

https://dspace.org/

A social constructivist approach to writing centre practice: challenges of raising academic genre awareness through group writing consultations

Shabanza, Kabinga Jack

2019

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/28615

Shabanza, Kabinga Jack (2019) A social constructivist approach to writing centre practice : challenges of raising academic genre awareness through group writing consultations, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/28615>

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

A Social Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of raising Academic Genre Awareness through Group Writing Consultations

---

Kabinga Jack Shabanza

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, in fulfilment of the academic requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Supervisor: Prof Leketi Makalela

Johannesburg, May 2019

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of All Humanity.

Acknowledgements

I am infinitely grateful to God, the Almighty, for giving me the will and the might to undertake and complete the study.

I would like to express my gratitude to my wife, Grace Kanyeba Tshimanga, for her unwavering friendship and support, and to my children, Deborah, Anita, Rachel, Maxine, and Elreal, my source of inspiration, encouragement and joy.

I am indebted to my parents, my father, Jean-de-Dieu Shimata Fuabana, and mother, Elisabeth Manionga Nzeu, for their priceless education, motivation and moral support. They taught me to 'dream big' and keep my faith in God even under difficult circumstances.

I thank my supervisor, Prof. Leketi Makalela, for his guidance, encouragement and support. I also thank Dr Dominique Mwepu, for his contribution at the initial phase of the research.

I would like to convey my sincere thanks to the following friends and colleagues at the University of Johannesburg for their words of encouragement. They are: Cecilia Dube, Ntombi Mdunge, Franci van Vuuren, Julia Mabulele, Kedi Mawer, Herve Mitoumba-Tindy, Rose Adegoke, Queenta Sindoh, Fokwa Honore, Prof. Rene van Wyk, Dr Welcome Kubeka, Dr Mark Winter, Fahmida Cachalia, Dr Andre van Zyl, Dr Graham Dampier, and Dr Guy Mihindou.

I do not have words to express my gratitude to my friends at Wits University, Dr Sibusiso Ndlangamandla, Dr Aloysius Kondoua, Dr Lomagugu Masango, Dr Thembeka Shange, and at Unisa, Moses Ralushai Mphariseni, and Hannes van Vuuren, for encouraging or challenging me to complete my studies.

To all those who provided me with the much needed moral support and whom I have not mentioned here,

Thank you greatly for your contribution.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own original work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted previously for any other degree or examination at any other university.

_____

Kabinga Jack Shabanza

Table of Contents

DEDICATION ..... **I**
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **II**
DECLARATION ..... **III**
TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... **IV**
LIST OF FIGURES ..... **X**
LIST OF TABLES ..... **XI**
CHAPTER ONE **1**
INTRODUCTION **1**
1.1. Background **1**
1.2. Situating the Study: Thesis Development **2**
1.3. Contextual considerations: writing centres at the University of Johannesburg **3**
1.3.1. Overview of the UJ writing centres 3
1.3.2. UJ writing centres: pedagogical perspectives 5
1.4. Problem Statement **6**
1.4.1. Background to the Problem 6
1.4.2. Problem Statement 6
1.5. Aim **7**
1.5.1. Aim of the Study 7
1.5.2. Objectives of the Study 7
1.5.3. Research Questions 8
1.6. Rationale/ Justification **8**
1.7. Scope of the Study **10**
1.8. Methodology **10**
1.9. Organisation of the Work **12**
1.10. Conclusion **14**
CHAPTER TWO **15**
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW **15**
2.1. Introduction **15**
2.2. Theoretical Framework: Social Constructivism (SC), New Literacies (NL), Academic Literacies (AL) and the Group Writing Consultation Model (GC) **15**
2.2.1. Social Constructivism: an Overview 15
2.2.2. New Literacies Studies (NLS) 22
2.2.3. The Group Writing Consultation Model 34
2.3. Literature Review on Social Constructivism, AL and Writing Centre Consultations in the Higher Education Context **40**
2.3.1. Social Constructivist Pedagogy 40
2.3.2. Studies on Writing Consultation Practice 45
2.4. Conclusion **53**
CHAPTER THREE **55**
METHODOLOGY **55**
3.1. Introduction **55**

3.2. Research Paradigm **55**
3.3. Research Design **55**
3.3.1. Mixed-Methods Design 55
3.3.2. Qualitative Approach 56
3.3.3. Quantitative Approach 58
3.4. Data Collection Methods, Procedures, Participants and Instruments **59**
3.4.1. Survey Questionnaire 2014 59
3.4.2. Focus Groups 63
3.4.3. Video-recorded Observations 68
3.4.4. Questionnaires 2016 73
3.5. Data Analysis **75**
3.5.1 Questionnaire Data Analysis 75
3.5.2. Focus Group Data Analysis 76
3.5.3. Observation Data Analysis 76
3.6. Ethical Considerations **77**
3.7. Limitations **77**
3.8. Conclusion **79**
CHAPTER FOUR **80**
QUESTIONNAIRE 2014 DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION **80**
4.1. Introduction **80**
4.2. Student Questionnaires **80**
4.2.1. Challenges and benefits of a one-on-one consultation 80
4.2.2. Social interactions and processes in the GC 83
4.2.3. Social interactions and disciplinary genre awareness 95
4.3. Writing Consultant Questionnaire Data **101**
4.3.1. Challenges facing writing consultants in a GC 101
4.3.2. Social interactions in a GC 103
4.3.3. Social interactions and disciplinary genre awareness 111
4.4. Summary of Findings **115**
4.4.1 Challenges facing student and consultants in GC 116
4.4.2 Social interactions in GCs 116
4.4.3 Social interactions for disciplinary genre/text awareness in GCs 117
4.5. Conclusion **118**
CHAPTER FIVE **119**
FOCUS GROUP DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION **119**
5.1. Introduction **119**
5.2. Focus Group with Students **119**
5.2.1. One-on-one writing consultation 119
5.2.2 Exposure and gain from varying perspectives or peer learning : advantages of the GC 120
5.2.3 Development of student voice/ opinion 122
5.2.4. Speaking vernacular languages 122

5.2.5 Benefits of the GC 125
5.2.6 The questioning technique 125
5.2.7 Consultant's attitude 126
5.2.8 Group seating arrangement in the writing centre 126
5.2.9 Collaboration between students 127
5.2.10 Consultant practices in GC 127
5.2.11 How to improve the GC 128
5.2.12 Focus of the consultation 128
5.2.13 Consultant understanding of disciplinary content 128
5.3. Focus Group with Writing Consultants 129
5.3.1. Collaboration among students in the GC 129
5.3.2. Consultants not being from the same field as the students 130
5.3.3. Consultant practices in a GC 131
5.3.4 The questioning technique 132
5.3.5. Discussion management/ disagreement among students 134
5.3.6. Seating arrangement 137
5.3.7. Focus of GC 138
5.3.8. Attention on individual needs 139
5.3.9. Length of time and amount of assignments 140
5.3.10 Consultant attitude 142
5.3.11. Student Practices in GC 143
5.3.12. Talk in the GC 144
5.3.13. Use of vernacular language in the GC 145
5.4. Summary of Findings 146
5.4.1 Themes related to the challenges of GC from a social perspective 146
5.4.2 Themes related to the social interactions in GC 147
5.4.3 Themes related to social interactions and acquisition of disciplinary literacies 150
5.4.4 Themes related to general challenges in GCs 151
5.5. Conclusion 152
CHAPTER SIX 153
VIDEO OBSERVATIONS DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION 153
6.1. Introduction 153
6.2. Video Observation A (Nancy) 153
6.2.1. GC seating arrangement, setting, and participants' positioning 153
6.2.2. The questioning technique 154
6.2.3. Student practices in the GC 159
6.2.4. Consultant practices and who decided the GC agenda 160
6.2.5. Collaboration among students 162
6.2.6. Focus of GC: Consultant understanding of disciplinary content 163
6.2.7. Developing student voice: Consultant Motivation/ encouragement 166
6.2.8. The Lack of time 167

6.3. Video Observation B (Frank) 168
6.3.1. Seating arrangement 168
6.3.2. The questioning technique 169
6.3.3. Student practices in a GC 170
6.3.4. Consultant practices 172
6.3.5. Collaboration among students: Students' use of questioning 178
6.3.6. Focus of GC: Consultant understanding of disciplinary content 178
6.3.7. Developing student voice: Consultant motivation or encouragement of students 181
6.3.8. Student non-participation and student participation or involvement in the GC 181
6.3.9. Disadvantage of GC: Administrative tasks 182
6.4. Summary of findings 183
6.4.1. Questioning as a GC strategy 183
6.4.2. Student practices 184
6.4.3. Consultant practices 184
6.4.4. Discussion/ Talk 185
6.4.5. Consultant's understanding of disciplinary content 185
6.4.6. Seating arrangement and organisational issues 186
6.5. Conclusion 186
CHAPTER SEVEN 188
QUESTIONNAIRES 2016 DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION 188
7.1. Introduction 188
7.2. Student Data 2016 188
7.2.1 Student Background Information 188
7.2.2. GC and Social Interactions 191
7.2.3. Student Practices 200
7.2.4. Consultant Practices 204
7.2.6. Consultant's understanding of disciplinary content 210
7.2.7. Seating arrangement and organisational issues 214
7.3. Writing Consultant 2016 Data 215
7.3.1. Writing Consultant Background Information 216
7.3.2. GC and social practices 217
7.3.3. Student Practices 219
7.3.4. Writing consultant Practices 220
7.3.5. Discussion/ Talk 223
7.3.6. Writing consultant and disciplinary content 228
7.4. Conclusion 231
CHAPTER EIGHT 232
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS 232
8.1. Introduction 232
8.2. The Group Consultation Model: Nature of the Problems 233
8.3. The social Constructivist Nature of the Group Consultation (GC) 239

8.3.1. Students and consultants' perceptions of the social interactions in GC 239
8.3.2. Discursive Practices in the Group Consultation 249
8.4 Writing Centre, Academic Literacies (AL) and Disciplinary Literacies Practices in GC: A Social Constructivist Perspective 263
8.4.1. Writing Centre Practice in GC: Social Constructivist Glance 263
8.4.2. Academic Literacies in GC: Social Constructivist Glance 267
8.4.3. Disciplinary Literacies in GC: Social Constructivist Glance 269
8.5. Conclusion 272
CHAPTER NINE 273
CONCLUSIONS: SOCIAL DISCURSIVE PRACTICES IN A GROUP CONSULTATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR WRITING CENTRE PRACTICE 273
9.1. Introduction 273
9.2. Summary of Findings 273
9.2.1. Context 273
9.2.2. Aims and Objectives 274
9.2.3. Research Questions 274
9.2.4. Scope of the Study 274
9.2.5. Methodology 275
9.2.6. Significance of the Study 276
9.2.7. Limitations 276
9.3. Conclusions 276
9.3.1. Group Consultation: the Risks 276
9.3.2. Writing Group Consultation Discursive Practices and Social Processes 280
9.4. Implications for Writing Centre Practice or Recommendations 286
9.4.1. Student Practices 286
9.4.2. Writing Consultant Practices 289
9.4.3. Writing Group Consultation and the Disciplinary Literacies 291
9.5. Recommendations for Further Research 293
9.6. Conclusion 293
SOURCES 295
APPENDIX A: STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE 2014 319
APPENDIX B: STUDENT SURVEY INFORMATION SHEET 322
APPENDIX C: STUDENT SURVEY CONSENT FORM 323
APPENDIX D: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE WRITING CONSULTANT 324
APPENDIX E: SURVEY WRITING CONSULTANT INFORMATION SHEET 327
APPENDIX F: SURVEY WRITING CONSULTANT CONSENT FORM 329
APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE STUDENTS 330
APPENDIX H: FOCUS GROUP STUDENTS INFORMATION SHEET 332
APPENDIX I: FOCUS GROUP STUDENTS CONSENT FORM 334
APPENDIX J: FOCUS GROUP CONSULTANT INFORMATION SHEET 336
APPENDIX K: FOCUS GROUP CONSULTANT INTERVIEW GUIDE 338
APPENDIX L: VIDEO OBSERVATION STUDENT GUIDE 340
APPENDIX M: VIDEO OBSERVATION STUDENTS PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET 341
APPENDIX N: VIDEO OBSERVATION STUDENT CONSENT FORM 343

APPENDIX O: VIDEO OBSERVATION CONSULTANT GUIDE 345
APPENDIX P: VIDEO OBSERVATION CONSULTANT INFORMATION SHEET 346
APPENDIX Q: VIDEO OBSERVATION CONSULTANT CONSENT FORM.....348

List of Figures

Figure 1: GC seating arrangement at APB (Consultant: Nancy) 154
Figure 2: GC seating arrangement at APK (Consultant: Frank) 169
Figure 3: Questionnaire 2016 students by year of study 189
Figure 4: Questionnaire 2016 students by faculty 190
Figure 5: Number of GCs attended by student 190
Figure 6: Number of students per GC 191
Figure 7: Students' perceptions of the GC 192
Figure 8: Students' impressions of the benefits of GCs 194
Figure 9: Students' impressions of the challenges of the GC 197
Figure 10: Student practices in GC 201
Figure 11: Decision on and control of the GC agenda 204
Figure 12: Consultant practices in GC 205
Figure 13: Students expressing their personal views 207
Figure 14: Students' use of vernacular (student data) 209
Figure 15: Consultants paying individual attention to students (student data) 210
Figure 16: Consultants' understanding students' disciplinary content (student data) 211
Figure 17: Writing areas of focus in GC (student data) 212
Figure 18: Consultant providing practical examples (student data) 213
Figure 19: Students assisting one another in GC (student data) 214
Figure 20: Students' perceptions of the GC social interactions 241

List of Tables

Table 1: Student perception of how to improve the One-on-one consultation 82
Table 2: Number of group consultations attended per student 84
Table 3: Number of students per GC 84
Table 4: Students' general perceptions of the GC 84
Table 5: Students' perceptions of the challenges of the GC 86
Table 6: Consultant GC practices as described by the students 87
Table 7: Student practices as described by students 89
Table 8: Writing areas learnt by students 93
Table 9: Who between the consultant and students spoke mostly in the GC 95
Table 10: Who between the consultant and students decided the GC agenda 97
Table 11: Consultant's understanding of the disciplinary content 97
Table 12: Focus of the First One-on-one and GC 99
Table 13: Focus of second one-on-one consultation 99
Table 14: Focus of third one-on-one consultation 100
Table 15: Focus of fourth one-on-one consultation 100
Table 16: Consultants' perceptions of how to improve the one-on-one consultation 102
Table 17: Number of GC conducted per consultant 103
Table 18: Consultant practices as described by consultants 103
Table 19: Student practices as described by consultants 104
Table 20: Areas learnt by students as described by consultants 109
Table 21: Consultants' perceptions of how to improve the GC 110
Table 22: Focus of first GC for consultants 111
Table 23: Focus of second GC for consultants 112
Table 24: Focus of third GC for consultants 112
Table 25: Focus of fourth GC for consultants 112
Table 26: Who spoke the most between the students and the consultant during the GC 113
Table 28: Number of GCs conducted and number of students per GC (consultant data) 216
Table 29: Summary of student practices in a GC 287
Table 30: Summary of writing consultant practices in a GC 289

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The current global higher education landscape has been characterised by the massification of university education, with inflows of students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds and multicultural backgrounds. This has resulted in the admission of scores of students who are 'underprepared' for academia, particularly from the viewpoint of Academic Literacies (AL) (Bharuthram & McKenna 2012; de Kadt 2006; Kane 2012). Writing centres have been at the forefront of efforts to provide these students with the academic development support necessary to bring their AL proficiency to an acceptable level (Archer 2008; Bharuthram & McKenna 2012).

In South Africa, the University of Cape Town was the first to introduce a writing centre in 1994, while the University of Johannesburg only opened its first writing centre in 2003. South African universities, notably; the University of Cape Town (UCT) (Archer, 2010; 2017), the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) (Nichols 2017; Dison & Mendelotz 2017), the University of Western Cape (UWC) (Slemming 2017), University of Johannesburg (UJ) (Kane 2012; Shabanza 2014; Mitoumba-Tindy 2017), Fort-Hare University, and the University of Stellenbosch (US) (Daniels, Richards & Lackay 2017), each has a writing centre. The latter are also referred to as Centre for Teaching and Learning, Learning Centre, Research Office, Study Centre, and even Reading and Writing Centre. The mandates vested in these writing centres vary from redressing the AL imbalances of the past, to spearheading research within the academic development programmes (Archer 2008; Dison & Clarence 2017; Slemming 2017). Since 1994, these universities have experimented with several conceptualisations of the writing centre and the current corpus of research in the field indicates writing centres still represent a work in progress.

Due to their situation within the academic development or academic support departments, the place of writing centres within institutions has been peripheral (North 1984). Only a few of these writing centres take centre stage for offering credit bearing modules, which feature on the list of mainstream university programmes (Archer & Richards 2011: 8). Even geographically, writing centres are often located in the marginal or isolated spaces of

universities, with no real funding (Ibid). Their closeness to the academic development units or divisions led to writing centres being considered for a long time as remedial spaces; a quick-fix one-stop-shop to rectify language deficiencies in individual students (Archer 2008; Archer & Richards 2011: 8; North 1990). In spite of these limitations, writing centres have been expanding to the point of being considered as an essential aspect of any academic development project. As part of their work, most writing centres cover study skills, writing, reading, and research skills. Moreover, writing centre theory and practice have developed beyond considering reading and writing simply as technical skills, to consider the real nature of writing, reading and research as social practices, which are embedded in the power relations and meaning making practices of prevailing institutions and structures (Archer 2008; Bourdieu 1991; Cope & Kalantziz 1993; Lea & Street 1998).

Writing centre research in the South African context has mostly focused on broader issues such as; the impact of writing centres on widening access to higher education, the impact of writing centre interventions on students' success, and the writing across the curriculum or writing in the disciplines approaches (Archer 2008, 2011; Kaplan 1996: 368). Few studies have focused on the specific pedagogical strategies used in writing consultations. With the rapid increase in the number of writing group consultations (GCs), it is imperative to zoom in on the specific writing centre pedagogical strategies used in the GC in order to improve their quality and maximise students' learning. This thesis represents an attempt to understand the writing GC as a novel pedagogical phenomenon in the writing centre context.

1.2. Situating the Study: Thesis Development

The researcher initially intended to investigate which one of the Individual Consultations (ICs) and the Group Writing Consultations (GCs) were most effective in addressing the AL problems of students. It also intended to foreground the challenges of both strategies. After initial discussions with my supervisor, I found that such an approach implied that the IC was easier to conduct than the GC, and that my possibly biased position seemed to favour the IC; making it difficult to investigate the real nature of both types of consultation. As a result, it was resolved that for the study to do justice to both strategies, I would carry out an investigation of the challenges posed by the GC. Another reason for this choice was because the IC was already the norm in most writing centres (Shabanza 2012), while the GC represents an entirely new phenomenon. It further appeared that problematising the GC in itself implied that, as a strategy,

it was difficult, risky and almost unwelcome. As a result, the challenges of conducting a GC were to be investigated without necessarily comparing it to the IC.

Investigating the challenges of a GC lends itself to the theories and principles of New Literacies Studies (NLS), social constructivism, and writing centre practice. Social constructivism through the Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) allows one to zoom-in on the writing consultant-student relationship and dynamics, through discussion, for instance (Corden 2001; Matsumara, Slater & Crosson 2008; Reznitskaya, Anderson & Kuo 2007). NLS sheds light on the social aspect of a GC (Gee 1990: 142-3; Lanshear & Knobel 1997: 17); whereas writing Centre Theory foregrounds shifts or the absence thereof in writing consultation processes (Kane 2012; Shabanza 2014). Combining these theories, it is assumed, allows for a better interpretation of the data and for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in a complex writing centre environment.

1.3. Contextual considerations: writing centres at the University of Johannesburg

1.3.1. Overview of the UJ writing centres

The University of Johannesburg currently has four Writing Centres, one on each campus. These are the Auckland Park-Kingsway (APK), Bunting Road (APB), Doornfontein (DFC) and Soweto (SWC) Campuses. The centres aim to cater for the Academic Literacies (AL) needs of approximately 50,000 students (UJ Academic Development & Innovation Annual Report 2016). Established in 2003, the writing centre on the Kingsway Campus (APK) campus is managed by a writing centre coordinator, who leads a team of ten writing consultants, each working 10 hours per week. These consultants are all postgraduate (PG) students from various departments including English (1), political science (2), development studies (3), economics (1), Law (1), linguistics (1), geology (1), sociology (1), and anthropology (2) (UJ Academic Development & Innovation Annual Report 2016). The APK writing centre caters mainly for students from the engineering, science, financial and economic sciences, humanities and law faculties. Challenges experienced at APK comprise of problems with the manual booking system and data capturing of increasingly large amounts of consultations. This is created by the fact that most students procrastinate and start working on their assignments a day or two before the due date. This then leads the students flocking to the writing centre in large numbers simultaneously during peak periods. The difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that due to lack

of a space on the booking sheets, lecturers resort to organising students in groups of six to ten students.

Started in 2009, the Auckland Park Bunting Road (APB) writing centre's staff comprises a coordinator and six writing consultants and a postgraduate fellow. The team assists students from purchasing management, accounting, fashion and jewellery design, and operations managements, and public relations. The writing consultants are from development studies (2), political science (2), education (1), sociology (1), and linguistics (1) (UJ Academic Development & Innovation Annual Report 2016). Challenges encountered by the centre are mainly related to limited physical space, particularly for GCs, and to the fact that certain students fail to honour their bookings purportedly due to circumstances beyond their control, such as changes in schedules and the pressure of completing several assignments with simultaneous deadlines.

The Doornfontein Campus writing centre opened in 2011 and is managed by a coordinator with the assistance of six writing consultants, respectively from economics (1), biotechnology (1), development studies (1), English (1), mechanical engineering (1) and chemistry (1) (UJ Academic Development & Innovation Annual Report 2016). The writing centre receives students from departments such as biomedical sciences, environmental health, somatology, radiography, food technology, industrial engineering, town and regional planning, and so forth. Challenges are related to issues of a lack of space for consultations, as the venue can only accommodate three ICs at a time and hosting more than one GC is already problematic. Hefty timetables occupy students from 8:00 until after 17:00 and leave them no time to book for and attend writing consultations. Students who can still manage to make bookings find it difficult to have to choose between attending a lecture or honouring a writing consultation.

The Soweto Campus writing centre opened its doors to students in 2012. The coordinator is assisted by six writing consultants from economics (1), biotechnology (1), development studies (2), English (1), mechanical engineering (1) and chemistry (1) (UJ Academic Development & Innovation Annual Report 2016). It receives students from departments such as biomedical sciences, environmental health, somatology, radiography, food technology, industrial engineering, and town and regional planning. Challenges are similar to those encountered at DFC.

For the 2014 academic year, the four Writing Centres conducted a combined figure of approximately 6000 consultations with both undergraduate and postgraduate students, of which approximately 600 were GCs. Based on the 2014 annual report, there are indications that these numbers are on the increase; thereby making the Writing Centres a potential growth area within the Academic Development Centre (ADC).

1.3.2. UJ writing centres: pedagogical perspectives

The UJ writing centres adhere to the notion of writing as a social practice (Street 1995; Lea and Street 2006). This approach focuses on developing the student into a better and self-reliant writer, as opposed to product oriented writing centres that focuse on improving the text (Bawarshi & Pelkowski 1999; North, 1984). Consultants are trained to optimally utilise the consultation time and space in a manner that empowers the student and enriches his or her experience at varsity. Consultants do not do work for students and take care not to spoon-feed the students or provide them with answers. They rather guide the students through a series of questions to the discovery of the answer or knowledge. Based on a peer-review model, students sit side-by-side with consultants, who model the target academic skills as practically as possible. Consultants are encouraged to make positive and encouraging statements about the students and their work, preferably focusing on specific writing areas. They adhere to the 'feedback sandwich' principle, that is, to give the 'good news' first, then the 'bad news' and finally make 'suggestions' in the provision of feedback (Dube Lear & Kane 2009). The focus is primarily on higher order (broader issues such as the students' understanding of the topic, inclusion of all the elements of the answer, etc.), and middle order concerns (structure organisation, logical flow of ideas, etc.), and very little on lower order concerns such as grammar, spelling and punctuation. It can also be said that consultants do not criticise lecturers with students or allocate, even hypothetically, a mark to the students' work.

Each consultation session, which typically lasts 30 minutes for undergraduate students, starts with an 'interview' whereby the consultant requests the student to state how he/she would like to be assisted. The writing areas covered include: report writing (including reformulating a topic, choosing a focus area, planning, writing a first draft, creating unity, referencing); assignment writing (understanding the questions or guidelines); compiling a reference list and in-text referencing, summarising, paraphrasing and quoting directly to avoid plagiarism; editing, revising and proofreading of assignments; as well as curriculum vitae and cover letter writing. As stated earlier, GCs have been introduced to remedy to issues related to large class

sizes and a lack of material time to assist as many students as possible with limited resources. In essence, this study problematises the GC as a pedagogical strategy in order to gain insight into its potential social constructive nature and complexities.

1.4. Problem Statement

1.4.1. Background to the Problem

Although writing centre research in the South African context is still embryonic, a few researchers have alluded to the IC as a pedagogical strategy; describing it and outlining its guiding principles. Archer and Richards (2011) compiled a book, which they described as the first attempt "by the writing centre movement [in South Africa] to collect some of our history and research into one volume", in which various authors sparsely highlighted the features of an IC. Principles upheld in the one-on-one consultation facilitation strategy include the questioning technique (Deyi 2011: 53; Kane 2012; Shabanza 2012), drafting and redrafting, as well as a minimum of two or more consultations on the same work (Deyi 2011: 56; Leibowitz & Parkerson 2011: 77). They also include the focus on the writing process and the writer, rather than on the text or product (Leibowitz & Parkerson 2011: 77; Kane 2012), and the development of meta-awareness or metacognition, as well as critical thinking skills in students (Leibowitz & Parkerson 2011: 87). This preliminary work has provided writing centre practitioners with a preliminary framework for understanding, implementing and training consultants on the IC. The problem is that little, if not nothing, has been said about the GC in terms of the practical steps or pedagogical strategies or principles to take into consideration while assisting students.

1.4.2. Problem Statement

Given what has been discussed in the previous paragraph and until recently, research on AL and on writing centre practice has focused on 'group discussions' (Grabe & Kaplan 1996), 'peer group writing' (Galvis 2010; Hansen & Liu 2005) and 'writing circles' (Lee & Boud 2003), and not on the GC. As the GC is a relatively new phenomenon in the South African context, there seems to be no theory and/ or literature that could be used in attempting to understand or explain its nature and methodology. This is because neither the peer writing group nor the writing circles correspond to the GC in terms of group organisation or dynamics or methodological approach.

On the one hand, a peer writing group pertains to a group of writers or students looking at each other's drafts and giving each other feedback, either under the supervision of a senior writer, or tutor, or not (Galvis 2010; Hansen & Liu 2005). On the other hand, writing circles refer to a scenario where a group of individuals undertake to produce a piece of writing by sharing roles and sections to write, whether under the leadership of a peer or not, or simply to give each other feedback (Lee & Boud 2003). I propose for purposes of this study that the GC, on the other hand, gathers students from the same discipline, course or module, writing one or separate drafts, to interact with a writing consultant, who may not be from their discipline, and receive feedback on their writing. The group composition, working strategies and purposes differ from those of the other two types of writing groups. Hence, because the intention of this study is to find out exactly what happens in a GC, I refrained from assuming that what happens is either a group discussion, or a writing circle, or a peer review activity. However, because it could be affirmed that there is some form of discussion or exchange of information, or even social interaction happening in the GC, the terms 'group discussion' and 'GC' will be used interchangeably in this study.

Statistics from the University of Johannesburg Auckland Park Bunting Road Campus show that from the 2500 consultations held in 2013, 1200 were GCs. The report also stated that the decrease in one-on-one consultations was due to an increase in the number of GCs. As a result, the shift from the one-on-one consultation to the GC alluded to earlier in this thesis has engendered a tremendous amount of uncertainty among writing consultants and students (Leibowitz & Parkerson 2011: 86). This inquiry into the socio-constructivist and socio-cultural tenets of the GC aims to uncover its challenges and complex nature.

1.5. Aim

1.5.1. Aim of the Study

This study aims to explore, through a social constructivist lens, the challenges facing writing consultants and students particularly with regard to raising the students' awareness of AL and genres through writing centre GCs.

1.5.2. Objectives of the Study

To achieve this aim, the following objectives are to be pursued:

- To identify the challenges facing students and writing consultant in group consultation sessions;
- To explore the social interactions occurring in the group consultations;
- To determine whether the social interactions focus on academic genre awareness and in what ways this is done.

As stated earlier, the study seeks to foreground the challenges faced by writing consultants and students alike by means of a mixed methods approach. The data collection was carried out by means of questionnaires, focus groups, and video-observations of GCs, to gain insight into the factors, situations or conditions that may aid or hinder student learning or acquisition of academic genres, in the GC context. This investigation intended to provide valuable insights into the socio-constructivist nature of the GC.

1.5.3. Research Questions

The main research question is: What are the challenges facing writing consultants and students during a GC with respect to academic genres?
The sub-questions are as follows:

- What are the challenges facing students and writing consultant in GCs?
- What are the social interactions occurring between students and consultants and among students in GCs?
- Do the social interactions, which occur in GCs, focus on genre awareness? And in what ways?

1.6. Rationale/ Justification

This study uses the Socio-Constructivist, NLS and Writing Centre Theories in attempts to understand the GC. What is common to these theories is their emphasis on the social element as a prerequisite of all teaching and/ or learning endeavours. The widening of access to university means that faculties and academic support services, including writing centres, all of which now have to contend with large class sizes, are under the obligation to find new ways of teaching and/or assisting the large numbers of students, albeit with minimal human, material and financial resources. To reiterate, increasingly in the South African context, there is a shift from the one-on-one consultation model to the GC, due to ever-increasing numbers of students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds entering universities (Kane 2012).

For writing centres, the increase in the number of GCs has necessitated a shift in writing consultation strategies for writing consultants and students. Moreover, this upsurge in GCs could result, not only in a lowering of the overall quality of consultations, but also in writing consultant burnout (North, 1984) with negative consequences on learning. Key to this thesis is understanding the pedagogical or didactic approaches and strategies used in facilitating the acquisition of AL and genres in the GC. The tools used by the writing consultants in the facilitation of the GC, and students' input in the process(es) are under scrutiny.

This thesis aims, among other things, to ascertain whether the consultants' approaches or strategies would be different while dealing with several students in the context of a GC. Recent studies have pointed to modelling (Kane, Lear, & Dube 2014), scaffolding (Dube, Kane, & Lear 2012), conversation or 'talk' (Archer 2011; Clarence 2011), and questioning or probing (Kane 2012), to name a few, as pedagogical tools used in facilitating the IC. Writing centre literature has cautioned practitioners against the dangers of adopting a 'quick-fix' solution approach to writing development, whereby the focus is on fixing the text instead of training better writers (Bawarshi & Pelkowski 1999; North 1984). In the 'quick-fix' or remedial approach, writing is considered as a skill, which, once 'perfected', can be transferred to other contexts, instead of viewing it as a social practice, which varies with cultures, identities, relations of power, space and contexts (Lea & Street 2006; Russell, Lea, Parker, Street & Donahue 2009).

One would also expect such an investigation to shed light on whether the focus of the writing GC is on academic literacy in general, or on disciplinary writing (Archer 2010; North 1984). Research on writing centres has reported that it is also in the mandate of writing centres to address overall language problems faced by predominantly L2 students in general and university first year L2 students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds in particular (Canagaraj 2002). The NLS, particularly when interfaced with AL, offers a framework for understanding what happens in a GC and whether language problems are equally explored. The above considerations seen as a whole served as a motivation for this study.

Given the complexity and novelty of the GC, it is primordial to identify the difficulties associated with it and explore its true nature. It should be noted that there is a dearth of research on social constructivist perspectives in the higher education context, with a particular focus on

group discussions globally. The scope of this study is limited to the context of the writing centre in an institution of higher education.

1.7. Scope of the Study

Given the nature of writing centre work, one would have advised a pre-consultation, consultation and post-consultation type of approach to an investigation on the group consultation. However, the aim of qualitative studies is not to generalise results to a larger sample of the population, but to investigate in depth even with a limited amount of participants, for instance.

This study intended to gather data randomly from writing consultants and students who had either conducted or attended a GC over the two months preceding the data collection. The data collection was conducted essentially at the University of Johannesburg writing centres, mainly the Auckland Park writing centre. The APK Campus houses 30,000 of the 50,000 UJ students, and has the biggest writing centre in terms of size of venue and number of consultations (±2800 consultation for 2013) and students seen (4000 students seen in 2013). Although the data collection was carried out on the four campuses, albeit not in equal participant populations, it is assumed that the data collected fairly represents the reality in other 'access' universities throughout South Africa.

1.8. Methodology

This study followed a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative approach was implemented using two sets of questionnaires (students and writing consultants) in 2014, and the same in 2016, while the qualitative approach in 2014 was carried out by means of two focus groups, one with students and the other with writing consultants, and video-recorded observations of two group consultations.

The first two sets of questionnaires were administered in 2014 to a hundred students, who had just attended a group consultation, of whom 61 responded by completing and returning, and to writing consultants, who were available across all four writing Centres at the University of Johannesburg, of whom 9 answered and returned questionnaires.

The focus group interviews aimed to investigate the major themes, which had transpired from the questionnaire data. Students and consultants who had agreed on the questionnaire forms to participate in a subsequent focus group interview were contacted and invited to participate in two separate sessions. One group interview involved six students and the other four writing consultants, both of which were conducted in the researcher's office away from the writing centre. These interviews were intended to explore the nature of the GC in terms of student-consultant and student-student relations, and the extent to which the consultation focused on exploring disciplinary or discipline specific genres or conventions, and the manner in which that was done.

The video-recorded observations were used to triangulate the themes identified in the data collected earlier in the questionnaires and focus groups. The first observation involved a consultant, named Nancy (pseudonym), and two students at the Auckland Park Bunting Road (APB) Campus writing centre in September 2014. The second observation recorded a consultation between a consultant named Frank (pseudonym) and two students at the Auckland Park Kingsway (APK) campus, also in September 2014. Both observations intended to further explore the themes identified earlier through social constructivist lenses, meaning by focusing on the content of and interactions in the group discussions.

The second two sets of questionnaires were intended to complement the data collected from the questionnaires, focus groups and observations carried out in 2014, which identified and explored a number of themes related to the challenges faced by students and consultants in GCs. The questionnaire used in 2014 was administered in 2016 to 200 students using Google forms and 53 students complemented and submitted their answers online between October and early November 2016. The Google forms questionnaires, adapted for consultants, were also administered to all UJ writing consultants across the four campuses, that is, 32 writing consultants, and 16 consultants participated. These questionnaires were designed to gather additional data on the nature, challenges, and content of social interactions in GCs. I intended to determine whether this new data would contain additional themes that had not been covered in the triangulated data from the 2014 questionnaires, focus groups and observations.

Further methodological procedures and other details are discussed in detail in Chapter Four on Methodology. The data analysis used social constructivism (SC), New Literacies Studies

(NLS) and Academic Literacies (AL), and Writing Centre Practice, as discussed in Chapter Two, as the analytical framework.

1.9. Organisation of the Work

This section presents an overview of the nine chapters that constitute the main body of this thesis. It also details the focus and building blocks of each chapter.

Chapter One introduces the background, aim and objectives of the study. It situates the study in the existing body of knowledge, explains the context and provides an overview of the writing centres at the University of Johannesburg, including the pedagogical perspectives underpinning their practice. The Chapter then presents the background to the problem, highlighting the lack of theory and literature on the GC in the writing centre context. It alludes to the lack of commonality between the concept of 'GC' and those of 'peer writing', 'writing groups' and 'collaborative group discussions'. The Chapter also expands on the research questions, assumptions, scope and limitations, before presenting the methodology and the organisation of the work.

Chapter Two presents both the theoretical framework and the literature review of the study. The theoretical framework introduces and explains the theoretical underpinnings of the research; namely, the Socio-constructivist, NLS, and writing centre theories. The literature review correlates current theoretical perspectives and previous studies to aspects of this study and further situates it in the existing body of knowledge. Both aspects of this Chapter highlight the need for further investigation into the nature and challenges of the GC, particularly in the South African writing centre context.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology adopted for this study. Firstly, it explains the research paradigm, approaches, and design. It presents an interpretivist paradigm for a predominantly qualitative study in order to gather in-depth views from the participants. Secondly, it proceeds to discuss the methods, including the 2014 questionnaires, focus groups, video-recorded observations; and the 2016 questionnaires, as well as the data collection instruments and procedures. Lastly, the Chapter explains the data analysis methods and ethical considerations of the study.

The next four chapters (Four, Five, Six, and Seven) all focus on the presentation of findings for the data collection methods (2014 questionnaires, focus groups, video recorded observations, and 2016 questionnaires). Each data collection method and instrument was used to verify or ascertain the findings from the previously used ones.

Chapter Four summarises the findings from the 2014 questionnaires both with students and writing consultants. It analyses the data with a focus on the challenges of GCs highlighting emerging trends, categories and themes. The findings from the questionnaires were used in formulating the focus group guiding questions, of which the findings in turn guided the observations.

Chapter Five is an analysis of the data gathered from the focus group, with students and with writing consultants, in 2014. It identifies the emerging trends, categories and themes based on the research problem of the study.

Chapter Six presents an analysis of the data gathered from the video-recorded observations of two GCs conducted in 2014. The emerging trends, categories and themes are identified using the research problem of the study.

Chapter Seven describes the findings from the 2016 questionnaires with students and with writing consultants. Using the findings from the 2014 questionnaires, focus groups and video recordings, the interpretation of data is carried out to identify the emerging trends, categories and themes. This final data analysis Chapter aims to either confirm, or refute the findings from the preceding data strands.

Chapter Eight is a discussion of the findings obtained from the 2014 questionnaires, focus groups, observations, and 2016 questionnaires. It cross-references the findings with the theoretical framework and the literature review to establish the contributions of this study in terms of GC pedagogy and their significance for writing centre practice.

Chapter Nine, the Conclusion, achieves three goals. It firstly concludes the study in relation to the main challenges of a GC, highlighting its nature, dynamics, and pedagogical principles. It then foregrounds the possible implications of the findings for AL in general and for writing

centre practice in particular. Finally, it concludes and makes recommendations around the main issues identified in the thesis, and on the areas to take into consideration for further research.

1.10. Conclusion

This Chapter explained the motivation for the study, presented the research problem and situated this study in the existing body of knowledge. It also briefly presented both the theoretical framework and the literature review of the study, including the social constructivist, NLS, and writing centre theories, and the associated theoretical perspectives and studies. It explained the methodology and demonstrated its suitability for such an investigation, before outlining the organisation of the work. The next Chapter looks at the theoretical framework and literature review.

CHAPTER TWO
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This Chapter presents the theoretical framework and the literature review section of the study. Firstly, the theoretical framework explores the concept of social constructivism, its definition and aspects with a focus on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and its application in the GC. It discusses a few research works done on social constructivism in higher education, before dwelling on its practice in the writing centres. Secondly, it discusses the theory of New Literacies Studies (NLS) used to explore the GC in the writing centre context. It examines aspects of AL that foreground social interactions through activities such as reading, writing, thinking, and talking, in the writing centre context. Thirdly, the notions of academic genres and L2 students' writing challenges are equally explored, especially because this investigation involves writing consultants assisting students with academic genres.

This Chapter emerged from the assumption that the GC, as a relatively new phenomenon, cannot simply replicate the pedagogy of a one-on-one consultation. It reviews studies done on Academic Literacies (AL) and writing centres, both globally and in South Africa. It highlights the fact that disciplinary literacies are at the centre of their practice and that writing centres are more ideally placed to unpack and assist students, who are grappling with the complex conventions, genres and discourses. The literature review foregrounds some of the issues related to the praxis involving writing centre practice and AL on the one hand, and social constructivist perspectives on the other, in HE. The following section begins the theoretical framework.

2.2. Theoretical Framework: Social Constructivism (SC), New Literacies (NL), Academic Literacies (AL) and the Group Writing Consultation Model (GC)

2.2.1. Social Constructivism: an Overview

This study uses social constructivism as a framework in the analysis and interpretation of GC data. It is inferred that the collaborative nature of the consultant-student and student-student interactions underpin the GC. Also referred to as SC, the theory finds its roots in

constructivism, an overarching learning theory that sees the learner's active involvement and participation in the teaching and learning process as central (Hussain 2012: 179). This theory corresponds with the learning-by-doing approach, which assumes that the more repeatedly one does something, the more efficient he or she becomes at it (Hussain 2012: 180). In order to understand social constructivism, one should first define constructivism and cognitive constructivism.

2.2.1.1. Constructivism

Constructivism originated in constructionism, a theory premised on the assumption that learning occurs where learners manifest the ability to create a product (Sabelli 2008). It is understood that the students' participation promotes learning in project-based activities by enabling them to establish links between different ideas and knowledge areas (Alesandrini & Larson 2002). Constructionism advocates discovery learning, where students use prior knowledge in learning new information (Sabelli 2008). It states that individual learners "construct mental models in an attempt to understand the world around them" (Alesandrini & Larson 2002). Sabelli (2008) contends that constructivist theories consider learning as a reconstruction, rather than a transmission of knowledge, where the effectiveness of learning derives from the sense of constructing something meaningful through participation in a portion of an activity. Learners can then draw their own conclusions by means of creative experimentation and by making tangible objects (Sabelli 2008). Fundamentally, the students' active participation in the construction of tangible objects in real-life is the pre-requisite for learning (Rogoff 1990).

Citing Duit and Treagust (1998) and Jenkins (2000), Jones and Brader-Araje (2002) point out that constructivism emerged because of the weaknesses of behaviourist educational practices. Behaviourism stipulated that student learning is preconditioned by the teachers' provision of the correct stimuli, which would be improved through observation of the students' behaviour. This emphasis on the teacher's responsibility led to the implementation of a plethora of school management strategies, management-by-objective, and teacher-performance evaluation systems. Teachers were blamed for students' non- or underperformance, as they were deemed responsible for restructuring the environment, and determining the most suitable reinforcement measure in order to produce the desired student behaviour.

After years of implementation, behaviourism failed to produce positive results due to its failure to take into account the complexity of the classroom as a teaching and learning context. It was bewailed for placing the blame on teachers in instances of student failure, and for its simplistic approach to student learning. In public schools in the United States of America (US), all teachers were required to participate in two behaviourist-based programs (Jones & Brader-Araje 2002): the first programme was the Effective Teacher Training, which involved a series of behaviours that teachers were expected to perform in the classroom. Although the Effective Teacher Training program was based on research of effective practices; for example, observing the wait time of at least 4 seconds between asking questions during class discussions raises achievement, it failed to take into account the complexity of student cognition and the dynamics of modern classrooms. The second programme was the Teacher Performance Appraisal System, which was an evaluation system that principals used to evaluate teachers. A principal would observe a teacher during instruction while checking off a series of behaviours that demonstrated effective teaching; for example, teacher's movement around the room.

An evaluation of these programmes showed that teachers who manifested the appropriate behaviours, and for whom all the right boxes were checked, were not necessarily the 'good' teachers. In essence, teachers could exhibit the desired behaviour, obtain good ratings on the evaluation instrument, and receive positive appraisal from the principal of the school, but not teach in a manner that is conducive to student learning. There was a consensus that the programmes, which only focused on the teachers, could not answer the question of why learning was not occurring and why instruction was ineffective.

As a result, constructivism was welcomed as a theory of knowing, which explained in clearer terms, the complexities of the teaching and learning processes, including the students' learning processes. An aspect of constructivism that could tie to this study is the fact that students have to collaborate as a group to work on a writing draft. Behaviourism could not be used as a framework for the study because the focus in writing centres is not on the writing consultant, but on the student. Athough the observations carried out in this study dwell slightly on the students' behaviour or actions and attitudes during the group consultations, this represents an insignificant aspect of the investigation, which focuses mainly on the social interactions and AL.

2.2.1.2. Cognitive constructivism

Piaget's cognitive constructivism, which focused mainly on the learner's mental processes, stipulated that the learner constructs knowledge based on his or her existing cognitive structure; depending on his or her interpretation of the experiences and existent information, cognitive development stage, cultural background and personal history (Skinner, 1976). Cognitive constructivism considered learning as a process of active discovery, in which the teacher is merely a facilitator aiming to help students link new information to existing knowledge, and enable them to adapt their existing intellectual framework in order to accommodate new information (Perry, 1999).

Jones and Brader-Araje (2002) argue that, in spite of Piaget's focus on the development of the individual, which side-lined the greater socio-cultural context, his theory on cognitive constructivism laid the foundation for constructivism, through an emphasis on the active role of the individual in learning. Piaget stresses that knowledge construction may only be possible when new knowledge is actively assimilated and accommodated into existing knowledge. He hypothesises that individual understandings of reality are perpetually being revised and reconstructed with time, based on exposure to new experiences (Piaget 1970: 57-58). This study assumes that through participation in GCs, students may benefit from the exposure to the ideas and experiences of other students, and from the opportunity to reconsider their own ideas or assumptions through social interaction and peer feedback.

Cognitive constructivism, however, does not lend itself to the objectives of this study, due to its focus on the cognitive processes and individual students. Aspects of the theory that could be compatible with the study are the acknowledgement of the teacher or tutor as merely a facilitator, who provides guidance to students in linking new information to prior knowledge.

2.2.1.3. Social constructivism

By definition, social constructivism is a sociological theory of knowledge, which applies the general philosophical constructivism to the social. Coined by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmannhe (Andrews 2012), the term originates in sociological and philosophical thought, through a combination of Alfred Schutz' Sociology of Knowledge and Durkheim's concept of

institution. Berger and Luckmannhe developed a theory with the intention of examining the manner in which subjective meaning transforms into a social fact.

Social Constructivism, a theory that has been largely attributed to Vygotsky (1978), postulates that knowledge is initially constructed in a social context before being appropriated by individuals (Bruning et al. 1999; Eggen & Kauchak 2004; Cole 1992). Sullivan (2011: 25) defines social constructivism as a "student-centered learning theory grounded in subjective epistemology that acknowledges social interactions as key to the construction of knowledge within cultural settings, then internalised by individuals resulting in learner growth". Social constructivism argues that learning cannot be separated from its social context (Vygotsky 1978). Socio-constructivists thus hypothesise that learning is an active process of discovery in which students learn to uncover principles, concepts and facts on their own, through guess work, trial and error, and intuitive thinking (Ackerman 2001; Brown et al. 1989). The social aspect is reflected in the group members' process of sharing of individual perspectives, which referred to as collaborative elaboration (Meter & Stevens 2000), results in the learners improved understanding and learning together (Greeno et al. 1996). Constructivists, in general, emphasise that learners make meanings through interaction with each other and with the surrounding environment. They stress that knowledge is socially and culturally constructed by humans (Ernest 1993; Prawat & Floden 1994), through engagement with each other. The importance of interaction was foregrounded by Vygotsky (1978) in his allusion to the importance of speech and practical activity, or the social and the practical element: "through activity a child constructs meaning on an intrapersonal level, while speech connects this meaning with the interpersonal world shared by the child and his/her culture".

Constructivist teachers play a mediational role, rather than an instructional one. They guide hands-on activities (Guthrie et al. 2004), coach students in achieving their goals (Alesandrini & Larson 2002); ensure, in a problem-based learning approach, that students are exposed to multiple problems and that students attempt to develop their own understanding of the problems (Alesandrini & Larson 2002). In order for the student-centred problem-based learning approach to attain its goal of stimulating the students' minds (Hmelo-Silver and Barrows 2006), five instructional strategies should be upheld. Firstly, learning activities should be an integral part of a larger task in order to make it possible for students to grasp the broader picture and envision how the tasks could be applied to other aspects of life, besides being able to find the activities useful (Wilson 1996).

Secondly, the teacher's support should be such that students would always retain ownership of the whole problem-solving process (Ibid). Thirdly, the designed task should always be authentic for the learner and should be in line with the learner's cognitive abilities (Ibid). Fourthly, learners should be provided with opportunities to reflect on the learning process (Ibid); and lastly, learners should be equipped to think critically and encouraged to test their idea against other viewpoints in a variety of contexts (Ibid).

In his analysis of social constructivism, Kim (2001) stresses the importance of culture and context in understanding social phenomena in the construction of knowledge. In his understanding, social constructivism is characterised by a number of key assumptions about reality, knowledge, and learning. Firstly, reality, which social constructivists believe is constructed through human activity, relates to the properties of the world as constructed serially by members of society (Kukla 2000, cited in Amineh & Asl 2015). As a result, reality cannot be discovered, as it does not exist prior to its social invention. Secondly, knowledge is also a human product, which is socially and culturally constructed (Ernest 1999). Meaning is created by individuals through their interactions with other members of society, and with the ambient environment. Thirdly, learning, which is viewed as a social process, occurs not only within an individual, as a passive development of behaviour shaped by external forces (McMahon 1997), but foremost in the immediate social context. Social activities and interactions are a catalyst of meaningful learning. This links to the notion of intersubjectivity of meaning, which pertains to the basis of the interactions occurring among individuals, who share common interests and assumptions. Ernest (1999) argues that effective communications and interactions are preconditioned by the existence of socially agreed-upon ideas of the world and social patterns and rules of language use. Kim (2001) adds that intersubjectivity among individuals is a prerequisite of the construction of any social knowledge and meanings, which are shaped and developed through negotiation within the communicating groups. Personally formed meanings arising from these experiences are affected by the intersubjectivity of the community. Kim continues that intersubjectivity allows individuals to extend their understanding of new information and activities provided by other group members.

New knowledge, which emerges from interactions between members of a community and their surrounding environments, resides within cultures (Shunk 2000). Awareness of the intersubjective meanings existing within a community by individuals enables them in turn to

access and understand new information and participate in the activities of the community. This notion of culture can be linked to the concept of AL, which is specific to particular disciplines, and aim to acculturate students into their genres, conventions and discourses, as discussed later in the theoretical framework of this thesis. While cultural constructivism is shaped by knowledge and reality in a particular context, cognitive constructivism focuses on the learner's construction of knowledge, and mental processes based on ambient stimuli.

Social constructivism has been criticised for its complexity, variety and lack of pedagogical constructs (Harris & Alexander 1998). This is because the students' reticence and lack of prior knowledge may render the application of socio-constructivist principles to the classroom context difficult. In this sense, social constructivism cannot be used as a framework for high school education or teacher education. Moreover, its implementation in a classroom environment is predicated on the students' total engagement with the material and the participation of all present in the class.

Proponents of constructivism argue that, although it is not a particular pedagogy, constructivism remains more of a philosophical framework than a theory hereby allowing its users to "precisely describe instruction or prescribe design strategies" (Harris & Alexander 1998: 4). Social constructivism has also been criticised for excessive focus on the social elements, such as social groups and interpretation processes (Brey 1997). Although some constructivists maintain that "learning by doing" enhances learning, critics insist that novices do not possess the required mental models or schemas necessary for "learning by doing" (Sweller 1988). Mayer (2004) emphasises that in order to use "learning by doing", one would also need to consistently use the guided discovery approach with learners. He cautioned that not all constructivist teaching techniques may be efficient or effective for all learners; and that for this to occur they all ought to be behaviourally active in the learning process in AL activities.

The close similarity between social constructionism and social constructivism resides in the fact that learners work together to construct artefacts, since social constructivism posits that "human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others" (Schacter 2009). There exists, however, a profound difference between the two: social constructionism dwells on the artefacts, whereas social constructivism focuses on the individuals learnings occurring as a result of the interactions in the group: in this study, the text

is constructed through the social interactions of a group. Schacter (2009) argues that social constructivism extends beyond constructionism in the sense that it takes cognisance of the role of other actors and cultures in the learners' development. Contrary to the social learning theory, social constructivism foregrounds social interactions and participation, rather than mere observation. It is for this reason that social constructivism seems better suited for this study, particularly because the latter seeks to understand the nature of the GC by zooming in on the interactions between the consultant and students, and among students. AL theory applied to the writing centre may offer a way of studying the academic and disciplinary literacies, as well as the dynamics and relations between participants in a GC, but social constructivism presents a more comprehensive framework for studying the social interactions. As stated earlier, no study has been conducted on the GC, which differs from the writing circles, peer writing groups and commonly used group discussions set-ups in the HE and writing centre context.

2.2.2. New Literacies Studies (NLS)

2.2.2.1. Overview of the Concept of 'Literacy' and 'Literacies'

Until recently, and for most role-players in educational and intergovernmental circles, the term 'Literacy', with capital 'L' and 'y' at the end, remains reminiscent of Literacy programmes implemented in the then developing countries by 'colonialist' governments and organisations (Street 1984). Kelder (1996) posits that the term is embedded in myths associated with economic progress, democracy, social and educational progress, and cognitive advancement (Graff, 1995), and continues to mean different things to individuals. The overarching misconception is that Literacy pertains to an abstract set of reading and writing skills, which exist independently from any context, and to a process of encoding and decoding texts, where a person's competency is assessed according to a normative standard and criteria (Ibid). Perry (2012) posits that literacy is linked to metaphors, which stand on their own. Thee metaphors dictate particular views of literacy with implications on how one views literacy, learners, and the content of the teaching curriculum (Papen 2005).

Kelder (1996) emphasises that teachers, parents, administrators, and policy makers fail to realise the historical, political, cultural, social, and ideological complexities and implications of literacy, because of the race for, and the anxiety related to, higher literacy levels, which feed the political, social and economic myths surrounding literacy. Researchers battle to disassociate

the aftermath of literacy from the historical, social and political contexts from which it emerged due to the fact that the acquisition of literacy is seen as a prerequisite for cognitive attributions or skills (Graff 1981, 1988, 1995; Goody & Watt 1988; Oxenham 1980, cited in Kelder 1996).

Nevertheless, for Graff (1979) and Erickson (1988), literacy can be seen as an 'equaliser', without which nations can be relegated to economic and cultural backwardness, and an individual to moral decay. This conception of literacy creates a 'deficit' model of literacy through which 'illiterate' individuals and societies are subjected to remedial reading and writing programmes, irrespective of their educational levels. These authors also stress that this perspective perpetuates a form of victimisation *quasi* based on race, class, and caste, often due to a lack of sufficient knowledge about, and understanding of indigenous cultural and oral traditions (Collins 1989; Gumperz 1986). This study assumes, in the section on academic genres, that students in academia are also alienated to some extent due to the 'gatekeeping practices' of disciplinary communities, and because disciplinary and academic cultures are seldom taught overtly to new students. For this reason, Oxenham (1980, cited in Kelder 1996) poses questions on whether literacy contributes to the emergence of civilisation and social progress, or whether these result from profound social and political changes in a society or culture. He wonders whether literacy has an effect on the development and cognition of individuals and whether these effects emanate from the learning environment, or from new ways of thinking in using reading and writing. Oxenham also inquires whether it is possible to comprehend what individuals are really doing when they engage in 'literate acts or practices'.

In Scribner and Cole's (1981: 236) definition, the concept of literacy extends well beyond the mere fact of "knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use". Elaborating on Krashen's distinction between "acquisition" and "learning", Gee (1990) sees literacy as the ability to control the use of secondary discourses (e.g. school, work, and profession). He emphasises the metacognitive or metalanguage aspect as crucial in the definition of literacy. The New London Group (1996: 77) equally stresses the usefulness of metalanguage for students to discuss language, texts and meaning making. Langer (1987: 2) defines literacy as a purposeful activity, a way of thinking, and not a set of skills, related to the use of reading and writing in various contexts. She goes on to state that it is a culturally specific phenomenon, which cannot be disassociated from the context and purpose of its practice.

Hamilton and Barton (2000: 7) underlined that literacy is what individuals and societies do with reading, writing and texts in real-life contexts, and the reasons behind this use. They argue that these practices reverberate beyond the actions with texts, to be connected to and shaped by the values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships. Hamilton and Barton (2000: 8) posit that literacy practices do not occur as a set of properties in individuals, but in relationships between people, within groups, and communities.

2.2.2.2. Problematic of the definition of 'Literacy'

One aspect of the definitions of literacy contemplated above remains problematic: its definition is inescapably linked to a set of reading and writing skills, which, once learnt by students, can be transferred at will from one context to the other. Perry (2012) argues that literacy extends beyond being able to use print to incorporate any form of personal communication, including literacy practices such as financial literacy or cultural literacy. Brandt and Clinton (2002: 1) explain that literacy practices almost always serve a multiplicity of interests, incorporating individuals and their agencies in larger enterprises, which extend beyond their immediate environments. In this way, literacy practices are not invented by their individual users and are not simply determined by the power of their local contexts (ibid). There is more to the local literacy practices than "just local practice" (Street 2003: 80). As will be discussed further, a literacy extends beyond one single context and, contrary to the postulation of the autonomous model, beyond the reading and writing as skills.

2.2.2.3. The Autonomous Model versus the Ideological Model of 'Literacy'

The autonomous model of literacy on the one hand holds that reading and writing skills can autonomously affect the associated social and cognitive practices and lead to higher cognitive abilities, improved economic conditions, and greater equality (Street 2003, 2005). It is in this sense that it was associated with developmental and education programmes regardless of the prevailing social conditions and cultural contexts (Ibid). This autonomous model was bewailed for essentially imposing dominant western conceptions of literacies, which were presented as neutral and universal, on other cultures (Muspratt, Luke & Freebody 1997; Prinsloo & Breier 1996; Robinson-Pant 2004). Kelder (1996) and Cook-Gumperz (1986) posit that through the autonomous model, students from varied cultural and racial backgrounds are judged and assessed against a standard normative discourse, which Cook-Gumperz refers to as "schooled

literacy", and which is estranged to the students' use of language in their own contexts and impedes their acquisition of higher literacy skills.

The ideological model of literacy on the other hand is more nuanced in its conception of literacy, which states that literacy is not a technical and neutral skill, but a social practice. It assumes that reading and writing are almost always rooted in specific perceptions of knowledge, identity, power relations, and world views, in such a manner that literacy meanings and practices are always contested (Gee 1996; Perry 2012). Street (1995, 2005) emphasises that engaging in literacy is always a social act, in which the nature of the literacy being learnt or the ideas about literacy being held by participants, is constantly being changed by the interactions between facilitators or teachers and students. This alternative model is termed 'ideological' because it foregrounds not only the cultural meanings, but also the power dimensions of reading and writing processes (Street 2005). The ideological model promotes the development and dissemination of conceptions of literacy, which take different cultures and racial groups into consideration (Street 1984, 2003). This model is closely linked to the New Literacy Studies (NLS), discussed in the next section.

2.2.2.4. New Literacies Studies (NLS)

New Literacies Studies represent a shift in how the study and acquisition of literacy is conceptualised (Gee 1996; Street 1993, 2005), from a dominant cognitive model to an understanding of reading and writing in their social and cultural contexts. It emerges from a consideration of an ethnographic perspective as opposed to the experimental and individualistic character of psychological studies of reading (Hamilton & Barton 2000; Collins 1995). NLS approaches thus consider all meanings and uses of literacy according to their specific contexts and look at literacy as a social practice, as stated earlier. Gee (1996) underlines that NLS as a movement is part of what was termed the "social turn" in the study of literacy; which represented a shift from a focus on individual behaviour and cognitive activity to a focus on social and cultural interactions (in Barton et al. 2000: 180). This was also a shift from a focus on reading and writing as neutral technical skills, which can be transferred effortlessly from one context to another to their conceptualisation as situated social practices (Ibid).

This approach may assist me in examining student writing both in their disciplinary contexts and in the GC. It would not have been possible to study the GCs without an acknowledgement

of the plurality and multicity of academic literacy cultures and practices prevailing in writing centre and academic department contexts. NLS represents a new paradigm in how literacy is perceived with an emphasis not on the acquisition of skills linked to the dominant approaches, but on literacy as a social practice, a recognition of multiples literacies varying with time and space, and contested in relations of power (Perry 2012; Street 1997: 77).

Street (1985) raises the issue of who decides what counts as literacy, whose literacies are dominant, and whose are marginalised or resistant. In one of his later works, Street (2005: 418) emphasises that in as much as issues of power relations involve assumptions of how a particular set of ideas of a given cultural group are imposed on or taken by another group, a number of questions need to be posed:

> What are the power relations among the participants? What are the resources? Where are people going if they take on one literacy rather than another literacy? How do recipients challenge the dominant conceptions of literacy?

These questions emerge directly from the power dimension of literacy and have implications for both research and practice (Street 2005). Researchers need to attempt to understand what a literacy means to the people themselves instead of imposing their own views on its nature. Street argues that individuals labelled "illiterate" in the autonomous model of literacy may from a more culturally sensitive point of view be making a significant use of literacy practices for specific purposes and in more particular contexts. This means that the boundaries between literate and non-literate are less apparent than individuals' "measures" of literacy. As part of the 'Social turn' movement, Street (2005) identified three articulations: NLS, multiliteracies, and critical literacy.

- Multiliteracies

The theory of multiliteracies developed by the New London Group (Cope & Kalantzis 2000) both derived and is distinct from the theories of literacy as a social practice. It pertains to "the real-world contexts in which people practice literacy" (Ibid). Cope and Kalantzis point out that the London Group focused on "the big picture; the changing world and the new demands being placed upon people as makers of meaning in changing workplaces, as citizens in changing public spaces and in the changing dimensions of our community lives – our lifeworlds". This

theory also adheres to the assumptions that power relations profoundly influence literacy and literacy learning. This theory differs from the theory of literacy as a social practice in that it recognises the multiplicity of communication channels and media (Perry 2012). The two converge in that the theory of Multiliteracies foregrounds the salience of linguistic and cultural diversity (Ibid) and focuses on modes of representation beyond the language level (Cope and Kalantzis 2000: 5).

Communication channels and media allude to the print mode, which is almost always implied in the multiliteracies approach. One of the criticisms is that theories of literacy as a social practice tend to stress practices that involve print literacy, instead of emphasising multimodality, which multiliteracies (Kress 2000) centres on. The Multimodality theory pertains to the occurrence of a variety of communicative channels through which the visual, audio, and special patterns of meaning arising from specific written or linguistic modes of meaning occur (Ibid). For the multiliteracies perspective, print literacy is one of the many forms of representation and meaning-making modes, although it has been privileged over the other forms. Multiliteracies' definition of a text extends beyond print to include a variety of forms and semiotic systems; meaning an emphasis on multiple media and other modes of representation, digital media and technologies, and their related practices. It is for this reason that multiliteracies is associated with the term new literacies, to specifically infer digital literacies and technologies prevailing in a rapidly changing social setting, in line with who the user is (Lankshear & Knobel 2003).

Equally, Gee (1996: vii) stresses that language is almost always loaded with "other stuff" such as "social relations, cultural models, power and politics, perspectives on experience, values and attitudes, as well as things and places in the world". The socio-cultural approach to literacies underpinning NLS is premised on the assumption that understanding literacy presupposes a detailed in-depth examination of the practices in varying cultural settings (Street 2001: 430). Street further claims that one needs to transcend the richness and variety of literacy practices emanating from such an ethnographic account, to a consideration of the associated theoretical models, which acknowledge power relations in literacy practices (Ibid). Brandt (2009) and Perry and Purcell-gates (2005) argue that a focus on power relations offers an understanding of agentive ways through which dominant literacies are adopted, appropriated for new purposes or rejected. This perspective posits that the agency of individuals allows them to appropriate or reject literacy practices in purposeful ways according to their needs and may sometimes

challenge practices in specific power relations. It also posits that socially contextualised practices provide insights into ways in which practices vary across different communities, and the ways in which they are dynamic and malleable. Moreover, multiliteracies provide a way to understand the way individuals communicate and make meaning, the issues of access to resources and the influence that social, economic and political structures have on the manner in which literacies are shaped. This theory also allows one to understand the implications of power relations on literacy instruction, including AL both in the disciplines and in spaces such as the writing centre.

- Critical Literacy

Another term associated with new literacies is critical literacy. Both Street's postulation about the ideological nature of literacy, and Hamilton and Barton's social literacy practices highlight the importance of power relations in how literacy is defined and practiced. Kress and other scholars emphasised the multiple literacies that exist beyond print, through the multiliteracies theory. Contrary to these theories, which bewail the dominance of western conceptions of literacy and their negative effects on other cultures and literacies, critical literacy foregrounds power and empowerment, alongside issues of agency and identity (Alvermann & Hagood 2000; Hagood 2002; Lewis, Enciso & Moje 2007a; Moje & Luke 2009).

Critical literacy also involves a recognition that distant literacies can come to local contexts with their force and meaning intact. Kulick and Stroud (1993) demonstrate how new literacy practices imported by missionaries to New Guinea, were immediately appropriated and adapted by locals to suit their circumstances, resulting in the birth of hybrid literacy practices. Instead of romanticising local literacies and vilifying the dominant ones, NLS focuses on the new or hybrid literacies (Ibid). The practical application of NLS in an institution of higher education, in the disciplines or in the writing centre is premised on a recognition of the multiplicity of literacies and the hybrid literacy practices that are born in these new contexts, such as the group writing consultation repeatedly.

2.2.2.5. Academic Literacies (AL)

-Definitions

Currently and in light of the above discussions, the term 'Academic Literacies' (AL) pertains to a specific approach in the study of literacy in the higher education context, which considers

reading and writing as social practices, which vary with context, culture and genre (Barton & Hamilton 1998; Street 1984, 1995; Vollmer 2002: 1). As demonstrated earlier, it mainly posits that reading and writing can no longer be seen as a set of decontextualised skills, which once learned can be seamlessly transferred from one context to the other (Russel, Lea, Parker, Street & Donahue 2009: 399). AL as a field originated from a body of practice-based research and literacy theory which gained momentum in the United Kingdom (UK) in the 1990s, due to issues such as the increasing numbers of students and the ever growing sizes of classes (Russel, Lea, Parker, street & Donahue 2009: 397). Approaches focusing on the explicit acculturation of students into the disciplinary codes and discourses, in an attempt to address the difficulties students encountered on contact with the unfamiliar discourses of the university, increasingly seemed impotent in addressing the students' problems (Ibid 397). Hounsell (1988 as cited in Russel, Lea, Parker, street & Donahue 2009: 397) defined 'academic discourse' as "a particular kind of written world, with a set of conventions, or codes, of its own". AL emerged as the study skills and learning support model based on the acculturation of students into academic discourses pioneered by practitioners working with small groups of students, which yielded no substantial fruits. The practitioners then began searching for more pragmatic and theorised explanations of the student writers' difficulties. This search generated a tremendous amount of data and theories. The meaning of the term however extends further beyond the various academic discourses to include the various institutional and social contexts, stakeholders and the relations that interface them vis-à-vis each other.

Based on the NLS methodological approach and on their own experience in academic literacy instruction and research, Lea and Street (1998) later described three models: the study skills model, the academic socialisation model and the AL model. The study skills model focuses on the surface features of writing and posits that the learners' transfer of writing skills and literacy from one context to the other occurs without any problem. The academic socialisation model aims to acculturate students into the disciplinary discourses and genres, considered as stable enough and based on the presumption that students will be able to reproduce these discourses and genres once they have understood and practiced the rules. The AL model revolves around the concepts of power and authority, meaning making, and identity, and foregrounds institutional prescriptions of what can be considered as knowledge in specific academic contexts, and the students' attitudes towards them. The AL model differs from the academic socialisation model in that it views the process of acquisition of the relevant literacies as more complex, dynamic, nuanced, situated, and embedded in epistemological issues and social

processes, including power relations between individuals, institutions, and social identities. Street's work has been instrumental in shaping new directions in AL practice and research.

AL further highlights the importance of situated literacies, which is the notion that defined literacies are linked to specific contexts, communities or cultures (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic 2000). Lankshear, et al. (1997) posit that discourses [or literacies, my emphasis] integrate words, acts, attitudes, beliefs and identities amongst others and that through participation in specific discourses individuals are "identified or identifiable as members of socially meaningful groups or networks, and as players of meaningful social roles" (Gee 1990: 142-3; Lanshear & Knobel 1997: 17). It is through discourse that individuals and group identities are formed. Zach (2009) analysed student writers' metaphors for academic writing. The research showed that language is one of the media through which social identities are defined. It also gave a sense of the student writers' understandings of academic writing and of themselves as writers within academia.

-AL and Disciplinary Genres

Recently, the AL development project has focused on L2 university entrants' engagement with or resistance to the prevailing dominant academic conventions, discourses, and genres, and on the students' ability to integrate academia through a hybrid discourse combining their primary discourses and the academic discourses. Canagarajah (2002) argues that conceptualising social practices and discourse communities as static and immutable is problematic especially with regard to L2 writers. He proposes five ways of looking at these issues: the English for Academic Purposes (EAP, Contrastive Rhetoric (CR), Social Process (SP), Transcultural Model (TM) and Contact Zone (CZ). EAP enforces a normative approach that the academic community discourses are not subject to negotiation or criticism. As a result, students who fail to adopt the established disciplinary discourses may not claim membership in that specific community. CR pertains to the willingness on the part of the academia to take the students' culture into account and pinpoint the conflicting areas existing between their primary communities and academic communities (34). Students are allowed to bring features of their vernaculars in their attempt to mediate its practices and those of the disciplinary practices, but CR strives to contain the particularities of each community to limit 'contamination'.

Canagarajah's SP approach believes that disciplinary discourses can be demystified through discourse analysis and provide access to those outside the community. This approach concurs

with the academic socialisation approach of literacies studies, which posits that coaching the students into the conventions and generic features of the academic community, will equip them to gain access to the communities and operate as insiders (Lea and Street, 1998). The limitation of this approach is that one only enjoys one community membership at a time. TM adopts a more complex orientation to communities and discourses when compared to the CR and the SP models; CR and EAP prevent students from crossing boundaries, and SP allows limited movements between boundaries. Furthermore, TM encourages porous boundaries through which students 'go and come' as they please. This means that students are permitted to belong to multiple communities simultaneously. Canagarajah's last model, the CZ takes into account the conflicts and struggles in the "negotiations of power while retaining the agency of writers to cross boundaries" (Canagarajah 2002: 39). Students do not simply 'switch' practices in function of the various discourse communities, they utilise creative strategies to adapt academic conventions to serve their interests and values (40). New genres and literacies are created in the process as dominant literacies are reshaped. Canagarajah points out though that all the above models contributed to the sharpening of the theoretical orientation of multilingual writers.

Lea (2004: 741) makes a case for AL to be used as a framework for course design in higher education. She argues that one of the particularities of AL, which sets it in contrast with the study skills and academic socialisation models, is the emphasis that students' acculturation into the academy does not occur seamlessly and by mere engagement with the discourses and practices of established practitioners. Research on AL suggests that the relationship of students with the academic dominant literacy discourses and practices is more complex than the socialisation model suggests. Lea (2004: 742) adds that students should be seen as active participants in a process of meaning making within the academy, centred on the issues of language, identity and the contested nature of knowledge. She contends that AL research should not be concerned with foregrounding specific groups of students (as foreign to the academic setting) and aspects such as assignment writing. It should rather be concerned with the origin of the problems students often face and issues of course design, given that all students, traditional and non-traditional, are negotiating a range of different texts as part of their studies.

AL posits that it is important to rethink the notion of genre, as conceptualised in the academic context and the main genre theories. It also examines the main trends in academic reading and

writing, and reading and writing challenges of L2 university students. It is important to consider the notions of genre in relation to academic reading and writing because one cannot efficiently investigate strategies to improve students' writing without establishing the interface between the difficulties emerging from the nature of genre, those from the students' L2 situation, and those stemming from the particularities of specific writing centre pedagogical strategies.

The term 'genre' originates from the French words meaning "kind" or "sort". It is used in this context to refer to the various types of texts used in academia. It is important to note that social conventions and practices, which are central to the formation of genres and genres themselves change over time as new genres supplant the old ones (Ramanathan & Kaplan 2000; Russel, Lea, Parker, Street & Donahue 2009). However, several generic forms present a multiplicity of features borrowed from other genres by way of borrowing and recombining the conventions (Devitt 2004). Devitt also states that genres initially emerged as a strict classification system in the ancient Greek literature and categorised poetry, prose and performance as generic forms. Each genre assumed specific characteristics and its 'performers' were restricted to that particular genre to the extent that it was believed that a type of person could only perform one type of genre and not others. Bakhtin (1983) posits that genres are socially specified, recognised and defined informally by a specific culture or community. Fairclough (2003: 26) defines a similar concept of genre, which stresses the social context of the text; stating that genres are "different ways of (inter)acting discoursally". Academic socialisation emphasises that genre instruction is a way through which all students, especially historically marginalised students, are exposed to the "ways in which the 'hows' of textual structure produce the 'whys' of social effect"; enabling students in this way to gain access to "a variety of realms of social power" (Cope & Kalantzis 1993: 8). Because genre theory is a branch of critical theory, it is equally concerned with the specificities of particular social and cultural contexts.

