt that they simply had to comply with academic convention – especially as expected by the assessment rubric. Hence, Pfeiffer (2018) argued that, for example, in the case of multilingual students), expressive writing could be used as a tool to develop the students into being academically literate. In this way writer identity is used to access powerful knowledge by students. Once again, this third element reiterates the mutual implications of academic literacies and the social realist perspective instead of seeing them as opposite ends of writing pedagogy.

The **fourth element** is the place of affect and reflection in writing. The academic literacies framework recognises the role of emotions, reflection, and identity in the writing process (Brand & Powell, 1986; Cameron, Nairn & Higgins, 2009; French, 2018). Writing is a social practice that evokes a variety of emotions and identities at different points in the writing process. The findings of this study have shown how students navigate emotions in writing the reflective essay. They also showed the

challenge that students faced in expressing emotions in academic writing even when they had to reflect. While reflection is an ongoing process that needs scaffolding for students (Coulson & Harvey 2013), social realism takes reflection and reflexivity to the level of knowledge (M.S. Archer, 2010). Reflexivity in writing does not only include recognition of emotions but *knowledge* of the self as a writer or writing practitioner (Davies, 2012; Slemming, 2019). In this fourth element, what we see again is how academic literacies and social realist perspective can expand research and understanding on the affective aspects of writing and self-knowledge, which could also feed into the third element on identity in writing.

The **fifth element** in Table 5-1 is the nature of socialising students during their transition into academic writing. For the purposes of the study, I have chosen Paxton's (2007) concept of interim literacies, which I discuss in Chapter Two, and use Figure 5-1 of this chapter to conceptualise some of the findings. Interim literacies help us to account for students' heteroglossic writing and their transition from school to university. It helps us to understand the entire findings on how students experience writing the field trip reflective essay. It helps us to understand the transitory nature of the challenges that the students in the study described. Interim literacies also help in formulating the recommendations of the study in the next chapter. At a broader level, it means students are part of discourse communities wherein they are introduced to social dimensions of writing (Beaufort, 1997; McCambridge, & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2012). However, for this chapter, the interim literacies framework has mutual implications for the concept of

conceptual resources that I discussed in Chapter Two and used in Figure 5-1 to discuss the findings.

The social realist perspective argues that students' transitions into being academically literate are made possible through their participation in communities of practice wherein they are explicitly socialised into forms of disciplinary knowledge to enable their epistemic ascent (Winch, 2014). 'Pedagogy is a sustained process whereby somebody(s) acquires new forms or develops existing forms of conduct, knowledge, practice and criteria, from somebody(s) or something deemed to be an appropriate provider and evaluator' (Bernstein, 1991, p. 259). The findings of this study also indicate the large extent to which students said that they needed different forms of assistance in both structuring their essay and in learning the sociological content. Context and content are not mutually exclusive. Hence, one cannot talk about focusing on the disciplinary content at the expense of context in which the content and its assessment happens. That is why I find polarised debates unproductive because by their very nature (and like discourse communities), communities of practice are contextual, ideological, and power laden. Yet they also seek to develop epistemic access for students in transition at university.

Conclusion

This chapter tried to conceptualise the findings to demonstrate the study's thesis statement. Given the findings, the thesis statement is that academic literacies and

the social realist perspective should not be polarised but rather seen as mutually implicating each other in improving writing pedagogy for first-year students. This argument is trying to take Jacobs' (2013) idea further but also avoid the impression that academic literacies and the social realist perspective are mutually exclusive in thinking and researching about student writing. Hence, the chapter ended with a theoretical conversation about the five elements.

To summarise the theoretical conversation through the five elements on writing and knowledge, I quote two scholars: one on social realism and the other on academic literacies. On social realism, Yates (2018, p. 47) reminds us, knowledge "is 'truth-seeking' rather than tied to immediate utilitarian problems and as such gives people access to abstract conceptual tools that enable more incisive ways of dealing with new things in their life beyond school" On academic literacies, Ivanič (1998, p. 296) reminds us that knowledge is not straightforward because:

> Identification with the objects of study and knowledge-making practices of fields of study is the only dimension on which alternatives exist. Some members of the academic community are students, apprentices, novices within the community … others are established, professional members of the same community: tutors, lecturers, researchers and theorists whose tasks are to teach and to contribute to the community's knowledge-making projects … I suggest that, in order to achieve a good degree, a student has to skilfully combine some characteristics of being an established member with those of being an apprentice.

I have taken these two ideas further in the next chapter in which I conclude the study and make recommendations.

