THE POSITIONALITY OF THE EUPHEMISM OF SERVICE LEARNING AT SELECTED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

BY

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DEDICATION

"An injury to one is an injury to all."

(Anonymous)

This study is dedicated to those communities in the catchment areas of the universities in South Africa, who are endlessly marginalised, but are used as guinea pigs for the advancement of the interests of universities.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that The Positionality of the Euphoria of Service Learning at Selected Higher Education Institutions in South Africa is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete reference.

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S.T.P. MATOBAKO

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KEY WORDS

Positionality

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Reciprocity

Hegemony

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Critical Emancipatory theory

Textually Oriented discourse Analysis (TODA)

ABSTRACT

This academic study was conducted as a critical scientific enquiry on the positionality of service learning at selected South African higher education institutions. The study critically and scientifically reflects on the positionality of the concept of service learning as practised at higher education institutions. It elucidates the different levels of conceptualisation and operationalisation of service learning by universities in relation to their catchment areas. In so doing, the study probes the positionality of **power relations** between **higher education institutions** and their **catchment areas** and/or local communities in the practice of service leaning.

Given the traditional and historical domineering and 'ivory tower' positioning and conduct of higher education institutions in relation to their catchment areas, the study explores the fundamental nature and spirit of power relations in the operationalisation of service learning. It probes whether the relationship between service learning policy development and societal development initiatives is still shaped and influenced by historical legacies of the apartheid logic, such as academic domineering and institutional hegemony. The study also investigates whether these feature in the pursuit of service learning, curriculum development and transformative efforts as practised by selected universities.

In order to draw parallels with studies of a similar nature, the study interrogates related literature. This enabled reflection on progressive conceptualisations of service learning, as opposed to retrogressive and/or technicist and, perhaps hegemonic and categorising concepts of service learning. In so doing, the study moves from the

premise that, despite high levels of interest in civic matters within and among institutions of higher learning in South Africa, service learning as a vehicle for social transformation and progressive teaching and learning, seems to be largely neglected, under-theorised and, at times, disguised as a **tool for the reproduction of inequalities**.

As a means of collecting data for the purpose of analysis and interpretation, the study uses a purely **qualitative methodology**. A Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis (TODA) was selected as a first choice and preferred methodology for the study of this nature because of its propensity to **thematise** issues of power relations. Furthermore, qualitative methodology is predisposed to recognising the **subjectivity** of the researcher in being intimately involved in the research process.

This **subjectivity**, as encouraged by qualitative methodology, has guided everything in this research study, beginning with the choice of the topic, proceeding to developing objectives for the study, to the selection of the methodology itself and ultimately to the interpretation of data. Through this methodology, the researcher was encouraged to reflect on the values and objectives of the study and how these could be used to problematise issues of power relations.

Although the study presents some **quantitative data** from other sources, there were a number of research problems that, for one reason or the other, did not lend themselves to a quantitative/ positivistic approach. Claims and pronouncements of quantitative researchers about the principles of **objectivity**, **quantification** and **absolutism** are not appropriate for thematising about issues of power relations, especially in instances of

hegemony, domination, exclusivity, ideological inclination, discursion, justice and **emancipatory praxis.**

To contextualise and narrow the focus area for research purposes, two South African higher education institutions (the universities of the Free State and of the Witwatersrand) were selected for the study. The choice of the two institutions was influenced by their history of involvement in service learning and curriculum repositioning processes. They have also been consistently portrayed by the South African academic world as strong campaigners in the operationalisation of first-rate service learning models, in the Free State and Gauteng provinces respectively (refer to chapter three for a detailed justification for such a choice).

The findings of this study indicate that the selected universities have responded to calls to reposition themselves in the area of synchronising their academic offerings with the reconstruction and development imperatives of the country. The research established that the two institutions have produced strategic service learning policy documents as a means of responding more appropriately to the needs of communities. The implementation of such documents was intended to enable the two institutions to develop service learning policy positions, thus making an institutional commitment to operationalising service learning.