The key concepts of 'genre stability' and 'genre change' appear to be central to genre theory and research, together with the notions of social practices, discourse communities and students' engagement with genres. The concept of genre almost always emerges in the relationship between the creation of texts and their corresponding social practices in a specific context (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 2005). The article *Genres, Authors, Discourses Communities: Theory and Application for (L1 and) L2 Writing Instructors* posits that, because of the rigid and fluid nature of genres, importance should be given to the writing process and not to socialising students into disciplinary practices (Ramanathan & Kaplan 2000: 171). On the one hand,

through “recurrent use and typification, these conventionalised forms of writing become vehicles by which knowledge and information get disseminated to a community of people with shared interest” (Ramanathan & Kaplan 2000: 172).

This is problematic because the rigidified writing conventions are ‘unconsciously or consciously’ reinforced by all practitioners in language and literacy education by assessing students’ performance based on the extent to which the performance conforms to the expected written discourse standards (Ramanathan-Abbott 1993). On the other hand, as the physical world and the perceptions of individuals and communities in it change over time or due to certain factors, these rigidified conventions undeniably undergo ‘incremental changes’ themselves. Hence, Ramanathan and Kaplan’s suggestion that heightening genre awareness in (L1 and) L2 instructors [or university students] as a way of developing their meta-awareness will result in them reflecting on and understanding the social practices of their discourse communities. These practices, which either contribute to maintaining genre stability or ensuring genre evolution, are also influenced by the L2 instructors or students’ participation in the communities, which may or may not effect change (2000: 171). Gee asserts that “meta-knowledge can make mal-adapted L2 students smarter than adapted ones” as “meta-knowledge is power leading to the ability to manipulate, to analyse, to resist while advancing” (1990: 148). It can be inferred that due to their being forced to learn genres and confront difficulties emerging from the complexities of academic genres, L2 students might be at an advantage in comparison to the other students. Vygotsky postulated that language influences the development of higher cognitive functions (Hodson & Hodson 1998), as it “enhances learning and precedes knowledge and thinking” (Powell & Kalina 2009: 248). Freire argued that learning is essentially based on dialogue and contributes to social constructionism: students assume both the teacher and learner roles, as their roles change frequently in the learning process (Gordon, 2009), as they learn through dialogue with others. The acquisition of knowledge occurs by means of inquiry and meaning making. Language then plays a pivotal role in the reception of information and organisation of meaning (Hodson & Hodson 1998). One limitation of both cognitive constructivism and social constructivism is their being premised on participating students’ prior knowledge, thinking abilities and understanding. This study posits that the group writing consultation might assist in heightening the students’ awareness of genre and genre change through social interactions and consultancy.

2.2.3. The Group Writing Consultation Model

As mentioned in the problem statement section, when one thinks of the type of methodology to apply to the GC, the tendency is to apply the approach used for the one-on-one or IC facilitation strategies. Others would suggest using the methods used for group discussions, writing circle or peer writing groups. The nature and dynamics of the group writing consultation have been found to be completely different from those of the aforementioned types of groups (Shabanza 2017). The commonality among these types of groups is the provision of feedback, either between the teacher/ lecturer/ facilitator or more advanced peer and the student, or among students.

2.2.3.1. Peer Writing Feedback

Peer feedback involves students providing feedback to other students. Researchers such as Ismael (2011: 75) have focused on the effects of positive feedback given during the IC on the student's written work. Ismael argues that factors such as the teacher's feedback, the student's proficiency, educational and cultural background, and expectations influence the impact of feedback on the student. Teachers or writing consultants in this case, should provide constructive and encouraging feedback to students throughout the writing process, without which learning would be impaired (Ismael 2011: 75). Ismael cites Lundstrom and Baker (2009), who investigated feedback in the context of peer review. The investigation was intended to find out which one between giving feedback and receiving feedback resulted in an improvement in the students' writing skills. Students from an intensive writing programme were grouped into feedback "givers" and feedback "receivers". The results showed that the "givers" who examined the other students' writing demonstrated more noticeable improvements in the writing during the semester. In a peer-learning environment such as the writing centre, learning is maximised through non-judgmental feedback and the guided writing process (Archer 2011; Kane 2012). It could be inferred that, similarly to writing circles, GC enable students to 'consult' with peers and benefit from the social interactions; for example, by clarifying their own thoughts about an assignment and integrating other students' inputs into their own ideas.

2.2.3.2. Writing Circles

Group writing consultations and writing circles refer fundamentally to differing models: one with a writing consultant playing the role of a guide or facilitator and the other, where peers work together to provide each other with feedback and guidance. Lee and Boud (2003) state that writing circle groups might be established on an *ad-hoc* basis or formed with each new project. Group members often aim to review the identified problems and work together on completing either a common draft or separate drafts. Lee and Boud (2003) emphasise that writing circle members are under the obligation to agree on the basic operating principles, which include:

- appointing a leader
- clarifying the recommended group behaviour: these must promote active participation, mutual assistance and equal opportunity.
- laying out all expectations and responsibilities of members
- outlining the authorship order
- agreeing on a meeting methodology (for example: conference calls, on-line conversations, email, and others)
- establishing a time line, which can be helpful in facilitating assignments and timelines.

Posner and Baecker (1993) propose a number of formats, which may be used by writing circles, depending on the purpose and composition. Firstly, the Single Writer format consists of a process where one person plays the role of scribe, while others have various duties within the group. Secondly, the Separate Writers format means different authors contribute sections which are combined at a later stage. Thirdly, the Joint Writing format is where two or more writers work on the text simultaneously. Lastly, the Scribe format pertains to a situation where one member writes the combined thoughts of the group. Kim and Eklundh (2001) stress that each of these scenarios has a group "Document Manager" in charge of controlling and handling the common draft, while other group members contribute more to the editing process rather than the actual writing. Kim and Eklundh point out that writing circles often consist of four or less authors.

One of the benefits of the writing circle as a process is that, because each group member is hands-on, though not to the same extent, all members become familiar with all aspects of writing. The process provides all members with the opportunity to contribute to the knowledge base and tasks, use their current skills, and build expertise to learn new ones.

2.2.3.3. Group Discussions: The Grable and Kaplan's Models

To shed light on the dynamics of the GC, I use Grable and Kaplan's group discussion principles as one of the conceptual frameworks. I should emphasise that group discussion represents one of the aspects of the GC, although these two models should not be used interchangeably. Grabe and Kaplan (1996: 306) discussed some of the models of successful group discussions, including Cooperative Learning and Group Work, Guided Group Discussions and Peer Group Responses. Cooperative Learning and Group Work aims to have students cooperate in inquiry and interaction in order to achieve a common goal. Based on a strictly organised approach, all learners are responsible for the group outcome. Each student in the group is allocated a task such as leading the group, encouraging interaction, documenting progress, and acting as a spokesperson for the group. The main responsibility of group members is to solve problems together and support one another, while the teacher's role is the scaffolding of tasks, modelling of desired behaviour, and monitoring of activities. Cooperative Learning groups share a number of features including offering an array of options for students, instructing them in social and interpersonal communication and leadership skills, promoting a sense of cohesiveness among members, taking the perspectives of individual members into consideration, and ensuring the logical organisation of tasks. The group often emphasises each member's responsibility to contribute to the attainment of the set objectives.

There are five main types of Cooperative Learning and Group Work approaches: the Group Investigative Approach, the Learning Together Method, Jigsaw, the Structural Approach and the Student Team Learning Approach (Ibid 307). The Group Investigative Method seeks to break large projects into smaller ones to be accomplished by subgroups that are responsible for planning, executing and reporting on the work. The Learning Together Method stresses the necessity of team members to work together throughout the project through team-building activities, discussion and teacher support. The Jigsaw encourages group and intergroup cooperation by giving members from different groups different sets of information and instructing them to join other group members with similar information to work together to achieve the goal. Groups then regroup and collate the information to achieve a broader goal. The Structural Approach instructs students on how to organise and present information for larger activities, using various types of cooperative strategies. Finally the Student Learning Method focuses on content-area learning, based on the prospects of member accountability, team reward and multi opportunities for success.

Grabe and Kaplan's (1996: 347) Guided Group Discussions involve students planning their writing, reading and responding to specific texts, through a rigorous process of inquiry. The teacher's constant questioning of the students interpretations and opinion steers the discussions in a different perspective on the texts and the writing itself each time. The discussions of the readings aim to direct the students to re-evaluate the evidence, the logic of arguments, the substance in a theoretical perspective and the conclusions to be drawn. Students are taught to challenge each other and exercise critical reading skills. The discussions often culminate in the writing of summaries in response to the readings; alternatively, students can work to schematically represent the information.

Peer Group Response, which is strongly supported by writing process researchers because feedback is provided by a person other than the teacher, involves students bringing their completed drafts to class and exchanging drafts with their classmates for feedback purposes (Grabe and Kaplan's 1996: 379). The students may be provided with peer-review guidelines and be required to present their written responses to each text read to the class, and even complete an evaluation or reflection form. The weakness of this approach is that students are given no instruction except to read each other's papers and comment. In addition to peer review and feedback, the benefits of this approach are that students will see similar problems and weaknesses in their own writing, be exposed to their peer's innovative and creative ideas, and discover new ways of reading specific genres. This approach relates to two theoretical trends: the first trend is the Reader-Response or Poststructuralist approach to text analysis and interpretation, whereby the reader creates and recreates the substance of texts, which is no longer considered as inherent to the text (Grabe and Kaplan's 1996: 380). The second trend, the Socio-Cognitive Approach to learning posits that the acquisition and utilisation of knowledge occur through negotiated interactions, involving real intentions to communicate with real audience expectations. This approach values the social context in which communication occurs.

In respect of this study, Grabble and Kaplan's Group Discussion Model cannot serve as a framework as it describes activities in a secondary school setting with a teacher as a facilitator and learners at the same educational level in terms of understanding, knowledge and educational experience. However, the foci of this investigation extend beyond the discursive aspects, to include the dynamics, AL and disciplinary literacies conventions, discourses, and

genres, as well as social relations between the consultant or teacher and students, among students, and between students and their disciplines. The GC differs from the group discussion in that the GC may not be guided by a teacher, but a writing consultant, who is seen as a peer by the students, may be meeting the students for the first time, may be from a field other than the students', and possess no familiarity with the students' disciplinary content. In this regard, it becomes imperative to investigate the exact nature of the social relations in the process of learning disciplinary genres.

One of the assumptions of this thesis is that as opposed to one-on-one consultations, the GC presents students with an opportunity to learn, not only from the writing consultants, but also from their peers. Through the group interactions, learners refine their own understandings and help others do the same (Woolfolk 2011). Applefield et al. (2001) define social constructivism as the assumption that individuals form or construct knowledge through interactions with others to exchange, contrast, and discuss ideas as learners. This viewpoint contends that the social construction of knowledge promotes modelling behaviours observed in the interactions with others. The determining factors in the social constructivist classroom is the collaborative and social interactions among students, and between students and the teacher (Applefield et al. 2001) or writing consultant.

Some of the key concepts underpinning constructivism are: the nature of the learner, the learner's responsibility for learning, the importance of discussion and collaboration among learners for learning, and the role of the instructor in a constructivist learning environment. Firstly, the learner is understood as a unique and complex agent in the learning process; possessing characteristics, which should be valued, promoted and rewarded (Wertsch 1997). As the learner's background and culture are given pre-eminence, he/she is urged to arrive at his/her own version of the truth, which would be undeniably influenced by his/her background, culture and worldview. This in contrast highlights the importance of the nature of the learner's social interactions with more knowledgeable members of his/her community, in order to be able to acquire knowledge of social meanings and usage of more significant symbol systems, such as language. This is crucial as "children [or young adults, my emphasis] develop their thinking abilities by interacting with other children [or young adults], adults and the physical world" (Vygotsky 1981).

Secondly, social constructivism stresses the learner's responsibility for learning, and not the instructor's, to actively participate in the learning process by constructing their own understanding, looking for meaning and trying to find "regularity and order in the events of the world even in the absence of full or complete information" (Glasersfeld 1991).

Thirdly, the constructivist Harkness Discussion Method, named after Edward Harkness, gathers students seated in a circle, motivating and controlling their own discussion, where the teacher's only functions are to observe and guide the discussion intermittently. Students non-competitively share the goal and the responsibility of conducting the discussion. Most studies aimed at raising the use of student discussion in the classroom promote and are underpinned by socio-constructivist theories. Group discussions offer several advantages including, firstly, allowing students to generalise and transfer their knowledge from classroom learning and building a solid foundation for communicating ideas out loud (Ormrod & Jones 2012). Secondly, these discussions increase students' ability to test ideas, synthesise ideas from peers, and build a deeper understanding of the content (Hurley 2012; Ormrod & Jones 2012). Thirdly, they create opportunities for students to 'talk' about their ideas and develop their thinking and reasoning skills, while arguing their opinions persuasively (Ormrod & Jones 2012). Fourthly, large and small group discussions offer students the feeling of belonging to a community and collaborating with others through talk and discussion (Hunt & Agnoli 1991).

Lastly, socio-constructivists ensure that the learning environment adequately promotes and profoundly challenges the learners' thinking (Di Vesta 1987). Learners who should retain ownership of the problem-solution process are trained to become effective thinkers. Moreover, in order to achieve this, instructors or teachers should assume multiple roles including consultant or coach. Some of the cooperative learning strategies include (Woolfolk 2010):

- "Reciprocal Questioning: students work together to ask and answer questions
- Jigsaw Classroom: students become "experts" on one part of a group project and teach it to the others in their group
- Structured Controversies: Students work together to research a particular controversy"

Woolfolk's strategies above emphasise that learning extends beyond a one-dimensional assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge by learners; it is a process through which learners are integrated into a specific knowledge community. The learner and the guide, be it the teacher or lecturer or a more advanced peer, constitute a *maximal learning environment* in

which learning is a socially mediated activity and where the collaborative nature of the interactions between the participants is key. In this context, the learner benefits not only from the teacher's guidance, but also from his/her active involvement in the group discussions or activities.

In this study, Woolfolk's principles are encapsulated in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) principle, which Vygotsky explained by classifying thinking and problem solving into three categories: skills that students can perform independently; those that they cannot perform even with assistance from others; and the ones that they can perform with help from others (Cleborne, Johnson, and Willis 1997). The latter represents the ZPD, which can also be conceptualised through Vygotsky's developmental levels: on the one hand, the actual development level, which the learners have already reached and at which he or she can solve problems on their own. On the other hand, the ZPD represents the potential development level, which the learner can reach under the guidance of a teacher or through collaborative work with peers (Vygotsky 1981).

In the study, I concur that the social aspect in social constructivism remains primordial; especially the elements of collaboration between not only the learners, but also the learners and their educator, who is not merely a facilitator, but a participant in the learning process. As such, Vygotsky's theory demarcates itself from the Piagetian concept, which prescribes that in the learning process the teacher should exclusively play the role of a guide and "let a naturally unfolding development take its course" (1984). Vygotsky's theory concurs with the purpose of this research in the sense that it considers learning as an essentially social phenomenon aiming to take the student struggling with AL in isolation and place him or her in a social setting with peers to facilitate learning. This study seeks to ascertain whether some of the principles of the ZPD, that is, collaboration, modelling, active involvement of both learners and facilitator, socialisation, socially mediated learning, and learner participation in the learning community, are upheld. The social constructivist learning environment is however not exempt of challenges.

2.3. Literature Review on Social Constructivism, AL and Writing Centre Consultations in the Higher Education Context

2.3.1. Social Constructivist Pedagogy

As an analytical framework, social constructivism provides the possibility of studying the GC from the social perspective, which lends itself to the writing as a social practice stance. I use this perspective to understand not only the nature of the GC, but also the social interactions between the writing consultants and the group of students, as well as amongst the students themselves. However as stated in the theoretical framework, this approach was essentially used in child psychology and in school education several decades ago. As such, applying it to the HE level has been found to be problematic for various reasons discussed in this chapter. The following sections discuss some of the studies that have been conducted on social constructivism in an HE context. These descriptions are limited to the approach as applied in academic writing development, mainly in writing centres and AL initiatives and modules.

Sullivan (2011: 24) conducted a study to introduce social constructivist pedagogy to secondary social studies pre-service teachers with the aim of uncovering strategies by which a university course instructor may model or teach social constructivism via socio-constructivist strategies. Using the positioning approach, the researcher used classroom talk to model and support social constructivism, to "mitigate student apprehension and promote a democratic learning community" (Ibid: 24). Positioning is a strategy for analysing dialogue to highlight specific features of talk used by speakers to situate others in facilitating their purpose within their conversation (Sullivan 2011: 25; Davies 2000). Sullivan uses Richardson's (2003) five principles of socio-constructivist classrooms, which are:

> (a) consideration for the individual and respect for students' background;
> (b) promotion of group dialogue with a view to discuss an aspect of the domain in order to facilitate a shared understanding of the topic;
> (c) planned or unplanned instruction in the formal knowledge related to the topic;
> (d) affordance of opportunities for participants to identify, challenge, change or add to the prevailing beliefs and understandings; and
> (e) development of students' meta-awareness of their own understanding and learning processes.

During the study, the classroom instructor positioned herself as a learner in her class and used the questioning technique as a conversational norm and positioning tool. The results showed that it is imperative that in the socio-constructivist classroom knowledge be construed between class participants, including the instructor. This is important especially in an academic setting where the lecturer's status as "purveyor of knowledge and truth" will be challenged and the

lecturer portrayed as a member of this particular learning community (Ibid: 27). The self-referent instructor sometimes used 'rhetorical' questions to seek feedback in a friendly and relaxed manner, negotiating procedural details of the class and syllabus. Using social constructivism in a classroom setting presented significant challenges, especially due to students' reticence and lack of prior knowledge on social constructivism. This required persistence and creativity on the part of the instructor, who might otherwise revert to teaching via transmission-oriented methods (Ibid: 25, 26). Sullivan concluded that the instructor's multicultural positioning vis-à-vis her teaching and views on social constructivism was emancipatory in the sense that although teaching often begins with the student in mind, it facilitates culturally responsive teaching. Currently in the writing centre context, consultants act as facilitators, and it will be beneficial to have the consultant act as a participant in the group discussion.

Liu and Lan (2016) conducted an investigation focusing on the collaborative nature of constructivist approaches. They studied the differences in levels of student motivation, lexical gains, and perceptions about collaboration between individuals and collaborative learning at university using students' activities on Google Docs. The study used two groups of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students where some students were randomly assigned to work individually and others were to collaborate to complete the tasks of interpreting Google Docs. The findings, which were consistent with previous studies, showed that collaborators performed better than individuals in terms of vocabulary gain. Moreover, collaborators scored higher in terms of motivation to acquire knowledge and a positive perception of the learning task. However, Liu and Lan argue that it is unsure what the source of the positive motivation and perception is since the user-friendly interface of the Google Docs could have played a significant role in the process.

Liu and Lan's investigation focused on how students, in this case EFL students, interact with one another in knowledge co-construction or meaning making negotiation in typical face-to-face communication situations, particularly in order to improve the knowledge of a target language. Social relationships significantly influence academic success (Samara & Lillejord 2012 cited in Liu & Lan 2016; Engstrom & Tinto 2008: 47), that is, students who can maintain positive social relationships with others in the academic setting are more likely to remain in school and perform better than those who cannot. In the context of web-based activities such as chatrooms, blogs and google docs, socialisation, which aims to acculturate students into the

disciplinary discourses and genres, and based on the presumption that students will be able to reproduce these discourses and genres once they have understood and practiced the rules, is facilitated where peers support one another. McLoughlin and Lee (2010) suggest that the internet particularly renders genuine communication between students possible to promote autonomous learning. The latter leads to meaningful communication, which results in motivation and engagement (Cho & Kim 2013). Given that Liu and Lan's study involved EFL students, it would be worthwhile to investigate the nature of the collaboration and social interactions among English as a Second Language (ESL) students in the group consultation processes, though not working on Google Docs. Another significant finding of Liu and Lan's research is that collaborators appeared to demonstrate a lower level of text anxiety than the individuals. Collaborators participated more actively in the web-based learning than individuals. This study is limited by the small size of the sample and the use of essentially quantitative data. Liu and Lan recommend that further research needs to investigate collaboration qualitatively in terms of the nature of interactions between students and during problem-solving activities or whether the nature of interactions influence knowledge gain. This recommendation lends itself to one of the objectives of this study, which is to investigate the nature of the social interactions between the students and the consultant and among students in the group.

In an article entitled "Collaborative Writing: Product, Process and Students' Reflections", where Storch (2005) sets out to investigate the nature of the collaboration occurring between students in small group discussions. As pointed out from the onset in this thesis, few studies have investigated what really happens in a GC, particularly with students involved in language or writing tasks. Storch gathered data through audio recording of individual and pair group work sessions, after the students had been given a choice between working individually or in a pair. Storch reported that most students preferred working in pairs. All texts produced were collected and the pairs were interviewed afterwards. The data was analysed and a comparison of the texts produced individually and those produced in pairs was made. It was found that pairs produced shorter and better texts in terms of meeting the requirements of the activity, grammatical correctness, and complexity, than the others. The audio-recording showed evidence of a more involved and productive process in the pairs' talks and finally the interviews highlighted the students' reflections on collaborative writing. One of the reasons why Storch's study resonates with this thesis is because of the collaborative work that occurred between students. The analytical framework of this study, social constructivism centers on the notion of

collaboration amongst peers. Collaboration was found to better facilitate the sharing of ideas and feedback among students. Most students expressed positive feedback about their experience of pair work, though a small number of them did not like collaborative work. Storch insists that based on social constructivism students' involvement in group discussions promote co-construction of knowledge (2005: 154). He further emphasises that from an L2 perspective and in pedagogical terms, small group and/or pair work are further supported by the communicative approach (154), which prescribe instruction through dialogue, talk or conversation.

However, Storch failed to point out that the limitation of peer review demonstrated by his study is that the students often focus on the text as a product and on the surface features of writing, such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation, rather than on the writing process and content or meaning. Storch also found that students collaborated more actively at the beginning or brainstorming stage and at the end of the process during the peer review or feedback stage, rather than throughout the process and sharing responsibility for the production of a text of quality. Storch cautions that small groups or pairs should not be constituted only for purposes of peer-editing, but the text should be produced together through a process of idea generation, information sharing, and feedback exchange to share ownership of the produced text. He however points out that these findings and conclusions are only suggestive and that the mostly quantitative results were statistically insignificant. Additionally, given the small scale nature of the relatively short texts written by students in the process, the influence of the collaboration in small groups and pairs should be studied further with a larger sample of students.

Brodahl et al. (2011) studied whether students' perceptions of collaborative writing depend on factors such as gender, age, digital competence, interest in digital tools, educational settings, or choice of writing tools, with a particular aim to determine which tools are most effective for small group activities. Using both a quantitative approach, through a questionnaire, and a qualitative approach, through interviews, the study administered a questionnaire to education students in order to gather data on their perceptions about Google Docs and *EhterPad;* both of which present users with opportunities to work simultaneously on the same document from different locations. The analytical framework included social constructivism and community of practice, defined earlier in this chapter. In the study, 166 education students participated in the collaborative writing of an assignment involving completing an online survey. Using frequency distribution to analyse the data, the study found that the perceptions of students with

above average digital competence and a positive attitude towards digital tools were positive. Gender had no influence on perceptions though younger students were found to be more positive than older ones, but the latter were so few that it was futile to draw any conclusions. Most significantly, 13.9% of students declared to have been motivated by the collaborative nature of the assignment and 15.7% reported that their ability to use the digital tools improved owing to the quality of the small group collaboration. However, 70% of students feared that the tools did not meet their expectations in terms of functionality and 40% of the students rather focused on editing or making remarks about other students' contributions. This last finding seems more relevant to this thesis as the rest of Brodahl et al.'s paper mostly dwells on the students' perceptions rather than on the nature of the collaborative interactions. Brodahl et al. conclude that to be more meaningful, this study should also qualitatively analyse the students' comments and the extent and quality of the use of the tools for collaboration.

2.3.2. Studies on Writing Consultation Practice

2.3.2.1. Studies on Writing Centre Consultations: A Global Perspective

The one-on-one consultation seems to have emerged with the writing centre movement and from their inception, writing centres have been known for their one-on-one consultations. What has changed over time is how the consultation is conducted, who was involved in them (type of student and of writing consultant), the associated theories or rationales, as well as the types of services offered by the writing centres alongside the one-on-one consultations.

In an article entitled "Valuing one-on-one consultations as input into other modes of teaching", Chanock (2007) argues that attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of one-on-one consultations are bound to misrepresent the real value of the consultations. This is because the input of the one-on-one consultation is towards other modes of teaching. She contends that through one-on-one consultations, one can understand the students' "good reasons" for their "bad writing", in order to design and administer richer and more pertinent interventions for a larger population of students. Chanock, who examined students' problems at the levels of choice of words, sentence and paragraph construction and referencing, concluded that the students' problems could derive from the lack of awareness on the respective disciplinary conventions. She devised a pedagogy and a curriculum to address the identified problems. She refers to Ivanic's (1998 cited in Chanock 2007) work on conversations with students at the University of Lancaster

about their work in-progress for their subjects. Ivanic reported that it is only through such individual conversations with students that he could gain insight into their problems, in this case, aspects of texts, which were difficult to apprehend from the surface features (Ivanic 192). In essence, a one-on-one consultation offers a unique and unsurpassed opportunity to gain insight into a student's real problems, whether with writing or with other aspects of AL. Chanock pointed out from the outset that the problem with one-on-one consultations is that it is almost impossible to measure their impact on student writing. Archer (2008) equally mentioned that there are a multitude of factors that may lead to an improvement in a student's writing, making it difficult to measure exactly how much of the influence can be attributed to the one-on-one consultation.

In Chanock's conclusion, forcing students to conform to a range of specific academic conventions or rules and genres, may not always result in an improvement in their writing or in good writing, due to their application in inadequate contexts (Chanock 2000: 125). Chanock reasoned that one-on-one consultations may offer not only opportunities for students to deal with the lower level order of concerns including spelling, grammar and punctuation, but also for them to understand the purpose of writing (Ibid). In one-on-one consultations, conversations with students may afford consultants a platform to identify the students' misconceptions about fundamental academic and disciplinary concepts and terms, and to rethink the issues and rectify the misconceptions. She established a link with the focus of the one-on-one consultations, but without alluding to the writing consultant or student's approach to the one-on-one consultation *per se*. However, Chanock's study dwelt on the contribution of one-on-one consultations in facilitating students' learning in academic writing and other contexts, without expressly examining the strategies or tools used in the one-on-one consultations. This study precisely ventures into the happenings of the writing consultation and in the complexities of its social nature and tenets. It is not enough to measure students' understanding of disciplinary convention using the results obtained from academic work; one should also zoom in on the social processes occurring among students engaged in group work and learning.

Walkinshaw, Milford and Freeman (2015) recently conducted research in response to the calls for measurable English language outcomes from one-on-one consultations on the academic writing abilities and lexico-grammatical competence of English as an Additional Language (EAL) students. The study documented the attendance of 31 EAL students and gathered

samples of their academic writing both before and after the nine-month research. The analysis of the samples involved both the rating and comparing of the participants' academic writing skills and a quantification of lexico-grammatical irregularities. The findings showed no noticeable positive shifts in the samples probably owing to the relatively short time of the research period and to the limited participation rate. It was found however that there was presence of future predictors of shifts with continued utilisation of the one-on-one consultation service. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed no correlation between attendance of one-on-one consultations and positive improvement in academic writing ability. A Spearman's rho calculation demonstrated a tentative relationship to positive pre-post shifts in the three academic writing sub-skills: task fulfilment, grammar, and vocabulary. However, instances of four common spelling and grammar errors (subject-verb agreement, wrong choice of word, plural/singular, and punctuation) declined at post-writing. The researchers concluded that there was a potential correlation between participants' use of one-on-one consultations and improved academic writing abilities with continued attendance of one-on-one consultations. Walkinshaw et al.'s study equally focused on the impact of one-on-one consultations and although the students' attendance of one-on-one consultations was analysed, no attention was paid to the dynamics of or strategies used in the one-on-one consultations by the consultant or student per se. This study intend to cover this gap by mapping the social interactions between role-players in GCs, without attempting to assess the effectiveness of the sessions.

Huijser, Kimminss and Galligans' (2008) conducted a study to evaluate the one-on-one consultation and concluded that one-on-one consultations are part of a number of learning facilitation strategies on a continuum. The findings showed that the complexity of student needs can only be defined through one-on-one consultations, as opposed to lectures and tutorials. Such complexities include conceptual "stuck places", student scaffolding for learning and development, as well as course and assessment analysis. Chanock, as well as Huijser, Kimminss and Galligans, do not however seem to place any value on how an IC is conducted by the writing consultant or experienced by the student.

Stevenson and Kokkim (2009) carried out a study to determine the criteria that students use to evaluate the effectiveness of one-on-one consultations. They aimed to avoid determining the success of one-on-one consultations in terms of levels of attendance and usage by students. The merit of their study is perhaps the recognition that AL work, which include one-on-one consultations, and which is mostly championed from outside the mainstream teaching and

evaluation processes. AL work is positioned and constructed in various ways in different universities, and perhaps in various faculties and disciplines within the same university. Through its analysis of how students judge one-on-one consultations, Stevenson and Kokkim's study presents an aspect that nears the objectives of my study, by examining how consultants and students approach one-on-one consultations or how they approach the interventions differently depending on the context.

In a theoretical study, Williams and Severino (2004) report on some of the differences between the pedagogical perspectives at play in a writing consultation with L1 (or native speakers) and L2 speakers of English. They point out that in the early 1990s, several authors examined aspects of writing centre practices for L2 writers. Their advice to writing centre consultants and coordinators working with L2 writers included firstly a consideration of how to manage the cross-cultural differences in interactions; secondly, how writing consultants should address common L2 errors in syntax, morphology and lexis; thirdly, strategies to use in assisting L2 writers; and lastly, the insights of contrastive rhetoric. They found that L2 writers require a more flexible approach in writing consultations in comparison to the approach used in native writers' pedagogy. Writing centre pedagogy and practice conventionally advises a non-directive and collaborative approach to writing consultation facilitation, making use mainly of the questioning technique as a primary method in assisting writers to discover their own meaning (Kane 2012; Shabanza 2014; Shamoon & Burns 1995). In this pedagogy, consultants do not dictate answers, but guide the writers through questioning in formulating their own plans for writing and for effective revision. The students' request to receive help with grammar, spelling and punctuation for instance is deflected or postponed with a suggestion to first focus on the text as a whole. Powers (1993) advocates that the consultant plays a role of cultural informant explaining to the L2 writer how educational expectations differ from their own cultural practices with which they are familiar. The consultant is equipped with the knowledge and expertise about academic and disciplinary conventions, rules, genres and cultures. Hence, he/she is better placed to act as a mediator between the student and their disciplines, since lecturers and tutors cannot afford to take each student by the hand and introduce them to these cultures due to large class sizes and time constraints.

William and Severino (2004) emphasise the differentiation of pedagogical approaches adapted for L1 and L2 writers. In one-on-one consultations, L2 writers, whose English language competence is limited, would not sense what 'sounds wrong' in their writing when encouraged

to read their work aloud by the consultant. This limitation may motivate consultants to adopt an authoritarian approach consisting in making overt suggestions for ways in which the L2 student would improve their work; which writing consultants do not often do with L1 writers. The latter are allowed to retain ownership of their work, while the consultant provides minimum guidance through questioning. Harris (1986) argued that the writing consultant somehow wears several "hats" in the same one-on-one consultation, including coach, diagnostician, listeners, commentators, and counsellor. In essence, the three approaches to writing consultancy referred to by McAndrew and Reigstad (2001, cited in Severino & Cogie, 2016), that is, student-centered, collaborative and teacher-centered, can all be used in one consultation.

In their conclusion, William and Severino (2004) argue that it is *quasi* impossible to determine the effectiveness of one-on-one consultations by setting up controlled conditions. They point out that writing consultancy with L2 writers is prone to a weakness. The principles of second language acquisition and active participation in negotiation (during the one-on-one consultation) of meaning may facilitate the acquisition of acquisition of AL, but the dominant status of consultants, often found to prevail in L2 consultations, may impede writers participation, resulting in a lost opportunity for language and AL learning.

The merit of their paper resides in that it explores one-on-one consultations in a manner that resonates with the aim of this thesis. The authors surgically examine writing consultations from a pedagogical perspective, and extend as far as differentiating between pedagogies used for L1 writers and those used for L2 writers. Being essentially theoretical, William and Severino's study failed to delve deeper into the difficulties experienced by consultants and L1, and L2 student writers. The study also looked at the students' performances individually. Another plausible assumption could be that L2, whose proficiency would be lacking in individual consultation, could possibly perform better if working in collaboration with other L2 students in a group consultation. In an attempt to fill this gap, this thesis precisely explores the challenges faced both by writing consultants and by students in a GC, which, it has been established, differs from the one-on-one consultation, peer group writing and writing circles, not only in terms of size, composition, dynamics, and pedagogical considerations, but also social interactions and processes.

3.3.2.2. Studies on Writing Consultation Practice: South African Perspective

This subsection presents an overview of the writing centre consultation model in the South African context. This is important because in order to explicate the challenges of a writing GC, one has to, among other things, to identify some of the features that differentiate the individual from the GC, for instance. Few stakeholders within universities are aware that in addition to the consultations, the writing centre conducts GCs, AL workshops, online consultations, and various collaborative initiatives with disciplinary staff, such as assistance on integrating AL into the assignment assessment rubrics and teaching materials (Archer 2010; Bawarshi & Pelowski 1999). It should be emphasised from the outset that the principles and strategies of the IC cannot be applied to the GC as the two diametrically differ in terms of group size and dynamics. It should also be noted that most empirical studies reviewed in this thesis, which allude to the social constructivist pedagogy, exploit collaboration as a catalyst of group learning, either among students, or among students and teacher/lecturer/tutor, or even between writing centre coordinator/director/consultant and departmental lecturer or tutor.

In a study entitled 'Engaging students through writing: a collaborative journey', Drennan (2017) reports on the findings of a writing centre-disciplinary lecturer collaboration. The study aimed to understand how the Free State University writing centre worked with academics to assist students with their disciplinary literacy needs. The investigation was motivated by the requirements for academic departments to expose the mostly academically unprepared or underprepared university entrants to the academic literacies and learning experiences and practices, to develop the 'concepts and schemas' necessary to cope with tertiary education (Drennan 2017: 63). As it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to ensure that students achieve the course and content objective as well as an adequate pass rate, universities should ensure that students are engaged in activities and practice skills that promote critical thinking, and discipline-specific reading and writing.

Using mixed-methods, the study data was collected from two collaborative initiatives: one with a lecturer from the Faulty of Law and the other with a lecturer from the Faculty of Medicine. For the initiative with the Faculty of Law, 198 first-year Legal Skills students wrote an essay on the 'importance of a plagiarism policy for (a) the University of Free State (UFS), (b) the Faculty of Law, and (c) the student. The participant students then had to (1) attend a one-hour face-to-face workshop in a small group, and then (2) an individual consultation at the writing

centre. The students then completed a questionnaire with a demographic section, multiple-choice questions, and a Likert-scale question section assessing their perceptions on the workshop and the associated materials. For the initiative with the Faculty of Medicine, 128 first-year students, who conducted visits to local clinics in small groups, were required to write a 1000-word reflective essay on their experience. These students were also required to (1) attend a compulsory information session, (2) small-group workshop, and (3) individual consultation at the writing centre. In the individual consultations, consultants ensured that the notions dealt with in the small group workshops were applied in the students' reflective essays. These students also filled in a questionnaire on their perceptions of the workshop sessions and materials. The qualitative data consisted of the questionnaire responses and individual sessions, while the quantitative data consisted of the essay scores.

From the Law Faculty data, 93% of students stated that they only understood the expectations of the writing task after the workshop and could not have passed the task without the session. Qualitatively, the themes that emerged from an analysis of the responses were the quality of the presentation, content of the workshop, interaction, environment, understanding of the writing process, and impact on writing skills. Students commented that they liked 'the way things were explained in detail' and the 'presenting skills' of the facilitator, as well as the way 'the facilitator was friendly and willing to help'. From the Medical Faculty data, 98.4% of students stated that they could not have understood the writing task without the workshop and 97% indicated that they only understood the required format post workshop. Themes that emerged from the qualitative data were the same as those obtained from the Law Faculty data. With regard to the workshop, the students stated that they appreciated the presentation (39%) and the interaction (34%). Drennan noted that the students who attended both the workshop and individual consultation obtained higher scores than those who attended either the workshop or the individual consultation.

One of the gaps in Drennan's study is the misconception that academic literacies and writing can be 'imparted' on students, as if these could be imposed or forcefully transmitted to students. This can be said to correspond with the deficit or remedial approach bewailed by writing centre practitioners and researchers. The study further argues that the literacies cannot be 'imparted in isolation', that is, from the students' disciplinary lecturers, when this phrase should pertain to isolation from the students themselves. One of the underlying objectives of this thesis, in investigating the challenges faced in group consultations through social constructivist lenses,

is that students should be the active participants at the centre of any initiatives aimed at developing their discursive, critical thinking, writing and reading abilities. In Drennan's study, both workshops and individual consultations were facilitated and conducted almost *extra-cathedra*, where the students could be said to be 'passive'. There seems to be no overt indication of a dialogue, talk or even interaction, which could have allowed students to 'play with' disciplinary concepts or explore conventions.

In a study conducted to explore possible multimodal pedagogies to use in improving student writing in the writing centre, Archer (2017) bewails the autonomous and decontextualised models of student support, where students continue to be characterised as 'lacking' in resources, as denounced in the review of Drennan's study above. Archer's study aimed to explore how modes and ensembles of modes were used by consultants and students to develop thinking and learning in one-on-one writing centre consultations at the University of Cape Town. Archer posits that this pedagogical approach can enhance the consultation through the use of multimodal pedagogies. Her study interrogates working on screen versus the page.

Archer situates her paper in the need for new pedagogies centred on talk and social interactions, which can stimulate and develop critical thinking, metalanguage and creativity in students. Archer uses aspects of the transformative theory framing writing centres as transformative spaces, where students who participate in the construction of discourse are in turn shaped by it through meaning making. Firstly, her study examined the use of multimodal pedagogies in consultant training programmes: consultants were given a task to reflect on an object that signifies their relationship to writing and their writing processes individually. Archer drew on a prior finding by Emmison and Smith (2000: 111, cited in Archer 2017) that in multimodal approaches to pedagogy, 'objects are seen as "reflections of wider lives of communities and individuals"'. She went on to claim that as meanings are created through 'recontextualisation', familiar objects are made strange by examining them in new contexts, while objects become catalysts for talk on experience in training situations. Secondly, consultants enacted mock writing consultations with some acting as 'angry' or 'proud' students, and the others as the consultants, before reversing these roles. These acted scenarios increased the consultants' use of their body and voice in their relation with students, including aspects such as gesture, intonation, proximity, positioning of the document, setting of the consultation agenda, practising –on-the-spot textual analysis, engagement of students through questioning, eliciting answers, creating dialogue, and maintaining focus on the task. Archer proposes four IC

multimodal pedagogies: talk, screen versus page, mind-mapping, and the exploitation of the constraints and risk through artificial restrictions in a writing consultation. This thesis is solely concerned with talk.

In practical terms, the link with this thesis is Archer's postulation that, for students, the one-on-one consultation represents a better way to learn to write: a student-centred environment affording students an exploration and experimentation with writing, and support from a 'critical, but supportive audience' (2017: 5). Her pedagogical stance is that through discussion and argument, for instance, students, who are encouraged to think independently, to articulate problems and to explain their writing and the associated processes, are inculcated a critical way of being. The paper draws on Kress' (2010) principles that the shift from the modes of talk to writing, writing to talk, images to talk, and talk to images to writing, involves cognitive processes. The verbalisation occurring through talk mostly by the student and dialogue between the consultant and the student determines how much learning occurs. This stance somewhat implies that the social interactions between the consultant and student is important, although the focus is on the cognitive aspects of talk. Thus, the weakness of Archer's paper is the overreliance on the cognitive aspect of this talk instead of exploring its social underpinnings as well.

It can be seen that studies have been conducted on peer writing, writing circles, group discussions, and ICs, but no studies currently exist on the GC, particularly in the writing centre context. This thesis intends to fill the gap of studies on the GC in the writing centre context and contribute to the body of knowledge on GC, particularly from a social constructivist perspective.

2.4. Conclusion

In this Chapter, I focused on the theories used as a framework in conceptualising the research and as analytical tools in the interpretation of the data of the study. Firstly, I provided and discussed the definitions of constructionism, constructivism, cognitive constructivism, and socio constructivism, and went on to discuss the weaknesses, strengths and pedagogical applications of socio constructivism. I also presented an overview of the concepts of New Literacies (NLS) and AL, with their definitions, development and applications in HE before describing the GC Model using Grabble and Kapplan's Group Discussion Model. I pointed out

that Group Discussion represents an aspect of the GC Model and that the two concepts may not be used interchangeably. Secondly, I reviewed selected literature on social constructivist pedagogy and writing consultation practice globally and in South Africa, with a particular focus on the individual consultation. It was found that previous studies rather exploited the collaborative nature of socio-constructivist pedagogies quantitatively, for instance, by looking at external factors such as digital competence, digital tolls, and educational setting. However, qualitative studies exploring for instance the interactions of group members, would lend themselves more effectively to an understanding of socio-constructivism in learning situations. The gap in the key literature on writing consultation practice shows that most research globally has focused on broader concerns such as the impact of writing centres on AL in general and student success in particular, their role in increasing access to university, and their institutional positioning, instead of zooming in on writing consultation pedagogy. Few studies that dwelt on the consultation as a pedagogical strategy, centred only on the one-on-one consultation or simply enumerated a few 'broad' and 'common' strategies used in one-on-one consultations such as the problem-based approach and mind-mapping. This study focuses on the group consultation as a socio-constructivist approach implemented to explore the challenges facing consultants and students in the social interactions occurring in the learning of disciplinary literacies in GCs. The next Chapter describes the research paradigm, design, and methodology with the associated procedures, participants, sampling, instruments, and data analysis tools.

CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This Chapter discusses the research paradigm, research design, data collection methods and procedures, instruments, population and sampling, and data analysis. It firstly explains the interpretative research paradigm in the context of this study. Secondly, it describes the research methods, including the questionnaires, the focus group, and the video-recorded observation, with the associated procedures. Thirdly, it presents the participants and the instruments used for each method and the reasons behind their use. Fourthly, it discusses the analysis of the data gathered from the questionnaires, focus groups, and observations. These research paradigm and design were selected to answer the questions: What are the challenges facing students and writing consultants in a GC? What are the social interactions occurring in the GC? And do these social interactions contribute to genre awareness? And how do they occur? The validity, reliability and ethical considerations of the study are also discussed. The research design is a mixed-methods design; a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and procedures.

3.2. Research Paradigm

This study uses the interpretative paradigm in the research design and analysis. This type of paradigm is suitable for qualitative research, particularly where the researcher utilises an inductive approach to observe a phenomenon in its natural setting (Newman 2000; Wilson & MacLeon 2011). This interpretative and inductive approach enabled me to carry out an interpretation of the empirical data, without departing from a theoretical perspective. The approach afforded me some flexibility in the analysis and understanding of and meaning making from the gathered data. Although mixed-methods are used, the overall research design is predominantly qualitative, with the quantitative approach being embedded in the qualitative one.

3.3. Research Design

3.3.1. Mixed-Methods Design

This study used the mixed-methods approach; the process of combining or integrating, as well as collecting and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data in one study (Creswell 2014).

Drawing on Creswell's research, the study uses the mixed methods approach because it deals with data emerging from quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (focus groups and observations). Mixed methods enable the research to counterbalance the weaknesses of one approach with the strengths of the other. They also assist the researcher to carry out a more profound exploration of the findings from the quantitative data, and to check the accuracy of the findings from the qualitative data. These methods also allow the researcher to carry out both statistical and textual analysis and interpretation, across different data sets.

These mixed methods are sequential and explanatory. They are sequential because the qualitative research is preceded and informed by a quantitative data collection, analysis and discussion of findings; and explanatory because the qualitative data complements and explains further the quantitative data and findings (Creswell 2014).

The data collection was carried out in the following order: in 2014, first questionnaires with students and with consultants (quantitative), focus group with students and with consultants (qualitative), and group consultation video-recorded observations (qualitative), and in 2016, second questionnaires with students and consultants (quantitative).

The mixed-methods approach was chosen for this study as an effective way to neutralise any biases inherent in any single method and the triangulation of data sources became a way of ensuring convergence across qualitative and quantitative methods (Jick 1979 in Creswell 2003). In the mixed-methods approach, one method can be embedded into another to allow for deeper insight into various analytical levels; in this case the quantitative approach carried out through survey questionnaires both in 2014 and in 2016 can be seen as a supplement to the qualitative approach implemented through focus groups and video recorded observations.

3.3.2. Qualitative Approach

The qualitative research design was chosen because it offers benefits or strengths in line with the type of data to be gathered. Firstly, this study investigates the challenges of the group writing consultation from the perspectives of writing consultants and students. This may only be made possible using an interpretative approach and a focus on the respondents' interpretation of meanings and their own understandings of their experiences and surroundings, as well as their own roles in the prevailing situations. What the respondents shared with the

researcher was analysed and interpreted using the NLS, social constructivism and AL theories in an attempt to answer the research question.

Secondly, the *de facto* subjective nature of this type of research may only be managed in the context of qualitative research, as it aims to understand not only the perceptions and experiences of respondents, but also the "entire situation" (Stainback & Stainback 1998: 1). The researcher is able to describe the context or natural environment with the associated variable and human interactions, as they are influenced by the context itself.

Thirdly, the nature of qualitative research is to focus on the human person. The latter is seen in qualitative research as an instrument of data collection (Stainback & Stainback 1988). This is the reason why the questionnaire used in this study was designed, used and analysed qualitatively: in order to focus on the actions, experiences, perceptions and even feelings of participants. These were gathered (through video observations and focus group) not only as portrayed in the group consultation, but also as they are conveyed in their own words and as they are interpreted by the researcher.

The qualitative design equally presents some disadvantages or weaknesses. Some of the advantages discussed in the previous paragraph may also constitute disadvantages if not dealt with by the researcher. The nature of this research design means that it is limited in scope: though UJ has four writing centres, one on each Campus, the data was gathered primarily at the APK Campus, using only 53 and 61 of the approximately 50,000 students, and only 20 of the 32 writing consultants. The observations used four of the close to 800 group consultations carried out yearly. Still, from a qualitative research design viewpoint, this is considered valid research as it aims not to generalise findings, but to gain a deeper understanding or insight of the perceptions, experiences, actions and responses in a specific context. Additionally, the subjectivity of qualitative research and the fact that the researcher, as a primary instrument of data collection, may be inductively biased, may compromise the validity and reliability of the study.

For this investigation, an attempt was made to palliate to these possible shortfalls of qualitative research. Creswell (2014: 199) points out that validity is maintained when the researcher ensures the accuracy of the findings by following specific procedures. The procedure followed by this research includes triangulation, the clarification of any bias that the researcher may

bring to the study, and the presentation of negative or discrepant information that may be against the emerging themes (Ibid: 202). Firstly, the results emanating from the observations were triangulated with those from the questionnaires and those from the focus group discussions. Secondly, having been a writing centre practitioner for more than eight years, the researcher might be tempted to demonstrate a preference either for the one-on-one consultation or the group consultation. For this reason, the possible biases were discussed and an attempt was made to outline how they were dealt with. Finally, aspects of the research, which may be in contradiction with the themes or with any other aspect of the study, were disclosed and described whenever necessary in the report.

Qualitative research is the examination, analysis and interpretation of observations in order to identify underlying meanings and patterns of relationships (Hunter & Leahey 2008). It asks broad questions and collects word data from participants (Ibid). I looked for themes and described the information in themes and patterns exclusive to that set of participants. The weaknesses of the qualitative research design reside in the subjectivity of the inquiry, which renders the establishment of reliability and validity almost impossible, and in the fact that the researcher may not detect any bias in the inquiry as he/she is involved in the data collection process (Stainback & Stainback 1988).

3.3.3. Quantitative Approach

The questionnaire, an instrument of data collection associated with quantitative studies, was used with the aim of representing the results of a study quantitatively in the form of graphs or tables. It may be useful in attempting to quantify attitudes, behaviours, and opinions, and in generalising the results to a larger portion of the population (Cresswell 2003). Using a quantitative approach in combination with qualitative methods was imperative, particularly because the methodology of this study was predominantly qualitative as the questions were designed qualitatively, posing questions such as what, how, and why. Still, through the use of questionnaires, the researcher aimed to pose a specific, narrow question and collect a sample of numerical data from participants to answer the question (Given 2008).

Some of the disadvantages of the quantitative approach are that the population sample may not be representative of the general population (Saunders et al. 2009). It can be time consuming, expensive, superficial and labour intensive (Ibid). The mixed-methods approach was intended to offset some of the respective biases of the qualitative and quantitative methods used.

Moreover, the data was analysed using descriptive statistics with the hope that the quantitative aspect would provide unbiased results that can be generalised to a larger population. As a result, the quantitative aspect of the research design is embedded in the predominantly qualitative design.

3.4. Data Collection Methods, Procedures, Participants and Instruments

In the mixed-methods approach, the quantitative approach was implemented using two sets of questionnaires (students and writing consultants) in 2014 and the same in 2016. The qualitative approach in 2014 was carried out using two focus groups, one with students and the other with writing consultants, and using video-recorded observations of two group consultations.

3.4.1. Survey Questionnaire 2014

-Method

This study administered two slightly different questionnaires in 2014: one to students and the other to writing consultants. These questionnaires sought to identify the challenges facing students and consultants in a GC and to explore both the nature and purpose of the social interactions occurring in the consultation. At this stage of the study, the questionnaire was the suitable instrument to identify a general trend in people's opinions, experiences, and behaviour, in order to make a general claim (Driscoll 2011: 163: Harrell & Bradley 2009). This study used it as a starting point to identify themes, which would be investigated in subsequent research procedures. Furthermore, as a quantitative method, the questionnaire offers the advantage of gathering descriptive data with an acceptable level of accuracy, covering a wide range of topics, being relatively inexpensive to use, and being easy to analyse using a variety of existing software. Its disadvantages include possible biased self-reporting, the lack of depth in the collected data, which may simply provide a general picture, and the inability to provide adequate information on the participants' context.

3.4.1.1. Student Questionnaire 2014

-Procedure

A questionnaire was administered to 100 students, of whom 61 completed and returned the questionnaires. The inclusion criteria was to have participated in a group consultation. I placed the research information sheet and consent forms at the reception of the writing centre on the APK Campus for two months in April 2014. After each GC, students were asked by the receptionist whether they would like to participate in a research on their experience of the GC.

Students who agreed to participate in the research were given the consent form and the questionnaire and asked to sit in a room adjacent to the front desk and complete the questionnaire. The completed questionnaires were gathered and analysed weekly by the researcher.

-Participants

The first questionnaire data set was completed and returned by 61 students comprised 27 males and 34 females, who had signed the consent forms, completed and returned the questionnaire. Forty-seven (47) were first years, 13 were honours, and one was a second year student. Most of them, 43 students, were from Humanities and the others were from a range of faculties. These questionnaires were administered on the APK Campus of the University of Johannesburg.

-Instrument

The questionnaire was subdivided into four main sections: section 1 gathered biographical information such as gender, faculty, department, and the year of study of each participant for each data collection method or phase. This information is important for the presentation and discussion of the data collected on the GCs and the associated challenges.

The second section posed questions on the students' experience of the one-on-one consultation in order to elicit whether the one-on-one consultation is a site for social interactions and how. It posed questions such as, how did you find the experience of sitting in one-on-one situation with a writing consultant to work on your writing? Do you think the one-on-one writing consultation worked in improving your writing? What is it that worked about it? What is it that did not work about it? What do you think should be done to improve the one-on-one consultation? Please list and explain four things that should be done to improve the one-on-one consultation.

The third section posed questions on the group consultation and social interactions between the students and the consultant, and among students. Some of the questions were as follows: How did you find the experience of sitting in a group with other students to work on academic writing? Do you think the writing group consultation worked in improving your writing? What is it that worked about it? What is it that didn't work about it? What do you think should be done to improve the group consultation? Please list and explain four things that should be done.

The questions in the second and third sections were intended to gather as much information as possible on what occurs in the consultation in order to later retrieve data pertaining to any type of social interaction and data related to the learning or exploration of disciplinary genres.

The fourth section posed questions on the processes in a group consultation. The questions were as follows: Briefly describe what the writing consultant did during the writing consultation from the beginning to the end? Briefly describe what you and other students did during the writing consultation from the beginning to the end? For the duration of the group consultation, did the writing consultant attend to each one of the students in the group individually? Did the students assist one another at any given time? If yes, how did they assist one another? Did the writing consultant participate in the discussions? Did the writing consultant show you examples of how you should write or did he/she demonstrate how to write a specific section of your work? Are there things that you learned during the group consultation which you think you will be able to do on your own next time? If yes, what did you learn that you can do on your own? This section aimed to gather each student's experience of and feeling about the consultation with a focus on the nature, process and content of the discussions with the consultant and other students.

The last section dwelt on the aspects of academic literacies, which could be at play in a group consultation. The questions were as follows: During the writing group consultation, who between you and the writing consultant spoke most of the time? How do you feel about that? Were students allowed to express their own opinions during the group consultation? At the beginning of the group consultation who decided what the group would be doing for the period? Was it one of the students, the students, or the writing consultant? Do you feel that the writing consultant understood your assignment guidelines? This section attempts to explore in details what the students and the consultant use their 'speaking time' for and why. It is interesting to know who between the students and the consultant speak more and what they talk about. It is also interesting to establish the type of social relationships at play in the group consultation.

3.4.3.2. Writing Consultants Questionnaire 2014

-Procedure

The questionnaire was also administered to 20 writing consultants to gather information on the challenges of the GC, but only 9 consultants completed the questionnaire and participated in

the research. The questionnaires used in 2014, the ones used in 2016, the focus group schedules and video-recorded observation schedules were all subdivided into the five sections similar, but not identical to the 2014 Student Questionnaire described in the previous section. The specific questions were adapted and refined at each stage in line with the findings of the preceding method. For instance, the focus group schedule posed more specific questions intended to build on and clarify the responses of the preceding questionnaire phase. The observation schedule built on and clarified the data gathered from the focus group, while the questionnaire used in 2016 built on and clarified the video-recorded observation data. This type of procedure assisted in triangulating the findings and exploring the themes in more depth each time.

For the consultants, I placed the research information sheet and consent forms at the reception of the writing centre on the APK Campus for two months in April 2014. The writing consultants across all campuses were asked whether they would like to participate in a research on their experience of the GC. Due to the relatively low number of writing consultants, who could find time to participate in the research, the aim was to administer the questionnaire to any writing consultants available across all four writing centres at the University of Johannesburg to reach a total of 20 answered questionnaires. Consultants who agreed to participate were given the consent form and the questionnaire and were asked to sit in the consultation room to complete the questionnaire. The completed questionnaires were gathered and analysed by the researcher to adapt and refine the focus group schedules.

-Participants

The 2014 consultants questionnaire was completed by nine (9) participants, all females from the Faculty of Humanities. They were from the following academic departments: anthropology and development studies (5), sociology (20, English (1), and linguistics (1). As can be seen, the consultants, who were from the Faculty of Humanities, conducted consultations with students from faculties other than the Faculty of Humanities. This is because, as will be discussed in the next chapter consultants at UJ are trained in providing academic literacies support to students from a variety of departments by way of a specialised questioning approach.

-Instrument

The sections of the questionnaires were similar to the ones used in the student questionnaires, but slightly adapted to address the consultants directly. The questionnaire was subdivided into

four main sections: section 1 gathered biographical information such as gender, faculty, department, and year of study of each participant for each data collection method or phase. The second section posed questions on the consultants' experience of the one-on-one consultation. The third section focused on the GC and social interactions between the students and the consultant, and among students. The fourth section asked consultants about the processes in a GC. The last section dwelt on the aspects of academic literacies, which could be at play in a GC.

3.4.2. Focus Groups

-Method

The study used two focus groups: one with students and the other with consultants. Powell and Single (1996, cited in Sagoe 2012) and Fern (1982) consider the focus group as the most suitable method to gather data on the participants' personal experiences. Focus groups were used to draw on the students' and consultants' personal experiences in order to answer the research question. Fern points out that a focus group is made of six to twelve participants, selected based on matching or a variety of characteristics in line with the objectives of the research. Focus groups are also defined as organised discussion (Kitzinger, 1995), collective activity (Powell & Single 1996, cited in Sagoe 2012), social events (Goss & Leinbach 1996) and interaction (Kitzinger 1995), almost always aiming to understand human social interactions.

Focus groups are associated and sometimes confused with group discussions, which are an entirely different phenomenon. Hughes and DuMont (2002) consider the focus group as an in-depth group interview using a somewhat homogenous group to gather information on a topic of interest to the researcher. Krueger (1994, cited in Webb & Kevern 2000) on the other hand sees a focus group as a group discussion in a systematically planned format aiming to obtain the participants' perceptions on a defined environment. Morgan (1997) also insists that the focus group relies on interactions among group members on the topic supplied by the researcher. In Gibbs' (1997) terms, what makes the focus group unique is the reliance on interactions between participants. Briefly, interaction is seen as the key or factor, which grants the method a level of validity, due to the fact that each participant's statements can either be confirmed, reinforced, or contradicted within the group by means of argument or explanation (Webb & Kevern 2000).

A focus group is also defined as “a qualitative data collection method in which one or two researchers and several participants meet as a group to discuss a given research topic” (Mack et al. 2005: 64). Mack et al. point out that focus group sessions are often recorded or video recorded by a moderator (the researcher), who guides the discussion by asking open-ended questions to participants. These questions often require in-depth responses, instead of single phrases or mere “yes” or “no” answers. Alternatively, a second researcher can act as a note-taker capturing detailed notes on the discussion. The strength of a focus group as a data collection method firstly is that it allow the researcher to collect a large quantity of information during a relatively short period. Secondly, they enable the researcher to access a spectrum of views on a specific topic, without seeking consensus. The disadvantage of focus groups is that they may not be suited for the collection of extremely personal or socially sensitive topics (Webb and Kevern, 2000).

Krueger (1994, cited in Webb & Kevern 2000) and Kitzinger (1995) emphasise that the idea behind focus group methodology is that group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview. When group dynamics work well, the participants work alongside the researcher, taking the research in new and often unexpected directions. Group work also helps researchers tap into the many different forms of communication that people use in day-to-day interaction, including jokes, anecdotes, teasing, and arguing. Webb and Kevern (2000) posit that in a focus group, participants can talk to each other, “asking questions, exchanging anecdotes, and commenting on each other’s' experiences and points of view'”. Webb and Kevern argue that this is what differentiates the focus group from “nominal groups, brainstorming, Delphi groups and other consensus groups”. Gaining access to such a variety of communications is useful because people's knowledge and attitudes are not entirely encapsulated in reasoned responses to direct questions. In this sense, focus groups often reach aspects of knowledge that other methods cannot reach (Kitzinger 1995). They can reveal dimensions of understanding that often remain untapped by more conventional data collection techniques (Ibid). Krueger (1994: 10-11, cited in Webb & Kevern 2000) asserts that focus groups involve human tendencies, attitudes and perceptions of constructs, ideas, and objects, through interaction with others. Each person is a product of their specific environment and are deeply influenced by the individuals around them and the setting. Brüggen and Willems (2009) outline criteria to be use in evaluating qualitative research including depth, breadth, efficiency, group dynamics, non-verbal impression and respondents. The depth of information means that the moderator gathers not only superficial data from the

answers to the research questions, but also the associated fundamental reasoning or arguments (Groenland 2002). The breadth pertains to the extent to which all aspects of the research question were addressed (Groenland 2002). Efficiency means that the gathered data is relevant to the topic or research question. In this case, the comments and reactions directly concur with the research objective, with an insignificant amount of unnecessary information (Groenland 2002).

Group dynamics are adequate when there is group cohesion judging from the interactions in the group, resulting in more spontaneous reactions and answers. Fern (1982) adds that the more ideas, the richer the information, and the higher the quality of the research. Non-verbal expressions or behaviour, such as attires, posture, facial expressions or tone of voice (Ayland & Dolan 1999), may assist the researcher in interpreting answers in their appropriate context and gaining an insight into the participants' thoughts and feelings (Mason & Davis 2007). Respondents' (or participants') attitudes towards the focus group for instance may determines their willingness to participate in the discussion meaningfully or not. Various social groups, busy persons such as professionals, executives or doctors, may not be available or cooperative for focus groups. The setting may play a determinant role in how or whether respondents participate in the focus group (Yoffie & Anzalone 1995).

3.4.2.1. Focus Group: Students

-Procedure

For this research, I conducted two focus group discussions: one with four writing consultants and the other with six students who have participated in a group consultation before. Both focus groups were conducted in my office for lack of alternative space in October 2014. After obtaining consent from the participants, I conducted the discussions and recorded them using a smartphone sound recorder from the beginning to the end. The group discussed and answered the questions, which were organised in three thematic areas: NLS, social constructivism and AL/writing centre theory. The format of the focus groups was predominantly a collective reflection on the questions, experiences and related issues, rather than attempt to strictly answer the questions posed by the researcher.

-Participants

Students who participated in the student focus groups were those who had indicated on the Questionnaires that they would like to participate in a focus group discussion on the same topic. The researcher contacted the students telephonically and asked them if they would like to participate in the focus group. Based on availability, a group of six students from the Faculty of Humanities, two females and four males, all 1st years, was formed and arrangements were made for the discussions. These discussions were also held in the researcher's office and recorded using a smart phone voice recorder.

-Instrument

For the focus group discussions, a schedule designed based on the findings of the questionnaires, was used. The schedule also investigated the five areas described under the questionnaire as instruments, but with a focus on the challenges identified by the students and the consultants.

The student focus group schedule comprised the following instructions and questions: list three things that you think the writing consultant should always do in a group consultation for the students to walk away with improved academic writing skills at the end of the session. What do you think are the things that students should always be encouraged to do during the group writing consultation? Based on your experience, what are the positive things that students tend to do during group writing consultations? Explain why you see these things as positive. Based on your experience, what are the negative things that students tend to do during group writing consultations? Explain why you see these things as negative. What do you think should be done for the group consultation discussions to meet students' needs in terms of academic writing or literacies? Based on your experience, what attitudes (for example: involved, active, distracted, uninterested, etc.) do writing centre consultants display during group writing consultations? How do you feel about that? Based on your experience, what attitudes (involved, active, distracted, uninterested, etc.) do students display during group writing consultations? How do you feel about that? Should collaboration between students during group consultations be encouraged? Explain why and how. What in your view should be done to ensure that support is provided to each individual student in the group? Why is this important? Do students use or speak to one another in vernacular languages? Explain. Do you feel that student participation is maximised in a group consultation as opposed to a one-on-one consultation? Explain. Can you confidently say that writing consultants understand students' assignment guidelines or

questions? Explain. What strategies do you personally use to ensure that you get the most out of a group writing consultation? Describe the strategies and say why.

These questions were posed with the intention of gathering data not only on the challenges of the GC, but also on the nature and implications of the social interactions between the students and consultant and among students. One of the objectives of this study was to determine whether the social interactions focused on unpacking the disciplinary genres and academic literacies. The writing consultant focus group schedule followed a similar organisation and purpose.

3.4.2.2. Focus group: Writing Consultants

-Procedure

The second focus group interview was conducted with four participants in the researcher's office away from the writing centre for lack of alternative space in October 2014. An email was sent to all writing centre consultants, a team of 30 across all four writing centres. This stage of the research could not have targeted the APK consultants only as this would have resulted in a smaller number of participants. After obtaining consent from the participants, I conducted the using a schedule. The discussions were held not in the writing centre consultation room, but away from the writing centre in the researcher's office. I used a smart phone voice recorder to record the discussion, which were transcribed verbatim immediately after the sessions or on the same day.

-Participants

The writing consultant focus groups involved consultants who had indicated on the questionnaires that they would like to participate in the focus group discussions on the same topic. I contacted the willing consultants telephonically and asked them if they would like to participate in the focus group. Some of those who had indicated on the questionnaire were not available and, in the end, only six consultants participated in the discussions. They all were postgraduate students, three males (one PhD Development Studies, one MA English and one PhD politics) and three females (two MA Anthropology and one MA Development Studies).

-Instrument

A focus group interview schedule was used as an instrument. It investigated the five areas described under the questionnaire section, but the questions were refined to investigate areas that had not been covered previously to fill the gaps identified in the questionnaire. The following are some of the main questions posed: List ten things the writing consultant should always do in a group consultation for the students to walk away with improved academic writing skills at the end of the session. What are the things that students should always be encouraged to do during the group writing consultation? Based on your experience what are the positive things that students tend to do during group writing consultations? Explain why you see these things as positive. Based on your experience what are the negative things that students tend to do during group writing consultations? Explain why you see these things as negative. How do you ensure that group consultation discussions always revolve around or tie with academic writing or literacies? Is there any group seating arrangement that you prefer over others? Which one and why? Based on your experience what attitudes (for example: involved, active, distracted, uninterested, etc.) do students display during group writing consultations? How do you feel about that? Do you encourage collaboration between students during group consultations? Explain why and how. How do you ensure that support is provided to each individual student in the group? Why is this important? Do students use or speak to one another in vernacular languages? Explain. Do you feel that student participation is maximised in a group consultation as opposed to a one-on-one consultation? Explain. Can you confidently say that you understand students' assignment guidelines or questions? Explain. What strategies do you personally use to ensure a successful group writing consultation? Describe the strategies and justify your answers.

Both student and consultant focus group sets of questions aimed to further explore the difficulties that both consultants and students encounter during the group consultation with a focus on challenges related to social interactions and to the acquisition of academic genres. The questions were subdivided into three thematic categories respectively investigating NLS, social constructivist principles and AL/writing centre theory underpinning the group writing consultations.

3.4.3. Video-recorded Observations

-Method

For this study, I conducted video-recorded observations of four group writing consultations in order to explore the challenges faced by consultants and students, and to determine whether the principles of social constructivism and socio-cultural literacies principles underpin the group activities. The objective of the recording was to explore the difficulties that both consultants and students encounter during the group consultation particularly in relation to academic and disciplinary literacies, including academic conventions, genres and discourses. The main reason for using observation in this investigation was to gather data, which is more accurate, on the group writing consultation to complement, through triangulation, the focus group and questionnaire data. The study involved the video-recorded observation of two group-writing consultations. The numbers of students in each group, which was led by one writing consultant, varied between three and eight. Although my intention was to video-record each consultation uninterruptedly from the beginning to the end, technical glitches and human errors interrupted the processes intermittently. To maximise the probability of gathering rich data, eight consultations were video recorded, of which four were usable and useful for the research, and only two were selected based on the richness of the data.

Observation as a method was selected in order for the researcher to access data, in this case actions, reactions, attitudes, feelings, and other elements such as the characteristics of the environment, which may not be gathered through interviews, questionnaires or focus groups, for instance.

Observation allowed the researcher to examine the behaviour, body language and attitudes of participants in the context of the group consultation. Fox (1998) notes that observation involves not only the sense of vision, but also sound. It also involves the interpretation of the information obtained from the senses, through processing and reorganising of data into usable units of information. As a result, 'observation' achieves more than just the recording data from the environment, as the researcher is active and not passive like a video camera or video recorder. Driscoll (2011: 160) describes two types of observations: participant observation and unobstructive observation. The 'unobstructive' character emphasises that the researcher maintains a distance or does not get involved in the activities or setting being observed. Marshall and Rossman (1995, cited in Paterson, Bottorff & Hewat 2003) distinguish between participant observation and in-person observation, that is, the researcher is 'absent' in the 'in-person' observation. Several other researchers differentiate between participant observation and nonparticipant observation. Most definitions of observation to some extent convey a sense

that observation implies the capturing or video recording of behaviours and interactions as they occur in their natural setting (Paterson, Bottorff & Hewat 2003). In participant observation, the researcher may interact with participants and may be or become part of the community being observed.

Observation is often used in research to gather data in nonverbal behaviours, which may be difficult to observe in real time. It is also preferred for its ability to lend some form of precision and credibility to a predominantly qualitative approach, through the use of technology, particularly the video recorder, which can be perceived as more authoritative than the human observer, who can be considered as biased and subject to error. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1994), the use of technology enables the researcher to assume a "privileged gaze", as the data collection process is exempt from the possible influence of relationships between the researcher and the participants. This allows for an in-depth description of behaviour and interaction patterns through a precise and systematic analysis of the video-recorded data.

Fox (1998: 12) suggests minute note taking as a way to render observation more precise and reliable. For the same purpose, Spradley (1980: 78ff, cited in Hammersley and Atkinson 1994) recommends the use of a note-taking checklist, outlining the elements to take note of:

- Space: the physical setting or location [my emphasis]
- Actor: all individuals involved
- Activity: all related acts posed by the individuals involved
- Object: the physical items which are present
- Act: single actions done by individuals
- Event: the context in which acts occur [my emphasis]
- Time: the temporal point at or a duration for which an act takes place [my emphasis]
- Goal: the results individuals aim to achieve [my emphasis]
- Feelings: the emotions felt and/ or expressed.

To this list, Hammersley and Atkinson suggest adding the researcher's own and immediate reflection as his/ her personal response to the items above.

The main advantage of observation is that it provides a way to mitigate the shortfalls of interviews and questionnaires, as the responses gathered through observation are more

accurate. These inaccuracies may occur due to the respondent's lack of awareness of their behaviour, lack of a precise memory of what their actions were, deliberate deceptive statements to portray him/herself better than he/she really is, and desire to provide the researcher with the answers or information he/she thinks the researcher wants. The main shortfall of observation is that the observation of behaviour may affect the behaviour that the researcher intends to observe. Additionally, observation may not be appropriate for

- events, which are not open to observation;
- behaviours, which are private in nature;
- unpredictable events, where the researcher may not know when and where to be present (for instance popular riots);
- events, which pose a life-threatening risk to the researcher (for instance, tsunamis, volcano eruptions); and
- events where ethical issues may arise (for instance, lack of informed consent).

In order to eliminate bias from observations, Driscoll (2011: 162) recommends using a "double-entry notebook", which separates the researcher's observations, in one column, from his/her interpretations, feelings and judgments, in another column.

3.4.3.1. Video-recorded Observation One: Nancy

-Procedure

Students who approached the writing centre reception to book a GC were asked whether they would like their consultation to be recorded as part of a study to explore their experience of the GC. Only GCs for which all the members had given consent were recorded. On the day of the GC, the consent forms were signed by the students and consultants and collected by the researcher, who ensured that the research context, purposes and ethical considerations were explained to the students beforehand. The researcher then proceeded to video-record the consultation without interfering as these were not participant observations. He also strived to record the sessions from the beginning to the end without interruptions. The

-Participants

As stated earlier, I conducted eight video-recorded observations, of which only four were usable. I only selected two of them based on the quality of the recording, the completeness of

the consultation and the richness of the data in answering the research question. The first observation was recorded at the Auckland Park Bunting Road Campus writing centre by one of the research assistants. The consultant was working with two students from the department of marketing, who had brought a draft assignment on business development. The assignment required students to investigate a business of their choice covering its creation, development, and marketing strategy.

-Instrument

The observation schedule was also subdivided into five sections. It differed from the focus group schedule in that it intended to further explore the themes identified both in the questionnaires and in the focus groups, while also attempting to determine whether there would be new themes or elements, which had not yet emerged from the data gathered so far. These observations also strived to answer the main research questions on the challenges faced in a GC, the nature of social interactions in a GC, and their relation to genre awareness.

3.4.3.2. Video-recorded observation Two: Frank

-Procedure

The second observation was conducted at the APK Campus writing centre. The procedure was the same as for the observation at APB. Students were asked by the receptionist whether they give consent for their GC to be video-recorded in order to explore their experience of the GC. Only GCs for which all the members had given consent were recorded. On the day of the GC, the consent forms were signed by the students and consultants and collected by the researcher. The researcher video-recorded the consultation without interfering as these were not participant observations. He also recorded the sessions from the beginning to the end without interruptions. This only included students who had participated in a group consultation.

