**Higher Education Institutions as space and context for student identity formation and transformation: Implications for First Year Experience.**

**Ganqa, N.H. (PhD) & Masha, R.K. (PhD)**
University of Fort Hare,
50 Church Street, East London, Eastern Cape, South Africa
nganqa@ufh.ac.za 0403 704 7681/071 920 0588
rmasha@ufh.ac.za 043 704 7081/082 780 1458

**Abstract**
Universities fulfil multiple of roles of transition as they provide contexts in which First Year (FY) undergraduate students form identities and build lifelong relationships. Chickering and Reisser's Student Identity Development theory was utilised in examining the role of universities in identity formation. This article employed a qualitative case study research design which purposively sampled first year undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Fort Hare. The results found an interplay of personal, social and educational identities that shape FY students' experiences. FY students form positive or negative identities which are constructed and reconstructed over time. The study concludes therefore that the university environment can act as a facilitator to developing new and positive identities, or it can hinder such development. Since the universities are involved in the process of identity development, they must determine how best to encourage these developmental changes by providing FY students with appropriate resources and opportunities.

*Keywords: context, first year experiences, formation, higher education institutions, space, student identity, transformation.*

**Introduction**
The transition from high school to university is one of the major contextual factors and the age at which students join the university is critical in their maturation process as it is usually the time of "identity exploration" (Gale & Parker, 2014; Christie, Barron & D'Annunzio-Green, 2013; Crafter & Maunder, 2012; Ecclestone, Hughes & Biesta, 2010). Gale and Parker's (2014) suggest transition of new students as a process of individual development that is fundamentally situated within social contexts, and which therefore cannot be understood solely at the level of the individual. Therefore, the trajectories of transformation evolves from a shift of individual student identity to another (Gale & Parker, 2014; Manzi, Vignoles & Regalia, 2010). The student's identity, which is in permanent transformation, is then produced on base of narratives available in context where new students develop their identity as "a university student' (Ecclestone et al., 2010). Briggs, Clark & Hall (2012) claim, "one of the reasons students find transition to university so tumultuous is that it often challenges existing views of self and one's place in the world". As students enter higher education for the first time; Shefer, Strebel, Ngabaza & Clowes

(2018) claim, they will only have knowledge 'about' the new learning context without contextualised knowledge 'of' that context.

According to Leary & Tangeny (2012) students have one primary developmental task during college years; and that is identity formation. Burkitt (2011) believe that students entering higher education make a personal investment using their cultural capital, which was accumulated through their prior education at school. Many students thus enter with a "currency" that might be foreign to the institutional culture (Renn & Ozaki, 2010:16). Therefore the individual identity, which centers around personal and social maturity, is believed to show the greatest gains in formation during the college years because of the diversity of experiences that the college environment provides (Weidman, De Angelo & Bethea, 2014:31). Although the fundamental purpose of higher education is to contribute to the intellectual (Kahu & Nelson, 2017; Baxter-Magolda, King, Taylor & Wakefield, 2012; Kelly 2009; Scalon, Rowling & Weber, 2007), personal (Oyserman, Devan & Novin, 2015; Vignoles, 2017; Leary & Tangney, 2012), and social development of college students (Weideman, et al., 2014; Bennet, 2012; Volet & Jones, 2012; Berzonsky & Luyckx, 2008). Rather than being simply skills or attitudes about learning, defining oneself in the learning sphere can be viewed as an identity issue that adolescents explore and make commitments to at the university (Stull & Blue, 2016; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). Universities fulfil a number of roles as they provide social contexts in which students are able to engage with new people, form identities and build lifelong relationships (Oyserman, et al., 2015). Jones & Abes (2013) believe that universities have a social contract and social responsibility towards the societies they serve. Kelly (2009) affirms the educational community and the capacity of institutions to establish supportive social and academic communities, especially in the classroom, as key to actively involve all students as equal members.

