EXPERIENCES INFLUENCING THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF 1ST YEAR NURSING STUDENTS AT THE WESTERN CAPE COLLEGE OF NURSING, SOUTH AFRICA, DURING 2008

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A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Public Health at the School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape

UNIVERSITY *of the* WESTERN CAPE

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KEYWORDS

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Failure rate

Attrition rate

South Africa

Professional nurse education

Nurse training

Western Cape

Nurse shortage

ABSTRACT

Experiences Influencing the Academic Performance of 1st Year Nursing Students at the Western Cape College of Nursing, South Africa, during 2008

Maria Elizabeth Mc Lachlan

MPH Mini-Thesis, School of Public Health, University of the Western Cape

This is a qualitative study, the aim of which is to explore experiences influencing the academic performance of 1st Year nursing students at the Western Cape College of Nursing, South Africa, during 2008 when the College was confronted with unprecedented failure rates among 1st Year students. It describes the College's collaboration with a higher education institution and the changes that emanated from this collaboration. The influence of situational factors on 1st Year nursing students is explored. These include the legacy of the inequality of past learning opportunities, institutional factors which hamper students' sense of belonging, and the social and academic integration of students into their learning environment. The methodology used in the process of exploring these factors included focus group discussions with students and in-depth interviews with staff in order to explore their respective perceptions of the problem. From this it is hoped that the quality of human resources for health will be enhanced. Findings indicated a multitude of factors influencing students' success and underperformance during their training, and that grade point average, contrary to traditional belief, is only one of these factors. In addition the study highlights the impact of an institution in transition on all role players in the institution. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of the Western Cape.

DECLARATION

I declare that *Experiences Influencing the Academic Performance of 1ˢᵗ Year Nursing Students at the Western Cape College of Nursing, South Africa, During 2008* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Full name: Maria Elizabeth Mc Lachlan

Date: 14 May 2010

Signed…………………………………

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my beloved husband Johnny and beloved son Myles whom I lost during the course of my studies. Myles, I greatly benefitted from your inspiration when we studied together. May you both rest in peace.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

1ST YEAR   1st Year was used to give it prominence as it referred to a specific group in the study

BNS	Biological and Natural Science
BOD	Burden of Disease
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
DoE	Department of Education
DOH	Department of Health
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FNS	Fundamental Nursing Science
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HIV/AIDS	Human Immuno Deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HRH	Human Resources for Health
LMICs	Low and middle income countries
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NY, USA	New York, USA
PHC	Primary Health Care
SA	South Africa
SANC	South African Nursing Council
SATAP	Standardised Assessment Test for Access and Placement
SRC	Student Representative Council
TB	Tuberculosis
UWC	University of the Western Cape
WC	Western Cape
WCCN	Western Cape College of Nursing

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Attrition   The process of students leaving a programme of study

                          permanently for any reason before completion.

Admission   Accepting a student into a study programme at an education

                          institution.

DoH Bursary   An annual amount of R24, 000.00 for the first year in 2008. It

                          is paid to students by the Department of Health for academic

                          purposes. It covers tuition (R10, 000.00), books, stethoscope

                          residence and meals (R6 487.00). The left over money is given

                          to the students for their own use**.**

Demarcation   Demarcations are outlines of work to be studied by students.

                          They are drawn up by lecturers and given to students a week

                          prior to writing tests or a month before writing examinations.

Excluded/resigned   Student are excluded on the grounds of not meeting the

                          entrance criteria or because they do not progress according to

                          the rules laid down.

Extended Curriculum   A 1st Year curriculum spreads over two years instead of one for

                          those students who volunteered to do so. It was originally

                          planned to accommodate students who were accepted with an E

                          aggregate (40-49%) instead of a D aggregate (50-59%) at

                          school exit level in South Africa.

Professional nurse   Someone who is qualified and competent to practice

                          comprehensive nursing independently and in a manner and at

                          the level prescribed by a professional body and who is capable

of assuming responsibility and accountability for such practice (Department of Health, 2008).

'Racial' Categories   Are categories such as "black" and "coloured" as categorised in terms of pre 1994 racial classification

'Racial' distribution   **'**Racial' distribution depicts the amount of each so-called 'race' group that makes up the total student population at the College**.** It was deemed important to explore it in the study in order to establish the possible role it plays in influencing the academic performance of students.

Student nurse   Someone undergoing education or training in basic nursing (Department of Health, 2008).

Time to completion rule   Prescribed duration of study allowed by the educational institution for a student to complete his/her training programme.
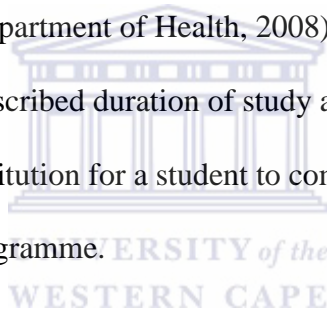
CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1. 1   INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study is located in the field of Health Human Resources development and nurse education with a particular focus on the exploration of experiences influencing the academic performance of 1st Year nursing students at the Western Cape College of Nursing (WCCN), South Africa, during 2008.

Chapter One introduces the study and the background to the problem and gives an overview of the study. The study setting is described and the problem to be explored is introduced. A rationale for conducting the study is presented.

Chapter Two reviews the literature that was found relevant to the topic being explored, focussing on the relevant national and international literature. The chapter covers a wide range of factors influencing academic performance identified in other studies previously carried out.

Chapter Three presents the aims, objectives and methodology of the study. Included is the study design, a qualitative exploratory study. It describes the study population and sample and the sampling procedure employed in the study as well as data collection methods, the data analysis process and ethical considerations. It includes preparation for the study and measurement instruments. Measures of rigour described include credibility, dependability and reflexivity of the researcher.

Chapter Four describes details of the findings of the study. It reflects on the WCCN as an institution in transition and includes all the themes which emerged from the study: social barriers to the study, difficulties in transition, "a hell away from home" (living environment) and inadequacies in the academic environment (learning environment).

Chapter Five constitutes a discussion of the findings.

Chapter Six provides a conclusion to the study and a set of recommendations coming out of it.

1.2   BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

The shortage of human resources for health (HRH), in particular a shortage of professional nurses, is regarded in most quarters as a global phenomenon which has reached crisis proportions (Clarke, 2002; Buchan & Calman, 2004). In low and middle income countries (LMICs), the challenge to offering adequate nursing care in the light of staff shortages has serious implications particularly for the health care of developing nations such as South Africa, which carries a quadruple burden of disease (BOD), including HIV/ AIDS, communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases and injuries (Bradshaw *et al,* 2003).

In developing countries the demand for nurses is even greater as they are regarded as "frontline staff" and therefore as the most critical component of the workforce (Buchan &

Calman, 2004). Nurse shortages also impact negatively on the successful implementation of Primary Health Care (PHC) which is nurse-driven in the South African public sector. Furthermore, the country's potential to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) is seriously challenged by this situation (Chabikuli, Gilson, Blaauw & Schneider, 2005; Buchan & Calman, 2004). In order to address this critical shortage, adequate training of nurses by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and colleges is imperative to ensure adequate health care delivery. In this context colleges train nurses up to diploma level while HEIs award a degree.

A number of challenges face the development of South Africa's nursing capacity. These include the continuation of the process of transformation and restructuring of health care services which began in the 1990s (Lehmann & Makhanya, 2005), the 'brain drain' of qualified nurses and other health personnel to more affluent countries which offer improved working conditions and remuneration (Health Systems Trust, 2000; World Health Report, 2006; Govender & Appel, 2006 and Dalamo, 2009) and the escalating HIV/AIDS and TB rates (Thom, 2008; Dalamo, 2009). This brain drain "… has to a large extent manifested the reported decline in the standards of nursing care and generally in the quality of healthcare in the public health facilities" (Department of Health: 2008: 7). The Nursing Strategy for South Africa which was formulated by the Department of Health (DoH) in 2008 focuses specifically on addressing the challenges of the DoH to maintain an adequate nursing force. This includes nurse education and training (Department of Health, 2008).

In 2007, the South African Nursing Council (SANC) noted the national ratio of professional nurses to population as 1: 461. In the Western Cape Province (WCP) where the study is located it is 1: 352 (SANC, 2007). According to the World Health Report (2006), the ratio of nurses in South Africa was 4.08: 1 000 in 2004. Elsewhere, for example in Ireland, a higher income country, the ratio was 15.20: 1 000 in 2004 and for a lower income country, for example, Zimbabwe, it was 0.72: 1 000 in the same year (World Health Report, 2006). This report referred to nurses but did not state whether the figure was based solely on registered nurses. According to Dalamo (2009), the shortage of nurses amounts to 46 000 throughout South Africa (SA). According to the Department of Health (2008) there are 196 914 nurses eligible to practise nursing, it is not clear whether this amount indicate nurses in general or registered nurses or whether they all are practising. Therefore the demand for nurses, in particular trained nurses, remains extremely high, in order to cope with the demands of health consumers and services.
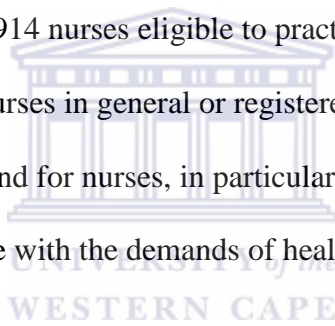
Furthermore the nursing population in South Africa (SA) is aging, and the training of nurses is time consuming. According to Dalamo (2009) many nurses will be retiring within the next 10 years, leaving an even greater deficit in the nursing cadre. It takes a professional nurse four years to complete training in SA but it can take up to six years if training is extended as a result of academic difficulties, for example.

In 2008, the DoH developed a Nursing Strategy for South Africa, its goal being "to achieve and maintain an adequate supply of nursing professionals who are appropriately educated, distributed and deployed to meet the health needs of all South Africans"

(Department of Health: 2008: 8). The DoH of the Western Cape has been increasing the intake of new student nurses at the WCCN annually since 2007 with the aim of compensating for this deficit (Green, 2007). However Macgregor (2007) suggests that many first year students at higher education institutions never complete training as a result of failing their courses. Nursing students, who fail have to repeat failed courses at their own cost and repay the bursary received from DoH (Green, 2007) which may have relevance to this study.

Evidence suggests that the intake of nursing students at the WCCN over the past seven years has exceeded the output of trained nurses after four years of training (Green, 2007). A review undertaken by the HSRC in 2009 confirms that the output of general professional nurses from the four-year college and university courses "fell 13% - from 2 682 in 1997 to 2 342 in 2007" (Breier, Wildschut & Mgqolozana: 2009: 2).

A further factor militating against WCCN's goal of training nurses is the decrease in the pool of applicants from between 8 000 – 10 000 in the 1999 - 2002 period, to 992 in 2007 and to 1 619 in 2008. The exact reason for this phenomenon is not clear but it followed the rationalisation of the four nursing colleges. The physical location of the amalgamated WCCN may have played a role as it is the only remaining government nursing college in the Western Cape and is now situated in a previously so-called coloured sub-economic area. White student applicants have declined seriously to the extent that there were no white students enrolled in 2008. It may also be because fewer people are interested in

following a nursing career and according to Green's report of 2008, those students with high academic symbols at the end of matriculation prefer to apply to UWC.

1.3   STUDY SETTING

The WCCN, the setting for the study, is the result of restructuring in 2000, when the four government nurse training colleges (which resided under the Department of Health), namely Carinus, Nico Malan, Otto Du Plessis and Sarleh Dollie Nursing Colleges, were 'rationalised' into a single College (Sutcliffe, 1999). These colleges were racially segregated during the apartheid regime in South Africa, with Carinus and the Otto Du Plessis College training white nurses and Nico Malan and Sarleh Dollie Colleges training coloured nurses. Over the past eight years, the College population has become multi-cultural and diverse compared to the former racially segregated colleges. The resultant institutional governance and staff arrangements will be described below and areas of role ambiguity discussed in the findings, in order to contextualize the students' experiences which are the focus of this study.

The amalgamated College, WCCN, began to operate in 2000 and in 2005 as a decentralised campus of Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). The building in which the WCCN has been lodged since 2000 has been in existence since 1969. It was previously Nico Malan Nursing College and consists of both a college and a student residence.

The establishment of the WCCN from the merger of other colleges and its location in the present buildings has resulted in numerous challenges facing the College, such as ongoing renovations of the buildings, absence of recreational facilities and no cafeteria for students. This was the result of many rooms being altered into classrooms because the existing classrooms could not accommodate the increased number of classes and the new class sizes. One of the positive outcomes has been the financial aid given by CPUT towards the library as well as an equipped computer room. Some clerical staff was also appointed by CPUT, including an academic support officer. Presently staff from both CPUT main campus and from WCCN is employed at the WCCN (Green, 2007; Green, 2008).
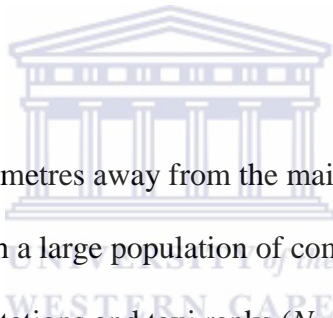
The WCCN is situated ±15 kilometres away from the main CPUT campus, in the Athlone area on bus and taxi routes, with a large population of commuters potentially attracting crime as is often the case with stations and taxi ranks (*News24*, 24/2/2010) . The railway station is two kilometres away. The WCCN is surrounded by Manenberg and Heideveld which are lower socio-economic townships and Guguletu, a 'black' township, towards the East. Students and staff have to cross the road to get to nearby small shops and fruit stalls if they need to buy refreshments as there is only a kiosk on the premises and no other facilities, such as banking or recreation facilities. The only available recreation facilities are on the main CPUT campus.

The WCCN offers a four year basic nursing programme (R425) which leads to a diploma qualifying a diplomate as a registered nurse in the fields of General Nursing, Psychiatry,

Community Nursing and Midwifery. This study focuses on the 1st Year nursing students of 2008 at the WCCN. The central focus of this study - the programme undertaken by 1st Year students - consists of 1 008 theory hours presented during block periods stretching over several weeks, and 1 000 hours of clinical practice in hospitals and clinics, during which time students get the opportunity to apply theory to practice. Practical skills which student nurses are required to apply in practice are demonstrated and practised in a simulation laboratory at the College. Following the completion of this programme, students are placed in clinical areas at various hospitals where they are expected to apply only the skills they have learned. The block study periods are therefore alternated with clinical placement periods. Students are accompanied in the clinical areas by mentors who are appointed by CPUT on a contract basis for a year at a time. These mentors are coordinated by a lecturer at the WCCN. They are experienced professional nurses and some of them are qualified lecturers.
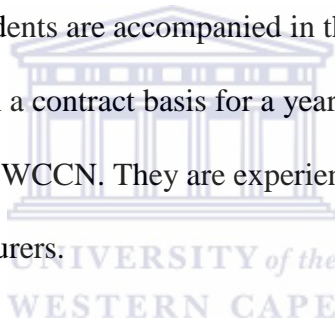
The University of the Western Cape (UWC) and CPUT, in collaboration with the WCCN, are the largest institutions training professional nurses in the Western Cape. The WCCN has been functioning under an Agency Agreement with the CPUT since 2005. In January, 2002, the then Minister of Education, Prof Kader Asmal, in the document on restructuring of the higher education system in South Africa, requested that UWC and Peninsula Technikon merge as a "unitary comprehensive institution offering both university - type and technikon - type programmes" (2002: 7) and that the WCCN be merged with the new institution. The intention of locating formal nurse

training within the HEI sector was endorsed by the DoH (Househam: 2002). However, CPUT was the only higher education institution which offered to incorporate the WCCN.

Nursing in South Africa is traditionally a Department of Health (DoH) function because the supply of nurses is the responsibility of the DoH at provincial and national levels. Previously students were state employees of the DoH and were remunerated on a monthly basis. Although nursing education is now located under CPUT and the WCCN, (DoH and HEI) the DoH has since 2003 provided student bursaries for the four years of training. On completion of their training, registered nurses work for four years for the DoH, of which one year is compulsory community service in a government institution, in order to ensure trained nurses for the country (Househam, 2002).
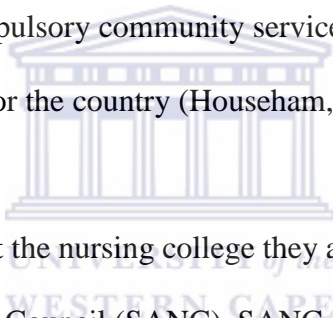
 When student nurses register at the nursing college they are simultaneously registered with the South African Nursing Council (SANC). SANC is the professional body which monitors the training of all nurses. It is their role to prescribe and approve the curriculum and provide directives and regulations for nurse training, as well as to serve as the disciplinary body for nurses. SANC also approves the nursing school where nurses are trained and accredits the clinical facilities where nursing students are placed for clinical practice. A professional nurse cannot practice nursing unless he/she is registered with SANC and pays an annual licence fee to practice. It is SANC's responsibility to ensure that nursing care is practised safely (SANC, *Nursing Act no33 of 2005*).

SANC's moderating function of the WCCN's examinations is delegated to the three universities in the Western Cape, University of the Western Cape (UWC), University of Cape Town (UCT) and University of Stellenbosch (US) and a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) still governs this arrangement in 2010 despite the fact that the WCCN has an Agency Agreement with CPUT. The MOA states that "The accrediting universities accept that nursing education and training is a higher education function in terms of the constitution of the Higher Education Act" (PGWC, undated: 10).

In terms of the 2005 Agency Agreement, a revised curriculum was developed by representatives of CPUT and WCCN to train student nurses, leading to a degree qualification; this has still, however, not been approved by SANC and remains in abeyance. Instead the SANC-approved combined curriculum leading to a Diploma in Nursing (R425) and not a degree, is still being used at the WCCN.
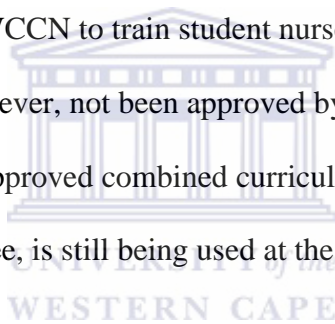
The Agency Agreement has therefore led to split governance, with the DoH paying student bursaries to CPUT which administers them. The mentors who are responsible for clinical accompaniment of students are financed by both DoH at 60% and CPUT at 40%. They are appointed on a contract basis renewed annually. The lecturers at the WCCN are employed by the DoH.

These arrangements have led to lecturers not always feeling sure what the future holds for them (Du Plessis, 12/3/2004). They were told in 2002 by the previous Provincial Director: HRD and Training, in a special meeting with staff in the library to either seek

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other employment or to study further (March, 2002). This resulted in the loss of many lecturers; new lecturers were appointed in subsequent years on a contractual basis. When contract lecturers were first appointed, they earned a basic salary with an added 43% to cover the bonuses and benefits normally given to permanent staff. This resulted in contract staff being remunerated at a significantly higher level than permanent staff on a monthly basis, an issue which was denied by the DoH at the time. This caused some tension between lecturers (Du Plessis: 16/1/2006). Seemingly many lecturers were drawn to the WCCN because of this payment arrangement

Despite the existence of the Agency Agreement, the WCCN still has its own internal governance structures such as the Senate and College Council, with both CPUT and University representatives. The WCCN also has its own Student Representative Council (SRC). The College SRC consults with the CPUT SRC and has been supported by them many times. On the other hand, students are dually enrolled by CPUT and the WCCN. Rules with regard to the examinations and student disciplinary policies have tended to diverge in the institutions and blame shifting has occurred on several occasions. Students have reported confusion over rules which at times have benefitted them. Confusion also exists among students with regard to study and practical hours as well as their access to a Degree versus a Diploma in Nursing (WCCN SRC: 8/4/2009: 17/8/2009). Students were reportedly under the impression that their studies would lead towards a degree instead of a diploma because they are registered students of an HEI. This was reinforced when a CPUT official addressing protest meetings during 2009 and 2010 said that they will be awarded a degree (on fulfilment of the requirements of a degree) which is presently not

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the case with the existing curriculum (R425). This has resulted in substantial animosity from students towards managers at both the WCCN and CPUT and is repeatedly on the agenda at student protests (WCCN SRC: 8/4/2009: 17/8/2009). This problem has not yet been resolved and needs the attention of the DoH, CPUT and SANC.