-Participants

The writing consultant was working with three students from the Faculty of Science, who had brought a draft assignment. They were requested to research, discuss and write an investigative report on a scientific device.

-Instrument

The observation used a smart phone video-recorder to collect data in the form of images and sounds to further explore the social interactions and their purpose. At this stage, the objective of the video-recording was to observe whether the social interactions centred on raising genre awareness. It was important to determine whether the discussions unpacked or processed the students' disciplinary texts, whether in writing or speaking.

The observation schedule/instrument posed questions such as: what do students require assistance with? What does the consultant do from the beginning to the end of the GC? What do the students do from the beginning to the end of the GC? This question is intended to ascertain whether the focus is on the text or on the student. Do the students assist one another during the GC? It was important to observe whether the students explained concepts to one another, whether they were successful in this and whether they did that in support of the consultant's explanation. Does the consultant participate in the discussions? How? Does the consultant provide examples or explanations of concepts? Who is speaking most of the time? Does the consultant understand the assignment?

3.4.4. Questionnaires 2016

The three first data collection methods used previously served the purpose of triangulation. This questionnaire administered in 2016 was intended to complement the earlier findings. The objective was to determine whether any new types of challenges would emerge in the 2016 data findings. Also, questionnaires are often used to verify the findings of more qualitative studies when a phenomenon has been studied deeply using qualitative methods such as interviews, case studies or observations. The questionnaire would then be administered to a wider population sample.

3.4.4.1. Questionnaires 2016: Students

-Procedures

A second questionnaire was administered to students to identify the weaknesses and strengths of the group writing consultation. This second questionnaire was different from the 2014 questionnaire in that it involved a different group of students and the questionnaires were administered online using Google Forms. It transpired that online questionnaires have an

extremely low participation rate. In the 2014 questionnaire, which administered the questionnaires by hand to 100 students, 61 questionnaires were completed and returned, against 53 for the Google Forms online questionnaire, which administered the questionnaires to 400 students in 2016.

-Participants

In 2016, using writing centre records, students who had attended a GC were sent emails with a participant information sheet, requesting their participation in an online research, with a link to the Google form or questionnaire. Although the questionnaire was administered to 400 students, 53 questionnaires were completed on Google forms.

The participants comprised 29 female and 24 male students who completed the online questionnaire on Google Forms. Eighteen were from the faculty of financial and economic sciences, 12 humanities, three engineering, three health sciences, two education, two management, and one science. The departments represented were: 11 students from Law, nine from Accounting, two from Business Management, two from Sociology, two from Finance and one respectively from Management, English, Education, Mechanical Engineering, Chemistry and MIRS. Forty-seven were 1st years, two 3rd years, one 2nd year, and two did not indicate their year of study.

-Instrument

All instruments throughout the study used the same questions to identify the challenges facing students and writing consultants in a GC, the nature of the social interactions occurring in the GC, and whether the social interactions contribute to genre awareness.

The 2016 questionnaire posed exactly the same questions as the one used in 2014. The questions also further investigated some of the themes, which had emerged from the previous data, namely: the student practices, consultant practices, student attitude, and so forth. This questionnaire intended to quantitatively represent how many times the main themes, including student practices, consultant practices, student attitude, etc. re-emerged in the data and any additional information, which could emerge.

3.4.4.1. Questionnaires 2016: Writing Consultants

-Procedures

For writing consultants, emails were sent to all writing consultants with a participant information sheet, requesting participation in an online research questionnaire. Out of 32 writing consultants for the four UJ Campuses, 16 questionnaires were completed and returned through Google Forms.

-Participants

Participants comprised nine females and seven male consultants. As for the faculties represented, nine consultants were from Humanities, four from Sciences, one from Education, one from Engineering, and one from Management. As for departments represented, four consultants were from Anthropology, three from Politics, two from Applied Chemistry, one from Science, one from Linguistics, one from Mechanical Engineering, one from English, one from Geology, one from Biotechnology and Food Technology, and one from Public Management. As for the year of study, eight participants were PhD, seven masters and one Honour's students.

-Instruments

This questionnaire also asked the same questions as the one used in 2014 for the reasons discussed under instrument in the previous section. After the triangulation of the data obtained from the 2014 questionnaires, focus groups and observations, this 2016 questionnaires intended to determine whether there would be new themes emerging and whether new information would be obtained to supplement the findings of the triangulation. They further explored how many consultants experienced problems with student practices, consultant practices, student attitude, and difficult discipline specific material, to name a few.

3.5. Data Analysis

3.5.1 Questionnaire Data Analysis

The questionnaire data was analysed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics pertains to the rendering of the main features of gathered data in quantitative terms (Creswell, 2009: 152; Lewin, 2011: 227). Descriptive statistics was chosen to analyse the 2014 and 2016 uestionnaire data to allow me to summarise the findings in a manner that would enable me to identify trends, themes and to make appropriate observations. The summary of the data can be represented in the form of a table or graph and will form the basis of the description and

discussion of the data. This method of data analysis is convenient because it is sufficient in itself for this particular investigation and does not necessitate complex statistical interpretations.

Driscoll (2011: 169) states that questionnaire data may sometimes contain quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (written answers/descriptions) data. For this thesis, the quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics, which assisted in calculating the percentage of writing consultants or students, who responded in a certain way; which assisted in displaying the information in a chart or a graph. The qualitative responses emerging from questionnaires were analysed using qualitative content analysis, which is explained in the sections that follow.

3.5.2. Focus Group Data Analysis

In order to carry out the qualitative content analysis the researcher made use of the data analysis software ***Atlas.ti7***. I used aspects of qualitative content analysis to analyse the data. One definition of content analysis which is perhaps more meaningful in this context is that of "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (Holsti 1969). It is also defined as a “detailed and systematic examination of the content of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases” (Leedy & Ormrod 2010: 144). Content analysis includes the following steps: description of the body of materials to be studied; specific definition or characterisation of the elements to be identified; coding; tabulation of each characteristic; and identification of themes emerging from the data (Ibid). In this study, I carried out a content analysis of the video recordings for both the participant observations and the focus group discussions.

3.5.3. Observation Data Analysis

Driscoll (2011) suggests that to analyse data obtained from observation, one may simply count the items observed, add up the numbers per item and report on the results. If one collected descriptions using a double-entry notebook, they could write thick descriptions of what they had observed into their writing. This type of analysis could include descriptions of the scene, behaviours observed, and the researcher’s overall conclusions about events. She cautions that this type of reporting should ensure that a separation is made between the researcher’s actual observations and his/ her thoughts or interpretations of those observations.

The recorded consultations and the focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim as soon as possible after the group session. ***Atlas.ti7*** was used to identify and code the data, to identify the emerging themes, group them into families, map out the relationships, and draw a report. A full description of the results is rendered in Chapter Seven using the participants' 'quotes' as support, before proceeding with the discussion of the themes against the literature in Chapter Eight.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

For ethical considerations, the researcher made a commitment to ensure that information of a personal nature obtained from this research remained confidential. Participants were requested to complete and sign a consent letter before being provided with a questionnaire. They also received an information sheet informing them of their rights not to participate or to withdraw from answering the questionnaires at any time without penalty. The researcher verbally made them understand that they were free to accept or decline to participate. To ensure confidentiality, their names do not appear in the report and may not be divulged to any third parties and their anonymity is guaranteed. The videos may not be shown to third parties and if they were, the participants' faces would be hidden in the video using the appropriate video editing software.

This research is purely for academic purposes and was conducted with the approval of, and in accordance with the principles laid down by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical). The collected data was analysed and the results were used in the research report only. The raw data and hard copies will be kept in a locked office cabinet on the Wits School of Education premises. The proposal including the questionnaire and consent letter were submitted to the Wits Graduate School Ethical Committee for approval prior to the data collection. Permissions to carry out the research was obtained from the Wits University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) and from the University of Johannesburg Registrar.

3.7. Limitations

This research aimed to gather data randomly from writing consultants and students who had either conducted or attended a GC over the two months preceding the data collection. The data collection was conducted essentially at the University of Johannesburg writing centres, mainly

the Auckland Park writing centre. The APK Campus houses 30,000 of the 50,000 UJ students, and has the biggest writing centre in terms of size of venue and number of consultations (±2800 consultation for 2013) and students seen (4000 students seen in 2013). Although the data collection was carried out on the four campuses, albeit not in equal participant populations, it is assumed that the data collected fairly represents the reality in other access universities throughout South Africa.

There exists several limitations to the study. Firstly, data was obtained from 'real-life' writing consultations within writing centres without prior preparation and in a non-controlled environment. A controlled environment would have ensured variety in terms of writing consultation group composition, year of study, discipline or field of study, in order to ensure reliability. Controlling the environment would also require collecting data from writing consultations involving the same consultant(s) with the same students, using the same or three of four assignments in varying conditions. Alternatively, the data would also be collected from various writing consultants with the same students in varying environments, and several other scenarios. However, because this study is a predominantly qualitative, the objective is not to achieve representativity, but to gather in-depth qualitative data.

Secondly, the researcher has no control over the size of the groups. Some groups were small with two or three students, whilst others were extremely crowded/large with eight to ten students. The researcher only interviewed the groups, which were available and had consented unanimously to participate in the research.

Thirdly, the GC writing areas of focus varied as students came from different fields of study. Because various consultations focused on different areas of academic literacies, this research is not to be examined based on the reliability originating from the same focus of the consultation or uniform conditions, context or circumstances.

Fourthly, time constraints were one of the major limitations of this study. Most consultants could not manage time well, meaning that the video-recording content dwells mostly on administrative activities such as filling in the consultation observation sheets and other 'house-keeping' activities. Time was also lost on 'unimportant 'arguments between students and when one of group members was late for the consultation, for instance.

Finally, the UJ writing centre premises seemed too small to hold more than one GC. The video-recordings of the pilot study were unusable due to noise intrusion: one could hear the other groups talking resulting in a cacophony and making it difficult to hear the group discussions clearly.

3.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained my methodology. I explained the research paradigm, design and data collection methods, and the reasons why they were chosen for this study. I have explained why a predominantly qualitative research design was appropriate for the study. I described the population and sampling techniques. I also explained the data analysis methods and ethical considerations. In Chapter Five, I present my findings, which are followed by the analysis of the focus group data in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER FOUR
QUESTIONNAIRE 2014 DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

4.1. Introduction

This Chapter presents the data collected from the questionnaire administered in 2014 for both students and writing consultants. This data presentation is not organised according to the questionnaire sections as described in the Methodology section, but in terms of the three research sub-questions, which are used as units of analysis, and comprise specific themes and trends each. Firstly, the Chapter analyses the questionnaire data to gather information on the challenges facing students and consultants in the GC. Secondly, it looks at the data on the social interactions in the GC with a focus on their nature and practices. Lastly, it presents data on the social interactions and the manner in which they contribute to disciplinary genre awareness. The following section presents the data on the challenges faced in the GC by students and consultants.

4.2. Student Questionnaires

4.2.1. Challenges and benefits of a one-on-one consultation

The focus in this section is on the challenges relating to social relationships and processes. Students were asked, **"How did you find the experience of sitting in a one-on-one situation with a writing consultant to work on your writing?"** in order to elicit whether the one-on-one consultation is a site for social interactions and how. Most students indicated that they viewed the experience as an 'excellent', 'innovative', and 'eye-opening' opportunity to improve their academic literacies, as they found the consultants 'friendly', 'understanding' and 'patient'. One of the students stated, "the experience was quite a fulfilling one and felt like a private tutorial session" (Student Questionnaire11), alluding to the individual attention afforded to the student. One student stated,

> The one-on-one consultation was good because I got the chance of identifying some mistakes in grammar. Another thing is that I was able to raise some of the questions that I had or questions that I had based on the essay writing. Everything was explained

> very well and I was able to have a clear understanding on how I was going to re-prepare it. (Student Questionnaire 12)

It can be inferred that in saying "I got the chance of identifying mistakes", he/she means that s/he was not afforded such an opportunity outside or before the one-on-one consultation, that is, in the tutorial or lecture.

> The one-on-one situation was good even though sometimes I felt so nervous, but it has helped me because I have improved a lot in my writing and I am scoring better results than before. (Student Questionnaire16)

It can be inferred that the challenge of the one-on-one consultation is that it places the student 'in the spotlight' and forces him/her to participate as there are no other students around to assist in answering the consultant's questions, for instance. Another student found the experience "very helpful in terms of the thorough details one needs assistance with in their writing" (Student Questionnaire15). Another response was "I found it helpful because a lot of work or aspects are covered" (Student Questionnaire20). Students also found the experience "really helpful because the consultant had a good ear and even better advice that went with it" (Student Questionnaire23) and "very informative" (Student Questionnaire25). In a one-on-one consultation, the consultant can pay attention to one student. The social relationship in a one-on-one consultation is ideal, perhaps.

The students were then asked, **"Do you think the one-on-one writing consultation worked in improving your writing?"** The majority of students used positive descriptors for the one-on-one consultation: 30 students (49%) (n=61) answered 'Yes', two answered 'No' and 29 (48%) skipped this question. One of the sub-questions asked "**what worked about it?"**. One student stated, "writing the formal way. Our report was too informal" (Student Questionnaire 16) and another one mentioned "cohesion, intro, argument, linking the essay. How to make it flow and how to structure it" (Student Questionnaire 4)

The students were asked: **"What is it that worked about it? What is it that didn't work about it?"** To the question requesting "**what did not work about the one-on-one consultation"**, 49 students stated 'Nothing' and others simply skipped the question. One of the students stated that "it is an overwhelming experience where you really grab what you going

to be briefed on" (Student Questionnaire36). This student's response reveals a frustration either with the shortness of the time allocated for the one-on-one consultation or with the hasty manner in which the consultant conducted the session.

Students were then asked: **"What do you think should be done to improve the one-on-one consultation?"** 29 stated that the time allocated for the consultation was too short and insufficient. Students overwhelmingly cited the lack of sufficient time to consult effectively as one of the major challenges. The following are some of the responses and the associated number of students:

Table 1: Student perception of how to improve the One-on-one consultation

ANSWER	STUDENTS (n=61)	%
Time too short	29	48
There is no need to improve the one-on-one consultation. It worked well.	7	11
Separate space for group consultations	4	7
Consultant's use of practical examples	4	7
Employ more consultants	3	5
Allow use of vernacular languages in a consultation	2	3
Assignment questions to be analysed in detail	2	3
Private space for each consultation	2	3
Student to be given a chance to ask more questions	2	3
Same consultants to assist students in case of follow-up consultation	2	3
Only employ consultants with good English language skills	1	2
Point out mistakes overtly	1	2
Double check student's work	1	2
ensure student has clear understanding	1	2
Consultants must be able to speak vernacular	1	2
Less admin forms to fill	1	2

Consultants to be allowed to edit work for students	1	2
Students and consultants to treat each other with respect	1	2
Quiz to be administered at the end of each consultation	1	2

Seven students insisted that there was no need to improve the one-on-oneconsultation, perhaps highlighting their satisfaction with the process. Still, this cannot be deemed sufficient proof of the effectiveness of the consultation since a larger number pointed to time issues. It should be noted that the academic literacies areas mentioned by the students are not necessarily left out in academic writing development initiatives in the students' departments, but when they are introduced, there is no sufficient time to either ensure that each individual student understands or they are not explained adequately or comprehensive or clearly.

Others students emphasised that the writing centre should employ more writing consultants, perhaps also referring to the need to provide more time and attention to the students. There was a general sense that more time should be allocated in order to cover more writing areas. Two students alluded to the need for more consultants to consult with students in vernacular languages. Three emphasised the need for consultants to use practical examples in their explanation of assignments or essays.

4.2.2. Social interactions and processes in the GC

The second section posed questions on the group consultation and social interactions between the students and the consultant, and among students. Students were asked **how many GC they had attended each**: 29 of them answered that they had attended one GC. Only three had attended two GCs and two attended three GCs. This means that most of the students who completed the questionnaire responded based on a one-time experience with this pedagogical approach. Initially, I was unsure whether this would negatively affect this research, but bearing in mind that these findings are complemented with the focus group and video-observation data and findings, with which they are later triangulated, the reliability of the study cannot be under question. Moreover, the findings are further complemented with the 2016 questionnaires findings, both from students and writing consultants.

Table 2: Number of group consultations attended per student

Number of group consultations	0	1	2	3	4
Students	4	29	3	2	0

Again, whilst 29 participating students indicated they had only attended one group consultation, consultants had conducted an average of 20 group consultations. According to students' responses, most group consultations comprised between 3 and 4 students, as can be seen in the following table.

The following table shows an average of 3 students per group for GCs with the highest being eleven groups of four students and ten groups of three students. Only one GC involved ten students at the same time. It will be interesting to know what the consultation focused on and whether the students were working on the same draft or whether they had separate drafts.

Table 3: Number of students per GC

NUMBER OF STUDENTS PER GROUP CONSULTATION	NUMBER OF GROUPS
2	5
3	10
4	11
5	4
6	0
7	0
8	0
9	0
10	1

Asked how they found the experience of sitting with other students in a group consultation to work on their academic writing, students stated that they found it "more informative", 'comfortable', 'helpful', and 'good and fun'.

Table 4: Students' general perceptions of the GC

ANSWER	NUMBER OF STUDENTS

Informative	5
Comfortable	2
helpful	6
Good and fun	4
Challenging, uncomfortable, difficult to follow	3

Most of the students described it as a positive experience, except for one who stated that he found it 'horrible': "the experience was horrible as the writing consultant didn't know how to help us as a group" (Student Questionnaire 11).

Students were asked: **"Do you think the writing group consultation worked in improving your writing?"** Forty-five students indicated that the group writing consultation worked in improving their writing skills, while the others abstained. Some of them responded "Yes" to the question whether the group consultation assisted them in learning to work as a group. Some mentioned writing areas such as grammar, assignment writing, referencing, formatting a report, and other areas as what worked about it. Another stated "she [the consultant] made us understand our mistakes and how we can improve them. We were able to recognise our mistakes and improve our marks" (Student Questionnaire17). Another student replied "yes, it worked because we came up with different ideas and we were able to see each other's' mistakes. Bringing different ideas on how to fix the mistakes in the report" (Student Questionnaire18). Another student said, "my group and I finally saw where we went wrong with our report. From the lecturer's [or consultant's] comments, we saw what we did wrong but we had no idea on how to fix it. We were able to correct our format." (Student Questionnaire27). Another also mentioned that "it did work in that I had problems with the usage of the apostrophe and generalisation when to use 'the', 'a' and 'an'. Also on linking ideas – what words to use to link ideas, using abbreviations in formal writing, formal language and referencing." (Student Questionnaire28). Eleven students alluded to the fact that the consultation assisted in correcting errors in their writing and/ or thinking. When asked what specifically worked about the group consultation, they mentioned

- the manner in which the consultant explained the assignment requirements or the lecturer's comments,

- the collective discussion, which allowed them to know other students' ideas and reasoning,
- the fact that the consultant was able to unpack the questions or instructions, and teach them about aspects of academic writing and/ or language they had not been exposed to before.

Briefly, the reasons cited by students include firstly, the capacity of a GC to highlight mistakes/errors that individual students would not otherwise identify on their own. In this response, the social aspect is perhaps the fact that GC allowed students to "see mistakes" not identified before, thanks to their peers' contributions or inputs. Secondly, the availability of a more advanced peer, the consultant, to guide in the learning process. Thirdly, the individual attention and pace adapted to individual students in such a manner that the group cannot move on until each individual has understood or achieved the task.

When asked to specify **what did not work about the group consultation**, twenty-two students indicated "Nothing". One of then stated: "so far everything worked fine, just that there was a member of the group who didn't say much". This again reinforces the importance for each group member to participate in the GC, as the social interactions are incomplete or ineffective when one or two students abstain. The following are some of the challenges facing students in a GC, as per their responses:

Table 5: Students' perceptions of the challenges of the GC

ANSWER	STUDENTS
Time should be longer for a group consultation	20
More space for group consultations	5
Consultant must be well trained to deal with group	1
Student to be given a chance to ask more questions	4
More interaction needed between consultant and group	2
There is nothing to improve the group consultation	4

Students overwhelmingly mentioned the fact that the time allocated for the GC, 30 minutes, is insufficient. They also pointed out to the lack of 'private' space to conduct the GC effectively and the lack of opportunity for students to ask as many questions as necessary. Again, this is

related to the insufficient time allocated to the consultant. Difficulties related to the lack of spaces in the writing centre and other issues are alluded to in the next section on the processes involved in a GC. Adversely, four students reiterated that there is 'no need to improve the GC'.

The questions in the second and third questionnaire sections were intended to gather as much information as possible on what occurs in the consultation in order to later retrieve data pertaining to any type of social interactions and to the learning or exploration of disciplinary genres.

The fourth section posed questions on the processes in a GC. The main question under this section requested **students to describe what the writing consultant did during the consultation**. The researcher organised and merged their responses in the following order:

Table 6: Consultant GC practices as described by the students

X	CONSULTANT PRACTICE AS DESCRIBED BY STUDENTS
Administrative and organisational	
1	Greeted the students
2	Introduced herself/himself
3	Asked students to and gave them time to fill in the observation form
5	Explained the rules of the consultation
Interviewing	
4	Asked the students how she could help them
6	Asked if students had an assignment brief/ questions/ instructions
Consulting/questioning	
7	Asked the students to read the assignment question aloud
8	Read the assignment/ looked at the work/ went through the assignment
9	Posed questions to students on the assignment
10	Helped students understand the assignment
11	Shared her understanding of the question with students
12	Explained the assignment
13	Helped with assignment in terms of how to answer the question
14	Took notes

15	Asked students to think of various ways to answer the question/ alternative answers
Adjourning/closing	
16	Pointed out what was missing/ irrelevant aspects/ errors and summarised the gains of the consultation, as well as booking for follow up GC

The consultant's practices can be categorised into four sections: clearing administrative or organisational matters, interviewing, consulting/questioning, and adjourning. Firstly, the administrative and organisational matters, where she greeted, invited the students to sit, and explained the rules of engagement, are dealt with. Secondly, s/he asked questions to gather basic information about the students and assignment, and familiarise the students with writing centre processes. Thirdly, s/he proceeds to consult, often through questioning. One student stated "the consultant asked sufficient questions and answered and explained all the questions we had" (Student Questionnaire22). Another one indicated that the consultant "asked us questions about our problems. Asked for our opinions and inputs, and read through our introductions and gave us handy tips" (Student Questionnaire53). It can be seen that the consultant's role was to ask students questions to steer the discussions in a particular direction in order to facilitate the students' understanding of the assignment questions and writing of the assignment answers. In the process, the consultant gave students opportunities to speak and listened to them in order to further guide them, as one student stated "the consultant gave us a chance to present our problems and then went through each problem with us until we find a solution" (Student Questionnaire 29). Another response stated, "She [the consultant] asked us to explain what we needed her to assist us with. As she engaged with us by actually leading us to all the answers of the questions we had asked. This was very helpful because it showed us exactly where we did not understand" (Student Questionnaire 51). The use of the phrase "she actually led us" is indicative of the process where the consultant works with the students step-by-step without doing the work for or spoon-feeding them. Another stated,

> "She let us read the assignment to her while she had a copy. During the consultation, she periodically paused us to give us and discuss hints that she picked and we ought to take note of, for example, linking the first paragraph with the next. She also helped on how to start a 'convincing paragraph'" (Student Questionnaire 28).

The above statements show that the consultant did not do work for the group. Although another student stated, "she [the consultant] came up with better ideas on how we can make our report better" (Student Questionnaire 60), consultants are trained to make suggestions and not to prescribe or dictate what students ought to write. In writing centre practice, the student is made to understand that they can disagree with the consultant's suggestion. Lastly, often consultants close by asking students to or by summarising the main lessons of the GC and making arrangements for a follow up consultation.

Asked to describe, briefly, what they (and other students) did during the writing consultation from the beginning to the end, students listed the following actions:

Table 7: Student practices as described by students

X	STUDENT PRACTICES AS DESCRIBED BY STUDENT
Admin and organisation	
1	Greeted the consultant
2	Filled in the observation form
3	Gave the assignment to the consultant
Consulting/questioning	
4	Students listened actively
5	Answered the consultant's questions
6	Participated in the discussions/ tasks
7	Asked questions where they did not understand
8	Took/ made notes
9	Summarised points for one another
10	Corrected the grammar
Adjourning/closing	
11	Discussed the relevant points

Firstly, the students greeted the consultant, filled in the writing centre observation forms, and handed the assignment hard copies to the writing consultant. These actions can be said to fall under the category of administrative and organisational matters. Secondly, the students asked and answered questions, as shown below:

> "We first explained what our essay was about and what we needed help with. We read the essay to be able to recognise our mistakes and where she did not understand we explained for her" (Student Questionnaire17).

The last part of the quote: "where she did not understand, we explained for her", shows that the consultant is not meant to be a subject expert. In fact, this research found that by explaining the subject matter to the consultant, students were afforded an opportunity to not only check their own understanding, but to internalise the disciplinary content.

Thirdly, students participated in discussions and summarised important points for one another. The following responses also demonstrate that exchanges in the consultation are not only between the consultant and students, but also and mostly amongst students. One participant stated "we brainstormed our ideas on how to fix the problems we had on the report. We then asked the consultant how to fix those problems" (Student Questionnaire 18). Another emphasised, "After being hinted on an error that we made, we were given a few minutes to discuss, edit, add and/or remove the unnecessary parts of the paragraph under consideration" (Student Questionnaire28).

Lastly, the students took time to do tasks together, corrected grammar and other mistakes, and took notes. Students emphasised that they each were given an opportunity to participate in the activities. One student stated, "we each presented our ideas" (Student Questionnaire35). Another one said, "we each took turns to read a piece of the assignment out loud and the writing consultant gave us advice regarding where we could take our info and also how to improve the assignment" (Student Questionnaire 40).

There is a sense that students use the consultant as a 'resounding board' to check their ideas or assignment answers. Other students stated, "we read our report out loud to see if it made sense and corrected the mistakes we made" (Student Questionnaire 48). Another said, "we did different things, others were taking notes as the consultant was giving us important notes and others answered the consultant's questions" (Student Questionnaire60).

I also argue in this thesis that the ideas of reading the assignment aloud for students is self-diagnostic as the student can identify the errors on their own and almost instantly decide to make the corrections. There is allusion to the consultant sending students back to conduct more

research to add to the evidence and supporting information. Moreover, there seems to be in the responses above a notion that each student benefited individually and contributed to the efforts of the group through individual involvement.

The next question asked to students was **whether the consultant attended to each student's needs:** 35 students agreed and nine disagreed. The students pointed out that they "worked as a group" (Student Questionnaire 30), since they each "had the same problem as a group and she [the consultant] had to address the same problem for each one of us? (Student Questionnaire 29). Another student stated, "our answers were answered individually and as a group" (Student Questionnaire 10). Another insisted, "yes, she checked with us individually and asked if we were each satisfied" (Student Questionnaire 42). However, one of the students disagreed confirming an earlier point by a student that some of the consultants are not skilled to deal efficiently with groups. The student stated, "not exactly, the only time he did was when answering a question" (Student Questionnaire 49). Nevertheless, the majority of students agreed that the consultant attended to each student individually and effectively.

Student were then asked **if they assisted one another during the consultation:** 26 replied 'No' and 25 'Yes'. Responses highlighted several reasons for students assisting one another ranging from the belief that " working together we could do more" (Student Questionnaire 10), to the need to elaborate on each other's contributions (Student Questionnaire 17), to assisting one another on how to implement the changes in the report (Student Questionnaire 27), and provide each other with feedback (Student Questionnaire 50). The responses below underline that fact that students used each other as resources in instances where the consultant could not assist and did not see that as a problem. One student stated, "Yes, because some of the students couldn't get what the consultant was trying to explain" (Student Questionnaire 19). Another one said, "Yes. We helped one another in reframing our statements" (Student Questionnaire 29); while a third one stated, "Yes. With things that some students knew so there was no need to ask the consultant" (Student Questionnaire 36). A few other students disagreed stating that they did not assist one another because students can do that in their own time, as the consultation time is insufficient for students to assist each other (Student Questionnaire 54). Another one pointed out that there was no opportunity to assist other students because each student focused on answering questions related to the section for which they had conducted research during the report writing (Student Questionnaire 60). The latter is an instance where

for a group assignment each student is allocated a section of the assignment to research and write up.

Asked if they believe **students should be allowed to assist one another when necessary during the group consultation**, 42 students said 'Yes' and five said 'No'. Given the considerable difference in responses, one would be interested in their respective reasons. One response stated that students should be allowed to assist one another because some students always have difficulties understanding or retrieving the main points in a document or speech (Student Questionnaire 3). Another student stated that students should assist one another because only students can understand and use certain words (Student Questionnaire 25). Another reason that was given was that in order for the group to work, students who do understand should help others (Student Questionnaire 7).

Other students disagreed that students should be allowed to assist one another. The first reason was that some "students do not say anything and let others answer everything" (Student Questionnaire 6). The second reason was that "fellow students do not always understand what needs to be done and how to apply the work to the guidelines" (Student Questionnaire 9), and the last reason given was that "the consultant has more knowledge and experience than the students" (Student Questionnaire 13).

Asked whether **the writing consultant also participated in the discussions among students**, 46 replied 'Yes' and three 'No'. This clearly shows that consultants participated in the discussion. Earlier responses from students pointed out that the consultants led the discussions and sometimes interrupted the students to redirect the discussions or provide hints and further stimulate the students. One response stated "yes, by giving a valid input from the topic" (Student Questionnaire 13), and asking "questions where she didn't understand" (Student Questionnaire 58).

Another response stated, "Yes. A lot of writing was involved. Changing our grammar mistakes and fixing our referencing mistakes" (Student Questionnaire 27). This response is related to the following response where the student emphasises the fact that the consultant spent time going through the work, line-by-line to correct the grammar, and that students found that process time consuming and perhaps unnecessary. The student stated, "no because we went with our final draft and she was correcting the grammar" (Student Questionnaire 9).

For the next question, "**Did the writing consultant show you examples of how you should write or did s/he demonstrate how to write a specific section of your work**?" the students' indication was that consultants should rather aim to ensure that the students understand the requirements of the assignment and include all the elements of the answers. This can be done by requesting or providing explanations or examples. This is precisely why the next question on the research questionnaire asked students **whether the consultant provided practical examples or showed students how to write.** Forty-three students replied 'Yes' and 7 'No'.

Asked **if there were skills the student learnt in the group consultation which they would be able to do on their own next time**, 44 students replied 'Yes' and three 'No'.

Table 8: Writing areas learnt by students

X	AREAS LEARNT BY STUDENTS
1	Communicating and discussing with other students
2	Writing an article
3	Writing an introduction and a conclusion
4	Writing a reference list
5	Unpacking assignment guidelines and questions
6	Reading more to improve language skills
7	Referencing in-text
8	Compiling a reference list
9	Writing short sentences
10	Eliminating unnecessary information
11	Essay structure
12	Report structure
13	Linking sentences
14	Breaking the work into manageable chunks
15	Thesis statement
16	The audience of a research report
17	Teamwork
18	Voicing their opinion

19	Methodology
20	Summarising
21	Report structure
22	How to reference a book, journal and website
23	Difference between research report and essay

Twenty-seven student mentioned ‘report writing’ as the focus of their first consultation and 30 stated it as the focus of their fourth consultation. Twenty-three students mentioned ‘assignment writing’ as the focus of their first consultation and six mentioned ‘essay writing’ as the focus of their first consultation, while three students mentioned ‘referencing’ for their fourth consultation. When analysing the ‘Areas learnt by students’ in the Table above, I realised that these areas could be clustered under some of the areas mentioned earlier in the Chapter. The following areas for instance could fall under **‘report writing’**:

- writing introductions and conclusions
- report structure
- linking sentences
- the audience of a research report
- voicing your opinion
- summarising sources
- methodology
- referencing

The following areas could fall under ‘essay writing’, excluding those common to ‘essay writing’ and ‘report writing’ in the above list:

- unpacking assignment questions
- writing short sentences
- reading
- eliminating unnecessary information

The following areas could fall under ‘referencing’, excluding those common to ‘referencing’ and ‘report writing’ in the above list:

- in text referencing
- compiling a reference list

The analysis done in relation to the preceding section means that when students are requested to list the areas learnt in the GC, they mention areas that are more specific than those mentioned as the 'focus' on particular consultation sessions. Briefly, when asked if there were skills that the student learnt in the GC, which they would be able to do on their own next time, 44 students replied 'Yes' and 3 said 'No'. Of the three who said 'no', one stated, "I still need assistance" (Student Questionnaire52). The finding is that students felt that they had learnt a great deal from the GC.

This section aimed to gather each student's experience of and feeling about the GC with a focus on the nature, social processes and content of the discussions with the consultant and other students.

4.2.3. Social interactions and disciplinary genre awareness

The students were asked the question: **During the writing group consultation, who between you and the writing consultant spoke most of the time?** Most students' perception was that the consultant dominated the consultations, whereas several others thought that both the students and the consultant shared the consultation time equally in terms of talk-time. A smaller number of students indicated that the students talked more than the consultant did.

Table 9: Who between the consultant and students spoke mostly in the GC

WHO SPOKE MOST OF THE TIME DURING THE CONSULTATION	STUDENTS
The consultant	20
The students	8
Both	14

Students who thought it was acceptable for the consultant to talk more stated that it is because the consultant needs to take time to explain concepts (Student Questionnaire 2; Student Questionnaire 20), to illustrate and make students understand (Student Questionnaire 6), and that as an expert (Student Questionnaire 36), the consultant should guide the students step-by-step (Student Questionnaire 41). One of the students stated,

> "The consultant took much time because he was trying to put the information we had in many ways and in words we can understand. It was quite enjoyable because you get many points" (Student Questionnaire 26).

Other students indicated that talk-time was shared equally in some form of dialogue. One student said, "the group members [talked most of the time] and the consultant stopped us to help us" (Student Questionnaire 10). Others stated "we spoke fairly equally" (Student Questionnaire 23), and "we spoke equally because the consultant needed our full participation" (Student Questionnaire 29). Students pointed out that they talked most of the time "because most of the time he [the consultant] asked questions and then we had to answer and explain it to him" (Student Questionnaire 25). Student presented their ideas and the consultant presented his and emphasised other points that the students had missed (Student Questionnaire 35). Another student insisted, "it was more of a dialogue. It felt comfortable" (Student Questionnaire 49).

When asked **whether during the group consultation students were allowed to express their own opinions,** forty-eight students replied 'Yes' and three replied 'No'. They felt attention was paid to what each one of them thought and needed to know. They stated, "Where we didn't understand we asked questions and we were allowed to" (Student Questionnaire 8). Another one said "yes. We were asked to explain what each one of us found unclear" (Student Questionnaire 20). Another student emphasised "yes. We were given a chance to answer questions such as 'what do you think about this?" (Student Questionnaire 42).

Furthermore, students were then asked the question **whether they were allowed to use their own languages (ie: isiZulu, isiSotho, tshiVenda, Afrikaans, etc.) during the GC.** It was assumed that being allowed to speak their languages would enable students to express themselves more easily and efficiently. Interestingly, most students stated that they were not allowed to speak, or were discouraged from speaking in vernacular. They stated that this was "because some of us we don't speak the same language" (Student Questionnaire 8) and that "the consultant will not understand our vernacular language" (Student Questionnaire 39). Another student said "no. we weren't allowed to use our own languages as the group consultant wouldn't understand the vernacular and so we chose to rather communicate in English" (Student Questionnaire 40). In other words, the group consultation forces students to communicate in English. This can definitely benefit all students given that the language of

instruction of the university is English, but others would argue that this cannot necessarily benefit students with a non-English or L2 and EFL backgrounds, who may have English language problems. This point will be discussed further in the next Chapters.

The next question asked **who at the beginning of the group consultation decided what the group would be doing for the session.** Was it one of the students, the students, or the writing consultant?

Table 10: Who between the consultant and students decided the GC agenda

WHO DECIDED THE AGENDA OF THE CONSULTATION	STUDENTS
The consultant	6
The students	27
Both the consultant and the students	9
The student leader	2
The lecturer	1

The answers to this question may give an indication of whether writing centre practice addresses disciplinary literacies development or not, in that the focus of consultations should be dictated by the authentic requirements of the assignments as communicated by the lecturer or tutor. The study found that the consultant ensured that the students determined the focus of the consultation. The students overwhelmingly agreed that they were rightfully the ones to make this decision: they "were the ones who needed help about certain things in our writing" (Student Questionnaire 8), and because "each group member was assigned to do something [for the group] to be more effective and efficient" (Student Questionnaire 10).

Further, the students were asked **whether or not they felt that the writing consultant understood their assignment guidelines.**

Table 11: Consultant's understanding of the disciplinary content

DID THE CONSULTANT UNDERSTAND THE ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES	STUDENTS

Yes	47
No	2
Not sure	2

One of the most important points of contention in writing centre practice is whether writing consultants should necessarily be of the same field as the student for an effective consultation. The question above can assist in settling the matter at least partially. The findings show that consultants, who are of a diverse background and from a variety of disciplines and who are not from the same field of the students they consult with, understood the assignment, meaning that the students were satisfied with the consultation. Asked whether the consultant understood the assignment forty-seven students out of fifty-three answered "yes". One of the students stated, "Yes. Because we passed the research assignment" (Student Questionnaire 5). Another one said, "yes, because she gave us and explained guidelines on how to improve our work" (Student Questionnaire 6). Another emphasised, "yes. Because we didn't even have a content on how to write articles, but she was able to guide us" (Student Questionnaire 8).

Others pointed out to the fact that the consultant was able to assist because he or she understood the assignment brief and supporting materials better than the students. One student affirmed that the consultant understood the assignment "because a rubric was given with the mark allocation and we applied the rubric to the assessment" (Student Questionnaire 9). Others agreed that the consultant "did because he asked questions pertaining to our assignment" (Student Questionnaire 21) and he "had the rubric […] to guide him on our assignment" (Student Questionnaire 25). Other students were emphatic about this in the following terms: "yes. Even though she didn't know the content she gave useful tips on paraphrasing, punctuation and when it is appropriate to use linking words" (Student Questionnaire 40) and another insisted that the consultant "managed to answer all the questions I had and she gave me methods of how I can improve my writing based on the essay question" (Student Questionnaire 51). Overall, the students mostly agreed that the consultants were effective even though they were from academic fields other than the students'.

The students were asked **whether the felt the writing consultant understood their assignment guidelines or not.** This section attempts to explore in details what the students and the consultant used their 'speaking time' for and why. This is in line with another section of

the questionnaire, which investigated what the students required assistance with in the **one-on-one consultation** for the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th consultations. The intention was to find out whether the individual consultation focused on genre awareness. The following responses show that it was the case.

Focus of Consultation 1 from the students' perspective:

Table 12: Focus of the First One-on-one and GC

One-on-one consultation			Group consultation		
Area of focus	**Students (n=61)**	**%**	**Area of focus**	**Students (n=61)**	**%**
Report writing	21	34	Report writing	27	44
Assignment writing	20	33	Assignment writing	23	38
Brainstorming/ planning	11	18	Structure/ format of an assignment	6	10
Essay writing	4	7	Essay writing	6	10
Grammar and language	2	3	Article writing	3	5
Time management	1	2	Referencing and citation	4	7
Study skills	1	2	Introduction and conclusion	2	3
			Research proposal	1	2

Of the topics mentioned for Consultation 1, most students mentioned report writing and assignment writing. These were instances where students requested feedback on their drafts. The Brainstorming and planning topics indicate that some students approached the writing centre without a first draft to obtain a clarification as to their understanding of the instructions or questions. The table above shows that the four first focus areas are the same for the one-on-one and GCs.

Focus of Consultation 2 from the students' perspective:

Table 13: Focus of second one-on-one consultation

One-on-one consultation			Group consultation		
Area of focus	**Students (n=61)**	**%**	**Area of focus**	**Students (n=61)**	**%**
Report writing	3	5	Assignment structure	4	7
Referencing and citation	3	5	Report writing	3	5
Research proposal	2	3	Article writing	1	2
Unpacking assignment instructions/ questions	2	3	Essay writing	1	2
Study skills	1	2	Research proposal	1	2
critical thinking	1				

Focus of Consultation 3 from the students' perspective:

Table 14: Focus of third one-on-one consultation

One-on-one consultation			Group consultation		
Area of focus	**Students (n=61)**	**%**	**Area of focus**	**Students (n=61)**	**%**
Brainstorming	3	5	Essay writing	6	10
Unpacking assignment instructions/ questions	2	3	Article writing	1	2
Assignment writing	2	3			
Introduction and conclusion	2	3			

Focus of Consultation 4 from the students' perspective:

Table 15: Focus of fourth one-on-one consultation

One-on-one consultation			Group consultation		
Area of focus	**Students (n=61)**	**%**	**Area of focus**	**Students (n=61)**	**%**
Introduction and conclusion	5	8	Report writing	30	49

Report writing	4	7	Referencing	3	7
Reference list and in-text referencing	4	7			
Research proposal writing	3	7			
Writing of article	1	2			

Both students and consultants listed the same areas for the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th consultations. The first and second consultations tend to focus on 'unpacking assignment questions' and issues of assignment structure; whereas the third and fourth consultations mainly focused on editorial issues and overall genre specific issues, including referencing.

In the study, more consultants than students found the one-on-one consultation frustrating; perhaps because the GC is easier to manage and facilitate effectively as it lends itself to inputs from several students.

The next section presents the findings from the writing consultants' questionnaires in 2014. It should be noted that the essence of the two questionnaires were the same though the consultant's questionnaires were adapted to address consultants directly instead of students.

4.3. Writing Consultant Questionnaire Data

4.3.1. Challenges facing writing consultants in a GC

Similar to the students' questionnaire, the first question asked consultants **how they experienced the one-on-one consultation**. Interestingly, some of the writing consultants found the experience of sitting one-on-one with a student to work on the latter's academic writing 'frustrating', 'hectic' and 'eye-opening', while the majority found it 'informative', 'rewarding' and 'a good opportunity for student learning'. One of the consultants stated, "I feel like consultations work well on a one-on-one basis. It gives more time to the individual student, allowing a student to gain all the help and assistance needed" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire1); alluding to the issue of the time allocated for the consultation. Another student also alluded to the same issue when he/she said, "an individual student can get involved and interact with a consultant. They can have a more in-depth session" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 1). Another consultant seemed to think that the individual consultation allows

the consultant to set an agenda more easily: “the one-on-one consultation works because you can set an agenda on what to focus on and work through it with the student. These can be carried through follow-up consultation” (Writing Consultant Questionnaire1).

The consultants were then asked what could be done to improve the one-on-one consultation and they mentioned the following.

Table 16: Consultants' perceptions of how to improve the one-on-one consultation

ANSWER	CONSULTANTS
One-on-one consultations should be longer	1
The admin takes up too much time	2
More private setting	2
Departments to clarify their assignment requirements with the writing centre /clear purpose for writing consultations	2
Writing centres to harmonise their approach to one-on-one consultation / develop a code of practice for consultation	3
English literature students should consultant with consultants with an English literature background	1
Students should not be allowed to visit the writing centre only to obtain the proof of consultation for the lecturers	1

The issue of time is recurrent perhaps because of the interactional nature of the GC requires ample time. Consultants suggested the following: that they should be trained on a standardised approach or technique to conduct the IC; that lecturers should clarify their requirements for consultants, consultations should take place in a more private setting; that administrative tasks should take less time, and that more time should be allocated to the IC. These issues are discussed in detail in the discussion of findings chapter. The rest of this section discusses findings on the GC, though this study did not intend to draw comparisons between the one-on-one consultation and the GC.

4.3.2. Social interactions in a GC

Students' responses indicated that most GCs comprised between three and four students as seen in the table below. These findings show that whilst 29 participating students indicated that they had only attended one GC, each writing consultant conducted an average of 20 group consultations with the following approximate numbers per consultant:

Table 17: Number of GC conducted per consultant

NUMBER OF CONSULTANTS	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
NUMBER OF GROUP CONSULTATIONS CONDUCTED	2	4	Between 7 and 11	12	20	More than 30	More than 80

Most students who answered questions had only attended one GC. Writing consultants indicated that they had conducted between 4 and 6 group consultations; an average higher than that of students. For this reason, it can then be inferred that the consultants' responses may be more reliable than the students' due to the experience with one-on-one consultations and GCs.

When asked to describe **what they, as writing consultants, did during the consultation**, the consultants mentioned the following:

Table 18: Consultant practices as described by consultants

X	CONSULTANT PRACTICES AS DESCRIBED BY CONSULTANTS
Admin and organisational matters	
1	Greeted, introduced him/herself and welcomed the students
2	Asked students to introduce themselves
3	Explained what they do and what they do not do at the writing centre
4	Made/helped them fill in the observation sheets/ admin forms
Interview	
5	Asked them what they needed help with/ ask each member

6	Asked them to explain the assignment
7	Asked them what they needed assistance with
8	Identified common themes/ needs/ concerns they would like to focus on
9	Set out an agenda if they did not have their own
Consulting/ questioning	
10	Asked them to read their work aloud so they could identify mistakes or errors
11	At the end gave them guidance on what to do on their own / helped where the students did not know what to do
12	Facilitated the discussions to allow for interactions with and amongst students

This question was intended to map out the practices followed by consultants. A comparison with the student practices shows that these practices can be subdivided into four categories: the welcome and set up, the admin practices, the establishment of agenda and the discussions. One of the consultants described the main steps in the following terms:

> "Introduce myself and the role of the writing centre. Fill in forms. Asked them what their needs are. Address common problems. Ask questions. Involve each member. Have them read their work out aloud. Thank them and book a follow up consultation if required" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 8).

There is a focus on the need for students to read aloud, talk and think about the work at hand. This participation in the social interactions seems to be valued by students and consultants. The following is the writing consultants' description of the students' practices during the group consultation:

Table 19: Student practices as described by consultants

X	STUDENT PRACTICES AS DESCRIBED BY THE WRITING CONSULTANT
Admin and organisational	

1	Greet the consultant
2	Fill in the observation form
3	Tell the consultant about the assignment/ explain their work
Consulting/ asking and answering questions	
4	Read their work out loud
5	Ask them clarifying questions
6	Indicate the problematic areas
7	Ask questions
8	Identify mistakes
9	Correct mistakes
10	Take notes
11	Understand academic writing
12	Ask questions from the group and consultant
13	Answer questions from the group and consultant
Adjourning/closing	
14	Book a follow up consultation

The two tables above describe the consultants' practices and the students' practices during the GC. It can be observed that the consultants' description of their own course of action emphasises their use of questioning or their instructions for students to pose specific actions. Their description of the students' actions seemed to indicate that the latter's' actions are only executed in response to the consultants' or only at the consultants' 'go-ahead'. This tendency by the consultant to centre all events on themselves could be understood by the fact that they are trained to 'guide' students in the writing process. Thus, they feel perhaps the need to control what happens in the process. The consultants' descriptions of the actions taking place in the consultation should however foreground the need for the consultant to remain student-centred, allowing students to talk more freely and in a more sustained manner to promote the self-diagnostic nature of the writing consultation, as prescribed by the Socratic questioning approach.

One of the consultants stated that students "usually […] respond to the questions asked by the consultant, read through their assignments as requested and write suggestions on their

assignments" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire7), as if a student cannot speak unless 'spoken to'.

When asked **how they found the experience of conducting a GC**, writing consultants found the experience, "challenging", "difficult", and informative. One of them stated "it can be challenging. There's often a lot of disagreement within the group. This makes it different to assist them in their writing" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 1). Another stated that it was "difficult because sometimes the other group members are late, or do not do show up at all. There is also group dynamics and the group members do not get along. So group consultations can be a problem sometimes." (Writing Consultant Questionnaire2).

Some other consultants felt that the GC was overwhelming, emotionally draining and challenging for various reasons. One consultant said "having four students with different ideas and sometimes conflicting ideas is overwhelming but enjoyable as I get to understand different perspectives" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire3). Another stated "they all listen but some just come because it was a group work/assignment. Also it's emotionally draining as you have to make sure that each student understands what's going on" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 5). The reason cited is the necessity to cater for the individual needs of each student in the group. Two consultants thought the GC was challenging firstly "when they [students] come with different assignments" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 7). Secondly, "it is more challenging than the one-on-one consultation especially because most often members in the group don't agree with one another. Groups are more resistant" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 8).

Moreover, there seems to be the notion that group work and individual involvement are difficult to combine in such a manner that each student benefits individually and contributes to the efforts of the group. One consultant stated, "it's almost similar to a tutorial and I feel students do not benefit as they would in an individual consultation" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire4). Two consultants, cited below, reiterated this:

> "Not as effective as one-on-one consultations. Each student usually has individual needs and even addressing these needs in group doesn't seem to be as effective, unless it is a small group between 2-3" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire5).

> "I don't have a problem with it. Its just difficult to dedicate enough time to individual students in a group because some hide behind other students and do not participate" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire9).

Other consultants provided details of why they thought the GC is challenging in comparison to an individual consultation. One emphasised that the challenge is that "the whole group must benefit. I focus on the group effort and needs, unless they all agree they have that problem" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 3). Others alluded to the fact that students in a GC may sometimes be working on one common draft or separate drafts, have common needs or concerns or varying ones, as shown in the following responses. One stated, "It's challenging when they come with different assignments." (Writing Consultant Questionnaire7). Another one emphasised "they [students] all listen, but same just come because it was a group work/assignment. Also it's emotionally draining as you have to make sure that each student understands what's going on" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire5). While another one stressed,

> "It differs between students. Some come prepared with questions and have their assignments printed. They are ready for the consultation. Others aren't prepared. They don't know their assignment topics. They give you their work for you to read and wait for you to give them answers. They don't want to take control of their own work" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire1).

The consultants overwhelmingly expressed a concern about having to attend to each individual student's needs, as was also shown in the responses to the next question.

Asked **whether they could attend to each student's needs,** seven of the writing consultants said "Yes" and one "no". One of the consultants pointed out that she "usually work[s] with them in a group, but I make sure everyone participates. I question each group member and let them read the sections of their assignment that they should be working on" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 1). Furthermore, consultants referred to the need to let the students who understood concepts explain to those who had difficulties. One said "when some students understand the explained concepts better than others! Ask them to explain them to their peers and to contextualise so they can catch on" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire4). Another one stated, "at times one student will not understand what I am explaining. I ask the other students

'who got it to explain to him/her'" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire6). Another consultant emphasised that all he/she did was ensure that any student who asked a question received an answer (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 7). Another pointed out that s/he tried to the best of her abilities to cater for each student's needs and that this was the "intention" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 2). The consultant implicitly admits the difficulty of attending to each student's needs efficiently.

Asked **if students assisted each other at any given time**, seven consultants replied "Yes" and one "No". It was found that students often guide or assist one another with the content (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 1), as the consultant is often from a field other than the students'. They also assist one another with grammar (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 2) and with clarifying aspects of the assignment (Writing Consultant Questionnaire1). Sometimes each group member is allocated a question to answer for the group (Writing Consultant Questionnaire9). Other consultants stressed that they allow students to assist one another and only intervene to steer the discussions in a different direction (Writing Consultant Questionnaire2). Another consultant specified that students should be allowed to assist one another to enable "peer learning and it might be better for students to get feedback from their peer rather than from the consultant" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 9). The consultant who disagreed that students should not be allowed to help one another argued that students use the 'spotlight' to "make others feel dumb and embarrassed" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 3).

Asked if they also participated in the group discussions, seven consultants replied "yes" and one "no". one of the consultants emphasised that "often […] the consultant should take the back seat" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire2). The others indicated that they only intervened when necessary "if there is need to. If they [students] agree on what is not true or right" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire3), "when they [students] sound confused about what they are discussing" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire7), and "when the conversation gets out of hand or off topic" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire9). Another one insisted, "sometimes, I mostly listen to establish where the need is and who are the group members who need more guidance" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire4).

To the question of whether **they provided students with practical examples**, five consultants said "yes" and one "no". one stated, "Some students are better at following examples, than just

if I give a structure" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire1). Another said "no. I explain to them what is required and ask them how they can provide" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire3)

The next question asked **consultants if students learnt something from the GC and what areas of academic literacies were learnt**. Seven consultants replied "Yes" there were several writing areas that students learnt in the consultation. Among the skills learnt, consultants cited the following:

Table 20: Areas learnt by students as described by consultants

X	AREAS LEARNT BY STUDENTS FOR WRITING CONSULTANTS
1	Academic writing
2	Essay structure
3	Coherence and cohesion
4	Analysing questions before writing the assignment
5	Brainstorming
6	Referencing
7	Grammar
8	Critical thinking
9	Reasoning
10	Editing their own work

The responses from the consultants indicated that the answer to this question is perhaps not as simple as one may assume. One consultant stated "I hope so. It is difficult to say for a fact as a consultant, when the students leave, we hope that they have taken something with them" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 2). Another stated, "it depends on the context of the assignment" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 9).

Asked **if the GC works in improving students' academic literacies**, two writing consultants stated 'yes', three 'No', two were unsure and the last one abstained. Their responses seemed slightly more nuanced than their answers to the other questions. One replied "not really. I feel that it contributes more to discussing how to integrate their work into a single assignment. Its more about brainstorming" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire1). Another stated, "it depends

on the size of the group" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 5). Another pointed out that all the GC did was address the students' general concerns, though the focus was on higher order concerns (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 5). A further response stated,

> "Writing no. understanding the question, yes. This is because they are many and normally they task each other to work on a certain section each. Hence, if you're not the one who wrote that section, you will just be sitting and listening to those who wrote it" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 6).

To the question of **what should be done to improve the GC**, writing consultants made the following recommendations:

Table 21: Consultants' perceptions of how to improve the GC

RECOMMENDATION TO IMPROVE GROUP CONSULTATIONS	WRITING CONSULTANTS
One student should not dominate the discussions	1
Separate rooms for groups/ more space	4
Make it compulsory for groups to consult at least 3 times	2
Departments should make their expectations clear to consultants	1
One person should not be allowed to consult alone for the group/ all group members to attend the group consultation	2
Students should be informed that consultants will not edit work for them	1
More time should be allocated for group consultations	3
Implement rule that one group one assignment	1
A group should not consist of more than 5 students	1
A group should consult with the same consultant throughout for the same assignment	1

Consultants made several recommendations to improve the GC. Firstly, they pointed out that the time allocated for the GC was insufficient. Students also mentioned the lack of ample time to conduct the GC effectively as a point to be improved. The writing centre allocates 30 minutes for undergraduate consultations, although this time can be extended to 1 hour upon request

from the students or the consultant. Responses from the student questionnaire showed that the protocol, administrative and organisational practices that the group and the consultant have to observe take one third and even half of the consultation time. These practices involves each student introducing themselves, filling in observation forms, and sorting out hard copies or finding electronic copies on a laptop or tablet. Secondly, consultants bewailed the issues of lack of space and sometimes privacy in the writing centre venue. This corroborates the students' response to the same question. Thirdly, consultants mentioned issues related to group organisation, including the necessity for a group to consult at least three times and with the same consultant each time for the same assignment, for all group members to be present at each consultation, for the group size to be limited to five students, and for the group to be writing a common assignment. Fourthly, consultants recommended that the lecturers or departments' expectations be communicated to writing consultants in advance and clearly. The students should be educated about what the writing centre does and what they cannot do; ie: editing the students' work. Lastly, consultants should be properly trained on how to conduct a group consultation to avoid issues such as the dominance of GC discussions by one or few students. In order for the consultant to achieve this, it could perhaps be important to also train them in AL principles, as investigated in the next section.

4.3.3. Social interactions and disciplinary genre awareness

The next question asked consultants **what the focus of their first, second, third and fourth consultations.** The focus of the 1st Group consultation from the writing consultants' perspective.

-Focus of first GC:

Table 22: Focus of first GC for consultants

FOCUS OF GROUP CONSULTATION	NUMBER OF CONSULTANTS
Understanding assignment questions	2
Assignment writing	1
Assignment structure	1
Questionnaire development	1
Report writing	3

Merging several copies of assignments	1

'Report writing' and 'understanding assignment questions' were pinpointed as the focus of the first GC. It should be reiterated that report writing could be dealt with concurrently with topics such as 'assignment structure', 'merging several copies', and even 'understanding assignment questions'.

-Focus of the Second GC for consultants

It focused mostly on the structure of assignments and essay writing as shown in the following table, which summarises the writing consultants' perspective:

Table 23: Focus of second GC for consultants

FOCUS OF GROUP CONSULTATION	NUMBER OF CONSULTANTS
Essay writing	2
Logical flow and structure of assignment	4
Sentence construction	1
Editing	1

-Focus of the third GC from the writing consultants' perspective:

Table 24: Focus of third GC for consultants

FOCUS OF GROUP CONSULTATION	NUMBER OF CONSULTANTS
Grammar	2
Report writing	1
Logical flow	1
Essay writing	2

-Focus of the fourth GC from the writing consultants' perspective:

Table 25: Focus of fourth GC for consultants

FOCUS OF GROUP CONSULTATION	NUMBER OF CONSULTANTS
Editing	1
Punctuation	1
Grammar	1
Essay writing	1
Report writing	2

For this section, consultants were asked who between them and the students spoke the most during the GC. The findings were as follows:

Table 26: Who spoke the most between the students and the consultant during the GC

WHO SPOKE MOST DURING THE CONSULTATION	NUMBER OF CONSULTANTS
The consultant	0
The students	6
Both	1
It depends	4

Two of the consultants answered that 'students' spoke the most, adding that students, who are the ones seeking guidance, should always be in control of the process. As a result, they should be the ones talking most of the time. One consultant emphasised "students. That is how it should be. Because they do not come for examination, but for guidance" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 3). Another one stated "the students. its always about the students and they should always feel in control" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 9). Two other consultants offered responses that seemed more reserved. One mentioned "it varies. I pose questions to get the group thinking and I assist them during the discussion" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 1). Another one said that the consultant and the students spoke equally because "it enabled me [the consultant] to listen to their problematic areas and then to hear me explain the assignment requirements. Quite a good experience especially when you listen." (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 6).

Consultants were then asked whether the **students were allowed to express their own opinion during the GC.** Eight consultants replied 'Yes' and one 'No'. One stated that this was "so that each member knows what one thinks and can get help if on the 'wrong' track" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 6).

The next question asked consultants **whether the students could use their own [vernacular] languages (for example: Zulu, Sotho, Venda, Afrikaans, etc.) during the GC**. Seven consultants said 'Yes' and two 'No'. The finding is that though there was no explicit prohibition to speak in vernacular, students often chose to speak in English. This is verified by the earlier student questionnaire findings where students emphasised that they could not speak vernacular because most consultants would not understand, and because not all students in a given group spoke the same vernacular language, and because with English being the language of instruction, some practice would surely assist.

Consultants were also asked who decided **what the group would be doing for the period at the beginning of the GC,** whether it was the consultants, one of the students or the students as a group. Most consultant stated that the students did. Two of the consultant indicated that they were the ones who decided the agenda. One stated s/he made the decision "based on what they needed help with" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire7), although without specifying the criteria applied in the process. Another stated "I decide as the consultant, but always with the students' consent if they are okay and incorporate that with what the students would like us to focus on" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire9). Another consultant specified that "the students in the group set an agenda, but some other times the group leader is the one who mentions what they need assistance with" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire1). The finding is that when the consultant sets an agenda for the consultation, he/she does so based on information received from the students either verbally or through assignment instructions and other materials that the students submit beforehand. It was also found that the students could suggest an agenda either collectively or through a group leader. This entails that they might have discussed the matter before visiting the writing centre.

Another question that the consultants were asked was **whether they could confidently say that they understood the students' assignment guidelines or questions.** Eight consultants said 'Yes' and one said 'No'. The consultants stated that "sometimes the guidelines are straightforward, but most of the time the guidelines are not specific enough" (Writing

Consultant Questionnaire 8). This response highlights one of the difficulties that consultants face: when assignment guidelines are unclear, students approach the writing centre for clarification. These findings showed that consultants, being senior students, sometimes understand the student lecturer's instructions better than the students, but the situation becomes more complex when these instructions are unclear even to the consultants. Another consultant pointed out, "most of the time. Some guidelines have been unclear, but the consultants discuss it and explain it to each other. So we are able to fully assist the students" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire1). There is reference here to the collaboration among writing consultants between consultation sessions, or at the weekly meeting, where they share information and difficulties about their consultation sessions with students from the same department, course or assignment. Most of the other consultants insisted that they almost always understood the assignment brief, guidelines or instructions and explained them to students, as shown in the following responses:

> Yes. Students needed help with structuring a paper as well as writing an introduction and a conclusion. The instructions were quite clear and straight to the point. The same applies for the development of a questionnaire. Besides a group of two is more manageable" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 7).

> Yes. Even though I don't understand that particular field or subject. The assignment were merely in simple English which needed to be interpreted in context" (Writing Consultant Questionnaire 6).

It should be noted that reference is not made to the content from the students' academic disciplines, but to the wording or meaning of assignment briefs, instructions or guidelines. The issue of a consultant not being able to understand or deal with content, or not, is discussed further in the next chapters under the question of whether the consultant should always be from the same field as the students they assist or not. The next chapter presents the findings from the focus group data with students and with consultants.

4.4. Summary of Findings

The data from the student questionnaire and those from the writing consultant questionnaires can be summarised in the following themes. The themes are organised according to the three

unit of analysis introduced at the beginning of the Chapter: the challenges facing students and consultants in a GC (including those with a social nature), the social interactions, and the disciplinary genres awareness through social interactions.

4.4.1 Challenges facing student and consultants in GC

The themes, which emerged from the challenges, were subdivided into two categories: the challenges facing students and consultants of a general nature and those of a social nature.

GC General challenges:

- insufficient time allocated for the one-on-one and GC
- lack of a dedicated private space for GCs
- few consultants available
- consultants do not fix grammar, spelling and punctuation errors for students
- student groups characterised by disorganisation/ attentism
- lack of motivation/ involvement on the part of few group members

GC Social challenges:

- some consultants are unskilled in the English language, interpersonal communication, and questioning technique
- consultation strategies are not direct/ overt (i.e. consultants use probing instead of pointing straight to errors)
- students are afforded few chances to pose questions
- not all students are involved in the discussions
- students' drafts are not double checked
- GC not suitable for all learning styles

The GC challenges of a social nature relate to the consultants and students' inability to create an environment conducive to interactions, discussions, talk among students and between themselves and the students in a manner that is conducive to learning and makes students feel at the centre of all GC activities. It can be inferred that students desire to be involved effectively. There is also a sense that the GC should be 'the space' where all learning styles or rather learning styles, which are not catered for in the departmental 'large class' lectures or tutorials, should be accommodated.

4.4.2 Social interactions in GCs

The themes, which emerged from the data in relation to social relations, are:

- GC social interactions are promoted through explanation, clarification, elaborations, definitions and questions
- Students assist one another through discussions during GCs
- Students value the consultants' "calculated" participation in their discussions
- Consultants should not dominate the discussions, but promote the exchange of ideas between students
- Students should be
    - Reading out loud
    - Thinking for themselves
    - Talking to one another
    - Sharing ideas with one another
    - Comparing ideas
    - Revising their original ideas based on lessons from other students
    - Borrowing ideas/ strategies/answers from peers
- Consultants should be
    - Encouraging and guiding students to talk/ discuss
    - Questioning (probing/ leading/clarification questions)
    - Facilitating the exchange of ideas between students
- Students should
    - Participate/get involved
    - Be open
    - Support others
    - Listen
    - Be actively involved
- The discussions must be
    - Inclusive
    - Student-centred
    - Comprehensive, that is, continued until all students are satisfied (more time needed)
    - In-depth (consultants should question effectively)
    - On-point (on assignment or disciplinary genres/texts)

4.4.3 Social interactions for disciplinary genre/text awareness in GCs

The themes, which emerged from the data in relation to how social interactions may contribute to the students' awareness of disciplinary genres or texts, are as follows. Student responses indicated that the GC afforded them an opportunity to

- Understand areas of AL/ writing or disciplinary content, which were previously obscure or difficult to access, through discussion with their peers or from the consultant's input.
- Think differently or become aware of other perspectives.
- Correct mistakes and errors in writing and thinking.
- Learn to talk and share ideas with peers.
- Learn to listen more attentively.

4.5. Conclusion

This Chapter presented the findings of the questionnaires administered to students and to consultants in 2014. The student questionnaire findings showed that students value interactions among themselves more than the ones with the writing consultant. The consultant questionnaire findings demonstrated that consultants aimed to facilitate interactions among students particularly because they were mostly from an academic field other than the students'. The Chapter summarised the themes emerging from the data firstly on the general and social challenges faced by students and consultants in a GC. Some of these were: the insufficient time allocated to the session, the lack of GC facilitation skills on the part of some of the consultants, the limited number of consultants available in the writing centre, and the fact that the consultation is conducted in a convoluted manner, not addressing issues head-on or overtly. Secondly, some of the themes related to the social interactions in a GC were: the importance of discussions, explanations and elaborations, the student-centeredness of all activities in a GC, the necessity to render the GC more in-depth, on-point, comprehensive, inclusive, student-led and interactive. Lastly, the themes related to the GC's ability to raise students' disciplinary genre awareness through social interactions were: students being able to understand areas of AL/ writing or disciplinary content previously obscure or difficult to access through discussion with their peers or from the consultant's input. Students also gained the ability to think differently or become aware of other perspectives, opportunity to correct mistakes and errors in writing and thinking, the chance to learn to talk and share ideas with peers. These themes are investigated further in the next Chapter on focus group discussions.

CHAPTER FIVE
FOCUS GROUP DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

5.1. Introduction

The previous Chapter discussed the themes emerging from the questionnaires administered to students and writing consultants in 2014. This Chapter dwells on the themes emerging from the focus group discussions with students and with writing consultants. It identifies the themes previously mentioned in the questionnaire data, which are repeated in this data, for further investigation. The focus groups were held to further investigate the challenges faced by the research population, through social interactions aimed at exploring disciplinary genres in GCs. The themes to investigate further were: the questioning techniques, focus of the GC, strengths and weaknesses of the GC, student practices, consultant practices, individual attention on students, collaboration among students, and consultant participation in the discussions. They also included practical examples from the consultant, the centeredness of activities on student needs, student voice, use of vernacular languages, setting and control of agenda, and consultant's field of study. This Chapter discusses these themes further and in-depth within the context of GC social interactions. In the sections, CP1 refers to 'Consultant Participant 1' and SP1 or P1 means 'Student Participant 1'.

5.2. Focus Group with Students

The focus group schedule comprised sections similar to the questionnaire questions including the challenges faced by students and consultants, the social interactions, and the capacity of these interactions to promote disciplinary genre or texts awareness. A group of six students from the Faculty of Humanities, two females and four males, all 1st years, was formed and arrangements were made for the discussions. These discussions were also held in the researcher's office and recorded using a smart phone voice recorder. All students had attended at least one GC and they all indicated that they had not attended a one-on-one consultation prior to the GC. The focus group data was analysed and interpreted using Atlas.ti7, a qualitative content analysis software. The following is a presentation and interpretation of the data by emerging theme.

5.2.1. One-on-one writing consultation

The first question posed to students in the FG interview investigated the one-on-one consultation, its nature, pedagogy, weaknesses and strengths. **Asked if they all had attended a one-on-one consultation**, all answered 'No'. This means that the GC was the first consultation that they attended at the writing centre. The students were asked **whether the one-on-one consultation worked for them, particularly in improving their AL or writing abilities**.

> P1: You know to come as a group is better because sometimes to face someone you don't know can be intimidated sitting with a person you don't know. But if you are sitting as part of group you can gain confidence and next time you can sit one-on-one.
> Q: Do you mean that writing consultants are intimidating?
> P1: No
> P3: Not at all. They are friendly. So, you must always start with a GC and when you feel confident enough you sit for a one-on-one consultation
> Q: Did you know that they are also students?
> P2: The consultants? Because some of us are afraid of raising our hands in class
> Q: Is the writing centre less intimidating than the lecture?
> P1: Yes, because if you ask a question to the writing consultant, that person won't laugh at you, but if you ask a question in class some of the students may laugh at you.

As this theme was not mentioned in the questionnaire data, it will not be discussed further in this Chapter. This excerpt shows that this type of consultation assists students in gaining confidence.

5.2.2 Exposure and gain from varying perspectives or peer learning : advantages of the GC

The students' assertion at the beginning of the passage above clearly portrays the one-on-one consultation as more intimidating than the GC. Students argued that once a student has attended a GC, he/she would be more comfortable sitting face-to-face with one consultant. The students pointed out that the writing centre consultation represents a safer space than the lecture, where other students may mock a fellow for providing an incorrect answer. Participants indicated that this may not happen in a consultation as the consultant avoid discouraging students. This comparison between the consultation and the lecture is also shown in the following statements:

P4: A student will sometimes understand a fellow student better than a lecturer or a writing consultant

Q: You think so. Do you all agree about that?

PA: Yes. Even when a fellow student explains something in English to you, the way he will explain it, you will understand him better than if a lecturer explained.

P1: In addition to the required explanation, the fellow student can add another aspect that he or she understands about the topic, which can help you understand the matter under discussion. I'm asking for instance about how do I link my introduction with the conclusion, but am not expressing myself clearly, but just because she heard me talk about the intro and the conclusion. She [the consultant] will assume that I need explanation about the intro and the conclusion but without necessarily understanding the exact question.

Most focus group participants emphasised that the GC worked for the students. One participant indicated that the group discussions allowed her to identify errors in her own writing, which she could not identify on her own.

Q: Did the GC work for you? How?

P2: Yes. I think my writing has improved because I realise the mistakes that we did as a group. Because we could notice some of the mistakes we made as a group for the first time. Some of the mistakes like our grammar the way we construct our sentences.

Another participant stressed that in a GC students also benefit when the consultant answers questions from peers, which they did not think of, as shown in the following statement:

P1: With group consultation for instance the consultant will say you have this and that but when I look at it, it doesn't link with this one. The consultant will answer a question from a student, but others also will benefit; as long as each student's question is answered.

P2: If you are alone you can ask one or two questions, but if you are in GC you are going also to benefit from opinions and issues raised by other students and the answers that they receive.

In a GC, students stand to benefit even when the consultant or the peers are addressing a question from another student.

5.2.3 Development of student voice/ opinion

Furthermore, participants underlined the importance for each group member to participate in the group activities, asserting that in a lecture, some students could manage to remain silent and not participate in the discussions. Participants seem to support that this is not possible in a GC as the consultant aims to involve each student. This corroborates with the 2014 findings about the importance of participation of all group members.

> P3: Sometimes you are writing a report as a group sometimes and when you get there you're the only one asking questions and the others don't see any problems with the draft. The lecturer won't see that there are other group members who are not saying anything.
> Q: Now you are talking about the GC or the lecture?
> P3: Both because we came into a GC and other members they don't say anything. Until everyone leaves. So say, we didn't say anything and the consultant won't notice that some other members won't say anything. So why were we there because we consulted by still got lower marks.

Participant 3 points out that non-participation by some of the group members could lead to the group getting a low mark for the assignment, foregrounding the necessity of individual participation by all.

5.2.4. Speaking vernacular languages

Students were asked if they should be allowed to speak in vernacular during the GC. Participant 1 specified that even in the lecture or tutorial, they explained concepts or interpreted statements to each other in vernacular particularly when their peers were unable to understand the lecturer. Students in the focus group emphasised that they each spoke several South African languages and that unfortunately, because the groups were not formed based on the languages that each could speak and because consultants mostly could not speak the language understood by all, the group only communicated in English.

P1: Should the consultant be a person who speaks your vernacular? Because we speak different languages we need one language for us to communicate. Each we are discussing in our African language others will experience differences understand. But you said at the beginning that when you come as a group and one doesn't understand you can interpret for him and help one another.

The necessity to choose between English and an African or vernacular language for the group consultation was also highlighted. It was found that students preferred to speak in English with consultants and in vernacular among themselves.

P1: The thing about the GC is that we are coming from different provinces….you are a Sepedi ….you learn something new on how to communicate…from different teachers some they were white, others black … to be from different places the consultant maybe can help you to communicate. She will show you how to communicate in writing and link your ideas. He/she might not express her feeling about your writing but she will be helping you arrange and fix your writing without mocking you.
Q: So what you are saying is that the fact that people come from various backgrounds helps the GC. Is it not an obstacle?
P3: Yes it is an obstacle. Because sometimes you fear to express yourself in English. You are like [...] my vocab is crap and you will be like quiet because you don't know how to approach the consultant and will be very shy to ask the question. Because let's face it when we're alone we will be communicating in Sepedi, in Zulu and it's very rare to communicate in English when we are alone even when we are discussing schoolwork without the consultant, but when the consultant is there we try to communicate in English. Many backgrounds is an obstacle.
P1: So to be part of group with people coming from various background and not want to ask a question because we come from different provinces.