However, Becker & Tausch (2014) is of the view that to FY students the university context is presented to them as a discontinuous space of tension and challenges. The authors refer to this as a 'betwixt space'; a means of conceptualising students' feelings of not belonging (Ibid). Yet, on entry to university students are expected to adjust to university life and hopefully reorganise the way they think about themselves as learners and social beings as this adjustment helps them develop learner identity and autonomy (Briggs et al., 2012; Berzonsky & Luyckx, 2008). Easterbook & Vignoles (2013) contend that students adjust quicker if they learn the institutional "discourse" and feel they fit in as a result of visiting the institution prior to admission. It is during this period that students need to form a sense of their student identity (Jones & Abes, 2013) and learn to act autonomously as a university student (Manzi, et al., 2010). Unfortunately if they miss out on this opportunity there is a tendency for them to experience disorientation and loss of personal identity (Becker & Tausch, 2014; Scanlon et al., 2007). This may make them feel that they are in the wrong place (Ecclestone et al., 2010; Christie, et. al., 2013).Yet, Briggs et al., (2012:18) advocate the need to create a distinct 'learner identity', as students "want to be treated as individuals, not as an item in a vast system". It is in this nexus that a gap has been identified to explore the role of the university context in the process of FY student identity development.

## Theoretical Framework

Two useful theories applied in exploring how students' identities are developed include Erikson (1968) and Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of identity development.

## Erikson Psychosocial Student Development Theory

Erikson is known as "the first clinical psychologist to address the identity development journey from adolescence through adulthood" (Torres, Jones & Renn, 2009). Erikson (1968) himself credits Sigmund Freud as one of the earliest theorists of personality and identity development. Taking a lifespan approach, Erikson (1968:138–140) identified eight stages, with each stage marked by a developmental crisis or turning point that provided the opportunity to add a particular strength, or the possibility of a failure that would lead to maladjustment, either of which could persist throughout life.  Especially important is the stage of "Adolescence"; which Erikson (1968:303) believes identity is initially formed through a combination of positive and negative movements. In positive identity individuals affiliate or identify with people and it thus has links to the past, as well as an orientation to the future (Erikson, 1968:310).  However, it is also possible for individuals to form a negative identity that is developed as a reaction against or rejection of a particular community, set of ideals, or beliefs (Erikson, 1968). Erikson advocates the healthy personality that (a) actively works to master the environment, (b) shows a sense of unity within the self and relationally with those around them, and (c) accurately perceives self and world (Erikson, 1968:91). Thus Erikson (1968) offers a functionalist approach that does not look at the nature of the objects or qualities but how they adapt to the environment.

## Chickering and Reisser' Student Identity Development

Building upon Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Development (1968), Chickering (1969) articulated a systematic framework to describe the factors involved with identity formation among college students. Chickering and Reisser in 1993 describes seven vectors representing developmental tasks university students undertake as they develop their individual identities. The seven vectors are: (1) developing competence; (2) managing emotion; (3) moving through autonomy towards interdependence; (4) developing mature interpersonal relationships; (5) establishing identity; (6) developing purpose; and (7) developing integrity. Rather than a series of stages; each vector takes into account the emotional, interpersonal, ethical, and intellectual aspects of development as student move into adulthood (Ecclestone et al., 2010). Chickering and Reisser's (1993) revised theory offers a more complete portrait of the variables involved with the fifth vector, "establishing identity". The revision concludes that *establishing identity* includes a series of factors including comfort with body image, gender, sexual orientation and developing self-esteem and self-acceptance (Chickering & Reisser, 1993:49; Whannell & Whannell, 2015). Like Erikson, Chickering & Reisser (1993) discovered that student identity is composed of multiple dimensions and is integrated with the broader society, culture, and history (Abes, 2009; Jones & Abes, 2013).