The study has, however, determined that there are gaps and inconsistencies in terms of policy commitments and the operationalisation of service learning by the two institutions. In line with the themes developed in this study, it was established that the two institutions have limited the extent of their commitment to paper (policy

documentation) and heartfelt pronouncements. The study furthermore reveals that despite the **paper** and **heartfelt commitments** of the two institutions on the concept of service learning, they are still restfully positioned as expert-oriented entities. By their nature and continuous domineering roles, they remain sites for the transmission of an effective **dominant** and **domineering culture** which limits the possibilities of their unleashing an **emancipatory praxis** that is so critical in the context of a transforming South Africa.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the problem

This study, with its resultant findings detailed in chapter 4, was carried out as a critical scientific enquiry into the positionality of the euphoria surrounding the pursuit of service learning at selected South African higher education institutions. The study is an attempt to critically and scientifically reflect on the positionality of the concept of service learning, so as to lay bare the varying levels of social constructedness, conceptualisation and operationalisation of the same concept within the confines of universities and in relation to their catchment areas. The study attempts to elucidate the paradoxical nature of the practices undergirding the concept of service learning, by examining the **variations**, **contradictions** and **challenges** faced by selected universities that are involved in the practice of service learning as an academic pursuit.

Service learning is a fairly young discipline in South Africa and there appears to be very little commonality in the usage and application of the term. Most studies tend to pay attention to standards of good practice in the pursuit of service learning by higher education institutions, in terms of the quantity of service learning programmes and student participation. Rather than focusing on the quantitative aspects of service learning standards, this study explores a different route by probing the qualitative nature and ***context-specificity*** of the pursuit of service learning. In carrying out this endeavour, the study scientifically probes the nature and proclivity of the pursuit of service learning at selected higher education institutions in South Africa, both in

theory and in practice. It investigates whether service learning is positioned to genuinely 'connect' the rich resources of the university to communities' most pressing social, civic, cultural and ethical problems, to their children, their youth, to schools, to teachers and to hardships characterising our townships. Furthermore, the study explores whether the selected higher education institutions are focussing their pursuit of service learning merely on constricted **non-empowering, charitable** and compassionate purposes, instead of genuinely on larger, **empowering, socio-academic justice** purposes – a larger sense of mission and greater clarity in a quest for empowerment. Service learning should be positioned to create an equitable and empowering climate of interface in which the academic and civic cultures connect and communicate more **deferentially** and more **respectfully** with each other.

This research study further probes whether service learning at these higher education institutions (which are identified in paragraph 1.2) has been positioned to seriously contemplate that the future of such institutions and that of communities is one. For communities and higher education institutions to survive, institutions need to genuinely step out of the trappings of their ivory tower and become enmeshed in the *quagmire and squalid conditions of poverty, marginalisation and deprivation* that characterise communities. In short, this inquiry investigates whether the scholarship of service learning at selected higher education institutions is being pursued according to the philosophy that **an injury to one community is an injury to all of those who constitute the higher education community** – lecturers, students, service providers and community representatives in the catchment area.

Put differently, in this study an attempt is made to probe, as we continue to vocalise and euphonise service learning in relation to our educational history as a nation, whether institutions of higher learning are confidently moving to the stage of genuine commitment to civic engagement and socio-academic justice. Are we perhaps being bogged down by embracing service learning as **charity** and, at best, 'cuddling service learning as a **project**' but never genuinely pursuing it as a commitment to civic engagement in the sense of progressive social connectedness?

This chapter is divided into a number of sections. The first few sections provide the background and context of the study. They provide an overview and background of the research problem in the context of a transforming higher education system, for the purpose of laying the basis and justification for conducting such a scientific enquiry.

Further sections outline the research questions and objectives that inspired this research. The study uses four quotations as **exemplars** to indicate contradictions between the dominant and subaltern (dominated) discourses that underpin the conceptualisation and implementation of service learning as practised by selected higher education institutions.

Subsequent sections outline the research methodology used in the study. A qualitative documentary and internet survey, free interviewing and textual as well as documentary analyses were used as tools to ascertain trends, issues, innovations and related policy development in the area of service learning as carried out by selected higher education institutions in South Africa.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The primary purpose of this scholastic research exercise is to embark on a critical and scientific investigation of the positionality of the euphoria of service learning as practised at selected higher education institutions in South Africa. The study specifically intends to show that service learning, in theory and practice, has not yet connected academic resources with the problems afflicting comminutes. The study seeks to bring to light inconsistencies, contradictions and conceptual and operational tensions and challenges that characterise the pursuit of service learning. The problem, as pursued in this study, is that selected higher education institutions appear to be focusing their service learning efforts on generating more and more service learning programmes, rather than on focusing on service learning for the pursuit of total emancipation of communities.