The following statements reinforce the dilemma faced with regard to English and vernacular:

P3: On the other hand, coming as a group won't help you learn properly because you might struggle to understand and write afterwards when you are on your own. You will be like let me go with Nomfundo because she will translate for me while I'm talking my Zulu. She will translate for me in the lecture. If Nomfundo is not available, you

won't learn. When you want to do your own work. What if she is in Botany and I'm in Psychology? I won't be able to go there.

P1: If a lecturer explains something. Because listening is a skill, maybe I have a higher rate of listening. Maybe you, you get something faster than me and translate it to me. To sit in the class or to sit with the consultant without understanding is a waste of time and you won't get anything and not coming back.

P3: You are saying that I'm Pedi and she is speaking in English I cannot understand. How about in the lecture? No one is there to translate for you.

P1: To come alone you can feel shy sometimes. As a group, you say I don't understand. The consultants are so friendly they can stop everything else to help you with that first.

P3: I think the writing centre can accommodate everyone and every language even if we are shy to ask questions.

Using a vernacular language reinforces the social aspect of the GC, but this was not emphasised in the questionnaire. Students also pointed to the lack of time to exhaust all areas identified by students and the consultant at the beginning of the consultation. Participant 1 stated that during the consultation the writing consultant intermittently reminded them to adhere to the time limits and that this constant reminding was a distraction. She also stated,

> P1: The consultant said that time is not on our side. You end up not asking the right question […] If you are doing your research, *neh*? It takes two months to find results. How can you ask a question in one hour to cover a two-month research? You need time. For the consultant to see where you went wrong, is he not supposed to read your full draft?

Participant 1's reasons for the need for more consultation time are for students to be able to pose more questions and for the consultant to be in a position to read the students' full draft. The other reason is to let students finish explaining their viewpoints (Participant 2). Participant 3 stressed that since in their module their tutor cannot be available for consultation, the writing consultant should at least make themselves available amply. Another students emphasised the need for students to be given time to take notes. Briefly, the lack of time was pinpointed as one of the most acute problem facing students with regard to the GC.

5.2.5 Benefits of the GC

As for the benefits of the GC, students mentioned collaboration and peer learning. One of the students stated that the GC could play a role in spoken language development and confidence building. This is shown in the following statements:

> P1: To come as group is better than coming alone because if I come alone and my English is not good you will help me. So to come as a group it's more helpful than coming alone. You can come alone after you have been here with the group
> P2: In addition to what she's has just said to come as a group is better because it can also help the writing consultant. For instance if his English is not proper. It can also disadvantage the consultant in that she can fail to understand the real thing that the student needs help with.
> Q: So if you're trying to ask a question and don't know how to say it. Your fellow student can translate for you?
> P2: Yes
> P3: The other student will be able to explain to the consultant what the student is trying to say. Because there are many communication styles and students understand each other better. Another student will understand even with the mistakes that I'm making. That he wants to say this or that. But the lecturer maybe I don't know having more knowledge he says Eish… I can't understand this student.
> Q: So if you are trying to ask a question to the WC and don't know how to put it, you colleagues can help you to put it in English.
> P1: Yes.

The confidence building cited here is perhaps to be correlated with the conception of the writing centre as a safe space for students mentioned in the literature review. This conceptualisation could be because of the distinctive social interactions among peers. Students are more open to discussion, which aims to clarify their ideas, understanding and perhaps positions and academic literacies difficulties with peers.

5.2.6 The questioning technique

The findings showed that students value the questioning technique used by writing consultants during the GC. Participant 1 insisted that the GC may not work for students if the consultant does not pose questions, which stimulate a student to think about the content. Participants

indicated that the consultant may not provide students with answers. She added, “If I ask a question and she [the consultant] is answering with question. You think she will ask you a question to you? No, she will ask me to elaborate on my own question and on my answers?”

In these findings, students repeatedly point out to questioning as the main activity that consultant should engage in during the consultation. Participant 2 mentioned that “the first consultation is about questions on our assignment and the second is for clarification questions. It’s about opportunities to ask as many questions as possible until you can understand”. Participant 2 also added that the consultant focuses on the students’ questions, which are different in nature. She emphasised that the students were the ones who posed questions, which the consultant helped them answer.

5.2.7 Consultant’s attitude

Students’ also alluded to the consultants’ attitude as a factor, which can either facilitate or hamper the GC. Participant 2 pointed out that a consultant should not react negatively when a student raises a point that they do not agree with, for instance. Participant 1 stated, “You are asking a question and she giving you a look like ‘really?’ You won’t have the courage to ask another question. You must be encouraged to ask and answer questions”. At another point in the focus group, Participant 1 also complained about the writing consultant in the following terms: “She is listening to you and she is tapping the pen. She’s looking at you, but it’s like she is not even listening”. The student emphasises the importance of receiving the ‘correct’ body language or signals from the consultant.

> Participant 3: Moving around can be so distracting.
> Q: Who was moving?
> Participant 1: No one was moving in the consultation. Now you are talking about the lecturer, right.
> Participant 3: The tutor. When she is checking what we are writing and talking.

In the middle of a discussion about the consultant’s attitude, the participants made the above allusion to distracting actions from tutors and lecturers. The consultant’s attitude, actions and reactions remain a determinant factor of the effectiveness of the GC.

5.2.8 Group seating arrangement in the writing centre

The following statement demonstrates that seating arrangements in the writing centre are generally not conducive to learning. The student below complained about the distraction that a poor seating position or arrangement can cause by deflecting the students' attention away from the communication or social exchanges with the consultant. The student stated:

> P1: It was ok but not good for me. We must sit in a way that we are all facing the consultant not on the corner of a chair. Otherwise, you are focusing on the pain. In a way that she can hear us and we can also hear what she is saying (Participant 1).

This seating arrangement or student position in the GC can either assist or impede the social interactions. This theme is therefore retained for further investigation in the video-observations.

5.2.9 Collaboration between students

Students complained that they were not allowed to discuss aspects of the assignment among themselves freely. The student below suggests that the consultant should not aim to talk extensively during the consultation. She should allow free discussions and only intervene to harmonise views or provide guidance through questioning. The student stated,

> P1: If they don't allow us to talk to each other and we have different views. If the consultant allows us to discuss ideas between ourselves and she will conclude or give her view at the end it will help. How do we ensure that each one in the group benefits from the consultation? It will be hard for the consultant to help all of us. It can be hard because …as a group, we have to raise questions not the consultant trying to go deeper and deeper because one can get emotional.

This response confirms the questionnaire finding on the necessity for the consultant to allow the students to talk freely to one another without unnecessary interference or intervening, except in the event of a discussion digression.

5.2.10 Consultant practices in GC

Asked about the things that the consultant should do in a consultation the students pointed out that "I think they should take time to read silently and then ask me to read" (Participant 1). The students stated that the consultant should read the student's draft silently and then instruct the student to read or ask questions. This perhaps shows that students value the opportunity to read

for the consultant. I further inquired whether it was not a misuse of time for both of them to read the same draft by asking, “Don’t you think you will misuse your time. Shouldn’t you read for her?” The students pointed out that they always “make a copy for her and she will be able to notice your mistakes”. Student indicated that they always made an extra copy for the consultant. One thing that also emerged from the questionnaire data is that the students should be requested to read their drafts aloud, explain, or elaborate on the assignment question; while the consultant should listen and only intervene by asking for further clarification questions to the student.

5.2.11 How to improve the GC

The students mentioned three main issues. Firstly, they mentioned the unavailability of consultants whom should in their opinion be available even after hours: “The consultants must avail themselves after 17:00 because we attend until 16:30 and must submit an assignment the next day. I can have a consultant’s number so that I can call the number and ask if we can consult”. This confirms the questionnaire finding on the problem created by the limited number of consultants on duty at any given time. Secondly, they mentioned the issue of a lack of sufficient time to effectively address the students’ needs. Lastly, one of the students said, “The consultation room is small. Because our first consultation was in the corner. If there can be more space for consultations”. This adds to the issue of a lack of adequate consultation space in the writing centre.

5.2.12 Focus of the consultation

Students also pointed out that consultations focused on the language aspect of their chemistry assignment (Participant 2). Another student, Participant 1, emphasised that the consultation should strive to read and reread the lecturer’s feedback or comments on the assignment in order to address them. Participant 1 specified that in this case the lecturer commented, “check your legendary figures”, and the consultant should be able to understand what the lecturer meant in order to assist the student. This response reinforces the relevance of the question of whether the consultant should be from the same field as the student or not. The student concern implies the possibility of the consultant not understanding the lecturer’s discipline specific or content related comments.

5.2.13 Consultant understanding of disciplinary content

Students alluded to the fact that although the consultant may be of a discipline other than theirs, s/he should read the assignment and react as a reader. Reference to the content by the student

means that the consultant should be able to understand a 'well written' assignment without necessarily being a subject specialist:

> P1: The consultant should look at the content. When you're reading you have to try and understand what is written not just how it is written. The consultant should read and see if he understands. Maybe I'm in law but the consultant is not in law. Even if you read it the consultant wouldn't understand? She has to understand. You have a basic notion about law as a science student.

This only partially confirms the questionnaire finding on the focus of consultations. Reference is not made here to the specific genres, but to the preferred or ideal strategy of assisting students in understanding assignments (in this case, the chemistry assignment). There is confirmation here of an earlier finding by students.

5.3. Focus Group with Writing Consultants

The student focus group findings thus far confirm the questionnaire findings for most emerging themes. These findings were further confirmed in the focus group by the four APK writing consultants. After obtaining consent from the participants, I conducted the discussions in my office away from the writing centre and recorded them using a smartphone sound recorder from the beginning to the end. The interview was conducted using a schedule described in the following section. This section explores the themes, which emerged from the focus group with writing consultants. These are collaboration among students, consultant not being of the same field as students, consultant practices, students practices, questioning, discussion, seating arrangement, focus of GC, length of time and amount of assignment, consultant's attitude, individual attention, talk, and use of vernacular languages in the GC.

5.3.1. Collaboration among students in the GC

One of the themes, which emerged strongly in the focus group discussions and which was also mentioned in the student questionnaires and consultant questionnaires, is collaboration among students during the GC. In the questionnaire responses, both students and consultants made comparisons between the one-on-one consultation and the GC, highlighting for instance collaboration among students as one of the advantages of GC, where a student would benefit from input for and from peers. The following excerpt underlines three aspects of the collaboration: mutual assistance with assignment, collaboration in answering questions from

the consultant, and body language to communicate either approval or support in their discussions or comments. A major advantage of the GC mentioned by writing consultants was the opportunity for students to benefit from varying viewpoints or perspectives owing to the number of participants, as opposed to a one-on-one consultation where the writing consultant only has the viewpoint of a single student to work with and the student cannot be exposed to the viewpoints of peers. In the following response, Participant 4 points out that the GC allows a student to explore the various facets of an issue, an assignment or any other work, and to integrate critical elements that one might have overlooked, which would be foregrounded in other's contribution into one's argument or viewpoint. In other words, students can 'enrich' their own viewpoints using their peers' contributions.

> CP4: there is always an element of looking at an issue from different facets. One person might have ignored and left that critical element, but as a group they will be able to see different viewpoints and be able to merge and integrate them and come up with aa more comprehensive argument about the topic that they are talking, if I can say so.

Student-student collaboration in general and the opportunity for students to benefit both from consultant and peer inputs can be said to be two of the most important findings of this study, emerging from the questionnaires and the student and consultant focus group data. Both are consistent with the social constructivist perspective in the sense that knowledge is explored and constructed with peers and individual abilities are enhanced and built upon to advance knowledge and mastery of acquired abilities.

5.3.2. Consultants not being from the same field as the students

The focus groups also foregrounded the question of whether consultants should only assist students from the same field of study in the writing centre. In the Questionnaires, students mentioned that they were forced to talk to one another in instances where the consultant, not being familiar with the assignment content or subject matter, could not understand the issues at hand. This prompted me to investigate this further in the focus groups. I asked the consultants whether they thought they understood the assignment instructions or briefs. The following were some of the responses:

> Q: Did you understand the assignment instructions?

CP2: There are times I have to read them two to three times. Because you don't want to give students wrong information. In a group consultation setting, I ask one of them to clarify otherwise I start asking questions until they understand or arrive at a point where they seem to understand. If it's ambiguous to me it's also to them.

Q: So you don't have to be from the same field as the students to help them?

CP2: I think sometimes it's an advantage.

CP1: Sometimes my understanding is different to the one they share with their tutor […] I think sometimes it's an advantage not to be from the same field of study as the students because this student was reading and you need to simplify it for someone who is not from your field. It's gonna be about me understanding the student.

Q: What happens if you don't understand and they don't understand it.

CP2: I ask them to explain it to me in plain English and they do but the way they have written about it is different and difficult to understand so I say write it as you say it first.

Both Participant 1 and Participant 2 emphasise that it is an advantage for the consultant not to be from the same field as the student in order to 'react as a reader' to the students' ideas and genuinely pose clarification questions until the student reaches a better understanding of the content. The consultants insist that if the written material is unclear to them it will also be to the tutor or lecturer who is supposed to mark the assignment.

5.3.3. Consultant practices in a GC

One of the questions that outsiders would ask about the writing centre is what exactly do consultants do with students? The literature has pointed out that consultants do not 'do work' or 'edit' for students (North 1984; Archer 2012), neither do they redraft or rewrite work for students. This study found that consultants aim to create opportunities from students to revisit their draft, explore the meanings of concepts, identify varying aspects of issues, and find or refine their own answers or viewpoints, as shown in the following responses.

CP2: We set an agenda from the onset what are we going to do, what is realistic for us to cover so that they don't walk away feeling like they haven't achieved much, and that you wasted their time. Set realistic goals at the beginning.

CP5: You should manage the group well because in a group we have these dynamics where there are talkative ones and non-talkative ones. So to ensure that everybody participates you should be able to encourage even those who are not talking; otherwise

it will be three or four people who will be dominating the consultation and they won't really get from that consultation what they come for.

Q: Other things?

CP2: I think if you are friendly and polite and you have that you're not talking down to them management, they will feel free and respond well and cooperate… I always find it like a good sign when students are thanking you at the end…

CP5: It should not always be one way. We should not hear the consultant talking all the time. Sometimes it's better to ask questions and let them answer. It's always better than you trying to play the expert and lecture them.

CP1: I agree with you but it boils down to the time issue … so you don't always have enough time and because you've established what they need you end up talking all the time. At the same time you don't want them to leave feeling they didn't do anything.

CP2: I think it's having to adjust your method when you start the consultation and people are unresponsive. I try and ask them naïve content related questions and once they feel that they can explain something to me they feel more confident.

The consultant's ability to involve the students into the GC from the beginning to the end, use questioning to maintain control of the group discussions and processes in the students' hands, and ensure that learning takes place, are primordial.

5.3.4 The questioning technique

The study found that consultants should guide students through questioning. There is a sense that neither students nor consultants may dictate answers to others or impose their own viewpoints. They should use a series of critical questions to assist students or other students in clarifying or exploring their own ideas. The following responses allude to this finding:

Q: What is the role of the consultant there?

CP2: The role of the consultant is scaffolding or integration.

CP4: You will find that they are given an assignment and approach the writing centre to get an idea of how to start writing and they have to write an assignment each. The film review for instance …

Q: Do you give them general feedback in order to avoid looking at each individual assignment for lack of time?

CP1: Some other times, I look at one person's draft and the other one listens in. I look at the assignment brief, we discuss it in general, and they ask questions. Sometimes I ask them to explain the brief to me and it helps them formulate their own thinking and correct themselves or each other on their understanding of the instructions or the assignment.

CP2: I do it differently … I tell them I couldn't choose between the two. I wouldn't read any of your drafts I will discuss it and you will ask me questions. If it was one student would you proceed the same …It will be much easier because they will be correcting their own mistakes.

Participant 2 states that because the questioning technique aims to assist students in reformulating their answer or ideas, it is also self-diagnostic, as student can discover their own mistakes in the process. The following response almost cautions that the questioning technique should not be carried out in a vacuum, but following a number of parameters such as the type of assignment, the time allocated, and the needs of the students in the group.

Q: Describe the process from the beginning to the end.

CP2: I wouldn't have an answer to that because it varies every time.

CP1: Yeah.

CP4: I follow a general principle. First of all, I ask them to introduce themselves and I would introduce myself by name. I found out if you're holding a discussion, they appreciate when you refer to them by name. Then you ask one of them to volunteer and tell you about the assignment, to explain the brief. I tell them if no one volunteers, I will pick one to do it. I usually take it from there to lead the discussion, through questions.

CP2: For me, it's been different every time. It varies on what are their needs. It depends on the assignment and it changes all the time. You ask them to read the brief and … sometimes you need to make a joke to lighten the mood … it depends.

CP1: You always want to get the brief make sure that they understand. You move on to the introduction and the other aspects … and at the end you want one of the students to summarise the consultation back to me, tell me what they can take away from the consultation.

There is a sense that because the consultants are not subject specialists, they allow the students to retain ownership of their work. Through questioning, the consultant provides the students with an opportunity to clarify, refine and even test their knowledge and understanding of the discipline specific content, as seen in the following response:

> Q: How do you ensure that you always bring the discussion back to academic writing?
> CP2: I think you use the questioning technique. You use the draft and if you see something far away you ask them how can you rephrase to make it sound more academic … How can you say this better? Etc.
> CP4: I think I have never seen a discussion move far away from the consultation…
> CP1: …we are consulting with students from fields other than our fields so we deal with structure and not content. It's almost always academic literacies.

This response shows that the consultants aimed to allow students to speak, talk and discuss more. Similarly, the following section underlines the necessity to allow the students to express themselves freely in the GC in a manner that may render the GC more enjoyable.

5.3.5. Discussion management/ disagreement among students

One disadvantage of the GC consultation which was emphasised in the questionnaires, both by students and consultants, was the difficulty of managing the discussions including instances of disagreement or even antagonistic behaviour among students, as mentioned in the following responses:

> CP4: Coming to the management of a group, the experience I've had is that they had already worked on the assignment and they started arguing between themselves… to see if they are on the right track. When you give them feedback on weaknesses in the writing they start arguing on who is right and that takes up too much time. Maybe you won't even have time to address all their concerns and the whole time is taken up by the discussion between themselves.

The following responses also identify issues that might arise from failure to manage the GC effectively, including monopolisation of the consultation by outspoken individual students, who tend to be male mostly. These students used the session for self-promotion, undermine other students, and prevent other students from learning.

Q: …and the negative things that they tend to do in GC?

CP4: If there are two charismatic leaders in the group the other one ends up disagreeing with the first just for the sake of disagreeing… sometimes when they are six but I think the males were more than females.

CP2: Males behave well when they are on their own and there are no females. Last time there was one very dominating character who almost was the one conducting the GC… whenever I would say something and they would look blank, he would take over 'what she is saying is that …'. He was like an assistant and I felt like 'do you guys really need me here'?

Q: What did you feel about that?

CP2: I felt like it assisted me to some extent … but I didn't want to let it happen for the other consultations as it takes control away. But it helped because he would use content-related examples where I used general ones, etc.

CP4: Sometimes you get the feeling that others did not get what the discussion is about. Those who are slow might not benefit as much as the others if they don't have the same level of understanding. In a group, there are different levels of understanding.

Managing the GC was challenging particularly for groups involving shy or withdrawn students. The consultants seem to emphasise that such students might deliberately choose not to participate in the consultation and leave the floor to 'outspoken' students.

Q: How do you ensure that all students in your group are pulled into the discussion and supported?

CP2: I think you always have students that are like 'the others are giving you answers so why are you bothering me'. And there are students who are not ashamed to tell you 'I don't know' and their attitude is 'I don't know'. Move on to the next student [...] you might try as much as you can asking direct questions […] you keep looking at them you nod your head […] students are stubborn sometimes.

CP4: You try and pinpoint those who are not talking. Some of them are shy and they think that if they get it wrong others will laugh at them. If you have established with the group that everyone's opinion matters you can ask what do you think […] what is your view of this? What do you think about this? At the end, I say each one of you should say something […].

The following participant strongly suggests a way of involving each student in a GC. Emphasis is placed on the necessity for the consultant to carefully observe the behaviour of each student in the group. Students' participation in the discussions is seen as a sign of their engagement with and understanding of or attempt to understand the issues at hand. Adversely, silence would be considered as a sign of indifference, a lack of knowledge and even confusion, as inferred in the following response:

> Q: Do you think the GC encourages participation?
> CP1: If you're discussing the ones that are talking are thinking about what you're saying. So the ones that aren't saying anything aren't thinking or following what you're saying.

The consultant's ability to retain control of the GC and attend to individual students might depend on the size of the group or even on the seating arrangement. It can be inferred that students are undecided between allowing the consultants to be hands-on and help them rewrite their drafts, and restricting the consultant to a sporadic use of the questioning technique.

There is a sense that the GC may be more difficult to manage due to disagreement or conflict, which may arise between students. Problems may also arise from the unwillingness to participate, or even from some of the students' tendency to monopolise or dominate the discussions.

> Q: Strategies to make the GC useful?
> CP1: You have to pay attention and listen […] because there is so many things happening […] people nodding, people not paying attention etc. You have to be there in the moment.
> CP4: What I have learnt from Mia[1] [another consultant] is that you don't have to be serious. Let them speak freely and have fun in the process. You will see that some of them are cracking jokes and discussing work.
> Q: I observed a consultation where the student opened a laptop and they were sitting around and people were peeping etc. How do you deal with that?

[1] Pseudonym

CP1: A lot of times students come with their laptop. We can't stop them and ask them to print the assignments all the time.

CP2: You get a student who is using track changes and is slow to type so I ask how good are you and how fast are you. Otherwise I ask them to use a hard copy.

CP1: Yeah.

CP2: With the track changes […] I suggest 'move this section'. He will move it.

CP4: If a have a group I like sitting copying, I sit between them in the middle so that I can help everyone.

CP2: One of the student who brought the laptop also brought a hard copy for me.

Q: Do you ask them to make notes or make changes as you consult.

CP1: I prefer them to make changes and take notes.

These responses identify actions that students did during the GC such as using body language, nodding, paying attention, participating in the discussions, taking notes, and enjoying themselves in the process. There is a sense that consultants would like to see students play an active role in the consultation instead of being passive listeners. There is a sense that students should be free and genuinely interested in the consultation.

5.3.6. Seating arrangement

It should be noted that 'seating arrangement' was not mentioned in the findings from the Survey Questionnaires neither by students nor by consultants. 'Seating arrangement' emerged for the first time as a GC challenge in the focus groups. This can perhaps be seen as one of the benefits of focus groups as a data gathering method. In the study, focus groups allowed me to use an interpretative approach in obtaining the respondents' interpretation of meanings and their own understanding of their experiences and surroundings, as well as their own roles in the prevailing situations (Creswell, 2003: 183). Creswell posits that this enables a study of the subjects and their experiences in their natural setting, thus making sense of the phenomena in terms of the meanings subjects give them in that setting.

Q: I observed a consultation where the student opened a laptop and they were sitting around and people were peeping etc. How do you deal with that?

CP1: A lot of times students come with their laptops we can't stop them and ask them to print the assignments each time.

CP2: You get a student, who is using track changes and is slow to type. So, I ask 'how good are you' and 'how fast are you'. Otherwise, I ask them to use a hard copy.

CP1: Yeah.

CP2: With the track changes […] I suggest move this section he will move it.

CP4: If a have a group, I like sitting between them in the middle so that I can help everyone.

CP2: One of the students who brought the laptop also brought a hard copy for me.

Q: Do you ask them to make notes or make changes as you consult.

CP1: I prefer them to make changes and make notes.

These responses perhaps provide an indication of the importance that consultant and students alike place on seating arrangement. The sitting situation of students could either promote or hamper the activities of the group. In the event, the group is sitting around a table for instance, the consultant would sit where he can have visual contact with each student and at the same time keep an eye on the hard copy or on the laptop screen. This is also shown in the following responses:

Q: What seating arrangement do you prefer for a group consultation?

CP4: Round table

CP2: Round table but the one who is reading needs to be where I can see what you are reading. For groups of more than seven students we need two consultants so that the other one can help maintain order and manage the students. Keep track of who is doing what. Make suggestions.

CP4: I found it useful when the Canadian research scholar attended my group consultations because he helped me.

CP2: At one time, we had 300 students that we were helping and it was difficult as they were disruptive.

Participant 4 indicates preference for a round table, perhaps as opposed to a rectangular or square table, as it allows for all students in the group to be within his visual field and for everyone to read on the hard copy or laptop screen.

5.3.7. Focus of GC

In the following responses, consultants state that the focus of a GC determines its complexity. A GC is rendered more complex when it is centred on an essay due to the multiplicity of voices particularly when students attempt to integrate their various individual sections into one essay. Report writing according to the consultants is easier as students write different sections.

> CP1: If your purpose is for instance to conduct a GC let's say with an essay. The GC is difficult with an essay. Perhaps because it's separate people who've written separate sections. They have different writing voices. Unless one person collates their sections together.
> CP2: For a report, the GC is easier to actually address as a group. With a one-on-one consultation it might become too much and you might not get enough time to cover the whole report as it is long and requires going through it section by section. If it's a group and they have already worked on the different sections, its much easier to address it with the group section by section.

In the discussions, I requested the participants to name one thing that the GC is about. Participant 1 mentioned 'writing', whereas Participant 2 listed 'integration' and 'communication'. What emerges strongly from these responses is 'integration', the need to assist students in producing a cohesive draft from an almost 'recklessly amalgamated' draft, formed from varying viewpoints. The next viewpoints suggest that the GC aims to 'unpack' the assignment or discussion points through 'talk'. This seems to suggest that regardless of the focus of the consultation the aim is to facilitate understanding and discussion, as shown in the following excerpt:

> Q: What about discussion. Talk or discussion?
> CP4: Unpack.
> CP1: They like that word. Others ask what do you mean?
> CP4: Their lecturers and tutors most of the time ask them to 'unpack'.
> Q: Maybe the lecturer emphasises that he needs to understand what you mean. So, explain.
> CP4: Another group asked me 'can we record' it was very easy. They were audio recording with a tablet.

5.3.8. Attention on individual needs

Another challenge of GC mentioned by consultants is the difficulty of maintaining each group member's attention on the work throughout the session and get them involved, as stated in the following responses.

> CP1: Yeah. Because also they each work on a different section and if you're discussing that section with one of them and the others are looking at you like 'I don't even know what's going on'. You discuss with one person and you're not even sure if the others are following.

In the following statement, the consultant alludes to the difficulty of obtaining the students' participation in a group consultation. Comparison is made between the GC and the one-on-one consultation.

> CP2: When you are with one student and you ask a question the person will think and give you an answer but in a GC the students will look at each other. It's more effective to get work done when you're dealing with one person.

Skills and attention to detail are required of the consultant to involve all group members in the activities of the group and maintain an environment conducive to learning.

5.3.9. Length of time and amount of assignments

The following responses add the challenge of covering all aspects of the assignment within a short period notwithstanding the varying individual needs of students.

> CP1: I would say the group consultations are harder. Simply because of the lack of time. Usually with a one-on-one consultation you have a single assignment which is not long. Even if it is long the students usually select or request you to look at specific areas they need help with […].
> CP1: So with group consultations, each member has their own draft of the same assignment.
> CP2: I also agree that when it's a group assignment, it's much harder because you are dealing with four to five different people. If it's an individual consultation you gauge the need of the person and you make a judgement of how you're going to conduct the consultation with them. But when it's a group there is no guarantee that they are going

to understand you and you have to repeat a couple of times. It takes a little bit of time to establish how you actually going to conduct the group consultation and sometimes you don't even get the time to establish the needs of the group members.

The lack of time to conduct the GC effectively was also found to be one of the major challenges.

CP2: Time seems to be much longer […] you also just have one person. With the group consultation it is usually longer and you have one student looking at one section and another looking at a different section […] so there is a lot of things that are complicated with group consultations.

In addition to the lack of time and the varying student needs, the consultants also mentioned the difficulty of attending to both strong and weak students simultaneously. Some students may not perform or contribute to group work, in addition to the problem of having individual students working on their own drafts each, as expressed in the following excerpt.

Q: A group with weak and strong students should work together.
CP2: If they subdivide the work and share sections, weak students do not perform and the strong one will have to do their work, but if they all work on the respective drafts and come to the writing centre to come up with a draft […].

The following response also alludes to the difficulty of integrating several individual drafts.

Q: Some you have different types of consultation whereby students hand in […]
CP2: There is one where they have done individual assignment and have to compile it into a report. Sometimes they have individual assignments and they just consult together. Assignments throughout the semester are compiled into one at the end. Scaffolding is needed from the consultant.

This reinforces the finding that, of all the aims, which can be pursued in a GC, consultants consider 'integration of various voices in an assignment' as the main objective of the GC. The following responses also corroborates this notion:

Q: What is the role of the consultant there?

CP2: The role of the consultant is scaffolding or integration.

CP4: You will find that they are given an assignment and approach the writing centre to get an idea of how to start writing the assignment and they have to write an assignment each. The film review for instance […] Do you give them general feedback and not look at each individual assignment as there is no time. Some other times, I look at one person's draft and the other one listens in. I look at the assignment brief and we discuss it in general and they ask questions. Sometimes I ask them to explain the brief to me and it helps them formulate their own thinking and correct themselves or each other on their understanding of the instructions or the assignment.

5.3.10 Consultant attitude

Consultants reported that the students' attitude changed due to some of the consultants' young age. Students adopted an almost casual outlook when the consultant seemed like their age mate, but refocused halfway through the consultation as the consultant used the questioning method and also due to the realisation of the apparent efficiency of the strategy.

Q: Students' attitudes?

CP2: There is another dynamic: a sense of disappointment when they see that it's me consulting with them. They follow you and progressively they listen to you and start saying 'it's beginning to make sense…' and they seem like 'heh' give her a chance! At the beginning when they walk in and realise their consultant is almost their age-mate and they seem like 'huh' what can we do 'this is what we have!' later on this always changes.

CP1: Yeah

Q: Other attitudes?

CP1: The distraction based on the youthful appearance of the consultants. I think they are playful at times and as you progress you ask a question and they become serious

This confirms the findings of writing practice and research on peer learning. Students responded better to instruction and learning activities when these were led by their peers. The response above alludes to an almost casual or relaxed atmosphere in the GC owing to the students' perception of the consultant as their peer. It could be inferred that the pedagogical

distance persist in a lecture situation perhaps because the lecturer is of an older generation, though this may not be the only factor.

5.3.11. Student Practices in GC

This study aimed to map out the nature of a GC, particularly regarding the practices followed by students and by consultants. The questionnaire data allowed for a thorough identification of the steps taken by students and consultants respectively. The students' practices can be subdivided into three sections: the administrative practices, questioning technique, and the adjourning.

> Q: What are the things that they should do?
> CP1: They need to establish what their needs are. They should come with an agenda because sometimes they come and ask you to fix the whole thing. You can't fix the whole assignment or essay for them. I think that it catches them off guard when they arrive. If they had like a list of things they want to look at when they get there.
> CP2: They should be able to work together. They should acknowledge what others say. So there shouldn't be issues between them. They are a group.
> CP5: I remember the consultation with the honours where they were going to get the same mark, but others didn't contribute as much. When they come as a group you can see the problems […] they say this lady has the introduction she said she was going to be here on time […] In group collaboration is very important.
> CP2: In order to manage that I ask them 'who is the group leader? Is everyone here? So that if there are issues in the background I know who to ask.
> CP5: Sometimes the one who starts speaking is the leader. The one who is talking a lot.

In the consultants' views, the students firstly dictate the agenda of the consultation. There is allusion to the students' misconception of the mandate of the writing centre as bewailed by many in the literature. Secondly, students should collaborate throughout the consultation. Finally, there should be a sense of direction or internal organisation whereby students know the requirement of the assignment, for instance. The following responses denote a sense that the consultant can lose control of the consultation when he/she fails to manage the outspoken members of the group or any conflict which might arise between dominant voices.

> Q: …and the negative things that they tend to do in GC?

CP4: If there are two charismatic leaders in the group the other one ends up disagreeing with the first just for the sake of disagreeing […] sometimes when they are six but I think the males were more than females.

CP2: Males behave well when they are on their own and there are no females. Last time there was one very domineering character who almost was the one conducting the GC […] I would say something and they would look blank, he would take over 'what she is saying is that […]'. He was like an assistant and I felt like 'do you guys really need me here'?

The consultants in the responses below emphasise careful attention and involvement from students, who should be offered a platform to speak freely about their AL needs and discuss the assignment.

Q: Strategies to make the GC useful.

CP1: You have to pay attention and listen […] because there are so many things happening […] people nodding, people not paying attention etc. You have to be there in the moment.

CP4: What I have learnt from Nellie [a consultant] is that you don't have to be serious. Let them speak freely and have fun in the process. You will see that some of them are cracking jokes and discussing work.

5.3.12. Talk in the GC

The findings showed that talk allows students to share their understanding of the assignment or points under discussion, particularly when the consultant's explanation seemed inaccessible or unclear for most students in the GC.

Q: Do you encourage them to talk between themselves?

CP1: I think they do that anyway.

CP2: If you're explaining you can see that there is that one who understands what you said and explains it to the others. They have a different way of doing it.

The following responses also insist on the necessity for the consultant to rather promote talk between students rather than monopolising talk at the students' expense.

CP2: I think if you are friendly and polite and you do not talk down to them, they will feel free and respond well and cooperate […] I always find it a good sign when students are thanking you at the end […].

CP5: It should not always be one way. We should not hear the consultant talking all the time. Sometimes it's better to ask questions and let them answer. It's always better than you trying to play the expert and lecture them.

CP1: I agree with you but it boils down to the time issue […] so you don't always have enough time and because you've established what they need and end up talking all the time. At the same time you don't want them to leave feeling they didn't do anything.

CP2: I think it's having to adjust your method when you start the consultation and people are unresponsive. I try and ask them naïve content related questions and once they feel that they can explain something to me, they feel more confident.

5.3.13. Use of vernacular language in the GC

One of the challenges that emerged throughout the survey questionnaires and focus group was the use of vernacular languages in the GC. Consultants reported that in spite of the university policy prescribing English as the language of instruction, students resorted to vernacular to share knowledge or clarify concepts.

Q: Do students use vernacular languages?

CP4: They do a lot.

CP2: Sometimes they look at you at you blankly meaning 'I don't understand'.

Q: Maybe it depends on who's sitting in front of you. If they see that you are black they address you in Zulu or Sotho sometimes. They look at you and guess that you must be front this province.

CP1: Yes, if you're African, they trust you can understand them and immediately switch to Zulu for instance. If you're white they would stick to English.

CP4: They do clarify issues for each other in vernacular and explain things to each other in vernacular.

The statements above indicate that, once in the presence of an African consultant, the students would assume the person could speak vernacular and initiate a conversation in that language.

The consultants asserted that students would not do that if the consultant was Caucasian or Asian, in which case, they would maintain communication in English.

5.4. Summary of Findings

This Chapter sought to achieve two main objectives: conduct a data analysis to identify the themes emerging from the student and consultant focus group data, and determine the ones, which emerged from the earlier questionnaire data and explore them further. The themes and findings, which were confirmed, were grouped in three categories:

5.4.1 Themes related to the challenges of GC from a social perspective

Both students and consultants mentioned the following two themes: the consultant's attitude and vernacular language.

-The consultant's attitude

Students indicated that the consultant's attitude in the GC can either facilitate or impede the students' participation in the discussions. They emphasised the importance of receiving the correct body language from the consultant at all time. For instance, the consultant should not be 'tapping a pen on the desk' when a student is explaining a point or stare at the students 'as if in disbelief'. The consultant should not seem upset when students disagree with them and should always be encouraging. This finding is related to the **students' attitude** mentioned by consultants: consultants stated that when students walked in and realised that the consultant is almost their age-mate, they portrayed a 'reluctant' attitude at the beginning of the consultation. This attitude progressively changed often half-way through the session as they realised that the consultant had their best interest at heart and strived to assist them with their work. For the social interactions and academic discussions to be effective, both consultants and students should display attitudes, behaviour and body language, which can facilitate further participation and maintain an environment conducive to learning for all.

-Speaking in vernacular languages

This theme as mentioned by both students and consultants was linked to the use of English at some point. The findings showed that while students preferred English for the group discussions, they insisted on being allowed to explain concepts to one another in their preferred vernacular. Students acknowledged that not everyone in the group would be able to speak or

understand all vernacular languages; some peers could only understand concepts when these were explained by fellow students in their language. Students emphasised that GC should be conducted in English to allow those who were not competent in the language to practise it, particularly because they are required to use English in the assignments and tests in their departments. Consultants pointed out that students almost instinctively used a vernacular language when they were faced with a 'black' or African consultant, only to switch to English if their response was not as spontaneous; which they did not do when the consultant was white or Asian. Consultants stated to have noticed that students often explained or repeated concepts to each other in the vernacular.

5.4.2 Themes related to the social interactions in GC

-The questioning technique, discussion and talk

Students stated that the only way for the GC to work was for the consultant to guide them using questioning. Such questioning should enable students to think about the discipline specific content and their own thinking. The consultant should not provide them with answers, should involve every student in the group, and aim to create opportunities for students to clarify, elaborate on and rethink their answers. Some students insisted that questioning should be the only activity the consultants engage in during a GC, as students should be given a platform to ask, reflect on and answer as many questions as possible. The data shows that consultants had more to say on the questioning technique than students. Consultants agreed that they should guide students through questioning, and added that neither consultants, nor students should dictate answers to others nor impose their own viewpoints. Consultants stated that they should use a series of critical questions to assist students in clarifying or exploring their own ideas and those of others. Students should be helped in formulating or reformulating their own thinking clearly and correctly. This is in a sense self-diagnosic as students may discover their own mistakes or errors in the process. Another consultant cautioned that such questioning should not be carried out in a vacuum: while questioning a student from an academic field other than their own, consultants should aim to respond as readers with a genuine drive to know and understand the topic or assignment. This further provides students with an opportunity to reinforce, internalise the disciplinary content through explanation, clarification, elaboration or critical thinking. Questioning can also be used to steer the discussions in a specific direction, stimulate talk and provide students with a voice and agency. Consultants indicated that through questioning students were forced to 'think' for themselves and participate in discussions,

instead of remaining passive participants, spectators, or receptors of other people's thoughts and knowledge.

-Enabling collaboration among students

Students complained that they were not allowed to discuss aspects of the assignment among themselves freely. They stated that the consultant should not aim to talk extensively in the GC. They should rather allow free discussions and only intervene to harmonise views or provide guidance through questioning. Students pointed out that because they have different views, they should talk to each other in the process of sharing and trying to understand one another. The consultant may conclude or give her/his views at the end. This suggests that the students value the opportunity of discussing or processing their ideas in order to reach a clearer understanding and not necessarily a consensus.

The consultant data expanded more on the collaboration among students than the student data: consultants made a comparison between the GC and the one-on-one consultation. Consultants pointed out that the advantage of the GC is that students can learn from and with their peers through collaboration. One of the consultant discussion excerpts outlined three aspects of collaboration: mutual assistance, answering questions, and common body language to signal either approval or disapproval, or even encouragement. They stated that collaboration among themselves assisted in exploring facets of assignments or questions that the consultant might not be aware of or have missed.

The above theme is related to the theme referred to as **development of student voice**. One of the students stated that as they consulted the consultant did not notice that there were students who sat there and said nothing from the beginning to the end of the GC. She added that a student cannot learn if they do not contribute to the discussions. There is an implication that by speaking, explaining, or elaborating on an idea, students engaged in learning and developed themselves to be able to discuss and add to aspects of knowledge.

-Students' perceptions of consultant practices in GC

Asked about the practices that a consultant should engage in during a GC, students stated that consultants should create opportunities for students to read their drafts aloud, explain, or elaborate on their ideas or assignment, while listening for good points and errors, and only

intervene to pose probing or clarification questions to the students. The consolidated practices to be followed by the consultant, from the student perspective, is presented in Chapter Four.

While replying to the same question, consultants also stated that they strived to create a two-way communication where students had to speak most of the time, while the consultant would be asking questions and steering the talk or discussions in the right direction. They pointed out that a consultant should not 'talk down' to students, but be friendly and polite, so that students can feel free, respond and cooperate. One of the consultants raised the dilemma of giving students enough time to express themselves, while at the same time managing the limited consultation time effectively. Another stated that the practices could be adjusted and readjusted depending on the students' needs, actions, and responses in the GC. The consolidated practices to be followed by the consultant, from the consultant perspective, are also presented in Chapter Four.

-Consultants' perceptions of student practices in GC

The consolidated practices to be followed by the students, from the consultants' perspective, are presented in Chapter Four. In the FG, consultants pointed out that students should bring an agenda or a list of things that they would like the consultant to assist them with. Students should ask questions, collaborate with peers, behave in a manner that is conducive to learning, and participate in the GC. Consultants also stated that students should show respect towards the consultants and their peers.

-Consultants' perceptions about their attention to the individual needs of students

The students contrasted the GC to the lecture by stating that in a lecture or tutorial, a shy student can remain quiet and uninvolved, but in a GC, the consultant strives to involve all students due to the small size of the group and because that is the consultant's aim. This point corroborates the consultants' responses on the importance of providing individual attention to students in a GC. Some of the consultants expressed the **difficulty of involving each student, maintaining their attention** throughout and ensuring that they gain from the consultation: some could be uninterested, be mentally preoccupied with other personal issues and not be present in the moment. In groups, some students contribute to the group draft or work more than others, while others let the more active members do the heavy-lifting for them. Consultants pointed out that one would almost always find such students in any given group.

-Perceptions about disagreements or conflicts among students/ mismanagement of the GC

Consultants mentioned the importance of managing the group disagreements or differences in opinions effectively, which was also highlighted in the questionnaires. They should also pay attention to individual students who monopolise talk and take difference of views personally. While striving to create a free and safe environment for student expression, consultants should still retain control of the group. This theme is related to earlier points on **consultant practice** and the provision of **individualised attention**, where consultants expressed the difficulty of involving unwilling or disinterested students. Some consultants considered student participation in the group discussions as an indication of a student's understanding of or engagement with the subject matter issues under discussion.

5.4.3 Themes related to social interactions and acquisition of disciplinary literacies

-Students' perceptions about their exposure to varying perspectives or peer learning

This theme relates to the lecture versus GC and the group discussion or talk in the sense that students can learn not only from the consultant, but also from their peers. Some students indicated that the explanations from their peers were clearer and more useful. Students indicated that by listening to their peers, they could rethink and refine their own ideas.

-Students' perceptions about the focus of the GC

The focus of the GC, in line with the students' responses, was quantitatively represented in the form of a table in Chapter Four. Apart from the specific assignment aspects mentioned by students, one student pointed out that the consultant and the group should read and reread the lecturer's comments on their marked scripts. Another student stated that the consultant should be able to understand the lecturer's comment better than the students. This relates to the question of whether the consultant should necessarily be from the same field as the students, which is addressed in one of the subsequent paragraphs.

The focus of the GC, in line with the consultants' responses, is quantitatively represented in the form of a table in Chapter Four. Consultants stated that their duty was to ensure that students understand the assignment, for instance the essay, and attempt to help them integrate the multiplicity of voices into one logical draft. There was reference in the data to the difficulty of assisting several students who are writing one draft, because three or four individuals wrote a section of the essay each, which could be divergent. The other scenario is sitting with students

who have separate essays, which could make the consultation time consuming and almost impossible to conduct effectively. There was also the question of whether the consultant should proceed with students section-by-section or discuss overall or common errors due to time constraints.

The students' views were confirmed in the consultant data. One of the survey questions asked about one thing that the students thought that the GC should be about. Most students and consultants said 'integration', and others stated 'writing'. By integration, the consultants explained that this referred to the need to assist students in producing a cohesive draft from a rough draft made of varying and divergent viewpoints.

5.4.4 Themes related to general challenges in GCs

-Insufficient time for GC (consultants only)

While in the survey questionnaire, both students and consultants mentioned the limited or lack of time to conduct the GC effectively, while in the FC, only consultants mentioned this theme. They pointed out that the time was insufficient given the varying student needs. What made the GC harder to conduct than the one-on-one consultation was the lack of time and the compounded difficulties of all students in the group. One of the consultants specified that it took time just to establish what the actual needs of the students were, and there was no guarantee that all students would understand and the consultant often had to repeat several times. Sometimes they did not even reach a point where they had established what the needs of the group were and they would have run out of time. Another consultant mentioned the complexity of catering for strong and weak students simultaneously. This difficulty is worsened when each student has a separate draft: this emerged as a major obstacle as students would be competing for the consultant's attention and input. Hence, this can be said to impede social interactions: others underlined the necessity for the consultant to integrate and use scaffolding in assisting students.

-GC seating arrangement

Both students and consultants referred to this theme. Seating arrangement pertains to how the students and consultant occupy or use the physical space, and to the nature of the space *per se*. This physical space, as described in Chapter Six, can be either conducive to learning or a real obstacle to student engagement with the GC. In the FG, students complained about the lack of

space to accommodate GCs. One stated that she could not concentrate because she shared the chair with another student and was uncomfortable throughout the session.

Consultants referred to the fact that students brought an electronic copy of the assignment on a laptop, instead of hard copies, and because they were many, not all of them could sit in front of the screen to read and follow the process. Even when students used a hard copy, they only printed two copies, one for the consultant, and the other was shared. Others were too far to be able to read on the paper. In the data, seating arrangement also referred to the fact that the consultation room and stations were inadequate, small, and in the same room; to such an extent that up to three group could be holding simultaneous consultations, resulting in a form of cacophony, such that students could not at times hear their consultant.

5.5. Conclusion

This section reported on the students responses during the focus group interview. Students pointed out that they felt safer in a GC as opposed to a one-on-one consultation as they would feel under pressure if sitting one-on-one with a consultant. With regard to the GC, the identified challenges are: the lack of time, the lack of space, issues related to whether or not they should use vernacular languages, the difficulties related to the use of English, consultants not using the questioning technique, consultant negative attitude at times, as well as the GC seating arrangement, and their practices. These responses were compared and contrasted with the students' and consultants' responses in the questionnaires. The focus group responses mostly confirmed the questionnaire responses in several regards. The next Chapter discusses the responses obtained from the video observations with students and with consultants.

CHAPTER SIX
VIDEO OBSERVATIONS DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

6.1. Introduction

The previous Chapter analysed and interpreted the focus group data from students and from consultants. It further investigated the themes, which emerged from the questionnaires and those that emerged for the first time from the focus group. Some of the themes investigated were the questioning strategy, collaboration among students, student practices, consultant practices, consultant understanding discipline specific content or consultant being of a field other than the students', developing students' voice and group seating arrangement. This Chapter investigates these themes further by means of video observation. The researcher studied the video recording of two group consultations to either confirm or refute these findings. The purpose of this Chapter is to triangulate the findings from the questionnaire, focus groups and video observations. In the sections, C refers to 'Consultant', Q to 'Question', and P1 or S1 to 'Student or Participant 1'.

6.2. Video Observation A (Nancy)

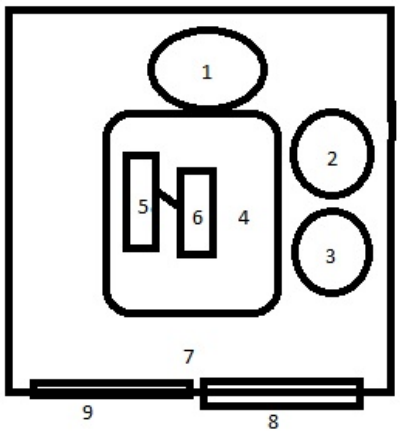
The observation confirmed most of the findings of the survey questionnaires and focus groups, with both students and consultants. Using triangulation, this chapter discusses the themes that emerged from the survey, the focus groups and video observations, as listed in the introduction to this Chapter.

The particularity of observations in comparison to questionnaires and focus groups is that I, as the researcher, observed first-hand the participants' actions, reactions, behaviours, words, situations, and seating arrangements. I could then make inferences from direct observations about the themes, while also searching for new ones. To provide a context and background for subsequent interpretations, I begin with a description of the consultation venue and positions of participants.

6.2.1. GC seating arrangement, setting, and participants' positioning

The video-recorded group consultation occurred in a cubicle at the APB Campus. Of all the UJ writing centres, this writing centre has the advantage of being located in a space, which was designed and constructed to house the writing centre, with cubicles and computers with internet

access. The consultant and two female students sat around a table with a desktop computer on it, as shown in the following figure.



1 Writing consultant
2 Student 1
3 Student 2
4 Table
5 Desktop computer
6 PC keyboard
7 Consultation room
8 Door
9 Glass window

Figure 1: GC seating arrangement at APB (Consultant: Nancy)

It was found in Chapter 5 that the inadequacy of the physical space in terms of room or consultation station size, number of seats, participant seating arrangement, and accessibility can represent a major obstacle for social interactions in the GC. The observation data showed the challenges posed by this seating arrangement, where the position of the desktop PC was a hindrance to the consultant's ability to see the screen, and the consultant and students struggled to interact effectively using the electronic copy. In the observation video, the consultant worked mostly with Participant 1, who was more involved, whereas Participant 2 simply nodded most of the time.

Another challenge was the simultaneous use of an electronic copy and a hard copy of the assignment. Students were seen paging through their hard copies as the consultant was pointing at the screen. The fact that the electronic copy was on screen on the desktop computer, and the hard copy in front of one of the students meant that the consultant and students had to refer back and forth between the two copies; wasting valuable time and obliterating any social interactions. The latter occurred intermittently through questioning and discussion.

6.2.2. The questioning technique

The observation confirmed the consultant's use of questioning as a strategy to facilitate the GC. In the following excerpt, the consultant can be seen asking the question: "do you mean 'widely or widened?'" This is because as the student is reading the consultant is also skimming through and following to check the student's reading.

Code: Questioning technique {6-0}

P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:5 [S1: Newscafé is considered a p..] (4:562-4:1312) (Super)

Codes: [Questioning technique]

No memos

S1: Newscafé is considered a premium brand in the market by aligning themselves with other position brands in their promotional activities. Newscafé has widely […].

C: Do you mean 'widely' or widened'?

[Consultant can read on the draft though it is placed directly in front of the student]

S1: Widened and expanded their experience delivery to their customer and by doing so have created […].

C: Do you mean 'by doing so' or 'in doing so'?

S1: Oh right […] and in doing so have created a great culture of great synergistic opportunity going forward. [Asking the consultant] Does it make sense?

C: Yes it does. You're still introducing what Newscafé is all about. And you know its objective and where it places itself in this world. Continue.

This response highlights the consultant's step-by-step guidance provided to students through questioning and explanation. Perhaps this practice is a new finding differentiating the observation from the questionnaire and focus group responses, particularly relating to the consultant practices. The earlier findings emphasised the questioning technique as the major strategy used by consultants in the GC, whereas the observation show the consultant explaining concepts to students, asking clarification questions and steering the students in order to save time, progressing through the draft steadily for each student to remain on par with the group. This guidance emerges in the form of instructions on what to do and what not to do next, as seen in the following extract:

Code: Consultant practices_Explanation of concept by consultant {4-0}

P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:11 [C: ok. Just be careful. Don't ...] (7:265-7:738) (Super)

Codes: [Consultant practices_Explanation of concept by consultant]

No memos

C: Ok. Just be careful. Don't give too many examples in your summary. Summaries usually don't have examples. The examples and the explanations will be explained later in the body of the document. So you just state the action plan is going to do this and that. Strategies are going to be this and that. The examples will be explained later in the body. So we've mentioned the action plan, the objectives, and I think we also mentioned the strategies right?

In the following excerpt, the consultant instructs students on how they can continue the work effectively after the consultation. The tip provided is that group members should listen to one of their peers reading the draft in order to listen for mistakes and make corrections.

P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:19 [C: will you please go through ...] (16:976-16:1190) (Super)
Codes: [Consultant practices_Explanation of concept by consultant]
No memos
C: Will you please go through the entire document after this. One of you should be reading aloud and listening and the other listening for mistakes. And you can eliminate most of the grammatical mistakes.

The consultant is seen stopping and re-orientating the students' reading or discussions in the following responses. The students are also seen stopping intermittently to ask the consultant: "Does it make sense?" As such, the GC becomes a platform where students and their consultant depend on each other to move the process forward: it is not only the students relying on the consultant.

P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:7 [C: Ok stop there. Where do you...] (5:429-5:1036) (Super)
Codes: [Questioning technique] [Student practice]
No memos
C: Ok stop there. Where do you start talking about the analysis, the objectives, the strategies and things that you will be discussing in your plan?
S1: I think it's 'ehh'. I'm not sure. Because the time we wrote this […] it included like the SWAT. Its weaknesses, but we didn't specify which strengths they have.
C: […] and what's this? Key?

S1: key success factors.

C: Ok. Did you also mention that?

S1: We did a summary of that [.].. like we said that Newscafé has weaknesses and advantages that […] [student skims through the paragraph using a pen]. Ok. The key success factors are not here.

The following responses present a case in point of a consultant requesting the students to reformulate their point:

P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:9 [C: what are you talking about ...] (6:454-6:760) (Super)

Codes: [Questioning technique]

No memos

C: What are you talking about here? It's a bit ambiguous.

S1: Ehh. Under the objectives, there is the four Ps. And one of the four Ps is what and how we gonna use the technology to advertise the business.

C: So you say that one of the objectives is the use of technology and what's another objective?

The following responses show the consultant asking students to explain or define a concept and the consultant poses a further question: "What does that mean?"

P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:10 [C: ok what's the action plan ?. ..] (6:1008-6:1617) (Super)

Codes: [Questioning technique]

No memos

C: Ok. What's the action plan?

S1: An action plan is a detailed summary of the breakdown of what is needed and when the marketing strategies […] to be implemented to enable the business to grow. This is a great advantage for Newscafé because it helps them understand who is involved in the marketing strategy and how it is going to be. Not all marketing strategies must be costly but there are instances where one does not have to spend money in the instance that atmosphere is concerned.

C: What does that mean?

S1: At the end like the point about the four Ps which is place, place, promotion and […]

It was found that even when explaining concepts to students, the consultants still used the questioning technique:

P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:12 [C: ok. Just be careful. Don't ...] (7:265-7:1024) (Super)
Codes: [Questioning technique]
No memos
C: Ok. Just be careful. Don't give too many examples in your summary. Summaries usually don't have examples. The examples, the explanations will be explained later in the body of the document. So you just state the action plan is going to do this and that. Strategies are going to be this and that. The examples will be explained later in the body. So we've mentioned the action plan, the objectives, and I think we also mentioned the strategies right?
S1: Yes in the action plan.
C: Ok. As I said just make sure that you go straight to the point. Ok, does this have to be one paragraph because it seems very long?
S1: We just saw like the eight marks so we just wanted to put more points to it considering the marks.

In the previous responses, the consultant is heard saying "so we've mentioned the action plan, the objectives, and I think we also mentioned the strategies. Right?" The consultant is making herself a member of the group, perhaps to instil a sense of safety in the student. The following responses show that in spite of her being part of the group, the consultant does not provide students with answers, but allows them to make corrections themselves and retaining control or ownership of the work:

P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:17 [C: is this your definition? S1…] (14:581-14:892) (Super)
Codes: [Questioning technique]
No memos
C: Is this your definition?

S1: Yes. Economic growth also affects the success of Newscafé because if there is economic growth […] [Student makes corrections on draft]. Economic growth […] This can lead to major improvements in lifestyle in living standards expanding current markets and opening news ones.

The following section shows that questioning was used not only by consultants, but also by students towards the consultant and towards other students.

6.2.3. Student practices in the GC

The questionnaires showed that the student practices consisted mainly of providing the consultant with information on the assignment questions or instructions, asking and answering questions, as well as participating in the discussions. The focus group provided a more nuanced approach to the student practices in the sense that students highlighted specific challenges; for instance, male students verbally dominated the consultation to the point of side-tracking the GC. Focus groups also confirmed questioning as the main activity that the consultants engaged in and questions were pivotal to all that occurred in the session. However, the consultant's questioning in the observation did not aim to facilitate further or deeper thinking on the part of the students, but remained superficial to some extent proceeding from one thought to another.

The next excerpt shows the students thinking and rethinking their choices and decisions aloud with the consultant. It can also be seen that one of the students is actively involved in the process with a pen in hand, making notes and corrections.

P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:7 [C: Ok stop there. Where do you...] (5:429-5:1036) (Super)
Codes: [Questioning technique] [Student practice]
No memos
C: Ok stop there. Where do you start talking about the analysis, the objectives, the strategies and things that you will be discussing in your plan?
S1: I think it's ehh. I'm not sure. Because the time we wrote this […] It included like the SWAT. Its weaknesses, but we didn't specify which strengths they have.
C: And what's this? Key?
S1: Key success factors.
C: Ok. Did you also mention that?

S1: We did a summary of that [.].. like we said that Newscafé has weaknesses and advantages that […] [student skims through the paragraph using a pen]. Ok. The key success factors are not here.

The consultant uses questioning not only to facilitate the consultation, but also and mostly to stimulate the students' thinking and entice them to make a decision or choice about subsequent steps.

6.2.4. Consultant practices and who decided the GC agenda

In the questionnaire data, the consultants and students indicated that the students are the ones who decided on the agenda of the consultation; whereas the focus group discussions demonstrated that though the students decided on the agenda, the consultant overwhelmingly influenced their decision based on his/her interpretation of the assignment brief or questions. This section aims to ascertain who between the students and the consultant made the final decision of what the focus of the GC should be. In the following responses, the consultant asks the students what they would like assistance on and the students provide an answer.

Code: Who decided the agenda {4-0}
P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:1 [C: Thanks. Alright how can I h...] (1:1404-2:226) (Super)
Codes: [Who decided the agenda]
No memos
C: Thanks. Alright how can I help you ladies today?
S1: We have an assignment we were supposed to choose any business […] and make a marketing plan on it.
C: Alright.

In the next responses, it can be seen that the students failed to provide the consultant with more information on the assignment and the consultant was forced to elicit the information from them. The consultant indicated that without the assignment instructions the consultation could not proceed:

P1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:2 [S1: So this is our draft [putt..] (2:230-2:1062) (Super)

Codes: [Who decided the agenda]

No memos

S1: So this is our draft [putting the draft in front of the consultant]

C: Do you have guidelines on how to go about this?

S1: We didn't print it.

S2: It's all on ULink [the UJ blackboard].

C: It's on ULink? We need to follow the guidelines. I need to know exactly what the lecturer wants you to do so that I can guide you in the right direction.

S1 and 2: Ho-hum!

C: So can one of you stand up quickly and print because I need to know exactly what you guys have to do […] [There is a desktop computer on the desk in front of the participants and the consultant passes the keyboard to S2 to retrieve the assignment guidelines on ULink for printing immediately]

C: In the meantime, while she's doing that, so tell me. What business did you choose?

S1 and 2: […] Newscafé.

This confirms an earlier statement from a consultant that students are often unprepared for the consultation. They report to the writing centre for the booked sessions without assignment instructions or any other supporting material. It can be seen from the following excerpt that though the students had already stated what they would like assistance with, the consultant still posed the question a second and even third time, simply to ascertain what the students' needs were.

P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:3 [C: Oh, I can see Newscafé [smi...] (2:1065-2:1472) (Super)

Codes: [Focus of the assignment] [Who decided the agenda]

No memos

C: Oh, I can see Newscafé [smiling]

Both students laugh […] So tell me about it.

S1: Basically it's a kind of business plan [giving the draft back to the consultant].

C: So, obviously I can see that this is the structure that was given to you […] [student agrees] […] so how do you need me to help you? How do I come in?

S1: Just for you to go read it and see if it makes sense. Where we can make changes.

It was found as shown in the following responses that the students mostly sought to receive the consultant's feedback on their drafts:

> P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:4 [S2: is this a memo or structure...] (3:111-3:812) (Super)
> Codes: [Focus of the assignment] [Who decided the agenda]
> No memos
> *S2: Is this a memo or structure?*
> *S1: This is the structure […] go to contents.*
> *S2: Here [pointing at the screen]*
> *S1: It is. That's the structure. This is the text.*
> *S2: I'm not sure about it.*
> *C: So which one is it? [scrolling for the students]*
> *S2: There you go.*
> *C: So what we're going to do is read point after point and then we go to the next section and see what you're supposed to write for that section, and then we look at the section on your draft to see if you did what you're supposed to do. Alright? [Students agree] Can we start? This is your executive summary. Read aloud please.*
> *S2: [Starts reading] the executive summary […] I can't see […]. [Struggles to read on the PC screen]*.

While dictating the practices to be followed in this GC, the consultant both poses clarification questions and provides guidelines as to what should be done next. This is done however after the students had shown him/her where the focus of the GC should be. The observation therefore shows that the consultant strongly influences the students' decision on the agenda of the consultation, although students may talk to each other or collaborate for the purpose.

6.2.5. Collaboration among students

It was found in the observation that students talked among themselves, guiding one another, explaining and even answering questions addressed to the consultant, as shown in the following excerpt:

> P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:4 [S2: is this a memo or structure...] (3:111-3:812) (Super)

Codes: [Focus of the assignment] [Who decided the agenda]

No memos

S2: Is this a memo or structure?

S1: This is the structure […] go to contents.

S2: Here [pointing at the screen]

S1: It is. That's the structure. This is the text.

S2: I'm not sure about it.

C: So which one is it? [Scrolling for the students]

S2: There you go.

It can be seen that the interactions between the students and the consultant facilitate the talks between the students on the assignment.

6.2.6. Focus of GC: Consultant understanding of disciplinary content

Another element that emerged strongly from the observation was the focus of the GC. This section investigated not only the focus, but also who made the last decision on the consultation agenda. This is crucial in order to determine whether the consultation practices adhere to the AL principles of student centeredness and the retention of the control of the consultation and assignment by the student. From the beginning of the consultation, students seemed unsure as to what they would like assistance with. It can be seen that the students' request was for the consultant to go through their draft and state whether it makes sense or not. It can be inferred that students intended to simply obtain a second opinion about their writing, using the writing consultant as a 'sounding board' to improve their writing.

Code: Focus of the assignment {4-0}

P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:3 [C: Oh, I can see Newscafé [smi...] (2:1065-2:1472) (Super)

Codes: [Focus of the assignment] [Who decided the agenda]

No memos

C: Oh. I can see "Newscafé"! [Smiling. Both students laugh […] so tell me about it.

S1: Basically, it's a kind of business plan [giving the draft back to the consultant]

C: So obviously I can see that this is the structure that was given to you […] [student agrees] […] so how do you need me to help you? How do I come in?

S1: Just for you to go read it and see if it makes sense. Where we can make changes.

The following responses show the consultant guiding students in the process of deciding the agenda of the GC and structuring their answers:

> P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:4 [S2: is this a memo or structure ...] (3:111-3:812) (Super)
> Codes: [Focus of the assignment] [Who decided the agenda]
> No memos
> *S2: Is this a memo or structure?*
> *S1: This is the structure […] go to contents.*
> *S2: Here [pointing at the screen]*.
> *S1: It is. That's the structure. This is the text.*
> *S2: I'm not sure about it.*
> *C: So which one is it? [Scrolling for the students]*
> *S2: There you go.*
> *C: So what we're going to do is read point after point and then we go to the next section and see what you're supposed to write for that section, and then we look at the section on your draft to see if you did what you're supposed to do. Alright? [Students nod]. Can we start? This is your executive summary. Read aloud please.*
> *S2: [Starts reading] the executive summary […].I can't see […] [struggles to read on the PC screen]*.

It can be seen that the students and the consultant struggle to read the electronic copy on the desktop screen together. The consultant has to ask the students each time where they are reading. This study also shows the difficulties of teaching or consulting with technology in the writing centre. The Video Observation B in which the participants rely essentially on assignment hard copies seemed to flow more smoothly than this one, where the participants made use of an electronic copy of the assignment.

Regarding the focus of the GC, it was found that the focus of the GC does not always coincide with the focus of the assignment. It can be seen in the following responses that the consultant observes a gap in the students' writing, and decides to steer the consultation in a different direction.

P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:13 [C: Ok guys I just noted someth...] (8:1497-8:1583) (Super)

Codes: [Focus of the assignment]

No memos

C: Ok guys, I just noted something. Since you started reading I don't see any form of referencing.

Whereas the assignment requires the students to write about the creation and development of Newscafé as a business, the consultant notices the lack of in-text-referencing and proceeds to teach and guide students on how to reference, as seen in the following responses:

P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:14 [referencing. Are you not suppo...] (9:111-9:1591) (Super)

Codes: [Focus of the assignment]

No memos

C: …referencing. Are you not supposed to reference?

S1: No, we don't think so.

S2: But, isn't referencing at the back of the work?

C: That is the reference list, but there is also in-text referencing where you're supposed to indicate where you got the information from. In in-text referencing, you only give the surname of the author, the year and the page, and then you give the full reference in the reference list at the end. So in academic writing if you don't reference it's plagiarism but you can double check with your lecturer if you are allowed not to reference because sometimes they ask you to writing a report and the lecturer specifically says do not reference.

S1: Ok.

C: Otherwise, you have to reference

S1: The information that we got was from a website. So are we supposed to put the website?

C: Yes. Normally you have to include the name of the website, the date and they normally have a copyright at the page. You put that then you close the bracket. So if you say according to Newscafé, the year, but if you want to say everything that you got there you state the name and the year are the end of the sentence in brackets. If you start with Newscafé only the year will be in brackets. So for any other information that

is not yours you have to reference except if the lecturer says you don't have to reference. So these are the achievements and you started to explain the history, some information about the […] Do you have that?

The questionnaire and FG data highlighted a number of areas dealt with in the consultation, including writing introductions and conclusions, report structure, linking sentences correctly and logically, summarising, audience of a research report, voicing opinion, referencing sources and methodology. The questionnaire also showed that the students decided on the agenda of the consultation. The consultants mentioned editing, punctuation, grammar, essay writing, report writing and referencing. It can be seen that consultants mentioned language surface features such as editing, spelling, and punctuation, revealing perhaps that students were less concerned with these errors. There is a contradiction between this perception and the findings of the observation, where the consultants posed questions to improve the students' broader understanding of the assignment and did not focus on grammar, spelling and punctuation, *per se*; although she asked the students to correct such errors two or three times in the process. Providing students with an opportunity to rethink or understand by reformulating their point has the potential of developing the students' own voice.

6.2.7. Developing student voice: Consultant Motivation/ encouragement

This study found that in order to entice students' participation and talk in the GC social interactions the consultants used encouragement or positive reinforcement. The consultant did not focus only on problems to be solved, but also on what the students got right. In the following response, the consultant uses the word 'excellent' to encourage the student.

Code: Consultant encouragement {1-0}
P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:8 [C: So we still have the key mi...] (5:1039-5:1567) (Super)
Codes: [Consultant encouragement]
No memos
C: So we still have the key missing. Excellent, I like the way you introduce the SWOT. That it has strengths and weaknesses and you also find a way to introduce this as well. But because it is an executive summary you have to state the objectives as mentioned there. So what is it that in this plan you will be discussing. What will you be analysing?

So you need to kind of indicate what you will be discussing in your plan. So let's go to that section. Can we move to that section?

The observations confirmed that the consultant used encouragement and motivation to get students involved, maintain their participation or stimulate engagement among students. However, due to time constraints, consultants may not always be in a position to focus on each student's needs.

6.2.8. The Lack of time

The questionnaires and focus group data identified the lack of time to conduct the GC effectively as one of the major challenges facing students and consultants. The video recording data confirmed the lack of time. The consultant is seen looking at her watch and saying: "we only have ten minutes left. Should we move to the next section?" There is a sense that adhering to the time allocation is a preoccupation that weights on the consultants' mind throughout the session, as expressed in one of the following responses:

Code: Lack of time {1-0}
P 1: Transcription DATA OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATION 3 Nancy.pdf - 1:18 [C: ok. So, I think you're doing...] (16:111-16:317) (Super)
Codes: [Lack of time]
No memos
C: Ok. So, I think you're doing it the right way. First, you tell me what it is and then you apply it to Newscafé. We have ten minutes left. So should we move to the next section?
S1: Yes please.

The students' facial expressions whenever the consultant referred to how much time was left for the consultation showed that the lack of time was a substantial barrier for effective social interactions in the GC. The students stopped or showed hesitation and clearly discomfort, before carrying on as if the consultant had disturbed an important act.

6.3. Video Observation B (Frank)

The previous section analysed and discussed the findings of the video observation A of the consultant named Nancy[2] at the APB Campus. This section discusses the findings of a second video observation with Frank[3] at the APK Campus.

6.3.1. Seating arrangement

The consultant is sitting with three students at one end of the table, while another consultation with a different consultant is being held at the other end of the table. A third consultation, a group of students with a consultant, is also being held at another table in the room. Their voices, which are clearly audible in the room, are increasingly disruptive. At APK, the consultation room (see Figure 2) houses several consultation stations or cubicles less than a metre apart from each other. The video-recorded GC discussions are rendered unclear by the background noises and voices of other students and consultants sitting nearby. There were two other consultations being held simultaneously and this made it difficult for students to follow their consultation throughout. This confirms the students' statements in the questionnaire and focus group where students and consultants mentioned the lack of space as one of the major challenges of the GC and the need for more spacious and user-friendly consultation rooms or stations.

[2]Pseudonym
[3]Pseudonym

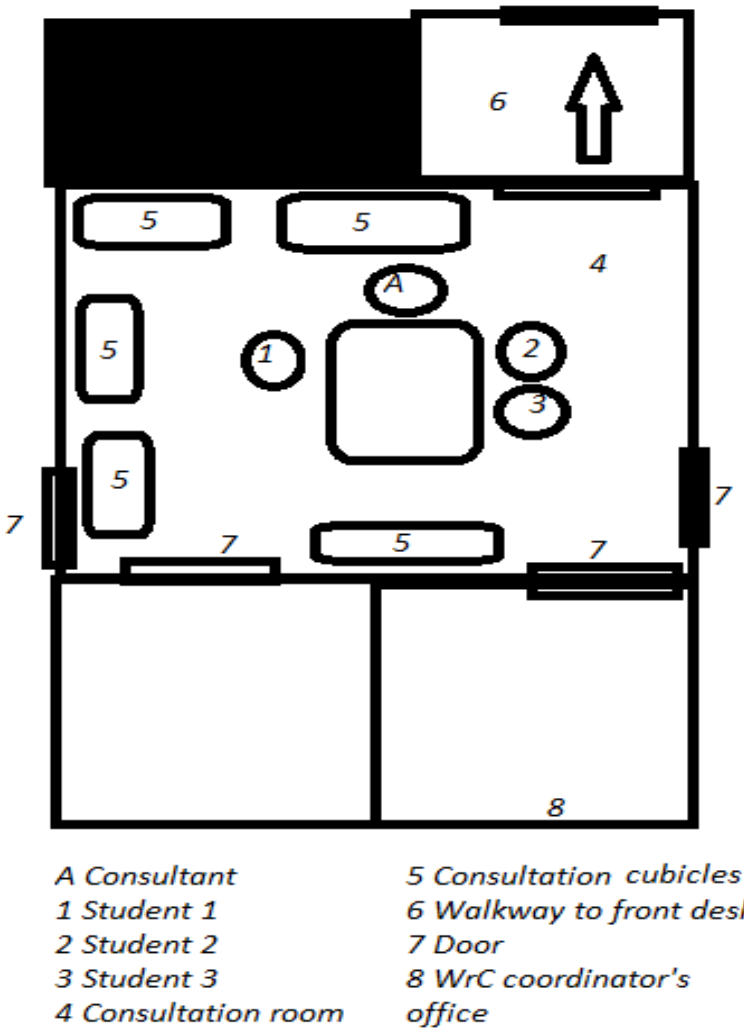


Figure 2: GC seating arrangement at APK (Consultant: Frank)

The seating arrangement in the writing centre of was one of the challenges that has been identified in all the data strands, from the questionnaires with students to the video observation. Another observation note stated, "The atmosphere is disturbed as a group of students enter the writing centre and trying to find where to sit" (Researcher) and a further observation noted "student reads, but she is inaudible because of the noise made by the other group in the background". This shows the inappropriateness of the physical spaces allocated to writing centres within universities. Such inconveniences may impede any GC facilitation strategy the consultant may attempt to use, including questioning and discussion.