Chapter Six

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to explore the experiences of first-year health science students in writing the reflective essay. As sociology was new and writing intensive for the students, it was important to find out how they understood and experienced the process of writing the reflective essay. The framework that guided the study is that of academic literacies, which views writing as a social practice. The key concepts for the study were *knowledge schema* and *authorial identity*. Interim literacies conceptualised the findings on knowledge schema and authorial identity. The significance of the study is not only to include the pre-writing experience but also to open a theoretical perspective between academic literacies and the social realist perspective of education. The study argued that interim literacies could help in conceptualising the challenges that students faced in writing the reflective essay as described in Chapter Four.

To conclude the study, I will repeat the research questions and sub-questions. Then I will use the sub-questions to provide key findings of the study. The research question was: 'How do first-year undergraduate students undertake and

experience the writing process for a reflective essay?' In answering the main question, the research sub-questions were:

1. What learning resources and strategies do students use to generate ideas in the pre-writing phase?
2. What challenges do students face in the writing process?
3. How does the process shape their identities as writers?

Key findings on learning resources and strategies were that besides reading about the historical background of the field trip sites, most students also created mind-maps and others engaged in brainstorming. It was also interesting to note that some of students interacted with their classmates, friends and senior students to discuss the challenges of writing the reflective essay.

Key findings on challenges that students faced during writing the reflective essay are textual and processual. For textual challenges, most students found it difficult to interpret their observations through sociological concepts and some struggled to structure the reflective essay while they grappled with content. Other students said that they were overwhelmed with information and could not easily decide which information to exclude. For processual challenges, most students felt that university writing limited their authorial authority and emotional expressions. Even though they were writing a reflective essay, they did not think that argumentation and reflection could be part of the same essay. Limits in authorial identity also placed students in a dilemma of 'tone' in writing. Students were not sure of how

they were expected to 'sound' in their writing. The deconstruction of the rubric suggested that the assessment rubric criteria contributed towards this dilemma because it demanded multiple literacies. Time management was also a key challenge for students in preparing, writing, revising, and submitting their reflective essay in time.

The above key challenges and processes seemed to shape students' writer identities in the process of writing the reflective essay. Hence the study suggested three writer identities, namely struggling writer, novice writer and tickbox writer. These writer identities do not intend to box students or suggest permanency. Rather, they describe authorial experiences of students while they were writing their reflective essay. They also reflect a transitory phase within students' writerly identities from school to university.

The objective of the study was to demonstrate how students' writing knowledge schemas and authorial identities develop through writing the reflective essay. In the process of data analysis and conceptualisation this objective had implications for a theoretical dialogue between academic literacies and the social realist perspective. This dialogue tried to show that debates about writing pedagogy should not polarise academic literacies and the social realist perspective but rather, should converge towards the advancement of writing pedagogy. This dialogue used five elements from the literature and findings of the study. From the study's objective, the argument (thesis statement) of this research

report is that academic literacies and the social realist perspective should not be polarised but rather seen as mutually implicating each other in improving writing pedagogy for first-year students.

Recommendations

From the findings descriptions and conceptualisation (Chapter Five) I make five recommendations. The first recommendation emerges from the debates about writing within and across disciplines, and the proposed theoretical dialogue between academic literacies and the social realist perspective. For a writing intensive service course that formed part of this study, I recommend an embedded or writing within the discipline approach to give students access to both academic literacies and rigorous disciplinary knowledge. It is not a new recommendation in the literature but rather an emphasis of this view based on the finding and thesis statement of the study. The closest research to my recommendation is a study by Hunter and Tse (2013, p. 226) in which they are responding to the 'call for the processes of writing and knowledge construction to be an integral part of disciplinary learning'. The study investigated a course, which actively integrated writing practice into disciplinary content. The writing part addressed the following processes: (1) reading critically; (2) structuring a coherent text; (3) synthesising/appropriate language required; (4) applying feedback/feedforward; (5) thought processes for analytical question; and (6) structure and language for assessment. Their findings suggest improvement in

writing and gaining knowledge about writing conventions to improve writing within a specific discipline. Writing within the discipline should not be confused with writing skills as already discussed in Chapter Two. Rather, it means a disciplinary course that also focuses on writing and language at university. By that, I do not mean separate academic development courses as suggested by McCabe (2011) and Khumalo and Maphalala (2019). Clarence and McKenna (2017) have already indicated that such embedded approaches could make academic literacies practitioners lose the sociopolitical context of writing. However, as I argued in Chapter Five, this does not necessarily have to be the case if we do not view academic literacies and social realist perspective as mutually exclusive.