**Literature Review**
**Conceptualisation of Identity, Self and Self-Concept**
Conceptualizations of identity vary greatly within and across disciplines, as it has been defined as "real" or "constructed", "stable" or "fluid", "personal" or "social", "unitary" or "multiple", and in many other ways that often seem to contradict each other (Vignoles, 2011). Firstly, identity is often conceptualized as a developmental construct. However, newer conceptualizations resist the notion of identity as a developmental, stable and linear process, instead emphasizing the fluid, dynamic, and performative nature of identity. Secondly, identity is defined as 'personal' or 'social' according to the processes that are considered most important in identity construction (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013; Torres et al., 2009). Personal identity is about choices made by an individual rather than social or cultural factors (Torres et al., 2009; Whannell & Whannell, 2015); and "a collection of identities that reflects the roles that a person occupies in the social structure" (Abes, 2009:142). Social identity is 'social' not because of its content, but because it is understood to be located in social interactions and cultural discourse that happen between people, rather than within the intrapsychic processes of each separate individual (Vignoles, 2017; Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012; Torres, et al., 2009:577). Identity is therefore socially constructed and continually changing as it involves a subjective interpretation of individuality in the context of activities (Vignoles, 2011; Jones & Abes, 2013; Berzonsky & Luyxck, 2008). Thirdly, Vignoles (2017) argue that identities can be both personal and social; also known as "collective identities". Identities are the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is (Oyserman, et al., 2012; Stull & Blue, 2016). Together, identities make up one's self-concept variously described as what comes to mind when one thinks of oneself (Leary & Tangney, 2012:70; Oyserman, et al., 2012:69). Rather than viewing identity as singular, Jones & Abes (2013) also believe that individual develop multiple identities. For student identity development, the model of multiple identities offer a multi-layered understanding of how the role of context contributes to identity development (Jones & Abes, 2013).

**Research Methods**
Universities are known the sites of multiple, complex and diverse social relations, identities, communities, knowledges and practices (Shefer, et al., 2018). This complexity is reflected in the changing roles and identities of first year students because there is a notion that universities are well-equipped and flexible enough to accommodate a more diverse student body (Shefer, 2018; Christie et al., 2013). Within this context, higher education can be understood as the site where a neo-liberal 'social imaginary' is dominant, framing the discourses of educational policy, shaping the possibilities of students' identities (Weideman et al., 2014). Since access to Higher Education Institutions have been widened, the University of fort Hare has attracted a different cohort of local and international undergraduate students including First time entry students (FTEN), First generation students (FGS), and First year (FY) students. Over time UFH has increased its horizon across urban and rural contexts in 3 campuses: Alice, East London and Bisho. To explore the research question, a qualitative research design using a descriptive, contextual case study design was chosen amongst First Year undergraduate students. Since qualitative studies require a small sample for semi-structured interviews (Cohen, Morrison & Manion, 2018); a small sample of FY year undergraduate students in different programmes was selected. First year students between the ages of 18-21 were recruited

for in-depth interviews with a focus on the role of the university in the formation of their identities. The interviews that lasted approximately one hour, were digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim. An inductive, thematic analysis was chosen to determine the meanings of first year students' identity development. Ethical issues such as anonymity, voluntary participation, confidentiality, privacy and protection from harm (Cohen, et al., 2018) were adhered to.

## Results
### Personal Identity, Freedom and Autonomy

The first year in college is known as an exciting time of new discoveries, freedoms in thought and behaviours, and growth in self-confidence (Van Breda, 2017; Hendriks, Rosen & Aune, 2011). Erikson (1968) recognizes confidence as belief the individual has in his or her capabilities and self-image, making decisions, and behaving competently. For First Year (FY) students, entering university involved substantial changes towards the formation of their personal identities. All participants reported that enrolment and participation in the university improved their self-concept by increasing their confidence, self-esteem, pride and overall happiness. Scalon et al., (2007:237) affirm, "Because college is invested with so much meaning in the larger society, to feel worthy of attending college is itself significant for how individuals identify themselves by these characteristics". **ST9 had this to say:**

> *"Having heard that I was accepted as a university student made me proud of myself. My parents told me that I was now an ambassador for my family and my small community in the rural areas and it should be well-presented. Everybody back home was happy, my family even organised for me a send-off party. Joy, happiness, jubilation and ululation was the order of the day as I was first in my generation to attend at a university".*

**ST8 adds:**

> *"How can I not be happy? I am free at last, I will definitely enjoy the freedom of staying away from home, from my parents and my siblings. It's scary but I need to grow up. I have overcome so many stages in my life. I will embrace this new chapter as well……it's like I'm living a dream. First I was a kid in kindergarten, a learner in the primary school, a student in the high school and now a "university student".*