6.3.2. The questioning technique

One of the most important challenges for consultants mentioned in the questionnaires, focus groups and first video observation, was the use of questioning. In the interpretation of the questionnaires, I found that the technique was used by consultants to guide student in the GC,

and in the focus group, I highlighted that the technique was also used to explain, teach or clarify disciplinary concepts. Through an analysis of the first video observation, I found that consultants also used the technique to help students ascertain, elicit or even internalise disciplinary concepts and conventions. This analysis of the second video observation largely confirmed that the technique is used for purposes of explanation, teaching, clarification and reinforcement or internalisation of key concepts and conventions. The consultant is heard saying, "So, how can we put it so that it makes sense?" and "because it is not what you are trying to explain". The consultant further states, "so give your own version in your own words […] what are you trying to say?" and "what does it mean?" In the following responses, the consultant is shown using questions in an attempt to steer the students' thinking in a specific direction: "so shall we talk about…?"

> P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:29 [C: so shall we talk about the …] (11:273-11:966) (Super)
> Codes: [Questioning technique: indirect question/ ascertaining/ eliciting]
> No memos
> *C: So shall we talk about the good and the bad of this? It's three different things. So you are going to described three different things: the good, the bad, and? Are you the ones that restructured this?*
> *S1: They gave us the […] and said you people think about the title of your presentation.*
> *C: Your topic should be meaningful so that if one reads it makes sense. It is not meaningful. It should be meaningful […] It should tell you what you are talking about. Now it's as if you are talking about three separate things. There is no connection between these three things. So, let's go back now here where we started […].'the field of physics ….*
> *S2: Scientist in the field […].*

The following response highlights something different: there is an attempt by the consultant to challenge the students to think deeper when he/she says, "are you talking about something that really happens? Are you imagining or are you talking about facts? [Students laugh]". The observation found that students also strived to engage the consultant through questioning, for instance.

6.3.3. Student practices in a GC

The previous section shows how the consultant initiated discussions through questioning, but students also play an important part in a GC. The following responses show students talking among themselves in an attempt to coordinate their collaboration among themselves, as well as cooperation with the consultant.

> Code: Student practice: collaboration/ student talking among themselves {1-0}
> P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:33 [S1: 'according to'… S2: now th...] (12:848-12:1277) (Super)
> Codes: [Student practice: collaboration/ student talking among themselves]
> No memos
> *S1: 'According to'…*
> *S2: Now there is a lot of 'according to' let's remove 'according to'. we can just continue. Start with the idea […].*
> *C: Yes. When starting a new paragraph you can start with the idea and the author at the end. So, with that in mind, how can we restructure this? It's now your turn [pointing to student 1]*

The following excerpt shows students reading and reformulating sections of the text for better understanding. Can this be construed as an attempt to 'teach' their peers?

> Code: Student practice: Student explaining/ reformulating {2-0}
> P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:23 [S2: the field of physics has c…] (9:293-9:1365) (Super)
> Codes: [Student practice: Student explaining/ reformulating]
> No memos
> *S2: The filed of physics has contributed through the form of technology that make it possible to study the mannerism of both past and present.*
> *C: What have you realised about that sentence. Is it logical? That is another issue. When we are writing, we need to make sure that our idea comes out clearly. What actually that sentence is saying is not clear. You say what? 'the field of physics has contributed recently a form of'. We 'contribute to'. So grammatically, the sentence is sick [students laugh]. Therefore, we need to cure it. So, 'the field of physics has contributed recently to what? I was expecting to see what the field of physics has contributed to and I have not seen it in that sentence. The sentence is not logical. It is*

not making sense. So how can we restructure so that it becomes meaningful. So what do you mean? What are you trying to say. So we can express it better.
S2: What they are trying to say is that the field of physics came up with this technology of the […] that would enable other forms of studies.

It was found that students are led to justify the choice made in their writing by means of explanation or examples.

P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:27 [C: We 'contribute to' no 'in'...] (10:284-10:644) (Super)
Codes: [Questioning technique: indirect question/ ascertaining/ eliciting] [Student practice: Student explaining/ reformulating]
No memos
C: We 'contribute to', not 'in'. Just put it in your own words. Forget about what is written.
S2: We're avoiding the word 'collider' at first because we are trying to say that the collider is some form of futuristic technological equipment that […]. So we say that it has invented a form of technology that enable to study the mannerism of the world.

Students attempt to clarify their own position or response to the reading, as the consultant is seen to be forcing them to 'think for themselves'. The following section shows how the consultant strives to challenge the students to contribute to the discussion.

6.3.4. Consultant practices

A comprehensive list of student practices and those of consultants as described in the questionnaire and focus group were compiled in Chapter 4. In this observation, the consultation starts with students trying to sort out their drafts. It seems there are several drafts, which were not arranged orderly prior to the consultation. The video showed that the consultant strived at all times to show kindness and maintain a welcoming atmosphere in the room. Consultants are trained to welcome students and ask them how they would like to be assisted, as demonstrated in the following responses:

Code: Consultant practice {7-0}

P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:6 [C: ok thank you very much and ...] (3:1-3:172) (Super)

Codes: [Consultant practice]

No memos

C: Ok, thank you very much and welcome to the writing centre. So, what can we do to help you. What are the things that you would like us to address for this assignment?

These responses confirm earlier findings particularly in the questionnaires, which identified and listed the various steps followed by consultants in the GC. After greeting and welcoming the students, consultants proceeded to inform the students about the do's and don'ts in the writing centre. The following responses show the consultant's guidance and attempt to promote reflection and exploration of content by the student. The consultant is also seen guiding the students in establishing an agenda for the GC.

P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:12 [C: Ok. What about the structure...] (4:966-4:1411) (Super)

Codes: [Consultant practice]

No memos

C: Ok. What about the structure of the work ? You guys should have an introduction, conclusion. How do you make them work together?

S2: Yeah. We were told to do that. Like, we were given a format, but when it comes to the results, we have to decide which one of them to put first and what to put second, etc.

C: So can you tell me? Which ones of them were actually given. So the introduction was given […]

S2: …We were given .

C: All of this was given to you […]

All students: we were given the methodology. There were just a few empty spaces for us to fill in the blanks.

C: So in terms of the content, all of this was given to you?

S2 and S1: No.

C: We were given the introduction, the methodology, the […].

S2: They only told us how to do this. It was just introduction, space, methodology, space, results, space. It was totally blank, the conclusion was totally blank.

C: It looks like in terms of the structure you seem to have a vision of what should be in the content […].

This is in contradiction with previous responses that the students decided the agenda of the consultation. The consultant can be heard and seen trying to steer the consultation in a given direction and influencing students to follow. This occurs in spite of the fact that the consultant uses questioning throughout the GC. He poses questions to entice further explanation of concepts and elucidation of alternative ways of formulating ideas.

P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:34 [C: what do you mean by 'in the...] (14:69-14:555) (Super)
Codes: [Consultant practice]
No memos
C: What do you mean by 'in the quest for'? This is not a desire for something […] It's not logical what you are trying to say. One of the principles is that you must keep your sentences short and simple. We avoid using some difficult and complex words that can complicate things and distort the sense of what you're trying to say. So, how can we keep it simple? [Pointing at S2] What suggestion can you make? Can you put it now in the sense of what you are trying to say?

The findings also confirmed the notion that after posing a question and when the students observe a moment of silence, consultants should not be uncomfortable and break the silence. The silence is meant to allow students more time to think deeper, with the realisation that the consultant will not provide them with the answer.

P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:35 [[Long pause. Students keep quiet...] (14:772-14:920) (Super)
Codes: [Consultant practice]
No memos
[Long pose. Students keep quiet and seem to be thinking hard with their eyes on their copies of the text {…} and the consultant breaks the silence]

The video observation confirmed that students often reported to the consultation unprepared. This unpreparedness emerged from the consultants' responses in the focus group. Students did

not bring the assignment instructions and other supporting materials. The following observation shows that writing centre (WrC) coordinators and consultants strive to build a repository of discipline specific assignment instructions and handouts, which are given to students during or after the consultation.

> Code: {1-0}
> P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:37 [[the consultant gets up and wa...] (15:401-15:659) (Super)
> Codes: [] [Consultant practice]
> No memos
> *[The consultant gets up, walks toward the shelf…looks for something, and seems not to find it. Comes back and says I don't seem to find the material. At the next consultation, I will give it to you. The linking words that go with specific contexts]*.

Teaching and explaining concepts emerged first from the focus group as one of the consultants' practices, whereas the questionnaires mostly underlined the questioning technique. There is a contradiction with the findings of the questionnaire and focus groups, as the consultant spoke most of the time, leaving a limited amount of time for student talk. The video observation also confirmed teaching and explaining as the main practices, as seen in the following responses.

> Code: Consultant practice: teaching/ explaining {7-0}
> P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:18 [C: so this is your draft? This…] (6:759-6:1589) (Super)
> Codes: [Consultant practice: teaching/ explaining]
> No memos
> *C: So this is your draft? This is yours? Basically, there are two ways to do in text referencing. You start with the author's name and give the idea or you start with the idea and put the author's name in bracket at the end. Let's assume that the author's name is John. So either you start with 'according to' or with 'John', immediately after saying 'John', you must put the date. That's the in-text reference. It depends whether that document has a page number or not. Let's assume that you go that document from the internet. You have an Html file or PDF file the Pdf may have a page number use it but the Html file do not have a page number. If that document […]*

You can start the other way round. You can even start with the idea: 'Female students at UJ..' at the end of the sentence 'where did you get it from'.

The following responses show that although the consultant is teaching and explaining, s/he still allows students to pose questions. The students are guided at their own pace.

P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:19 […. In this case, John will be ..] (7:1-7:617) (Super)
Codes: [Consultant practice: teaching/ explaining]
No memos
C: […] In this case, John will be inside the bracket . Is that ok? Then the year, then the page. You can put the full stop after the bracket because this is part of the sentence. So this is how you do in text referencing.
S2: So the date is always included […]
C: The year is always included […]
S2: What if you have two authors?
C: If you have two authors […] Ok if it's several authors, let's say 'John, Mary, and Paul'. Ok? The first time you reference in-text say all the names, but the subsequent times you reference, you just say 'John, et al. date. It that ok? Any question about that? [Students: yes].

It can be seen that in a GC, the consultant can keep repeating a question, giving all students a chance to answer, until one of them finally answers correctly.

P1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:21 [C: Actually, the two of them a...] (8:1-8:478) (Super)
Codes: [Consultant practice: teaching/ explaining]
No memos
C: Actually, the two of them are right. You arrange them alphabetically. In the bibliography you use the initials. If it's John, J.K., the date, the title of the book, the place, colon, then the publisher. Is that ok? Is there any question about the issue of referencing? Now the issue of linking words. You start reading and I will stop you to intervene if necessary. She will read up to a certain stage, then I will say you continue, you continue. Start reading.

However, it was observed that while teaching the consultant dictated answers to the students, literally spoon-feeding them. This is in contradiction to good writing centre practice.

> P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:31 [So scientists in the field of ..] (12:1-12:288) (Super)
> Codes: [Consultant practice: teaching/ explaining]
> No memos
> *C: So scientists in the field of physics invented the technology that will help in the study of […] in the world both in the past and present. Are we there?*
> *[The consultant is dictating the answers to the students]. Are we there? Good continue […] [Instructing S1 to carry on reading].*

The following responses underline the consultant's intention and drive to ensure that the purpose of the consultation, which is to improve the students' draft or writing, is achieved. The consultant, after a process of reflection and correction, request the students to rephrase or improve their writing.

> P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:32 [S1: we were just thinking. We ...] (12:371-12:845) (Super)
> Codes: [Consultant practice: teaching/ explaining]
> No memos
> *S1: We were just thinking. We didn't use any sources.*
> *C: Are you sure? Because at the end of the day, this work will be put through turn-it-in. because if you're lying Turn-it-in will pick it up. If it's somebody's idea.*
> *S1: We spent two hours to put this paragraph together.*
> *C: So, let us continue. So how now based on our discussion on in-text referencing can you restructure this so that it makes sense?*

The questionnaire and focus group data greatly emphasised questioning as the activity that the students and consultants predominantly engaged in during the GC. The video observation however shows that in addition to questioning students, consultants took time to explain and even 'teach' concepts. Students on their turn addressed questions, not only to the consultant,

but also to their peers. The latter intermittently undertook to collaborate by answering even questions that were directed towards the consultant in the GC.

6.3.5. Collaboration among students: Students' use of questioning

Earlier in this thesis, and while analysing the questionnaire responses, I found that both students and consultants pointed to questioning as the main student practice in a GC. Participants in the focus groups also mentioned that students should not be passive, but be active by asking questions and participating in the discussions. In the video observations, students are seen asking questions, as shown in the following excerpt:

> Code: Student asking question {2-0}
> P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:16 [S2: for instance according to,..] (5:1028-5:1174) (Super)
> Codes: [Student asking question]
> No memos
> *S2: For instance according to … should the name be in brackets? Some of the names we put in brackets, but not others. And we didn't know where to put the year. So what to put there inside the text.*
> *S1: Especially if it is not one author. If you have many authors and for you to reference in that specific sentence. Do we include all the authors? Say there were four, yeah […].*

This study found that this collaboration among students is crucial particularly when the consultant is of a field other than the students. The latter would then answer one another's questions, and explain areas of the content with which the consultant might be unfamiliar.

6.3.6. Focus of GC: Consultant understanding of disciplinary content

To discuss the discipline specific content, which the consultant may not be familiar with, one has to look at the object of the GC. Hence, the questionnaires identified various types of assignments including essays, research reports, investigative reports, in-text referencing, compiling the reference list, proposal writing, article writing and other writing areas, as listed in the questionnaire and focus group findings. The focus groups mostly mentioned writing reports or essays, both of which could fall under 'assignment'. The first GC observed dwelt on the writing of assignment involving research and write up. The students were required to identify a business in Johannesburg and write an essay on its creation, development, nature,

and conduct a market analysis including the SWOT analysis of its weaknesses and strengths. The second focused on writing a report on the LCD. The students were required to investigate the LCD, its nature and applications, and write a report, which included an introduction, development with references, and a conclusion. This section analyses the data emerging from the video observation to identify its focus. In the following responses, students state that they wrote a first draft and the lecturer requested them to refine it and write up an improved draft based on his/her comments.

> Code: Focus of GC {7-0}
> P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:4
> [C: ok thank you very much and ...] (3:1-3:334) (Super)
> Codes: [Focus of GC]
> No memos
> *C: Ok thank you very much and welcome to the writing centre. So what can we do to help you. What are the things that you would like us to address for this assignment?*
> *S1: [video inaudible] We have a draft and we've added extra information on top of the first draft. So, we are not sure which to add in and which not to.*

The responses also show that the students are unsure as to what the focus should be and how to improve the draft. Students state that they would like assistance with interpreting their data and discussing the results.

> P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:5
> [C1: Ok. Others? S2: no its jus..] (3:337-3:791) (Super)
> Codes: [Focus of GC]
> No memos
> *C1: Ok. Others?*
> *S2: No it's just a similar case we would like to […]*
> *C: I'm trying to put the picture together. What is it precisely? Is it in terms of logical sequencing of your ideas?*
> *S1: […] We have looked at the benefit of […]. And then our concern is understanding and explaining our data findings and stuff like that.*
> *[..]. We don't know the […] the length […] what aspects to put in and what not to put in.*

S1: What makes a good final draft […]

It can be seen that the focus is also on referencing and using linking devices in their writing. The following responses demonstrate that the students can sometimes pinpoint exactly what they would like the GC to cover.

P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:8 [S1: what about the referencing...] (3:976-3:1243) (Super)
Codes: [Focus of GC]
No memos
S1: What about the referencing?
S2: You can help us with the referencing in the text and the back of the draft.
S1: Our lecturer says we do not use linking words correctly […]
C1: When you talk about linking devices. Is it linking words?

Student 1 then points out that this draft should not be completely different from the first draft according to the lecturer's instructions. It was also observed that students paid attention to the broader guidelines without understanding the details. They are heard asking the consultant questions to know how long the assignment should be.

P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:10 [C: so if I've heard you guys c..] (4:89-4:450) (Super)
Codes: [Focus of GC]
No memos
C: So if I've heard you guys correctly, you're not really sure what the length of the assignment must be. Still the rubric of the assignment wasn't specific in terms of length of the assignment […] For some assignments, they say the minimum should be this much and maximum should be that much. Any specifications?

In the above responses, I observed that the consultant repeated what he thought the students had said to allow students to clarify or to internalise the knowledge. Repetition then can be said to be a pedagogical tool used in teaching, explaining or reinforcing new concepts.

This section sheds some light on the practices as well. The questioning technique is complemented with explanation, teaching, clarification, elaboration, definition, and repetition. The focus is on the clarification and reinforcement of knowledge and thinking. Students are enticed in this manner to participate and use their own voice.

6.3.7. Developing student voice: Consultant motivation or encouragement of students

The video observation confirmed a point made in the consultant questionnaires and focus groups that consultants strived to make encouraging comments to students either for motivation or promotion of participation in the discussions, as seen in the following response.

> Code: motivation {1-0}
> P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:13 [C: it looks like in terms of t..] (5:457-5:574) (Super)
> Codes: [motivation]
> No memos
> *C: You seem to have a vision in terms of what should be in the content and in terms of the structure […].*

The findings show that without the participation of all or most students, the GC may not be effective in facilitating learning. Consultants should be responsible for enticing and promoting students participation in GC social interactions.

6.3.8. Student non-participation and student participation or involvement in the GC

One of the findings is that consultants struggled to keep everyone involved in the GC. In the questionnaire and focus group data, mention was made of some male students dominating the GC at the expense of less vocal, withdrawn or shy students, who would deliberately avoided any involvement in the discussions. In the focus group, consultants stated that they strived to involve each student in the discussions by creating a non-threatening and non-confrontational environment and by directing some of the questions to withdrawn students. The observation confirmed this, as seen in the following excerpt:

> Code: GC individual involvement {1-0}
> P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:20 [C: what about you? [pointing t..] (7:1098-7:1206) (Super)

Codes: [GC individual involvement]

No memos

C: What about you? [Pointing to the third student for the first time]

S3: I think you do it alphabetically

It can be inferred that had the consultant not singled the student out, the latter would not have contributed to the discussion.

6.3.9. Disadvantage of GC: Administrative tasks

This section deals with issues of student unpreparedness for the GC and the hurdle created by administrative tasks such as completing the observation form or questionnaire. The video observation shows that students did not bring their assignment instructions; worse, some of them were reading the instructions for the first time during the GC. In the focus group data, consultants mentioned that students should take the time to prepare for the GC beforehand and approach the writing centre with the required materials. There is also a sense that students often expect the consultant to do the work for them. It can be observed that the consultant is the one who was to provide the students with the assignment instructions.

Code: Disadvantages of GC: admin tasks {2-0}

P 1: Transcription Data OBSERVATION GROUP CONSULTATIONS Frank.pdf - 1:2

[C: what are you looking for? S..] (1:660-1:1210) (Super)

Codes: [Disadvantages of GC: admin tasks]

No memos

C: Ok. The consultant's name is Frank. Please take time to fill in the observation sheet. Just take one the one that […]

S2: These are the instructions for the final draft [handing copies to the consultant]

C: What is this?

S3: The instructions for the … [paging through a pile]

C: What are you looking for?

S2: The assignment instructions [The consultant gets up and fetches two pages from the shelves in the writing centre and asks]

C: Are these the instructions?

S1: Yes.

The consultant was able to provide instructions for the assignment because, as stated earlier in this thesis, writing centres build a repository of assignment rubrics and instructions as they receive students from various academic disciplines or departments.

This observation also shows that the completion of observation sheets took students more than 10 minutes. Considering that the time allocated for the GC is approximately 30 minutes, an excessive amount of time is being wasted on administrative tasks. Hence, the lack of time was also identified as a challenge in the questionnaires and focus groups. This means that for social interactions to play a role in learning, the participants need ample time, perhaps one hour and more, or more consultants at any given time, adequate space, and an environment conducive to learning.

6.4. Summary of findings

In relation to social interactions, the video observation confirmed most findings from the questionnaires and focus group, with only a few exceptions. The themes emerging from the three strands (questionnaires, focus group and video-observations) of data gathered both from students and consultants can be organised and/or merged into six categories: questioning as a GC strategy, student GC practices, consultant GC practices, discussion and talk, the consultant's understanding of disciplinary content, and seating arrangement.

6.4.1. Questioning as a GC strategy

Questioning was merged with

- Student voice, which links to motivation and encouragement
- Student confidence building
- Consultant attitude

The themes, which emerged from the data in relation to social relations, are:

- GC social interactions are promoted through explanation, clarification, elaborations, definitions and questions.
- The observation video highlighted GC challenges of a social nature relating to the consultants and students' inability to create an environment conducive to interactions, discussions, talk among students and between themselves and the students in a student-centered manner. It can be inferred that students desire to be involved in a GC

effectively. The GC emerged as 'the place' where all learning styles, which are not catered for in the departmental 'large class' lecture or tutorial, should be accommodated.

- One of the consultants in the videos was unskilled in English language/ interpersonal communication/ questioning technique.
- Consultation strategies used were not direct/ overt (i.e. consultants used probing, where they could have pointed straight to the student's writing errors)
- Students were afforded few chances to pose questions

6.4.2. Student practices

- Students were
    - Reading out loud
    - Thinking for themselves
    - Talking to one another
    - Sharing ideas with one another
    - Comparing ideas
    - Revising their original ideas based on lessons from other students
    - Borrowing ideas/ strategies/answers from peers
- Students
    - Participated/got involved
    - Were open minded
    - Supported others
    - Listened
    - Were actively involved

6.4.3. Consultant practices

- This theme was merged with 'attention to individual needs of students'
- Consultants were
    - Encouraging and guiding students to talk/ discuss
    - Questioning (probing/ leading/clarification questions)
    - Facilitating the exchange of ideas between students
- Students valued the consultants' "calculated" participation in their discussions.

- Participants indicated that consultants should not dominate the discussions; they were expected to promote the exchange of ideas between students.
- Students' drafts were not double checked, as the GC was 'hasty'.
- GC was shown as not suitable for all learning styles: in each group, at least one student seemed uninvolved or disinterested.
- Consultants did not deal with grammar, spelling and punctuation errors for students, although there was an indication that the students needed assistance with the surface features of language.

6.4.4. Discussion/ Talk

- Participants indicated that the discussions must be
    - Inclusive
    - Student-centred
    - Comprehensive, that is, continued until all students are satisfied (more time or more consultants needed)
    - In-depth (consultants should question effectively)
    - On-point (on assignment or disciplinary genres/texts)
- Participants highlighted that, in discussions, students should
    - Assist one another through suggestion, explanation etc.
    - Think differently or become aware of other perspectives.
    - Correct their own and one another's mistakes and errors in writing and thinking.
    - Learn to talk and share ideas with peers.
    - Learn to listen more attentively.
- Collaboration among students created
    - Exposure to multiple perspectives
    - Opportunity for speaking about content in vernacular
    - Talk in GC
- Risks of GC
    - not all students were involved in the discussions
    - student group characterised by disorganisation/ attentism
    - lack of motivation/ involvement on the part of certain group members

6.4.5. Consultant's understanding of disciplinary content

The themes, which emerged from the data in relation to how social interactions may contribute to the students' awareness of disciplinary genres or texts, are as follows. Student responses indicated that the GC afforded them an opportunity to

- Understand areas of AL/ writing or disciplinary content previously obscure or difficult to access through discussion with their peers' or from the consultant's inputs.
- Consultants relied on students' explanation or definition of concepts and materials: the risk is that consultants could be unwittingly misled by 'weak' students.

6.4.6. Seating arrangement and organisational issues

6.4.6.1. Seating arrangement/ set up of consultation space

- lack of a dedicated private and 'quiet' space for GCs
- few consultants available

6.4.6.2. Lack of time

- insufficient time allocated to the GC
- consultation time 'wasted' on administrative tasks such as filling in the consultation observation sheet

6.4.6.3. Amount of assignment

- complexity or difficulty created when
    - each students has their own draft
    - the assignment draft is electronic on a desktop or laptop screen
    - the assignment is made of more than four pages and cannot be covered effectively or sufficiently in one GC

6.5. Conclusion

This Chapter showed that although the questionnaire and focus group data presented an 'ideal' reality of the GC, the observation videos reveal the difficulty of implementing the questioning technique, student practices and consultant practices effectively. The videos show consultants and students striving to share ideas, as well as use resources and tools amid a plethora of barriers such as the lack of time, unfavourable consultation space and disorganised peers. This research has the merit of carrying out an audit of the social interactions in a GC, with the view to highlight their complexities and requirements. The next Chapter further investigates the main themes quantitatively. It reports on the findings of the questionnaires administered in

2016 on the GC facilitation strategy, student practices, consultant practices, collaboration among students, consultant understanding of disciplinary content of students in fields other than their own, development of student voice, as well as organisational issues.

CHAPTER SEVEN
QUESTIONNAIRES 2016 DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

7.1. Introduction

This Chapter explores the themes, which emerged strongly or were merged in Chapter 6. These are questioning as a GC facilitation strategy, student practices, the role of discussion and talk in GC, consultant's lack of familiarity with the students' disciplinary content, and organisational issues. While the previous chapters focused on the data collected in 2014, this Chapter analyses the 2016 student and consultant questionnaires quantitatively using only the percentages aspects of SPSS, although the process remains qualitative in nature. It deals with the student questionnaire data, then the consultant questionnaire data, and ends with a summary of the findings. In the sections, QS1/2016 refers to '2016 Student Questionnaire 1' and QWC1/2016 means ''2016 Writing Consultant Questionnaire 1'.

7.2. Student Data 2016

In this section, the data gathered from the student questionnaires in 2016 is analysed. It further investigates the video observation themes including the questioning approach, student practices, consultant practices, the role of discussion and talk in GC, the consultant's possible lack of familiarity with disciplinary content, and organisational issues. The section begins with an overview of the students' background information.

7.2.1 Student Background Information

7.2.1.1. Gender, Year of Study and Faculty

In order to accurately analyse the data, I decided to provide the participant background information, which could influence how one 'reads' and interprets the data. Under this subheading, the gender, faculty, year of study, the number of GCs, each student attended, as well as the number of students in each group, are presented.

The data shows that most participants in the research were female, with only a few males. In relation to the aim of the study of exploring the factors, which can impede social interactions and learning in the GC, genre cannot pose a challenge, as most consultants and students in the

study were females. There seems to be no concern of overrepresentation of males and there is no possibility of underrepresentation of women.

The overwhelming majority of participants were first years from various faculties, followed by third years by a wide margin, as shown in Figure 3.

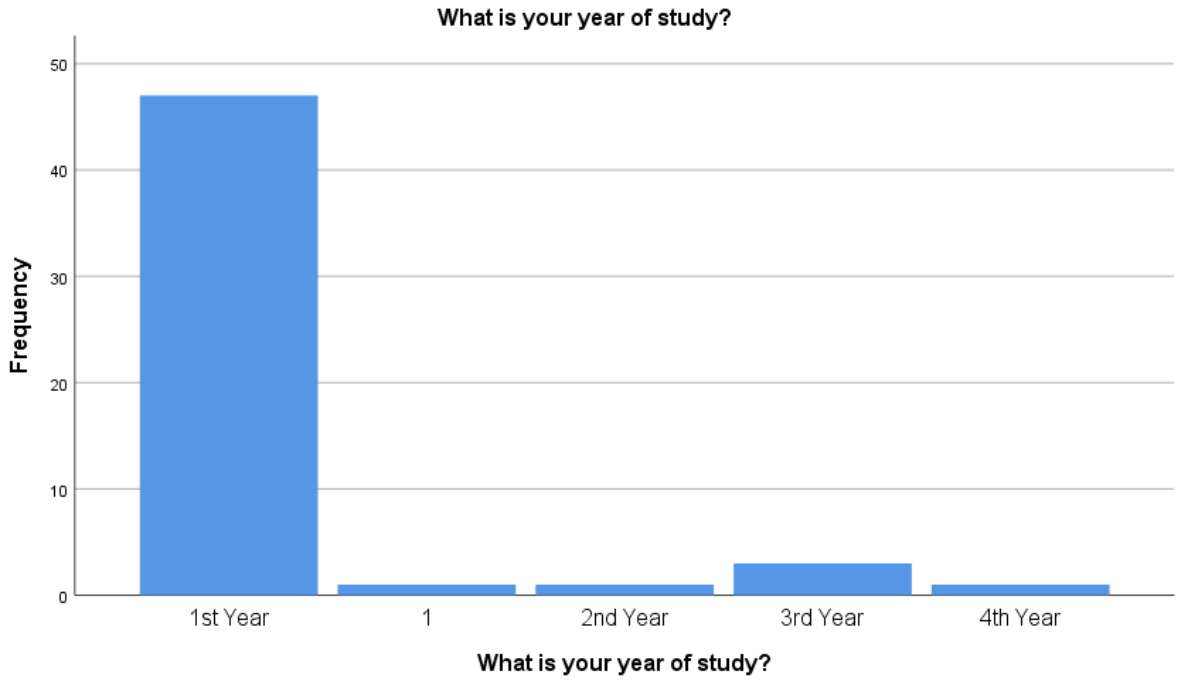


Figure 3: Questionnaire 2016 students by year of study

The questionnaires showed that most 1st year students were from the Faculty of Economic and Financial Sciences (FEFS), followed by Humanities and then Law. The Faculties of Engineering, Health Sciences, Education, Management and Sciences were marginally represented. Challenges in the GC may not include the students' year of study as most students are first years, whereas consultants are all postgraduate students.

The faculty of the students may not pose a challenge either as most students are from FEFS and Humanities, and most consultants are from Humanities. The faculties with the highest number of participants were FEFS, Humanities and Law. The other faculties, that is, Management, Sciences, Health Sciences, Education and Engineering, had a marginal representation, as seen in Figure 4.

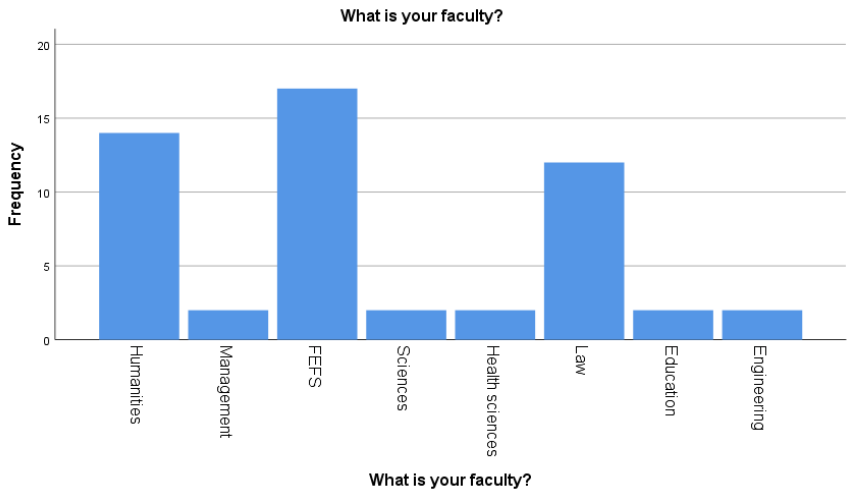


Figure 4: Questionnaire 2016 students by faculty

7.2.1.2. The Number of GCs attended

Assuming that the higher the number of GCs attended or facilitated the higher the quality of the data provided by both either students or consultants, this number becomes a determinant factor in the study. The average number of GCs attended per student was four with a minimum of one and a maximum of six, judging from the video observations. Four GCs seem to be the ideal number to give a student a sense of whether the strategy works for him/her or not.

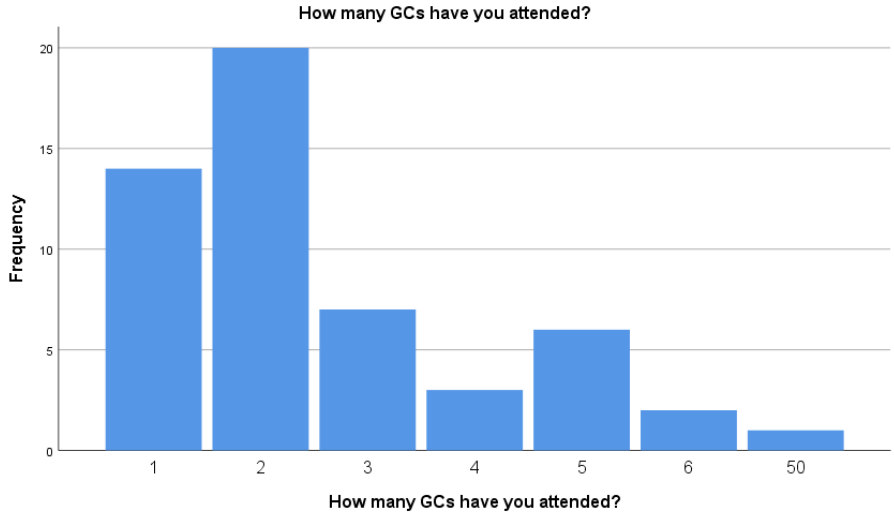


Figure 5: Number of GCs attended by student

The inclusion criteria for students in the study being having attended two GCs, once more, the focus is the participants' experience of the GC and not on quantitative measures. It can be inferred therefore that the number of prior GCs attended and facilitated by participants being above two, the data provided is of acceptable quality due to experience.

7.2.1.5. Number of Students in each GC

In the writing centre literature, the ideal number of students in a GC should be between three and eight. In the study, the average number of students in a GC was five with a minimum of two and a maximum of 15 and judging from the video observations. This number of participants in a GC was conducive to effective social interactions through questioning and discussion, particularly with a focus on the learning of disciplinary literacies.

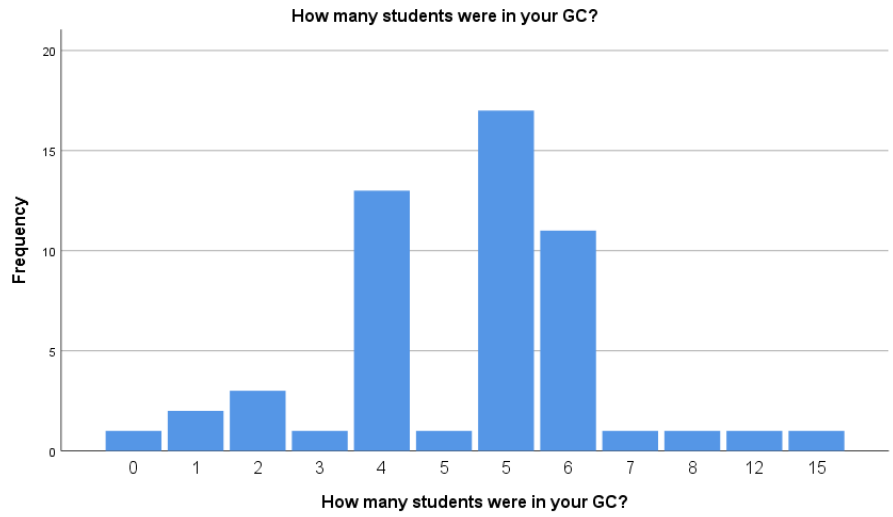


Figure 6: Number of students per GC

7.2.2. GC and Social Interactions

In relation to social interactions, the video observation confirmed most of the findings from the 2014 questionnaires and focus group, with only a few exceptions. Although the video observation contradicted some of these findings, it confirmed 'questioning' as one of the predominant strategies used by the consultant, after 'explanation'. Most participants mentioned 'explanation' and 'posing questions' as 'what the consultant did mostly throughout the GC.

7.2.2.1. Student Experience of the GC

Most students found the GC helpful, enjoyable or informative. Few students found it either challenging or confusing. This could be an indication that given how it is currently conducted through questioning the GC 'works' for students.



Figure 7: Students' perceptions of the GC

Students, who found the GC 'challenging', mentioned various reasons in the questionnaires including the pressure of having to answer "difficult" questions in front of others (QS13/2016) and the non-participation of some group members (QS20/2016). Another stated, "It was challenge because people were coming up with different opinion and require understanding or accommodating everyone regarding their differences" (QS21/2016). Another participant stated, "It was challenging because when some students set a level or rather expectations that you cannot meet, it is too much pressure" (QS33/2016). Another participant mentioned that lack of time: "It's very stressful because we all had our different opinions about the topic given to us and some were lacking time management" (QS38/2016).

Dominance of the GC by a few outspoken students was also mentioned as a major challenge. The student sated, "It was a good experience but we had others that did not want to listen to the opinions of other individuals" (QS40/2016). Another mentioned the negative attitudes of other students saying, "[I was] furious because in the group there were always some students who think they know better than all of us" (QS26/2016).

Students found the GC "informative" and "enjoyable". One of these students stated, "We share information and find the solution while communicating with each other" (QS12/2016). Pointing to the opportunity of benefiting from multiple perspectives, one student stated, "It made the work a lot easier because there were different contributions" (QS29/2016). Another stated,

> It was part of my academic growth, and I got to learn that group participation is essential to get robust ideas and different point of views from others and it even taught me how to think broadly about questions and consider the possible outcomes of how you approach different situations (QS24/2016).

A further response indicated, "It was nice, because we were able to bounce ideas off each other and understand other people's perspectives and thoughts" (QS31/2016). Another student stated, "I found it helpful as each of the group members came up with constructive ideas" (QS32/2016). Furthermore, one student referred to the sense of confidence gained in the GC in the following terms:

> It helped me especially with my fears cause I learned how to express myself and realized how my opinion count which basically improved my self-esteem and confidence, and it was also motivating seeing other students showing dedication to their work (QS25/2016).

Other students stated that it was beneficial or informative because "points which I would have missed were raised by the others" (QS27/2016), and "I learned new aspects of writing" (QS28/2016). The GC was also beneficial as "it helped to be able to answer essay questions in an appropriate manner" and was "less complicated and complex than being alone as sharing ideas with my peers rather than with the whole class is rather amusing than traumatic" (QS52/2016). Another reason was "because some of the stuff I [a student] did not remember I could ask the person I was consulting with to remind me" (QS49/2016).

These findings showed that the reasons why students found the GC challenging were the dominance of a few students, the negative attitude of some of the students, the lack of time, the pressure of having to answer difficult questions in front of others, and the pressure to work towards the high expectations of other students. These themes then represent risks that can impede social interactions and learning in a group. Some students found the GC enjoyable or informative due to the opportunity to benefit from multiple perspectives, receiving support from other students, benefiting from answers given to others, realising their own mistakes or 'blind spots', and learning to think more broadly or considering opposing views. These benefits are factors that promote learning and group social interactions.

7.2.2.2. Students' Impressions of the benefits of the GC

To complement the reasons why some of the students found the GC helpful, enjoyable or informative, this section summarises the responses on what they liked the most about the session. Most students mentioned 'individual attention' [from the consultant]. They appreciated the time taken by the consultant to focus on individual students, perhaps through questioning or interaction. Several students also mentioned benefiting from 'multiple views' from other students and 'collaboration with other students' respectively. These responses relate to the social nature of the GC, which differentiate the GC from the one-on-one consultation.

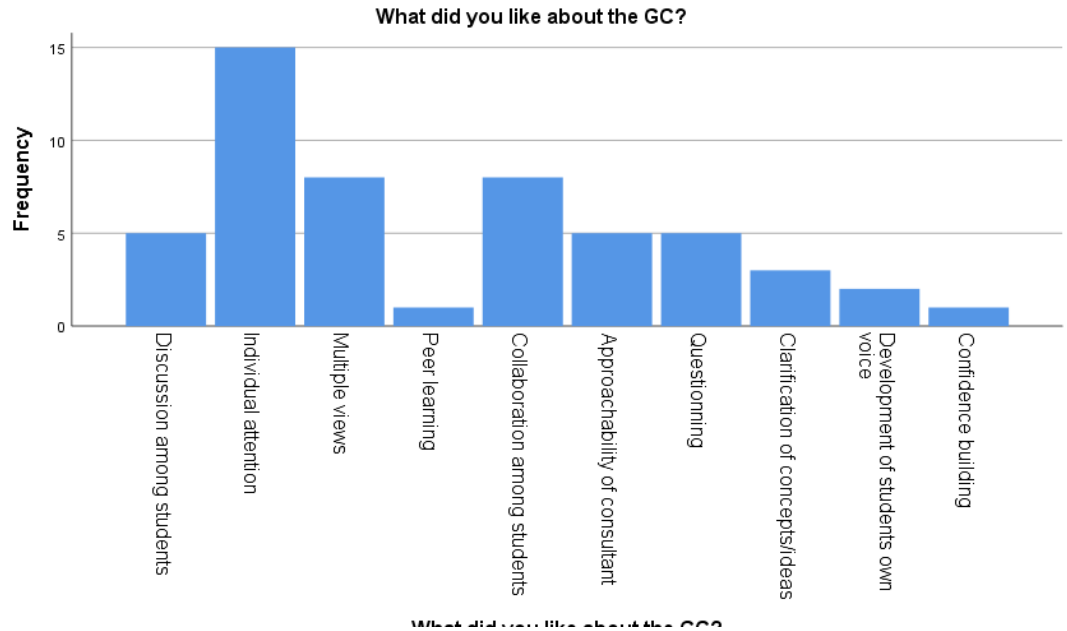


Figure 8: Students' impressions of the benefits of GCs

-Individual attention

The students' responses on what they liked about the GC was divided into themes, as shown above. Only themes with the highest incidence in the data such as "individual attention", "multiple views", "collaboration", "discussion", "approachability of consultant", and "questioning" are dealt with. Most students mentioned the "individual attention" from the writing consultant as reasons why they "like the GC". One student stated, "The lady really was interested in helping us create flow and explain correctly as well as not verbosely" (QS3/2016). She "allowed [everyone] to ask a questions and clarification" (QS10/2016). Moreover, the consultant took time "to attend to each individuals specific needs" (QS8/2016) and gave "everyone […] a chance to participate and share their knowledge (brainstorming)"

(QS27/2016). As a social space, the GC is more effective when the consultant attends to the needs of each student. Clarification of concepts, student voice, confidence building, and peer learning, are insignificant and are not analysed further.

-Collaboration

Collaboration with other students was mentioned as one of the most liked feature of the GC. One student stated, "It does not take time to complete the assignment at hand more especially when people in the group are cooperative (QS1/2016). Others said, "at the end of the day we were able to work together and got to know each other's differences" (QS37/2016). Referring to the ability of a group, as opposed to the individual, to solve complex problems successfully, another student stated,

The fact that whatever we were dealing with, the essay writing, we went through it step by step, which allowed us an opportunity to even engage with each other and we were also granted an opportunity to learn new things and more information was introduced to enhance our essays (QS47/2016). Another student stated,

> What I liked the most is that when we went for consultation as a group we combined all the challenges that we came up across with and we were unable to solve them then we consult to be elaborated further by the tutor or a mentor based on the topic (QS21/2016).

These responses foreground collaboration as an essential factor in the GC. It enables students to overcome their differences in views, know each other better, and facilitate the consultant's work and learning.

-Multiple perspectives/views

As confirmed in the previous sections, students valued the opportunity of learning from multiple perspectives or "different opinions" (QS4/2016) or "different views" (QS11/2016) in the GC. Other students mentioned, "the fact that other people from the group would have similar questions as myself" (Q5/2016), "getting different point of views and being able to express yourself" (QS14/2016), and "the difference of opinion and the debates that occurred […] stimulated critical thinking (QS28/2016). Another liked "the fact that everyone talks about their challenges on whatever we are consulting about and find solutions in the end"

(QS15/2016). This theme underpins the transformational nature of the GC. Students come to the realisation that they are not the only one facing difficulties and that difference of opinion may be a positive experience or stage in learning. They also learn to express their ideas and to collaborate for problem solving.

-Discussion

Discussion was mentioned by students as one of the most positive aspect of the GC, as it allowed them to speak their "own mind" (QS2/2016). This study found that the 'discussion' element is closely related to 'questioning', and could even be encompassing or underpinning other writing consultation facilitation strategies such as elaboration, clarification, and scaffolding. It was found that consultant use discussion to trigger or promote the exploration of disciplinary genres and conventions by and among students.

-Questioning

Questioning was valued in the GC for the affordance to students seek clarification, explanation, and elaboration on the various aspect of assignments or knowledge. Students pointed to the opportunity to pose questions not only to the consultant, but also to their peers, as extremely beneficial to learning. One student stated, "all our questions were answered" (QS33/2016), and others stated, "We asked a lot of question which I wouldn't have asked if I was alone" (QS34/2016). Another related that the GC "also gave us the opportunity to be able to get answers to questions that I thought could be irrelevant and unimportant" (QS38/2016). It can be inferred that attendance of the GC exposes students to the questions and answers intended for other students in the group.

-Consultant's positive attitude/ Approachability

The approachability of the consultant or the consultant's positive attitude was foregrounded as an element of encouragement in the GC. One student pointed out that "the tutor [writing consultant] was patient and took us through everything and she was friendly" (QS46/2016). Another stated,

It was good because the lecturer [or writing consultant] who helped us was not a dictator. She was sharing ideas with us and challenged us which helped me and other members to think out of the box and be analytical about how to approach situations (QS24/2016).

The effectiveness of the GC is premised on the consultant's sense of tact, open-mindedness, and patience. Findings in this section focus on what the students "liked" about the GC, mostly confirmed the 2014 questionnaires, focus group, and video observation findings, on the questioning approach, the consultant's attitude, multiple views, collaboration, and discussion/talk.

7.2.2.3. Students impression of the challenges of the GC

The overwhelming majority of students in the study replied "Nothing" ('6' in the Graph) to the question: "What is it that you did not like about the GC?" This perhaps signifies a mostly positive experience of the consultation. Whether this positive feeling is due to the fact of being in a group with peers or to the effective learning experience, is unclear.

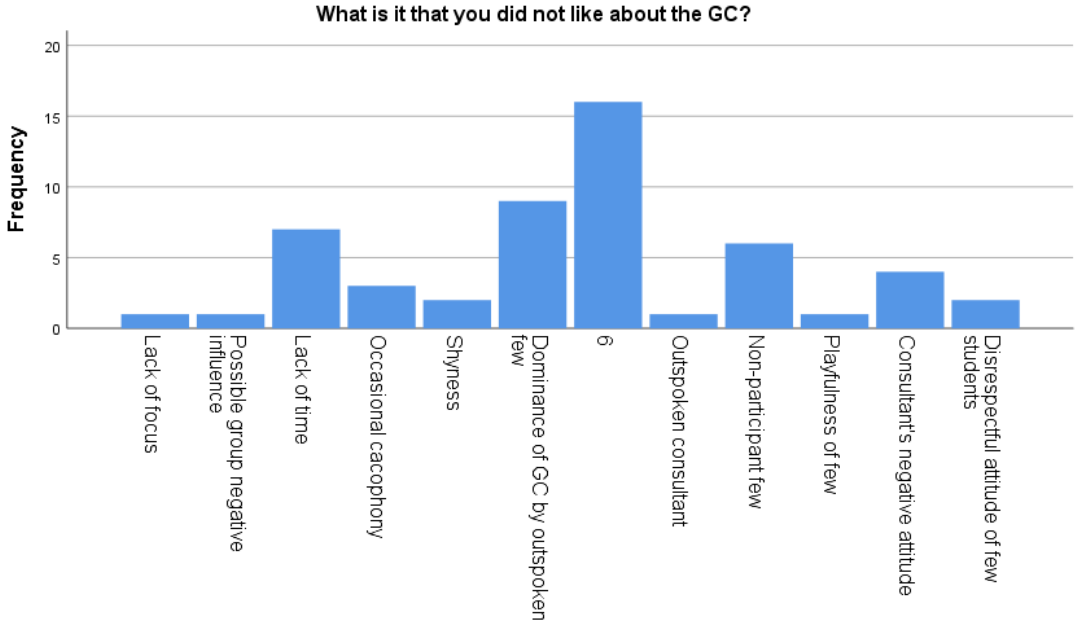


Figure 9: Students' impressions of the challenges of the GC

The following sections deal with the themes, "nothing in particular", 'dominance of a few students", "lack of time", "non-participation of a few", and "consultant's negative attitude".

-Nothing in particular

Students answered "Nothing" to the question of what they did not like about the GC. One of them stated, "There was nothing I did not like because I got the help I needed" (QS10/2016). Another one said,

> Nothing much. It is just that some of my group members were playful and were not really listening, which would kind of distract the majority of the group to effectively listen to the consultant. (QS14/2016)

This response shows that most participants who replied with “nothing” could in fact have a lot to say. This student, after saying “nothing”, goes on to indicate that she did not like the fact that the negative behaviours of some ‘non-participating’ members in the group was disruptive for the others.

-Dominance of few

The dominance of a few group members could easily impede participation in the GC. One of the students stated, “Some group members were bossy and wanted to control the group and thus, that caused conflict between us” (QS33/2016). Another indicated that she did not like “being overruled because the majority of your group members agree with an answer that you disagree with” (QS2/2016). The use of the word “overruled” implies that the student could have been speaking or expressed their opinion, which was dismissed. In their responses, a number of students stated to have experienced a sense of rejection from the GC. One stated,

> The fact that they considered themselves to be "better" than others, and their opinions mattered mostly not enough time to touch on everything that the lecturer took a lot of time explaining what we already know (QS7/2016).

In response to this seclusion, one even decided to keep quiet and book for an individual consultation afterward. She said, “I did not get a proper platform to say what I felt like saying at all times, hence I scheduled the next consultation by my own” (QS6/2016). This might perhaps be the reason for non-participation from a number of students: other group members’ ‘bad’ “behaviours” (QS9/2016). This inability to advance with the group may be due to the student’s own slow pace of learning or personal learning style, or to the fact that some members of the group have set the standard too high, as mentioned by some of the students earlier in these findings. Another student referred to the inability to contribute to the discussion:

> When I run out of ideas, I felt dumb because other group members were participating. So, I was feeling guilty about that because the lecturer [the subject lecturer] emphasised that we should all participate throughout the assignment (QS20/2016).

The domination or monopolisation of discussions by one or few students should be prevented or controlled by the consultant, as it can impede learning by alienating students.

-Non-participation of few

The non-participation of some of the group members can inhibit learning in a GC. A student stated, "Some people are lazy, they do not like to participate" (QS16/2016). Another stated, "there were some students who were not cooperating" (QS46/2016). Showing frustration with non-participation, another stated, "people depended too much on a group leader to do the whole work...and if the group leader failed to do some of the things. They blamed every failure to the group leader" (QS25/2016).

However, the following response provides perhaps an indication as to why some of the students do not participate in GC: they do not feel comfortable working in a group. One student stated, "five people was too much for me and I do not feel comfortable in a group" (QS21/2016).

-Consultant's negative attitude/ lack of professionalism

Dissatisfaction with the consultant's negative attitude was expressed overwhelmingly by students in the study. One student stated, "The consultation people were not friendly" (QS18/2016), and another said, "I did not like anything because the person we were consulting with was only talking to the person that was asking questions all the time" (QS40/2016). The following response alludes to the inability of consultants to involve all group members in the exchanges. The negative attitude can also be due to the lack of professionalism on the part of the consultant, as shown in the following responses:

> We assisted each other as the writing consultant who was supposed to help us was busy fiddling with her phone while telling us that our work is incomplete and she would rather do it with people who are serious (QS46/2016).

This was corroborated in the video observation, which showed that consultation strategies used were not direct or overt. Consultants used questioning or probing, where they could have pointed straight to the students' writing errors. They also made suggestions instead of spoon-feeding students. The observations also showed that one of the consultants in the videos was

unskilled in English language, in interpersonal communication, and in the questioning technique, which could also be perceived by students as a lack of professionalism.

-Lack of time

The lack of time was mentioned by most students as a major problem of the GC. One student stated, "we did not give everyone a chance to explain his /her ideas [because of lack of time]" (QS49/2016). The video observation findings in the previous Chapter also showed that students were afforded a few chances to pose questions due to a lack of time. Insufficient time leads to a rushed and superficial consultation, resulting in frustrated students and learning inhibition.

This section looked at the main challenges of the GC, such as dominance of few, lack of time, non-participation of few, and the consultant's negative attitude. Other themes such as lack of focus, occasional noise, negative peer pressure, shyness, outspoken consultant, playfulness of few, were not dealt with due to their insignificance in the data. Students responses to the question "what did you not like about the GC?" aimed to elicit some of the challenges faced both by students and writing consultants in the GC. The next section deals with the students practices in the GC.

7.2.3. Student Practices

Student practices in the GC play a pivotal role in the underlying social interactions. They include the students actions, reactions, interactions, attitudes and behaviours. The 2014 questionnaire themes were confirmed in the focus group and video observations. The following are the 2016 questionnaire findings, which were meant first to complement the 2014 questionnaire, focus group and video observation findings, and then to ascertain the findings of the triangulation.

7.2.3.1. Student Practices in the GC

The 2014 students GC practices includes actions or practices first identified in 2014 and confirmed in 2016, such as posing questions, answering questions, and participating in group work and discussions, to name a few. Taking notes, engaging in group work, posing questions, listening to the consultant and other students, and participating in discussions were mentioned as the main practices, as show in Figure 10. These themes are discussed in detail with their associated student responses.

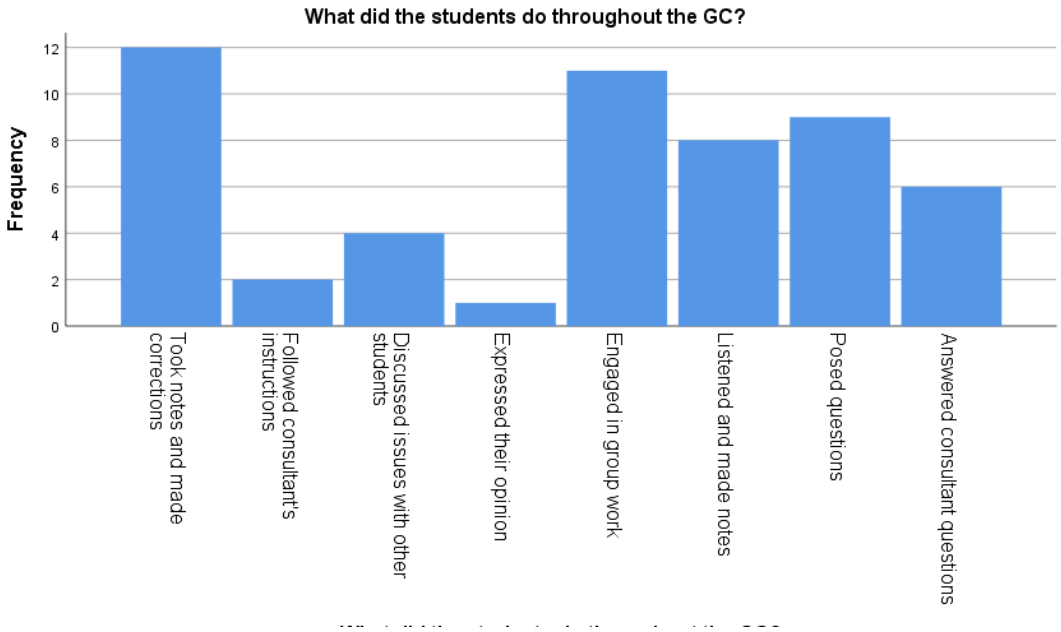


Figure 10: Student practices in GC

-Taking notes

"Taking notes" was mentioned by most students as their main practice in the GC. One stated, "We kept on taking notes so that we don't forget what the consultant is highlighting" (QS1/2016). Another pointed out "We took down notes and asked as many questions as possible" (QS5/2016). A student said,

> As the tutor/lecturer gave in inputs on how we should go about researching the question. We took notes and suggested a few points based on the research, to see if we did a different approach would it work in our favour and our research (QS23/2016).

Other students mentioned taking notes and making corrections on their drafts. One stated, we "Took notes and scratched out where we had gone wrong during the completion of the work (QS6/2016) and another indicated "We were taking notes ,so that they can help us to correct the project draft" (QS10/2016). These responses emphasise the students' exchanges with the consultant, while listening, not passively, but actively, while taking notes. This practice is conducive to learning in a GC.

-Discussing

Discussion was foregrounded as an important practice in the GC. One student stated, we "discussed with her the issues brought up and made corrections" (QS3/2016). Another stated,

"we discussed better ways or easier ways of doing the assignment and we also researched about things we were not familiar with such as the methodologies that we have never heard of before like qualitative method like that did not click on my mind at all" (QS28/2016). Discussion was used to generate ideas. One student stated, "We gave our opinions but at first we had to come up with all the problems that young people experience and how they can be achieved better" (QS7/2016). Mentioned by students as one of the benefits of the GC, this theme appears to be at the centre of learning activities in this group scenario.

-Engaging in group work

"Engaging in group work" as a practice was mentioned by several students. One student referred to division or distribution of work for more efficiency in the following terms,

> We divided our work according to who had what kind of resources for the required work. The first one stays in accommodation on campus so he conducted a survey with other students about our qualitative questions since our assignment was based on students. Another one did PowerPoint computer work, which we have to present to judges. Another did further research about referencing, which was quite difficult. The last member went to interview the manager of the shop we were researching (QS24/2016).

One of the prerequisite of an effective GC is the active involvement of all students in the group activities. Such hands-on student engagement underpins any effective GC, as opposed to a large class lecture or tutorial.

-Listening to the consultant or other students

Active listening, which was alluded to in the previous section, seems primordial for learning in the group. It was found that listening served the purposes of either taking notes, making corrections, asking more questions or contributing to the discussions or information sharing activities. A student stated, "We were listening on what the lecturer said and asked questions where we were stuck" (QS9/2016). Another one said, "We as a group made sure that we listened very carefully to what the consultant told us and we also took some notes as he was explaining the problem we were facing" (QS21/2016).

-Questioning\asking questions

In the study, students made reference to answering and posing questions either to the consultant or to other students. One remarked, “we asked each other questions based on the project that we were doing and try to come up with different ideas” (QS13/2016). Others stated, “We were asking many questions since we were many as a group” (QS20/2016); “we asked as many questions as possible” (QS17/2016); and we “asked questions and participated in the discussion” (QS29/2016). Others indicated, “We asked as many questions as we can and where we did not understand” (QS30/2016), and “We first asked our questions and made note on the answers and made notes on the advices he suggested to us afterwards” (QS32/2016). These responses show that questions were asked for better comprehension, clarification, knowledge and elaboration.

-Answering questions

As shown previously in the study, consultants use questioning as a facilitation strategy and the students’ main practice is answering such questions. One student stated, “we answered the questions we were asked and pointed out our different opinions” (QS27/2016) and another said, “We answered questions and corrected our mistakes” (QS47/2016). It can be seen that taking notes, posing and answering questions, listening and discussing ideas, can occur simultaneously between the consultant and students, and among students.

7.2.3.2 Decision and Control of the GC Agenda

The overwhelming majority of students pointed out that the decision on the agenda of the GC was made by the consultant. Another group indicated that the students rather were in control of the agenda, as shown below.

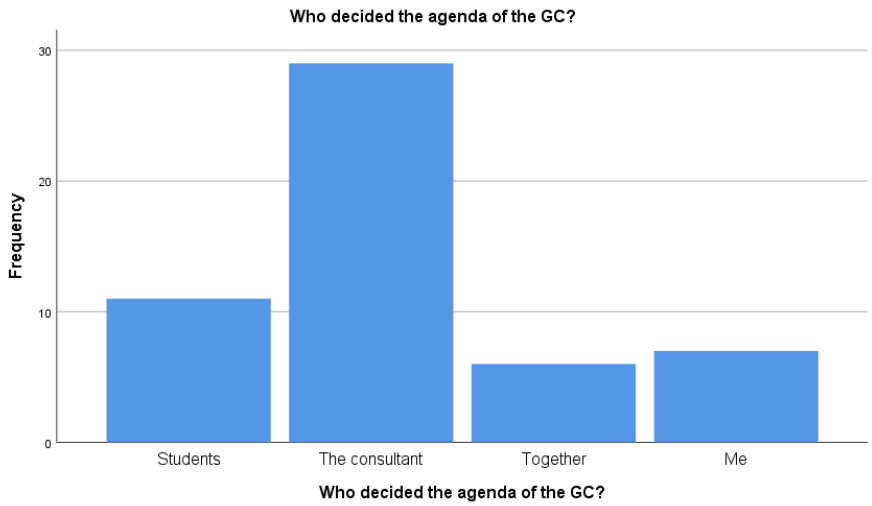


Figure 11: Decision on and control of the GC agenda

In the video observation, the consultant was seen posing questions and probing in order to arrive at an acceptable agenda with the students. Although the students were seen and heard explaining the assignment brief, they still depended on the consultant to decide what the GC should focus on and in what order. A close analysis of the video shows that the consultant posed questions before assisting students in deciding the agenda, without imposing his preference. By deciding on the agenda, the consultant would be in contravention of one of the canons of writing centre practice: students should retain control of their work. The next section presents the findings on the writing consultant practice.

7.2.4. Consultant Practices

The 2014 questionnaire, focus groups and video observation showed that consultants encouraged and guided students to talk or discuss, used questioning (probing/ leading/clarification questions) in GC, and facilitated the exchange of ideas between students. Students value the consultants' "calculated" participation in their discussions, and they stated that consultants should promote the exchange of ideas between students and not dominate the discussions. The video observation exposed the fact that students' drafts were not double checked, as the consultation was 'hasty'. It also showed that the GC was not suitable for all learning styles: in each group, at least one student seemed uninvolved or disinterested. Another video observation showed that consultants do not deal with grammar, spelling and punctuation errors for students, though there was an indication that the areas covered were what the students desired to be assisted with.

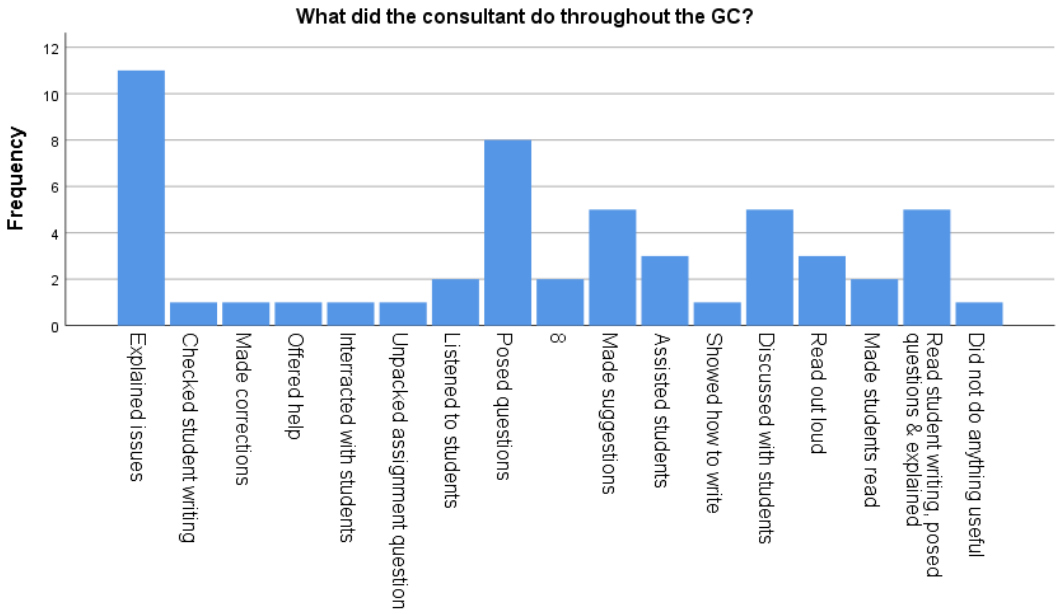


Figure 12: Consultant practices in GC

The main consultant practices, as shown in Figure 12, are: explaining concepts, posing questions, making suggestions, promoting discussion among students, reading the students' writing, and assisting students. These themes are dealt with in detail in the following lines.

-Explaining issues/concepts

'Explanation of concepts" was mentioned as the main consultant practice. Students stated that the consultant explained, "the assignment and what was required of us to do" (QS42/2016). Another student stated, "he was helpful because he was explaining whenever we need help and assisting us" (QS20/2016). Another pointed out "He gave us a brief of an explanation based on the problems that we came up across and jotted down some notes for us to remind ourselves during the research" (QS21/2016). Another said, "she first explained the concept of writing and what process should one follow for effective writing, the do's and don'ts of academic writing, then she asked if everyone understands or has something valuable to add" (QS27/2016). Moreover, the consultants explained, "how to structure our essay looking at our draft essay and giving us answers when we asked" (QS37/2016) and "explained everything in details" (QS41/2016). In the consultants' view, explanation differs from discussion in that it relates more to teaching and to the transmission of knowledge.

-Posing questions

The consultant pointed to ‘questioning’ as their main practice in the GC. One student stated that the consultant posed “general questions on areas of difficulties. Those areas were worked on during the consultation. We gained important skills to be applied to academic writing” (QS8/2016). Similar to discussion, questioning represents an effective GC facilitation strategy used to enable student involvement, talk, and critical thinking.

-Making suggestions

Students mentioned “making suggestions” as one of the consultants’ main practice. A student stated that “the consultant listened whilst we gave different opinions and never participated. Afterwards, she then added her opinions and expressed how she felt and how she sees things on her perspective” (QS7/2016). Another said, “she read our literature review and suggested ways on how to improve it, and also told us to in-text referencing” (QS9/2016). Another student said, “The person that was helping with the consultation wanted to see what we have written and gave us pointers on how we can write an essay and make it more interesting so that we can be able to get more marks as a group” (QS15/2016). A further response stated, the consultant “Had suggestions that made perfect sense, edited and corrected a few errors” (QS40/2016). ‘Making suggestions’ emerges as a more subtle approach used by consultants particularly in trying to avoid ‘spoon-feeding’ students or imposing their own views in the consultation.

-Reading/ making students read aloud

Students pointed out that the consultant read and made them read aloud. One student stated, “they read out the question” (QS16/2016). Another stated that they [consultants] “Read some guidelines for writing an academic essay, explained to us, asked and answered questions to and from students” (QS18/2016). They read to identify errors: “they made us read our work so that we can identify the problem ourselves” (QS19/2016). Another student said “what he did was read our essay [...] He told us to read the essay aloud, each and every one taking a paragraph. As we read, we spotted those small mistakes we had made and gave our views, until we reached the end of the consultation” (QS45/2016). Another indicated “We all read aloud our thesis statement then he attended us one on one to help correct where we did wrong” (QS14/2016). This is in contradiction with writing centre practice. In contrast to the consultant reading aloud for the students, making students read would promote activity, involvement, and a deeper engagement with the material.

-Discussing with student

As emphasised previously, discussion encompasses several other consultant practices and remains pivotal in GC facilitation. One student stated,

> We discussed things that we failed to understand as first year students. We are not familiar with the system. We made sure that we always find an alternative of doing things. He emphasised on things that could really make us obtain good marks and lectured us on the fact that we don't pay attention to our schoolwork and that we should start taking it seriously [...] He also encouraged us to think positively about ourselves (QS29/2016).

Other students said, “She interacted with us through questions and discussion of our ideas” (QS31/2016). The role of discussion has been explained previously.

7.2.5.2. Students expressing their views freely

The freedom for students to express their views was mentioned as one of the factors, which facilitated learning in the GC. Through their responses, students indicated that in the GC, they were given ample opportunities to express themselves, assist one another through suggestion and explanation, think differently or become aware of other perspectives, correct their own and one another’s mistakes and errors in writing and thinking, learn to talk and share ideas with peers, and learn to listen more attentively.

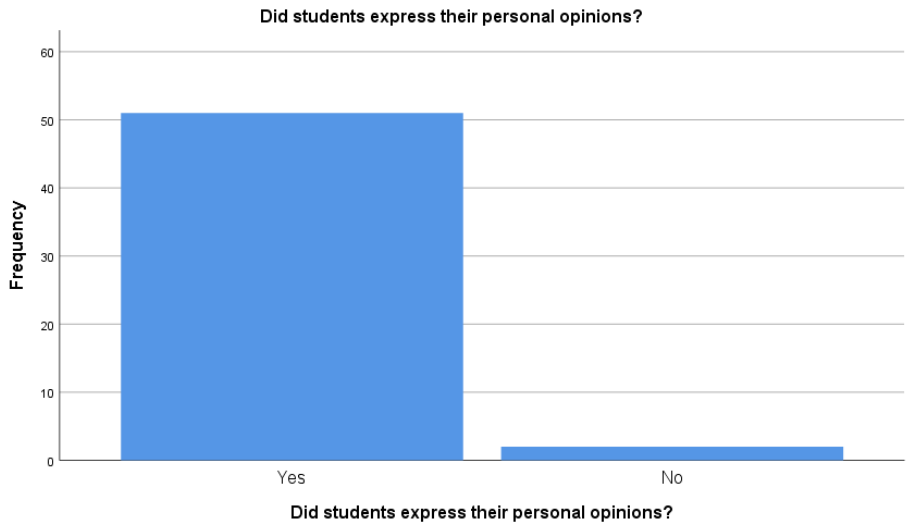


Figure 13: Students expressing their personal views

This shows that the effectiveness of the GC depends on whether or not the consultant can create a 'democratic' and 'free' space. Consultants should not monopolise or suppress talk. They should however control and steer the talk or discussions in the correct direction each time.

7.2.5.3. Students use of vernacular languages

Vernacular languages were used by students in the GC to address or explain difficult or new concepts to one another. They however indicated that they always addressed the consultant in English. In the 2016 questionnaire findings however 29 students (55%) (n=53) stated that they did not use vernacular languages at any point in the GC. These students advanced reasons such as the need for all to communicate in an international medium of communication, which is English. One stated, "It was fair because we had to speak a language that everyone would understand which is English" (QS19/2016). Another said, "because we as students speak different languages, so if we speak them we won't understand each other" (Q211/2016).

Others felt that English being the language of instruction, they should be afforded opportunities to practice it: "to me I didn't have a problem speaking in English because I believe that if we practice speaking English the more we become perfect and confident" (QS9/2016). Others stated, "I am okay with that I feel as if we should be speaking in English" (QS28/2016), and "I feel it is fair as most of the consultants only speak and understand English and at UJ the medium of learning is English so it is a norm for us to learn to practice using this language" (QS52/2016). Another declared, "It's okay because the language of learning (English) is understood and used by the institution so it is the only way we could communicate effectively without any misunderstandings" (QS30/2016).

For others, a group member could speak in vernacular on condition that there is translation back into English. The student stated, "Not everyone is fluent in English so I feel it is good that we accommodate each other, for as long as one explains or translates what they want or are trying to say in English" (QS44/2016). Another stated, "I fully supported it as we were from different cultures and English being the media of instruction it made it acceptable for everyone in the room to be comfortable and to engage in the discussion" (QS41/2016).

One student stated, "Fine because she [the consultant] would not understand what we were saying" (QS51/2016). It was important for the group to communicate in English to

accommodate the consultant, who could possibly not be a speaker of that particular vernacular language. Also, the vernacular spoken could be a mother-tongue of some of the group members only with the risk of alienating the non-speakers.

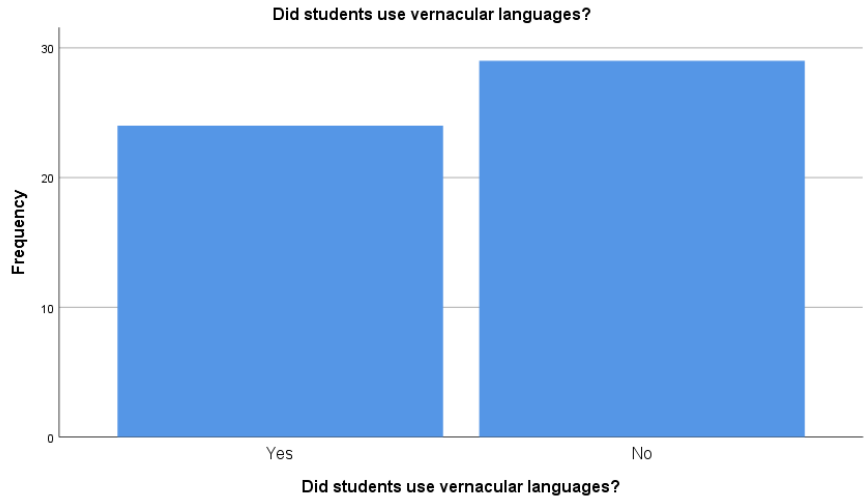


Figure 14: Students' use of vernacular (student data)

Most students indicated that the content may be better understood when explained in vernacular and by a peer. Students stated, “because sometimes there are things you can't easily explain in English but easy with your language” (QS2/2016) and “because others would come to rescue and try to explain it in English so that others may understand” (QS7/2016). Another declared, “because some of the things we don't understand were difficult to explain” (QS14/2016) and another, “because I am not yet good with English and it was embarrassing because people came with great ideas using their own language but after translating them we were happy to see the usefulness of the idea while others learnt a new language”.