1.3 Context of the problem

The winds of change and continuing transformation initiatives that currently characterise South Africa have presented a number of consequences and challenges for higher education transformation and curriculum development processes. The challenges are such that higher education transformation, curriculum development and related learning and academic operationalisation are now required to be carried out in a **socially conscious, inclusive** and **participatory** manner. Institutions need to become **responsive** to the socio-economic and political **imperatives** and **imaginations** of national transformation and reconstruction initiatives. Thus higher education institutions in the country are required to put in place **vision** and **mission**

statements that blend together teaching, research and **service** practices within broader socio-economic and political processes.

The foregoing challenges represent a radical departure from traditionally **elitist**, **hegemonic**, **categorising**, **selective** and **exclusive** transformation and curriculum development processes. Historically, for example, higher education curriculum development processes in South Africa were carried out in a manner that relegated community knowledge contributions to levels of **exclusion** and **nothingness** (van Wyk, 2004). At the same time they promoted academic conduct and scholarship that focused exclusively on **charity**, **welfarism**, **sympathy**, and sectional interests (academic exclusivity, exclusive knowledge production tendencies and gate-keeping and more recently, westernised and/or neo-liberal theoretical preferences) that are perceived to be reproducing disempowering negativities of the past.

At the output level, such negativities resulted in the pursuit of curriculum development activities that were tailored to advance and entrench disempowerment, self-serving academic practices, intellectual domination, and academic supremacy. The domineering academic consciousness and operationalisation was intended to promote intellectual subserviency and poor quality academic achievements on the part of those who were positioned as secondary components of the higher education domain (Matobako & Helu, 1999).

Given the traditional and historical domineering and 'ivory tower' positioning and conduct of higher education institutions in relation to their catchment area, this study explores the pursuit of service learning in terms of fundamentals of power relations

between **higher education institutions** and their **catchment areas** and/or local communities. The study explores the nature of the relationship between service teaching policy developers (curriculum developers), academics, students, service providers and community representatives. It probes whether this relationship is still shaped and influenced by historical legacies of the apartheid logic, such as academic domineering and institutional hegemony, and whether these feature in curriculum development and transformative efforts carried out by the selected universities.

The central precept informing this investigation is that, being cultural dispositions, **transformation** and **curriculum development** carry with them some historical resonance with **hegemony**, **exclusion**, **dominance** and **marginalisation.** They serve as the means by which contemporary **community – higher education relations** have assumed an **undemocratic** content and orientation. In this way, curriculum development and transformation practices become inseparable from the actual political and economic conditions they help to maintain (Matobako & Helu, 1999).

As an illustration of, and with reference to suspicions about the genuine commitment of higher education institutions to pronouncements about progressive positioning in the area of social responsiveness, this study reflects critically on how **empowering academic practices** and **social justice**, key concepts in emerging democracies, have become rhetoric and vacuous, even within academic circles.

This study therefore probes the use of the concept of **service learning,** in the wake of universities' claims and pronouncements about progressive interactions with communities. It investigates whether **structural inequalities** and continuing

disempowerment of communities are hidden behind the notions of 'civic responsibility', reciprocity and 'community involvement', which become nothing more than **patronage, charity** and **project** issues.

1.4 Purpose of the study

This study is a scholastic investigation of the levels of contradictions between the discursive practices of dominant and subaltern (dominated) discourses that underpin the conceptualisation and implementation of service learning. The study, furthermore, raises issues of **inconsistencies, positionality, ideological preferences** and **hegemony**, with regard to exclusion, reproduction and marginalising practices characterising the positionality of **service learning** in post-apartheid higher education transformation and curriculum repositioning.

The purpose of this study then, is to evaluate the situatedness of service learning as practised by selected higher education institutions in South Africa. Consistent with the findings in chapter four, the study shows that there is no **neutrality** in the pursuit of knowledge production and the related usage of the notion of service learning in the area of teaching, learning and research as purported to be carried out by selected higher education institutions in South Africa.