Apart from eight lecturers for the 1st Year students in 2008, additional staff for the 1st Year students in 2008 included one manager, one academic support officer and one computer trainer. The academic officer resigned after the first semester but was replaced in the second semester by the former computer trainer. In 2008 there were eight lecturers and 330 1st Year students. Four of the eight lecturers were responsible for BNS and four for FNS, resulting in large classes of approximately 80 students each. This is high in relation to the official staff - student ratio of 1:26 for the whole College, the reason being an insufficient amount of lecturers, in particular for the 1st Year students.

In the academic context of the WCCN, the language of instruction has also changed from a dual language medium (Afrikaans and English) to English only, which has created a situation where the majority of students do not study in their mother tongue and some lecturers do not teach in their mother tongue (WCCN, 2003). Many of the lecturers in 2008 who were predominantly Afrikaans speaking had to adjust to English as the language of learning and teaching, and expressed anxiety about this.

As a result of the decline in applicant numbers, many of the 2008 applicants did not meet the academic entrance criteria and therefore were not eligible for selection. This resulted

in an inadequate student intake for 2008 as projected by the Provincial Government of the Western Cape (PGWC) and prospective students were 'head hunted' in order to make up the required intake number. Only 330 were accepted on the program for 2008, after many students were rejected, owing to eligibility issues, or failed matriculation or the taking up of student places at UWC. This also resulted in the College accepting students who were originally rejected on the basis of eligibility because of inadequate entry grades which were the sole criterion for entry at the time (Green, 2008).

The minimum admission criteria for 2008 were as follows:

- Minimum qualification: Senior Certificate with a D aggregate (50-59%)
- Subjects: Biology, Mathematics and or/Physical Science with E (40-49%) on Higher Grade, or a D (50-59) if on Standard Grade
- Languages: Two languages of which one must be English or Afrikaans with Higher Grade passes. The exam for one of these languages must be taken at the level of a first language (Green, 2008).

When in 2008, the College admission criteria were adjusted by the Selection Committee to allow additional students to enter the program, academic entry grades were still the sole determinant of admission (see Appendix 4 - WCCN: Facts in Brief, 2008).

The following Adjusted Admission Criteria were formulated for 2008:

- An acceptable Biology symbol, for example, A-C and no Mathematics and/or Physical Science

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- An E symbol in Biology Standard Grade

- Mathematics and Science subjects: E Standard Grade for Mathematics, Science or Biology, with a D aggregate matriculation

- Enrolled Nursing Auxiliaries/ Enrolled nurses were also accepted if they had E for Biology Standard grade and a D aggregate matriculation.

These students were to follow an Extended Curriculum Programme (ECP) offered at the WCCN for the first time in 2008 to bridge the educational gap. The ECP represents an effort to support students with potentially inadequate academic competence and to improve student academic performance by extending the first year for a longer period, for example, the first year to be taken over two years (Green, 2008). According to Gill (2008), the coordinator and lecturer for the ECP, many students felt they were being discriminated against because the Standardised Assessment Test for Access and Placement (SATAP) which determines academic literacy skills. This was only carried out after they had joined the mainstream of students. Those with 26-39% in these tests were required to follow the ECP; however after approaching the SRC, the College management reached a compromise decision that the ECP would be voluntary. Only 29 students joined the programme out of a total of 40 originally selected students. Furthermore, three of the ECP students dropped out soon afterwards for various reasons of which one is a wrong career choice. A total of 26 students completed the first part of the 1st Year after one additional student dropped out (Gill, 2008). The success or failure of the ECP will only become known at the end of 2009.

Altogether 308 new students, including two who left soon afterwards, were accepted at the WCCN in 2008 of which 14 had an E aggregate matriculation pass where the norm is a D aggregate (Green, 2008). A total of 330 1st Year students commenced the program in 2008 at the WCCN. This included 34 (10, 3%) students repeating 1st Year and 29 (8, 8%) students who embarked on the ECP.

The student intake at the WCCN has also changed substantially: pre-2000, the four nursing colleges had an annual intake of 100 students each (i.e. a total of 400 students). However each college had their own staff complement and therefore classes were not big and there was sufficient space to accommodate students. Starting off with 100 new 1st Year students at the WCCN in 2000, the student intake increased annually, reaching a total of 330 in 2008 including repeat students. By 2010, the WCCN has still not been able to take in 400 1st Year students to match the combined intake of the four different colleges because of the smaller pool of applicants, fewer lecturers and inadequate classroom space.

The curriculum for the R425 diploma in 1st Year includes Biological and Natural Sciences (BNS) and Fundamental Nursing Sciences (FNS) as the main subjects. In addition, computer training, academic support and interpersonal skills (IPS) are offered. No exams are written on the latter three subjects. BNS has not only a theory component but includes an Objective Simulated Clinical Examination (OSCE) where students have to identify the different bones of the body and the cells. The FNS is assessed by means of both theory and practical examinations. Both FNS and BNS tuition is offered

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independently in the first and second semester: students can proceed to the next part of the subject in the second semester irrespective of whether they pass or fail. They may not, however, proceed to the second year of study until they have passed the content of both 1st Year semesters. When they fail the second semester of the 1st Year they may only repeat the second semester in the second semester of the following year.

Table 1 was compiled by the researcher from the WCCN's Alphabetical Student Records, and Student Results to depict the increase in 1st Year student intake and output over the years 2006-2008. It also reflects the increase of male students in nursing as a profession. Female students however remain in the majority. In 2006 more students were Afrikaans and English speakers, but by 2007 and 2008, there was a significant increase in IsiXhosa speaking students (WCCN Alphabetical Student Records, 2006-2009; WCCN Final Results, 2006-2008).
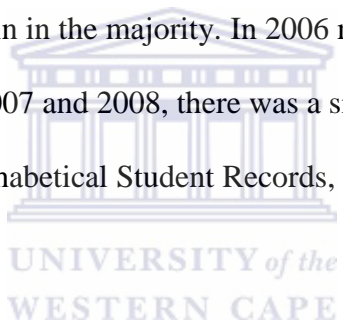
Table 1. WCCN Student Data (2006 - 2008) (WCCN Alphabetical Student Records, 2006- 2009; WCCN Final Results, 2006-2008).

Year	Intake	Demographic data				Course results	
		Males	**Females**	**Eng/Afrikaans (coloured)**	**Eng/IsiXhosa (black)**	**Fail FNS**	**Fail BNS**
2006	**197**	14%	86%	54,3%	45,7%	5,6%	22,8%
2007	**303**	13,9%	86,1%	30,7%	69,3%	8%	17.5%
2008	**330**	18,5%	81,5%	37,6%	62,4%	10%	25%

With regard to the subjects failed from 2006-2008, BNS has always been the subject with the highest failure rate. There is also a slow increase in students failing FNS year on year.

In terms of the training strategy, student failures also constitute a loss of revenue to the DoH which provided bursaries amounting to R24 000 per student in the 1st Year in 2008 (Green, 2008). This amount increases with the progress of study years. However if a student fails, he/she must repeat the year at her/his own cost, which sometimes results in student attrition.

Table 2 focuses on the 330 students of 2008 of whom 209 were black students and 121 were coloured students. The table shows the failure rates in the two key subjects over the two semesters by language as well as those students who were academically excluded or dropped out.

Table 2. The failure rate in the 1st and 2nd semesters (WCCN Final Results, 2007-2008)

Variable	Black students (isiXhosa-speaking)	Coloured students (Afrikaans/English-speaking)
Intake for 2008	209	121
1st Semester FNS* failure rate	27 (13%)	2 (1.57%)
BNS failure rate**	36 (17.7%)	25 (19%)
Excluded ***	2	2
2nd Semester FNS* failure rate	7 (3.4%)	0

BNS** failure rate	39 (19%)	35 (27%)
Excluded***	2	3

* FNS - Fundamental Nursing Science (Includes principles of basic nursing care)
** BNS - Biological Nursing Science (Includes the normal functioning of the body)
*** Excluded - Students are excluded when they drop out of the course; or when they do not progress academically; or they did not complete their practical hours needed for the first year; or they are pregnant or did not qualify for entry to the examination (continuous assessment mark for the semester - too low).They either defer to the next year or do not, depending on the reason for exclusion.
**** For the purposes of this study "black" and "coloured" racial groups are categorised in terms of pre 1994 racial classification.

Table 2 shows more black students than coloured students registered in 2008; this predictably coincides isiXhosa mother tongue and Afrikaans and English mother tongue students. With regard to the FNS failure rate, very few coloured students failed in either semester, but the failure rate is higher for black students particularly in semester 1 (13%). The percentage of students that failed BNS is far more serious in both semesters for both groups, although the percentage of coloured students that failed BNS in the 2nd semester (27%) is much higher than that for black students (19%). The students from the two groups who were excluded from the program are more or less equal, with coloured students exceeding black students by one in the 2nd semester.

Since 2000, the socio-economic status of a large number of students at the College appears to have declined and many depend solely on bursaries provided by the DoH. This point is made by a staff member who felt that "these bursaries seem to serve as a panacea [incentive] to attract nurses to the profession" (Green: 2007). The bursaries are meant to pay for the students' academic requirements and accommodation. For many nurses however, the bursary serves as the only income for feeding their families (Green, 2007).

1.4   PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study focuses on the problem of an increased failure and attrition rate of 1st Year students at the WCCN over the past few years resulting in smaller numbers of nurses qualifying at the end of four years or slower throughput of qualified nurses, thereby contributing to the shortage of nurses in the country.

This problem is identified by Green (2007) who notes that only 75% of the 2003 student intake had completed their training in the required time - four years later. In addition, the annual student attrition rate has escalated from 4, 6% in 2003 to 34, 4% in 2006. Of even greater concern is the fact that 25% of students (see Table 1) of the 2008 cohort of 1st Year students failed BNS and 10% failed FNS (WCCN Final Results, 2008)..

The increasing failure and attrition rates of 1st Year students is of great concern to the WCCN management and the DoH because of its negative impact on health human resource development (Green, 2007) and thus the supply of nursing professionals. However, the experiences that influence the academic performance of the 1st Year nursing students are not fully understood. It is hoped that this study will elucidate some of these experiences, enabling the WCCN to make recommendations to address these challenges.

1.5   PURPOSE OF CONDUCTING THIS STUDY

In relation to the situation described above, this study was initiated out of an interest in how 2008 1st Year students experienced the College as an institution for nurse training at a time when the College itself was undergoing a period of transition with continuous adjustments of various processes, all of which have caused some operational fragmentation.

This study will hopefully facilitate planning of appropriate institutional interventions to support and improve the academic performance of 1st Year students, to decrease the failure and attrition rates, to improve the throughput of nurses at the end of four years, and in so-doing contribute to the reversal of the decline in health human resource capacity in South Africa. This in turn, it is hoped, would indirectly improve the health care of those sectors of the population which utilise the public health services.

This concludes Chapter One. Chapter Two describes the literature reviewed locally, nationally and internationally. It covers various aspects of importance for this study.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the review of the literature situates this study within the fields of Social Sciences, Social Psychology and Adult Education. Both national and international trends with regard to factors influencing the academic performance of 1st Year students have been consulted. Factors influencing the performance of all first year students in all countries were considered as well as those of student nurses in particular. Limitations to this review included the inaccessibility of some of the literature. One reason for this is the dearth of research of this nature undertaken at nursing colleges since most of these studies have been undertaken at university level. However a review from the HSRC depicts a decrease in professional nurse output between 1997 and 2007 as 13% in nursing colleges and universities (Breier, Wildschut & Mgqolozana, 2009). These authors describe a notion of nurse training being neglected. This percentage confirms the shortage of professional nurses being trained or increasing attrition in nursing colleges.

Evidence from the literature suggests that the experience of first year students in higher education institutions has been studied by various researchers and in many countries, including South Africa (Moll & Slonimsky, 1989; Womble, 1996; Kantanis, 2000; Ofori, 2002; Sheard, Lowe, Nicholson and Ceddia, 2003; McInnes, 2003; Fraser and Killen, 2005, McCarey, Barr & Rattray, 2007; Geleto, 2007).

Furthermore the literature on academic performance at higher education institutions (HEIs) both in nursing and other disciplines suggests that this is a complex issue involving many existing and potential factors, ranging from individual and social to psychological and institutional factors. These experiences will be discussed according to those which arise from individual students and their social context and those that are institutional in nature either prior to or after entering nursing education. Various sub-themes have emerged throughout the literature search in the exploration of the experiences of students in higher education in general and more specifically in 1st Year nursing education. These sub-themes will be addressed in the next section.

2.2 INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS WHICH IMPACT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

According to the literature reviewed, individual and social factors have an important place in the academic performance of students. In some instances these factors manifest as academic problems amongst students but can nevertheless be considered to originate from socio-economic factors.

Cross (1981) alludes to three different types of barriers to learning in adults. Firstly 'situational' barriers, which have to do with factors in the context of an individual's life which prevent or restrict him/her from studying, for example, costs, time factors, etc. Secondly 'institutional' barriers, which deal mostly with lack of knowledge about courses offered or about the rules of the institution, and thirdly 'dispositional' barriers such as personal and past learning experiences or such barriers as, for example, lack of

confidence. Cross (1981) posits that of all these barriers, situational barriers rank the highest (Cross, 1981).

2.2.1 The Role of Situational Factors

There is wide concurrence that socio-cultural factors, such as social class, socio-economic status, social roles of parents, the level of the father's education, ethnic and cultural backgrounds and practices, and loneliness can influence the academic performance of nursing students (Ofori, 2002; Salamonson & Andrews, 2006; Geleto, 2007; McCarey, Barr & Rattray, 2007).

Demographic factors are also cited as having an influence, for example, Ali (2008) in his study on basic nursing diploma students in Sindh, Pakistan, found that age and marital status plays a role in the academic performance of students. Geleto (2007) in his Ethiopian study on the academic performance of students in higher education institutions, found that younger students are better performers and that females are reported in some studies to perform better than their male counterparts in nursing courses (McCarey, Barr & Rattray; 2007; Ali, 2008).

### 2.2.2 The Consequences of Racially Segregated Schools

The literature cites the impact of previous racially divided schools on education. Bunting (1994) alludes to the "illegitimate" racially segregated schools, with their legacy of inequality regarding access and opportunities, and "unsatisfactory education" for black people under the pre1994 SA constitution, when formal education of each racial group

was governed by different government departments (Bunting, 1994). However segregation is still experienced in many instances, even though all schools reside now under the Department of Education. Manifestations of this are unequal opportunities for students: many students from poor social backgrounds are unable to afford access to schools with improved learning environments, with the resultant difficult adjustment to HEI's. Students are generally poorly prepared because of the lack of well- trained science and mathematics teachers and the rote learning teaching methodology rather than encouragement to take responsibility for their own learning (Pandor: 2004).

2.2.3 Transition and Integration of 1st Year Students into Tertiary Education

According to the literature, the issue of transition of students to tertiary education is considered a very important aspect of ensuring student success (Sheard, Lowe, Nicholson and Ceddia, 2003; Naong, Zwane, Mogashoa and Fleischmann, 2009). Adjustment to tertiary education level has many potential variations in the form of individual, social and academic adaptation. According to the literature reviewed, students generally find the adjustment from school to tertiary life overwhelming and find themselves having to deal with many new experiences. These may include adapting to large and intimidating university environments which leave students unsettled and may lead to extended periods of adjustment while getting to know the facility together with its resources and services. Students are adjusting to new teaching and learning environments different from those of their schools, and requiring the adoption of new and different learning strategies (Kantanis, 2000; Sheard, Lowe, Nicholson and Ceddia, 2003; Naong, Zwane, Mogashoa and Fleischmann, 2009).

Furthermore they have to adjust to the fact that their expectations are not being met, sometimes because of inadequate career guidance or preparation for their new venture (Sheard, Lowe, Nicholson and Ceddia, 2003). These authors suggest that when students choose a degree program the choice should be an informed one as this is regarded as a major factor influencing successful transition to tertiary education. Having to adjust to a new social and academic environment can turn out to be a very lonely experience if the environment is strange, if students do not know any other students and if they are not accustomed to the diversity of a higher education environment (Kantanis, 2000; Nuñez, 2009).
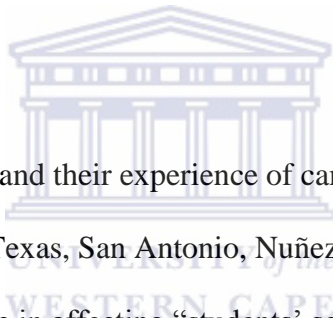
In her study on Latino students and their experience of campus climate and sense of belonging at the University of Texas, San Antonio, Nuñez (2009) found evidence that racial climate plays a strong role in affecting "students' sense of belonging" (Nuñez, 2009: 56). She posits that social and academic integration are very important aspects in making students feel connected and promoting in them a sense of belonging to the university. Any form of negative stereotyping, or marginalisation, whether overt or subtle, affects the social adjustment process adversely in students of colour (Nuñez, 2009).

Du Toit and Van Staden (2005) assert that the socialization of young nursing students from a heterogeneous to a more homogeneous group - accepting and conforming to the professional norms of nursing with its distinct dynamics during a time of personal change
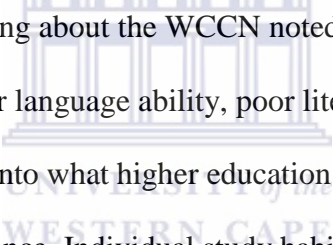
and emotional instability - can be a very challenging experience for them. Lawrence (2006: 184) in her Australian study concurs strongly with the aforementioned authors, adding that nurses still have to "… master discipline specific culture with its various, and at times inconsistent, clinical, theoretical and research literacies" apart from all other transitions they have to make (Lawrence, 2006).

2.2.4   The Effect of Language and Learning Practices

Bunting (1994) clearly posits the fact that different racial groups, i.e. Whites, Coloureds and Black students, as classified by the previous SA constitution, prior to 1994, were exposed to unequal learning opportunities, for example, resources and quality of teaching and learning practices. Students also differ with regard to social, cultural and economic situations and backgrounds and therefore would experience their new learning environments very differently. According to Kantanis (2000) students have to adjust to a climate of independent learning which is unlike their school experience, where the contact with their teachers was experienced in a much smaller context (Kantanis, 2000).

In South Africa, language is another issue which influences success and or failure rates in tertiary education. Moll & Slonimsky (1989) argue that some people are able to think abstractly when speaking in their home language, but are forced into concrete modes of activity when they attempt to either speak or write in English. They note that, "They find themselves incapable of translating their abstract understanding into another language" (Moll & Slonimsky: 1989: 165). These authors regard this as a function of having being socialised over many years into a rote-learning context during school.

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An important issue highlighted by Fraser and Killen (2005) is that major differences between the social and cultural backgrounds of lecturers and students result in differences in perceptions and thus the difficulty for the lecturers to facilitate learning, and for the students to "approach their studies in ways that will optimize their chances of success" (Fraser and Killen, 2005: 28). This can occur because of perceptual differences which may result in misunderstanding or non understanding on the part of the students of what is being offered by the lecturer. This situation may have relevance to this study as staff and students of the WCCN come for diverse backgrounds.