The following are more reasons why vernacular was used: “It was a good idea because some students come from township high schools; hence, English is not their home language” (QS12/2016) and “because people are able to thoroughly express themselves” (QS31/2016), and “sometimes people speak/express better when talking in their own languages” (QS40/2016). Another said, “because some of us don't know English very well "not me though" and that makes people to be scared to ask questions that might help both the consultant and the students” (QS32/2016). It can be inferred that for either the consultant or student to revert to the vernacular, they should ensure that all participants possess an above average competence or understanding of the language. Otherwise, students should be allowed to ‘code switch’ or translate for one another discretely.

7.2.5.3. Consultant's individual attention to students

The findings showed that even in the context of discussions, in which students speak freely, the consultant strived to pay attention to and involve individual students.

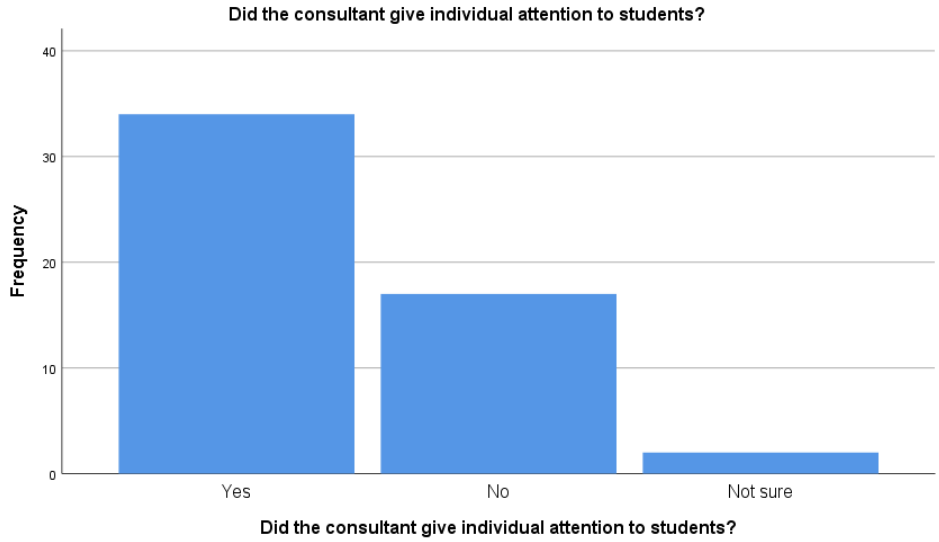


Figure 15: Consultants paying individual attention to students (student data)

One of the most difficult challenges of the GC for consultants is to attend to or provide attention to each student in the group. Consultants should be trained in group consultation dynamics and facilitation strategies.

7.2.6. Consultant's understanding of disciplinary content

In the findings, so far, students have referred to the fact that the consultant could be from a field other than theirs, although without making it sound like a problem. This study investigated whether this can impede the social interactions in the GC or whether it can be an obstacle to the students' learning of disciplinary literacies. It was found that students learn not only from the consultant, but also from the social interaction in the GC as a whole; that is, from their peers and even from their own reflection and thinking in the processes. The UJ writing centres being multidisciplinary in nature, the following section inquires whether the consultant, who could be from a field other than the students', understood the subject or disciplinary content, at least from the students' point of view.

7.2.6.1. Did the consultant understand the content of student assignment?

The majority of students stated that the consultant understood the subject content. Only a few students thought that the consultant could not understand the content. It can be inferred that the

consultant assisted the students in a manner that aided their understanding of their disciplinary content, without being from their discipline.

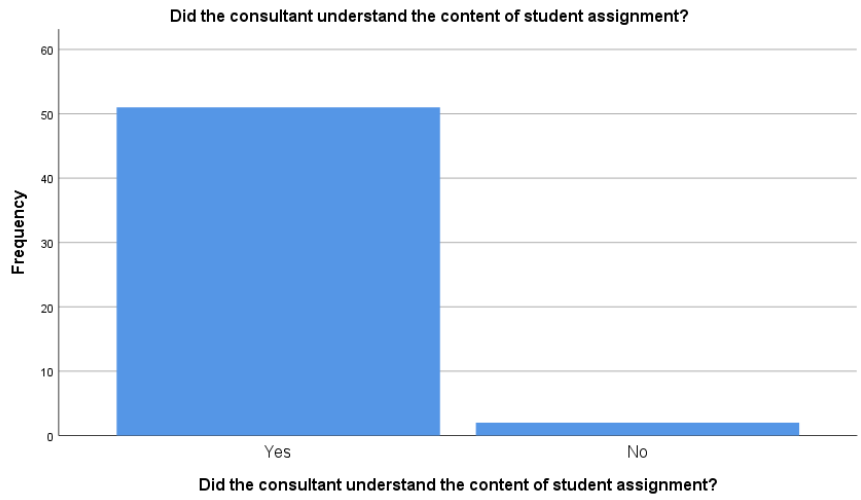


Figure 16: Consultants' understanding students' disciplinary content (student data)

The consultant could be from a field other than the students', but s/he should be able to play a 'reader responder', gauging the clarity, substance, logic and relevance of the students' writing.

7.2.6.2 Writing area of focus in a GC

Determining the type of assistance that the students needed provided clarity on whether the consultant would be in a position to assist. Students mentioned "essay writing", "assignment writing" and "report writing". It should be noted that "assignment writing" which at first seemed to be a separate theme, was found to refer to either "essay writing" or "report writing".

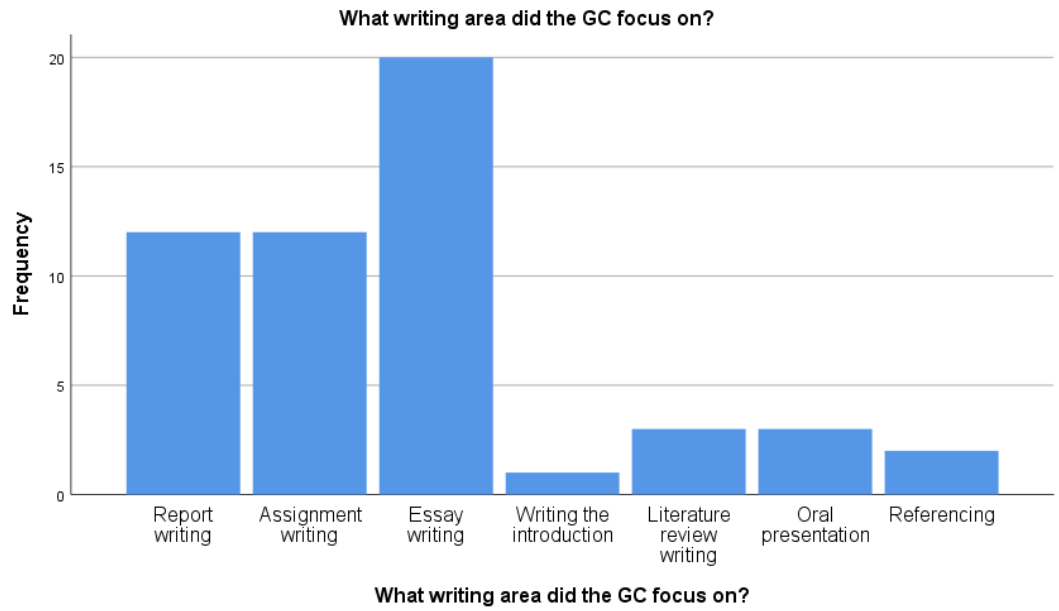


Figure 17: Writing areas of focus in GC (student data)

This study in general and the video observations in particular found that in the event that the consultant was from a field other than the students', he/she relied on students' explanation or definition of disciplinary concepts and materials. It was pointed out earlier in these findings that this gave rise to the risk of consultants being unwittingly misled by 'weak' students.

7.2.6.4. Consultants providing practical examples

Considering the students' affirmative responses to the question of whether the consultant understood the disciplinary content, it could be worthwhile to investigate whether the consultant gave the students practical examples on their specialised or disciplinary content. Students overwhelmingly confirmed that the consultant provided such examples. It can be inferred that in such an instance the GC can be said to have been successful.

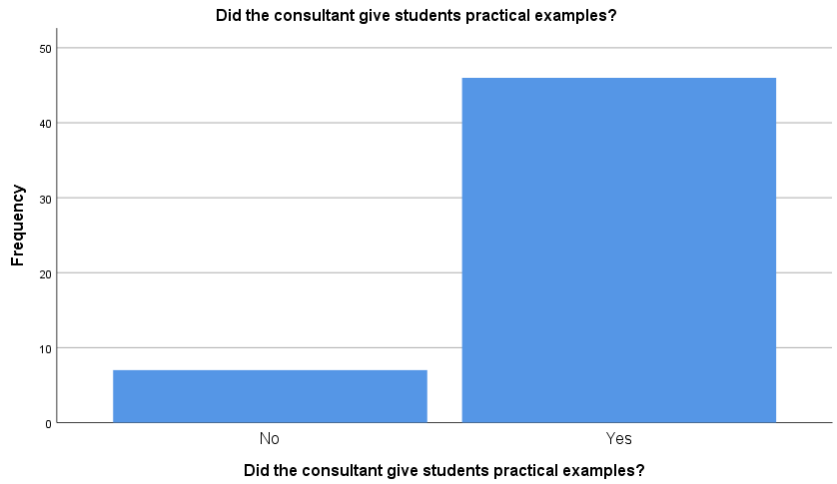


Figure 18: Consultant providing practical examples (student data)

Students indicated that the consultant showed them "examples we should write it. By showing us Templates" (QS4/2016), how to reference using real-life journals and articles (Q61/2016), and "an example of a complete assignment that was similar to the assignment we were doing and explained how each was done" (QS29/2016). Other responses indicated, "Yes, he gave us notes" (QS38/2016) and "use their work and we also went to the internet to find examples" (QS2/2016).

Others stated, "Yes... she showed us proper linking words and grammar" (QS25/2016) and "yes, in terms of essay writing every aspect was explained. We were shown how to write an introduction for example each paragraph in the body should have a topic sentence" (QS27/2016). Students confirmed that the consultant "showed us how to go about the writing and looked at specific segments of our work in which he felt needed some sort of brush up" (QS47/2016) and "showed me how to construct my sentences and provide evidence for claims made" (QS51/2016). The provision of practice examples and modelling by the consultant emerged from the data as a prerequisite for an effective GC.

7.2.6.5. Students assisting one another in GC

The following findings confirmed that students learnt, not only from the consultant, but also from one another. Students asserted that they assisted one another during the GC.

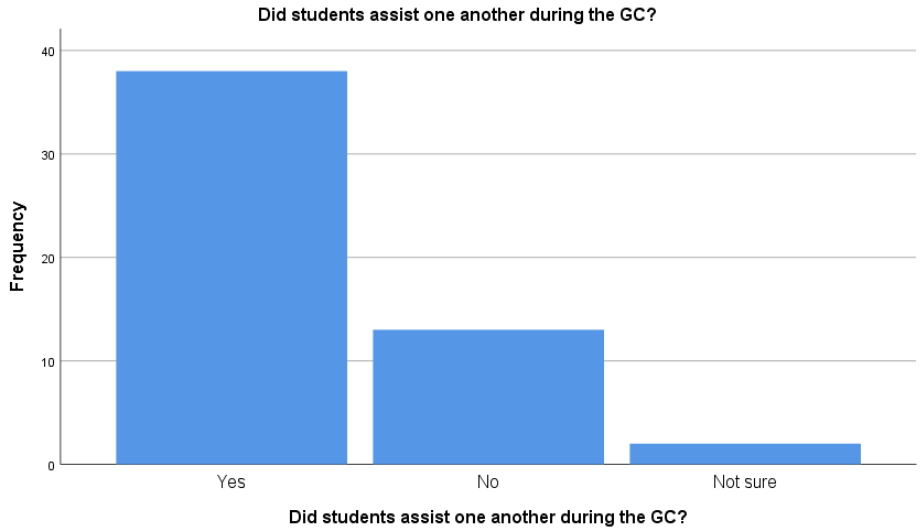


Figure 19: Students assisting one another in GC (student data)

Students assisted one another in answering the consultant's questions, expressing various views on the topic or assignment, or elaborating on aspects of the work. They stated, "Yes, they answered questions that the consultant was asking in cases where the individual didn't know the answer" (QS1/2016). In these instances, students "provided alternate options" (QS3/2016).

Students explained aspects that the consultant could not explain to them. One stated, "Yes. If one didn't understand their task they would explain to them thoroughly" (QS50/2016). Others said, "Yes, students tried to find difficulties of other students and address them if they understand better" (QS13/2016) and "If another student did not understand the other student that understand better helped" (QS15/2016).

Students checked each other's work. They stated, "Yes. We took a lot at each other's assignments and pointed out words, which we believe might be our weak points" (QS51/2016) and "yes by checking spelling and grammar errors yes by checking spelling and grammar errors" (QS53/2016). Another said, "yes by checking each others essays to see what we missed" (QS46/2016). These findings show that consultants should allow students to assist one another in the GC, as student learning can originate not only from the consultant, but also from other students.

7.2.7. Seating arrangement and organisational issues

7.2.7.1. Seating arrangement/ set up of consultation space in consultation room

The findings from the 2014 questionnaires, focus groups and videos pointed to the lack of a dedicated private and 'quiet' space for GCs. This was confirmed in the 2016 questionnaires: students, when asked what they disliked about the GC, mentioned the lack of space and the noise and "chaos" in the consultation room. The lack of space could also be confirmed by the video observations. Three to four GCs were being held in one consultation room and noise intrusion disturbed students in each group. GCs should be exempt of noise interference.

7.2.7.2. Lack of time for GC session

The video observations revealed problems such as insufficient time allocated to the GC and consultation time 'wasted' on admin tasks such as filling in the consultation observation sheet. The lack of time has been confirmed in the 2016 questionnaire findings. The 'inconvenience' created by admin tasks at the beginning of the GC however was not mentioned in these findings. In order for learning to occur, GCs should be held for a minimum time of an hour to accommodate all learning styles and provide sufficient opportunities to each member for discussion and questions.

7.2.7.3. Number of drafts and length of assignments

The complexity or difficulty created when each students has their own draft and when the assignment draft is electronic on a desktop or laptop screen, and when the assignment is made of more than four pages and cannot be covered effectively or sufficiently in one GC, was not mentioned in the 2016 questionnaire. However, some students complained about the fact that each student had a separate draft and each was vying for the consultant's input. Forming groups where students are working on individual and different drafts or, worse, different assignments may not be practical.

7.3. Writing Consultant 2016 Data

This section analyses the data gathered from the writing consultant questionnaires collected in 2016. It also further investigates the video observation themes including the questioning approach, student practices, consultant practices, the role of discussion and talk in GC, the

consultant's possible lack of familiarity with disciplinary content, and organisational issues. The section begins with an overview of the consultants' background information.

7.3.1. Writing Consultant Background Information

Gender, faculty, year of study, the number of GC each consultant has conducted, and the number of students in each group may play a role in the effectiveness of the GC. Out of sixteen writing consultants in the research, nine were female and seven were male. Nine were from the Faculties of Humanities, four from Sciences, and one respectively from Management, Engineering and Education. It was highlighted earlier in the study that most students in the research were from Humanities, the Financial and Economic Sciences, and Law. This means that most consultants would be able to access and understand the students' subject/disciplinary contents

Regarding the year of study, eight consultants were PhD students, seven Masters (MA, MSc, or M-Tech), and one was at honour's level. The fact that most consultants were either PhD or Master's degree students is an indication of the relatively high level of expertise in academic writing/literacies represented among participants in this data strand. It is understood that these consultants have some experience conducting research and writing academic documents, in addition to the training offered in the writing centre.

7.3.1.4. The Number of GCs conducted by each Consultant

The highest number of GCs conducted by one of the consultants was 50, and the lowest was two, with an average number of 23. The highest number of students in a GC was 10, and the lowest was three, with an average of seven students in a GC, as seen in Table 31. In the student responses, this average was five.

Table 27: Number of GCs conducted and number of students per GC (consultant data)

		How many GCs have you conducted?	How many students were in your GC?
N	Valid	16	16
	Missing	0	0
Mean		23.06	7.00

Median	22.00	7.50
Minimum	2	3
Maximum	50	10

7.3.2. GC and social practices

The consultant's general impressions of the GC, their impressions of the benefits, as well as the challenges are discussed in this section.

7.3.2.1. Consultants' general impressions of the GC

Most consultants described their experience of the GC as "challenging", and "more difficult than the one-on-one consultation". A few consultants mentioned "informative", "dynamic" or interactive, and "enriching". These themes are interpreted in details in the following lines.

-Enriching / Student engagement and participation

Consultant who found the GC "enriching" or rewarding posited that this was due to positive student engagement and attitude in the GC. One consultant stated,

> The experience is always good because I always learn something new after each consultation. The consultations are all different and I always learn something from other fields which is very enriching (QWC7/2016).

The following consultant response points to the uniqueness and individuality of each student, and the effectiveness of the GC, owing to the group situation or social nature of the consultation:

> **Fulfilling**: particularly when one is able to assist the student to understand what is expected in the assignment, critically assess the content given, and is able to express knowledge academically by logical flow of argument or the presentation of ideas through writing. **Uniqueness and individuality**: One finds students that are demanding in terms of that the consultant has to go beyond to kick start creative imagination especially for essay type assignments; while some students easily understand the

expectation and apply content while thinking broadly out of the box. **Productive/effective**: especially when practical academic writing skills are imparted to the students effectively in the induction or facilitation of individual understanding that writing is a process and that they can actually find it to be interesting and enjoyable when they grasp academic concepts and expectations (QWC13/2016).

In order to appreciate the GC and turn the challenges into opportunities for student and consultant growth, a consultant should acknowledge its complexities in terms of student individuality and group dynamics.

-Challenging

Consultants pointed out that the GC can be challenging due to non-participation or apathy on the part of group members. One stated "[the GC can be] rewarding [but] sometimes challenging. It is rewarding when you can see how the students are benefiting and willing to improve, and challenging when they expect you as a consultant to do all the work" (QWC3/2016). Another declared, "It's easier when the students are proactive and understand their work" (QWC5/2016). The effectiveness of the GC seems premised on the participation of all group members and can be impeded by student apathy and a lack of interest.

-More difficult than the 1-on-1

Consultants stated that the GC is more difficult than the one-on-one consultation, as in the latter they can pay attention to that one student, who is forced to participate in the session. One consultant stated, "With the one-on-one consultations, it was more effective as the attention was solely on the students and her/his needs thereof" (QWC15/2016). Another said, "It was much easier dealing with one student as they were also open to asking questions and participating as opposed to group consultations where students shy away from engaging for fear that their peers will laugh at them" (QWC16/2016). Involving and attending to each group member poses a tremendous challenge for consultants. The lower the number of students in the group, the higher the chances of the GC being effective.

7.3.2.2. Consultants' perceptions of the benefits of the GC

When asked what they liked about the GC, most consultants mentioned the "multiple perspectives/ or views" from students. Other consultants mentioned the "discussions among

students", and "collaboration among students". The other themes, "Individual attention" and "engagement", were insignificant. One consultant said "nothing in particular". It can be inferred that the discursive nature of the GC, which allows for the sharing of individual and multiple perspectives on certain aspects of the students' disciplinary content is seen as valuable by most consultants. The discursive social practices also promote collaboration among students and their engagement with the content.

7.3.2.3. The Consultants' Perceptions of the Challenges of the GC

When asked what they disliked about the GC, most consultants mentioned the "absence of few students", meaning the fact that some of the group members did not attend the GC. They also mentioned the "non-participation of a few" and the "dominance of few students". The other themes were "lack of time", "persisting disagreement among students", "group conflict", "more difficult than the one-on-oneconsultation", "unpreparedness of few", and "negative attitude of few". The themes such as "non-participation of few", "dominance by a few", "absence of few", and even "unpreparedness of few" seem to represent all factors that may impede the facilitation of effective discussions or social interactions among group members. This reinforces the finding that the participation of all students in the group is crucial to social interactions and learning.

7.3.3. Student Practices

It is important to identify student practices in the GC in order to explore the associated social interactions. When asked to describe what the students did throughout the GC, most consultants stated that students "explained their understanding", "listened and took notes", and "asked questions". Other themes such as "checked their own work", "followed the consultant's instructions", "answered the consultant's questions", "read assignment aloud", and "clarified their writing needs" point to the dependence between the students and the consultant, as well as among students. Learning in the GC depended on these social interactions.

-Explaining

Most consultants proceeded by asking students to explain the assignment, their understanding and their needs in the GC. One consultant stated, "they [students] provided information

regarding their understanding of what the assignment is about and specifically what they generally needed help with" (QWC2/2016). Another stated,

> They provided explanation reflecting their understanding of how to deal with the common issue. They explain the instructions guiding the report/assignment/proposal as understood by them. They answer questions asked by the consultants. They take notes of the suggestions offered by the consultants (QWC7/2016).

This finding addressed both the second and third objectives of the study. For consultants, promoting students' explanations and reflections on their assignment or writing fostered deeper understanding, as well as the students' reasoning abilities.

-Asking questions/ questioning

For consultants, the students' questioning aimed to elicit/ obtain clarification and understanding. One consultant declared, "they also asked questions on aspects that they had not clearly understood. They confirmed that they were satisfied with their level of understanding and can now do the assignment with confidence. They completed forms at the end of the session" (QWC3/2016). Another consultant said, "Most students expected answers and asked leading questions in attempts to get me to do their assignment for them. Others focused on the assignment at hand and asked questions to clarify aspects which they did not totally understand" (QWC16/2016). Questioning played a role similar to explanation. It served also to involve them in the discussions or exchanges.

-Answering questions

The consultants indicated that questioning was intended to promote the students' exploration and understanding of the assignment or disciplinary content. One consultant stated, "[the students] answered questions from consultants when she needed clarity on their work. And effected some changes during consultation" (QWC4/2016).

Other themes such as "followed the consultants' instructions" and "read aloud" were insignificant and were therefore not interpreted.

7.3.4. Writing consultant Practices

The most significant and recurrent themes "listened to students", "posed questions", "explained assignment" and "instructed students to explain assignment" are interpreted in the following lines. Consultants were requested to describe what they did from the beginning to the end of the GC.

-Posing questions

One consultant pointed out that she used questioning to facilitate learning. The consultant stated,

> I introduced myself, explained the role of the writing centre so that we can be on the same page/ laying ground rules so that the students can understand what I am in a position to do and what I cannot do. Give students a chance to introduce themselves and to also highlight some of the needs they have concerning the assignment. From there, the discussion begins. I ask leading questions in guiding the students towards learning (QWC11/2016).

Another consultant stated that she posed questions to clarify the students' understanding and spot any misconceptions:

> As the consultant, when students arrive and are seated, I welcomed them and introduced myself. Students were told to feel free to express themselves. I enquired from the students what the assignment was about and any related instructions and guidelines associated with the task. Asked leading questions to establish what the students needed help with. Figured out how to address the needs of the students in the most effective way. Asked questions at intervals and encouraged students to do so as well. This was to make sure that what I was being addressed is meaningful to the students and also to clarify any misconceptions. At the end of the process, students were encouraged to book for a follow-up consultation if deemed necessary. The necessary forms were handed out to be completed by the students (QWC2/2016).

Consultants intended to gauge the students' understanding:

> I asked students to tell me what they needed help with. I asked them to explain their understanding of the assignment questions. I asked probing questions to understand the

> assignment and to get an understanding of how much they understand. I made sure all members participated. I gave them suggestions on their concerns and suggestions to work as a team (QWC3/2016).

Another consultant stated that she asked a series of questions to promote the students' independent thinking:

> I always begin by greeting students and familiarising myself with their department and faculty. I then go on to ask the student to briefly speak about the assignment and what it is that they would like to achieve from the given session. If I see that the student needs assistance with high order needs but perceives that lower order needs are most important, I use the writing centre rubric to describe why higher order needs have to be addressed before lower order needs. I always ask the students if the outcomes they mentioned at the beginning of the session have been met, the answer has always been yes. In order to achieve this I ask the students leading questions during the consultation to ensure the student is thinking for him / herself. I advise students to return especially if we were unable to look at everything as the consultation is time sensitive which I tell them in the beginning (QWC4/2016).

The following consultant's response also points to the development of the students' critical thinking and sense of engagement with the subject content:

> Normally, the consultation begins with the consultant asking the students to briefly explain the assignment, including what they have done, what areas they want to cover etc. From the responses one can assess what the students say with what is the written instruction to determine first if the students understood the purpose of the assignment. This is followed by leading questions that help the student understand the main objective should they have missed essential aspects of it. One group member is given the assignment to read out loud as part of the self editing approach, beginning from the first section whether it be the abstract or the introduction. The consultant carefully listens for constructive feedback on the structural elements for that section i.e. introduction structural components, mostly higher order concerns. The consultant may pause the reader to highlight concerns particularly if poor sentence construction makes meaningless communication. It is important because it will help the group asses

whether or not they were able to constructively communicate their views or concepts, clearly addressing the subject of discussion or they completely went off topic. Again leading question encourages critical assessment of the work and harnesses the intellectual input of the individuals into the group work. Meanwhile the students will be also engaging with the content creatively. Each section is approached in the same manner unless the group agrees that they probably have similar issues in all sections and would like to address them outside the consultation or would like to focus on areas of concern (QWC13/2016).

Questioning was utilised in facilitating learning, gauging and clarifying student understanding, and promoting independent and critical thinking.

-Listening to students

Listening to students' talk/ discussions was mentioned by consultants as an important strategy, which enables deeper insight into the latter's thoughts, needs and concerns. One consultant stated, "I would listen to the student's concerns, and then quickly think of the best method to address them" (QWC8/2016). Another stated, "I would listen then prompt them with questions to elicit responses on how they thought the work should be addressed then provide guidance" (QWC12/2016). Questioning and listening, in addition to encouraging students to talk through discussion and explanation, enabled the consultant to effectively carry out the GC.

7.3.5. Discussion/ Talk

The 2014 findings that the participants' discursive social practices underpinned and orientated the GC were reinforced by the 2016 questionnaire data.

7.3.5.1. Individual attention to students

This study asked the consultants whether they provided students with individualised attention. The effectiveness of GC can be hampered by a high number of students, as the consultant cannot attend adequately to each student. Most consultants replied "yes". This confirmed that the consultants were at least aware of the importance of attending to the individual needs of each student in the GC.

7.3.5.2. Talk among Students

The writing centre literature foregrounds discussion, talk and dialogue as key strategies underpinning the GC. Consultants were asked whether students talked to one another in the GC. All consultants unanimously agreed affirmatively. For the discussions to be effective, students should feel free to talk to one another and not only to the consultant.

7.3.5.3. Consultant's participation in the GC discussions

When asked whether they participated in the GC, most consultants agreed "yes" and only one replied "no". This shows that in most GCs, the consultants' participation is notable, but not dominant, as shown in the associated responses. The consultants emphasised that they only intervened intermittently to guide or refocus the discussions. One consultant stated, "If sometimes I will recapitulate what they said or ask probing questions when they are going out of context in order to bring them back on track. So I guide these discussions" (QWC3/2016). Others indicated, "In a limited manner, only to guide students with regards to the assignment at large" (QWC4/2016), "I facilitate the discussion but the student discuss" (QWC11/2016), and "yes but mainly to prompt and guide. more like a facilitator" (QWC12/2016). The following responses specified that the consultant intervened, but 'not aggressively':

> Yes, not aggressively to allow student peer learning to take place. Especially since writing consultants are not content based unlike tutors. Sometimes examples of specific content can derive engagement and critical analysis from the rest of the group with the help of more leading questions from the consultant (QWC13/2016).

Consultants intervened by posing questions, making suggestions, and providing some explanation or clarifications. One consultant indicated, "Yes. By asking questions and suggesting points that will help the students to put their ideas in right perspectives. By helping them to organise and present their thoughts and findings in correct order" (QWC6/2016). Another posited, "I always participate in the discussions by clarifying some concepts and giving some directions to the writers" (QWC7/2016). Another consultant mentioned a more nuanced approach where students are encouraged consider multiple perspectives. The consultant stated, "yes, I did participate just to provide clarity. But in my approach in academics

no one is right or wrong, I take the considerations of both sides and invite them to be constructive and consider other's views" (QWC14/2016).

7.3.5.5. Consultant's Use of Practical Examples

This question sought to ascertain whether the consultant provided practical examples aimed at facilitating the students' understanding of the content and whether these were effective in the consultants' opinion. The majority of consultants declared to have provided such examples. One consultant stated, "Yes when necessary I would use my own scrap paper to show students an example but the paper was never given to students and many examples were also discussed" (QWC3/2016). Another stated, "Yes. Depending on which one I considered necessary. I showed them from my own work. And I have also had to drive home my points by doing some writing during consultation (QWC5/2016). Another indicated, "Sometimes I show them examples , guide them , ask them to explain and discover their mistakes and correct them (QWC6/2016). It can be seen that consultants provided students with not only with guidelines, but also examples on how to write a specific text or genre for instance. Writing centres usually build a repository of assignment guidelines or briefs from specific disciplines, which are useful when students do not bring such with them. Consultants stated,

> Yes I did. I gave them guidelines on how to write the introduction, body of the essay and conclusion. I used the hamburger analogy to explain to them how paragraphs are structured: with the top bun being the topic sentence, the fillings being the explanations and bottom bun being a concluding sentence in a paragraph (QWC15/2016).

Another consultant referred to examples of genres that he would find online together with students using the writing centre computers and internet access. The consultant explained,

> Both examples from the books and online sources are helpful in showing students especially research based group assignments, getting an online article can effectively show them an example of an abstract, introduction etc. Also aspects of referencing from the online library handout come in handy by assisting students to learn the skill of referencing. Demonstrating for example how to identify the key words in a question helps students learn aspects of analysing a question to ensure they cover all aspects expected in the assignment. Also, demonstrating the planning aspect prior to the writing

like brain storming, mind mapping etc. helps students to address the question objectively (QWC12/2016).

These practical examples served the purpose of both scaffolding and clarifying disciplinary content in the GC. It should be emphasised that the consultants' perceptions were that the strategy was effective in facilitating learning.

7.3.5.6. Students expressing their Personal Views

Consultants were asked who between the consultant and the students spoke most of the time. This question intended to gauge from consultants whether the students expressed themselves freely or not. Overwhelmingly, consultants stated that students expressed themselves freely in the GC. Any talk or discussion controlled by the consultant would be deemed ineffective or unacceptable.

7.3.5.7. Control of talk in the GC

To complement the previous question, the consultants were asked who between the consultant and the students spoke most of the time in the GC. Most consultants said "students" and a smaller number said the "consultant". This means that consultants were at least aware of the necessity to cede control of the GC exchanges to students. GCs are effective when students retain control of their work and engage in discussions unabated.

7.3.5.8. Students use of Vernacular Languages

Another consideration should be that with the status of the English language in South African being a Second Language, students in GCs should be allowed and enabled to use vernacular languages, as confirmed by students in the second main section of this Chapter. The 2016 student questionnaires findings showed that students used vernacular languages to explain difficult subject content and concepts to one another. When asked whether the students used vernacular, most consultants replied "no", and a smaller number stated "yes". This is in contradiction with the students' stance that they were allowed to use and did use vernacular in GC. This contradiction means that although students may have used vernacular in the GC, the consultants' perception is that this should not be the case. This reluctance could be because

most consultants, being international students, cannot speak fluently or understand most vernaculars. It could also be because even South African consultants would not be able to speak and understand all or most vernaculars of the country. Another complexity would be that the dominant voice among students would start speaking and impose their own language at the expense of others, who in fact would simply keep quiet and feigns understanding. This of course except when one forms a group according to students' and consultants' vernacular, which would be against the principles of a multicultural educational setting, as advocated in the country. Consultants who indicated that students did not use vernacular cited their own lack of competence in the vernaculars. A consultant stated, "I don't speak any other languages except English. Even if I did I don't believe in code switching. I believe the best way to learn a language and understand how to write it is by practicing that language" (QWC3/2016). Another said,

> It is always good to allow the writers to express themselves in languages, which they can use to easily express themselves. But some of the writing consultants may not be familiar with South African local languages which make it difficult to allow the writer to use their own languages" (QWC7/2016).

Another consultant cited the need for all students to understand any vernacular that would be used. She stated,

> It was okay with me since I and some other students in the group could not understand the language in question. This might have influenced the effectiveness of the consultation session(s) negatively by resulting in communication breakdown (QWC9/2016).

Consultants who supported the use of vernacular languages in GCs cited the need for students with a low level of competence in English to explain or have content or concepts explained to them in their language. A consultant stated, "As long as they interpret it back to English... It helps them to express themselves at the beginning and very essential to the process (QWC10/2016). Other responses stated, "Sometimes they digress to their mother tongue, I don't have a problem with that if they are trying to clarify to their group mates but I may not understand because I am a foreigner" (QWC11/2016) and "It was Ok for me as some were able to express themselves better when they code switched" (QWC12/2016). There seems to be

consensus that the use of vernacular by students is acceptable when done among themselves, but not with the consultant. Another consultant stated, “It is unavoidable especially one finds that students express hints here and there in their language faster than they can translate. Very rare instants where the entire sentence is in a native dialogue” (QWC13/2016). Others stated, “I think it can be used if it contributes to bringing clarity among students who are not able to understand some explanations; other than that I think it is not necessary” (QWC14/2016), “I think code switching is vital for some students to understand instructions, However, English should dominate” (QWC15/2016).

The general perception was that the language of instruction in GCs should remain English, although the discreet use of vernacular language can be allowed among students, who can explain or unpack questions or content to one another, without imposing the vernacular on other students or the group. Such use of vernacular would foster learning and social interactions, hence playing the role of linguistic catalyst or support for English.

7.3.6. Writing consultant and disciplinary content

This point somewhat complements a finding that has already been confirmed in this study; that the consultant understood the content in some aspects and that the students explained it to them when they failed to understand. It was found that students sometimes simply wanted the consultant to play the role of a sounding board. In the 2016 student questionnaire findings, students indicated that the consultant should not ‘spoon-feed’ them with answers when they had knowledge of the content. Consultants should give students an opportunity to formulate answers for themselves.

7.3.6.1. The Consultant’s Understanding of the Content of Students’ Assignments

When asked whether they understood the students’ disciplinary content, the majority of consultants stated “yes”. This understanding may not equate to a complete mastery of the content. The role of the consultant is not to explain the content, but to create opportunities through questioning and discussion for students to unpack for and explore the content with one another.

7.3.6.2. Writing Areas covered in the GC

This question is important in order to determine whether the GC focused on any type of genre, which might be difficult for the consultant to understand and deal with. When asked what the students needed assistance with, most consultants mentioned, “essay writing”, and others “report writing”. It was shown earlier in the chapter that most students were from the Humanities and from Economics and given that most consultants were from Humanities, it can be inferred that the latter were familiar with these essay writing conventions. GCs habitually focus on the writing of specific genres and students, who usually bring the associated guidelines, are assisted in unpacking the relevant genres.

7.3.6.3. Deciding on the Agenda of the GC

Considering that GCs should focus on unmuddling disciplinary genres and literacies, the students should be the ones to dictate the agenda of the GC; at least at the start of the session, and in some respects. In the study, half of the consultants stated that students decided the agenda, and the other half mentioned the consultant. The findings in this respect are thus inconclusive. In the 2016 questionnaires in this Chapter, the students indicated that they are the ones who decided the agenda. It can be inferred that while the students felt that they were the ones who made the decision and were in control of the agenda, the consultants were undecided. This is perhaps an indication that the consultants were successful in relinquishing control of the agenda to the students.

Consultants were of the opinion that when students decide the agenda, the GC as a whole and time management are more effective. Consultants said, “Then they take responsibility of what is being addressed and we are able to manage time” (QWC3/2016), “Okay. Students should be allowed to indicate specific areas where they need assistance to the consultant” (QWC6/2016), and “It works especially in case of a long assignment or report because sometimes the duration of each consultation may not allow to cover a large part of the work” (QWC7/2016).

Other consultants indicated that, because students know their needs more than the consultants do, they should dictate the agenda of the GC. Consultants stated, “It works as I can form an agenda based on their different needs” (QWC14/2016), and “It was productive in that it provided a working and finite agenda with regard to the sessions objectives” (QWC8/2016). A further response stated, “Yes as in a one-on-one consultation it is the attendee of the consultation that sets the tone and guidance is adjusted dependent on the level of work

submitted - in a group this requires everyone's input" (QWC4/2016). Other reasons were that "It was a good strategy as the students knew exactly what to expect within their consultation. If students took over, not much progress would be made as they would spend much time bickering and discussing issues not relevant to the assignment" (QWC15/2016). Other consultants indicated, "It was alright with me since the agenda reflected the common concerns of the students and not just some few individuals or the consultant" (QWC9/2016) and "it sets the pace and tone of the consultation better" (QWC10/2016).

Consultants who felt that they, not the students, should decide on the agenda, cited the need to manage time effectively, to cover the entire material, or to organise the work more effectively. Consultants stated, "yes, because they consultant understand the limitation of time and how much can be covered within that time" (QWC1/2016), and "It enables the consultant to manage the process effectively" (QWC2/2016). Another said, "Normally students come to consult because they require an editing service, so the consultant has to avoid that by asking if there are specific areas they would like to cover if not then each section is briefly covered. It works for such cases (QWC12/2016). Another stated "I felt okay with that. it worked. it showed that they were organised and considering the time frame they had to be strategic in how to go about the assignment" (QWC13/2016). It can be inferred that students decided on the GC agenda and spoke more than the consultant in the GC.

7.3.6.4. Suggestion to improve the GC

Asked for suggestions on how the GC can be improved, consultants provided an array of points, none of which were mentioned by most students. The majority of consultants mentioned "student commitment and participation". The other themes mentioned marginally were: "GC participation to be made compulsory for all members", "students coming for GC must bring rough draft", "lecturers to brief consultants on assignment requirements", "more consultations", and "students to see same consultant for same assignment each time". Other insignificant themes were "more awareness of writing centre services on part of lecturers", "make groups smaller", "students to book for GC when a group", "more GC time", and "writing centre work to be embedded into disciplinary content". Overall, the emphasis again is on compulsory, not only student attendance, but mostly participation in GC. These findings point to the importance of individual participation in the discursive and social practices of the GC.

7.4. Conclusion

This Chapter analysed the findings of the 2016 student and writing consultant questionnaires respectively. It further investigated the findings emerging from the 2014 student and consultant questionnaires, focus group and video observations. Using Atlas.ti and SPSS, and proceeding by triangulation of these data and findings, the study merged the themes from the three methods into five thematic families: the GC discursive and social practices, student practices, consultant practices, discussion/talk, and writing consultant's understanding of disciplinary content. Some of these themes were confirmed by the 2016 student or consultant findings, and others were not. The next Chapter discusses the overall findings of the study.

CHAPTER EIGHT
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

8.1. Introduction

This Chapter discusses the overall research findings while locating them in the analytical framework. The Chapter also explains the implications of the challenges or risks of the GC, the social constructivist nature of the GC and its role in the GC social discursive practices for the students' acquisition of the disciplinary literacies. Chapters Four to Six carried out an analysis of the data obtained from the 2014 survey questionnaires, focus groups, and video observation, respectively with the students and writing consultants. The findings from these three methods, that is, six data strands, were analysed and triangulated with and complemented with the 2016 survey questionnaires, two strands, with students and writing consultants respectively, which was discussed in Chapter 7. These data analysis Chapters foregrounded a number of themes, which were confirmed further and some of which were merged to arrive at six overarching themes. The latter are: questioning as a GC facilitation strategy, student practices, writing consultant practices, discussion/talk in the GC, consultant's awareness of the students' disciplinary literacies, and organisational issues.

The discussion in this Chapter pivots around the theoretical and analytical underpinnings introduced in Chapters Two, that is, Social Constructivism, NLS and AL/Writing Centre Practice. Locating the findings within these constructs allows for an understanding and addressing of the research question, which is 'what are the challenges facing writing consultants and students during a GC with respect to academic genres?' And the sub-questions, which are:

- What are the challenges facing students and writing consultant in GCs?
- What are the social interactions occurring between students and consultants and among students in GCs?
- Do the social interactions, which occur in GCs, focus on genre awareness? in what ways?

The Chapter begins with a discussion of the challenges associated with the GC, particularly because there seems to be a significant differentiation between the GC Model, the one-on-one consultation, peer writing, writing circles and discussion groups, as discussed in Chapter Two.

8.2. The Group Consultation Model: Nature of the Problems

The evidence in this study suggests that both students and consultants found the GC challenging for reasons such as the possible non-participation of a few group members, the dominance of a few group members, and the negative and disrespectful attitude of a few group members. They also mentioned the lack of time, the occasional noise, and the outspoken writing consultant. As can be seen, the above-mentioned problems represent elements capable of impeding the social interactions in the group. This section discusses this problematic nature of the GC in detail.

Students and consultants both found the GC challenging for differing reasons. The students' reasons in the study included the pressure of having to answer "difficult" questions in front of others. Others found the experience "overwhelming" due to the level of expectations set by other students. Interestingly, these students specified that this pressure emanated not from the consultant, but from peers. This position corroborates the constructivist concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD), where students can learn collaboratively with peers (Cleborne, Johnson & Willis 1997). The consultant plays the role of a 'distant teacher', one who "lets a naturally unfolding development take its course" (Vygotsky 1984), allowing for comprehensive and elaborate discussions or exchanges among students.

Other students stated that the challenge was due to the multiplicity of opinions and voices, each of which had to be accommodated. The study also found that students found the GC time insufficient to exchange ideas effectively and satisfactorily. Effective social interactions among students and between students and the consultant require sufficient amount of time.

Students also referred to the challenge of accommodating all questions from group members. One response stated, "It was difficult at first because each and every student wanted to ask whatever their question was and some were not getting the response they hoped for or got the feedback they wanted because they didn't really understand but at the end we got it right" (QS16/2016).

An additional problem was the difficulty of answering students' questions effectively. The associated assumption is that, in order to provide students with the needed and correct answer, the consultant should be of the same academic field. This point is linked to the question posed

recently in most literature on writing centre practice; that should the writing consultant be of the same field as the students to assist them effectively with academic literacies or writing development? (Johnson, Clark & Burton 2015). This point is discussed later in the thesis.

-More difficult than the one-on-one consultation

The above response also alludes to the differences in the students' level of understanding and dispositions in the GC. Consultants stated that the GC is more difficult than the one-on-one consultation, as in the latter they can pay attention to that one student, who is forced to participate in the session. One consultant stated, "With the one-on-one consultation, it was more effective as the attention was solely on the student and her/his needs thereof" (QWC15/2016). Another said, "It was much easier dealing with one student as they were also open to asking questions and participating as opposed to group consultations where students shy away from engaging for fear that their peers will laugh at them" (QWC16/2016).

-Non-participation of few group members

As discussed in Chapter Two, social constructivism has been criticised for its complexity and lack of pedagogical applicability (Harris & Alexander 1998). Its critics argued that its implementation in teaching is predicated on the group members' unanimous participation and engagement with the material or task. This standpoint posits that total participation is almost impossible to achieve with students. Students in the research stated that others could not participate due to late coming, 'laziness', or the reluctance to engage in the task or the material. When a student arrives late, they miss the discussions and exchanges, and it becomes difficult for them to understand the context or objective of the interactions. As a result, they remain quiet. Other students bewailed the dependence of group members on the group leader throughout the writing process, and added that the latter was then blamed for any shortcomings. Other students suggested that peers only began to participate and contribute at the last minute due to time constraints and group pressure. The students in the study thus emphasised the importance for group members to be part of the discussions throughout from the beginning to the end if they were to understand the context of the other members' utterances, the developments, resolutions, and conclusions of the discussions.

Consultants equally pointed out to non-participation, a lack of involvement or apathy on the part of some of the group members as some of the major challenges faced in the GC. The study found that the GC could be either rewarding for the consultants when students are willing to

participate and improve their writing, or challenging when the students expect the consultant to do the work for or spoon-feed them or are not involved for varying reasons. Students in the group should be proactive and should engage in group tasks. This also confirms Lundstrom and Baker's (2009) and Ismael's (2011: 75) postulation that in peer writing, students who provide feedback to their peers or to the group benefit more in terms of learning than those who receive feedback 'passively', and who miss numerous opportunities for learning. This finding is crucial particularly because in a study by Lea and Street (1997), for instance, students expressed their difficulties in understanding university or lecturer (or consultant) feedback. In writing centre practice, the consultation model, whether group or individual, is based on the provision of feedback by the consultant to students. This study emphasises that in the GC context the consultant should foster the provision of feedback by students to other students through discussion. The writing consultant should be able to take complex issues such as the students' learning preferences and identities, and issues of power relations and meaning making in the specific academic and disciplinary contexts, into consideration in their interactions and work in both one-on-one and GCs.

-Domination of the discussions by group members

There was also reference to the fact that dominant students did not give others an opportunity to speak. The study found that some students were either implicitly intimidated or discouraged by other group members who would dominate the discussions or monopolise the participation in the GC. Such students would 'appropriate' the interactions with the consultant, particularly when the latter was not skilled in facilitating the GC or allowed this to happen. This occasionally led to group conflict or a disadvantage for some of the shy or reserved participants. One students described the unfavourable experience in the following terms: "I didn't like being overruled because the majority of your group members agree with an answer that you disagree with" (QS2/2016). The use of the word "overruled" implies that the student could have been speaking or have expressed their opinion, which was dismissed. It was found that several students agreed that this dominance of the GC by one or few students caused them to resent the GC or experience a sense of rejection from others. One stated, "The fact that they considered themselves to be "better" than others, and their opinions mattered the most" (QS7/2016). This behaviour is contrary to the perception of the writing centre as a safe space for students, as discussed in most South African literature on writing centres (Archer 2012; Archer & Richards 2011; Spigelman & Grobman 2005: Leibowitz et al. 1996; Kane 2012). Norton (2010: 8) asserts that for students a sense of safety was not only fundamental, but also

a prerequisite for their full participation in a given literacy world. Due to its distinctiveness (Spigelman & Grobman 2005) and peer learning model (Kane 2012), the writing centre represents a safe space for students to talk about writing; a space which is exempt from institutional ideology and where "students can talk together to understand themselves and resist subordinate instructional forces" (Spigelman & Grobman 2005: 11). Students in this study described some of the domineering group members as 'negative influences' that prevent their free expression and learning. In response to this seclusion, some students in the study resigned themselves to keeping quiet in the GC and booked for an individual consultation afterward. One students stated, "I did not get a proper platform to say what I felt like saying at all times. Hence, I scheduled the next consultations on my own" (QS6/2016). The study deduced that this might be one of the reasons for non-participation in GC for a number of students. However, this inability to contribute or advance with the group may also be due to the student's own slow pace of learning or differing personal learning style, or to the fact that some members of the group set too high a standard, as mentioned by some of the students earlier in these findings.

-Disrespectful attitude of few group members

The study showed that students value respect from peers and are discouraged by any contrary behaviour. They bewailed the disrespectful behaviours of some of the group members, who deprived them of the chance to express their views or voices without disruption. This opportunity is important to students, as the study found that students approach the writing centre in order to obtain a second opinion on their writing or ideas. Writing centre literature has placed the blame on the students' occasional lack of respect or regard for writing centre work or staff. North (1984: 441) urged 'fellow professionals', that is faculty lecturers, to show a level of respect for writing centre work, as students may only demonstrate the same when it is modelled by their "classroom teachers". This theme relates to the theme on 'persisting disagreement among students and group conflict'. Students in the study pointed out that any negative or disrespectful attitude irremediably translated into a waste of time and of opportunity to solve writing issues for the group. These attitudes may perpetuate conflict, misunderstanding or bottleneck issues, which could only be solved through effective or positive exchange of ideas or interactions.

-Unpreparedness of few group members

In the study, themes such as "non-participation of few", "dominance of few", "absence of few", and even "unpreparedness of few" seem to represent variables that may impede the facilitation

of effective discussions or social interactions among group members. Social exchanges are key to the effectiveness of the GC. Students and consultants in the study mentioned some of the group members' unpreparedness as a major problem in the GC. As stated earlier, one of the social constructivist principles dictates that for learning to occur socially or in a group, the full participation of all is crucial. From a social constructivist perspective, this participation is key because "human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others" (Schacter 2009). When some of the group members come to the GC unprepared, both the group and the concerned students are deprived of the latter's valuable input and involvement.

-Consultant's negative attitude/ lack of professionalism

The following student statement is evidence that the writing consultant's attitude vis-à-vis students in a GC may either encourage or discourage the latter. It can either foster learning or cause students to become despondent:

> The fact that sometimes I would feel as if I know nothing… as we mostly write and feel as if our work is just too perfect and later feel as if we wrote nonsense when we are being corrected (QS43/2016).

This statement foregrounds the consultant's inability or unwillingness to provide feedback in a constructive manner. Students in the study expressed dissatisfaction with some of the consultants' negative attitude. One student stated, "The consultation people were not friendly" (QS18/2016) and another said, "I did not like anything because the person we were consulting with was only talking to the person that was asking questions all the time" (QS40/2016).

Students also mentioned the lack of professionalism relating to the consultant's drive to spoon-feed or provide them with answers. In writing centre practice, the consultant's mandate is to guide students through questioning and suggestions, and not to 'spoon-feed' or provide students with answers (Kane 2012). In the study, some students criticised the consultant for imposing his/her own views/answers on the students. Students mentioned other instances of unprofessionalism on the part of a consultant in the following terms: "We assisted each other, as the writing consultant who was supposed to help us was busy fiddling with her phone while telling us that our work is incomplete and she would rather do it with people who are serious" (QS46/2016). This consultant exhibited both a lack of interest and a complete disregard for the

students' right to be assisted in the GC. Such behaviour should not be tolerated as it infringes on the students right to education and deprives them of innumerable opportunity to improve their writing, voice, and thinking. It also contradict the idea of the writing centre consultation as a safe space, alluded to earlier.

-The lack of time

In the study, students referred to the lack of time as a major problem for the GC. Due to time constraints, consultants may not be able to attend to the needs of individual students. Other students blamed the consultant's late coming or inability to manage the consultation time more effectively. Since each group member's input is valued, groups had to wait for late comers to begin the consultation. Furthermore, as the constructivist teacher plays a mediational role, guiding students in hands-on activities, rather than an instructional one (Guthrie et al. 2004), the presence and participation of all group members is required. Most of the other students in the study confirmed that these factors contributed to the shortening of the GC time. Additionally, the video observation findings showed that students were afforded few chances to pose questions due to the lack of time.

-Disorder/noise and student varying learning styles

A few students in the study mentioned the 'noise' in the GC as one of the major problems. They stated that the GC "Was too loud" (QS4/2016). Unfortunately, a group of four students and more cannot be quiet if they are encouraged to participate in a discussion. Because the consultant's intention is to create a space where students can feel free to express themselves without unnecessary disruption, the exchanges might seem 'loud' to a student who is unaccustomed to such an environment. It is suggested therefore that this student's complaint could be because of his/her unique and different personal learning style. AL as a field encompasses issues of power relations, identity, multimodality, and learning dispositions and affordances (Canagarajah 2002; Perry 2012; Lea & Street 1996; Kane 2012), which speak to the importance of accommodating varying and differing students learning styles. Kolb (2005: 195) state that the notion of learning style pertains to differences in learning based on individual preferences in the utilisation of various learning cycle phases. Kolb posits that based on the student's hereditary equipment, prior life experiences, and the demands of the ambient environment, he or she develops a preferred way of choosing among various learning modes [or materials]. In this instance, the student developed an aversion for the GC or group work. This student's preference however cannot be accommodated, as it could be due to personal

temperament or affinity, which is unfavourable to the GC setting and dynamics. Other students in the study indicated that they preferred the one-on-one consultation to the GC, perhaps for the same reason.

Having discussed the problems that students and consultants associate with the GC, the next section explores the perceptions of participants regarding the strategy, in a bid to determine whether the latter relates to some of the features ascribed to social constructivism in higher education.

8.3. The social Constructivist Nature of the Group Consultation (GC)

8.3.1. Students and consultants' perceptions of the social interactions in GC

One of the assumptions of this thesis is that with the GC being a social activity, the principles of socio-constructivism are at play in the writing consultant-student and student-student social interactions. The study used Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is premised on the principle that if a student can perform a task with assistance from a teacher or advanced peer, they can perform it on their own (Cleborne, Johnson & Willis 1997). It is worth investigating whether this applies to the GC, which implies a group of students learning together under the guidance of a more advanced fellow student or peer (the writing consultant). Group learning is under consideration because knowledge is initially constructed in a social context, before being appropriated by individuals (Bruning et at. 1999; Cole 1992; Eggen & Kauchak 2004). Sullivan (2011) prescribed that for learning to occur in a social constructivist environment, which is in principle guided by the teacher or more advanced peer, activities should be student-centred. This is because social interactions are key to the construction of knowledge within cultural settings, and to its internalisation by individuals for learner growth (Ibid). The study found that activities in a GC pivot on discursive social practices among students, and between the students and the consultant. This section discusses student responses to the question: What was your experience of the GC?

Students in the study found the GC "informative". This theme was merged with the themes "enjoyable", due to the similarities in the reasons provided. Students stated that the GC allowed them to access and share information, and find the solutions to problems, while communicating with each other" (QS12/2016). Students in the study overwhelmingly associated their experience of the GC with positive 'feelings'. Hamilton and Barton (2000) posit that literacy

practices may reverberate beyond the actions posed with the text, to be connected to and shaped by the feelings, among other factors, which participants associate with them and the social relationships.

Pointing to the opportunity of benefiting from multiple perspectives, one student stated, "It made the work a lot easier because there were different contributions" (QS29/2016). Another stated,

> It was part of my academic growth, and I got to learn that group participation is essential to get robust ideas and different point of views from others and it even taught me how to think broadly about questions and consider the possible outcomes of how you approach different situations (QS24/2016).

It can be inferred that the GC represents an opportunity to support student learning, outside lectures and tutorials, as it exposes students to their peers' perspectives and understandings. Moreover, students in the study indicated that they were able to bounce ideas off each other and engage with and understand the peers' perspectives and thoughts. This confirms findings that peer learning can be used in facilitating student learning and development of their own voices or perspectives, and motivation or confidence (Russel et al. 2009).

Other students pointed out the constructive nature of the feedback shared among students. These students stated that GC work allowed them to become aware of their potentials as individuals, and gain a sense of confidence, as expressed in the following terms:

> It helped me especially with my fears cause I learned how to express myself and realised how my opinion counts, which basically improved my self-esteem and confidence, and it was also motivating seeing other students showing dedication to their work (QS25/2016).

Other reasons given by students in the study are that the GC exposes them to points they could have missed, which were raised by the others" (QS27/2016), and "learning new aspects of writing" (QS28/2016). Further reasons were learning how to formulate answers more appropriately or correctly, and explaining complicated and complex notions in front of a smaller group, rather than the whole class (QS52/2016).

Another term used by students in the study to describe the GC was "helpful". Reasons also included exposure to multiple student perspectives, impartation of a sense of confidence, individual attention from consultant, and the collaboration with other students as shown in the following graph:

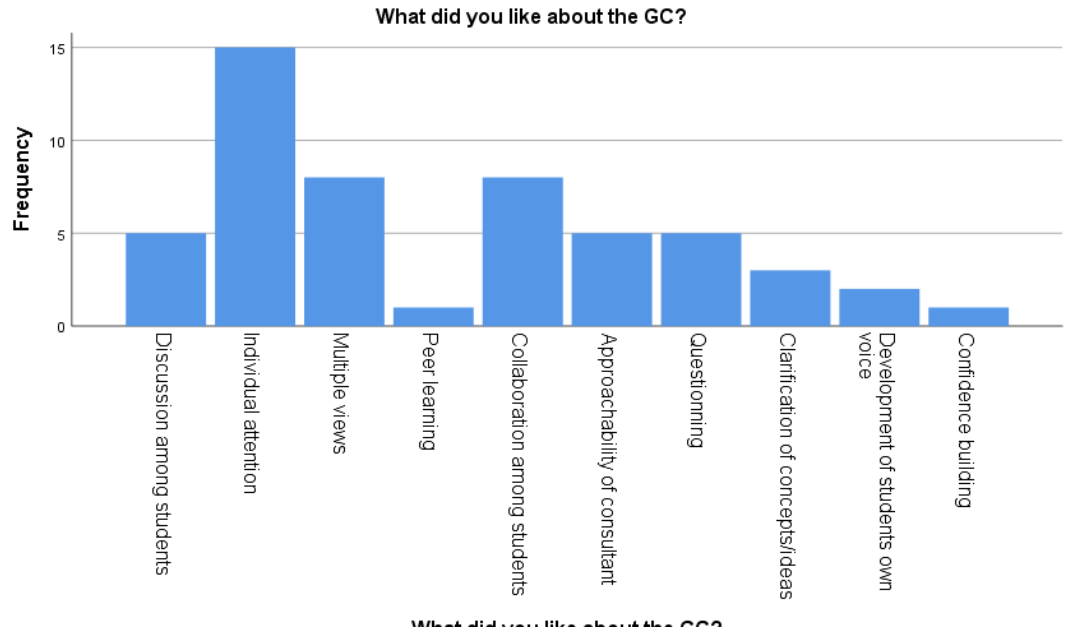


Figure 20: Students' perceptions of the GC social interactions

-Individual attention/ approachability of writing consultant

Students mentioned the "individual attention" from or "approachability of the writing consultant as reasons why they "liked the GC". Several participants expressed an appreciation of "how the consultant took time to attend to each individual's specific needs" (QS8/2016). This is in line with NLS, which prescribes attention to the individuality, identity and needs of each student (Darsot 2010; McWilliams & Allan 2014; Moje & Luke 2009). Students lauded that "everyone […] had a chance to participate and share their knowledge (brainstorming)" (QS27/2016). This is consistent with Street's (1995, 2005) emphasis that through participation in literacy, as a social act, and interactions, the participants constantly alter the nature of the literacy. Consequently, it is crucial for a writing consultant to involve any single student in the GC into the interactions. Most of these responses point to the approachability of the consultant, perhaps and assumedly, as opposed to, the discipline lecturer or tutor who is limited by the large size of the class. Recent research in the South African context has highlighted the large-class size as one of the major impediment to AL development (Archer 2017; Dison & Clarence 2017).

-Collaboration among students

Chapter 7 noted that students also "liked" the element of collaboration with other students in the GC. Liu and Lan (2016) emphasised the importance of collaborative learning in higher education, due to the complexity of academic and disciplinary literacies. Storch (2005) found that collaboration in a social constructivist environment can better facilitate the sharing of ideas and feedback among students. According to Applefield et al. (2001), one of the determinant factors of effective learning in the social constructivist classroom is collaboration among students and with the teacher, or facilitator, through interactions. Interactions in this instance often occur in the form of discussions. I referred to the constructivist Harkness Discussion Method, where students as a group and driven by self-motivation may carry out and control their own discussion in a non-competitive environment, and where the only prerogatives of the teacher are 'distant' observation and intermittent guidance. Such discussions may result in an increase of student ability to test ideas, synthesise ideas from peers, and build deeper understanding of the content (Lessow-Hurley 2012; Ormrod & Jones 2012). They represent opportunities for students to 'talk' about their ideas and develop their thinking and reasoning skills, while arguing their opinions persuasively (Ormrod & Jones 2012). Large and small group discussions offer students the feeling of belonging to a community and collaborating with others through talk and discussion (Hunt & Agnoli 1991). Students pointed out that collaboration was rendered attractive by the 'open' cooperation among students, the tolerance shown regarding differences of views and preferences, the opportunity to express one's views freely, and the chance to deal with complex issues as a group. One student stated,

> The fact that whatever we were dealing with, the essay writing, we went through it step by step, which allowed us an opportunity to even engage with each other and we were also granted an opportunity to learn new things and more information was introduced to enhance our essay (QS47/2016).

In addition to instilling a sense of responsibility and ownership of the learning process, group discussions offer several advantages including, the opportunity for students to achieve the transfer of knowledge from classroom learning and building a solid foundation for the application and communication of ideas in other contexts [my emphasis] (Ormrod & Jones 2012).

-Multiple perspectives/views

As confirmed in the previous sections, students valued the opportunity of learning from multiple perspectives, that is, "different opinions" (QS4/2016) or "different views" (QS11/2016) in the GC. Social constructivist aspects of the GC underlie the group members' process of sharing individual perspectives, referred to as collaborative elaboration (van Meter and Stevens 2000), resulting in the learners improved understanding and learning together (Greeno et al. 1996). Also, students mentioned the realisation that they were not the only ones to hold a certain views. This is because, in Social constructivist terms, learning is an active process of discovery in which students learn to uncover principles, concepts and facts on their own, through 'guess work, trial and error, and intuitive thinking' (Ackerman 2001; Brown et al. 1989). Moreover, students stated to have been exposed to views, which were different from theirs, and which they learnt to either refute or agree with, partially or completely. This corroborates the view that as knowledge is socially and culturally constructed by humans, through engagement with each other, learners make meaning through interaction with each other and with the surrounding environment (Ernest 1993; Prawat & Floden 1994). Learning in the GC is preconditioned by the students' and consultant's ability to value, capacitate and nurture collaboration in all activities.

-Peer learning

This study found that the GC may enable a student to reconsider their own views, thinking, and attitudes through exposure to those of others and with the help of other group members. Lundstrom and Baker (2009) investigated feedback in the context of peer review, with the intention of investigating which one between giving feedback and receiving feedback resulted in an improvement in the students' writing skills. Students from an intensive writing programme were grouped into feedback "givers" and feedback "receivers". The findings showed that the "givers", who examined the other students' writing demonstrated more noticeable improvements in the writing during the semester, than the "receivers". It has been found that in a peer-learning environment such as the writing centre, learning occurs effectively through non-judgmental feedback and guided writing process (Archer 2011; Kane 2012). It could be inferred that through the GC, students 'consult' with peers, and benefit from the social interactions, by clarifying their own thoughts about an assignment and integrating other students' inputs into their own ideas. Students in the study stated, that one can "learn a lot of from other people" (QS20/2016) and that the GC "helped us realise our weaknesses and strengths" (QS31/2016).

In practical terms, Grabble and Kaplan (1996) prescribe that one way of implementing peer learning effectively is by providing students with peer-review guidelines and requesting them to present their written responses to each other by reading them out in the class and to complete an evaluation or reflection form. While this approach presents the benefit of exposing students to their peer's innovative and creative ideas and discovering new ways of reading specific genres, its weakness is that students are given no instructions, except to read each other's papers and make suggestions for improvement. The benefit of this type of peer review and feedback is that students will see similar problems and weaknesses in their own writing, which could boost their sense of confidence and expose them to ways of overcoming them.

-Group Discussion

Students and consultants in the study pointed to discussion as one of the most positive aspects of the GC, as it enables free communication or exchange of ideas. However, the study zoomed into the strategy to gather a sense of what constitutes a social constructivist discussion in the GC context. One student specified,

> The mentor [or consultant] who was conducting the discussions was giving each one of us a chance to say out our own views. He would then take it from there by telling us what his views were and we understood and agreed to what he was saying most of the time (QS45/2016).

It can be seen that the consultant was in control of the activities in the session, but is that advisable? Grabe and Kaplan (1996: 306, 315, 379) discussed some of the principles that underlie successful group discussions, including Cooperative Learning and Group Work, Guided Group Discussions and Peer Group Responses. Cooperative Learning intends to stimulate cooperation in inquiry and interaction among students, who are responsible for the group outcome to achieve a common goal. Each student in the group is allocated a task such as leading the group, encouraging interaction, documenting progress, and acting as a spokesperson for the group, for the group to solve problems together and support one another. In such a setting, the teacher's role is the scaffolding of tasks, modelling of desired behaviour, and monitoring of activities. Cooperative Learning groups share a number of features including offering an array of options for students, instructing them in social and interpersonal communication and leadership skills, promoting a sense of cohesiveness among members,

taking the perspectives of individual members into consideration, and ensuring the logical organisation of tasks. The group often emphasises each member's responsibility to contribute to the attainment of the set objectives. Given the findings of this study, the Cooperative learning approach as such cannot be applied to the GC, because it is too structured.

The Group Investigative Method seeks to break large projects into smaller ones to be accomplished by subgroups that are responsible for planning, executing and reporting on the work. The Group Investigative method cannot apply to GC due to the sub-group aspect, which would require more time and space.

The Learning Together Method stresses the necessity of team members to work together throughout the project through team-building activities, discussion and teacher support. The Learning Together method represents only one aspect of the GC. The Jigsaw encourages group and intergroup cooperation by giving members from different groups different sets of information and instructing them to join other group members with similar information to work together to achieve the goal. Groups then regroup and collate the information to achieve a broader goal. The Jigsaw method can be prescribed for larger group and projects, and not for the GC.

The Structural Approach, which instructs students on how to organise and present information for larger activities, using various types of cooperative strategies, is only one aspect of the GC. Finally, the Student Learning Method focuses on content-area learning, based on the prospects of member accountability, team reward (Wertsch 1997) and multi opportunities for success. The Student Learning method also represents an aspect of the GC.

Peer Group Response, which is strongly supported by writing process researchers because feedback is provided by a person other than the teacher, involves students bringing their completed drafts to class and exchanging drafts with their classmates for feedback purposes (Ibid 379). As stated earlier, students may be provided with peer-review guidelines and be required to present their written responses to class readings to the group, and even complete an evaluation or reflection form. The weakness of this approach is that students are given no instruction except to read each other's papers and comment. In addition to peer review and feedback, the benefits of this approach are that students will see similar problems and weaknesses in their own writing, be exposed to their peer's innovative and creative ideas, and

discover new ways of reading specific genres. This approach relates to two theoretical trends: the Reader-Response or Poststructuralist approach to text analysis and interpretation, whereby the reader creates and recreates the substance of texts, which are no longer considered as inherent to the text (380). The second trend, the Socio-Cognitive Approach to learning posits that the acquisition and utilisation of knowledge occur through negotiated interactions, involving real intentions to communicate with real audience expectations. This approach values the social context in which communication occurs, and lends itself partially to the framework of this study.

Additionally, Grabe and Kaplan's (1996: 347) Guided Group Discussions, which involves students planning their writing, reading and responding to specific texts, through a rigorous process of inquiry, lends itself better to the social constructivist nature of the GC. The teacher's constant questioning of the students interpretations and opinion steers the discussions in a different perspective on the texts and the writing itself each time (Applefield et al. 2001). The discussions of the readings for instance aim to direct the students to re-evaluate the evidence, the logic of arguments, the substance in a theoretical perspective and the conclusions to be drawn. Students are taught to challenge each other and exercise critical reading skills. The discussions often culminate in the writing of summaries in response to the readings; alternatively, students can work to schematically represent the information.

This study found that the 'discussion' element of the GC is closely related to the 'questioning', 'explanation' and 'clarification' components, and to other GC facilitation strategies, and could even be underlying any GC facilitation strategy.

-Questioning

Sullivan (2011: 25) posits that questioning may be utilised in the social constructivist classroom whereby knowledge can be construed between class participants, including the instructor. In this study, one student stated, "We asked a lot of question of which I wouldn't have asked if I was alone" (QS34/2016), and another stated that the GC "also gave us the opportunity to be able to have answers to questions that I thought could be irrelevant and unimportant" (QS38/2016). These students are referring to the consultant's questioning as a process leading them to their own answers. The social constructivist nature of the GC enables this knowledge construction in a manner that challenges the lecturer's status as "purveyor of knowledge and truth", particularly in an academic setting, to portray him/her as a member of this particular

learning community (Ibid: 27). In Sullivan's (2011) study, as discussed in Chapter 2, the self-referent instructor sometimes used 'rhetorical' questions to seek feedback in a friendly and relaxed manner, negotiating procedural details of the class and syllabus. In the study, both students and consultants stated that they valued the consultants' use of questioning and agreed that through questioning students were able to reflect on and address assignment problems/ questions. Writing centre practice and research suggest a non-directive approach and collaborative approach to writing consultation facilitation, through questioning, which is to be construed as a primary method in assisting writers to discover their own meaning (Kane 2012; Shabanza 2014; Shamoon & Burns 1995). In a sense, consultants should not dictate answers, but guide writers/students through questioning in formulating their own plans for writing and effective revision.

-Clarification/ Explanation of concepts/ideas

Students and consultants used the words "explain[ed]", "explanation" or clarification", pertaining to the "clarification of ideas" as the reason why they liked the GC. The study found that in GC, consultants are afforded more time or opportunities to 'explain' or 'clarify' complex or new concepts. A participant stated that they valued "the way the mentor [consultant] took time to carefully explain the contents of the required assignment and being able to ask questions from individually or group" (QS36/2016). Students also valued the chance to explain ideas or concepts in their own words: "the fact that everyone was given a chance to try to explain clearly where and how they need help" (QS40/2016). In spite of the writing centre practice or pedagogy principle discouraging consultants from dictating answers or spoon-feeding students, and although consultants are to guide the writers through questioning in formulating their own plans for writing and for effective revision, consultants may be forced to 'teach' or 'explain' certain concepts.

When an L2 student requests to receive help with grammar, spelling and punctuation for instance, the request should not be deflected or postponed with a suggestion to first focus on the text, as a whole. Powers (1993) advocated that the consultant plays the role of cultural informant explaining to the L2 writers, for instance, how educational expectations differ from their own cultural practices with which they are familiar. Moreover, the knowledge and expertise about academic and disciplinary conventions, rules, genres and cultures, should be made accessible to students by the consultant. This is because the latter is better placed to act as a mediator between the student and their disciplines; since lecturers and tutors cannot afford

to take each student by the hand and introduce them to these cultures, due to large class sizes and time constraints.

-Development of students' own voice

This study has established that the GC model is based on peer learning and collaboration among all participants. Myatt (2017: 10) emphasised the importance of allowing all voices to find expression for an effective collaborative activity. He went on to state that space must be open for voices other than those of teachers, tutors, directors, and others in the learning space. In this study, students and consultants mentioned the development of students' own voice as a positive element of the GC. One student stated, "I got to voice out my opinion regarding the essay" (QS43/2016). Recent research has characterised the writing centre as a safe and non-judgmental space, where students can talk to their peers about their own work (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996: 315; Kane, 2012: 48). This was confirmed in the study where, another student pointed out "we took our time to help each other without looking down at others as we don't have the same strength and weaknesses as students" (QS50/2016). "Without looking down at each other" in a non-threatening way and in a manner that would allow the timid students, for instance, to speak. Archer (2008: 143) states that the writing centre trains students in understanding and accessing the specific disciplinary practices and discourses, and in metacognition. The support provided by the writing centre enables students to stay in the system until graduation (Thokozile & Archer 2011: 148). She emphasises the importance of the writing centre in the academic socialisation process where students are coached into academic genres, and organisational and structural aspects of writing in specific disciplines and at institutional level in a neutral and supportive environment (Archer & Parkerson 2011), especially through the one-on-one [and group] consultation model. She argues that the individualised attention on the students' AL needs have increased the level of self-confidence and self-reliance in students, concomitantly to a development in their own voice and agency in writing (Archer 2011: 354).

-Consultant's positive attitude

Closely related to the depiction of the writing centre as a safe learning space for students, referred to above, is the consultant's positive attitude. Students and consultants referred to the consultant's positive attitude as an element of encouragement in the GC. One pointed out that "the tutor [writing consultant] was patient and took us through everything and she was friendly" (QS46/2016). Another stated,

> It was good because the lecturer [or writing consultant] who helped us was not a dictator. She was sharing ideas with us and challenged us which helped me and other members to think out of the box and be analytical about how to approach situations (QS24/2016).

The success of the writing centres in the South African context especially is premised on the students' perception of the centre as a safe non-judgmental space, where students can talk to their peers about their own work (Grabe & Kaplan 1996: 315; Kane 2012: 48). This study found that not all students who visit the writing centres are 'at risk' or 'weak' students: some of them simply need a second opinion on their drafts or/and use the writing consultant as a 'resounding board' in the writing process. The latter's willingness to create space for the student to talk freely is paramount. In the focus groups, students complained that some of the consultants were impatient and inconsiderate, while others showed disregard and disrespect. Students' responses show that the onus is on the consultant to render the GC space safe, encouraging and empowering for students through positive attitudes and behaviours. Devlin and McKay (2014) suggest that instructors and teachers, to facilitate students' transition into university, should model for students the kind of behaviours and attitudes that are conducive to learning.