1.5 Objectives of the study

Given the preceding background, perspective, context and broader purpose of this study as provided in sections 1.1, 1.3 and 1.4, the specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To conduct a situational analysis of service learning in the context of transforming higher education practice;
- To critically analyse and even redefine the power relations characterising academic practices at selected South African higher education institutions, through a critical reflection of the tensions, paradoxes and contradictions in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of service learning;
- To expose the **contradictions** and sift out **inconsistencies** characterising the notion of service learning and practice in relation to the concepts of **reciprocity**, **counter-hegemony**, **participative inclusivity** and **social empowerment,** as opposed to disempowering concepts like hegemony, charity, welfarism and patronage;
- To demonstrate how the use and emphasis on the expert-oriented, charity and patronage concepts in service learning practices can be seen to contribute to the **reproduction** of the ideologies of **hegemony**, **disempowerment**, **domination**, **categorisation** and **exclusion;**
- To present viable and informed recommendations intended to undermine efforts that are geared toward frustrating transformation initiatives in the country.

1.6 Definition of operational concepts

This section attempts to define key concepts that are operationalised in this study to unravel inconsistencies characterising the varying levels of the pursuit of service learning. The key concepts that are defined here are 'service learning' and 'positionality'. The concepts are defined with the purpose of promoting a comprehensive understanding of the conceptual basis of this study.

1.6.1 Service learning

Service learning has historically been defined from a variety of angles. This study favours universal definitions which are appropriate and progressive and reflect the context of service learning. For example Bringle and Hatcher (1996) have defined service learning as:

> *…a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organised service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. Unlike extracurricular voluntary service, service learning is a course-based service experience that produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related to course material through reflection activities such as directed writings, small group discussions, and class presentations* (p.2).

In the *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (2004), service learning is defined as:

> *… applied learning which is directed at specific community needs and is integrated into an academic programme and curriculum. It could be credit-bearing and assessed, and may or may not take place in a work environment* (p.26).

Eyler and Giles (1999) define service learning as:

> *…a form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students work with others through a process of applying what they are learning to community problems and, at the same time, reflecting upon their experience as they seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves* (www.servicelarning.org/welcome_to_service-learning/service_learning-is/inde...p.2).

The Corporation for National and Community Service (2002) traditionally defines Service learning as a method by which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organised service that is conducted in and meets the needs of communities. Service learning is coordinated by an institution of higher education or community service programme, in conjunction with the community. It is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students or the education components of the community service programme in which the participants are enrolled. It is seen as a practice that helps foster civic responsibility and it provides structured time for students or participants to critically reflect on the service experience (National and Community Service Trust Act, 1993; Corporation for National and Community Service, 2002).

Service learning is seen to engage individual participants in activities that combine both community service and academic learning. It is regarded as a teaching method which combines community service with academic instruction through its focus on critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility. In this way, service learning programmes are designed so as to involve students in structured and organised community service in order to address local needs, while developing their academic

skills, sense of civic responsibility and/or engagement and commitment to the community.

The concept of service learning in this study refers to developmental, empowering and/or progressive credit-bearing educational practice, in which students participate in an organised and **reciprocal** service activity that meets collectively identified community needs. Students reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, broader appreciation of the discipline and an enhanced (progressive) sense of civic responsibility and/or consciousness (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

The foregoing understanding facilitates a closer relationship between theoretical and practical knowledge by balancing the progressive value of academic expertise with respect and value for community participation, which in certain quarters is still regarded as exclusive academic practice.

1.6.2 Positionality

Positionality, in the context of this study, refers to a critical and reflective situational analysis of the concept of service learning as carried out at the level of a university's academic practice. This concept is selectively used in this study to unravel the contradictions underpinning current service learning practices at higher educational institutions (Crawford & Valsiner, 2002). Furthermore, the concept is used to distinguish between **progressive** (socio-academic justice and genuinely developmental practices) and **retrogressive** and/or hegemonic (charity, sympathy and

project related) service learning policies and practices, as carried out by selected higher education institutions in South Africa.

A positioning discourse is also found to be valuable in this study as it reflects on the imbalance of power relations between the empowered universities and the disempowered communities who have a stake in higher education (Takacs, 2002). The discourse of positionality challenges the world of academia and perceives it as failing to address issues about the disadvantaged and disempowered from the **voice** of the disadvantaged. In keeping up with the spirit of the findings in chapter 4, it argues that education and learning should be seen as tools to combat oppression and exclusion. Education and learning should work to empower all people, not only those who can 'understand' academic jargon (Takacs, 2002).