In her report Green (2007) writing about the WCCN noted a range of individual academic competence factors such as poor language ability, poor literacy skills, poor study techniques, and lack of insight into what higher education study entails, as contributory factors to poor student performance. Individual study habits of students at the WCCN are cited as leading to poor academic performance as a result of inadequate preparation time being allocated by students for examinations or tests (Green, 2007). Geleto (2007) and a number of other researchers note that students who start studying early, perform much better than those who start studying only when exam dates become known. Louw and Edwards (2005) advocate continuous reading and early preparation for examinations, suggesting the cumulative aspect of learning as being beneficial. This would also prevent the unnecessary anxiety arising from pressure being put on one before an examination.
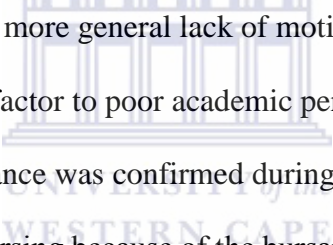
2.2.5   Social Identifications Theory

Social Identifications Theory has relevance to this study in terms of experiences influencing the academic performance of 1ˢᵗ Year nursing students. According to this theory, 1ˢᵗ Year nursing students would experience their identity as a group and the functionalities of such a group will dictate its behaviour and how individual members see themselves and the group to which they belong. Hogg and Abrahams (1988) are of the view that social identity and belonging to a group are inextricably linked to the extent that it allows you to know "who you are". Hogg and Abrahams (1988) furthermore conclude that this group belongingness is a psychological entity. Social identity furthermore manifests as group behaviour in certain instances when a group feels threatened by, for example, another group. Group members regard themselves as out-group members and the other group is seen as the in-group (Hogg and Abrahams, 1988). This theory is felt to have potential in understanding the experiences of 1ˢᵗ Year students at the College.

According to the Social Identity approach, this scenario can cause differentiation in intergroup relations, creating competition as well as the potential for social mobility and social change. Hogg and Abrahams (1988: 27) explain social mobility as "a belief that boundaries between groups are permeable". Therefore social mobility would allow members of the sub-ordinate group to cast aside their 'unfortunate' status and enjoy similar status to the in-group. Social change in this context is defined as "a belief that boundaries between groups are rigid, fixed and impermeable [and] cannot be crossed" (Hogg and Abrahams, 1988: 28).

2.2.6   Career Choice - The Influence of Second Choice Directions

The findings of a study conducted in Ethiopia on students in a higher education setting, showed that students who were admitted into a department of their first choice study direction performed better than those who pursued studies in departments that were not their first choice. This is regarded as a significant factor influencing students' academic performance (Geleto, 2007). This conclusion is supported by Green (2007) who noted that students who are turned down at the UWC come to the WCCN for nursing studies (Green, 2007).This suggests that motivation issues may have relevance to this study.

Green (2007) further suggests a more general lack of motivation for entering nursing as a profession to be a contributing factor to poor academic performance. The effect of motivational issues on performance was confirmed during exit interviews with students when a student said: "I came nursing because of the bursary which will help the family but I hate nursing and physically vomit every time I enter the ward" (Green, 2007: no page number). The aforementioned motivation is linked more closely to the perception of many students of the bursary as an incentive to study nursing and thus serving as extrinsic motivation.

Geleto (2007) explored a range of negative attitudes of students towards lecturers, courses and the size of classes in relation to motivation and their consequent negative academic performance. A number of authors identify absenteeism as a contributory negative factor affecting academic performance. This can be regarded as a symptom of

lack of motivation or commitment to purpose (Womble, 1996; McCarey, Barr & Rattray, 2007; Geleto, 2007). In this study the issue of motivation is explored in situations which arise from social and prior academic experiences. It is also dealt with as a psychological factor.

2.2.7 The Effect of Financial Constraints on Students' Academic Performance and Dropping out of Studies

The Student Pathways study undertaken by the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) found that 40% of South African university students dropped out in their first year of study (Macgregor, 2007). In this study financial constraints were found to be the biggest impediment to succeeding in and continuing with their studies for black students from financially impoverished family back grounds and significantly influenced student drop-out rate. Another finding of the study was that an average of 70% of all students at seven South African universities came from low-income families while at Fort Hare, a historically black university, the proportion was found to be 82% (Macgregor, 2007). Jacobs (2002) is of the opinion that financial problems cause stress and anxiety among all students and have a negative impact on student's academic performance. The aforementioned is a relevant problem for many students.

Linked to economic inequities amongst impoverished family members is the issue of students' travelling to and from campus. This also causes a considerable amount of stress which arises from lengthened travelling time as a result of irregular transport systems. This was a finding of Jacobs's quantitative study on Grenadian medical students at St

George's University (2002). What is worth noting about this sample of Grenadian students is their personal attributes including maintaining a positive attitude, remaining motivated and having a committed and hardworking approach towards reaching their goals (Jacobs, 2002).

Womble, (1996) in reporting on her study at the University of North Carolina, is of the opinion that college students experience numerous obstacles, such as "… time management, financial problems, sleep deprivation, social activities and … having children" (Womble, 1996: 1). Any or all of these influence their academic performance negatively. Womble (1996) therefore advocates that childcare facilities be available for older students with children to assist them to cope with college life. Poor nutrition, weak social support (as perceived by students) and factors such as having to learn to live on their own, having to cook their own meals, and to work and study can cause stresses which may be challenging and overwhelming for students (Womble, 1996).

2.2.8 Views on Pre-entry Academic Achievement

Pre-entry academic achievement occupies an important place within the literature and there is considerable emphasis on the performance of individual students represented by their grades at the end of their school careers. Studies vary in the extent to which they rate the importance of this factor in influencing students' performance at tertiary level. Some are of the opinion that students with higher grade entry qualifications perform consistently better and thus posit that pre-entry achievement should be considered as a key criterion in the selection of students (McCarey, Barr & Rattray, 2007; Geleto, 2007).
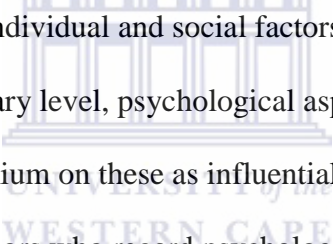
This opinion is supported by a study done in the province of Sindh, Pakistan by Ali (2008) who concluded that students' previous academic performance is the criterion which bears the greatest importance in the selection of nursing students. It is interesting to note that poor BNS test results at the WCCN were also associated with low grades in school-leaving results in a report compiled by Green (2007) considering the 1st semester results of 1st Year students in 2007 (Green, 2007).

Pre-entry academic achievement was studied by Fraser and Killen (2005) in the South African context. They conclude that school matriculation results which have traditionally been considered as the entrance criterion are an outdated benchmark. They are of the opinion that South African students in the South African context are exposed to different kinds of life experiences, in terms of social, cultural, academic and economic factors. They assert that the entrance criteria of students to higher education should be considered with caution and feel that if matriculation results constitute the only entry criterion considered; students "are set up for failure". They therefore consider such a selection strategy as being immoral as well as not one which does not take into account the needs and motivation of students who have the potential to succeed (Fraser and Killen, 2005: 26).

2.2.9   Views on Academic Support in Tertiary Education

During the 1980s, Academic Support staff of the Universities of Cape Town, Natal and Witwatersrand, whose role it was to analyse the academic difficulties of African students at universities, described academic support programs as being ill conceived and prepared

to adequately accommodate these students' needs. Their concern was that Academic Support Officers coming from different cultural backgrounds might not fully appreciate their students' experiences (Moll & Slonimsky, 1989). The learning practices in apartheid's education institutions, fraught with political subjectivities, was noted by these authors: the focus was and remains more on the practice and impact of rote learning practices at school, referred to as superficial processing of information which neglects the development of critical thinking capacity (Moll & Slonimsky, 1989). This proposition is further supported by Salamonson and Andrews (2006) and Rogan, San Miguel, Brown & Kilstoff (2006).

Following on from the role of individual and social factors which influence the performance of students at tertiary level, psychological aspects will be discussed since many authors place a high premium on these as influential in learning and academic performance. Some of the authors who regard psychological factors as playing a role in academic performance believe that grade point average results should not be the only criterion considered for admission of students to higher education institutions (Fraser and Killen, 2005).

2.3   PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS RELATED TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND LEARNING

A number of authors support the notion that psychological factors play a distinct role in the way one manages and organizes one's world. In a path analysis study in the United Kingdom (UK) on pre-registration diploma nursing students undertaking a module on

Psychological Perspectives in Nursing, Ofori (2002) concludes that a psychological factor such as support-seeking is a much better predictor of students' performance than entry level grades. This study was undertaken because of the module having a large enrolment, using lectures as the main means of presenting content and having the expectation of students seeking one-to-one academic support. According to Ofori (2002), lectures create an educational context which affects student learning and subsequently affects student performance (Ofori, 2002).

In recognition of the effect of psychological stress on students, Knowles (1980; 1985) regards learners themselves as rich sources and resources for learning and therefore encourages peer group support to allow for a climate of supportive collaboration between learners instead of rivalry. He emphasizes the absolute importance of a climate of mutual trust in education because according to him, learners carry a suspicion of their teachers from an early school going age and therefore the lecturer is not trusted until trust is proven or earned. Lecturers are viewed as authority figures that have to earn the trust of learners (Knowles, 1985).

2.3.1 The Learning Climate and Academic Performance

The present study concerns young adults from school as well as more mature adults who were mostly exposed to the didactic model of teaching and learning. Knowles (1980; 1995) in his extensive exploration of the needs of adults in education (as opposed to the needs of children through traditional pedagogy), was the originator of the concept of andragogy by means of which he denotes the principles of adult learning (Knowles,

1980). In discussing the eight components of an andragogical process design, Knowles (1995) emphasizes the importance of having a climate that is conducive for effective learning, in which both physical and psychological aspects are crucial. He describes the role of an adult educator as that of "helper, guide, encourager, consultant and resource - not that of transmitter, disciplinarian, judge and authority" (Knowles, 1980: 37). The latter is known to have been the role played by teachers in the traditional mode of pedagogy or teaching children. Knowles (1980) is of the opinion that bad memories from previous school experiences may be laid down in the psyche of adults resulting in a poor self-concept, which could have many negative consequences for adult learning. He therefore advocates a climate of humanness, pleasure, openness and authenticity as extremely important for encouraging learning (Knowles, 1980; Knowles, 1995).

Knowles (1995) attaches high importance to the psychological aspect of learning and regards this as even more important than a student's physical state or the physical climate in which she/he is operating. A climate where mutual respect between learner and facilitator prevails is crucial in encouraging learning as opposed to a climate of no respect or where student experience is not valued. He argues that this can result in learners' energy being spent in dealing with those negative or uncomfortable aspects of the learning climate at the expense of focusing on learning itself (Knowles, 1995).

Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) concur strongly with the view of Knowles (1980) on the importance of the educator playing the role of facilitator and partner rather than that of mere provider of content. Adults should be seen in the context of their social roles in

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society. By making use of their previous experiences and their capacity for experimentation and discovery, one is acknowledging and respecting the ability of adults to contribute towards their own learning. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) advocate the need for adults to be assisted in becoming self-directed learners with the focus on process and student-centeredness as opposed to content-centeredness. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) warn educators that this might be a difficult task, in the sense that not all adults fulfil such roles adequately in society, and are, for example, not necessarily self directed. They warn of the danger of adults becoming rigid in terms of their previous knowledge, thus preventing openness to growth and development. They note that educators should try to be realistic in their approach to adult learning (Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982).

2.3.2 The Role of Internal Locus of Control, Self-efficacy, Academic Support-seeking and Self-regulatory Behaviours in Academic Success

Ofori (2002) refers to two important motivational mechanisms: firstly the concept of perceived self-efficacy, defined in Bandura's terms as "People's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (1994: 1), and secondly the concept of outcome expectancy defined by Wigfield and Eccles (1992 as cited by Ofori, 2002: 6)) as "… how well students expect to do in a future exam or assessment". Therefore, according to these models if students judge their self-efficacy and outcome expectancy to be slightly pessimistic, they are more likely to make use of self-regulated learning strategies and have a more positive outcome as opposed to students who have low support-seeking capacity and high outcome expectancy, and who thus may think that they are able to

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perform well. Bandura (1994) emphasizes that a strong sense of efficacy on the part of students is required in adverse circumstances, for example, failures, setbacks or environmental demands, in order for them to remain task-orientated. He further concludes that those individuals who are preoccupied with self-doubt as to their efficacy are disturbed in analytical thinking, and tend to lower their aspirations with resultant deteriorating performance. On the other hand, those individuals who have had past successes would be positively influenced in terms of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). Andrew and Vialle (1998) found in their Australian study that students who engage in self-regulated learning utilise specific strategies which increase their confidence and help them to become high achievers. These findings indicate that learning strategies and self-efficacy play an important role in academic performance.
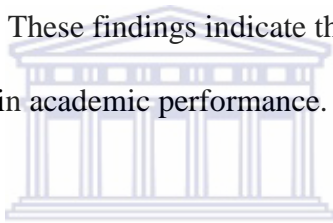
Internal locus of control is regarded as a key factor in performance, described by Louw and Edwards (2005: 578) as one's expectation that "… the way in which one responds to everyday situations will make a difference to what happens" to one. This definition suggests that students with an internal locus of control would tend to seek support when they need it, feeling obliged to make an effort to be successful. These authors suggest that those with an external locus of control "… believe that what happens to them is more a matter of chance or luck" (Louw & Edwards, 2005: 578). In other words they feel that what happens to them is controlled by others and not themselves.

Ofori (2002) concludes that an internal locus of control and anxiety about performance plays a positive role in support-seeking. He presents his argument as follows: academic

support-seeking is "an important aspect of self-regulated learning" strategies. Self-regulated learning is described as "planning, monitoring and effort management" (Ofori, 2002: 5) and could assist in counteracting some of the disadvantages of an impersonal educational context, such as large classes and the use of the lecture method.

2.3.3 The Role of Motivation in Academic Performance

A qualitative study done in New Zealand, rated self-motivation of a student as the most important factor in academic success (Ditcher and Tetley, 1999), self-motivation was rated as important by both students and academics in the study. Motivation is referred to as a drive which directs thinking and activates behaviour towards reaching a goal or which enables one to find the essentials necessary for survival and development (Maslow, 1970). Motivation in an individual is influenced by self-efficacy beliefs which include beliefs in his/her ability to cope in difficult or threatening situations; being unable to cope raises the possibility of anxiety and depression (Bandura, 1994).

Maslow (1970) is well known for his "hierarchy of needs" in terms of motivation, Suggesting that lower level needs have to be met before higher level needs become operative. With the first level needs being more physiological in nature, for example, addressing hunger, second level needs include the need for security and safety; third level needs are psychological needs such as love and belonging while fourth level needs include the need for esteem, respect for and respect by others. The highest level of needs is the fifth level which constitutes self-actualization needs, argued to be reached much later, in adulthood and to include aspects of morality, problem solving, and lack of

prejudice against others (Maslow, 1970). Maslow suggests that there are two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, which is regarded as being stimulated by the inherent nature of an activity and not by external factors, while extrinsic motivation is externally stimulated by rewards or the recognition to be gained from the activity (Maslow, 1970).

2.3.4 The Role of Stress and Distress in Student Performance

Stress and distress have relevance to this study particularly in relation to the practicum required of first year students. Reporting on a cross-sectional study of 1st Year nursing students in Scotland, Jones and Johnston (1997) found that these students experienced much more stress with hospital placements than students who are in their 4th Year. They studied two cohorts and found that sources of stress were common to both cohorts and "… include[d] academic issues such as "fear of failing … lack of free time … long hours of study and … college response to student need". Other sources of stress not commonly associated with study were "… alcohol usage, … loneliness, … personal problems, … personal health problems, … doubts about career choice, … doubts about diploma education as career preparation, and … problems with parents" (Jones and Johnston, 1997: 475-476). In her phenomenological study of 1st Year degree nursing students at a British University, Halarie (2006) found that these students felt like outsiders when placed in the wards for the first time and that this was stressful. Another finding was that these students felt ward staff were more inclined towards accepting diploma students than degree students (Halarie, 2006).

Psychological factors seem to play a significant role in learning and academic performance of students. Post-enrolment factors which have been found by various studies to play an important role in the academic performance of students will be discussed next.

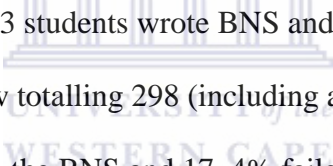## 2.4 THE IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The literature reviewed reveals the influence of institutional factors on the academic performance of students, reinforcing the point that entry qualifications are not the only factors responsible for the failure or success of students. In a study conducted on pre- and post-enrolment factors from both lecturer and student perspectives at two South African universities, Fraser and Killen (2005) found post-enrolment factors to be as influential for students' performance as pre-enrolment and psychological factors. Their study will be further discussed below.

2.4.1 Views on Science Subjects

In a study done in Australia, Andrew (1998) and Andrew & Vialle (1998) conclude that nursing students consistently struggle with biosciences or physical sciences, despite their exposure to these subjects during their schooling. These authors support the notion that biology as a school subject does not necessarily indicate how the student will perform in the sciences within the first year of an undergraduate nursing course. The Minister of Education in SA (Pandor, 2004) contributes the point that performance at SA schools in mathematics, science and technology constitute a serious challenge for SA as the grades

achieved by students in these subjects in Grade 12 are poor as a result of decades of inequality (Pandor, 2004). She further concludes that these limitations stem from "… under-qualified teachers of mathematics and science and lack of adequate facilities and resources for effective teaching and learning" (Pandor: 2004: 2).

According to Green (2007) BNS, which forms a large and important part of the 1st Year nursing curriculum, is the subject most often failed by 1st Year students at WCCN. In BNS, the anatomy and physiology of the entire body structure is studied. Exposure to science subjects in a nursing curriculum is imperative as it forms the basis of the nursing curriculum (Green, 2007).

In the first semester of 2008, 303 students wrote BNS and 19, 8% failed; in the second semester, the same students now totalling 298 (including a few students from 2007 who are repeating the subject), wrote the BNS and 17, 4% failed (Green, 2007).

In a quantitative study undertaken by Andrew and Vialle (1998) in Australia of the academic performance of 1st Year students in a science course of the Bachelor of Nursing program, the relationship between self- efficacy and self-regulated learning behaviours were examined. From this it was concluded that students dislike science and do not regard it as being relevant to nursing (Andrew and Vialle, 1998). This conclusion of the authors is debatable as there are so many other experiences that first year students have to cope with apart from studying science. Furthermore since science subjects form the basis of nursing courses, the conclusion of lack of relevance is surprising.
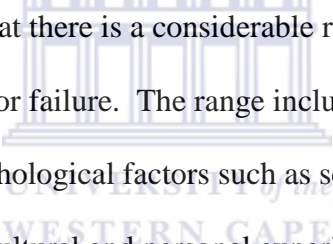
2.4.2 The Impact of Class Size on Academic Performance

Class size and shortage of instructors are also seen by some authors as having an impact on academic performance**.** A quantitative study done by Keil and Partell (1997) at a University in New York on students from four schools within the university, including the nursing school, revealed that large classes have a negative influence on post secondary students' academic performance. Similarly Ofori (2002) and Gibbs (1998) found in their respective studies of nursing education that large classes, coupled with shortages of instructors at HEIs, are not conducive to good academic performance (Keil and Partell, 1997; Ofori, 2002 and Gibbs, 1998)**.**

2.4.3 The Effect of Teaching Strategies on Academic Performance

Teaching strategies used by lecturers are also indicated in various studies to have a significant effect on academic performance. A survey by Malimane (1999), undertaken as part of a South African study on midwifery nursing students, found that the lecture method was the teaching strategy preferred by lecturers. Ofori (2002) cites Gibbs (1989) as noting the lecture format being a passive learning strategy where students just receive information but are not stimulated cognitively. The perceptions of students (as opposed to lecturers) of factors affecting academic performance were found by Ditcher and Tetley (1999) and Malimane (1999) to be considerably divergent, for example, well structured presentations and availability of resources were rated much higher by students than lecturers, who in turn rated the attendance of students at lectures, their academic ability and the consistency of their efforts higher. According to this study, lecturers cite factors

within the students' control as affecting academic performance negatively, while students blame factors under the lecturers' control as contributing to their subsequent poor academic performance (Ditcher & Tetley, 1999; Malimane, 1999).The study of the latter author seems to be unduly focused on the personalities of the study sample which were examined as well as the "weak and strong points of staff and students". This comes across as a personal judgement of peoples' personalities. Furthermore, both these authors failed to give a rich description of their study settings, rendering a poor understanding of the background against which the studies were done, and providing no basis for transfer of these findings to other settings.