The second recommendation is to scaffold the process of writing the reflective essay. Reflection is an ongoing process that needs scaffolding for students (Coulson & Harvey, 2013). Furthermore, social realism takes reflection and reflexivity to the level of knowledge (M.S. Archer, 2010). Reflexivity in writing includes emotions and knowledge of the self as a writer or writing practitioner (Davies, 2012; Slemming, 2019). Scaffolding might allow students to manage their time, reflect on the writing process through feedback and engage with revisions, plagiarism and the dilemmas of emotions and authorial identity before they submit the final work. Scaffolding can enhance metacognition of the writing genre during the writing process (Pessoa, Mitchell, & Miller, 2018; Negrettia, & McGrath, 2018; van Dijk, Vivian, & Malan, 2019) especially considering that first-

year students are poorly inducted into their disciplinary genres (Nallaya, 2018). In short, undergraduate health science students might benefit from scaffolding academic literacies to enable them to access disciplinary knowledge and reflexivity (Bjerkvik, & Hilli, 2019; Rose, et al., 2008).

The third recommendation is to find ways to co-construct or at least hold workshops on the assessment rubric with students. Carless (2015) argues for co-construction of assessment rubrics with students to demystify and enable students to negotiate meaning and voice in comprehending and executing the rubric expectations. Matshedisho (2020) also indicates how health science undergraduate students struggle with reading and understanding an assessment rubric for a reflective essay. However, the deconstruction of the assessment rubric in Chapter Five indicated how the reflective essay rubric is laden with ideology, power relations and disciplinary situatedness. Thus, the recommended co-construction or rubric workshop should not be a SOLO taxonomy checklist of what students should do but rather a literacy exercise that enables students to see through and engage with the multiple literacies and metaphors that are embedded in the assessment rubric (Bearman & Ajjawi, 2019). Such an engagement might allow students to negotiate and find their tones in writing the reflective essay.

The fourth recommendation is constructive alignment of the course in which learning aims, outcomes and assessments dovetail.

> ‘Constructive alignment’ starts with the notion that the learner constructs his or her own learning through relevant learning activities. The teacher's job is to create a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes (Biggs, 2014, p. 1).

In the case of the reflective essay, as a lecturer I need to demonstrate to students how the assessment fits into the course outcomes and other assessments. This is important considering that the findings suggest that students could not comprehend how their reflective essay writing helped them with writing the second essay in the course. This finding suggests either lack of articulation within the course or lack of communication to students about how the reflective essay might help them to attempt the second essay. Thus, constructive alignment and articulation might help students with both course content and expectation of what do to with course content when they write their reflective essay.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I suggested a theoretical conversation between academic literacies and the social-realist perspective in education because there seems to be little research on evidence of how academic literacies pedagogy provides epistemic access for students (Butler, 2013). Perhaps research on scaffolding (as explained in the second recommendation) might be the springboard from which to provide evidence of how academic literacies and the social realist perspective could provide theoretical tools through which we research evidence of epistemic access in the context of interim literacies. Such research would be important because: ‘Learning requires opportunities for

practice and exploration, space for thinking or reflecting "in your head" and for interaction with others, and learning from and with peers and experts' (Fry, 2009, p. 22).

Limitations of the Study

The study has three limitations. Firstly, it did not investigate the actual students' written reflective essays but only students' experiences of writing them. Secondly, written tutorial responses did not allow for elaboration or probing. Finally, the six interviews did not represent the class but only those who were willing (mostly males and only one female) to take part in the study.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Field trip Brief and Assessment Rubric

Section 1: SOCL 1016 Assignment Field Trip Brief

Reflection Piece Question

From your Kagiso/Munsiville field trip observations, critically reflect on the site you visited and how it helps you think about health care.

TASKS DURING THE FIELD TRIP

Carry a field work journal/notebook in which you *make notes* on the following:

(A) Observations (Describe the site, people and their surroundings)

- How does the air/place smell?
- How hygienic are those conditions?
- What amenities are available?
- What sounds do you hear?
- What observations can you make about people within this community?
- What health hazards can you see, hear and smell?
- What observations can you make about health care workers in this community?
- What other observations can you make?

(B) Enquiries (Ask questions about the site)

- What socio-economic issues affect this community?
- What health issues affect this community?
- What is the purpose of the facility that you are visiting?
- How does this facility function?
- What are the successes of this facility?
- What are the challenges in this facility?
- What other questions can you ask?

TASKS AFTER THE FIELD TRIP

(C) Synthesis (convert your field trip notes into an essay)

- Outline the history of the area that you visited.
- Use five (5) concepts from lectures/readings that best explain your **observations** and **enquiries**.
- Explain how each concept relates to some of the observations & answers from your questions.
- Is there another way to explain the observations? How so?
- How do health care models help you to explain your observations?

