Shaping the learning environment of first year students: Combining collective space with collective learning

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Background

• First years are not coping – FYE initiative

• Our brief: investigate physical space on & around campus – conducive to LCs???

• My dual role – both practitioner and researcher

Cycle 1: Res X

- Voluntary/Organic
- Unstructured
- Work together thru Q Papers; discuss problems re content

Cycle 2: Res X & Y

- Intervention: Workshops
- Structured i.t.o. dates, times, topics
Theoretical Framework:

“Standing on the shoulders of giants”

- Socio-constructivist critical lens - Authors: Vygotsky, Engeström, Stetsenko, Roth & Lee, and more.

- Why Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)?
  - Situated in social/ cultural/ historical context/system
  - Don’t learn in isolation (knowledge is socially constructed)

- Using Wenger’s Communities of practice (CoPs) to conceptualise LCs

- Why critical theory? Habermas: “not enough to understand...”

- Lit Review: Transformation @ HEIs, FYE, LCs (US & SA Unis)
## X2 Activity Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st AS: FYE initiative</th>
<th>2nd AS: Student Affairs initiative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong> (subject)</td>
<td><strong>House Committee a.k.a. “HK”</strong> (subject)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>use workshops</strong> (tool)</td>
<td><strong>use study time</strong> (tool)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>to mediate the formation of LCs</strong> (object)</td>
<td><strong>to mediate the fostering of an academic culture</strong></td>
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</table>

**Shared object:** to shape the learning environment of first year residence students.

**The outcome envisioned for both AS:** student academic success.
Workshop Schedule

Object of Activity: to conceptualise & implement LCs in order to shape the learning environment of 1st years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
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<th>May</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Res Y</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Res X</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st session</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>&amp; Ground rules</td>
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<td>Group Skills</td>
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<td>2nd session</td>
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<td>Group</td>
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<td>Conflict &amp;</td>
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<td>Diversity &amp;</td>
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<td>Equity</td>
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<td>3rd session</td>
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<td>Cooperative</td>
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<td>learning</td>
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<td>4th session</td>
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<td>Finding</td>
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<td>your voice</td>
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<td>5th session</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>Your choice?</td>
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Why these topics????
Socio-economic/ Cultural/ Historical Context
Sample Residences: Own culture

- Res X
  - Ex RAU
  - Degree

- Res Y
  - Ex TWR
  - Diploma
### Home Language

1. Sepedi 20%
2. Setswana 18%
3. Xhosa 16%
4. Sotho 13%
5. Zulu 11%
6. Xitsonga 7%
7. Afrikaans 4%
8. ENGLISH (Lang of Instruction) 2%
9. Siswati 1%

### Reasons for Studying

1. Because I really want to 54%
2. Because I don’t know what else to do next 13%
3. Because my parents or family want me to 9%
4. Because I don’t want to start working yet 7%
5. To improve my future job opportunities 6%
6. To get away from home 4%
7. To learn about things that really interests me 3%
8. Other reasons 0%
|----------------------------------|--------------|-----------|

**Faculties where students are located**

1. Economic and Financial Sciences: 22%
2. Management: 20%
3. Science: 14%
4. Engineering and the Built Environment: 11%
5. Education: 6%
6. Law: 3%
7. Health Sciences: 19%
8. Humanities: 17%

**Financing of Studies**

1. My parents/family will pay for my studies: 3%
2. I will use a loan (Bank, TEFSA etc.): 33%
3. I have a bursary: 13%
4. I will work to pay for my own studies: 27%
5. A combination of the answers given above: 20%
All 1st Years between 2007 & 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Hours per Week</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Less than 5 hours per week.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Between 5 and 10 hours per week.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Between 10 and 15 hours per week.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Between 15 and 20 hours per week.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 More than 20 hours per week</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Student study hours in grade 12

Study Hours per Week
Research Design & Methods

• **Case Study Design:** bounded case, deep understanding
  - “How” question (Yin, 2009)

• **Critical Paradigm:**
  - not only *understand*, but also *critique*

• **Population and sample:** 2 UJ residences
  - First years on *voluntary* basis

• **Data analysis:** on-going, CHAT as analytical tool
  - Initial codes from CHAT framework
  - Atlas.ti analysis will reveal issues to consider at each Res respectively
Support needed w.r.t. reading, understanding, writing: language problem

Tensions / "dramatic collisions" / contestations

Do not know how to work collaboratively &/or prefer to work individually

Request for tutors/extra tutoring

Want experts in the field to give talks – sit back & listen

Researcher not part of mainstream academic staff

Study time: increased 7:00-11:00 – caused major discontent

Forced to study and HK police (power issues)

RAs did not know how to assist

Researcher not involved: problematic – think RAs trying to "tell them what to do"

RAs not equipped to deal with pedagogical issues

Venue taken away by Campus Security – power issues

The min requirement is 60%, for exams or else get kicked out of Res

Res 5 Pillar Model: not coping with all activities

Focused on the content but lack critical skills

Lack of student commitment (culture of passivity)

Social/emotional problems

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Social/emotional problems
Further Analysis...

- Content analysis using AtlasTi software package
- Codes, categories and themes
Any Questions?