The above literature suggests that there is a considerable range of factors which contribute to academic success or failure. The range includes factors which are inherent in the individual including psychological factors such as self-efficacy and motivation as well as those originating from cultural and personal experiences and perspectives, for example socialization and family of origin, In addition there are those factors that stem from exposure to previous academic and socio-economic and cultural experiences, for example previous educational exposure and the burden of the apartheid legacy on "graduates" of the South African schooling system. Then there are those factors within the control of the institution, such as class size, teaching strategies, lecturer numbers and teaching styles, and of crucial importance, the learning environment or climate of the higher education institution to which students have to adjust, and within which they must be retained and grow to become successful independent professionals.

The next chapter features the research methodology employed in this study and details the selected study design, including study population, sample size and sampling procedures. It also entails the preparation for the study and measurement instruments. The data collection strategy and analytical process are also described.

CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the methodology of the study is described. This includes the aims and objectives of the study, an explanation of the study design, the definition of key terms, a description of the study population, the sample size, the sampling procedure, the data collection strategy and the data analysis process as well as measures for rigour.

3.1   AIM

 The aim of this study is to explore the experiences that influenced the academic performance of 1st Year students at the WCCN, South Africa during 2008.

3.2   OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

1. To explore how nursing students experienced their 1st Year of training in 2008.

2. To explore the expectations of 1st Year students with regard to factors that might enhance their academic performance.

3. To explore the perceptions of key informants of experiences influencing 1st Year nursing students' academic performance at WCCN during 2008.

3.3   STUDY DESIGN

This study builds on the findings of a report written by Green at the WCCN during the first semester of 2007. The report was prepared for the Director Nursing of the Department of Health of the Western Cape and entailed the concern of the management and staff of the Western Cape College of Nursing about the attrition rate and academic failure of 1st Year students in 2007. This report comprised interviews with students exiting the first year as well as a survey of 91 first year students, dealing mainly with study methods, reading and language.

A qualitative research methodology within the interpretivist paradigm was utilized to address the aim of this study which is to explore the experiences that influenced the academic performance of 1st Year students at the WCCN, South Africa, during 2008. A qualitative approach was selected to elicit insights into students' experiences of their 1st Year of study, as well as perceptions of those closely associated with them in order to explore the experiences which could have affected their academic performance in 2008.

This is an exploratory study. Exploratory studies allow for in-depth exploration and descriptions of processes or phenomena (Brink and Wood, 1998). By exploring the phenomena in this study with the people concerned, it is hoped to arrive at new knowledge and understanding of the meanings which people attach to their experiences.

This understanding was enhanced by conducting the research in the naturalistic setting, where students study and most of them reside. This is regarded as critical in a study of

this nature. In choosing to conduct the research in this setting and using this methodology, the researcher hopes that a more nuanced description of the students' experiences will be possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005).

3.4   STUDY POPULATION

The study population consisted of the 1st Year students at the WCCN in 2008 as well as key staff involved with them during the same period. As described in the setting, the student population is diverse, coming from different social, cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds. Students speak different languages as their first languages include Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa. In addition, students come from both educationally disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds. The population proportions according to gender, language and failure rate for BNS and FNS are reflected in Tables 1 and 2 in Chapter One of this study.

In 2008 there were 330 first year students. Of these 30, 9% failed 1st Year. This includes those who failed both BNS and FNS. The Key informants consist of four staff members for 1st Year students of 2008. The staff members are Afrikaans and English speaking and from different ethnic groups. Some of these staff members have been involved with the 1st Year students for many years. One of them had been involved with these students for the last year.

3.5   PREPARATION FOR THE STUDY

Preparation for the study was facilitated by the fact that the researcher is a lecturer at the WCCN. On three occasions the researcher approached each class of students who passed their 1st Year in 2008 in order to explain the research to them and to distribute and collect consent forms. Participation was explained as voluntary and participants were informed that their identity would be kept confidential and that they could withdraw at any time. Permission, as written informed consent, was sought from each participant for the audio recorded FGDs and interviews before commencement of data collection. Some students were very keen to participate but many were hesitant as they wanted to participate in the research only if they could benefit directly from it. This could not be guaranteed by the researcher. Some male students from a certain group told the researcher frankly that they were not interested in research at all.
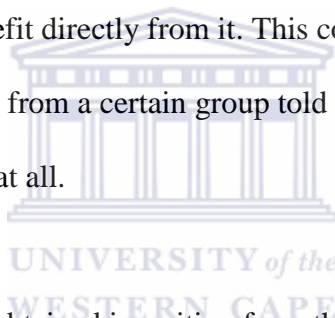
Permission to collect data was obtained in writing from the executive management at the College and time was negotiated with the College management and class lecturers. It was not always easy for the researcher to negotiate time for data collection as some of the second year lecturers were not keen to release students for this purpose. Most of them however cooperated well.

The only time the researcher could collect data was during lunch times and students were served refreshments afterwards. Those students who were repeating their first year in 2008 had their FGDs on a Saturday as they repeated their classes on a Saturday. Time could be negotiated more easily with them and their lecturers.

The researcher also explained the purpose of the research in advance to the staff members who were to be interviewed individually as key informants. They were selected because most of them were senior permanent staff and had been responsible for the 1st Year for a minimum of five years. The staff members taught FNS and BNS during 2008 and the other staff member also had regular contact with the students and knew what kind of academic problems first year students were experiencing. The inclusion of staff as key informants provided data source triangulation.

3.6   SAMPLE PROCEDURE AND SIZE

Sampling was purposive, which Brink notes "… is based on the judgment of the researcher regarding participants" (1996: 141). A maximum variation sample was selected to facilitate gathering rich detailed perceptions of those students who passed and those who failed. Maximum variation sampling is regarded as "purposefully picking a wide range of variation on dimensions of interest" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 182).

Although a sample of four groups of eight students, i.e. thirty two (32), representative of four specific purposive criteria was planned, thirty eight (38) students volunteered to participate in the study. Since some students seemed to be hesitant to participate during the recruitment process, and because the researcher feared ending up with less than eight participants per focus group, she decided to accept all 38 students who were prepared to participate.

In addition four staff members were included as key informants to triangulate and expand on the perspectives of the students. These staff members were specifically selected to achieve maximum variation with regard to race, gender, experience, position and age. The purpose of interviewing both students and staff was to allow the researcher to enter into the perspectives, opinions, and experiences of the 1st Year students and of key staff, to understand how they view the world and the meanings they attached to their world (Patton, 1990).

The student sample was comprised of roughly 50% of students who passed, and 50% who failed first year in 2008. Although the intention is not to compare perceptions of those who passed and failed quantitatively, it is regarded as important to understand both the factors which serve as barriers and those which facilitate success from a range of students' points of view. Furthermore maximum variation sampling in this study included variations in gender, residential location (living-in and living-out students), as well as age variations. Male and female participants were selected in a ratio proportional to the overall student population.

Variation in languages was also a criterion and students were purposively selected according to language, with 50% from the English and Afrikaans speaking students combined, and 50% isiXhosa speaking students. This selection was made in order to represent their diversity of experience which is still pronounced in post-apartheid South Africa. In addition, the Focus Groups were divided by language to facilitate easier

communication, and to avoid one language group dominating the discussion, which was a perceived risk.

The sample was selected according to the criteria indicated in Table 3.

Table 3 – Maximum variation and purposive sampling of 1st Year students, 2008 (WCCN Alphabetical Student Records, 2008-2009)

1st Year Students of 2008 who passed and were in their second year in 2009						Residence	
Focus Group	**Participants**	**Language**	**M**	**F**	**Age group**	**In**	**Out**
1	10	Afrikaans/ English	1	9	19-32	5	5
2	12	IsiXhosa	6	6	22-35	10	2
1st Year Students of 2008 who failed and are repeating 1st Year in 2009						Residence	
Focus Group	**Participants**	**Language**	**M**	**F**	**Age group**	**In**	**Out**
3	8 *All 8 students are repeating BNS and 3 are repeating FNS as well*	IsiXhosa	2	6	19-27	4	4
4	8 *All 8 students are repeating BNS and 1 is repeating FNS as well*	Afrikaans/English	1	7	19-24	4	4

During the process of data collection there were small changes in the composition of the sample: one female student withdrew from FGD1 because she had another appointment, and one male withdrew before commencement of the Focus Group. Groups 3 and 4 (those that failed) were separated from those who had passed (Groups 1 and 2) to avoid arousing sensitivity amongst those who had failed.

FGDs 2 and 3 were conducted in English because the researcher does not speak isiXhosa. An isiXhosa speaker was in attendance and clarified expression where necessary. Language group separation aimed to counter language power relations which could have resulted in one group silencing the other.

3.7   DATA COLLECTION

Permission was obtained from the SOPH and supervisor to replace the 2007 student cohort with a 2008 cohort of 1st Year students for several reasons. It was felt that too much time would have elapsed before the researcher could collect data. The researcher was concerned that participants might have forgotten detail as the 1st Year students of 2007 would have been in their third year of study by 2009; this might have affected the credibility of the research. The student sample was changed to the 2008 student cohort.

Examination results and other records of the WCCN such as Alpha lists (alphabetical records which reflect each student's name and surname, age and gender, language and address) and class lists of the 1st Year students and repeat student lists were consulted to identify which students were 1st Year students during 2008, who had passed and who was

repeating the 1st Year during 2008. In addition, information was gathered from the 1st

Year staff member in a separate interview, long before the data collection interviewing

began. This allowed the researcher to learn about the 1st Year students and to gather

information regarding pass rates and staff complement for 1st Year students during 2008.

3.8   MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS

Measurement instruments utilised for data collection comprised guidelines for FGD's

with 1st Year students and a separate set for individual interviews with key informants

(see Appendix 3). The researcher reviewed much literature with regard to information on

FGD's and individual in-depth interviews. The guidelines for FGD's were developed

with due consideration of the aim of the study, and questions were devised which would

elucidate positive and negative experiences of the 2008 1st Year students and would also

allow students to interact with each other and share experiences.

The guidelines for key informants were also guided by the aim of the study with

questions aimed at exploring how lecturers perceived students' experience in 2008. A

pilot study was not undertaken since students were already reluctant to participate in the

study and staff member numbers were limited in the 1st Year.

Face to face data collection took place between February and April of 2009 at the

WCCN. The questions in the student FGDs were semi-structured and open-ended

questions were asked. Interviews were utilized to gather perspectives from staff

members. These interviews followed a pre-set guide which allowed for in-depth
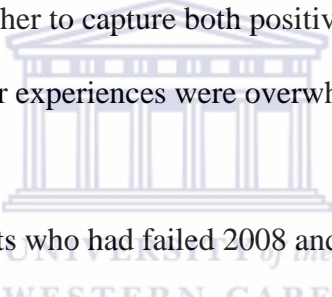
exploration. The combination of FGDs and in-depth interviews provided data and method triangulation for the study. FGDs lasted between one and one-and-a half hours and interviews between a three-quarter and one-and-a half hours.

FGDs were chosen because of advantages such as allowing the researcher to capture group participation and interaction, a process which provides a richness of experience and enhances naturalness. In the process of discussion, participants responded to each others' views, disagreed and agreed, mostly on issues amongst themselves, thereby enhancing the range of the data. FGDs also serve as a support structure to encourage interaction and to assist those students who do not feel comfortable to speak on their own (Kitzinger, 1995; Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005). This was considered especially important as sectors of the student population, the researcher and lecturers are in some cases from different social and cultural backgrounds. A disadvantage of FGDs can however be that some participants may be intimidated by those who are more talkative (Kitzinger *et al*, 2005). This is one of the reasons why participants were divided by language which concomitantly divided "black" from "coloured" students, according to mother-tongue. Although "black" students speak English they noted that they feel much more comfortable speaking isiXhosa. It was felt that interaction, one of the key features of Focus Groups, would be lost in a combined group.

Four FGDs were held as described above. During FGDs, study participants were observed by the researcher for verbal and non-verbal cues and a note taker was also asked

to take notes in relation to responses and reactions. Verbal communication was audio recorded, as arranged with participants beforehand, and data was transcribed verbatim.

Both FGDs and in-depth interviews were documented in a journal after every data collection event. Data were perused following an interview or FGD in order to understand what transpired during any of the above. This kind of reflection would allow the researcher to gauge whether additional questions needed to be asked or changed in order to collect necessary data. The FGDs went quite well; participants could identify with each other and comment. Unfortunately a wealth of negative data emerged and despite the efforts of the researcher to capture both positive and negative experiences, participants' perceptions of their experiences were overwhelmingly negative.

The third FGD was with students who had failed 2008 and were repeating their first year in 2009. The students had difficulty in getting started. They needed a lot of encouragement to start talking, but once they started talking the FGD went reasonably well. It was difficult for the researcher to remain objective as she is a lecturer at the College, already knew the content of previous FGDs and did not want to pose leading questions to the participants. Participants were also encouraged by the interpreter to talk and participants wanted to carry on with the FGD.

Each recorded FGD and interview was immediately transferred onto a CD. Each CD was marked with the group or interview which was recorded and the date on which it was done. A duplicate of the CD was made in order to supply the transcribers with one and

the second one was kept by the researcher in a locked safe, to prevent data getting lost and to maintain confidentiality.

3.9   DATA ANALYSIS

Audio recorded data and additional notes which were made by both the note taker and researcher were compared at the end of each focus group. Transcribed data was coded into emerging themes and categories; the transcribed data was compared with the recordings and notes to gauge whether it was transcribed correctly.

A process of content analysis was undertaken. The researcher immersed herself in the data of FGDs and interviews, reading and re-reading the transcripts as well as the notes made from the diary in order to become totally familiar with the data. Some of the transcribed interviews were given to the participants to verify whether they had been correctly transcribed. Several iterations of coding were captured to finally arrive at the subsequent themes which evolved. Data was coded and organized into emergent thematic categories during the thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis entails "… the process of searching for or uncovering the common patterns or threads that are woven through an entire set of data" (Gifford, 1998: 546). A peer review was undertaken with the supervisor also doing some coding, which was compared in order to ensure credibility of the researcher's coding process. The themes were "hand coded" or categorized without the use of a computer programme.

The emerging themes were firstly colour coded and afterwards typed on a MS Word document in an effort to try and put data together which resided under one theme and to ensure that all data was considered before clustering, in order to manage the huge amount of data. Afterwards the cut and paste method was used and more data collapsed as it was incorporated into the themes which eventually emerged. The themes were finally used by the researcher to organize interpretations of the findings.

The themes and sub themes which evolved during the analysis of data are discussed with verbatim quotations to illustrate the findings of both FGDs with students and interviews with staff members.

3.10 ETHICS

The study was intended to lead towards a better understanding of experiences which affect nursing student academic performance at the WCCN and with the hope that the study may lead to programme and performance improvement.

An application for ethics approval was submitted to the UWC Ethics Committee to conduct the study and the protocol was approved. Participation was voluntary for all students and 1st Year staff members. Each one of them was provided with a Participant Information Sheet explaining the purpose; aim and process of the research study, requesting their participation and assuring confidentiality (see Appendix 1). Participants were informed that all focus groups and interviews would be audio recorded. They were asked for written consent once they agreed verbally to participate in the study (Informed

Consent Form - see Appendix 2). The researcher guarded at all times against causing any harm to the participants in the group. It was unlikely that the other informants would perceive the research as threatening or invasive, given the purpose of the research, however it was difficult to predict how participating staff might feel in future. To address this, statements have not been attributed to staff specific roles to maintain anonymity. All participants were made aware that they could withdraw at any stage. All data collected was kept confidential and anonymous. Should any issues of concern arise, a counsellor from the College was available to assist students with these issues.
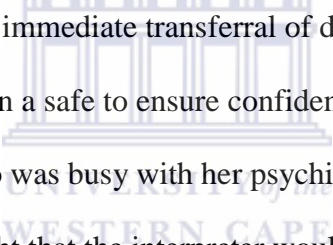
3.11   MEASURES FOR RIGOUR

The importance of rigour in qualitative research cannot be overemphasized. Therefore the researcher attempted to ensure the rigour and plausibility of the study by integrating the steps that follow into the research process. Data source triangulation was achieved by collecting data from both students and 1st Year staff. In addition methods triangulation was undertaken by using FGDs as well as in-depth interviews (Koch & Harrington, 1998; Patton, 1990; Mays & Pope, 2000 and Streubert Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). The afore-mentioned contributed to a broader, more holistic perspective of the phenomena being researched.

Transferability was facilitated by developing a thick description of the context in which this study was undertaken to ensure that those who read the study are able to establish whether it is applicable to their context or not. This study is relevant for the South African context and could be applied to a comparable college environment.

3.11.1 Credibility

The credibility of a study depends on the level of detail of description of the setting, the reasons for the study, identification of the problem, the kind of data collected and how it was collected (Gifford,1998). The credibility of this study was ensured by giving a thick description of the setting and of the problem and how it was identified. Data collection is described with regard to the time period over which it was collected, how it was collected, how coding was done and how themes were eventually identified.

Credibility was also ensured by immediate transferral of data collected to a CD. A second CD was made and kept locked in a safe to ensure confidentiality. The interpreter was a 4th Year student at the College who was busy with her psychiatric module and is a keen and committed person. It was thought that the interpreter would have insight into the students' world and would be well placed to understand what was needed from the student participants. Cognisance was taken of the fact that they knew him/her and would not feel strange or inhibited in her/his presence. He/she also wanted to learn about research. He/she was well prepared by the researcher with regard to confidentiality and note taking and was presented as neutral and unbiased in the FGDs. Translation of isiXhosa was done by both the interpreter and the verbatim transcribers and by developing verbatim transcriptions of interviews and Focus Group Discussions. By means of this process the researcher attempted to develop as accurate as possible a reflection of the participants' perceptions, ideas and experiences. Furthermore, the

researcher ensured that participants' "lived experiences" were accurately exemplified through using direct quotations in the findings. This is referred to as "…vividness and faithfulness to the description of the phenomena" (Koch and Harrington, 1998: 885). Leading questions were avoided as far as possible and non-verbal behaviour of participants were observed and recorded. Some verbatim transcriptions were returned to the participants to check whether they considered the transcription to be an accurate recording of what they said. To ensure that coding was done logically the supervisor also coded data and exemplars of the researcher were verified by the supervisor to ensure that data was not distorted and that the study is credible.

3.11.2 Reflexivity

The researcher is a psychiatric nurse with experience in interviewing, but acknowledges the fact that some answers could have been explored in more detail if time was not a constraint. Furthermore, being a psychiatric nurse, and presently teaching social sciences, the researcher could comprehend the social and cultural issues of the participants and had empathy for the participants, especially in the FGDs. Sensitivity towards cultural and social issues amongst the participants was ensured by including an isiXhosa speaking interpreter during the Focus Group Discussions with IsiXhosa students (Whittemore, Chase and Mandle, 2001).

A qualitative research methodology was considered, because the researcher was not merely interested in statistics but in the deeper meanings of experiences in the lives of the participants. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows exploration of student

experiences underlying prior quantitative research, which had revealed poor throughput rates and attrition; understanding the experiences of students was deemed the best strategy to understand how the situation could be addressed.