While 60% of FY students mentioned that they were *"happy, "proud", "relieved", "looking forward"* in becoming independent learners at a university; 40% of FY students reported to have experienced feelings of *"fear", "anger"," sadness", "disorientation", "frustration", "uncertainty"* and *"a sense of loss"* from being separated from their homes and parents assuming new roles. Following "honeymoon phase' on arriving with excitement and happiness; the student enters the "party's over phase" when they begin to experience a number of shocks due to the new environment, such as social changes and changes related to the academic environment (Briggs et al., 2012). Gale & Parker (2014) have argued that instead of following existing compartmentalised views of the transition to university, it is important to recognise that students often do not immediately fit in at university and are therefore in a transient space between home and university life.**ST3 reports:**

> *"Since childhood I have been around family, it's the first time that I am out of their territory. Although I am nervous, worried, and stressed but I know their prayers will*

*keep me going. I used to have sleepless nights thinking of my parent, it is not easy*
*but I will ultimately adjust".*

**ST1 adds:**

*"The on-campus residence is my first place I have occupied and can rightfully claim*
*it as my own. But that I don't like the fact that I have to share it with roommates. The*
*challenge I foresee is on managing my space and my finances so that I don't bother*
*my parents by asking for help. But I will have to prove to them that I can manage*
*university my life".*

University transition may involve changes and students are faced with making life decisions independently of their families (Gale & Parker, 2014; Crafter & Maunder, 2012). These changes can make students experience feelings of homesickness, isolation, depression, anxiety, unhappiness and confusion (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2012). Adult separation anxiety disorder (ASAD) can become obvious in young adults as they transition to college and become homesick (Hendricks et al., 2011; 283). Homesickness is defined by Hendricks et al., (2011) as being "the distress or impairment caused by actual or anticipated separation from home". According to Becker and Tausch (2014) a myriad of stressors FY students face during transition are likely to according to negatively impact their college performance and identity development. Yet, establishing a positive student identity is an essential factor in being persistent and successful as a university student (Briggs et al., 2012). Although adapting to the new context of higher education, has been experienced as challenging and stressful; however it provided FY students with the opportunity to fundamentally alter an individual's sense of self, their identity and self-image, leading to significant personal transformation.

**Educational Identities**

Alongside personal benefits, FY student mentioned the role of the faculties and lectures and how these contributed to the quality of the learning environment, the experiences of their peers, and the larger campus community. For first-year university students, Shefer et al., (2018) claims one of the most important contexts is the university environment, specifically academic settings including the classes that they are attending.  According to Kelly (2009) the college environment act as a mechanism for creating positive educational identities for first year college students. Students develop new competencies and, subsequently, confidence as they master new skills (Bennet, 2012; Manzi et al., 2010). An important context for positive interactions with the university community, faculty and staff was mentioned as collaborations and engagements on campus activities, in lectures, tutorials, workshops and residences.

Engagement allows students to develop, feelings about their peers, professors, and institutions which give them a sense of connectedness, affiliation, and belonging, while simultaneously offering rich opportunities for learning and development (Kahu & Nelson, 2017; Peters, 2014). FY students reported to have taken responsibility for their learning and were involved in teaching and working with other students in educationally purposeful ways as tutors and peer mentors in campus residences and student organizations. Kahu & Nelson (2017) found that students have greater influence on each other than any other source of influence and the role of peer leaders can are used very extensively; in residence halls, first year seminars and teaching labs in science courses, and language courses. **ST6 reflects:**

> *"I never joined a study group, but I was appointed as Student Instructional Leader (SI) for mathematics. After class, I schedule time to work with my students at Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) through the guidance of tutorials from my lecturer.*

Although 55 % of FY students discovered that learning at the university and faculty interactions with lecturers was *"relevant"*, *"contextual"*, *"engaging"*, and *"meaningful"*.