8.3.2. Discursive Practices in the Group Consultation

8.3.2.1. Student Practices: a social constructivist perspective

This study has established the social constructivist nature of the GC, which remains underpinned by prevailing social interactions. This section therefore discusses the activities that students engage in during the GC in order to investigate the associated social interactions or practices. When asked to describe what the students did throughout the GC, consultants used terms such as "explained their understanding", "listened and took notes", "asked questions", "checked their own work", and "followed the consultant's instructions". They also mentioned "answered the consultant's questions", "read assignment aloud", and "clarified their writing needs". Most of these terms tacitly point to the interdependence between the students and the consultant, as well as among students. Learning in the GC depends on these interactions.

-Students explaining: explanation

Explanation was discussed previously from the consultant's perspective. It was found that consultants often felt the need to explain or teach in spite of the writing centre practice principle prohibiting any spoon-feeding of students (Kane 2012; North 1984). This section focuses rather on explanations provided by students. Most consultants in the study indicated that they proceeded by asking students to explain the assignment, their understanding and their need in the GC. One consultant stated, "they [students] provided information regarding their understanding of what the assignment is about and specifically what they generally needed help with" (QWC2/2016). Another stated,

> They provide explanation reflecting their understanding of how to deal with the common issues. They explain the instructions guiding the report/assignment/proposal as understood by them. They answer questions asked by the consultants. They take notes of the suggestions offered by the consultants (QWC7/2016).

As can be seen, these responses link concepts such as 'understanding' and 'reflection' to 'explanation'. Consultants afforded students an opportunity to explain the assignment or its content as a way for the latter to reflect on, better understand, and reinforce disciplinary knowledge. Furthermore, as stated early in this thesis, explanation by students facilitates the development of their own voice as writers and as members of their academic and/or disciplinary communities (Archer 2011). Affording students an opportunity to explain concepts and write to one another is crucial because, as Clarence (2012: 129) asserts, several "disciplinary academics have become so inured to their disciplinary ways of knowing, thinking and writing that they may and do struggle to clarify their own disciplinary conventions". As a result, difficult concepts not understood by some students can be explained or underlined by their peers in the group. This corroborates Vygotsky's (1984) ZPD, where more advanced or knowledgeable peers may assist others.

-Students asking questions: questioning

This study found that students value the opportunity to pose questions throughout the consultation. This is in line with Schcolnik, Kol, and Abarbanel's (2006: 15) postulation that in a social constructivist classroom, students may initiate questions in the learning process. Similarly, Tsang (2011) asserts that one of the most critical activities of students in collaborative group discussions would be questioning. The study showed that students posed

questions not only to the consultants, but also to one another, as a form of collaboration. The essential nature of interactions among students is evident in Clarence's (2012) caution that, to be 'liberatory' and not 'regulatory', in a manner that questions, or resist [my emphasis], rather than normalise academic or disciplinary discourses or literacies, students should be guided to 'talk' about their work. There is a sense that in order to question existing literacies, the students should be 'directing' the questioning or talk, as opposed to 'talk' directed by a lecturer or writing consultant, which would literally aim to 'force already marginalised students to change" (Carter 2007: 141).

Consultants stressed that students mostly posed questions for clarification and understanding. This corroborates a point made in the previous section regarding Clarence's (2012) statements that some disciplinary academics do not explain or make their disciplinary concepts or conventions explicit; hence, the need for writing consultants to afford students a platform to pose questions and provide said explanation for one another. Consultants equally indicated that it is important for students to pose questions, as a sign of involvement, and for learning purposes. It was found however that the students' use of questioning was not always noble: Consultants pointed out that most students expected answers and asked leading questions to entice the consultant to provide them with answers or solve some of their assignment problems. As a result, to use questioning effectively, consultants should be trained in extensive questioning (Kinkead & Harris 1993: 156).

-Students answering questions

Closely related to questioning is 'answering questions'. Answering questions in a GC is similar to writing itself in the sense that it requires students to exercise a level of agency (Russel et al. 2001). Russel posits that unlike multiple-choice questions, writing forces students to develop a voice and a perception of themselves as empowered selves, who have something to say. Russel goes on to state that perceiving themselves in this light represents for students a decision to choose a writer identity and an act of participation in this 'powerful' social practice and in the practices of their disciplines. In the study, consultants indicated that they asked questions seeking clarity to help the students explore and understand the assignment or disciplinary content. One consultant stated,

> [The students] filled in forms, explained their concerns and specific needs, explained to the consultant the nature of the assignment and their understanding of it, answered

> questions from the consultants when she needed clarity on their work, and effected some changes during consultation (QWC4/2016).

Another explained,

> The students fill in the writing centre form on arrival and then speak to the brief of the assignment at hand and take out their assignment hard copy. In some cases, this [the copy] is electronic - as some students claim not to be aware of the writing centre policy. In the case of an electronic copy, the students sit where the screen is visible to all involved. The students then answer leading questions asked by the consultant to guide the students in terms of the demands of the question. Lastly the students sign the writing centre form (QWC5/2016).

In a GC, students are forced to assume responsibility for their own learning, as opposed to a large class tutorial or lecture. The study showed that answering the consultant's questions was for some students the first time to engage with their disciplinary content. Drennan (2017) states that "writing is a helpful tool to come to grips with difficult content; creating a sense of awareness about audience and practice when writing assignments for different disciplines; helping students develop their authentic voice and avoid plagiarism". Some students in the survey and focus group stated that the GC was useful as it exposed them to aspects of the assignment or questions that they could not have encountered had they remained on their own.

-Students following the consultant's instructions

Consultants also indicated that students mostly requested and depended on the consultant's instructions and guidance. This purported student dependence on the consultant for learning could be contrary to AL and social constructivist principles, which prescribe that the consultant plays the role of a reserved and distant guide or facilitator. As discussed in Chapter 2, the social constructivist teachers play a mediational role rather than an instructional one. They guide hands-on activities (Guthrie et al. 2004); coach students in achieving their goals (Alesandrini & Larson 2002); ensure, in a problem-based learning approach, that students are exposed to multiple problems and that students attempt to develop their own understanding of the problems (Alesandrini & Larson 2002). Activities in a social constructivist environment should be student-centered (Hmelo-Silver & Barrows 2006). As a result, in the GC context, the consultant would not 'give' instructions, but allow the group of students to self-regulate, generate their own questions and work together to find answers.

However, consultants in the study provided a sense that because students may not always "know what they do not know", they would be obliged to guide the students step-by-step in the process of solving their own writing problem, which they would clearly spell out at first. Consultants stated, "Most of the writers ask you to help them with checking the grammar, the referencing, the content or the layout" (QWC8/2016) and "Often they'd present drafts, inform the consultant that they were interested in knowing whether their writing was 'on the right track', and then wait for the consultant's opinion" (QWC9/2016). Another indicated, "They [students] would provide an overview of their work then seek assistance in improving the structure and flow. Sometimes they would seek assistance with referencing" (QWC13/2016). In most writing centres, consultants are trained to assist students in addressing the higher order concerns (broader issues, such as answering an assignment question or addressing a topic), first, before moving on to the middle (such as text unity, organisation or structure) and lower order concerns (grammar, spelling and punctuation). Consultants pointed out that it is their responsibility to manage the consultation in order to create an environment, which is conducive to learning, and direct activities for an effective GC; while playing a mediational, and not an instructional role.

-Students reading aloud

Consultant emphasised the students' reading of their assignment aloud for the consultant and the group. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 2, this is in line with the writing centre practice principle that students should retain ownership of the assignment or written work (North 1984). Secondly, the reading may be self-diagnostic in the sense that as the student reads they can hear themselves, pick up errors, and correct themselves in the process (Shabanza 2014). This is confirmed by Archer (2017: 6), who states that "students also often pick up on their own language mistakes and logical inconsistencies when reading aloud". The consultant stated,

> Most groups tend to just push the copy of their assignments to the consultant immediately after greetings. This is followed by an unclear description of the assignment given. Then individuals feel compelled to take turns in reading the portion compiled by them in the group assignment. Normally, during the reading, students read absent-mindedly such that they cannot notice that the entire paragraph does not link to the subheading under discussion (QWC14/2016).

The consultant alludes to the necessity for the student to read actively in order to identify inconsistencies and errors. From a social constructivist perspective, while reading aloud, the student is reading not only for him/herself, but also and most importantly for the group; for the consultant to hear, assess and provide feedback, and for the visual and verbal feedback of peers. Castle (2017: 131) posits that "the reading aloud process acknowledges and appreciates the diversity of voices and the quality of ideas produced by writers through freewriting, and also builds confidence among them, in their ability to generate meaningful text, quickly and easily". Castle also argues that when writers take turns reading aloud, they are soliciting responses and critique from peers.

It can be seen that student practices, far from constituting mere cognitive, administrative, or even operational activities, cast the students as dependent on and involved in the activities, social or otherwise, of the group and those of the consultant. The next section discusses the consultant practices.

8.3.2.2. Writing Consultant Practices: a social constructivist perspective

Consultants in the study underlined a defined number of tasks as part of their practices in the GC. From the 2014 survey questionnaires, focus groups, video-observations, and 2016 survey questionnaires, the following themes were mentioned and confirmed: "listened to students", "posed questions", "explained assignment" and "instructed students to explain assignment". It can be seen from the onset that some of the consultant practices are identical to some students practices, as discussed previously. The practices, which were mentioned by both students and consultants are students and consultant "questioning", students "listening", students "explaining", and consultants "instructing" students. Themes are discussed only briefly in the following lines, as they have been discussed in detail previously.

-Consultant questioning students: "Posed questions"

This study concurs with writing centre research that consultants use questioning as a consultation facilitation strategy (Archer 2017). Students in the research pointed out that in the GC the consultant mostly 'posed questions'. Among the reasons for using questioning, consultants mentioned facilitating learning and understanding, clarifying difficult concepts, and developing student critical thinking and independent thinking. One consultant pointed out that she used questioning to facilitate learning. She stated,

> I introduced myself, explained the role of the writing centre so that we can be on the same page/ laying ground rules so that the students can understand what I am in a position to do and what I cannot do. I give students a chance to introduce themselves and to also highlight some of the needs they have concerning the assignment. From there, the discussion begins. I ask leading questions in guiding the students towards learning (QWC11/2016).

Other consultants stated that they used questioning to clarify the students' understanding and spot any misconceptions. In social constructivist terms, systematic questioning, also referred to as Socratic Questioning, can lead the student to the discovery of the answer or exploration of the text (Vygotsky, 1981). This was implied by one of the consultants in the study:

> As the consultant, when students arrived and were seated, I welcomed them and introduced myself. Students were told to feel free to express themselves. I enquired from the students what the assignment was about and about any related instructions and guidelines associated with the task. I asked leading questions to establish what the students needed help with. Figured out how to address the needs of the students in the most effective way. I asked questions at intervals and encouraged students to do so as well. This was to make sure that what was being addressed is meaningful to the students and clarified any misconceptions. At the end of the process, students were encouraged to book for a follow-up consultation if deemed necessary. The necessary forms were handed out to be completed by the students (QWC2/2016).

The consultant emphasises that as she proceeds through questioning, she encourages students to do the same. Questioning allows writing consultants to guide students in the learning process, without imposing themselves or their views, or spoon-feeding the students with answers or solutions to their writing needs or problems.

Consultants also used questioning to gauge the students' understanding. Piaget (1970: 57) concurs that in a constructivist learning environment, individual understandings of reality are perpetually being revised and reconstructed based on exposure to new experiences. Through consultant-student engagement and questioning in a GC, the knowledge problems and gaps of individual students are exposed and dealt with through discursive processing. This process

unearths and exploits the otherwise previously unspoken writing experiences of others and/or all in the group. Kim (2006) argues group inter-subjectivity is achieved when individuals extend their understandings of new information and activities through exposure to those of other group members. The following consultants' response shows such intent to foreground the concerns and ideas of individual group members:

> I asked students to tell me what they needed help with. I asked them to explain their understandings of the assignment questions. I asked probing questions to understand the assignment and to get an understanding of how much they understand. I made sure all members participated. I gave them suggestions on their concerns and suggestions to work as a team (QWC3/2016).

In the study, another consultant stated that she asked a series of questions to promote the students' independent thinking. To promote the latter, writing centre pedagogy and practice recommends the non-directive and collaborative approaches to writing consultation facilitation, which utilise questioning as a primary method in assisting writers to discover their own meaning (Kane 2012; Shabanza 2014; Shamoon & Burns 1995). In this pedagogy, consultants do not dictate answers, but guide the writers through questioning in formulating effective writing plans.

To justify the use of questioning, consultants also pointed to the development of students' critical thinking and sense of engagement with the subject content. Similarly, Grabe and Kaplan's (1996: 347) Guided Group Discussions, as explained in Chapter 2, recommend a rigorous process of inquiry, carried out through questioning, to involve students in the planning, writing, and reading of their writing, in response to specific texts. Of crucial importance is the teacher's constant questioning of the students interpretations and opinions, which steers the discussions in various perspectives on the texts and the writing itself each time. Focusing on the readings, such questioning should enable the students to re-evaluate the evidence, the logic of arguments, the substance in a theoretical perspective and the conclusions to be drawn. This rigorous process may culminate in the students' development of their own understanding of problems (Alesandrini & Larson 2002).

-Consultants listening: "Listened to students"

Writing centre practice discourages consultants from monopolising talk or assuming ownership of student work (Kane 2012). They should allow or enable students to "do the talking" (Mitoumba-Tindy 2017), while listening attentively for a more effective and meaningful writing and consultation experience. It can be inferred that in order to use questioning effectively, consultants need above average listening skills, in addition to encouraging students to talk through discussion and explanation. This study found that students value the consultants' "calculated" participation in their discussions, and that consultants should not dominate the discussions, but promote the exchange of ideas between students.

-Consultants explaining: Explanation of issues/concepts

Consultants confirmed that they 'explained' most of the time. Students stated that the consultants explained the assignment requirements and other aspects of writing, such as the introduction and conclusion, which seemed difficult to write for most students in the GC. The challenges and opportunities of explanation as a consultant practice have been discussed previously under student practices. The study found that the consultants listened to the discussions and only intervened to make corrections and provide the needed explanation. One student stated, "yes, correcting and explaining why things were wrong" (QS3/2016) and another said, "yes, the consultant listened to our views and explained to us if our views were wrong" (QS2/2016). Consultants also interrupted discussions to provide examples for better understanding and to enhance the quality of discussions.

Consultants also intervened for purposes of clarity or further information, as expressed in the following responses: "Yes by adding additional information wherever needed" (QS4/2016) and a student stated, "Yes. He intervened as much as possible to give clarity" (QS5/2016). Several participants stated that the consultant participated in the discussions in order to clarify the students' understanding. One stated,

> Yes, He mostly wanted to find out what our understanding of the requirements of the work was, then he rectified where we were mistaken. He also gave us a clear understanding on how to tackle the topics that needed to be discussed (i.e what is important when extracting information from a source and what is not to include in the write up) (QS6/2016).

Another who pointed out that the consultant intervened only intermittently, said, “Just a bit to give us some pointers here and there to understand the theme that we were dealing with as a group” (QS15/2016). Another pointed out, “yes but not to a large extent” (QS52/2016).

The study found that consultants also intervened to make suggestions. One student said, “yes she even suggested ways on how to improve our literature review” (QS9/2016). Another pointed out “yes, by telling us what was wrong and how can we improve” (QS10/2016). Consultants also aimed to provide “us feedback and correcting our mistakes or misunderstanding” (QS14/2016).

-Consultants making suggestions

Writing centre practice and research encourages consultants to make suggestions and not impose their views or answers (Kane 2012; Archer 2012). The following student responses confirm this principle: a student stated that “the consultant listened whilst we gave different opinions and never participated afterwards. She then added her opinions and expressed how she felt and how she sees things on her perspective” (QS7/2016). Another student stated, she “read our literature review and suggested ways on how to improve it, and also told us to in text referencing” (QS9/2016). Another student pointed out, “The person that was helping with the consultation wanted to see what we had written and gave us pointers on how we can write an essay and make it more interesting so that we can be able to get more marks as a group” (QS15/2016). A further response stated, the consultant “had suggestions that made perfect sense, helped us edit and correct a few errors” (QS40/2016). In a multidisciplinary writing centre context, where the consultant may not be seen as a content expert (Johnson, Clark, and Burton 2015), and where the praxis revolves around embedding academic literacies interventions into the disciplinary curriculum (Archer 2012), consultants should adopt a rather reserved stance in their work with students, particularly regarding the subject-specific content of assignments.

-Consultants making students read aloud

In the study, consultants and students agreed that there were several benefits of having students read their writing aloud. Reading aloud enables students to identify their own errors: “they made us read our work so that we can identify the problem ourselves” (QS19/2016). While some students approach the writing centre with the expectation that consultants may literally ‘do’ their work for them (North 1984), reading aloud enables the students to peruse their work

more attentively, identifying mistakes/errors, and correcting them. This corroborates one of the most fundamental principles of social constructivism, which emphasises the student's responsibility for learning, and not the instructor's, to actively participate in the learning process by constructing their own understanding (Vygotsky 1981). The importance for students to read aloud and its role in learning has been discussed previously under student practices.

-Consultants engaging in discussion with students

The social constructivist aspect of discussion in the GC has been discussed earlier in this Chapter. As stated in Chapter 2, socio-constructivist perspectives for the higher education context show preference for group discussion, an aspect of GC, as a pedagogical application for several reasons. Firstly, engaging in group discussion may enable students to generalise and transfer the learnt knowledge to other contexts, while developing their capacity to communicate their knowledge verbally (Reznitskaya, Anderson & Kuo 2007). This is shown in the following student response, where the participant refers to how the writing assistance may help students achieve better results in the context of their discipline. The student stated,

> We discussed things that we failed to understand as we are first year students and are not familiar with the system. He made sure that we always find alternative ways of doing things. He emphasised on things that could really make us obtain good marks and lectured us on that we don't pay attention to our school work and we should start taking it seriously [...] and encouraged us to think positively about ourselves (QS29/2016).

Secondly, group discussions may contribute to an improvement in the students' ability to test their ideas, synthesise the ideas of others, and develop their understanding of what they are learning (Ibid). This ability of students to evaluate ideas is shown where one student stated, the GC "improved how we communicate and how things are supposed to be when involved in a group" (QS32/2016). Thirdly, discussion creates opportunities for students to exercise self-regulation, self-determination, and a desire to persevere with tasks (Corden 2001; Matsumara, Slater & Crosson 2008). One could also add increasing student motivation, collaborative skills, and the ability to solve problems to the list. Fourthly, discussion creates opportunities for students to talk with one another and discuss their ideas, which increases their ability to support their thinking, develop reasoning skills, and argue their opinions persuasively and respectfully (Reznitskaya, Anderson & Kuo 2007). Lastly, the feeling of community and collaboration in classrooms increases as students freely interact with each other.

When asked whether they participated in the GC, 13 consultants (81%) (n=16) agreed "yes" and only one (n=16) replied "no". This shows that in most GCs, the consultants' participation is notable, but not dominant, as shown in the associated responses. The consultants emphasised that they only intervened intermittently to guide or refocus the discussions. One consultant stated, "sometimes I will recapitulate what they said or ask probing questions when they are going out of context in order to bring them back on track. So I guide these discussions" (QWC3/2016). Another indicated, "In a limited manner, only to guide students with regards to the assignment at large" (QWC4/2016), "I facilitate the discussion but the students discuss" (QWC11/2016), and "yes but mainly to prompt and guide. More like a facilitator" (QWC12/2016). The following response specified that the consultant intervened, but 'not aggressively':

> Yes, not aggressively to allow student peer learning to take place. Especially since writing consultants are not content based unlike tutors. Sometimes specific content examples can drive engagement and critical analysis from the rest of the group with the help of more leading questions from the consultant. (QWC13/2016).

As stated earlier, consultants intervened by posing questions, making suggestions, providing some explanation, or clarification. One consultant indicated, "Yes. By asking questions and suggesting points that will help the students to put their ideas in right perspectives. By helping them to organise and present their thoughts and findings in correct order" (QWC6/2016). Another posited, "I always participate in the discussions by clarifying some concepts and giving some directions to the writers" (QWC7/2016). Still another said,

> Yes, I would alwaysand ensure that whatever they explained to each other as a group was clear to everyone, and was within the acceptable standards of academic literacy and helpful for both the assignment and their academic development (QWC8/2016).

Another consultant mentioned a more nuanced approach where students are encouraged to consider multiple perspectives. The consultant stated, "yes, I did participate just to provide clarity. But in my approach in academics no one is right or wrong, I take the considerations of both sides and invite them to be constructive and consider other's views" (QWC14/2016). In these 2016 questionnaire findings 48 participants (91%) (n=53) indicated that the consultant

intervened in the student discussions. Triangulation with the 2014 questionnaires, focus groups and video observation findings, shows that the consultant intervenes to harmonise views, ensure that the students did not digress or prevent any dominant voices from monopolising or diverting the discussions.

-Consultants offering AL assistance: "offered help"

Consultants in writing centre practice are trained not to impose a GC agenda (Kane 2012; Shabanza 2017). The latter should be dictated by the student; hence, the consultant should ask the student, "How can I help you?" even when the student's need is apparent or obvious. Students in the study confirmed that consultants repeatedly offered help. One student stated, "she [the consultant] asked us what we needed help on, asked us questions, then she explained how to do it and get better marks" (QS25/2016). AL and NLS considerations recommend a student-centered approach, where all interventions or activities are geared towards the student's learning style (Kolb 2005; McWilliams & Allan 2014: 10; Nyback 2013), dispositions, preferences, strengths, weaknesses, difficulties, and needs (Devlin & McKay 2014:106).

-Consultants interacting with students

In the context of this study, the term 'interaction' may be conceptualised in opposition to 'facilitation', 'lecturing' or 'teaching', to denote a two-way or dialogic exchange of ideas. Students indicated that the consultant interacted with students most of the time in the GC. A student stated "He [the consultant] would take our details down, and then start interacting with us, making us feel comfortable, and addresses our concerns" (QS5/2016). Hewitt (2016) states that through interaction, "learners may be enabled to make sense of experiences and develop new understandings which are then internalised". She goes on that learners should be seen as participants in the social environment of the classroom, where knowledge is constructed jointly by individuals in a mediated social context (Pelech & Pieper 2010, cited in Hewitt 2016) and where the role of the teacher is primordial. This role is dealt with under group discussion, in the previous sections. It was found that consultants encouraged discussion to promote the sharing of ideas. A student stated, "Yes she did. She listened to us first and engaged in the discussion to share her ideas too and everyone had a chance to speak" (QS18/2016). This was also done to bring discussions back on track, as stated in the following terms, "Yes, this was done mostly when we all have different ideas about the issue, so we did this in order to come up with one answer to the problem" (QS13/2016). Another student said, "Yes he did. As we were reading our essay taking turns. When spotting errors, he stopped us. We fixed those, and

in other times made sure we pitched in more constructive sentences than what we had" (QS44/2016). Students said, "yes she did, where we were wrong she corrected us and gave us tips on how to improve the essays" (QS45/2016) and "Yes, by correcting some of the things he felt we were saying wrong and gave us a much more mature perspective on it" (QS46/2016).

The consultant's participation also ensured that the assignment expectations were understood. A student stated, "Yes, in order to guide us and making sure we do what is expected to be done and also to monitor us based on our behaviour as a group" (QS21/2016). The findings in this study have shown that consultants refrained from dominating the discussions and strived to ensure that students talked freely. It can be inferred that the students were at all times at the centre of the social interactions in the GC. The next section investigates whether students were free to express their views and opinions.

-Consultants showing students how to write: Modelling and scaffolding AL

As discussed in Chapter 2, Grabe and Kaplan (1996: 306, 315, 379) posit that the teacher's or consultant's role in group discussions is the scaffolding of tasks, modelling of desired behaviour, and monitoring of activities. Cleborne, Johnson, and Willis (1997) indicate that for the achievement of academic socialisation, socially mediated learning, and learner participation in their respective learning communities, collaboration and modelling are required from both the learners and the facilitator. A student mentioned that, the "consultant showed us how to construct our sentences in an order and how to write a flowing essay" (QS50/2016). Another pointed out, the consultant "showed us how to answer questions by looking at key words and also to identify the type of essay we need to write" (QS38/2016). Mtonjeni and Sefalane-Nkohla (2017: 149) report that in higher education, academic writing development is mediated mainly through modelling and deconstruction of the target genres. Moreover, modelling is suited for the South Africa HE context where most university entrants are either un- or underprepared for university studies particularly relating to academic literacies (Butler 2013). The consultant is required to 'teach' fundamentals of genres through practical examples and 'by doing'.

This question sought to ascertain whether the consultant provided practical example aimed at facilitating the students' understanding of the content and whether these were effective in the consultants' opinion. Fourteen consultants (88%) (n=16) declared to have provided such

examples. One was unsure and only one did not provide any practical examples to students. One consultant stated,

> Yes especially those who were consulting with regards to their research report projects I demonstrated and showed them model examples that could help them to understand and structure the different sections of their work in a better way (QWC1/2016).

Some consultants pointed out that they provided students with guidelines on how to write a specific text or genre for instance. Writing centres usually build a repository of assignment guidelines or briefs from specific disciplines, which are useful when students do not bring such with them. Consultants stated,

> Yes I did. I gave them guidelines on how to write the introduction, body of the essay and conclusion. I used the hamburger analogy to explain to them how paragraphs are structured: with the top bun being the topic sentence, the fillings being the explanations and bottom bun being a concluding sentence in a paragraph (QWC15/2016).

These practical examples served the purpose of both scaffolding and clarifying the disciplinary content in the GC. It should be emphasised that the consultants' perceptions were that the strategy was effective in facilitating learning.

8.4 Writing Centre, Academic Literacies (AL) and Disciplinary Literacies Practices in GC: A Social Constructivist Perspective

This Chapter foregrounds the role of the GC in the facilitation of academic genre awareness through social discursive practices. The GC offers innumerable opportunities to positively impact the student learning of academic and disciplinary writing in contrast to large class lectures or tutorials. These opportunities can be discussed from the perspective of writing centre practice, AL and disciplinary literacies.

8.4.1. Writing Centre Practice in GC: Social Constructivist Glance

This study showed that the discursive nature of the GC practices, which allows for the sharing of individual and multiple perspectives through discussion, on certain aspect of the students'

disciplinary content, is seen as valuable by most consultants. The discursive social practices also promote collaboration among students and their engagement with the content.

-Who between the students and the consultant decided the agenda of the GC

Determining who between the consultant and students decided on the agenda of the GC could potentially give an indication whether the students maintained ownership of the work or not. As discussed earlier, writing centre practice prescribes that consultants ask students what they would like to be assisted with, even when the student's writing needs are apparent or obvious (Kane 2012; Mitoumba-Tindy 2017). This probing is important as consultants may not do work for students, nor do they write on any of the students' draft. Corbett (2015: 58) argues that consultants may not remove tutorial transcripts, or field notes, or even memories from their "context and interpret them in ways that best serve their [or the consultant's] rhetorical purposes". Students are responsible for taking notes and making decisions on any suggestion received from the consultant. Any dictation and control of the GC agenda by the consultant would undeniably contradict the social constructivist stance, which acknowledges student-centeredness and social interactions as primordial in the construction of knowledge in 'cultural' settings (Sullivan 2011: 25). McAndrew and Reigstad (2001, cited in Severino & Cogie 2016) also foreground student-centredness, collaboration and teacher-centeredness, as the three main approaches to writing consultancy. In this study, some students indicated that the consultant decided on the agenda. They found this helpful as a way to avoid conflicting interests from peers and save time as each group member requested help on a different aspect of writing. One student stated, "it felt good to me because it was the only way to avoid unnecessary conflicts" (QS28/2016). Another indicated that the consultant was right in deciding on the agenda, because the students were unsure and needed help deciding (QS9/2016).

Some students expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the consultant decided on the agenda. One student stated, it was "not good because at some point we felt intimidated" (QS8/2016). This is potentially a problem because it seems the consultant was domineering and imposing of his/her own agenda and views, without giving the students an opportunity to contribute in the GC. Other students also stated that the group decided together on the agenda. Whether they meant students together or students and consultants should be investigated further. Students said, "I feel like it was a democratic decision therefore it was fair and efficient" (QS32/2016) and "I liked it since we all had different issues that we needed to be dealt with" (QS37/2016).

Considering that writing centres aim to enable students to access complex disciplinary content and academia (Archer 2008; Clarence 2012; Lewin & Mawoyo 2014), the students should be the ones to dictate the agenda of the GC; at least at the start of the session, and in some respects. Eight consultant (50%) (n=16) stated that students decided the agenda and eight (50%) (n=16) mentioned the consultant. The findings in this respect are thus inconclusive. In the 2016 questionnaires, the students indicated that they are the ones who decided the agenda. It can be inferred that while the students felt that they were the ones who made the decision and were in control of the agenda, the consultant were undecided. This is perhaps an indication that the consultants were successful in relinquishing control of the agenda to the students. Consultants were of the opinion that when students decide the agenda, the GC as a whole and time management are more effective. Consultants said, "Then they take responsibility of what is being addressed and we are able to manage time" (QWC3/2016), "Okay. Students should be allowed to intimate the consultant with the specific area where they will be needing assistance" (QWC6/2016), and "It works especially in case of a long assignment or report because sometimes the duration of each consultation may not allow to cover a large part of the work" (QWC7/2016).

-Who spoke the most between the consultant and the students in the GC

Closely related to the question of whether students were in control of the discussions or not is the question whether students spoke more than the consultant throughout the GC. Writing centre research has highlighted the crucial role of 'talk' in writing centre pedagogy, as a 'liberation' and 'assimilation' tool (Clarence 2012), and as an enabler of collaboration (Harrington et al. 2017). Most students and consultants indicated that the students spoke most of the time or perhaps one should rather say, the consultant made students speak most of the time. This means that consultants were at least aware of the necessity to let students talk most of the time.

-Student and consultant suggestions on how the GC can be improved

Students and consultant provided an array of suggestions on how to improve the GC. Most of these suggestions are confirmed in the literature on writing centres, AL and social constructivism:

- Student commitment and participation in GC: as discussed earlier in Chapter 2 and in this Chapter, one of the limitations of social constructivism as a pedagogy is its inability

to facilitate learning without the complete and persistent collaboration and involvement of all students in a group (Harris and Alexander 1998).

- Writing centre work to be embedded into disciplinary curriculum: writing centre work recently has centered on the Writing in the Disciplines (WiD) initiative, which aims at embedding academic writing development initiatives in the academic department curriculum (Russel et al. 2009).
- More awareness of WrC services on part of lecturers: writing centre literature has for decades been advocating for more efforts aimed at sensitising both students and faculty academic staff on the real mandate and offerings of the writing centres, particularly to dissipate myths and misconceptions based on the 'remedial' or 'deficit' model of academic literacies (North 1984).

Suggestions emerging for the first time in writing centre research in South Africa, particularly relating to the GC Model:

- Participation in the GC to be made compulsory for all members: non-participation in GC discussions or activities having been identified as one of the risks or problems in the GC by both students and consultants. It may be worthwhile to investigate ways of enticing maximum participation from each group member. The implementation of social constructivism in a classroom environment is predicated on the students' total engagement with the material and the participation of all present in the class (Harris & Alexander 1998). Similarly, any student's reticence and lack of prior knowledge should be dealt with lest the application of socio-constructivist principles to the classroom context be rendered difficult.
- Workshops for students with similar AL needs: Clarence (2012) points out that student AL needs may be addressed in small groups through individual attention, rather in large class tutorials or lectures.
- Groups to see the same consultant each time with the same assignment
- Students coming for GC should bring a rough draft
- Lecturers to brief writing consultants on assignment requirements and expectations
- More GCs
- Make groups smaller
- Students to book for GC when it is a group, not for one-on-one and then bring peers
- More consultation time

The suggestions in this last bullet list constitute some of the key implications for GC and writing centre practice, as described in the next Chapter, for effective GC social interactions.

8.4.2. Academic Literacies in GC: Social Constructivist Glance

This section discusses the consultant's individual attention to student, students voicing their personal attention, and students speaking vernacular.

-Consultant's individual attention to each student

Davis (1993) explains the difficulty for students to feel part of a community and to connect with others for support and group study in large class lectures, which also pose a tremendous challenge for instruction and learning, owning among other reasons to the differing students abilities and the multiplicity of learning styles. Several researchers have stressed the importance of individual attention in attempting to support students' AL needs (Clarence 2012; Davis 1993; Foster 2010). Clarence (2012: 131) suggests a tutorial system, where students are provided with such support in smaller groups, thus enabling individual attention to students by trained tutors, or consultants. Similarly, Foster (2010) foregrounds the difficulty for academics to provide individualised attention to the ever-increasing number of 'poorly-prepared students', due to extensive workloads, large classes, and plummeting teaching and research resources. Individual attention in the GC is thus of prime importance. In this study, only eight consultants (50%) (n=16) confirmed to have provided individual attention to students, while six consultants (38%) stated they could not. Thirty-four students (64%) (n=53) stated that the consultant gave individual attention to students. I inferred that the consultants were at least aware of the importance of attending to the individual needs of each student in the GC. Overall, the findings showed that even in the context of discussions, where students speak freely, the consultant strived to pay attention to and involve individual students.

-Students expressing their personal opinions

AL draws the attention of practitioners in HE to the necessity to enable the development of students' voice (Archer 2011; Clarence 2012), writer identity (Darsot 2010; Lea & Street 2006), or membership to academic communities of practice (CoP) (Wenger 2000). In the findings, 16 consultants (100%) (n=16) stated that students expressed themselves freely in the GC. Through their responses, students indicated that in the GC, they were given ample

opportunities to express themselves, assist one another through suggestion and explanation, think differently or become aware of other perspectives, correct their own and one another's mistakes and errors in writing and thinking, learn to talk and share ideas with peers, and learn to listen more attentively. Fifty-one students (96%) (n=53) confirmed that they were free to express their views or opinions. It is my view that this enablement cannot occur without allowing for the 'hesitant', 'inexperienced', sometimes 'casual', and 'uninformed' opinions of students to be expressed. This study found that student voice and not the consultant's dominated the GC discussions and interactions. It asserted that any talk or discussion, which is controlled heavily by the consultant, would be deemed unacceptable, inappropriate, and unsuitable for a student-centred ethos.

-Student using vernacular languages

The study showed that students used vernaculars to explain difficult subject content and concepts to one another. Most consultants in the study stated that they do not allow students to use vernacular in GC and a few indicated they do. As stated earlier, the consultants' responses contradict the students' stance that they were allowed to use and used vernacular in GC. This contradiction means perhaps that students use vernacular among themselves without express permission from the consultant. The consultants' reluctance could be because most consultants, some of whom are international students, cannot speak fluently or understand all vernacular languages. Another complexity would be that the dominant voice among students would start speaking and impose their own language at the expense of others, who in fact would simply keep quiet and feign understanding. This of course except when one forms a group according to the students' and consultants' vernacular, which would be against the principles of a multicultural educational setting, as advocated in the country. In terms of AL, however, allowing students to use vernacular among themselves could be conducive to learning and to the development of voice (Archer 2011) and writer identity (Lea & Street 2006), as argued in the previous section. One consultant stated,

> It is always good to allow the writers to express themselves in languages, which they can use to easily understand themselves. But some of the writing consultants may not be familiar with South African local languages which makes it difficult to allow the writers to use their own languages" (QWC7/2016).

Another said, “As long as they interpret it back to English... It helps them to express themselves at the beginning and very essential to the process (QWC10/2016). The number of students who stated that they used vernacular languages in the GC of 24 (45%) (n=53) is still high and their reason cannot be ignored. Most students who agreed indicated that sometimes the content is understood easily when explained in vernacular and by a peer. Students stated, “because sometimes there are things you can't easily explain in English but easy with your language” (QS2/2016) and “because others would come to the rescue and try to explain it in English so that others may understand” (QS7/2016). Another declared, “because some of the things we don't understand were difficult to explain” (QS14/2016) and another, “because I am not yet good with English and it was embarrassing because people came with great ideas using their own language but after translating them we were happy to see the usefulness of the idea while others learnt a new language”. A student stated, “It was a good and ideal because some students come from township high schools; hence, English is not their home language” (QS12/2016) and “sometimes people speak/express better when talking in their own languages” (QS40/2016).

Consultant responses stated, “Sometimes they digress to their mother tongue, I don't have a problem with that if they are trying to clarify to their group mates but I may not understand because I am a foreigner” (QWC11/2016) and “It was Ok for me as some were able to express themselves better when they code switched” (QWC12/2016). One student stated, “Fine because she [the consultant] would not understand what we were saying” (QS51/2016). It was important for the group to communicate in English to accommodate the consultant, who could possibly not be a speaker of the vernacular. Also, the vernacular spoken could be understood only by a few group members with the risk of alienating the non-speakers.

Other students felt that English being the language of instruction should be practiced, “to me I didn't have a problem speaking in English because I believe that if we practice speaking English the more we become perfect and confident” (QS9/2016). Another student stated, “I feel it is fair as most of the consultants only speak and understand English and at UJ the medium of learning is English so it is a norm for us to learn to practice using this language” (QS52/2016).

8.4.3. Disciplinary Literacies in GC: Social Constructivist Glance

In the study, students indicated that the consultant could be from a field other than theirs. The UJ writing centres being multidisciplinary in nature, the last question of the questionnaire (2014 and 2016) sought to ascertain whether this can impede the social interactions in the GC

or whether it can be an obstacle to the students' learning of disciplinary literacies. One of the major findings of the study is that students learn not only from the consultant, but also from the social interaction in the GC as a whole; that is, from their peers and even from their own reflection and thinking processes. Using the students and consultants' responses, the following section discusses the AL/writing areas the GC focused on, the consultant's understanding of the disciplinary content, and the students' assistance to one another in the GC.

-The AL/writing areas dealt with in GCs

The study explored the type of assistance the students required to determine whether the consultant would be in a position to assist. This question is important in order to determine whether the GC focused on any type of genre, which might be difficult for the consultant to understand and deal with. When asked what the students needed assistance with, nine consultants (56%) (n=16) mentioned, "essay writing". The other seven consultants (44%) (n=16) said "report writing". In instances where, as noted in video observation findings, the consultant was from a field other than the students', the consultant relied heavily on students' explanation or definition of disciplinary concepts and materials. This gives rise to the risk of consultants being misled by 'weak' students. Johnson, Clark and Burton (2015: 63) argue that writing consultant may experience an overwhelming sense of uncertainty when consulting with students from unfamiliar disciplines". Johnson, Clark, and Burton emphasise that what is important is for the consultant to understand how to initiate effective interactions with such students, on their disciplinary writing. In this study, among the AL/writing areas students needed assistance with were "essay writing", "assignment writing" and "report writing". It was subsequently noted that both "essay writing" and "report writing" could be categorised as "assignment writing", though they seemed as separate themes.

As can be seen in the graph above, which is confirmed in most writing centre research and literature, essay, report, are literature review are listed as the main genres dealt with in most writing centres (McWilliams and Allan 2017; Myatt and Gaillet 2016), though the report also includes lab reports. In the study, nine consultants (56%) (n=16) are from the Humanities Faculty, four from Sciences, against one for Engineering, Education and Management. Seventeen students (32%) (n=53) came from the Economics and financial Sciences, 14 (26%) Humanities and 12 (23%) Law, against two for Management, Sciences, Health Sciences, Education and Engineering, respectively. This means that the bulk of students visiting the writing centre, who are from Humanities, Economics and financial sciences, and Law, are

assisted by consultants from the Humanities, who are familiar with essay, report and literature review writing. It can be inferred that these Humanities consultant would experience difficulties assisting engineering and science students due to the overly technical character of the genres in these disciplines, but not the Humanities, Economics and financial sciences, and Law.

-Consultant understanding of the disciplinary content of students

A more fundamental question is, should the consultant be of the same field as the student they assist or should they possess a background knowledge to be able to assist students effectively. This consideration was ascertained by asking students and consultants whether the consultant understood the disciplinary content. Fifty-one students (96%) (n=53) stated that the consultant understood the subject content. Only two students (4%) (n=53) thought the consultant could not understand the content. I can therefore assert that the consultant assisted the students in a manner that aided their understanding of their disciplinary content, without being necessary from their discipline. Alternatively, the consultant assisted students in a manner that was satisfactory or 'helpful' to the students. When asked whether they understood the students' disciplinary content, 15 consultants (94%) (n=16) stated "yes". Only one consultant (6%) (n=16) said "no". Johnson, Clark and Burton (2015) found that, in a multi-disciplinary writing centre confronted to this type of dilemma, the effective tutor or consultant is an effective communicator, as the consulting strategies may be more supportive of the students from an unfamiliar field, than the disciplinary staff, lecturers or tutors. Writing centre practice trains consultants to act as 'facilitators' (Kane 2012), rather than tutors, who rely heavily on disciplinary knowledge.

-Students assistance to one another in GC

As stated earlier, in a social constructivist learning environment, students learn not only from the teacher, tutor, or consultant, but also and mostly from one another, through social interactions and group discussions (Vygotsky 1981). The study inquired from students whether they assisted one another with their AL/writing and assignment writing. Most students throughout the questionnaires, focus groups and observations, confirmed that they assisted one another during the GC, in answering the consultant's questions, expressing various views on the topic or assignment, or elaborating on aspects of the work. Students stated that they explained aspects that the consultant could not explain to one another. One stated, "Yes. If one didn't understand their task they would explain to them thoroughly" (QS50/2016). Others said,

"Yes, students tried to find difficulties of other students and address them if they understand better" (QS13/2016) and "If another student did not understand the other student that understand better helped" (QS15/2016). Students checked each other's work. They stated, "Yes. We looked a lot at each other's assignments and pointed out words, which we believe might be our weak points" (QS51/2016). This point somewhat complements a findings that has already been confirmed in this study: that the consultant understood the content in some aspects and that the students explained it to them when they failed to understand. Moreover, some students visited the writing centre simply to pick the consultant's brain and the consultant played the role of a resounding board. In the 2016 student questionnaire findings, students indicated that the consultant should not 'spoonfeed' them with answers when they had knowledge of the content. Consultants should rather create opportunities for students to formulate or reformulate answers for themselves.

8.5. Conclusion

This Chapter set out to discuss the findings obtained from the 2014 questionnaires, focus groups, observations, and 2016 questionnaires. The findings of the first three methods were triangulated and the 2016 questionnaire data and findings were used to complement the earlier findings. For discussion purposes and following a process where themes were merged and categorised, the discussion is organised in three major sub-headings: the GC Model and nature of the problems, the social constructivist nature of the GC, and the social constructivist glance at the writing centre practice, AL and Disciplinary literacies in the GC context. Problems or risks of the GC Model include non-participation from group members, consultant's negative attitude or lack of professionalism, domineering few, disrespectful attitude of few students, and lack of time. The social constructivist nature of the GC includes the social interaction experiences of students and consultants, and the discursive social practices, enacted through the students and consultants' respective practices. Lastly, the writing centre practice, AL and disciplinary literacies in GC were also discussed. The next Chapter, Conclusion, presents a summary of the study and ends with suggestions for writing centre practice and new directions in research on the topic.

CHAPTER NINE
CONCLUSIONS: SOCIAL DISCURSIVE PRACTICES IN A GROUP CONSULTATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR WRITING CENTRE PRACTICE

9.1. Introduction

This Chapter presents a summary and the conclusions of the study, as well as its implications for writing centre practice. Firstly, it summarises the context, aim, objectives, research question, scope, methodology, limitations and significance of the research. Secondly, it discusses the conclusions to be drawn from the findings obtained from the 2014 questionnaires, focus groups, video observations, and 2016 questionnaires, each with students and consultants. The conclusions pivot on the challenges or risks of the GC as a writing consultation facilitation strategy, the social constructivist nature of the GC, and on the discursive practices in the GC. Further, the Chapter delves into the implications of these findings for writing centre practice, that is, for student practices, writing consultant practices and AL and disciplinary literacies. The first section presents the summary of the study.

9.2. Summary of Findings

9.2.1. Context

The widening of access to university means that faculties and academic support services including writing centres, all of which now have to contend with large class sizes, are under the obligation to find new ways of teaching and/ or assisting large numbers of students with minimal human, material and financial resources. Increasingly, South African writing centres experience a shift from the one-on-one consultation to the GC model due to the ever-increasing numbers of students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds entering universities (Kane, 2012). This study used the Social Constructivism, Writing Centre Practice, AL/disciplinary Literacies in attempting to understand the GC. For writing centres, the increase in the number of GCs has necessitated a shift in writing consultation strategies for writing consultants and students. Moreover, this upsurge in GCs could result not only in a lowering of the overall quality of consultations, but also in writing consultant burnout (North, 1984) with negative consequences on learning. Key to this thesis is understanding the social interactions occurring

in the GC and their contributions to the facilitation of AL and genre awareness. The emphasis resides on the social element as a prerequisite and enabler of all GC endeavours.

9.2.2. Aims and Objectives

The study aimed to explore the challenges facing writing consultants and students particularly with regard to raising students' awareness of AL and genres through writing centre GCs. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were to be pursued:

- To identify the challenges facing students and writing consultant in group consultation sessions;
- To explore the social interactions occurring in the group consultations;
- To determine whether the social interactions focus on genre awareness and in what ways.

This investigation intended to provide valuable insights into socio-constructivist nature of the GC.

9.2.3. Research Questions

The main research question was: What are the challenges facing writing consultants and students during a GC with respect to academic genres? The sub-questions were as follows:

- What are the challenges facing students and writing consultant in GCs?
- What are the social interactions occurring between students and consultants and among students in GCs?
- Do the social interactions, which occur in GCs, focus on genre awareness? In what ways?

9.2.4. Scope of the Study

The study data was gathered randomly from writing consultants and students who had either conducted or attended a GC over the two months preceding the data collection. It was conducted essentially at the University of Johannesburg writing centres, mainly the Auckland Park writing centre. The APK Campus houses 30,000 of the 50,000 UJ students, and has the biggest writing centre in terms of size of venue and number of consultations (±2800 consultation for 2013) and students seen (4000 students seen in 2013). Although the data collection was carried out on the four campuses, albeit not in equal participant populations, it was assumed that the data collected represented the reality in other access universities throughout South Africa.

9.2.5. Methodology

This study followed a mixed-methods approach: the quantitative approach was implemented using two sets of questionnaires (students and writing consultants) in 2014 and the same in 2016, while the qualitative approach was carried out in 2014 using two focus groups, one with students and the other with writing consultants, and video-recorded observations of two group consultations. The data was collected in the following order.

Firstly, a set of questionnaire was completed and returned by 61 students and another set by 9 writing consultants. As for the inclusion criteria, students must have attended at least one GC, and consultants must have facilitated at least one GC.

Secondly, focus group interviews were carried out to investigate the major themes, which had transpired from the questionnaire data, further. Six students and four consultants who had agreed on the questionnaire forms to participate in a subsequent focus group interview were contacted and invited to participate in two separate sessions in the researcher's office away from the writing centre.

Thirdly, video-recorded observations were conducted to triangulate the themes identified in the data collected earlier in the questionnaires and focus groups. The first observation involved a consultant, named Nancy (pseudonym), and two students at the Auckland Park Bunting Road (APB) Campus writing centre in September 2014. The second observation recorded a consultation between a consultant named Frank (pseudonym) and two students at the Auckland Park Kingsway (APK) campus, also in September 2014.

Lastly, two more sets of questionnaires were administered in 2016, one was collected from 53 students and the other from 16 consultants, to complement the data collected from the 2014 questionnaires, focus groups and observations, which had identified and explored a number of themes related to the challenges faced by students and consultants in GCs. The 2016 questionnaires were completed on students using Google forms by 51 students and 16 consultants.

The data analysis followed the analytical framework included Social Constructivism (SC), AL/disciplinary Literacies, and Writing Centre Practice, as discussed in Chapter 2.

9.2.6. Significance of the Study

Awareness of the social constructivist nature of the GC may assist in focusing the GC practices on social interactions rather than on cognitive aspects, group consultation dynamics or skills. Writing consultants and students will prioritise practices that are conducive to effective social processes between the students and the consultant and among students.

9.2.7. Limitations

The study had two main limitations. Firstly, it carried out two surveys, one in 2014 and the other in 2016, each one with students and with consultants. It also implemented focus groups, one with students and the other with writing consultants, and video observations of eight group consultations, six on the Auckland Park Kingsway (APK) Campus and two on the Auckland Park Bunting (APB) Road Campus: only two of which were utilised in the study. The study generated eight strands of data, which was an enormous amount of data, whereas the PhD thesis could have been written with only one strand of data. As a result of this limitation and of the abundance of data, the findings of each method had to be analysed and interpreted in a separate chapter (Chapters 4 to 7). Being essentially qualitative in nature, the study could have focused on a more in depth analysis of minute details of each method. Delving into detailed analysis and interpretation was difficult due to time constraints and limited scope. Secondly, the study relied heavily on the perceptions of students and consultants in the questionnaires and focus groups. It was found that perceptions can provide ideal or unrealistic descriptions of reality. Only video observations provided data that seemed 'more reliable' and contradicted some of the findings from the other methods.

9.3. Conclusions

9.3.1. Group Consultation: the Risks

In social constructivist terms, the GC poses a number of risks to learning and effective social interactions, such as the possible non-participation, the dominance, the negative attitude, and disrespectful attitude of a few group members. Other risks are the lack of time for an effective GC, the occasional noise, and the outspoken writing consultant. This section summarises the findings on each of these risks.

-Non-participation

As the application of social constructivism in a learning environment is predicated on the unanimous participation and engagement of all group members (Harris & Alexander 1998), facilitating a GC remains a disheartening undertaking. Student late coming, 'laziness', apathy, or reluctance to engage GC activities represent real risks to GC social interactions. Due to late coming, students may miss most of the discussions or exchanges, and be unable to understand the context or objective of the interactions; and as a result, choose to remain quiet. Over-reliance on input from the group leader or any other single group member may also impede the learning process. Moreover, most group members may only begin to understand, participate and contribute to discussions in the last minutes of the consultation to no avail. Hence, it is crucial for all group members to participate in the discussions throughout the GC to understand the context of the members' utterances, the developments, resolutions, and conclusions, contribute meaningfully and benefit in terms of learning.

Furthermore, the GC may be either rewarding for the consultant, when the students are involved or willing to work to improve their writing, or challenging when the students expect the consultant to do the work for them or spoon-feed them. Proactivity and engagement are required of students in the GC, as in peer writing, students who provide feedback to their peers or to the group benefit more in terms of learning, than those who receive feedback 'passively' (Ismael 2011: 75; Lundstrom & Baker 2009). As students find it difficult to understand their academic lecturer's (or tutor's) feedback (Lea & Street 1996), the GC in the writing centre, which facilitates peer learning, through either individual or group consultations, allows for the guided provision of feedback by students to other students through discussion. One of the strengths of the GC is that writing consultants take complex issues such as the students' learning preferences and identities, and the issues of power relations and meaning making in the specific academic and disciplinary contexts, into consideration in their interactions and work in both ICs and GCs.

-Dominance of a few group members

In the GC, some students may be either intimidated or demotivated by other group members, who would dominate or monopolise the participation in the discussions. Domineering students can 'appropriate' the interactions with the consultant, particularly if the latter is unskilled in facilitating GC, or allows this to happen. The resulting imbalance in the interactions may lead to group conflict or be a disadvantage for some of the shy or reserved participants, who may subsequently resent the GC or experience a sense of rejection from others. This behaviour is

contrary to the perception of the writing centre as a safe space for students (Archer 2010; Archer & Richards 2011; Spigelman & Grobman 2005: Leibowitz et al. 1996; Kane 2012). For students a sense of safety was not only fundamental, but also a prerequisite for their full participation in a given literacy world (Norton 2010: 8). Due to its distinctiveness (Spigelman & Grobman 2005) and peer-learning model (Kane 2012), the writing centre represents a safe space for students to talk about writing; a space which is exempt from institutional ideology and where "students can talk together to understand themselves and resist subordinate instructional forces" (Spigelman & Grobman 2005: 11). In response to this type of 'exclusion', shy or reserved students may remain quiet in the GC and book an individual consultation afterward. However, other students may remain quiet due to other reasons such as the student's own slow pace of learning or unique/different personal learning style, or gaps in knowledge, or lack of communicative competence.

-Disrespectful attitude of few group members

Students value any positive attitude from peers, particularly respect, and are disheartened by any behaviour to the contrary. Disrespectful behaviours from group members deprives others of the chance to air their opinion or voice, or discourages them from participating in group discussions or activities, without disruption. This participation is important to students who genuinely would like to obtain a second opinion or some input on their writing or ideas. Occasionally, students display a lack of respect or regard for writing centre work or staff (North 1984: 441). Moreover, North urged 'fellow professionals', that is faculty lecturers, to show a level of respect for writing centre work, as students may only demonstrate the same when it is modelled by their "classroom teachers". Furthermore, any negative or disrespectful attitude may irremediably translate into a waste of time and opportunity to solve the writing issues of the group. These attitudes may perpetuate conflict, misunderstanding or bottleneck issues, which may only be solved through effective or positive interactions.

-Unpreparedness of few group members

As stated earlier, social interactions are key to the effectiveness of the GC. One of the major obstacles of a GC is the unpreparedness of a group member. Unpreparedness can impede participation in the GC, deprive the group of both valuable input and involvement, and disadvantage both the group and the student concerned in terms of learning. Total participation in the group interactions is key because "human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others" (Schacter 2009).

-Consultant's negative attitude/ lack of professionalism

The writing consultant's attitude vis-à-vis students in a GC may either motivate or demotivate the latter. The consultant's inability or unwillingness to provide feedback in a constructive manner, for instance, may cause students to become despondent. Students may become reserved as an expression of dissatisfaction or discontent with some of the consultants' negative attitude. Similarly, students may see the consultant's effort to spoon-feed or provide them with answers as a lack of professionalism, as students value the opportunity to voice their opinion and interact with the consultant and peers. In general, the consultant's imposition of his/her own views/answers on the students would not be welcome. Moreover, in writing centre practice, the consultant's mandate is to guide students through questioning and suggestions, while avoiding spoon-feeding or providing them with answers (Kane 2012). Another negative attitude would be the consultant's lack of interest and complete disregard for the students' right to be assisted in the GC. Such behaviour should not be tolerated as it infringes on the students right to education and deprives them of innumerable opportunities to improve their writing, voice, and thinking. It also contradicts the idea of the writing centre consultation as a safe space, as alluded to earlier.

-Outspoken writing consultant

Closely linked to the previous point is the frustration, which an outspoken consultant may cause for students. Since the consultant may be perceived by students as an 'authoritative figure', and since students react positively and function more effectively under the leadership of a peer (or fellow student) (Cleborne, Johnson & Willis 1997), the consultant should play the role of a 'distant teacher' or facilitator. This ideal situation can be achieved by allowing the GC processes to unfold naturally (Vygotsky 1984), through comprehensive and elaborate discussions or exchanges among students. Forceful guidance, facilitation or intervention by the consultant may lead to a rather controlled and non-emancipatory process for students.

-The lack of time

The lack of time to conduct the session may pose as a major problem for the GC. Due to time constraints, consultants may not be able to attend to the needs of individual students. Time can be shortened by the consultant's or students' late coming, and by the consultant's inability to manage the consultation time more effectively. Since each group member's input is valued,

groups may have to wait for late comers to begin the consultation. Lack of time means fewer chances for students to pose questions and receive answers.

-Disorder/noise and student varying learning styles

Disorganisation or disorder may pose a serious challenge for the GC. Essentially, when a group of three or four students is engaged in discussion, the members are bound to be loud particularly because participation is strongly encouraged. As the consultant's intention is to create a space where students can feel free to express themselves without unnecessary disruption, the exchanges might seem 'loud' to a student who is unaccustomed to such an environment.

Another consideration is that not all students' personal learning styles are compatible with the 'noisy' or 'loud' GC environment. In terms of AL aspects, such as issues of power relations, identity, multimodality, and learning dispositions and affordances (Canagaraj 2002; Perry 2012; Lea & Street 1996; Kane 2012), the varying and differing student learning styles are to be accommodated. The notion of learning styles pertains to differences in learning based on individual preferences in the utilisation of various learning cycle phases (Kolb 2005: 195). Due to specific hereditary equipment, prior life experiences, and the demands of the ambient environment, each student develops a preferred way of choosing between various learning modes [or materials]. For instance, a student can develop an aversion to group work and a preference for one-on-one consultation, which should be perfectly acceptable in the writing centre context.

The next section summarises the discursive practices of the GC using social constructivism as analytical framework.

9.3.2. Writing Group Consultation Discursive Practices and Social Processes

9.3.2.1. Social Constructivist Features of the GC

-Collaboration among students

Collaborative learning can be used in HE to facilitate the new entrants' access to complex academic and disciplinary literacies (Liu & Lan 2015). In a social constructivist environment, collaborative learning can better facilitate the sharing of ideas and feedback among students (Storch 2005) through interactions (Applefield et al. 2001) or discussions, among students, and with the teacher or facilitator. In social constructivist group discussions, students as a group and driven by self-motivation carry out and control their own discussion in a non-competitive environment, where the only prerogatives of the teacher are 'distant' observation and

intermittent guidance. Such discussions result in an increase of the students' ability to test ideas, synthesise ideas from peers, and build deeper understanding of the content (Hurley 2012; Ormrod & Jones 2012). They represent opportunities for students to 'talk' about their ideas and develop their thinking and reasoning skills, while arguing their opinions persuasively (Ormrod & Jones 2012). Large and small group discussions offer students the feeling of belonging to a community and collaborating with others through talk and discussion (Gelman, 2003; Hunt & Agnoli 1991). Collaboration in a GC may take the form of 'open' cooperation among students, tolerance of opposing views and preferences, the opportunity to express one's views freely, and the chance to deal with complex issues together. In a GC, collaboration may also instil a sense of responsibility and ownership of the learning process, as group discussions offer several advantages including, the opportunity for students to achieve the transfer of knowledge from classroom learning, and building a solid foundation for the application and communication of ideas in other contexts [my emphasis] (Ormrod & Jones 2012).

-Multiple perspectives/ views

Students valued the opportunity of learning from multiple perspectives, that is, "different opinions" or "different views" in the GC. In social constructivist terms, the GC members share individual perspectives, referred to as collaborative elaboration (Meter & Stevens 2000), resulting in the learners' improved understanding and learning together (Greeno et al. 1996). Students may attain the realisation that other students share their views, while others oppose them, as learning is an active process of discovery in which students learn to uncover principles, concepts and facts on their own, through 'guess work, trial and error, and intuitive thinking' (Ackerman 2001; Brown et al. 1989). In a GC, students learn to either refute or agree with the views of others, either partially or completely, as knowledge is socially and culturally constructed by humans (Ernest 1993; Prawat & Floden 1994). Students thus learn through engagement and make meaning through interaction with each other and with the surrounding environment (Ibid). As stated earlier, learning in the GC is preconditioned by the students' and consultant's ability to value, capacitate and nurture collaboration in all activities.

-Peer learning/ student positive attitude towards peers and learning

The GC may enable a student to reconsider their own views, thinking, and attitude through exposure to those of others and with the help of other group members. In a peer-learning environment such as the writing centre, learning occurs effectively through non-judgmental feedback and guided writing process (Archer 2011; Kane 2012). It could be inferred that

through the GC, students 'consult' with peers, and benefit from the social interactions, by clarifying their own thoughts about an assignment and integrating other students' inputs into their own ideas. Students in the study stated that one can "learn a lot of from other people" (QS20/2016) and that the GC "helped us realise our weaknesses and strengths" (QS31/2016). In practical terms, Grabble and Kaplan (1996) prescribe that one way of implementing peer learning effectively is by providing students with peer-review guidelines and requesting them to present their written responses by reading them out in class and to complete an evaluation or reflection form. While this approach presents the benefit of exposing students to their peer's innovative and creative ideas and discovering new ways of reading specific genres, its weakness is that students are given no instructions, except to read one another's papers and make suggestions for improvement. A further benefit of this type of peer review and feedback is that students will see similar problems and weaknesses in their own writing, which could boost their sense of confidence and expose them to ways of overcoming them.

-Development of student voice

This study established that the GC model is based on peer learning and collaboration among all participants. Myatt (2017: 10) emphasised the importance of allowing all voices to find expression for an effective collaborative activity. He went on to state that space must be open for voices other than those of teachers, tutors, directors, and others in the learning space. In this study, the students and consultants mentioned the development of the students' own voice as a positive element of the GC. One student stated, "I got to voice out my opinion regarding the essay" (QS43/2016). Recent research has characterised the writing centre as a safe and non-judgmental space, where students can talk to their peers about their own work (Grabe & Kaplan 1996: 315; Kane 2012: 48). This was confirmed in the study where, another student pointed out "we took our time to help each other without looking down at others as we don't have the same strength and weaknesses as students" (QS50/2016). "Without looking down at each other" in a non-threatening way and in a manner that would allow the timid students, for instance, to speak. Archer (2008: 143) states that the writing centre trains students in understanding and accessing the specific disciplinary practices and discourses, and in metacognition. The support provided by the writing centre enables students to stay in the system until graduation (Thokozile & Archer 2011: 148). Archer (2011) emphasises the importance of the writing centre in the academic socialisation process where the students are coached into academic genres, and organisational and structural aspects of writing in specific disciplines and at institutional level in a neutral and supportive environment (Archer &

Parkerson 2011), especially through the one-on-one [and group] consultation model. Archer (2011) argues that the individualised attention on the student AL needs have increased the level of self-confidence and self-reliance in students, concomitantly with a development in their own voice and agency in writing (Archer 2011: 354).

-Consultant positive attitude/ input

The consultant's positive attitude may contribute to creating in the student writers the perceptions of the writing centre as a safe learning space. Such a positive attitude may motivate and reinforce the students' sense of self-confidence. A positive attitude also means friendliness, patience, and affording each student a chance to speak. The success of the writing centres in the South African context especially is premised on the students' perception of the centre as a safe and non-judgmental space, where students can talk to their peers about their own work (Grabe & Kaplan 1996: 315; Kane 2012: 48). Not all students who visit the writing centres are 'at risk' or 'weak' students: some of them simply need a second opinion on their drafts and use the writing consultant as a resounding board in the writing process. The latter's willingness to create space for the student to talk freely is paramount. Consultants may not be or become impatient, inconsiderate, and disrespectful, as it is their duty to create and maintain a safe, encouraging and empowering space for students in the GC, through positive attitudes and behaviours. This role is crucial as instructors (or consultants) and teachers, who facilitate the student writers' transition into university, should model for students the kind of behaviours and attitudes that are conducive to learning (Devlin & McKay 2014).

9.3.2.2. Discursive Practices in GC

-Questioning

The GC affords student writers an opportunity to pose and answer questions that they would not have thought of had they been alone, or questions that they would have found irrelevant and unimportant. The consultant's questioning, as a process leading them to their own answers, may play a pivotal role in their growth as writers. Sullivan (2011: 25) posits that questioning may be utilised in the social constructivist classroom, as knowledge can be construed between class participants, including the instructor. The instructor's or writing consultant's role as the "purveyor of knowledge and truth", particularly in an academic setting, to portrays him/her "as a member of this particular learning community" (Ibid: 27), is suspended to centre the questioning on the student. Questioning enables students to reflect on and address assignment

problems/ questions. As it lends itself more appropriately to writing centre practice and research, which suggests a non-directive and collaborative approach to writing consultation facilitation, questioning is to be construed as a primary method used to assist writers to discover their own meaning (Kane 2012; Shabanza 2014; Shamoon & Burns 1995). Consultants do not dictate answers or solutions, but guide student writers through questioning in formulating their own plans for effective revision and writing.

-Group discussion

Discussion emerged as one of the most positive aspects of the GC, as it enables free communication, or the exchange of ideas. In social constructivist terms, discussion allows the writing consultant to provide each student with an opportunity to express their own views, 'think aloud' with other students, gather all group members' thoughts, voice his/her own views reservedly, and train student writers to weight a multitude of views and formulate their own position. Far from being in total control, the writing consultant allows the discussions among students to unfold organically only intervening intermittently to redirect the flow, without really disrupting the exchanges among students. The GC, as a model of group discussion, corresponds to Grabe and Kaplan's (1996: 347) Guided Group Discussions, which involves students planning their reading and writing, and responding to specific texts, through a rigorous process of inquiry. The writing consultant's constant questioning of the students interpretations and opinions steers the discussions in a different perspective on the texts and the writing itself each time (Applefield et al. 2001). Discussions of specific readings for instance aim to direct the students to re-evaluate the evidence, the logic of arguments, the substance in a theoretical perspective and the conclusions to be drawn. Students are taught to challenge each other and apply critical reading and listening skills. The discussions often culminate in the writing of summaries in response to the readings; alternatively, students can work to schematically represent the information in some textual form.

As part of the questioning strategy, which itself may be used to 'trigger' or direct a discussion, the consultant and students may create opportunities for the 'explanation', 'elaboration on', and 'clarification' of specific aspects of writing or disciplinary genres or concepts.

-Facilitation through explanation, clarification, elaboration, and exemplification

The terms "explanation", 'elaboration', or 'clarification", pertain to the "clarification of ideas", and can be used to enable or ascertain the student writers' understanding of complex

disciplinary concepts. In a multidisciplinary writing centre, a consultant may require students to 'explain' or 'clarify' complex or new concepts, while 'responding as readers'. As clarity in writing is important in academic writing in general, students should produce writing that is accessible to a lay audience, with definitions, elaborations, examples, and evidence. Students stand to benefit tremendously from the chance to explain ideas or concepts in their own words. However, relating to editorial, organisational, grammatical, spelling, punctuation notions, and particularly for L2 student writers, consultants may be forced to 'teach' or 'unpack' the problematic, misunderstood, or unfamiliar notions.

This teaching may be carried out in spite of the writing centre practice or pedagogy principle discouraging consultants from dictating answers or spoon-feeding students. It is also in spite of the directive that consultants are to guide student writers through questioning in formulating their own plans for writing for effective revision. However, when an L2 student requests to receive help with grammar, spelling and punctuation for instance, the request should not be deflected or postponed with a suggestion to first focus on the text, as a whole. The consultant plays the role of cultural informant explaining to the L2 writers, for instance, how educational expectations differ from their own cultural practices with which they are familiar (Powers 1993). The knowledge and expertise about academic and disciplinary conventions, rules, genres and cultures, should be made accessible to students by the consultant. This is because the latter is better placed to act as a mediator between the student and their disciplines; since lecturers and tutors cannot afford to take each student by the hand and introduce them to these cultures due to large class sizes and time constraints.

-Reflection in the GC

It can be inferred that in order to explain, elaborate on, or clarify concepts, student writers engage in reflection. Consultants constantly provide students with opportunities to explain or clarify the assignment or its content, through reflection, as a way of achieving understanding or knowledge reinforcement. This thesis reinforces the idea that the GC facilitates the development of the student writers' own voice as writers and as members of their academic and/or disciplinary communities (Archer 2011), through these discursive practices. Affording students an opportunity to explain concepts and writing to one another is crucial because most "disciplinary academics have become so inured to their disciplinary ways of knowing, thinking and writing that they may and do struggle to clarify their own disciplinary conventions" (Clarence 2012: 129). In the GC, difficult concepts not understood by some students may be

explained or underlined by their peers in the group, and reflected on by the student writer; in line with Vygotsky's (1984) ZPD, where more advanced or knowledgeable peers may assist others.

-Group drafting/ brainstorming/ free writing/ outlining

In addition to discussing, explaining, elaborating, clarifying, listening, reading aloud, and reflecting, students in the GC engage in brainstorming, freewriting, outlining, and drafting in the GC. As the consultant and/or other students 'discuss', 'explain' or 'elaborate on' concepts, students 'take notes', which often implies or includes outlining or even drafting. Students essentially work on improving their drafts by making adjustments and corrections. As consultants create an environment where students retain ownership of the assignment or written work (North 1984), they motivate the latter to make improvements to their drafts. Moreover, by reading and discussing their writing aloud, students engage in a self-diagnostic exercise, where they can hear themselves read and talk, and pick up errors, and correct themselves [their drafts] in the process (Archer 2017: 6; Shabanza 2014). Reading aloud builds confidence and the ability for the student writers to produce quality writing and generate meaningful texts (Castle 2017: 131). As they follow the group discussions or group feedback, students do not take notes passively or only for recording keeping purposes. Most of them engage in the instant application of the writing tips being shared, by rewriting in the broad lines of their paragraphs or assignment drafts, or by redoing the assignment outline, or freewriting, thereby changing the direction of their texts. These findings thus dispel the myth that writing consultants write assignments or dictate any writing for students.

9.4. Implications for Writing Centre Practice or Recommendations

The findings of this study, in terms of the risks, social constructivist nature, and discursive practices, underpinned in social interactions, of the GC, lead to profound implications for writing centre practice, academic literacies and disciplinary literacies, as well as institutionally.

9.4.1. Student Practices

Students' practices in a GC occur in relation to the consultant, other students or the group. They appear geared towards either the co-construction, reinforcement, or evaluation of knowledge, as seen in the following table.

Table 28: Summary of student practices in a GC

X	STUDENT PRACTICES	ROLE IN SOCIAL INTERACTIONS
1	Greet the consultant (on arrival)	Breaks the ice
2	Complete the observation form	The consultant may have the form/student details (e.g. names) in from of her/him throughout the session
3	Tell the consultant about the assignment	Saves the consultant time to read closely/establishes student understanding of task requirement
4	Read the work aloud	[same as previous]
5	Explain the work to consultant	[same as previous] and helps students clarify their understanding
6	Hand/show the assignment brief/question/instruction to the consultant	[optional]: students should retain the draft or ownership of the draft
7	Indicate problematic areas	Students dictate the agenda of the session in this way
8	Answer the consultant's questions	The consultant's questioning may trigger, direct or redirect discussions with or among students
9	Listen actively	Students learn not only from consultants, but also from peers. Without listening actively to others' contributions, one may not participate meaningfully in discussions
10	Participate in the discussions/tasks	Group discussions are key in the social constructivist environment as enablers of co-construction of knowledge and learning
11	Ask questions where they do not understand	Students' active participation is a prerequisite of learning. They ask questions to clarify understanding
12	Take/make notes	Note making and note taking are elements of reflection and knowledge organisation and reinforcement

13	Identify errors/mistakes on own drafts	In writing centre practice and social constructivist pedagogy, students may not rely on the consultant to point errors/mistakes out for them.
14	Correct errors/mistakes	Students are empowered and may do the task independently in future if they identify and correct their own errors/mistakes
15	Summarise points for consultant and one another	Encourage sharing of ideas and knowledge reinforcement
16	Strive to gain clear understanding	[Same as previous]
17	Answer questions from consultant and group	[Same as previous]
18	Ask clarifying questions to consultant and/or group	[Same as previous]
19	Discuss main/relevant points	[Same as previous]
20	Correct three (3) selected grammar, spelling and punctuation issues	Students are empowered and may do the task independently in future if they identify and correct their own errors/mistakes
21	Book follow up consultation	Students need help realising the importance of creating a writing process, where they can consult more than once for the same draft before final submission. The follow up session allows the consultant to check whether the suggested changes have been integrated correctly and if there have been any improvements in the students' writing. In this instance, the more consultations before submission, the better.

From the writing centre and social constructivist perspectives, carrying out these practices, which underpin 'complex' social interactions, requires a substantial level of training, tact and consideration on the part of the consultant. Listing the practices in this manner foregrounds them somewhat, as mere skills used in the GC. This study showed that in reality the consultant is confronted with hindrances such as the insufficient time allocated to the session, the possible

lack of GC facilitation skills on the part of the consultants, the limited number of consultants available in the writing centre. He/she also may grapple with the fact that the consultation is conducted in a convoluted manner, with the risk of not addressing issues head-on or overtly. It is also unclear how discussed discursive practices, such as discussion, explanation, and elaboration; and the associated requirements, such as the student-centeredness of all activities in a GC, the necessity to render the GC more in-depth, on-point, comprehensive, inclusive, student-led and interactive, fit in the list of practices.

9.4.2. Writing Consultant Practices

Writing consultant practices also serve the purpose of supporting social interactions between students and the consultant, and among students; and pivot on the co-construction, reinforcement, or evaluation of knowledge, as seen in the following table.