As a result of the foregoing discourse, varying levels of positionalities of service learning are identified and these are explored in more detail in chapter 2 of this research work. The first level of analysis is service learning as a scholarship of **charity** and/or **patronage** discourse, as influenced by the dominant, hegemonic and centralised neo-apartheid and/or neo-colonial theoretical postulations. The second level is a more moderate level, referred to as the **project purpose** of service learning, which borders between the first and the third levels. The third level is a visibly **counter-hegemonic** and **emancipatory** positioning, that sees service learning as a **socio-academic justice** activity. This level derives its influence from such luminaries as Foucault, Duncan, Marx, Gramsci and a host of emancipatory critical discourse scholars. The identification and differentiation of the three positions is intended to

unravel conceptual tensions as well as contradictions underpinning the three philosophies in the context of operationalising service learning.

The concept of **positionality**, then, is considered in this study as the main driver of this investigative exercise. It is used selectively to unravel the contradictions underpinning current service learning practices at the selected higher educational institutions (Crawford & Valsiner, 2002).

1.7 Theoretical framework (the lens)

In pursuing genuine developmental and/or progressive changes in South Africa and elsewhere in the world, similar studies about transforming higher education and its functions have been carried out by a significant number of scholars to explore the challenges faced by universities in engaging more closely with surrounding communities. In the main, these developments are prompted by the growth of social problems and by the growing disparities between the rich and poor, what this study refers to as the **dominant** and **subaltern** groupings.

This study examines the concept of positionality of service learning by exploring a number of theoretical studies carried out by critical discourse luminaries who purport that: (i) post-apartheid developmental discourse and practice are reproducing issues of exclusion through the usage of concepts like service learning (Greenberg, 2004) (ii) service learning is riddled with ideological contestations and intellectual tensions (van Wyk, 2004); and (iii) the notion of knowledge production and service learning has no impartiality in the debates about the transformation of higher education (Patel, 2002).

The main thrust of these and other arguments is that service learning is considered relative to some preferential ideological hegemonic positioning (Malecki, 2000). For those who locate their intellectual inputs within the dictates of the dominant discourse, the outcry against service learning could be a guise for maintaining historical and recently acquired (for some) academic privileges. For the subaltern (dominated discourse) representatives, service learning is a valuable academic mechanism that should be used genuinely to improve the quality of life of disadvantaged communities.

To give a more scientific theoretical expression to these initiatives, this study is located within the emancipatory (critical pedagogy) theoretical viewpoint. This framework is the preferable lens for this study as it provides the basic tenet for an interpretive and analytical discourse. It is also regarded as a valuable framework that thematises issues of **power relations** in academic practices and provides an outlet for discriminatory academic practices (Giroux & McLaren, 1994). Furthermore, this framework appears to be consistent with the critical discourse analytical postulations of facilitating the deconstruction and rescaling of social relations in accordance with the demands of unrestrained, inclusive and acceptable academic practice as it relates to curriculum development (Fairclough, Pardoe & Szerszynsky, 2001).

Theoretically, the paper moves from the premise that service learning is riddled with ideological contestations and intellectual tensions. In illustrating this assumption, the paper draws the ‘battle-line’ between subaltern and dominant intellectual discourses (Duncan, Gqola & Hofmeyer, 1992; Fairclough, 1992). For ease of reference and

purposes of identity, the subaltern discourse will be represented by the civil society organisations, community representatives as well as organic academics, researchers and learners (who have committed ‘class suicide’ by locating their practices within the progressive developmental discourse).

This category (the subaltern group) has repositioned itself as an equal and respectful community partner who prefers to locate its intellectual and academic inputs (teaching, learning and research) within the domain of emancipatory discourse, development practices and deconstructionism. This is the framework and lens through which this group can advance the social transformation agenda through reciprocal academic practices such as teaching, learning and research.

The dominant discourse, on the other hand, is represented by privileged and/or affluent academics, learners and researchers most of whom have been cushioned by vestiges of past discriminatory and anti-developmental academic practices. They construe service learning in negative, pessimistic and less constructive terms, and most probably perceive the community and community structures alike as unequal objects that they can selfishly use to advance their academic aspirations. They use *neo-liberalism* as the lens through which higher educational transformation agenda and curriculum repositioning could be advanced. This category regards academic practice as an expert-oriented domain.