However, 45 % of FY students indicated that on attending their first lectures they felt "*stressed", "confused", "impatient" and "uncertain";* thus scepticism, low productivity and anxiety about their roles and educational identities was experienced. When facing academic challenges students experience disorientation and a loss of personal identity (Becker & Tausch, 2014). To overcome doubt, fear and anxiety, FY students exercised what Baxter-Magolda, et al., (2012) terms cognitive and behavioral strategies of resistance by adopting a mindset of *"I will hang on" "I will adapt and adjust"* or *"nothing will hinder me."* Furthermore, FY students reported to have felt insecure and excluded due to the unavailability of staff for consultation, guidance and clarities. **ST1 notes:**

> *"I miss my teachers in high school who gave clear directives on what to learn. Now here I am expected to push myself or find a group to work with on projects and assignments. Even if I decide not to attend lectures no one bothers to know why. This lassiez fare has really made me lazy and disorganised. I resort to surf internet for fun and amusement."*

Scalon et al., (2007) acknolwedge that students who have transitioned to university from a school environment may be confused and anxious as they realise that university learning is more complex and requires different learning routines; being organised, prepared and planning ahead. Easterbrook & Vignoles (2013) assert that students newly entering higher education are often only familiar with an institutional discourse that they have acquired through school and, as such, may feel that replicating previous behaviour and thought in the new discourse is correct. Rather than engaging in critical thought by expanding and judging perspectives, students gravitate toward and imitate their instructors' points of view (Peters, 2014). Baxter Magolda et al., have termed this phase of the journey toward self-authorship "following formulas" and students often frame these formulas as if they are their own (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012). Yet, the demands of the stated outcomes of higher education and life beyond university require adults to develop self-authorship: the internal capacity to author one's views, identity and relationships (Baxter Magolda et al., 2012).

Online technologies played a significant role in changing the character of teaching, learning and interaction in the first year. The majority of students in first year accessed online course resources; however the effective use of technology in learning and teaching requires a more informed understanding of the expectations of students, staff and institutions, along with preparation for and induction into the use of technology to foster positive learning and student outcomes (Ecclestone et al., 2010). Bennet (2012) caution against making assumptions about how first year students want or expect to engage with technology-enhanced learning and the extent of their skill set for doing so. Peters (2014) point to the positive as well as negative effects on students of belonging to the digital generation, and to the need for HEIs to understand, manage and enhance, and indeed, even to model, these new literacies. FY students mentioned changes in the way they viewed themselves as a result of engaging in new activities and gaining new knowledge through technology.**ST9 reflects:**

> *"Coming from rural areas, placed in a class with students from Model C schools I was completely lost confused and lonely. Most of my classmate spoke English so well I saw myself as naïve and illiterate, and I was so shy I chose to keep quiet. It took me a while to even find a friend through social media. I had to join class What' s Up groups, then met friends in Facebook and Twitter. I soon fell in love with social media as I was glued to internet taking advantage of the free university Wi- fi all the time.*

**ST2 adds:**

> *"I am always on my computer surfing internet for research assignment, although at times I would download music and videos, watch series movies or comedies, online."*

Therefore, the Internet, Websites and web conference tools and online social networks such as Facebook, Twitter created new platforms in FY students' identity development as co-constructors of learning. The learning space and context of the university thus becomes an external influence that changes students' behaviour and shape students' educational identities (Kelly, 2009; Kahu & Nelson, 2017). Educational identity is defined by Bennet (2012) as the understanding of who one is through the meaning attached to subjective experiences within educational institutions and the experience of social position within educational institutions. Thus, the college environment can act as a facilitator to developing new and positive educational identities, or it can hinder such development.