Table 29: Summary of writing consultant practices in a GC

X	WRITING CONSULTANT PRACTICES	ROLE IN SOCIAL INTERACTIONS
1	Greets and welcomes the students	Breaks the ice
2	Introduces herself/himself	First attempt to connect with student and create a sense of safety
3	Ask students questions and gives them time to complete in the observation form/ their details	The consultant may have the form/student details (e.g. names) in from of her/him throughout the session
4	Ask students what they would like assistance with/ offer help	Students dictate the agenda of the session in this way
5	Explains the rules of the consultation/ what the writing centre does and what it does not do in the consultation	Creates realistic expectations and help focus the group discussions and activities
6	Asks if students have an assignment brief/ questions/ instructions	Establishes student understanding of task requirement and helps focus the group interactions and activities

7	Asks students to read the assignment question aloud	Saves the consultant time to read closely/establishes student understanding of task requirement
8	Reads the assignment/look at the work/assignment and go through it silently	Establishes student understanding of task requirement
9	Asks students to explain the assignment	Saves the consultant time to read closely/establishes student understanding of task requirement
10	Poses questions to students on assignment	Establishes student understanding of task requirement
11	Identifies common themes, needs, concerns they would like to focus on	Helps focus the activities and interactions of the group
12	Sets out agenda for the day (in consultation with students)	[Same as previous]
13	Helps students understand the assignment	Encourage sharing of ideas and knowledge reinforcement
14	Shares own understanding of the question with students	[Same as previous]
15	Explains own view of the assignment	[Same as previous]
16	Helps with assignment in terms of how to answer the question	In Vygotsky's terms, there exist knowledge that students will never be able to access without assistance from a teacher or advanced peer.
17	Takes notes	Note making and note taking are elements of reflection and knowledge organisation and reinforcement
18	Asks students to think of various ways to answer the question/ alternative answers	Create opportunities for students to be exposed to multiple views
19	Points out what is missing/ irrelevant in assignment/writing	In Vygotsky's terms, there exists knowledge that students will never be able to access without assistance from a teacher or advanced peer.

20	At the end, gives students guidance on what to do on their own / help where students do not know what to do	[Same as previous]
21	Facilitates the discussion to allow for interactions with and amongst students	Group discussions are key in the social constructivist environment as enablers of co-construction of knowledge and learning
22	Poses clarification question to ascertain understanding	Encourage sharing of ideas and knowledge reinforcement
23	Asks students to list or summarise the main points/answers/solutions	[Same as previous]
24	Ask students to summarise key changes to be made to draft/writing/assignment	[Same as previous]
25	Encourages and help students make follow up booking as they exit	Students need help realising the importance of creating a writing process, where they can consult more than once for the same draft before final submission

These practices are geared towards the facilitation of the student writers' disciplinary genre awareness through social interactions. They are intended to enable an understanding of areas of AL/ writing or disciplinary content previously obscure or difficult to access, by discussing them with the student writer's peers, and from the consultant's inputs. Students may also gain the ability to think independently and differently, and become aware of other perspectives, while using the opportunity to correct mistakes and errors in writing and thinking, and the chance to learn to talk about and share ideas with peers and others.

9.4.3. Writing Group Consultation and the Disciplinary Literacies

This study found that in the GC, the type of assistance required by students, which may be specific in nature, often leads to a focus on a broader academic or disciplinary genre; for example: argumentative essay, descriptive essay, lab report, or investigative report. For a consultant to be able to assist students effectively in the GC, it is not necessary for them to be of the same academic field as the students. The writing consultant's role, which focuses on

academic literacies/writing, differs from the tutor's role, which essentially focuses on the content. What is important is for the consultant to respond to the student's writing as a reader, that is, a lay audience seeking clarity in the student's writing. In a multidisciplinary writing centre, the consultant could be from a field other than the students' and still be able, through social interactions and discussions, to facilitate the students' learning of disciplinary literacies. **I emphasise that in an effective social constructivist group, students should learn not from the consultant, but mostly from the social interactions in the GC as a whole; that is, from their peers and even from their own reflection and thinking in the processes.**

However, there are risks that the consultant should guard against. Firstly, any over-reliance by the consultant on the students' explanation or definition of disciplinary concepts and materials, without careful scrutiny of the students' input for validity, may result in students internalising serious errors in judgement, thinking, and content. Secondly, the consultant may be inadvertently or deliberately misled by 'weak' or 'superficial' students; particularly because even under normal circumstances, writing consultants already "experience an overwhelming sense of uncertainty when consulting with students from unfamiliar disciplines" (Johnson, Clark & Burton 2015: 63). However, this study showed that such risks remain minimal, as students may not deliberately provide the consultant and others with erroneous information and because, in Vygotskian terms, groups often have more advanced peers who may correct and guide peers in the correct direction.

Notwithstanding these risks, what is important is for the consultant to initiate and maintain effective interactions with and among students on their disciplinary writing. In the study, AL/writing areas students need assistance with are "essay writing", "assignment writing" and "report writing". Other areas covered in consultations may include the writing of essays, reports, and literature reviews (McWilliams & Allan 2017; Myatt & Gaillet 2016). Just like consultants, the bulk of students visiting the writing centre, are from Humanities, Economics and Financial Sciences, and Law, and need assistance with essay, report and literature review writing; which areas that consultants are familiar with. Even when the consultant is from a discipline other than the students, they can still assist students in a manner that aids their understanding of their disciplinary content. In a multi-disciplinary writing centre confronted to this type of dilemma, the effective consultant is the good communicator (Johnson, Clark & Burton 2015), as the consulting strategies may be more supportive of the students from an unfamiliar field, than the disciplinary knowledge itself. Writing centre practice trains

consultants to act as ‘facilitators’ (Kane 2012), who focus on the thinking process [my emphasis], rather than tutors, who rely on disciplinary knowledge.

As emphasised previously, in a social constructivist learning environment, students learn not only from the teacher, tutor, or consultant, but mostly from one another, through social interactions and group discussions (Vygotsky 1981). In a GC, students assist one another in terms of their AL/disciplinary writing and assignment writing. They do this while answering the consultant’s questions, expressing various views on the topic or assignment, or elaborating on aspects of the work. They take over from the consultant and explain aspects, which the consultant cannot explain, to one another. Students may even check each other’s work or assignments. To reiterate, in spite the possible consultant’s limited understanding of some aspects of the specialised disciplinary content, ‘strong’ students in the groups may support the consultant by explaining the more complex aspects to their peers. Briefly, even in a multidisciplinary writing centre, the GC is a space where disciplinary literacies and texts can be unpacked effectively and in a manner that supports the student writers’ learning of complex disciplinary conventions and genres.

9.5. Recommendations for Further Research

The reliability of any research using the perceptions of students and/or writing consultants may remain uncertain due to various factors. In this study, for instance, the video-observations foregrounded a number of weaknesses for the GC, which the student and consultant responses, or perceptions in the questionnaire and focus groups, could not highlight. Hence, to investigate the GC further, future studies should use observation as the main research methods to analyse at least eight to ten GCs.

9.6. Conclusion

This Chapter summarised the study, conclusions, implications or recommendations for writing centre practice, and possible directions for future research on the topic. In the summary of the study, I presented a snapshot of the context, aim, objectives, scope, methodology, significance and limitations of the study. The context explicated the need to arrive at a better understanding of the GC, as a novel writing consultation facilitation strategy, different from the group discussions, peer group writing, writing circle, and even the one-on-one consultation. The aim of the study was to explore the challenges faced by students and writing consultants in GCs, in

raising academic genre awareness, using Social Constructivism, NLS/AL and Writing Centre Practice, as analytical frameworks. The study objectives were to identify the challenges facing students and writing consultant in GC sessions; to explore the social interactions occurring in the group consultations; and to determine whether these social interactions focus on genre awareness. The scope of the study, which was essentially qualitative in nature, was limited to the UJ writing centres. I also stated that the findings of this study would not be generalised as the study was qualitative in nature, aiming to rather explore the issues in depth. The methodology used questionnaires, focus groups, and video observations in 2014, as well as additional questionnaires in 2016, each with students and consultants. The limitations were that the study relied heavily on the perceptions of students and consultants in the questionnaires and focus groups. Only the video observations provided data that seemed 'more reliable' and contradicted some of the findings from the other methods.

In the conclusions of the study, I looked at the problems or risks of the GC including the non-participation, dominance of few group members, unpreparedness, the consultant's negative attitude, the outspoken consultant, the lack of time, and group disorganisation. The social constructivist features of the GC included collaborations among students, multiple perspectives, peer learning, development of student voice, and the consultant's positive attitude. Discursive practices centred on questioning, as a GC facilitation strategy, group discussion, facilitation through explanation, clarification, elaboration, modelling, exemplification, and reflection (group and individual), as well as drafting/brainstorming/free writing/outlining (group and individual). In the implications of the study, which also serve as recommendations, I discussed the student practices, consultant practices, and AL/disciplinary literacies in GC.

The significance of this study resides in that, for AL and writing centre practitioners, and departmental academic staff, awareness of this social constructivist nature of the GC can assist in focusing the GC practices on social interactions, in attempting to familiarise students with disciplinary genres, rather than solely on cognitive aspects and GC dynamics. Priority should be given to the practices that are conducive to effective social interactions and learning in the groups.

Sources

Ackermann, E. (2001). Piaget's constructivism, Papert's constructionism: What's the difference. *Future of learning group publication*, *5*(3): 438.

Alesandrini, K. & Larson, L. (2002). Teachers bridge to constructivism. The Clearing House, 119-121.

Alvermann, D. E., & Hagood, M. C. (2000). Critical media literacy: Research, theory, and practice in "New Times". *The Journal of Educational Research*, *93*(3): 193-205.

Amineh, R. J., & Asl, H. D. (2015). Review of constructivism and social constructivism. *Journal of Social Sciences, Literature and Languages*, *1*(1): 9-16.

Andrews, T. (2012). What is social constructionism. *Grounded theory review*, *11*(1): 39-46.

Applefield, J. M., Huber, M., & Moallem, M. (2001). Constructivism in theory and practice: Toward a better understanding. *The High School Journal*, *84*(2): 35-53.

Archer, A. (2008) Investigating the effect of Writing Centre interventions on student writing. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 22(2): 2010 - 2026

Archer, A. (2010). Challenges and potentials for Writing Centres in South African tertiary institutions. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *24*(4): 495-510.

Archer, A. & Richards, R. (eds) (2011). *Changing Spaces: Writing Centres and Access to higher Education*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press

Archer, A. (2012). Changing academic landscapes: Principles and practices of teaching writing at the University of Cape Town. *Writing programs worldwide: Profiles of academic writing in many places*, 353-364.

Ayland, C., & Dolan, A. (1999, November). Analysis on trial. In *Esomar Qualitative Research Conference,* Athens.

Babbie, E.R. (2010). *The Practice of Social Research* (12th ed.). Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.

Bakhtin, M.M. (1983). "Epic and Novel". In Holquist, Michael. The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barbara, G. D. (1993). *Tools for teaching*. Jossey-Bass.

Barnett, R. (2004). Learning for an Unknown Future. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 23(3): 247-260.

Barnett, R.W. & Blummer, J.S. (2001). *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing Center Theory and Practice.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Barton, D., Hamilton, M. & Ivanic, R. (2000) *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context.* London: Routledge.

Bawarshi, A., & Pelkowski, S. (1999). Post-colonialism and the Idea of a Writing Center. *The Writing Center Journal*, *19*(2): 41-58.

Bean, J. (2011). *Engaging Ideas: The professor's guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning*. San-Francisco: Jossey-bass.

Berkenkotter, C. & Huckin, T.N. (2005). *Genre Knowledge in disciplinary communication: cognition/ culture/power*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Erlbaum.

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard: Harvard University Press

Brandt, D. (2009). *Literacy and learning: Reflections on writing, reading, and society*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brandt, D., & Clinton, K. (2002). Limits of the local: Expanding perspectives on literacy as a social practice. *Journal of literacy research*, *34*(3): 337-356.

Brey, P. (1997). Social constructivism for philosophers of technology: A shopper's guide. *Techné: Journal of the Society for Philosophy and Technology*, *2*(3-4): 56-78.

Brodahl, C., Hadjerrouit, S. & Hansen, N. K. (2011). Collaborative Writing with Web 2.0 technologies: education students' perceptions. *Journal of Information Technology Education*, 10, IIP 73-103. Available: http://www.jite.org/documents/Vol10/JITEv10IIPp073-103Brodahl948.pdf

Brown, S. D., Lent, R. W. & Larkin, K. C. (1989). Self-efficacy as a moderator of scholastic aptitude-academic performance relationships. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *35*(1): 64-75.

Brüggen, E. & Willems, P. (2009). A critical comparison of offline focus groups, online focus groups and e-Delphi. *International Journal of Market Research*, *51*(3): 1-15.

Bruning, R. H., Schraw, G. J. & Ronning, R. R. (1999). *Cognitive psychology and instruction*. Prentice-Hall, Inc., One Lake Street, Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458.

Cabral, A.P. & Tavares, J. (2002). *Reading and Writing Skills in Higher Education: Lecturers' Opinions and Perceptions.* Paper Presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, University of Lisbon, 11-14 September.

Canagarajah, S. (2002). Multilingual Writers and the Academic Community: Towards A Critical Relationship. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 1(2002): 29-44

Carter, M. (2007). Ways of knowing, doing, and writing in the disciplines. *College composition and communication*, 385-418.

Castle, J. (2017). Benefits of freewriting for academic staff engaged in a writing retreat. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *31*(2): 124-137.

Chanock, K. (2000, September 21-23). *Evaluating one-to-one support for academic literacy: From institution to documentation*. Paper presented at the Australian Council for Adult Literacy International Conference, Lens on Literacy, Fremantle, Australia.

Chanock, K. (2002). Problems and possibilities in evaluating oneto-one language and academic skills teaching. In J. Webb & P. McLean (Eds.), *Academic skills advising: Evaluation for program improvement and accountability* (199-221). Melbourne, Australia: Victorian Language and Learning Network.

Chanock, K. (2007). Valuing individual consultations as input into other modes of teaching. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, *1*(1), A1-A9. Available from: http://www.journal. aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/view/1/4

Cho, M. H., & Kim, B. J. (2013). Students' self-regulation for interaction with others in online learning environments. *The Internet and Higher Education*, *17:* 69-75.

Clarence, S. (2011). Writing in the Academy: Collaborative writing development with students and lecturers at the UWRITING CENTRE Writing Centre. In *Changing Spaces: Writing Centres and Access to Higher Education*. Edited by Archer, A. & Richards, R. Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 101-114.

Cole, P. (1992). Constructivism revisited: A search for common ground. *Educational Technology*, *32*(2): 27-34.

Collins, J. (1989). Hegemonic practice: Literacy and standard language in public education. *Journal of Education*, *171*(2): 9-34.

Collins, J. (1995). Literacy and literacies. *Annual review of anthropology*, *24*(1): 75-93.

Cook-Gumperz, J. (1986). Caught in a web of words: Some considerations on language socialization and language acquisition. *Children's worlds and children's language*, 37-68

Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (1993). Introduction: How a genre approach to literacy can transform the way writing is taught. *The powers of literacy: A genre approach to teaching writing*, 1-21.

Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures.* London: Macmillan

Corbett, S. J. (2015). *Beyond dichotomy: Synergizing writing center and classroom pedagogies*. WAC Clearinghouse.

Corden, R.E. (2001). Group discussion and the importance of a shared perspective: Learning from collaborative research. *Qualitative Research,* 1(3): 347-367.

Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 3rd ed. London: Sage publishers.

Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 4th ed. London: Sage publishers.

Darsot, F.M. (2010). Engineering students' construction of identity through their writing. Unpublished Masters' degree dissertation, faculty of education, university of Johannesburg.

Davies, P. (2000). Approaches to evidence-based teaching. *Medical Teacher*, *22*(1): 14-21.

Davis, B.G. (1993). *Tools for Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers

Davis, B. & Harre, R. (2001). Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves. In Wetherell, M., taylor, S. & Yates, S.J. (Eds). *Discourse Theory And Practice* (261-271). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Devitt, A.J. (2004). "A Theory of Genre". *Writing Genres*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1–32.

Devlin, M., & McKay, J. (2014). Reframing'the problem': Students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds transitioning to university. *Universities in transition: foregrounding social contexts of knowledgein the first year experience*, 97-125.

Deyi, S. (2011). Feedback or feed-forward?. *Changing spaces: Writing centres and access to higher education*, 47-58.

Dison, L., & Clarence, S. (2017). *Writing Centres in Higher Education*. Stellenbosch: AFRICAN SUN MeDIA.

Di Vesta, F. J. (1987). The cognitive movement and education. In *Historical foundations of educational psychology* (203-233). Springer, Boston, MA.

Dixon, R. A. & Johnson, S. D. (2011). Experts vs. Novices: Differences in How Mental Representations Are Used in Engineering Design. *Journal of Technology Education*, 23(1): 47-65.

Dube, C., Kane, S. & Lear, M. (2012). The effectiveness of students redrafting continuous assessment tasks: the pivotal role of tutors and feedback. *Perspectives in Education*, 30(3):

Duncum, P. (2008). Thinking critically about critical thinking: towards a post-critical, dialogic pedagogy for popular visual culture. *International Journal of Education through Art*, 4(3): 247-257.

Drennan, L. M. (2017). Traversing the spaces of higher education through writing. *Reading & Writing-Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa*, *8*(1): 1-8.

Driscoll, D. L. (2011). Introduction to primary research: Observations, surveys, and interviews. *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, *2:* 153-174.

Eggen, P. & Kauchak, D. (2004). Windows on classrooms. *Educational Psychology, New Jersey*.

Engstrom, C. & Tinto, V. (2008). Access without support is not opportunity. *Change: The magazine of higher learning*, *40*(1): 46-50.

Ernest, P. (1993). Constructivism, the psychology of learning, and the nature of mathematics: Some critical issues. *Science & Education*, *2*(1): 87-93.

Ernest, P. (1999). Forms of knowledge in mathematics and mathematics education: Philosophical and rhetorical perspectives. In *Forms of mathematical knowledge* (67-83). Springer, Dordrecht.

Fairclough, N. (2003). Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research. London and New York: Routledge.

Fern, E. F. (1982). The use of focus groups for idea generation: the effects of group size, acquaintanceship, and moderator on response quantity and quality. *Journal of marketing Research*, 1-13.

Flavell, J. (1971). "First Discussant's Comments: What is Memory Development the Development of? *Human Development*, 14(4): 272

Foster, G. 2010. 'Teacher effects on student attrition and performance in massmarket tertiary education'. *Higher Education*, 60(3): 301-19.

Fox, N. J. (1998). *How to use observations in a research project*. Trent: NHS Executive.

Frechtling, J. (2002). An overview of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. *The 2002 User-friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation*.

French, E. (2010). Critical Thinking and Organisation Theory: Embedding a process to encourage graduate capabilities. *E-Journal of Business Education & Scholarship of Teaching*: 2010, 4(1): 1-10.

Galvis, D.N.M. (2010). Peer editing: A strategic source in EFL students' writing process. *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, *12*(1).

Gee, J. (1990). *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideologies in Discourses*. Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press.

Given, L.M. (2008). *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Los Angeles, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Glasersfeld, V. E., 1991. An exposition of constructivism: Why some like it radical. In *Facets of systems science*, (229-238). Springer, Boston, MA.

Goody, J. & Watt, I. (1988). originally published 1968,'The Consequences of Literacy'. *Perspectives on Literacy, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville*, 3-27.

Gordon, M. (2009). Toward a pragmatic discourse of constructivism: Reflections on lessons from practice. *Educational studies*, *45*(1), 39-58.

Goss, J. D., & Leinbach, T. R. (1996). Focus groups as alternative research practice: experience with transmigrants in Indonesia. *Area*, 115-123.

Grabe, W. & Kaplan, R. B. (1996). Theory & Practice of Writing: An Applied Linguistics Perspective. London and New York: Longman

Graff, H. (1995). Assessing the History of Literacy in the 1990s: Themes and Questions. *Armando Petrucci and M. Gimeno Blay. Valencia, Spain: Universitat de Valencia*, 5-46.

Greeno, J. G., Collins, A. M., & Resnick, L. B. (1996). Cognition and learning. *Handbook of educational psychology*, *77*, 15-46.

Groenland, E. A. (2002). Qualitative research to validate the RQ-dimensions. *Corporate Reputation Review*, *4*(4): 308-315.

Gumperz, J. C. (Ed.). (1986). *The social construction of literacy*. Cambridge University Press.

Guthrie, J. T., Wigfield, A., Barbosa, P., Perencevich, K. C., Taboada, A., Davis, M. H. & Tonks, S. (2004). Increasing reading comprehension and engagement through concept-oriented reading instruction. *Journal of educational psychology*, *96*(3): 403.

Hamilton, M. & Barton, D. (2000). The International Adult Literacy Survey: what does it really measure? *International review of education, 46*(5): 377-389.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1994). Ethnography and participant observation. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 248-261.

Haidet, K. K., Tate, J., Divirgilio-Thomas, D., Kolanowski, A. & Happ, M. B. (2009). Methods to improve reliability of video-recorded behavioral data. *Research in nursing & health*, *32*(4), 465-474.

Hagood, M. C. (2002). Critical literacy for whom? *Literacy Research and Instruction*, *41*(3): 247-265.

Hansen, J. G. & Liu, J. (2005). Guiding principles for effective peer response. *ELT journal*, *59*(1): 31-38.

Harrell, M. C. & Bradley, M. A. (2009). *Data collection methods: Semi-structured interviews and focus groups*. Rand National Defense Research Inst Santa Monica CA.

Harrington, S., Dinitz, S., Benner, R., Davenport, L., Hudson, B. & Warrender, K. (2017). Turning Stories from the Writing Center into Useful Knowledge: Writing Centers, WID Programs, and Partnerships for Change. In *Writing Program and Writing Center Collaborations* (141-160). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Harris, M. (1986). *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English.

Harris, K. & Alexander, P. (1998). Integrated Constructivist Education: Challenge and Reality. Educational Psychology Review, 10(2): 115-127.

Hewitt, E. (2016). *Teachers thinking about and using peer group discussion in primary science* (Doctoral dissertation, School of Education).

Hmelo-Silver, C. E. & Barrows, H. S. (2006). Goals and strategies of a problem-based learning facilitator. Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-based Learning, 1: 21-39.

Hodson, D. & Hodson, J. (1998). From constructivism to social constructivism: A Vygotskian perspective on teaching and learning science. *School Science Review*, *79*(289): 33-41.

Holsti, O.R. (1969). *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities*. Holsti: Addison-Wesley.

Horning, A. (2007). "Reading across the Curriculum as the Key to Success". *Across the disciplines,* 4. Available from: http://www.wac.colostate.edu/edatd/articles/horning2007. (Accessed October 2016)

Huijser, H., Kimmins, L. & Galligan, L. (2008). Evaluating individual teaching on the road to embedding academic skills. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, *2*(1): 23-38.

Hughes, D. L., & DuMont, K. (2002). Using focus groups to facilitate culturally anchored research. In *Ecological research to promote social change* (257-289). Springer, Boston, MA.

Hunt, E., & Agnoli, F. (1991). The Whorfian hypothesis: A cognitive psychology perspective. *Psychological Review*, *98*(3): 377.

Hunter, L. & Leahey, E. (2008). Collaborative Research in Sociology: Trends and Contributing Factors. *The American Sociologist,* 39 (4): 290.

Hussain, I. (2012). Use of Constructivist Approach in Higher Education: An Instructors' Observation. *Creative Education*, 3(2): 179-184

Lessow-Hurley, J. (2012). *The foundations of dual language instruction*. Pearson Higher Ed.

Ismael, S.A.A. (2011). Exploring Students' Perceptions of ESL Writing. *English Language Teaching,* 4(2):73-83.

Jansen, R. G., Wiertz, L. F., Meyer, E. S., & Noldus, L. P. (2003). Reliability analysis of observational data: Problems, solutions, and software implementation. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, *35*(3): 391-399.

Jenkins, S. D. (2011) Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Critical Thinking. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 50(5): 268-274

Johnson, R., Clark, B. & Burton, M. (2015). Finding harmony in disharmony: Engineering and English studies. *Young Scholars in Writing*, *5:* 63-73.

Jones, M. G. & Brader-Araje, L. (2002). The impact of constructivism on education: Language, discourse, and meaning. *American Communication Journal*, *5*(3): 1-10.

Kane, S., Lear, M. & Dube, C. M. (2014). Reflections on the role of metacognition in student reading and learning at higher education level. *Africa Education Review*, *11*(4): 512-525.

Kane, S. (2012). Reading and Writing in the Writing Centre: An Integrative Approach. Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of South Africa, Proceedings of the Heltasa 2012 Conference, Stellenbosch University, South Africa, 46-54

Kelder, R. (1996). Rethinking Literacy Studies: From the Past to the Present. Proceedings of the 1996 World Conference on Literacy.

Kim, B. (2001). Social constructivism. *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology*, *1*(1): 16.

Kim, H. C. E., & Eklundh, K. S. (2001). Reviewing practices in collaborative writing. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)*, *10*(2): 247-259.

Kinkead, J.A. & Haris, J.G. (eds) (1993). *Writing centers in context: Twelve Case studies*. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Kirschner, P. A., Sweller, J., & Clark, R. E. (2006). "Why minimal guidance during instruction does not work: an analysis of the failure of constructivist, discovery, problem-based,

experiential, and inquiry-based teaching". Educational Psychologist 41 (2): 75–86. doi:10.1207/s15326985ep4102_1.

Kitzinger, J. (1995). Qualitative research: introducing focus groups. *Bmj*, *311*(7000): 299-302.

Kolb, A.Y. (2005). Experience-Based Learning Systems DAVID A. KOLB Case Western Reserve University Academy of Management Learning & Education. *Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education*, 4(2): 193-212.

Kress, G. (1998). *Social Semiotics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Kress, G. (2000). Multimodality. *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*, *2:* 182-202.

Kulick, D., & Stroud, C. (1993). Conceptions and uses of literacy in a Papua New Guinean village. *Cross-cultural approaches to literacy*, 30-61.

Langer, J. A. (Ed.). (1987). *Language, literacy, and culture: Issues of society and schooling*. Ablex Pub.

Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (1997). Critical literacy and active citizenship. *Constructing critical literacies: Teaching and learning textual practice*, 95-124.

Lasswell, H.D. (1948). Power and Personality. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Lea, R.M. (2004). Academic Literacies: A Pedagogy for Course Design. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29(6): 739-756

Lea, M. R. & Street, B. V. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An academic literacies approach. *Studies in higher education*, *23*(2): 157-172.

Lea, R.M. & Street, B. (2006). The Academic Literacies Model: Theory and Applications. *Theory into Practice*, 45(4): 368-377

Lee, A., & Boud, D. (2003). Writing groups, change and academic identity: Research development as a local practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 28(18):7-200.

Leedy, P.D. & Ormrod, J.E. (2010). *Practical Research: Planning and Design*. 9th ed. London: Pearson.

Leibowitz, B., Goodman, K., Hannon, P. & Parkerson, A. (1996). The Role of the Writing Centre in increasing Access to Academic Discourse in a Multilingual University. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 2(1): 5-19.

Leibowitz, B. & Mohamed, Y. (Eds) (2000). *Routes to Writing in Southern Africa*. Cape Town: Silk Road International Publishers.

Leibowiz, B. & Parkerson, A. (2011). A Conversation about the UWC Writing Centre Project. In *Changing Spaces: Writing Centres and Access to higher Education*. Archer, A. & Richards, R. (eds) Stellenbosch: Sun Press

Lewanika, T. & Archer, A. (2011). Communities of Practice: Reflections on Writing, Research and Academic Practices in a Writing Centre. In *Changing Spaces: Writing Centres and Access to higher Education*. Archer, A. & Richards, R. (eds) Stellenbosch: Sun Press

Lewin, C. (2011). Understanding and Describing Quantitative Data. *Theory and Methods in Social Research*. 2nd ed. Edited by Somekh, B. & Lewin, C. London: Sage. 220-230

Lewin, T., & Mawoyo, M. (2014). *Student access and success: Issues and interventions in South African universities*. Cape Town: Inyathelo.

Lewis, C., Enciso, P., & Moje, E. B. (Eds.). (2007). *Reframing sociocultural research on literacy: Identity, agency, and power*(1-11). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Lillis, T. (2003). Student Writing as 'Academic Literacies': Drawing on Bakhtin to Move from *Critique* to *Design. Language and Education*, 17(3): 192-207

Lillis, T. M. & Curry, M. J. (2010). *Academic writing in global context*. London: Routledge.

Liu, S. H. J., & Lan, Y. J. (2016). Social Constructivist Approach to Web-Based EFL Learning: Collaboration, Motivation, and Perception on the Use of Google Docs. *Educational Technology & Society*, *19*(1): 171-186.

Lofthouse, R., & Birmingham, P. (2010). The camera in the classroom: video-recording as a tool for professional development of student teachers. *Teacher Advancement Network Journal*, *1*(2).

Lundstrom, K. & Baker, W. (2009). To give is better than to receive: The benefits of peer review to the reviewer's own writing. *Journal of second language writing*, *18*(1): 30-43.

Mack, N., Woodsong, E., MackQueen, K. M., Guest, G., & Niamey, E. (2005). *Qualitative research methods: a data collectors field guide, family health international, research triangle park*. North Caroline: Family Health International.

Mann, P.S. (1995) *Introductory Statistics, 2nd Edition.* New York: Wiley

Mason, P. R., & Davis, B. H. (2007). More than the words: using stance-shift analysis to identify crucial opinions and attitudes in online focus groups. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *47*(4): 496-506.

Matsumura, L.C., Slater, S.C. & Crosson, A. (2008). Classroom climate, rigorous instruction and curriculum, and students' interactions in urban middle schools. The Elementary School Journal, 108(4): 294-312.

McLeod, S. H. & Miraglia, E. (2001). Writing across the curriculum in a time of change. *WAC for the new millennium: Strategies for continuing writing-across-the-curriculum programs*, 1-27.

McLoughlin, C. & Lee, M. J. (2010). Personalised and self regulated learning in the Web 2.0 era: International exemplars of innovative pedagogy using social software. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, *26*(1).

McMahon, M. (1997, December). Social constructivism and the World Wide Web-A paradigm for learning. In *ASCILITE conference. Perth, Australia*, 327.

McWilliams, R. & Allan, Q. (2014). Embedding academic literacy skills: Towards a best practice model. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, *11*(3): 8.

Mitoumba-Tindy, H. (2017). Working in the interspace between subject knowledge and academic literacies: Writing centres as a zone of proximal development: 67-80. In: *Writing Centres in Higher education: working in and across the disciplines*. Edited by Clarence, S. & Dison, L. Stellenbosch: Sun Press.

Moll, C.L. (1990). Vygotsky's Zone of proximal Development: Rethinking its Instructional Implications. *Journal for the Study of Education & Development*, 157-168

Moje, E. B. & Luke, A. (2009). Literacy and identity: Examining the metaphors in history and contemporary research. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *44*(4): 415-437.

Motta-Roth, D. (1998). Discourse analysis and academic book reviews: A study of text and disciplinary cultures. In J. F. Coll, I. Fortanet, J. C. Palmer, & S. Posteguillo (Eds.), *Genre studies in English for academic purposes* (29-48). Castellón, Spain: Universitat Jaume I.

Mtonjeni, T. & Sefalane-Nkohla, P. (2017). Meaning-making through writing in the applied sciences. *Writing Centres in Higher Education Higher Education*, *9:* 145.

Muspratt, S., Luke, A., & Freebody, P. (1997). Constructing critical literacies. Creskill.

Myatt, A. J. (2017). Enacting Partnerships: Writing Programs, Writing Centers, and the Collaboration Continuum. In *Writing Program and Writing Center Collaborations* (1-23). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Myatt, A. J., & Gaillet, L. L. (Eds.). (2016). *Writing Program and Writing Center Collaborations: Transcending Boundaries*. Springer.

Nelson, S. (2000). Teaching collaborative writing and peer review techniques to engineering and technology undergraduates. In *Frontiers in Education Conference, 2000. FIE 2000. 30th Annual,* 2: S2B-1. IEEE.

Newman, I. (2000). A Conceptualization of Mixed Methods: A Need for Inductive/Deductive Approach to Conducting Research. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting at New Orleans, LA, April 2000.

Norton, B. (2010). Identity, literacy, and English-language teaching. *TESL Canada Journal*, 1-1.

North, S. (1984). The Idea of the Writing Centre. *College English*, 46(5): 433-446

North, S. (1990). "The Idea of a Writing Center." *Rhetoric and Composition: A Sourcebook for Teachers and Writers*. Edited by Richard L. Graves. 3rd. ed. Portsmouth: Boynton Cook. 232-246.

Nunan, D. & Di Domenico, M. (2013). Market research and the ethics of big data. *International Journal of Market Research*, *55*(4): 505-520.

Nyback, M. H. (2013). A constructivist approach to teaching and learning at the degree programme in nursing at Novia University of applied sciences. Finland. Retrieved in June 10 from http://www.novia.fi/assets/filer/Publikationer/SerieR-rapporter/Teaching-and-learning-6.2013.pdf

Nystrand, M. (1996). *Opening dialogue: Understanding the dynamics of language and learning in the English classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Odell, L. (1995). Basic Writing in Context: Rethinking Academic Literacy. *Journal of Basic writing*, 14(1): 43-55.

Olsen, G.A. (ed) (1984). *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration.* Urbana: NCTE.

Ormrod, J. E., & Jones, B. D. (2012). *Essentials of educational psychology: Big ideas to guide effective teaching*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Palincsar, A. S. (1998). Social constructivist perspectives on teaching and learning. *Annual review of psychology*, *49*(1): 345-375.

Papen, U. (2005). *Adult literacy as social practice: More than skills*. Routledge.

Paterson, B. L., Bottorff, J. L. & Hewat, R. (2003). Blending observational methods: Possibilities, strategies, and challenges. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *2*(1): 29-38.

Perry, K. H. (2012). What Is Literacy?--A Critical Overview of Sociocultural Perspectives. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, *8*(1): 50-71.

Perry, K. H., & Purcell-Gates, V. (2005). Resistance and appropriation: Literacy practices as agency within hegemonic contexts. In *Yearbook-National Reading Conference*, 54: 272.

Piaget, J. (1970). Science of education and the psychology of the child. Trans. D. Coltman.

Powell, K. C., & Kalina, C. J. (2009). Cognitive and Social Constructivism: Developing Tools for an Effective Classroom. *Education*, *130*(2).

Posner, I. R., Baecker, R. M., & Mantei, M. (1993). How people write together. In *Proceedings of the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (25: 127-127). IEEE Institute of Electrical and Electronics.

Powers, J. K. (1993). Rethinking writing center conferencing strategies for the ESL writer. *The Writing Center Journal*, *13*(2): 39-47.

Prawat, R. S., & Floden, R. E. (1994). Philosophical perspectives on constructivist views of learning. *Educational Psychologist*, *29*(1): 37-48.

Pretorius, E. (2000). “What The Can’t Read Will Hurt Them: Reading And Academic Achievement”. Available from: http://www.innovation.ukzn.ac.za. (Accessed October 2016).

Pretzlik, U. (1994). Observational methods and strategies: The author looks at unstructured and structured observation, nonparticipant and participant observation, and briefly deals with sampling. Observational studies involving children in home, play and hospital situations illustrate related ideas. *Nurse Researcher*, *2*(2): 13-21.

Prinsloo, M. & Breier, M. (Eds.). (1996). *The social uses of literacy: Theory and practice in contemporary South Africa*, (4). John Benjamins Publishing.

Purser, E., Skillen, J., Deane, M., Donohue, J. & Peake, K. (2008). *Developing Academic Literacy in Context*. Available from: www.zeitschrift-schreiben.eu (Accessed May 2016)

Raimes, A. (1991). Out of the woods: Emerging traditions in the teaching of writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25: 407-430

Ramanathan-Abbott, V. (1993). An examination of the relationship between social practices and the comprehension of narratives. *Text*, 13: 117-141.

Ramanathan, V. & Kaplan, R. (2000). Genres, Authors, Discourse Communities: theory and Application for (L1 and) L2 writing Instructors. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 9(2): 171 - 191

Reznitskaya, A., Anderson, R.C. & Kuo, L. (2007). Teaching and learning argumentation. *The Elementary School Journal*, 107(5): 449-472.

Richardson, V. (1997b). Constructivist Pedagogy. *Teachers College Record*, 105(9): 1623-1640.

Rogoff, B. (1990). Apprenticeship in Thinking: Cognitive Development in Social Context. New York: Oxford University Press.

Russell, D.R., Lea, L., Parker, J., Street, B. & Donahue, T. (2009) Exploring Notions of Genre in “Academic Literacies” and “Writing across the Curriculum”: Approaches across Countries and Contexts. In: Bazerman, Charles; Bonini, Adair and Figueiredo, D´ebora (eds.) Genre in a Changing World. *Perspectives on Writing,* 459–491.

Sagoe, D. (2012). Precincts and prospects in the use of focus groups in social and behavioral science research. *The Qualitative Report*, *17*(29): 1-16. Available from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17/sagoe.pdf. (Accessed October 2016)

Sandelowski, M. (2000). Focus on Research Methods -Whatever Happened to Qualitative Description. *Research in nursing and health*, *23*(4): 334-340.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2009). *Research methods for business students*. Harlow: Pearson education.

Schacter, D. L. (2009). *Psychology. Catherine Woods* (p. 267). ISBN 978-1-4292-3719-2.

Scribner, S. & Cole, M. (1981). Unpackaging literacy. *Writing: The nature, development, and teaching of written communication, 1:* 71-87

Schcolnik, M., Kol, S. & Abarbanel, J. (2016). Constructivism in theory and in practice. In *English teaching forum* (44(4): 12-20). US Department of State. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Office of English Language Programs, SA-5, 2200 C Street NW 4th Floor, Washington, DC 20037.

Scribner, S., & Cole, M. (1981). Unpackaging literacy. *Writing: The nature, development, and teaching of written communication, 1:* 71-87.

Severino, C. & Cogie, J. (2016). Writing centers and second and foreign language writers. *Handbook of Second and Foreign Language Writing, 11:* 453.

Shabanza, K. (2012). *Bachelor of Technology Students Thinking Critically Within a Zone of Proximal Development: The Role Of The Writing Centre in Developing Critical Thinking.* Unpublished Research Report, University Of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

Shabanza, K.J. (2014). 'Struggling with Postgraduate studies': Bachelor of Technology Students writing Academic genres, paper presented at the Higher Education Learning & Teaching Association (HELTASA), University of South Africa (UNISA) Pretoria, 27 – 29 November 2013.

Shabanza, K.J. (2017). Enhancing reflection on writing: using group-writing consultations to develop meta-awareness of disciplinary writing: 161-174. In: *Writing Centres in Higher education: working in and across the disciplines*. Edited by Clarence, S. & Dison, L. Stellenbosch: Sun Press.

Shamoon, L. K., & Burns, D. H. (1995). A critique of pure tutoring. *The Writing Center Journal*, *15*(2): 134-151.

Shunk, D. H. (2000). *Learning theories: An Educational Perspective* (3rd ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Simion, F., Regolin, L., & Bulf, H. (2008). A predisposition for biological motion in the newborn baby. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *105*(2): 809-813.

Simpson, Z. (2009). "Totally in the Zone": Using metaphor to 'glimpse'writer-identity. *Education As Change*, *13*(1): 195-209.

Song, X. (2014). Changing social relations in higher education: the first year international student and the "Chinese learner" in Australia. *Universities in transition: Foregrounding social contexts of knowledge in the first year experience*, 127-156.

Skinner, S. B. (1976). Cognitive development: A prerequisite for critical thinking. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, *49*(7): 292-298.

Spigelman, C., & Grobman, L. (Eds.). (2005). *On location: Theory and practice in classroom-based writing tutoring*. Colorado: University Press of Colorado.

Stainback, S., & Stainback, W. (1988). *Understanding & Conducting Qualitative Research*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

Stevenson, M. D. & Kokkinn, B. A. (2009). Evaluating one-toone sessions of academic language and learning. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning, 3*(2): A36-A50. Available from http://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall/article/view/86/66

Stotsky, S. (1983). "Research on Reading/ Writing Relationships: A Synthesis and Suggested Directions". *Language Arts*, 60(5): 627-642.

Storch, N. (2005). Collaborative writing: Product, process, and students' reflections. *Journal of second language writing, 14*(3): 153-173.

Street, B. (1995) *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography and Communication*. London and New York: Longman.

Street, B. 1996. Academic literacies. In *Challenging ways of knowing in maths, science and English.* Edited by Baker, D., Clay, J. & Fox, C. Brighton/Philadelphia: Falmer Press.

Street, B. V. (1997). Social literacies. In *Encyclopedia of language and education*, (133-141). Dordrecht: Springer.

Street, B. (2001). Contexts for literacy work: The 'new orders' and the 'new literacy studies'. *Powerful literacies. Leicester: NIACE*.

Street, B. (2003). What's "new" in New Literacy Studies? Critical approaches to literacy in theory and practice. *Current issues in comparative education, 5*(2): 77-91.

Street, B.V. (2005). At last: Recent applications of new literacy studies in educational contexts. *Research in the Teaching of English, 39*(4): 417-423.

Street, B.V. (2014). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education*. London and New York: Routledge.

Sullivan, C.C. (2011). Modeling the model: The use of classroom talk in teaching socioconstructivist pedagogy in a social studies teacher education setting. *The Journal of Classroom Interaction,* 24-32.

Sweller, J. (1988). Cognitive load during problem solving: Effects on learning. Cognitive Science, 2, 257–285.

The New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard educational review*, *66*(1): 60-93.

Thokozile, L. & Archer, A. (2011). Communities of practice : reflections on writing, research, and academic practices in a writing centre. In, Archer, A. & Richards, R. (eds) (2011). *Changing Spaces: Writing Centres and Access to higher Education*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press

Torgeson, J., Rashotte, C. & Ann, A. (2001). "Principles of Fluency Instruction in Reading: Relationships with Established Empirical Outcomes". Quoted in wolf, M., ed. 2001. *Dyslexia, Fluency and the Brai*n. Timonium, MD: York Press.

Tsang, A. (2011). In-class reflective group discussion as a strategy for the development of students as evolving professionals. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *5*(1): 7.

Van Meter, P. & Stevens, R. J. (2000). The role of theory in the study of peer collaboration. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *69*(1): 113-127.

Vacek, J. (2009). Using a Conceptual Approach with Concept Mapping to promote Critical Thinking. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 48(1): 45-48

Vollmer, G. (2002). Socio-Cultural Perspective on Second Language Writing. *News Bulletin*, 25(2):1-2

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1981). *Thought and Language*. Edited by Hanfmann, E. & Vakar, G. Massachussets: The M.I.T. Press.

Walkinshaw, I., Milford, T., & Freeman, K. (2015). Individual consultations: Academic writing outcomes for international students. *SAGE Open*, *5*(3): 2158244015607936.

Webb, C. & Kevern, J. (2001). Focus groups as a research method: a critique of some aspects of their use in nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *33*(6): 798-805.

Weber, K., Maher, C., Powell, A. & Lee, H.S. (2008). Learning opportunities from group discussions: Warrants become the objects of debate. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, 68 (3), 247-261.

Wenger, E. (2000). Communities of practice and social learning systems. *Organisation*, 7(2): 225-246.

Williams, J. & Severino, C. (2004). The writing center and second language writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *3*(13): 165-172.

Williams, J. (2004). Tutoring and revision: Second language writers in the writing centre. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *13:* 173-201. doi:10.1016/j.jslw.2004.04.009

Wilson, B.G. (1996). Constructivist learning environments: Case studies in instructional design. *Educational Technology*. Englewood Cliffs, (1996), 252. *IEEE Transactions On Professional Communication*, 1997, 40(4)

Wilson, S. & MacLean, R. (2011). *Research methods and data analysis for psychology*. McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Wolff, B., Knodel, J. & Sittitrai, W. (1993). Focus groups and surveys as complementary research methods. *Successful focus groups: Advancing the state of the art*, 118-136.

Wertsch, J. V. (1997). Narrative tools of history and identity. *Culture & Psychology*, 5-20. Available from: http://lchc.ucsd.edu/mca/Mail/xmcamail.2007_12.dir/att-0342/Wertsch__James_V._-_Narrative_tools_of_history_and_identity_-_ver.pdf (Accessed 13 May 2019)

Appendix A: Student Survey Questionnaire 2014

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

TARGET GROUP: STUDENTS

Please take time to fill in the following questionnaire:

1. PERSONAL DETAILS

1	Gender	Male☐		Female☐	
2	What is your faculty?				
3	What is your department?				
4	What is your year of study?	1st year☐	Second year☐	Third year☐	Fourth year☐
		Other (specify)			

2. ONE-ON-ONE WRITING CONSULTATION

5	How many one-on-one writing consultations have you attended? Answer:
6	What did you require assistance with? (Example: assignment writing, essay writing, report writing, etc.). Answer: Consultation 1: _____ Consultation 2: _____ Consultation 3: _____ Consultation 4: _____
7	How did you find the experience of sitting in one-on-one situation with a writing consultant to work on your writing? Please explain. Answer:

8	Do you think the one-on-one writing consultation worked in improving your writing? Please explain. Answer: a) What is it that worked about it? b) What is it that didn't work about it?
9	What do you think should be done to improve the one-on-one consultation? Please list and explain four things that should be done.

3. WRITING GROUP CONSULTATION

10	How many writing group consultations have you attended? Answer:
	How many students were parts of each group (including you)? Answer:
11	What did you require assistance with? (Example: assignment writing, essay writing, report writing, etc.). Answer: Group Consultation 1: _____ Group Consultation 2: _____ Group Consultation 3: _____ Group Consultation 4: _____
12	How did you find the experience of sitting in a group with other students to work on academic writing? Please explain. Answer:
13	Do you think the writing group consultation worked in improving your writing? Please explain. Answer:
	a) What is it that worked about it?
	b) What is it that didn't work about it?
14	What do you think should be done to improve the group consultation? Please list and explain four things that should be done. Answer:

4. PRINCIPLES OR PROCESSES OF A GROUP CONSULTATION

15	Briefly describe what the writing consultant did during the writing consultation from the beginning to the end.

16	Briefly describe what you and other students did during the writing consultation from the beginning to the end.
17	For the duration of the group consultation, did the writing consultant attend to each one of the students in the group individually?
18	Did the students assist one another at any given time? If yes how did they assist one another?
19	Do you think students should be allowed to assist one another when necessary during a group consultation? Please explain.
20	Did the writing consultant participate in the discussions? Please explain.
21	Did the writing consultant show you examples of how you should write or did s/he demonstrate how to write a specific section of your work? Please explain.
22	Are there things that you learned during the group consultation which you think you will be able to do on your own next time? If yes, what did you learn that you can do on your own?

5. PRINCIPLES OF ACADEMIC LITERACIES

23	During the writing group consultation, who between you and the writing consultant spoke most of the time? How do you feel about that?
24	During the group consultation, were students allowed to express their own opinions?
25	During the group consultation, were students allowed to use their own languages? (For example: Zulu, Sotho, Venda, Afrikaans, etc.)
26	At the beginning of the group consultation who decided what the group would be doing for the period? Was it one of the students, the students, or the writing consultant?
27	Do you feel that the writing consultant understood your assignment guidelines? Please explain

Appendix B: Student Survey Information Sheet

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET – SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE
TARGET GROUP: STUDENTS

Dear Student,

OBJECT: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Invitation: I would like to invite you to participate in a research project (see topic above) conducted by myself in fulfilment of my PhD degree in Applied English Language Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The Project: This research is important because recently writing centres across the country have experienced an increase in the number of writing group consultations caused by the admission of thousands of students, especially into the first year of university. The problem is that for decades South African universities have mainly conducted one-on-one writing consultations with students and the training of writing consultants, those who consult with students, has been fairly standardised and centered on the one-on-one consultation. With the group consultation as a new phenomenon, writing centre consultants have recently reported a feeling of uneasiness and inadequacy as to whether the group consultation should be conducted following the same methodologies and principles as the one-on-one consultation. In a bid to understand the group consultation, I'm conducting this research to find out the challenges that writing consultants and students alike experience in the context of the group consultation. Your assistance is required to answer a few questions which I believe will assist in understanding the group consultation dynamics and methodology.

Your Participation: You have been chosen because you recently attended a writing consultation at the writing centre and we are interested in your feedback. **Your participation will involve you answering a questionnaire**, which will take you approximately 25 minutes to complete.

Anonymity and confidentiality: Please note that participation is entirely voluntary and should you choose not to participate you will suffer no penalty or loss of benefit. If you do choose to participate please remember that you may withdraw from answering the questionnaire at any time without penalty. Additionally, your name will not be divulged to any third parties and your anonymity is guaranteed.

End Use of Research Data: This research is purely for academic purposes and is conducted with the approval of, and in accordance with the principles laid down by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical). The collected data will be analysed and the results will be used in the research report only. The raw data and hard copies will be kept in a locked office cabinet on the Wits School of Education premises.

If you do choose to participate, thank you sincerely for your help. Please complete, sign and return the attached Consent Form.

Regards,

KJ Shabanza _ PhD Candidate, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Appendix C: Student Survey Consent Form

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

CONSENT FORM – SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

TARGET GROUP: STUDENTS

Dear Student,

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE CONSENT FORM

After reading the information sheet, kindly indicate if you accept to participate in a survey by ticking the appropriate answer. Please complete, sign and return this form.

PLEASE TICK THE APPLICABLE OPTION:

Consent to participate in the survey:

I agree to participate in the survey. **Yes**☐ **No** ☐

Consent to complete a questionnaire for the survey:

I agree to fill in a questionnaire for the survey. **Yes**☐ **No** ☐

Consent to participate in a focus group interview:

I agree to participate in a focus group interview at a later stage. **Yes**☐ **No** ☐

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- My name and information will be kept confidential and safe.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotaped.
- All the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3 to 5 years after completion of this project.

Full Name (Confidential): _____Signature: _____Date: _____

If you do choose to participate, thank you sincerely for your help.

Appendix D: Survey Questionnaire Writing Consultant

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE
TARGET GROUP: WRITING CONSULTANTS

Please take time to fill in the following questionnaire:

4. PERSONAL DETAILS

1	Gender	Male☐		Female☐	
2	What is your faculty?				
3	What is your department?				
4	What is your year of study?	1st year☐	Second year☐	Third year☐	Fourth year☐
		Other (specify)			

5. ONE-ON-ONE WRITING CONSULTATION

5	Approximately how many one-on-one writing consultations have you conducted with students? Answer:
7	How do you find the experience of sitting one-on-one with a student to work on his/her writing? Please explain. Answer:
8	Do you think the one-on-one writing consultation works in improving students' writing? Please explain. Answer:
	b) What is it that doesn't work about it?
9	What do you think should be done to improve the one-on-one consultation? Please list and explain four things that should be done.

6. WRITING GROUP CONSULTATION

10	How many writing group consultations have you conducted with students? Answer:
	In average how many students form parts of each group? Answer:
11	What do they require assistance with mostly? (Example: assignment writing, essay writing, report writing, etc.). Answer: Group Consultation 1: _____ Group Consultation 2: _____ Group Consultation 3: _____ Group Consultation 4: _____
12	How do you find the experience of sitting with a group of students to work on their academic writing? Please explain. Answer:
13	Do you think the writing group consultation works in improving students' academic writing? Please explain. Answer:
	a) What is it that works about it?
	b) What is it that doesn't work about it?
14	What do you think should be done to improve the group consultation? Please list and explain four things that should be done. Answer:

4. PRINCIPLES OR PROCESSES OF A GROUP CONSULTATION

15	Briefly describe how you as a writing consultant conduct a writing group (things you do from the beginning to the end).
16	Briefly describe what students do during the writing consultation from the beginning to the end.

17	For the duration of the group consultation, do you attend to each one of the students in the group individually?
18	Do the students assist one another at any given time? If yes how do they assist one another?
19	Do you think students should be allowed to assist one another when necessary during a group consultation? Please explain.
20	Do you participate in discussions between students in the group? Please explain.
21	Do you show students examples of how they should write (a specific section of their work for instance)? Please explain.
22	Do you think there are things that students have learned during the group consultation which they will be able to do on their own next time? If yes, what have they learnt that they could do on your own?

5. PRINCIPLES OF ACADEMIC LITERACIES

23	During the writing group consultation, who between you and the students spoke most of the time? How do you feel about that?
24	During the group consultation, were students allowed to express their own opinion?
25	During the group consultation, did students use their own languages? (For example: Zulu, Sotho, Venda, Afrikaans, etc.)
26	At the beginning of the group consultation who decided what the group would be doing for the period? Was it you, one of the students or the students as a group?
27	Can you confidently say that you understood the students' assignment guidelines or questions? Please explain.

Appendix E: Survey Writing Consultant Information Sheet

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET – SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE
TARGET GROUP: WRITING CONSULTANTS

Dear Writing Consultant,

OBJECT: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Invitation: I would like to invite you to participate in a research project (see topic above) conducted by myself in fulfilment of my PhD degree in Applied English Language Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The Project: This research is important because recently writing centres across the country have experienced an increase in the number of writing group consultations, caused by the admission of thousands of students especially into the first year of university. The problem is that for decades South African universities have mainly conducted one-on-one writing consultations with students and the training of writing consultants, those who consult with students, has been fairly standardised and centered on the one-on-one consultation. With the group consultation as a new phenomenon, writing centre consultants have recently reported a feeling of uneasiness and inadequacy as to whether the group consultation should be conducted following the same methodologies and principles as the one-on-one consultation. In a bid to understand the group consultation, I'm conducting this research to find out the challenges that writing consultants and students alike experience in the context of the group consultation. Your assistance is required to answer a few questions which I believe will assist in understanding the group consultation dynamics and methodology.

Your Participation: You have been chosen because you have conducted a number of writing consultations at the writing centre and we are interested in your feedback. **Your participation will involve answering a questionnaire**, which will take you approximately 25 minutes to complete.

Anonymity and confidentiality: Please note that participation is entirely voluntary and should you choose not to participate you will suffer no penalty or loss of benefit. If you do choose to participate please remember that you may withdraw from answering the questionnaire at any time without penalty. Additionally, your name will not be divulged to any third parties and your anonymity is guaranteed.

End Use of Research Data: This research is purely for academic purposes and is conducted with the approval of, and in accordance with the principles laid down by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical). The collected data will be analysed and the results will be used in the research report only. The raw data and hard copies will be kept in a locked office cabinet. The audio-recordings and the video-recordings will be transcribed and stored safely in a password-protected computer on the Wits School of Education premises.

If you do choose to participate, thank you sincerely for your help. Please complete, sign and return the attached Consent Form.

Regards,

KJ Shabanza

PhD Candidate, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Appendix F: Survey Writing Consultant Consent Form

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

CONSENT FORM – SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

TARGET GROUP: WRITING CONSULTANTS

Dear Writing Consultant,

SURVEY CONSENT FORM

After reading the information sheet, kindly indicate if you accept to participate in a survey by ticking the appropriate answer. Please complete, sign and return this form.

PLEASE TICK THE APPLICABLE OPTION:

Consent to participate in the survey:

I agree to participate in the survey. **Yes**☐ **No** ☐

Consent to complete a questionnaire for the survey:

I agree to fill in a questionnaire for the survey. **Yes**☐ **No** ☐

Consent to participate in a focus group interview:

I agree to participate in the focus group interview at a later stage. **Yes**☐ **No** ☐

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- My name and information will be kept confidential and safe.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotaped.
- All the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3 to 5 years after completion of this project.

Full Name (Confidential): _____Signature: _____Date: _____

If you do choose to participate, thank you sincerely for your help.

Appendix G: Focus Group Interview Guide Students

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

INTERVIEW GUIDE – FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS
TARGET GROUP: STUDENTS

Level of study:

Faculty:

Department:

Writing centre campus:

Number of students in the group ☐ Males ☐ Females ☐

Students' department:

QUESTIONS

1. Of the one-on-one writing consultation and the group writing consultation which one do you think assisted you the most in terms of improving your academic writing? Please explain.
2. Based on the purpose of the writing consultation (assignment, lab report, essay writing, etc.) what consultations in your opinion were the most ineffective in improving your academic writing? Please explain why?
3. List three things that you think the writing consultant should always do in a group consultation for the students to walk away with improved academic writing skills at the end of the session.
4. What do you think are the things that students should always be encouraged to do during the group writing consultation?
5. Based on your experience what are the positive things that students tend to do during group writing consultations? Explain why you see these things as being positive.
6. Based on your experience what are the negative things that students tend to do during group writing consultations? Explain why you see these things as being negative.

7. What do you think should be done for the group consultation discussions to meet students' needs in terms of academic writing or literacies?
8. Is there any group seating arrangement that you prefer over others? Which one and why?
9. Based on your experience, what attitudes (for example: involved, active, distracted, uninterested, etc.) do writing centre consultants display during group writing consultations? How do you feel about that?
10. Based on your experience what attitudes (involved, active, distracted, uninterested, etc.) do students display during group writing consultations? How do you feel about that?
11. Should collaboration between students during group consultations be encouraged? Explain why and how.
12. What in your view should be done to ensure that support is provided to each individual student in the group? Why is this important?
13. Do students use or speak to one another in vernacular languages? Explain.
14. Do you feel that student participation is maximised in a group consultation as opposed to a one-on-one consultation? Explain.
15. Can you confidently say that writing consultants understand students' assignment guidelines or questions? Explain.
16. What strategies do you personally use to ensure that you get the most out of a group writing consultation? Describe the strategies and say why.

Appendix H: Focus Group Students Information Sheet

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET - FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS TARGET GROUP: STUDENTS

Dear Student,

OBJECT: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Invitation: I would like to invite you to participate in a research project (see topic above) conducted by myself in fulfilment of my PhD degree in Applied English Language Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The Project: Recently, writing centres across the country have experienced an increase in the number of writing group consultations caused by the admission of thousands of students, especially into the first year of university. The problem is that for decades South African universities have mainly conducted one-on-one writing consultations with students and the training of writing consultants, those who consult with students, has been fairly standardised and centered on the one-on-one consultation. With the group consultation as a new phenomenon, writing centre consultants have recently reported a feeling of uneasiness and inadequacy as to whether the group consultation should be conducted following the same methodologies and principles as the one-on-one consultation. In a bid to understand the group consultation, I'm conducting this research to find out the challenges that writing consultants and students alike experience in the context of the group consultation. Your assistance is required to answer a few questions which I believe will assist in understanding the group consultation dynamics and methodology.

Your Participation: You have been approached because you recently attended a writing group consultation at the writing centre. Your participation will involve answering questions and taking part in a group discussion, which lasts 45 to 120 minutes and which will be audio-recorded.

Anonymity and confidentiality: Please note that participation is entirely voluntary and should you choose not to participate, you will suffer no penalty or loss of benefit. If you do choose to participate please remember that you may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. Additionally, your name will not be divulged to any third parties and your anonymity is guaranteed.

End Use of Research Data: This research is purely for academic purposes and is conducted with the approval of, and in accordance with the principles laid down by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical). The collected data will be analysed and the results will be used in the research report only. The raw data and hard copies will be kept in a locked office cabinet. The audio-recordings will be transcribed and stored safely in a password-protected computer on the Wits School of Education premises.

If you do choose to participate, thank you sincerely for your help. Please complete, sign and return the attached Participation Consent Form and the Audio-recording Consent Form.

Regards,

KJ Shabanza

PhD Candidate, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Appendix I: Focus Group Students Consent Form

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

CONSENT & AUDIO-RECORDING CONSENT FORMS – FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

TARGET GROUP: STUDENTS

Dear Student,

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

After reading the information sheet, kindly indicate if you accept to participate in a focus group interview by ticking the appropriate answer. Please complete, sign and return this form.

PLEASE TICK THE APPLICABLE OPTION:

Consent to participate in a focus group interview:

I agree to participate in a focus group interview.	**Yes**☐	**No** ☐
Confidentiality and anonymity:		
I agree to maintain confidentiality of all information shared in the group.	**Yes**☐	**No** ☐
I agree not to mention other participants' real names, only numbers.	**Yes**☐	**No** ☐
I agree to adhere to the ground rules of the group interview.	**Yes**☐	**No** ☐

AUDIO-RECORDING CONSENT FORM

After reading the information sheet, kindly indicate if you accept to be audio-recorded during the focus group interview by ticking the appropriate answer. Please complete, sign and return this form.

PLEASE TICK THE APPLICABLE OPTION:

Consent for the consultation to be audio-taped:

I agree to be audio-recorded during the focus group interview.	**Yes**☐	**No** ☐

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- My name and information will be kept confidential and safe.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotaped.

- All the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3 and 5 years after completion of this project.

Full Name (Confidential): _____Signature: _____Date: _____

If you do choose to participate, thank you sincerely for your help.

Appendix J: Focus Group Consultant Information Sheet

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET - FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS TARGET GROUP: WRITING CONSULTANTS

Dear Writing Consultant,

OBJECT: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Invitation: I would like to invite you to participate in a research project (see topic above) conducted by myself in fulfilment of my PhD degree in Applied English Language Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The Project: Recently, writing centres across the country have experienced an increase in the number of writing group consultations caused by the admission of thousands of students, especially into the first year of university. The problem is that for decades South African universities have mainly conducted one-on-one writing consultations with students and the training of writing consultants, those who consult with students, has been fairly standardised and centered on the one-on-one consultation. With the group consultation as a new phenomenon, writing centre consultants have recently reported a feeling of uneasiness and inadequacy as to whether the group consultation should be conducted following the same methodologies and principles as the one-on-one consultation. In a bid to understand the group consultation, I'm conducting this research to find out the challenges that writing consultants and students alike experience in the context of the group consultation. Your assistance is required to answer a few questions which I believe will assist in understanding the group consultation dynamics and methodology.

Your Participation: You have been approached because you recently conducted a writing group consultation at the writing centre. Your participation will involve answering questions and taking part in a group discussion, which lasts 45 to 120 minutes and which will be audio-recorded.

Anonymity and confidentiality: Please note that participation is entirely voluntary and should you choose not to participate, you will suffer no penalty or loss of benefit. If you do choose to participate please remember that you may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. Additionally, your name will not be divulged to any third parties and your anonymity is guaranteed.

End Use of Research Data: This research is purely for academic purposes and is conducted with the approval of, and in accordance with the principles laid down by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical). The collected data will be analysed and the results will be used in the research report only. The raw data and hard copies will be kept in a locked office cabinet. The audio-recordings will be transcribed and stored safely in a password-protected computer on the Wits School of Education premises.

If you do choose to participate, thank you sincerely for your help. Please complete, sign and return the attached Participation Consent Form and the Audio-recording Consent Form.

Regards,

KJ Shabanza

PhD Candidate, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Appendix K: focus Group Consultant Interview Guide

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

INTERVIEW GUIDE – FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS
TARGET GROUP: WRITING CONSULTANTS

Level of study:

Faculty:

Department:

Writing centre campus:

Number of students in the group ☐ Males ☐ Females ☐

Students' department:

QUESTIONS

17. Of the one-on-one writing consultation and the group writing consultation which one is the most challenging to conduct? Please explain.
18. Based on the purpose of the group consultation (assignment, lab report, essay writing, etc.) what consultations are the most challenging to conduct? Please explain why?
19. List ten things the writing consultant should always do in a group consultation for the students to walk away with improved academic writing skills at the end of the session.
20. What are the things that students should always be encouraged to do during the group writing consultation?
21. Based on your experience what are the positive things that students tend to do during group writing consultations? Explain why you see these things as being positive.
22. Based on your experience what are the negative things that students tend to do during group writing consultations? Explain why you see these things as being negative.
23. How do you ensure that group consultation discussions always revolve around or tie with academic writing or literacies?
24. Is there any group seating arrangement that you prefer over others? Which one and why?

25. Based on your experience what attitudes (for example: involved, active, distracted, uninterested, etc.) do students display during group writing consultations? How do you feel about that?
26. Do you encourage collaboration between students during group consultations? Explain why and how.
27. How do you ensure that support is provided to each individual student in the group? Why is this important?
28. Do students use or speak to one another in vernacular languages? Explain.
29. Do you feel that student participation is maximised in a group consultation as opposed to a one-on-one consultation? Explain.
30. Can you confidently say that you understand students' assignment guidelines or questions? Explain.
31. What strategies do you personally use to ensure a successful group writing consultation? Describe the strategies and say why.

Appendix L: Video Observation Student Guide

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

OBSERVATION GUIDE – OBSERVATIONS
TARGET GROUP: STUDENTS

PERSONAL DETAILS

Name of writing consultant (pseudonym):

Level of study:

Faculty:

Department:

Writing centre campus:

Number of students in the group ☐ Males ☐ Females ☐

Students' department:

QUESTIONS

32. Motivation for the group consultation: assignment, lab report, essay writing, etc.
33. Writing consultant's activities during the group consultation
34. Students' activities during the group consultation
35. Group activities
36. How group discussions relate to academic writing
37. Grouping writing strategies
38. Seating arrangement
39. Participants' attitudes (involved, active, distracted, uninterested, etc.)
40. Collaboration within the groups
41. Consultant's support to individual students
42. Use of vernacular languages
43. Students' participation
44. Writing consultant's understanding of the students' assignment guidelines or questions
45. Writing consultants strategies

Appendix M: Video Observation Students Participant Information Sheet

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET - OBSERVATIONS
TARGET GROUP: STUDENTS

Dear Student,

OBJECT: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Invitation: I would like to invite you to participate in a research project (see topic above) conducted by myself in fulfilment of my PhD degree in Applied English Language Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The Project: Recently, writing centres across the country have experienced an increase in the number of writing group consultations caused by the admission of thousands of students, especially into the first year of university. The problem is that for decades South African universities have mainly conducted one-on-one writing consultations with students and the training of writing consultants, those who consult with students, has been fairly standardised and centered on the one-on-one consultation. With the group consultation as a new phenomenon, writing centre consultants have recently reported a feeling of uneasiness and inadequacy as to whether the group consultation should be conducted following the same methodologies and principles as the one-on-one consultation. In a bid to understand the group consultation, I'm conducting this research to find out the challenges that writing consultants and students alike experience in the context of the group consultation. Your assistance is required to answer a few questions which I believe will assist in understanding the group consultation dynamics and methodology.

Your Participation: You have been approached because you are about to participate in a writing group consultation in the writing centre. Be advised that your involvement is limited to your participation in the group consultation, which lasts 30 to 50 minutes and which will be video-recorded.

Anonymity and confidentiality: Please note that participation is entirely voluntary and should you choose not to participate, you will suffer no penalty or loss of benefit. If you do choose to participate please remember that you may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. Additionally, your name will not be divulged to any third parties and your anonymity is guaranteed. To ensure your anonymity your face will be hidden in the video using the appropriate video editing software.

End Use of Research Data: This research is purely for academic purposes and is conducted with the approval of, and in accordance with the principles laid down by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical). The collected data will be analysed and the results will be used in the research report only. The raw data and hard copies will be kept in a locked office cabinet. The video-recordings will be transcribed and stored safely in a password-protected computer on the Wits School of Education premises.

If you do choose to participate, thank you sincerely for your help. Please complete, sign and return the attached Participation Consent Form and the Video-recording Consent Form.

Regards,

KJ Shabanza

PhD Candidate, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Appendix N: Video Observation Student Consent Form

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

CONSENT & VIDEO-RECORDING CONSENT FORMS - OBSERVATIONS

TARGET GROUP: STUDENTS

Dear Student,

OBSERVATION CONSENT FORM

After reading the information sheet, kindly indicate if you accept to be observed during the group consultation by ticking the appropriate answer. Please complete, sign and return this form.

PLEASE TICK THE APPLICABLE OPTION:

Consent to be observed during the writing group consultation:

I agree to participate in the group consultation. **Yes**☐ **No** ☐

Consent to participate in a focus group interview:

I agree to participate in the focus group interview at a later stage. **Yes**☐ **No** ☐

VIDEO-RECORDING CONSENT FORM

After reading the information sheet, kindly indicate if you accept to be video-recorded during the group consultation by ticking the appropriate answer. Please complete, sign and return this form.

PLEASE TICK THE APPLICABLE OPTION:

Consent for the consultation to be video-taped:

I agree to be video-recorded during the group consultation. **Yes**☐ **No** ☐

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- My name and information will be kept confidential and safe.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotaped.

- All the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3 to 5 years after completion of this project.

Full Name (Confidential): _____Signature: _____Date: _____

If you do choose to participate, thank you sincerely for your help.

Appendix O: Video Observation Consultant Guide

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

OBSERVATION GUIDE – OBSERVATIONS
TARGET GROUP: WRITING CONSULTANTS

PERSONAL DETAILS

Name of writing consultant (pseudonym):

Level of study:

Faculty:

Department:

Writing centre campus:

Number of students in the group ☐ Males ☐ Females ☐

Students' department:

QUESTIONS

46. Motivation for the group consultation: assignment, lab report, essay writing, etc.
47. Writing consultant's activities during the group consultation
48. Students' activities during the group consultation
49. Group activities
50. How group discussions relate to academic writing
51. Grouping writing strategies
52. Seating arrangement
53. Participants' attitudes (involved, active, distracted, uninterested, etc.)
54. Collaboration within the groups
55. Consultant's support to individual students
56. Use of vernacular languages
57. Students' participation
58. Writing consultant's understanding of the students' assignment guidelines or questions
59. Writing consultants strategies

Appendix P: Video Observation Consultant Information Sheet

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET - OBSERVATIONS
TARGET GROUP: WRITING CONSULTANTS

Dear Writing Consultant,

OBJECT: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Invitation: I would like to invite you to participate in a research project (see topic above) conducted by myself in fulfilment of my PhD degree in Applied English Language Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The Project: Recently, writing centres across the country have experienced an increase in the number of writing group consultations caused by the admission of thousands of students, especially into the first year of university. The problem is that for decades South African universities have mainly conducted one-on-one writing consultations with students and the training of writing consultants, those who consult with students, has been fairly standardised and centered on the one-on-one consultation. With the group consultation as a new phenomenon, writing centre consultants have recently reported a feeling of uneasiness and inadequacy as to whether the group consultation should be conducted following the same methodologies and principles as the one-on-one consultation. In a bid to understand the group consultation, I'm conducting this research to find out the challenges that writing consultants and students alike experience in the context of the group consultation. Your assistance is required to answer a few questions which I believe will assist in understanding the group consultation dynamics and methodology.

Your Participation: You have been approached because you are about to start a group consultation with students in the writing centre and we are interested in what happens during the consultation. Be advised that your participation is limited to your conducting the group consultation, which lasts 30 to 50 minutes and will be video-recorded.

Anonymity and confidentiality: Please note that participation is entirely voluntary and should you choose not to participate you will suffer no penalty or loss of benefit. If you do choose to participate please remember that you may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. Additionally, your name will not be divulged to any third parties and your anonymity is guaranteed. To ensure your anonymity your face will be hidden in the video using the appropriate video editing software.

End Use of Research Data: This research is purely for academic purposes and is conducted with the approval of, and in accordance with the principles laid down by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical). The collected data will be analysed and the results will be used in the research report only. The raw data and hard copies will be kept in a locked office cabinet. The video-recordings will be transcribed and stored safely in a password-protected computer on the Wits School of Education premises.

If you do choose to participate, thank you sincerely for your help. Please complete, sign and return the attached Participation Consent Form and the Video-recording Consent Form.

Regards,

KJ Shabanza

PhD Candidate, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Appendix Q: Video Observation Consultant Consent Form

A Socio-Constructivist Approach to Writing Centre Practice: Challenges of Raising Academic Genre Awareness through Writing Group Consultations

Researcher: Kabinga Jack Shabanza
Contact details: 071 977 3716 – kshabanza@yahoo.fr

CONSENT & VIDEO-RECORDING CONSENT FORMS - OBSERVATIONS

TARGET GROUP: WRITING CONSULTANTS

Dear Writing Consultant,

OBSERVATION CONSENT FORM

After reading the information sheet, kindly indicate if you accept to be observed during the group consultation by ticking the appropriate answer. Please sign the form and give it back to me.

PLEASE TICK THE APPLICABLE OPTION:

Consent to be observed during the writing group consultation:

I agree to participate in the group consultation. **Yes**☐ **No** ☐

Consent to participate in a focus group discussion:

I agree to participate in the focus group discussion at a later stage. **Yes**☐ **No** ☐

VIDEO-RECORDING CONSENT FORM

After reading the information sheet, kindly indicate if you accept to be video-recorded during the group consultation by ticking the appropriate answer. Please sign the form and give it back to me.

PLEASE TICK THE APPLICABLE OPTION:

Consent for the consultation to be video-taped:

I agree to be video-recorded during the group consultation. **Yes**☐ **No** ☐

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- My name and information will be kept confidential and safe.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotaped.

- All the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3 and 5 years after completion of this project.

Full Name (Confidential): _____Signature: _____Date: _____

If you do choose to participate, thank you sincerely for your help.