The researcher attempted to be reflexive of her own role at all times within the study process, by self-critique, appraising her influence on the process, and by keeping a journal (Gifford, 1998; Koch & Harrington, 1998 and Morse, 2002). Being a lecturer employed at the WCCN for the last ten years, since the rationalization of the four colleges, the researcher had to be constantly aware of her own subjectivities and biases, and not to impose any of this during data collection and analysis.
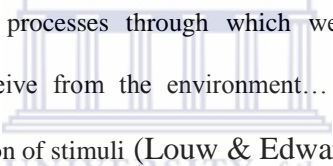
3.11.3 Dependability

Dependability "… seeks means for taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced change" Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 299). The researcher ensured dependability by documenting the changes in the research process, for example, changing of the cohort of 2007 students to 2008. There were no other changes with regards to the setting, research problem, research design, and data collection methods during the research process (Gifford, 1998).

This concludes Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the findings that arose from data analysis.

CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4 the findings of the study are presented. These are all empirical findings. In the researcher's endeavours to achieve the aim of the study, (to explore the experiences that influenced the academic performance of 1st Year students at the WCCN during 2008), the perceptions of four student groups and four key informants (staff members who were in direct contact with these students) were analysed. In this context, the definition which Louw & Edwards offer of perception informs the researcher's methodology:

> Perception refers to those processes through which we give meaning to the information our senses receive from the environment… [It] involves selection, organization and interpretation of stimuli (Louw & Edwards: 1997: 121).
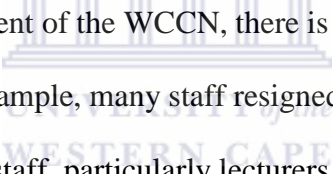
Because this is a qualitative research study, the findings would typically reflect the opinions and feelings of the participants and how they experienced their 1st Year at the College (Hancock, 1998). The verbatim quotes extracted from the data are presented as used by the participants and include colloquial expressions as well as language and grammar mistakes in order to do justice to the authenticity and vividness of their perceptions and experiences.

The fact that the WCCN as an institution has been in a state of ongoing transition since 2000 (which in 2010 is not yet resolved), is worthy of mention as this might have exerted some influence on institutional processes and dynamics, student adjustment and

integration. To set this context, brief descriptions of the manifestation of institutional

governance arrangements which were introduced in chapter one, as part of the setting, are

described here.

4.2   AN INSTITUTION IN TRANSITION

Arising from the institutional governance arrangements, conflicting and continuously

changing policies, for example, examination rules, examination entry policies, discipline

policies have led to insecurity and resentment on the part of both staff and students as has

been evident in views expressed by staff and in discussions on numerous occasions with

staff, and in annual student protests since 2007.

Eight years after the establishment of the WCCN, there is still a strong sense of staff

insecurity at the College; for example, many staff resigned in the period prior to and after

the restructuring in 2000. New staff, particularly lecturers, were appointed to short-term,

contract posts because of the lack of security of the future of the WCCN and uncertainty

as to whether CPUT would be able to accommodate all College staff. WCCN lecturers

are still unsure whether they will remain employees of the DoH on which staff

establishment they have remained since the restructuring, or be re-located should CPUT

absorb nurse training from the DoH (Green, 2007; Green, 2008).

As a result of institutional arrangements, students have been required to be dually

enrolled as students of both the WCCN and CPUT. Attempts on the part of the

institution to integrate or bring uniformity to the rules of WCCN and of CPUT are poor

and causes confusion among students. Furthermore, students are disappointed by the fact that they are still required to study the R425 curriculum of the DoH/WCCN (approved by SANC on rationalisation of the colleges in 2000). As has been previously noted, the CPUT curriculum has not yet been approved by SANC and has awaited approval since 2005. This has led to much discontent amongst the past and present students who have expectations of a degree programme by virtue of CPUT being a HEI, and from suggestions made by a senior CPUT authority following a student protest meeting in 2007 and 2009.

All of these issues have created an environment at the WCCN which formed a complex and conflictual backdrop to the experiences of 1st Year students during 2008. These issues emerge through the data together with a range of social, economic, cultural, individual and academic issues. The themes that emerged from the data analysis will be presented in the following section.

4.3 MAIN THEMES

In the course of this study undertaken at the WCCN the four main themes which emerged from data collected are as follows:

1. Social barriers to study

2. Difficulties in transition

3. A "hell away from home" (living environment)

4. Inadequacies in the academic environment (learning environment)

4.3.1 Social Barriers to Study

Social barriers to study form the first theme in the data analysis. Social barriers are regarded by Cross (1981) as barriers which students experience in their own social environments. These include economically deprived social backgrounds, poverty issues and home circumstances. These social barriers are present when students embark on their careers and students continue to experience them throughout their period of study. In other words, such barriers can be regarded as "baggage" students carry with them into their learning environment. In this study, these barriers also include the violence occurring in students' present social environment. Students perceive violence as permeating their study environment and rendering them unable to fulfil their study obligations. This theme feeds into addressing the first issue influencing students' experience their first year.
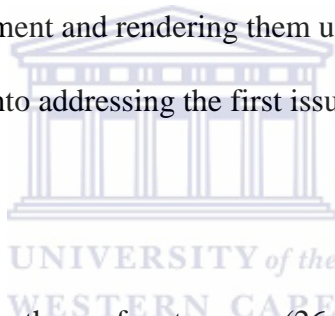
A number of students, especially those of mature age (26 and above), experience living out - that is at home - as hampering them in their studies, as their multiple roles in their home environment are demanding and set up tensions, for example, between obligations towards family and towards their studies. This is experienced by students as influencing their academic performance negatively. This issue was described by one student (FGD1):

> *... by the time I get to study it's 10 o'clock at night, when everything else is done, my children is sleeping. So it's a huge impact on me academically, living out.*

Cross (1981) supports this student's description of the tension between domestic demands and study, showing how "situational barriers" such as lack of time can be a

barrier to development in adult learners. The student quoted above has children, in other words, adult responsibilities. This issue was commented on by a staff member whose perception and view of adult students is that they shoulder more social problems than younger students and are more frequently ill and absent from class or from the workplace (Interview 2):

> *The student … is a learner but the student got also other responsibilities at home … the students got more social problems, that really that I would say have an influence on their learning.*

Another staff member felt that students' home circumstances are very taxing and expressed the following view (Interview 3):

> *… the ones living out, the burden there could be higher on them because some of them come from really disadvantaged backgrounds where the breadwinners have died, …have gone to jail, …have left them …these are real issues we address on a daily basis.*

Other students experienced their home environment as not being conducive to studying due to stress-filled social circumstances which interfere with the required attention and time needed for them to concentrate on their studies. This was explained as follows (FGD 2):

> *… circumstances are not viable back home as there are too many problems or they are fighting or they are suffering and you have to face the problem in your home… if you are at home you can't study because today you will see that there's*

no food and maybe you are obligated to make a plan for food. It's not nice…we

have problems at our homes and even now whilst we are here in this nursing we

have problems at home.

From the above it is evident that this student was torn between being at the college and the numerous problems at home which permeated his/her study world.

These points confirm the social disadvantages that many students experience. Many students in the FGDs related stories of and agreed with each other their lack of finances. On entering nursing college, the bursary turned out to be inadequate, resulting in their not having food or money to travel to and from work. Although students did not admit overtly in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) that the bursary attracted them, a staff member viewed the situation differently (Interview 4):

> *… you know what attracted them? It's poverty because they live in poverty, their*
>
> *parents can't afford to send them to university or technikon and here nursing is*
>
> *offering them a bursary for the full four years and they are also guaranteed of a*
>
> *job, who wouldn't take that opportunity even if nursing weren't their first or*
>
> *second or third choice.*

The "situational barrier" of violence was found to be a common theme which permeates the students' study world and will be discussed next as one of the social barriers to learning. Students who live out (those who live at home) encounter numerous problems commuting from their homes to and from the College and/or to the clinical placement (at

a hospital or clinic). This has resulted in some students being severely emotionally traumatised which had affected their academic performance in various ways.

This student became distressed all over again in the FGD when explaining her aspirations of passing her 1st Year. She describes her ordeal on her way to her home, in Khayelitsha one evening from the hospital (FGD 2):

> *I was shot there ... just when I got off the taxi around past eight ... and that influences your studies ....*

Violence was a common code across the data collected and many students identified with each other on this issue. Another student explained an experience of violence as a distraction during one of her exams (FGD 3):

> *...when I was going to study for June exams then my phone was stolen by tsotsis [colloquial for criminals] ...was stressed about my phone ... and what my mother is going to say, so I didn't study well at that time, that's why I failed.*

A staff member judges this to be one of the reasons why students at times do not arrive at work or class, thus losing valuable time. In concurring with the above students, the staff member explains that dealing with these matters forms part of staff members' daily work. This goes beyond the designated duty for staff in the learning environment. A staff member described this problem (Interview 3):

> *...we have students regularly ...being dispossessed of cell phones, money ... one student lost all her books because they couldn't get money ... [from her].*

The above examples of the theme depict a sense of helplessness, powerlessness, a lack of choice and a lack of agency in the participants - a sense of having no free will to choose what happens to one and of having to worry constantly. There are many barriers preventing the participants from reaching their full potential. These seem to take the form of personal inability resulting from home circumstances, environmental impositions, such as having to deal with violence and traumatic incidents, and potentially being "forced" into nursing in order to alleviate social circumstances. Bandura's (1994) concept of self–efficacy is relevant here. He theorizes the necessity for a strong sense of self-efficacy in order for people to cope with adverse demands.

The next theme which emerged strongly through the analyses is "difficulties in transition". Transition is taken to mean "… passage or change from one state … or set of circumstances to another" (Oxford Dictionary, 1984: 801). Transition is discussed incorporating various underlying sub-themes.

4.3.2   Difficulties Experienced by Students in Transition

This theme encompasses many adjustments to be made by students during a period of transition. Many of the participants in this study entered the higher education setting, encumbered by their own difficulties which affected their capacity to engage fully in the learning process, as is evident in the previous theme. Some of the general adjustments having to be made by students entering a tertiary institution include individual, social, academic and professional transitions.

Individual transition is used to signify the developmental tasks of an adolescent in commencing adult tasks such as choosing a career path. This transition may mean having to live on one's own for the first time in one's entire life, making independent decisions and planning in advance (Du Toit & Van Staden, 2005; Louw, Van Ede, Louw, 2007). For the mature student, this kind of transition may have entailed adjustment from doing other work to nursing, as well as having to juggle one's time between being a mother or a spouse and a learner.

In the discussion with students, social transitions were also apparent. These are transitions from the known environment which is home to the unknown, in this instance the College residence, or from earning wages to being dependant on a bursary and having to study. It also means being exposed to nursing clinical practice. Having to make new friends emerged as another challenge.

Furthermore academic transitions were a significant factor for students and involved becoming independent learners and having to take responsibility for their own learning. This entailed having to adjust to a new learning environment and climate different from that experienced at school.

Loneliness was keenly felt by quite a number of students and is described by one student who seemed to act as a spokesperson for many students (noticeable in the use of "them").

The same student described how financial reasons combined with loneliness led to a distraction for them from their studies and made life very difficult for them (FGD 1):

… Many of them, they are on their own; they must see to themselves, they are away from their families. Sometimes it makes them sad - it keeps them distracted, it distracts them away from their work because they alone, they are here all the time, you can't go home, they don't see their family… the parents don't have money, [to come visit] now they worry, they stressed about that, and the fact that they must study hard to get through this year. So it is very difficult!!

The above quotation is an example of individual transition, illustrating the personal difficulties experienced by students.
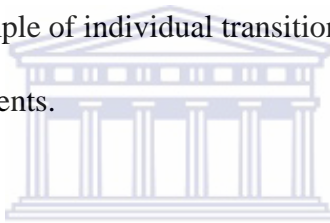
With regard to social transition, a student already in the second year of the programme experiences living on his/her own as a major and ongoing adjustment (FGD1):

I'm not used to being on my own, so that's just a major adjustment that I had to make. … I'm still getting used to it …

A sense of belonging is advocated as key to students engaging actively in the learning process and campus environment as soon as possible (McInnis and James 1994; Kantanis, 2000; Nuñez, 2009). This implies that the extent to which students integrate socially and academically will influence their academic performance either positively or negatively. These authors draw our attention to the importance for 1st Year students of making a positive transition to a higher education institution as soon as possible in order

to prevent attrition as students become disengaged from their studies if this transition is not successful.

The academic transition proved to be one that extended over a long period for these participants. An academic transition encompasses departing from the high school context to that of a tertiary education setting, a transition which proved to be extremely difficult for some students. This was illustrated by students' perceptions of the college environment being very different from that of their school (FGD 2):

> *The experience was difficult in terms of the adaptation from … high school as they used to present lectures for us … where if you read a book and its being explained to you. … [It] wasn't what I expected they would be. They didn't… explain to me - because we had some tutors [at WCCN], they read the work out of the book and when we asked questions they couldn't explain to us what it [was] about.*

The view of this student was supported by many others who had experienced their school environment with their teachers as smaller, more personal, the modes of teaching different to those at the college and they were finding difficulty now in taking more responsibility as independent learners. Many students were aware also of the difference in workload at the College (FGD3):

> *… I failed last year because … I was using my own way of studying, the way I was using in high school so then at times I lost track of time when I'm studying and then there's a problem maybe at home …*

Similarly a mature student described her difficulty in adjusting to a climate of learning after a three year break since matriculation (FGD1):

> *... It's a huge gap to have to adjust because in our time we didn't have the same curriculum, and things are different, the ways of studying are different [you] ... have to adapt from the years that you were at school to this type of education level.*

In support of the mature student, a staff member shared the experience of younger students being academically more able, probably because they have fewer responsibilities at home and fewer social problems (FGD1):

> *... I mean forty-five and surely that student's learning needs is different from the others. So it is possibly due to being out of school for quite some time that that student might struggle to study.*

A staff member supports the idea of giving more attention to the transition process in 1st Year as students need time to adjust from secondary to tertiary education (FGD1):

> *In our orientation ... we should address the issue of moving from high school into a tertiary institution more ... we must be more rigorous about that because at the moment, it is just the orientation [a week of registration, during which each lecturer shows their class around the physical environment of the College, introduces students to their course outcomes, meeting some staff members, e.g. counsellor, academic support officers and sorting out health issues, e.g. immunizations].*

Most students not only had to adjust from secondary to tertiary education but had to adjust to an academic environment where the language of instruction is English and not their mother tongue, as the majority of students are IsiXhosa and Afrikaans speaking (FGD 2):

> *... For all of us English is not your first language and you will have a problem when you come in a tertiary institution and you don't know that ... and they don't give you like a slow, I don't say spoon-feed but take it at a slower pace.*

Some staff members concluded that the English medium of instruction has contributed to the failure rate (Interview 1, 3, 4):

> *The failure rate has increased since we introduced an English only policy ...*

The medium of instruction changed in 2005 from Afrikaans and English, to English only. Staff members expressed the idea that both the Afrikaans speaking (usually coloured) and isiXhosa students are "equally disadvantaged", as they termed it.

Professional transition is also evident and includes having to master discipline specific issues related to nursing (Lawrence, 2006). Adjusting to clinical exposure of 1 000 hours and studying at the same time was another adjustment students described. Many students in the FGDs were in agreement with each other that they were not aware of the clinical placement in their programme. They thought the nursing programme would be classroom bound (FGD1, 2, 3, 4).

This practical thing was new to us ... more especially we had to wake up 6 o'clock. It was not easy for us. It was the first time and it was too much for us ... no!

Being exposed to the clinical environment during their practicum which forms part of their programme was experienced as difficult and new to them. Students complained at length about the attitude of some of the mentors who accompany them in their clinical placement (FGD3):

... my tutor shouted at me everyday in front of people and I would be stressed, sometimes hurt, and cry, and one day I cried at the hospital because my tutor swore at me in front of people because I did not greet her....

Students complained of tiredness on returning to class (block period) after a period of clinical placement and having to write a test on their first day of class. This might be an indication that some students did not fully comprehend what nursing entails and were poorly prepared for a nursing career or that nursing was not the right career choice for them. Sheard, Lowe, Nicholson and Ceddia (2003) regard the preparation of students for making the right career choice as extremely important. However, students did not admit overtly that they had chosen the wrong career or entered the nursing profession because of the bursary, except for one student who felt she was forced by her mother to become a nurse.

A staff member expressed a view on how nurses view the nursing profession, noting that (Interview 3):

"... some of the students think that nursing is a romantic vocation ..."

While the transition to higher education and nursing in particular seems to have been a significant challenge for many students, what they experienced in the new context seems also to have offered a range of hurdles for them. In particular, there is evidence of disappointed expectations with regard to the learning environment as well as in the living environment where they are residing.

The next theme to be framed includes the students' disappointed expectations in both the living environment and learning environment of the College. This was an overwhelming, overarching theme which all students identified with, whether they had passed or failed their 1st Year. Students also perceived these issues as having contributed negatively to their academic performance.

4.3.3   A "hell away from home" (Living environment)

A social environment is viewed as the environment in which one lives and interacts with people in one's surroundings. Many disappointed expectations emerged from the FGDs about both the new learning and the living environment. Most of the students identified poorly with their new living and learning environments, claiming that these had a profound effect on their academic performance. Not having their expectations met culminated in feelings of being unimportant and devalued. Students from all four FGDs

expressed anger and resentment about their new learning environment and residence. The importance of students having an acceptable residence is crucial as it involves basic needs being met and it assists the transition into the new social environment or social integration into the educational institution. It was evident how these disappointed expectations were affecting the students' learning experience. In the interests of clarity students' disappointment with the living environment is discussed first, as students suggested it has a direct influence on their learning (FGD 1 & 2):

> *This environment also had an impact in my academical failure because it is like, I don't know a desert or somewhere because there is nothing to entertain me and outside it is not safe. It's not the studies or the work that is depressing; it's the place where we live in …*
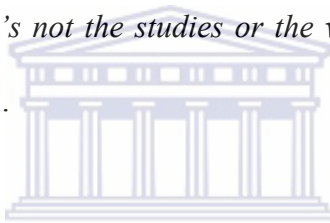
Many students experienced the residence as an unfriendly place, a place where you would rather not be if you had a choice. One student described the real fear of being in the residence when his/her family left the first time (FGD 2):

> *… the furniture is very old, it's like baboons are staying there ... you get to this place and inside the furniture is old and you are scared and you are not used to other people ... when the visitors leave, they leave the furniture. It's scary, please!!*

A staff member concurred with this feeling and shared an experience of the residence on a walkabout with someone from the Directorate (Interview 1):

... The furniture in the students' bedrooms, the mattresses in 30 years had never

been renewed. She was appalled; I was appalled at the furniture. It's was

honestly, it's so depressing and you got to say when last did we buy mattresses?

[Some of the mattresses were replaced subsequently].

The students complained of the residence not having lounges for them to relax and be comfortable in, and no recreation facilities to provide a balance in their lifestyle between work and play. Students felt that although they are studying to become health professionals, there are no health facilities for them such as there are at the CPUT campus. Although students are eligible to use the CPUT facilities, they find having to make arrangements to get there cumbersome.
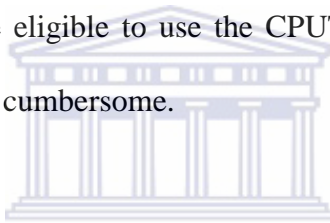
Many students described their disappointment in the appearance and atmosphere of the college, claiming that they were not aware that they would be placed at the Athlone campus site, expecting that they would be in Bellville where the main campus is situated and which they regard as superior to the WCCN site. Students were not proud of the College as their new home; some felt embarrassed living at the College and would have much preferred to be on the CPUT campus. Students shared a feeling of awkwardness at living at the WCCN campus (FGD 2, 3, 4):

I did not know when I came here that this school is rotten, I thought I was going

to be at Pentec [Peninsula Technikon, was the previous name for CPUT] or

Bellville or maybe in Athlone, I did not know I was coming here, I thought it was

in Bellville right? 'Oh', it's in Klipfontein [the road leading to Athlone] and then

I came here ... I just saw this blue, orange building, and then I walked inside and I said but it looks like a hospital and then you come to your room and then you see this iron bed ... but this thing also affecting us because the condition of the school is, no man ... Even if someone is asking you' where are you studying?' I say I'm studying in Pentec ...