**Interpersonal and Social Identities**

The social environment of educational institutions is the context for the development of educational and social identities (Volet & Jones, 2012). FY students establish friendships with other students, peers and fellow classmates through various kinds of extra-curricular and extra mural university contexts. Social construction of identity occurs in different contexts on campus such as in how student organizations are created and which students are drawn to them, or in the social identities among those in leadership positions and those not, as well as in issues of institutional fit within access and retention (Berzonsky & Luyckx, 2008; Stull & Blue, 2016). Shefer et al., (2018) describe institutions where students are actively engaged in a variety of campus committees as providing meaningful contexts to decision making groups. In such meetings FY students seek membership in identity based organisations such as Student Representative Council (SRC); student political organizations; Student Christian Movement (SCM), Student Counselling Unit (SCU), Sports Clubs, Learning Groups, Community Projects. Identity-based organizations are those registered student groups whose mission includes serving the educational, cultural, social, or other needs and interests of students from a given psychosocial identity (Renn & Ozaki, 2010:14; Van Breda, 2017). **ST8 reflects**:

> *"I was part of the group that campaigned for other students to join our political organisation. I have a political background from my high school years. Joining the university was a way of gaining more popularity and fame. Most of the time I was engaged in university meetings, political engagements more than academic engagement.  Even outside campus. I will be called for interviews in  radio stations. As such I am getting paid for some of the businesses I am engaged in".*

Renn & Ozaki (2010) believes that student involvement in campus activities leads to student learning in a number of domains, including leadership development. Torres et al.,

(2009, 579), also comment on the value of student participation in university governance, noting social as well as functional and developmental benefits to this engagement. Student participation in university governance can be understood as part of the emerging and related discourses of education for democracy and 'universities as sites of citizenship' (Stull & Blue, 2016; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). The involvement of students as union officers in student organisations and leadership positions is perceived as positive identity transformation (Renn & Ozaki, 2010). Berzonsky & Luyckx (2008) also identified several roles the college played in the transformation of identities such as interactions with others, self-appraisals by the students, social comparisons with others, and emulation of role models.

In the social sphere, on the contrary, the feeling of not belonging to the institution or to the peer group creates a problematic transition for the student (Easterbook & Vignoles, 2013:457). The first year is a point in the educational pipeline at which students are particularly vulnerable (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2012); being accepted by the group is an ongoing desire of students and will be pursued regardless of the consequences (Hendricks et al., 2011). **ST5 notes:**

> *"I see myself as a "a one size fits all"; I joined almost every club, association, group I could find to meet new people, establish social networks and have as many friends as I could make. Social networks and social gatherings are important to me a student. These are long lasting relations that we cherish, love and respect".*

Becker & Tausch (2014) are of the opinion that students will not give up the social assimilation and feeling of belonging, and will risk much to be accepted and identified with a group. Loss and lack of social support have been found to lead to negative psychological experiences such as tension, confusion and depression (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010; Hendricks et al., 2011). Becker & Tausch (2014) warns that social exclusion can have detrimental effects on the individual ego and identity which may in turn develop low self-esteem, and powerlessness.**ST9 had this to say:**

> *"Coming from rural areas raised by a very strict and principled family, joining social group and being engaged in social gatherings was a nightmare for me. I was introduced to a new life that was not befitting my culture and traditional beliefs. I tried so hard to be like others but it is not working for me. As a result I feel so lonely and depressed, I read books most of the time".*

Establishing a support network can be one of the strategies to help reduce stress (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2013; Pillay & Ngcobo, 2012). Students who have good levels of social support tend to produce the most desirable outcomes in the areas of academic, social, and emotional adjustment (Leary & Tangeny, 2012). For Gale and Parker (2014) the greater the perceived institutional integrity, the more students are commitment to the institution.

**Discussion of Findings**

Transition to higher education is a process of shifting identities through engagement in the practices of the higher education community (Gale & Parker, 2014); where those practices are constructed and reconstructed through individual meaning-making within the context of microsystems and broader social macro-systems (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). These in turn, impact upon individual action, participation in the higher education community and identity (Volet & Jones, 2012). The role of context is emphasised in the development of identity as it also offers abundant educational and vocational opportunities and may

enhance the achievement of an identity (Van Breda, 2017). When learners are confronted with new knowledge and skills, with a new social world, a new culture, a new language (Ecclestone et al., 2010). Manzi et. al, (2010) affirm that students embrace a new set of social relationships, a new habitus and cultural capital which may contribute towards building their personal and social identity. When the new students' identity is transformed, integrating the past experiences a context of development in the present and outlining possible futures is opened (Crafter & Maunder, 2012). Thus, the growth of FY student within HEIs can be identified through intellectual maturation as well as psychological and psycho-social skills (Burkitt, 2011; Oyserman et al., 2015; Vignoles, 2017).