(D) Reflections (express your thought within the essay)

- How did you feel about the area/site that you visited? Why?
- How helpful was the field trip? Why?
- How has the literature helped you explain your observations?

Section 2: Rubric for SOCL 1016 Reflection Piece[12]

CRITERIA	Minimal Reflection D (50-59%)	Satisfactory Reflection C (60-69%)	Good Reflection B (70-74%)	Critical Reflection A (75 -100 %)
Describe the site and locate it in historical context.	Describes the site but with limited background.	Describes the site and gives historical background.	As in **C** and explains how the historical background is influencing the present situation.	As in **B** and reflects critically on how the history influences health and disease patterns in the area.
Select and explain key concepts relevant to your observations.	Lists some concepts but with limited explanations. Repeats concepts for different observations.	Lists five concepts drawn from literature but limited explanation of concepts. Repeats explanations.	Good display of concepts & context from literature. Attempts to highlight *alternative* concepts that can explain the same observations.	As in **B and** presents a strong position (*clear voice*) in relation to what these explanations tell us about health and disease issues and how the affect site they visited.

[12] Fail = (0-49%) in which the student misunderstood the question.

Apply concepts to explain the observations.	Focuses only on one or two concepts with limited use of observations as evidence for applying concepts. Poor application with no originality.	Lists five concepts but with limited application to context of site visited. Observations show good coverage and relevant evidence but insufficient integration with concepts.	Good evidence and application of relevant concepts to the site. Can apply historical evidence to enhance conceptual application. Awareness of problems in applying concepts to the observations	As in **B** and ideas are well supported by literature to understand the observations. Reflects critically by assessing or evaluating all chosen concepts to explain the observations
Reflect on the value of the visit and how it shapes your thinking about health care.	Lists pros & cons of the field trip without reaching a conclusion. No analysis of implications.	Expresses pros & cons of the field trip. States a conclusion but with limited discussion of implications.	Balanced analysis of pros & cons of the field trip. Conclusion is well reasoned and explores implications for health care.	As in **B** and is able to generalise beyond the site visited. Uses literature to show how visit has changed their thinking about health care.

Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire

GUIDING QUESTIONS

STUDY TITLE: First-Year Students' Writing Process for a Reflective Essay: Knowledge Schema and Authorial Identity.

1. What do you do before you start writing an academic essay?

2. What did you do before you start writing your reflection piece essay?

3. What challenges did you encounter before starting your reflection piece essay?

4. What challenges did you encounter during the writing of the essay?

5. What kinds of things do you do to stay on track while writing your academic essay?
    a. To who do you go for help?
    b. What resources do you consult

6. Did you revise your academic essays? Why?

7. What kind of changes do you make when you revise your academic essay?

8. Do you think you were able to put your thoughts into words for the reflection pieces? Explain.

9. Do you think you were able to put your feelings into words for the reflections piece? Explain.

10. Did you think about whether your reflection paper answered the question?
    a. If no why?
    b. If yes, how did you know?

11. How did you feel about writing the reflection piece:
    a. Before you started writing it?
    b. While you were writing it?
    c. After finishing it?

12. Do you think sociology essay writing is different from essay writing in school? Explain

13. Learning from your field trip writing experience, what changes did you make in writing your next sociology essay?

14. What assistance would you have liked to receive in writing the reflection piece essay?

15. Do you have anything that you would like to add about your experience of writing the reflection piece essay? Explain.

Appendix C: Participants Information & Consent Forms

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Rajohane Matshedisho and I am a Masters student in Education at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating how first year students undertake and experience the writing process of a reflective essay. The aim of this research project is to find out ways in which students perceive both the essay and the writing process. The objective is to learn from these experiences and improve my teaching of academic writing.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview. The interview will take 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using a digital device (optional).

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous; I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information. The information you give to me will be securely held and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any

distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report, which will be available online through the university library website. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Rajohane Matshedisho (072 227 6060)

Email : Rajohane.Matshedisho@wits.ac.za

Supervisor : Dr Belinda Mendelowitz

Telephone : 011-717-3178

Email : Belinda.Mendelowitz@wits.ac.za

Consent Form

Title of project **:** First-Year Students' Writing Process for a Reflective Essay

Name of researcher : Rajohane Matshedisho

I, _____ agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. Please circle the relevant options below.

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous YES NO

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes

in his / her research report YES NO

I agree that the interview may be audio recorded YES NO

I agree that the information I provide may be used YES NO

anonymously by other researchers following this project

…… (Signature)

…… (Name of participant)

…… (Date)