Another student appeared very angry, showing her anger with visible body language and tone of voice about conditions at the residence (FGD 4):

It is not a home away from home; it is a 'hell away from home'.

This place make me talk. If I don't want something, if I don't like something I will feel free to say to you anything I want and sometimes I don't care how you feel because this is how they make me ... this place [WCCN] makes me an animal. It ... makes me be angry for something over nothing.
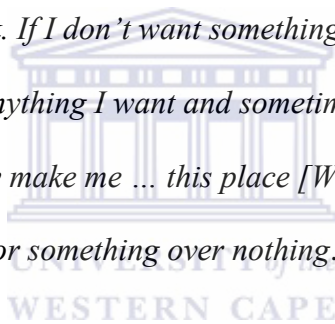
This student also explained the repercussions for her of being continually annoyed with people (inclusive of managers, lecturers and cleaners) with whom she has dealings at the College.

The students described many more of the things that were disappointing for them, for example, students are not respected as people, the meals are of poor quality and insufficient, they have no privacy in their rooms, and they are continually criticized by and nagged by a range of staff, including cleaners, housekeepers and lecturers. According

to Maslow (1970), respect from other people is an important need for human beings and thus as far as these students are concerned this need has not been met.

The majority of students from all FGDs communicated their experience of poor conditions at the residence with regard to food which they feel directly affects their responses to the learning environment (FGD2):

> *We couldn't help falling asleep because we are hungry and the food that we get, the potato beef stew, you can't eat it and the rice sometimes is old or it's not well cooked so we can't or we don't get filled with the food. … I got the sausage I could taste it when I put it in my mouth, it was off and I had to throw it away… We get hungry here at school, so we can't even concentrate.*

A lecturer agrees that students get hungry at times because they wait for the bursary to pay for food although the bursary is actually meant to pay for the residence and their studies. This was attributed to students' poor and difficult social backgrounds (Interview 4):

> *… they come from very difficult backgrounds because lots of them rely on the bursary. They come here with … social problems, they are hungry …*

A student expressed appreciation for a period when lecturers actually provided sandwiches for them because they realised that students were falling asleep in the class because of hunger while they were awaiting bursary payouts. This occurred between March and August 2008 because sometimes the bursaries are only paid out as late as August/ September of the year in which students register.

Further shortcomings at the College residence, as perceived by students and which were said to have affected their academic performance in varying degrees, are lack of study venues, periodic lack of hot water and electricity for their rooms, and no facilities to prepare their own food. Furthermore students perceive their immediate living environment as unhygienic and commented continuously on the lack of recreation facilities. A student's description of the lounge is as follows (FGD 1):

> *… you can't sit on a straight chair and watch ... a movie 10 o' clock at night because how you are going to sit upright like this and watch TV? That is not inviting - give them a lounge seat that they can lay on. … you can't just stay in one small room, you get frustrated, I'll get upset to live in one small room and when you come out there is nothing else for you to do.*
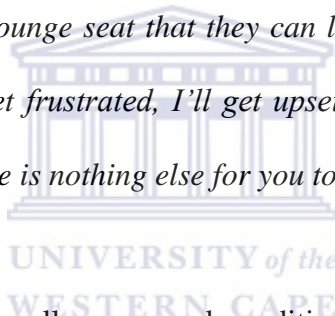
Participants in the FGDs continually compared conditions and facilities at WCCN with what UWC and the main campus of CPUT have to offer as Higher Education Institutions (FGD2):

> *What I was expecting is for our school to be like others and be a place to have fun, like there's a pool [at WCCN] but its dirty, everything - like sports and ... everything, like other schools. ... and ... the shower stuff, hygiene environment of the hostel is very poor. ... the other thing that gets to us a lot here in school is that there is no sport, ... you find that you will have stress, you write tests one after the other and after you've finished and you're free, you would like to have fun and play ball, go dancing, go to the concert.*

Students spoke many times about other universities having gyms, tennis courts, places for students to relax and eat and 'looks like a place of learning' A staff member concurred strongly with the students' experience of a lack of recreation facilities. This staff member was also of the opinion that students get up to all sorts of problematic activities because they have no recreation facilities (Interview 4):

> *There's no recreation here, there's nothing for them, they are just in their room and uh, there's nothing …*

Maslow (1970) notes that to feel safe is a basic need which will come to the fore continually until it is met. Although students regard the inside of the college as safe, they perceive the environment where the College is situated as endangered by crime and violence. Many students felt that the WCCN premises have been in existence for a long time (37 years), yet no provision is made for students to feel safe once they leave the immediate premises of the College (FGD1 & FGD 4).

> *Just outside the gate, … waiting for a Bellville taxi … I think it was my first week I was robbed here by the bus stop … I came inside there was a whole shooting and stuff, I came here I was traumatised but no one could help me and that was my first week and I told my mom and she said if it's like this you not going back …*

Only one student felt that the security inside the hostel was a positive aspect. Her view was not supported by her colleagues, however, as another students view on the security was as follows (FGD1):

The cameras - I don't like it ... it feels like a jail ...

Disappointed expectations may be linked to students' continually describing feelings of being devalued, for example, feeling that they are not given a hearing or that there is no response to their requests when they approach members of staff at the College, ranging from top management to the general assistants. This student anger was expressed as follows FGD1):

... nobody listens to you, like people in authority is not using it properly. Nobody is addressing anything. They want to be in charge then act like you are in charge, do something about it!

The above statement, like many such others, reflects the way in which the College fails to meet the physical and several psychological needs according to Maslow's framework (1970). In confirming that the required respect towards students is lacking at times, a staff member expresses this view (Interview 3):

... I think some of the lecturers are not able to handle the tertiary institution as well because respect that goes with the tertiary institution is lacking with certain lecturers.

The same staff member reflected further on how engaging students in responsibilities and acknowledgement at the College, for example, in the library or kitchen, contributed positively to students' self esteem and being respected by others (Interview 3):

... we've got such a great working relationship with the students now that we actually have them working in the kitchen, taking up responsibilities.

When students were asked how the WCCN could be improved to make it more acceptable for future students the angry and dismayed response of one of them was "I will not recommend this place to anybody". This was in keeping with how the rest of the group felt (FGD 4):

> *I will not recommend anybody to come to this place, because number one how can you stay in a room which you have to share … How can you stay like that, you can't live like that … they don't inform you that the geysers are put off … [they don't know] how to handle us as adults … they belittle you even more as what they do on the academic level … it is not nice at all!*

The theme in this section was that of the perceptions and feelings of students about the living environment at WCCN, The dominant theme shows suggests disappointment on the part of students and an expectation of receiving better living conditions than they had done. This evidently resulted in poor identification with the place in which they stay, in other words the place they expected to be the "home" in which they spend four or more years while they study. Their experience of the academic or learning environment will be discussed next.

4.3.4   Inadequacies in the Academic Environment (Learning Environment)

Knowles (1970) alludes to the important task of lecturers and the atmosphere conducive to learning in adult education which needs to be created by them. It is important that the

learning environment facilitate learning to assist students with positive academic integration and develop in them a sense of belonging.

The role the College as an institute of higher learning, the lecturers, managers, classroom and teaching equipment play in the learning process is crucial. However the learning environment at the College was perceived by the majority of students as negative.

One student, discussing the quality of teaching at the College noted that the "lecturer doesn't have a clue", meaning he/she does not know the topic or subject he/she is teaching, with the resulting student dissatisfaction. The following passage describes how students viewed such a situation (FGD1):

> ... The other lecturer who doesn't have a clue what she's teaching! ... If you don't know what you teaching how is the student going to learn?

Many students in the group complained about the language use of most of the lecturers in the 1st Year during 2008. A student explained that the lecturers' English was problematic and added to his difficulty in grasping subject content. He noted his inability to understand Afrikaans terms used by lecturers who were using English during lectures and at other times when addressing students. Students experienced and perceived language as having a negative effect on their academic performance.

This student was of the opinion that the Afrikaans mother tongue students were advantaged and that he felt disadvantaged and left out as an isiXhosa speaker (FGD2):

My observation was the illiterate facilitators … our lecturers do not … speak fluent or pure English … They speak Afrikaans… they just mix Afrikaans because it's their language, so they've got a better understanding themselves. … they know what they are talking about and they can't be able to explain it to us. It will be difficult for us to understand more because they have a better understanding of what they talking about … they explain in Afrikaans. When they explain in Afrikaans, the Afrikaans students, they've got a better understanding of what they are talking about - for us we are left behind [meaning they feel left out and cannot associate with the rest of the class]

The student who expressed the above was one of the many who felt dissatisfied with Afrikaans being used in the classroom from time to time. A staff member admitted that Afrikaans is sometimes used in class and was aware of students' discontent about this (Interview 4):

I tell them-I'm an Afrikaans lady and if I speak Afrikaans now you will not understand what I say - and then you must hear 'oh, no'! And all the … [complaints], then I tell them, okay I will … [speak English].

One of the staff members concurred strongly with the students that the use of English as the medium of instruction poses a problem for students and lecturers alike at this College (Interview 3):

… in defence of the lecturers, some of them also sit with the language barrier because most of them are Afrikaans speaking. … That adds to the frustrations of

both the students and the lecturers … because of a language barrier he or she struggles to impart that knowledge ... a student ... receives the knowledge but because of a language barrier can't give it back to you. ... how can he give the knowledge back to you? ... I promise you if he gives the knowledge back in his own language he's doing better.
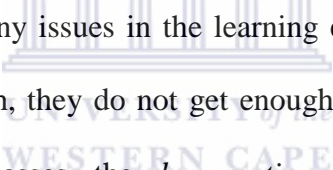
In the above quotation, it is suggested that students hear the message but as a result of language barrier for both lecturer and student, they do not fully comprehend it. It is also inferred that students understand the message, but are incapable of putting it in their own words as a result of the language barrier.

All staff members interviewed agreed that most students struggle with English language skills referring to grammar and spelling. Students are also said to have poor numeracy and calculation ability. Staff commented on the negative impact this has on the lecturers' marking time as they struggle to decipher student's writing (Interview 2):

… because since 2006 you spent more time to edit,… grammar; spelling as really to focus on the facts and I must tell you, I don't see that since 2005 that we, that we better off [improved] ….

Many students implied that lecturers have a negative attitude and are very discouraging which influences students learning and their sense of well-being negatively. A student explained the impact of this (FGD 4):

... some of the lecturers ... come with the attitude, they would say to you ...'all of you are not gonna see each other next year'. How can you come into a class and tell students for the first time [who are in class for the first time] in the class that all of us is not going to see each other next year in second year. How can you promote people to study when you tell them that? How can you say second semester not all of you are gonna pass, some of you are gonna fail; that means you gonna ... destroy the path the person must walk on and the person won't have the courage to study as you've already told the person that he/she will fail. So I feel it influences you in everyway - it influences the quality of staying here and it influences you on academic level as well.

Students complained about many issues in the learning environment, e.g. outcomes are not clear, the work is too much, they do not get enough time to study between clinical practicum and returning to classes, the *demarcation* (or outlines provided prior to examinations of essential topics to be studied) is inadequate. An overwhelming unsatisfactory feature was the lecturers' teaching style. They feel that lectures are offered in an uninteresting manner which makes them not feel like participating. This also influences them negatively. The following is only one example of how a student explained it (FGD1):

They don't make the classes interesting enough, because if you come into a class you'll just hear this one person talking...and talking...and talking and then the person asks a question, no one answers, because there wasn't the interest in the subject because they didn't present it very well, because I felt like 'ooh, I can just

go home and listen to my brothers or sisters talking…talking…talking, then they

ask a question then I don't know what they said.

Students at the WCCN and UWC receive bursaries from the Department of Health on an annual basis while they study. Some students experienced being discriminated against, treated unfairly and feel stigmatized as "poor bursary students" at a college and in the clinical area. They specifically expressed the feeling that they have no choice because of receiving a bursary (FGD1):

> *… we beggars, we must accept what we get, we can't expect more because we are*
>
> *not paying for it. It make us feel inferior….*

They compared themselves with nursing students at UWC and felt that the university students are viewed and treated as superior to them, for example, receiving more respect and having the opportunity to be observers in the ward, whereas the WCCN students have to work very hard (FGD1):

> *…we are seen as students, we are expected to work hard and do all the work,*
>
> *But then you see students (UWC) come in and they are just here to observe, and*
>
> *they are also on the bursary we are on. It's very unfair.*

One of the reasons participants also expressed mistrust in the College management was that they felt that WCCN management expects them to comply with certain requirements for the programme and when they try to clarify these requirements, management says it is

a requirement of the South African Nursing Council (SANC) or even CPUT. Students reflected on this issue (FGD1& 2):

... I expected is the truth…the management, we were expecting the truth - truth is important - they say there is a …1000 hours [to be worked] and when you ask what - they will say it's SANC …. All the blame I put it <u>here</u> in the management of Nico Malan because I … when I experienced here a problem last year I went to the management of Nico Malan, they said 'no, this rule is from PenTech'.

It is interesting to note that students still refer to the WCCN as Nico Malan (a name which reflects its identity under apartheid) and CPUT as Pentech. It reinforces the impression of students not being proud and having poor identification with their learning environment, in this instance the College.
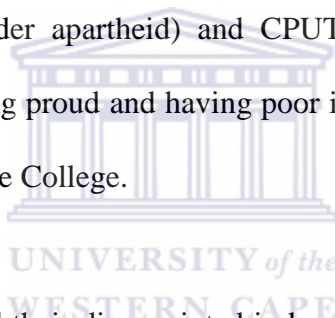
Furthermore students discussed their disappointed in how management treats them when they experience a problem (FGD2 & 4).

They really treat us like we are, I don't know, like people who don't have a life; People who don't have problems. I mean we are people after all. We also experience problems as they are or other...

Speaking of some experience at the College, a staff member expressed a feeling of lack of unity amongst staff members, for example, between management and lecturers at the College as well as between staff members and students which was referred to as "them

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and us". The staff member concludes that it is detrimental to the learning environment (Interview 3):

> *Firstly the gap between management and lecturing staff should be closed. That gap is way too big.*

A feeling of an attitudinal rift between lecturers and students was described as lecturers "refuse to lower their standards and come down to the level of the students"

> *... rift that ...is not conducive to a learning environment because the students are already saying now 'them, them' instead of 'us, we, unity, one thing'*

The "them and us" issue was keenly felt by a student who describes how students have to (FGD1)

> *... do what they say and we don't have a say at all ... we beggars, we must accept what we get, we can't expect more because we are not paying for it.*

From the above one can gauge the extent to which the self-esteem of students is affected. They feel that staff, whether at the College or in a clinical practicum, look down on them and treat them as subservient.

Class size is another issue students regarded as a problem which they did not experience during their schooling and which they perceived as interfering with their learning process. They felt that this was manifested in noise pollution, lack of discipline, divided

attention and lack of concentration with consequent failure. This also reflects some adjustment issues. A student expresses her views on class sizes (FGD4):

> *… what I believe makes people fail is …there are 100 of you in the class and we are not used to that you see, …you cannot concentrate because there are many of you, and even the way they are teaching here we never …you see we are not used to it, we are used to the way we studied at high school where they would explain and we would write notes ….*

A staff member expressed frustration and dissatisfaction at having to mark 327 scripts with poor spelling and language problems after tests, describing this experience as feeling like a "rollercoaster". The staff member felt that it disturbs their function in preparing their work (Interview 2):

> *…we don't have … big numbers only and because of our administrative tasks that is just increasing. So it's really frustrating, its de-motivating, it's about job dissatisfaction …we don't only focus on our teaching role so that's what actually frustrates me is the fact that you don't have proper time …just to read up and doing research …you as the lecturer land up sometimes being the clerk, being the clinic sister, being the social worker, being the Reverend … all factors …really has an influence on your morale, and you felt like that the students think 'oh the lecturer is not prepared'*

All four staff members interviewed concurred strongly with the students on the adverse effects of large classes. The concern of one particular 1st Year staff member about class

size is very obvious in condemning having to use the lecture method as a teaching strategy and feels that this shapes the students as receivers and that they are not participating actively. She describes the difficulties of a large class (Interview 2):

... Seventy students in a class is a nightmare for lecturers and also affect the students ... and also the layout of the classes it is very difficult to do active learning (facilitation). So you find yourself teaching; teaching; teaching. So you get actually get more like passive learners.

According to staff members, large classes at the WCCN are firstly the result of the large intake of students, secondly the result of a lack of venues and thirdly insufficient educators. The negative effects of large classes have been borne out by many researchers such as Keil and Partell (1997), Gibbs (1998) and Ofori (2002).
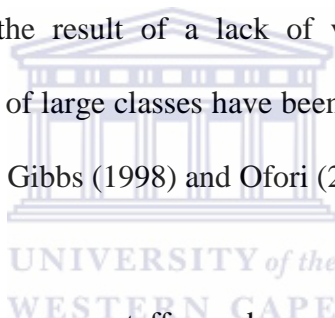
There were divergent opinions among staff members with regard to coping with large classes, for one of them it was not a problem compared to another one who felt that large classes are totally non-conducive to learning and are very disturbing.

Students admitted in the focus groups that they are not keen on seeking assistance from their lecturers. On asking students what prevents them from consulting with their lecturers they said they were scared. Students added that they do not feel they can approach a lecturer alone, because they do not know what to expect. They also said that consulting a lecturer is fruitless. This students' experience of attempting to consult a lecturer is related (FGD2):

... if I don't understand let's say something on the class and I go to the lecturer, she will do what she has done in class. She will take the textbook and read what is in the textbook.

Many students in the focus group shared the feeling of being scared when confronted with the idea of consulting a lecturer. This student related her experience (FGD2):

... the lecturer said 'if you have a problem just come to me, not the whole class', and then we, we were scared; I was scared to go to the lecturer alone because I don't know what she is going to say ... even when speaking Afrikaans, we're scared of saying what are you saying in English now?

Staff complained of a lack of student academic support-seeking behaviour. This was regarded as one of the problems that have a negative influence on students' academic performance. Students in need seldom or never consult lecturers, even on invitation from them. One staff member refers to a colleague and herself who have invited about 150 students in to consult with lecturers (Interview 2)

... she jotted down plus minus a hundred and fifty books you know 'come and see me, come and see me come and see me'. So I said to her this is also what I am doing ....

Staff members concurred with the lack of support-seeking from students. Furthermore they noticed that the students who seek academic support are those who actually perform well (Interview 2 & 4):

...it's actually the students that are very hard working or the students that took in [concentrated/ participated] very well; they come to, to the lecturer for advice to get even higher mar]....

Teaching equipment forms part of the learning environment for students. A number of students expressed their disappointment with the college's inadequate teaching equipment. There was agreement that in spite of the College having been in existence for many years it is ill prepared with regard to adequate teaching equipment. One student for example expected that lectures would be presented supported or illustrated by three dimensional views (3D), or that a real sheep bladder or stomach would be dissected to demonstrate its layers and functioning. The student was disappointed when this turned out not to be the case. There was wide agreement amongst students about their disappointment with the equipment available when they had to do a presentation on poverty in 2008 during their first year. They had put in much effort collecting all the evidence for their presentation, only to find that they could not display what they wanted to because of poor equipment or lack of equipment. As a result, they felt that their marks were compromised (FGD1):

...they need to seriously upgrade. For such a big facility not to have a microphone that works or the battery that dies all the time ... not to have ...an overhead projector for us ... sound, I can hundred percent say that had those students be able to hear what the whole topic was about, we would've gotten a much better response from the students and we would've gotten a much better

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mark at the end of the day because then we would brought across the story that

we wanted to do.