## Conclusions

Transitioning from high school to university is an important developmental milestone that holds the potential for personal growth and behavioral change for FY students as it involves changes in their roles, be it personal, academic or social. The university context plays a role in the formation of multiple student identities thereby leading to their transformation. The university, faculties and departments influence the academic and educational identities of FY students; whereas student affairs staff promote students' personal and social development outside the classroom. A close link between self-identity and behaviours which students demonstrate in the wider social context have been identified. New students are influenced by the university environment and peer social experiences have significant effects on the development of positive or alternatively negative students' identity and transformation. Therefore, the university context can influence FY roles of individuals in groups, and on interactions among groups as they make their way into adulthood to form self- concept.

## Suggestions

As HEIs welcome a more complex and diverse student population, they must adopt a more holistic approach in the shaping of student identity development. Rather than merely placing the burden on students to adapt to an unalterable context, institutions should respect the importance of understanding students' perceptions of their educational environments and experiences and include such perspectives in developing students' identity. Since the universities are involved in the process of identity development, they must determine how best to encourage these developmental changes in students and who should facilitate the process. In transforming the learning spaces for positive identity development; HEIs need to provide students with the appropriate resources and opportunities. The more the universities understand how they influence students in making meaning of their identities, the better they are able to assist in promoting student learning and development.

## Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is that it is specific to one learning context, in that it focused on first-year students from one university. It would be valuable to repeat this methodology again with multiple site. A different sample with multiple sites in the same university might have produced different results. Notwithstanding the intricacies associated with qualitative study especially within a case study approach, the emerging issues cannot be generalized to the whole population or other faculties and universities. Because the study was conducted on such a relative small scale over a limited time and in a limited context it

provides the insights and indications on trends and tendencies as perceived by new students.

## References

Abes, E., S. (2009). Theoretical borderlands: Using multiple theoretical perspectives to challenge inequitable power structures in student development theory. *Journal of College Student Development,* 50, 141-156.

Baxter Magolda, M., B., King, P., M., Taylor, K., B. & Wakefield, K., M. (2012). Decreasing authority dependence during the first year of college. *Journal of College Student Development,* 53, 418–435.

Becker, J., C., & Tausch, N. (2014). When group memberships are negative: The concept, measurement, and behavioral implications of psychological disidentification. *Self and Identity*, 13, 294-321.

Bennet, D. (2012). A Creative Approach to Exploring Student Identity. *International Journal of Creativity & Problem Solving,* 22, 27-41.

Berzonsky, M., D., Luyckx, K. (2008). Identity styles, self-reflective cognition, and identity processes: A study of adaptive and maladaptive dimensions of self-analysis. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research,* 8, 205-219.

Briggs, A., R., J., Clark, J. & Hall, L. (2012). Building bridges: Understanding student transition to university. *Quality in Higher Education,* 18, 3-21.

Burkitt, I. (2011). Identity construction in sociohistorical context. In S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx & V. L. Vignoles (Eds.). *Handbook of identity theory and research* (pp. 267-283). New York: Springer.

Chickering, A., W. (1969). *Education and identity*. San Francisco, CA; Jossey-Bass.

Chickering, A. W. & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Christie, H., Barron, P. & D'Annunzio-Green, N. (2013). Direct entrants in transition: becoming independent learners. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38, 623-637.

Cohen, L., Morrison, L. & Manion, K. (2018). *Research in Methods* (7TH Edition).New York: Routledge Palmer.

Crafter, S. & Maunder, R. (2012). Understanding transitions using a sociocultural framework. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 29, 10-18.

Easterbrook, M. & Vignoles, V., L. (2013). What does it mean to belong? Interpersonal bonds and intragroup similarities as predictors of felt belonging in different types of groups. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 43, 455-462.