More than one staff member in the individual interviews concurred with the above view and was equally, if not more, frustrated about the lack of or poor functioning of the equipment. The process of getting the PowerPoint presentations going is time consuming as most classes are not fitted with electronic equipment. A staff member admitted that these problems interfere with enjoyment of the facilitating learning (FGD1):

> *… even the microphone, the technology don't want to work and I mean you had to ... stop or you first had to go get someone and it is also valuable teaching and learning time that is wasted in the class … that is not conducive for teaching especially with this big classes … not really not a pleasure to teach.*

A staff member was very concerned about the inaudibility of staff member's voices to students because of the inadequate electronic teaching equipment and large classes and therefore agreed with how the students felt. The de-motivating effect of the present cumbersome functioning of the teaching equipment which students complained about was endorsed. Another staff member felt that some students might have lost out on necessary attention due to the large classes, but felt they could be reached through other means.

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The above are all examples of disappointed expectations as experienced by students in both their living and learning environments and which they feel have contributed adversely to their academic performance during 2008.

Amongst the 38 students in the focus groups, there was only one student who admitted frankly that she had chosen the wrong career as a result of parental influence. This had resulted in 2008 being a "very bad" year for her to adjust to the College. The process is described of how this student came to register (FGD 2):

> *...nursing it was not my first choice, it was not even my second [choice] … my mother is a nurse ...They told me...if I apply there in PENTEC, then [I] must I choose to be a nurse ...but actually I'm wasn't want to be a nurse. I wanted to apply in ... in the UCT as uh, something to work on the … on the plane [aeroplane].*
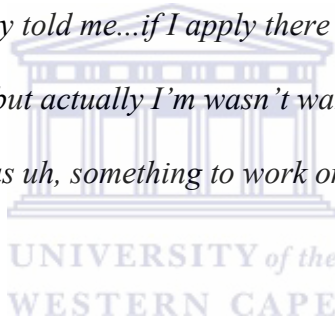
A staff member described how many students do in fact make the wrong career choice in opting for nursing (Interview 4):

> *Thirty started off but they left because of wrong career choices etcetera ...' my friends pressurised me to join them and I realised this is the wrong place…'.*
>
> *We had a few students who just left the first or the second day; they started vomiting, last year we lost two students and uh, I was sad because they left but the one said she couldn't work with sick people, the other one said she didn't know that she must touch a patient, and that she must give him … a bed pan.*

Geleto (1997) is of the opinion that second choice study direction does in fact influence academic performance adversely. According to a staff member the above finding is supported by the fact that students who are turned down at other tertiary institutions such as UWC and CPUT because of eligibility issues come to the WCCN to pursue a career in nursing (Green, 2007).

This chapter has described the findings of the study. It relays the feelings, experiences and perceptions of the participants in the study. It also posits the experiences they perceive as having adverse effects on their academic performance. Unfortunately their perceptions are overwhelmingly negative with the exception of two positive experiences, namely, good security inside the College and lecturers feeding them when they were hungry. The researcher tried to phrase and rephrase questions so that students could consider both positive and negative factors, but to no avail and this in itself reflects the anger they experience at the College. There was no distinct difference in the perceptions of the students who passed their first year in 2008 and those who failed their first year in the four focus groups. Many of the students seemed self-of conscious of being recorded even though all consented to it. Students in all four focus groups expressed much anger towards the staff and the institution in many different ways as could be sensed in the verbatim data collected. There was significantly less discussion amongst the IsiXhosa speaking students who failed their first year in 2008. The researcher sensed some guardedness at the outset: they only started talking after about fifteen minutes yet no one left the group or expressed the wish to leave.
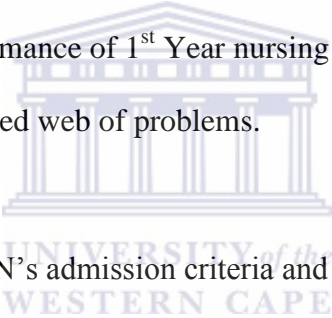
Chapter 5 constitutes a discussion of these findings.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

5.1   EXPERIENCES THAT INFLUENCED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

This chapter presents a discussion emanating from the findings of the study.

The context of this discussion is 2008, a year in which 25% of the 330 1st Year students failed BNS and 10% failed FNS. Thirty-eight students (half of whom passed and half of whom failed their 1st Year) participated in the FGDs and four staff members took part in face to face interviews. The picture that emerged from this exploration of experiences influencing the academic performance of 1st Year nursing students at the WCCN during this year represents a multilayered web of problems.

Within the context of the WCCN's admission criteria and process in 2008, many of the students might have been exposed to inadequate prior education which would render them potentially under-prepared for what HEIs expect of them. This is suggested as some students who were turned down at universities applied to the WCCN and additional students were headhunted when the number of new applicants was too low according to the quota needed by the DoH. Coupled with this the College, in an attempt to meet their required entry quota, reduced the entrance criteria after the initial intake in order to recruit more students. That the problem is widespread in South Africa is noted by Pandor (2004) who expressed her concern about the poorly qualified mathematics and science teachers who prepare these students at secondary school level.

Inadequate preparation in the sciences and in the language of tuition (English) is likely to have been the first obstacle in the student's career path, although this was not the focus of the study. Findings however revealed that 1st Year nursing students at the WCCN struggle with BNS, a finding which concurs with the findings of Andrew (1998) and Andrew & Vialle (1998), that nursing students in Australia struggle with physical sciences despite having taken biology as a school subject. They are of the opinion that having taken a science subject at school does not guarantee that students will do well in nursing. This might suggest that factors other than entry criteria play a role. However, although students' prior competences in the sciences are likely to have had some importance, a range of social, institutional and academic factors emerged from the study, factors which have been found in various other studies (Cross, 1981; Ofori, 2002; Fraser and Killen, 2005; Salamonson & Andrews, 2006; Geleto, 2007; McCarey, Barr & Rattray, 2007. Academic entry criteria are acknowledged as important by the College and this might be a factor influencing student academic performance, as the findings of this study have revealed, but this is beyond the scope of this study. From this study it emerged that the home context from which students originate poses many situational barriers (Cross, 1981).

The issue of economic stressors and poverty in the home were dominant themes, constituting situational barriers to learning as described by Cross (1981) and identified by Jacobs (2002) and Macgregor (2007) in their respective studies as obstacles to learning. As mentioned elsewhere in the study, many students at the WCCN come from poor socio-economic circumstances. This was confirmed by a lecturer who stated "they [the

students] are from the poorest of the poor" while other staff members expressed having to deal with too many social issues, and act as "social workers" at times. Financial difficulties do not only seem to have affected their study capacity but also played a role in their psychological well-being which manifested in poor self-esteem and lack of agency. In the focus groups, students admitted to feeling inferior and like beggars because of the bursary they receive. Financial stressors featured during focus groups as students admitted to thoughts of worrying about their home circumstances and being hungry in class, to the extent that their concentration was affected. Macgregor (2002) in a study done at a South African university, and Jacobs (2006) in their respective studies emphasise the important role financial constraints play as an obstacle to learning. Macgregor (2002) found this to be a factor in the attrition rate at university level.
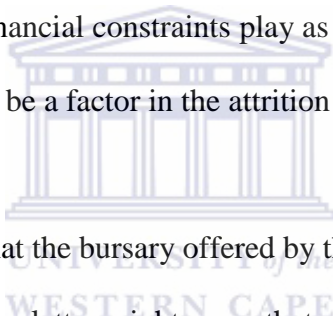
Financial stress also suggests that the bursary offered by the DoH might have been seen as potentially bringing relief. The latter might mean that students were externally motivated, which might have reduced their motivation for self - regulated learning (Andrew and Vialle, 1998; Ofori, 2002). The bursary however, which was envisaged as bringing positive relief from economic burden, was experienced firstly as inadequate for all their material needs and secondly it made them feel like "beggars" or second class citizens. As a result they felt that they had no choice in matters but had to "do as … told". Thus the bursary soon lost its shine and was forgotten as a privilege.

The promise of economic relief however, may also have attracted students to nursing in spite of their not being motivated by this career choice; a trend alluded to by staff. The

bursary as an incentive for career choice as experienced at the WCCN was not found in other contexts explored in the literature. Evidence from focus groups suggests that many of these students had very little prior knowledge about nursing and the demands thereof, which raises the relevance of Geleto's (2007) finding in his study, undertaken in Ethiopia, of the negative effect of second choice study direction on student success. In the nursing profession study choice direction can be regarded as playing a significant role in motivation, as nursing is a demanding profession from the onset. It demands intrinsic motivation and particular commitment. Student nurses are exposed to clinical practicum from very early on in their training which can be daunting, especially having to deal with very ill patients battling between life and death. In many cases student nurses are younger than patients; having to deal with this can be difficult, especially as students felt that some mentors were not supportive enough. In addition their perception that the sister in the ward discriminated against them as and not the university students amplified their identity as an "out group" or one with less power than others (Hogg and Abrahams, 1988). They felt as students of the WCCN they would like to have observer status, like the university students, instead of having to perform nursing duties.

Violence, another dominant theme and social issue experienced within the home and communities of many students, is a further stressor and continued to affect those living at home and College while commuting to and from the College or clinical placement area. Violence, which is very pronounced in the South African context, has affected many students, who remain traumatised and emotionally scarred during their years of study. It is experienced by many from within their homes up to just outside the premises of the

College, contributing to a sense of loss of freedom and of control. Unfavourable situations at home and in the broader environment were noted as intruding into students' classroom environment and hampering concentration. Situational barriers (Cross, 1981) affected both young adults pursuing a career for the first time as well as the mature students living at home, and proved to be a serious challenge in the context of 1st Year nursing students. Violence affecting students as has been profoundly as described is predictable in the South African context and it is notable that this situation was not evident in other contexts.

In order to find a place in the new environment both socially and academically, students were subject to multiple transitions. However, transition to the new College environment proved to be an extremely stressful experience and was accompanied by disappointed expectations. The residence and College atmosphere were experienced as "a hell away from home" by a student living in at the College, a sentiment which was echoed by others. The latter confirms their experience as profoundly stressful, and almost unbearable. This theme dominated the findings.

Although their personal security needs (Maslow, 1970) were met by safety measures inside the College, insecurity still prevailed in the form of financial insecurity which hampered their psychological health and well-being, and reducing their self-esteem. This reducing of self esteem was as a result of their being bursary students as well as receiving disrespect from staff, poor nutrition and poor living conditions. The possibility that the conglomeration of adverse factors amplified these feelings cannot be excluded. Although

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changes have been made, for example the replacement of mattresses and the
improvement of security measures inside the College, students were still very dissatisfied
with basic conditions at the College, conditions which appeared to overwhelm them.

Another factor which contributed to these feelings was a lack of mutual trust between the
students, management and lecturers as well as the lack of respect students experienced
from all categories of staff at the College. This may have prevented them from
developing a sense of belonging to the College which left students emotionally
vulnerable, lonely and resulted in a reduction of academic support-seeking. This
alienation and distrust in relation to the College was not encountered in any other studies
in the literature reviewed. Knowles (1980) also refers to students' idea of lecturers having
to earn respect from students as arising from a preconceived view of lecturers by
students. Cross (1981) refers to these perceptions and feelings on the part of students as
dispositional barriers. This experience also fits with Maslow's third hierarchical level of
his needs framework – a sense of esteem and of belonging and acceptance (Maslow,
1970). The fact that students did not develop a sense of identity with the WCCN may
have derived from the disrespect they experienced from their role models, the lecturers.
Students described the disrespect they received from lecturers as constructing them as
people who might experience problems. Lecturers were perceived by students as having
negative attitudes and being prejudiced towards them. Students picked this up from the
things that were said to them and the way they were treated as if they were people who
had no choices. This might have instilled an idea in the students of lecturers and
managers being the *in-group* and the students being the *out-group*, as being inferior to the

in-group (Hogg and Abrahams, 1988). Students might have experienced powerlessness and loss of control of their environment and a reduced sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994).

Students seem to have anticipated that their coming to the College would be an improvement on their background circumstances, the fulfilment of hopes and dreams, their new aspirations and expectations. The references to Pentech (CPUT) suggests their expectation of an attractive higher education physical environment, one of which they could be proud. On arrival at the College, students experienced the building as disappointing and, unlike the academic institution of their expectations, caused some to be embarrassed to be associated with it. For those students who were previously disadvantaged, whether as a result of the political situation or otherwise, it may have felt like a double disappointment, coupled as it was with the discovery of the real demands of a career in nursing.

The mature students in their 1st Year seem to have experienced transitional stress as they had to find a way of bridging the gap between satisfying the needs of family and stepping into the role of being a student as regards role and available time. This finding is similar to the finding of Geleto (2007) in his study in Sindh on the experiences of older students. In contrast the younger students in this WCCN study had to orientate themselves to the role of adults and leaving home, in conjunction with the demands of the study programme. As adolescents they had to fulfil developmental tasks which signify
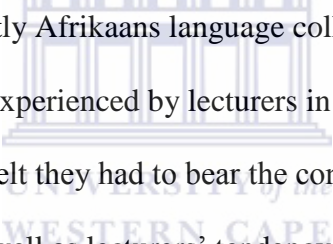
transitions in themselves, despite all the other transitions which were awaiting them as young adults in their new study and career venture (Du Toit and Van Staden, 2005).

For many their first time away from home turned into a battle of adjusting to their new environment. Food at the College, which Maslow (1970) classes as a basic need, was a disappointment and a barrier to their studies as students felt hunger interfered with their concentration. In addition they might have felt undermined as they regarded the food as being of poor quality.

From these perceptions and experiences, one can see that students found themselves once again in circumstances beyond their control. The combination of disadvantaged schooling, violence, poverty, lack of choice and disrespect leaves them with a feeling of disgruntlement, hopelessness and of being controlled by others. This in turn may demonstrate students' lack of self-efficacy in Bandura's (1994) terms, causing them to experience an external locus of control. The aforementioned may negatively affect their motivation, which may already be low as a result of possible extrinsic motivators, such as the bursary. Bandura (1994) notes the need for a strong sense of self-efficacy in adverse circumstances which is sorely lacking in these students who feel that circumstances control their performance in the College.

Students reported having experienced great difficulty during the academic transition to the College. What they were exposed to within their previous learning context differed greatly from the practices of the Higher Education Institution. In the HEI greater

independence on the part of students was expected in learning, a mode of learning which seemed different from their previous education, where rote learning was a practice and higher levels of dependence were tolerated by teachers. This finding is very similar to the findings of Kantanis (2000), Sheard, Lowe, Nicholson and Ceddia (2003), and Naong, Zwane, Mogashoa and Fleischmann (2009) in their respective studies on factors which create barriers in student transition. At the WCCN, students are orientated by their lecturers with regard to the academic environment. What students have expressed as a need is that time should be allocated for them to get to know each other and socialize with fellow students.

Being a previously predominantly Afrikaans language college, with mostly Afrikaans-speaking lecturers, difficulties experienced by lecturers in using English for tuition angered 1st Year students who felt they had to bear the consequences of lecturers' poor or inadequate use of language, as well as lecturers' tendency to intersperse their discussions with Afrikaans. Due to the latter, IsiXhosa students felt that the Afrikaans students have been advantaged. Nuñez (2009) advocates awareness of disturbed racial climates in an academic environment, noting that they interfere with social and academic integration, and a "sense of belonging". In post-apartheid South Africa, it might also be experienced by black students as subtle marginalisation.

Students are taught in English only, which is not their mother tongue and lecturers teach in English which is not the mother tongue for many of them. This might have been very difficult for both the students and lecturers, but it is the students who need to understand

what is being taught. This might have been a negative factor in their academic performance. Staff however complained of inadequate literacy skills on the part of the students and having to correct language all the time when marking tests.

Both the mature and the younger students had to adapt to the demands of a professional career in nursing, with its own particular values, norms and professional culture of practices and vocabulary. Both Du Toit and Van Staden (2005), and Lawrence (2006) alluded to the same reality in their studies. This transition is likely to have been a major shift for first year students and one for which much support is needed. That some of them experienced criticism and humiliation in the wards is most unfortunate and quite the opposite of a supportive atmosphere. Students reported experiences of being regarded as inferior to their university counterparts and some noted discrimination in the way they are being treated in contrast to their university colleagues.
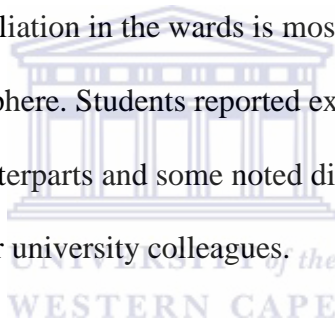
Students are accompanied in the clinical areas by mentors as described before, who reside under the auspices of CPUT and are co-ordinated by a lecturer of the WCCN. The harshness of some mentors was identified by students as a disturbing factor. The researcher, together with some colleagues, witnessed the anxiety of some students because of the way they were being treated. This was reported immediately to the manager concerned and further action was taken. The possibility arises that students, because of their anxiety and negative experiences of the College, tend not to recognise positive experiences, feeling that their locus of control is external, and thus they might experience loss of control of their environment and lack self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994).

Students regarded themselves, lecturers and management of the College to be on very different levels, a situation of "them and us". Their experience of lack of trust, of feeling threatened and disgruntled through not being heard might, according to Social Identification Theory, lead students to self-identify as an *out-group* (Hogg and Abrahams, 1988). The aforementioned may further spur feelings of marginalisation and of being controlled by management and staff and as a result, the development of a need to defend themselves by radical steps to reverse the situation. This is exemplified in the student protests with which the WCCN is confronted year after year, more especially in March of each year.
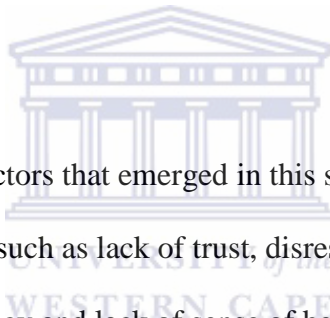
On reflection of the range of factors that emerged in this study influencing student academic performance, factors such as lack of trust, disrespect, loneliness, lack of freedom to choose, lack of agency and lack of sense of belonging, one can see that these experiences might well have posed obstacles to learning, as these concerns and anxieties could interfere with one's focus on one's studies in multiple ways (Knowles, 1995). Factors such as lack of trust and disrespect from lecturers as experienced by students are in direct contrast with what Knowles (1995) suggests for the ideal adult learning environment. Knowles (1980), as father of the andragogical process, emphatically recommends that the role of an adult educator be supportive, encouraging, and a resource, amongst other attributes, and discourages judgmental and authoritarian attitudes. He also points out that students have a lot to contribute to the classroom situation. However the

culture of nurse training still tends to be very hierarchical and lecturers adopt strict authoritarian attitudes and teaching styles.

Geleto (2007) regards bad relationships between lecturers and students as a negative influence on learning, and students were very negative towards lecturers in the FGDs. Cross identified these as dispositional barriers. Geleto also gives class size as a factor which could result in lack of motivation and result in negative academic performance. This factor may also have resulted in students' not seeking academic support arising from anxiety, leading to the reinforcement of rote learning practices as a last resort. The academic support programme offered at the College by CPUT having as its main focus 1st Year students, has never been systematically evaluated. It is offered as a non-credit-bearing subject and many students are not keen to attend these sessions.
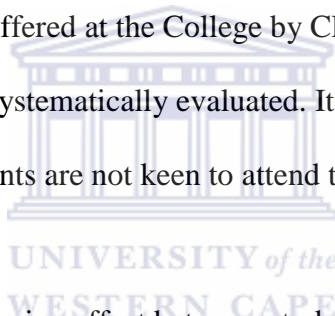
The above barriers have a distancing effect between students and staff and therefore adversely affect social and academic integration and disturb the development of a sense of belonging. It also appears that when other barriers emerge, such as inadequate teaching equipment, large classes, lack of language choice, students cannot cope with these further setbacks. Lecturers and the manager affiliated with the 1st Year students have often raised the issue of the inadequacy of lecture rooms and teaching equipment at meetings but progress has remained poor and unsatisfactory.