Ecclestone, K., Biesta, G. & Hughes, M. (2010). Transitions in the Lifecourse: the role of identity, agency and structure. In K. Ecclestone, G. Biesta & M. Hughes (Eds.), *Transitions and Learning through the Lifecourse* (pp. 1-15). London, UK: Routledge.

Erikson, E., H. (1968). *Youth and crisis,* New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Gale, T. & Parker, S. (2014). Navigating change: a typology of student transition in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education,* 39,734-753.

Hendrickson, B., Rosen, D. & Aune, R. (2011). An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35, 281-295.

Jones, S., R., & Abes, E., S. (2013). *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kahu, E., & Nelson, K. (2017). Student engagement in the educational interface: Understanding the mechanisms of student success. *Higher Education Research & Development*. 1-14.

Kelly, S. (2009). "Social Identity Theories and Educational Engagement." British *Journal of Sociology of Education,* 30, 449-462.

Leary, M., R. & Tangney, J., P. (2012) *Self, Self-Concept and Identity* (Ch. 4 pp. 69-104). New York: The Guilford Press.

Manzi, C., Vignoles, V., L. & Regalia, C. (2010). Accommodating a new identity: Possible selves, identity change and well-being across two life-transitions. *European Journal of Social Psychology,* 40, 970-984.

Oyserman, D., Elmore, K. & Smith, G. (2012). In M. Leary and Tageny (Eds.). *Handbook of Self and Identity* (pp 69-104). New York: Guilford Press.

Oyserman, D., Destin, M. & Novin, S. (2015). The Context sensitive Future Self: Possible selves motivate in context, not otherwise. *Journal Self and Identity,* 14, 173-188.

Peters, A., K. (2014). *The Role of Students' Identity Development in Higher Education in Computing.* Dissertation for the degree of Licentiate of Philosophy in Computer Science with Specialisation in Computer Science Education Research Department of Information Technology, Uppsala University, Sweden.

Pillay, A., L. & Ngcobo, H., S., B. (2010). Sources of stress and support among rural-based first-year university students: an exploratory study. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 40(3), 234-240.

Renn, K., A. & Ozaki, C. (2010). Psychosocial and Leadership Identities among Leaders of Identity-Based Campus Organizations. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education,* 3, 14–26.

Scanlon, L., Rowling, L., & Weber, Z. (2007). 'You don't have like and identity…you are just lost in a crowd': Forming a Student Identity in the First-year Transition to University. *Journal of Youth Studies,* 10, 223-241.

Shefer, T., Strebel, A., Ngabaza, S. & Clowes, L. (2018). Student accounts of space and safety at a South African university: implication for social identities and diversity. *South African Journal of Psychology,* 41, 61 – 72.

Stull, C., L. & Blue, C., M. (2016). Examining the influence of professional identity formation on the attitudes of students towards inter professional collaboration. *Journal of Inter professional Care*, 30, 90-96.

Torres, V., Jones, S., R. & Renn, K., A. (2009). "Identity Development Theories in Student Affairs: Origins, Current Status, and New Approaches," *Journal of College Student Development*, 50, 577-596.

Van Breda, A., D. (2017). Students are humans too: Psychosocial vulnerability of first year students at the University of Johannesburg. *South African Journal of Higher Education.* 31, 246–262.

Vignoles, V., L. (2017). Identity: Personal and Social. *Oxford Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology* (2nd Ed.). New York: Springer.

Vignoles, V., L. (2011). Identity Motives. In Schwartz, S., Luyxcky, K., Vignoles, D. (Eds). Handbook of Identity Theory and Research (pp, 403-432). New York: Springer.

Volet, S. & Jones, C. (2012). Cultural transitions in higher education: Individual adaptation, transformation and engagement. In S. Karabenick & T. Urdan (Eds). *Advances in Achievement and Motivation Series: Transitions across schools and cultures* (pp. 241-284). Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing.

Weidman, J., C., De Angelo, L. & Bethea, K., A. (2014). Understanding Student Identity from a Socialization Perspective. *New Directions for Higher Education.* 166, 43-51.

Whannell, R. & Whannell, P. (2015). Identity theory as a theoretical framework to understand attrition for university students in transition**.** *Student Success, 6,* 43-52.