For students to refer to the residence that is supposed to be their second home, as a 'hell away from home' is suggestive of unbearable encounters of being humiliated and not

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belonging. This includes disrespect, not being heard, lack of understanding, feeling unsafe, an unsupported learning and living environment, a place where one would rather not be if one could help it, and one which lacks warmth and defies affiliation.

The negativity of the student experience in this study is overwhelming. The researcher and interpreter attempted on numerous occasions during the FGDs to probe for and elicit positive experiences, but participants kept referring to the negative side of things. On reflecting on these responses, the researcher questioned if this was because negative experiences were too overwhelming or because there were no positive experiences other than the two reported above. Negativity stems from their social circumstances as well as from their experience at the College.
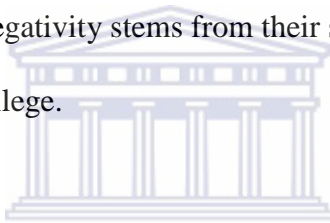
The researcher also experienced some resistance to the study at the onset as students expressed the wish to have something done to improve their immediate situation, not some solution that might be found in the remote future. It must be stated that the information gained from the FGDs and interviews is not exhaustive and is limited to what participants discussed in the context of FGDs and was in particular limited by time constraints for these sessions.

The uncertainty of where the WCCN really belongs, with unclear governance and policies, and resultant under-resourcing with regard to teaching equipment, staff and lecturing space, generates a feeling of uncertainty for both students and staff. This is only

evident in parts of the findings, but seems also to affect the ethos of the College adversely.

5.2   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the limitations of this study arises from the fact that the researcher has been unable to contact or access further information on the 1st Year students of the WCCN who failed and were excluded from the programme, or who have left as a result of having to pay their own fees to repeat subjects.

Another limitation of the study was the time constraint imposed on data collection from the second year students (the 1st Year students of 2008), who were in class at the time of data collection. The request for time with them for FGDs, although officially sanctioned, was not well received by some lecturers. Non residential students were not prepared to stay after 16:00 for FGDs because of difficulties in finding safe public transport home and thus their FGDs had to be fitted into their lunch time of about an hour's duration, during which time students also needed to get refreshments, resulting in students arriving late in class after lunch. This time limitation could possible have created anxiety in students with their having to return to class late, or even getting transport home, as some lecturers allowed them to go home after the FGDs.

Further limitations were that some students felt uncomfortable and "scared" of the audio recorder, especially in the first interview. Students did not want to hold the recorder or speak into it, resulting in some recordings being very faint. Prior arrangements were

made with them about the recording and there were no objections raised about their being audio recorded once consent was obtained. Even in subsequent FGDs students were still somehow anxious about using the audio recorder.

Language was a barrier in FGD's with isiXhosa students even though the researcher had an isiXhosa interpreter, as this resulted in the focus of the conversation being lost in the time spent on interpretation. The interpretation was also time-consuming as some of the time for the FGD was spent on interpretation.

The next chapter serves as the conclusion to the study.

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION

6.1   THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In conclusion, the experiences influencing academic performance in first year at this nursing College, in line with the findings of many other researchers were found to be complex. This was to be expected in an exploratory qualitative study.

No comparative qualitative studies were found by the researcher with regard to this subject in nursing colleges in South Africa, although many other similar studies have been done at university level internationally. This study may therefore serve as a starting point for addressing some of the institutional problems that exist in the WCCN and comparable nursing colleges in the South African context. These findings may be transferable to other similar contexts in South Africa but may not serve to confirm hypotheses or draw scientific conclusions as this was not the purpose and nature of this qualitative study (Kumarasamy, Safren, Raminani, Pickard, James, Krishnan, Solomon & Mayer, 2005).

This study however depicts experiences that might have had a direct or indirect influence on the students' experience and therefore their performance. What emerged from the study is the fact that grade point average, traditionally accepted as the main entrance criterion to a HEI, might be a factor, but not the only factor, influencing a student's academic performance. Many situational, psychological and dispositional factors as well as personal experiences might play a role in the academic performance of students in addition to institutional factors. The emphasis placed by students on their living

environment and their concern about staff attitudes seem to provide important pointers to improving their experience of the learning environment, and easing the experience of multiple transitions.

In spite of the importance of situational barriers to their experience of 1st Year at the WCCN, the apparent contribution that institutional factors or post registration experience plays in the academic performance of students emerges as exceptionally high in this study. Furthermore the continuing role played by apartheid education and societal inequality cannot be ignored in the South African higher education context, as this has exerted an influence on staff-student relations, language difficulties, perceptions of the institution, institutional merging procedures and academic performance.

The fact that students had an opportunity to express their anger and disgruntlement amicably for the first time and to be listened to, provided students with some outlet where what they said was not judged. It is hoped that this was a very good experience for students, albeit not the primary purpose of the focus group discussions. Some students enjoyed the focus group discussions and requested that they be repeated.

What might be deemed significant in the study is the identification of a range of complex factors, both socio-economic and institutional, which may have affected, and could continue to affect, student performance if not addressed. It has also brought an awareness of how 1st Year students really perceive and experience the WCCN and has focused attention on these perceived problems. The study forms a basis for further studies being a

new study of this kind for Colleges of Nursing in South Africa. Further studies need to be undertaken in other contexts as this study is limited to a particular setting. A follow-up study at the WCCN should be done some time in the future to see whether there is any growth with regard to changes recommended. It is particularly the institutional factors that are of significance here, in that they could guide interventions by the WCCN and similar colleges in comparable contexts. These are addressed through the recommendations which follow.

6.2   RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from this study, the following recommendations are emergent:

Governance

- Lines of accountability and communication should be made clear to staff and students.

Academic Policies

- The process of designing and approving a curriculum for a degree programme should be concluded, which is a task of CPUT and WCCN with ultimate ratification by SANC.

- CPUT should inform all applicants in advance that the degree in nursing is not yet available and that they will receive a diploma if successful at the end of four years training.

- DoH and CPUT should only admit students who meet the official admission criteria to avoid creating a precedent and setting students up for failure and causing unnecessary expenses to the DoH in the long run.

Learning Environment

Noting that although some changes have been made, they are insufficient. The following recommendations are therefore made**:**

- The core business of the College is to educate nursing students. Therefore the study/learning environment needs to be conducive to learning. The College's learning environment needs deliberate upgrading in order to fulfil the learning and teaching needs of students and staff. This includes learning and teaching equipment as well as sufficient adequate size class rooms. Class rooms should be comfortable to prevent overcrowded classes. This is the responsibility of CPUT and the DoH.

- Class sizes need attention, and should be made smaller in the light of the academic background of students and the language difficulties of students and staff.

- Strategies for developing a sense of institutional belonging should be work-shopped and instituted. An introductory orientation and transition programme could be considered within the first few weeks for students, to make them feel welcome and to build a sense of belonging and proper academic and social integration into the College.

- It is important for lecturers and mentors to be aware how they are perceived by students. Lecturers need to ensure that they are well equipped with the necessary knowledge, and make every effort to make the classroom atmosphere conducive to learning.
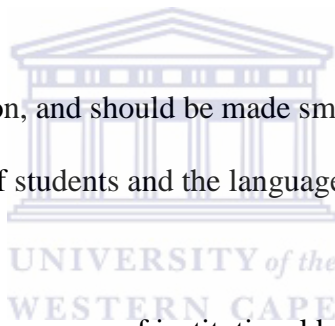
- Managers, lecturers and other staff need to be strongly aware of their attitudes and body language and what these communicate to students. They need to be culturally sensitive and professional in all their encounters with students, ensuring that they serve as appropriate role models. Staff members needs to adopt a more positive attitude to allow new students to integrate socially with each other and academically with the College and an awareness of the impact of the these on the learning students' learning environment.

Academic Support

- The present academic support programme in place at the College should be evaluated.
- The staff should be offered professional development strategies.
- The academic support programme should be more structured to extend to at least the first two years instead of being available to students only in the first year of study.

Living Environment

- The residence should be equipped to create a homely atmosphere which is appreciated by students.
- Sharing of single rooms by students and the use of double bunks needs to be reconsidered.
- Meals should be assessed and should be nourishing, appealing and sufficient to meet students' needs.

- Leisure facilities and equipment should be obtained and lounges should be made available for students. Recreation facilities should be considered strongly as students need to have a balance in their lives.

Staffing Strategies

- The gap between management and lecturing staff and lecturers should be narrowed in order to create harmony and improve staff morale which will have a bearing on the staff's enjoyment of their work and ultimately benefit the students. Lecturers should be given the opportunity to be heard.

- Channels of communication should be improved and the input of lecturers should be respected. This is the responsibility of the DoH, CPUT and the WCCN.
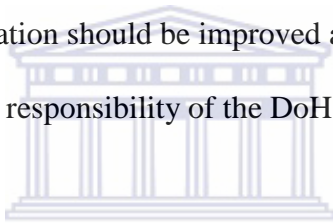
These and further recommendations should be collectively debated and prioritised with staff and students of the College.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION DOCUMENT

October 2008

Dear Participant

Thank you for your willingness to hear about this research. What follows are explanations of the research study and an outline of your potential involvement. The research is being conducted for a mini-thesis research study. This is a requirement for the Masters in Public Health which I am completing at the University of the Western Cape. If there is anything you do not understand, please feel free to ask me. My contact details and those of my supervisor are recorded at the end of this document.

TITLE OF RESEARCH

Experiences Influencing the Academic Performance of First Year Nursing Students at the Western Cape College of Nursing, South Africa during 2008.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The research aims to understand the experiences which influenced the academic performance of 1st Year nursing students at the Western Cape College of Nursing

(WCCN) during 2008. It is hoped that with your participation, a better understanding will be developed about these factors and their impact on the academic performance of 1st Year nursing students. These ideas will then be used to improve the conditions and circumstances which affect students negatively and to enhance those experiences which are positive. The research will inform the development of guidelines to support the academic performance of 1st Year nursing students at the Western Cape College of Nursing.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT

[Either A or B will be deleted for each group].

A. The study will include group discussions (called Focus Group Discussions) with a group of other nursing students involved in the 1st Year training programme of 2008 at the WCCN. Questions will be asked about your experiences during 2008. These group discussions will be audio recorded to prevent any distortion of information given by you.

B. The study will include individual interviews of a number of other staff who were involved in the 1st Year training programme of 2008 at the WCCN. Questions will be asked about your experiences during 2008. The interviews will be audio recorded to prevent any distortion of information given by you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will be kept confidential at all times. I shall keep all records of your participation locked away at all times and will destroy them after the research is

completed. This includes a consent form which I will ask of you to sign should you agree to participate in the research study.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary, which means that you do not have to participate. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study. If there is anything that you prefer not to discuss, please feel free to say so.

BENEFITS AND COSTS

You may not get any direct benefit from the study. However, the information we gather from participants in this study will hopefully be of value to future students and may help to support their academic performance more effectively.
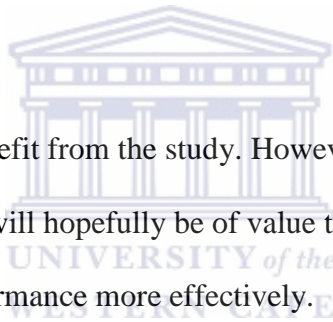
INFORMED CONSENT

Your signed consent to participate in this research study is required before I proceed with interviewing you. The consent form is included with this information sheet in order for you to review.

QUESTIONS

Should you have any further questions or wish to know more, I can be contacted as follows:

Maria Mc Lachlan

Student Number: 2642384

Cell phone: 0822155889/ Telephone at work: 021 684 1200/1248

E-mail: mmclachl@pgwc.gov.za

Fax number 021 6371317

I am accountable to Lucy Alexander, my supervisor at UWC. Contact Details are

021 6835265/ 0835644519

Or c/o The School of Public Health

021 9592782

Fax 9592872

E-mail: lalexander@uwc.ac.za/lalexander@icon.co.za

APPENDIX 2: RECORD OF INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Research: Experiences Influencing the Academic Performance of First Year Nursing Students at the Western Cape College of Nursing, South Africa During 2008

In the Participant Information Sheet it was explained that your participation is entirely voluntary, meaning you do not have to participate or can withdraw at any time. Refusal to participate will not in any way disadvantage you or result in any kind of penalty.

If however you choose to participate, you may stop at any time. You may also choose not to answer any particular questions that are asked in the study. Please feel free to say if there is anything that you do not want to discuss in the study.

All information collected in this interview will be kept strictly confidential. Should you choose to participate in this research study, your signed consent is required before I proceed with the interview with you.

Confirmation of Consent

I have read and understand the information about this research study on the Participant Information Sheet. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I have the right to end the interview at any time or to choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study.

By signing this sheet, I show my willingness to participate in this research study.

Participant Name (Printed)…………………………………………

Participant Signature ………………   Date of Consent…………..

Researcher conducting the study (Printed)………………………..

Signature of Researcher…………….   Date…………….

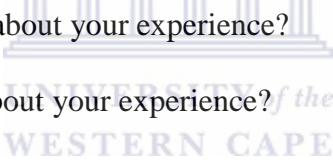UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

APPENDIX 3: GUIDES FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND INTERVIEWS

A. **Focus Group Discussions with Students**

We are here to talk about your 1st Year nursing experience at the Western Cape College of Nursing. I have read about the experiences of 1st Year nursing students in many other countries, including South Africa, about what influenced their academic performance, but I am interested to hear about yours.

1. What was your 1st Year like at WCCN?

From here I will allow them to tell their story for a while. If it does not come up by itself, I would probe for the following in the course of the conversation:

- What was good about your experience?
- What was bad about your experience?
- Do you feel this had any impact on your academic performance?
- What would have made it different?

2. What were your expectations of your 1st Year at nursing College?

- Are you happy with your choice to become a nurse?
- When your expectations were not met, how did it make you feel?
- Do you think what you said now had an influence on your academic performance? Tell us why you think so.

Looking back on your experience, can you tell us what the College could do in future to improve the academic performance of future 1st Year students?

B. **Interviews with Lecturers**

The researcher would introduce the topic and explain the purpose of the research to the interviewee and ask the following:

1. What the experience was like of teaching the 1st Year students in 2008?

2. What were positive and negative experiences which could have influenced the student's academic performance?

   - Did the1st Year students experience particular difficulties with FNS/BNS?

3. What would you like to see changed

C. **Interview with manager**

The researcher would talk about the purpose of the interview and allow the manager to talk freely.

1. What was you experience like in managing the 1st Year students of 2008?

If some points are not covered, the researcher will probe as follows:

   - Tell me about the positive experiences you had with 1st Year students in 2008

   - Any negative experiences with 1st Year students in 2008?

2. What to your knowledge could have enhanced or hindered the academic performance of these 1st Year students?

   - Why do you think this enhanced or hindered these students' academic performance?

   - Do you think the 1st Year students of 2008 experienced any particular difficulties with BNS/FNS?

3. What would you like to see changed at the College?

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D.   Interview with academic support officer

The researcher would talk about the 1ˢᵗ Year students of 2008 and him/her interest in

hearing about their experiences with regard to the purpose of her research. And ask

the following questions.

1. What was it like being the academic support officer for the 1ˢᵗ Year students of

2008?

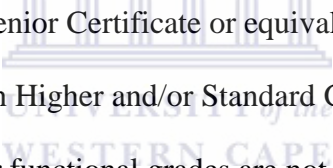I would allow him/ her to talk about it and ensure that she covers aspects such as:

- Was this group of students different from previous groups? If yes, I would ask
  him /her to explain how different.

2. Was there anything that possibly could have affected their academic performance?

- Is there anything which could have influenced them in any way?

- If the answer is yes, the researcher would ask: Why do you feel this is so?

3. Is there anything which could be done to improve conditions for 1ˢᵗ Year students

at the College in order to enhance their academic performance?

APPENDIX 4: WCCN: FACTS IN BRIEF

History: Currently undergraduate studies are undertaken by Western Cape

College of Nursing in association with the Cape Peninsula

University of Technology. This is due to rationalization.

Name of course: Diploma for Registration as a Nurse (General, Community and

Psychiatry) and Midwife

Admission Criteria: The minimum criteria for admission to the Nursing Program are as

follows:

➤ Senior Certificate or equivalent with at least five subjects

on Higher and/or Standard Grade Subjects passed at lower

or functional grades are not acceptable.

➤ A pass in Biology (at least an E on the Higher Grade or a D

on the Standard Grade) with Mathematic and / or Physical

Science

➤ Higher Grade passes in two of the eleven official

languages, one of which must be either English or

Afrikaans. One of the languages must be a first language.

➤ Students may be required to attend an evaluation session.

Evaluation sessions may include literacy, numeracy or

psychometric evaluation. Details about such sessions will

be supplied on application.

Place of study: At present a student has a joint student registration with both

Western Cape College of Nursing (WCCN) and Cape Peninsula

University of Technology (CPUT). Their academic institution is at

WCCN in Klipfontein Road, Athlone. The practica sites are at

various hospitals and clinics.

Medium of instruction: The medium of instruction and communication is English. The

other two official languages of the Western Cape will be used as a

support mechanism when required as media of communication

Cost: Currently a bursary of R24 000 is provided by the Department of
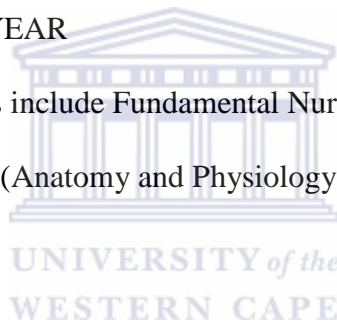
Health

From this amount the institution deducts fees for books, equipment

(stethoscope, penlight torch etc), exams, and courses such as First

Aid. The balance of the deducted amount is given to the student

usually every quarter.

Course Outline: The duration of the course is four years, each year usually divided

into semesters. The student has to pass both a theoretical and

practical component of each year of study.

For progression to the next year the student also has to comply

with practical and theory hours to be completed or submit a

practica work book, assignments and attendance records for a

particular year of study.

FIRST YEAR

Subjects include Fundamental Nursing science, Biological Natural

sciences (Anatomy and Physiology) and Community Nursing

DEPARTMENT of HEALTH

Provincial Government of the Western Cape

REFERENCE: Mrs. M E Mc Lachlan
ENQUIRIES: Mrs. M. Leonard
Date: 03/12/08

To whom it may concern,

Your request for conducting a research at WCCN (Letter dated 3September 2008) was considered and is granted on condition of the following:

❖ Your research project complies with the ethical principles evaluated and accepted by your institution of training (University of Western Cape)

❖ Prior to publication research information need to be availed to the Western Cape College of Nursing.

Thank you.

Ms M M Leonard
Head of Department (Acting).

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The Afrikaans or Xhosa version of this document is available on request.

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Fax: +27 21 959-3170
Website: www.uwc.ac.za

6 September 2010

To Whom It May Concern

I hereby certify that the Senate Research Committee of the University of the Western Cape has approved the methodology and the ethics of the following research project by: Mrs. M Mc Lachlan (School of Public Health)

Research Project: Factors influencing the academic performance of 1st year nursing students at Western Cape College of Nursing, South Africa during 2007

Registration no: 09/1/19

Peter Slater
Manager: Research Development Office
University of the Western Cape
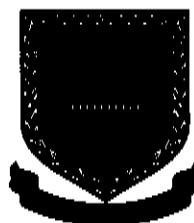
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A place of quality, a place to grow, from hope to action through knowledge