1.7.1 Service learning as a pursuit of civil responsibility

The theoretical construction informing this study sees service learning as a tool for nurturing civic responsibility in its beneficiaries. Civic responsibility is understood to refer to a broad array of proficiencies and adeptness that beneficiaries need to possess in their pursuit of service learning. These proficiencies include the empowerment competencies of citizenship for democracy, participatory democracy and social responsibility. Such competencies enable students at higher education institutions to acquire and use information, to assess their involvement in service learning activities, to make decisions and judgments, to promote social interests, to assign meaning and to apply appropriately empowering citizenship competencies to new situations.

The foregoing empowering competencies imply a number of positive traits that are considered as the hallmarks of a deepened sense of social responsibility, namely:

- respect
- empathy
- tolerance
- trust
- cooperation, and
- responsibility for oneself and others.

1.7.2 Service learning in relation to margin and centre descriptors

The practice of power relations in higher education has, over the years, intentionally or unintentionally positioned people, as well as local communities, to carry out

academic practices such as policy development relating to teaching, learning and research. It has become a tendency, for example, to refer to people and local communities as belonging to the **centre** or the **margins**. Researchers, policy developers and learners alike have positioned themselves in terms of preferable epistemologies, and have positioned 'others' in terms of making academic inquiries and assumptions about the nature of their (researchers, policy developers and learners) relationships with others and the world. The **margin-centre dichotomy,** as evidenced in the world of academia, is thus seen as useful in terms of making positionality a useful construct to discern the disproportionality of the locus of power in academic-community relationships. As St. Louis and Barton (2002) observed:

> *…those in the margin and centre are often very aware of their positionality in relation to the other. Those in the centre, however, don't realise the power dynamics as much because they are the beneficiaries of the outcomes of power relationships and, as a result, keep those who are the margin out in the margins. On the other hand, those in the margin either find ways to join those in the centre or resort to accepting that they will never be able to be part of the centre* (p.3).

Positionality, in terms of the margin-centre dichotomy, is therefore regarded as some kind of mobility from one position to the other – once those who perceive themselves to be on the margin, begin to perceive themselves as being in a position of inferiority, they then strive for some place and acceptance in the centre, which is positioned as a form of superiority. The foregoing dichotomisation enables us to position higher education transformatory practices and curriculum repositioning as being carried out by subjective, biased and theoretically positioned practitioners. It also enables us to critically investigate the genuineness of pronouncements about higher education

engagements in service learning – to ask questions as to whether engagements with communities and service partners are carried out in relation to a centre versus margin type of engagement, with the purpose of benefiting the centre at the disadvantage of the margin.

Finally, the margin-centre dichotomy enables us to delineate and theorise about the pursuit of service learning at three further levels, namely, service learning as a pursuit of charity, service learning as a pursuit of a project and service learning as a pursuit of socio-academic justice. These levels are delineated so as to be able to reflect different angles of the distribution of power in the relationship between higher education institutions and the catchment areas (Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005).

1.7.3 Service learning as a pursuit of charity

One of the objectives of this study is to probe whether the outcry against service learning could be a guise for simply complying with issues of policy, with little or no intention of contributing to issues of community empowerment. Such an approach relegates service learning to the status of simply enabling higher education institutions to maintain their historical and acquired academic privileges. Service learning pursued along the lines of **charity** involves a condition where higher education institutions express **tolerance** towards local communities and **voluntarily** provide academic service to such communities as a measure of kindness and/or benevolence, as a charitable pursuit.

This charitable purpose of service learning, in which the power of the higher education institution dominates, positions university-community engagement in terms of giving very little recognition to the contribution of local community. It affords little value in recognising them as important partners toward the advancement of the cause of service learning. Higher education institutions operating within this mode tend to understand and relate to local communities from a technicist point of view, but a big gap exists between the knowledgeable higher education institution and the less knowledgeable (poor, ignorant, needy, less fortunate, etc) community (Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005).

The use of the concept of positionality is therefore intended to find out whether the operationalisation of service learning is carried out as a welfare and/or charitable academic pursuit, or as a genuinely collaborative, mutually beneficial and empowering academic practice that seeks to accomplish social justice.

1.7.4 Service learning as a pursuit of a project (moderate level)

The next level of positioning service learning is by means of the project purpose of service learning. This level is considered to be moderate in this study, in the sense that it borders somewhere between a **charity mode** of service learning and a **socio-academic justice** mode of service learning. The moderate positioning of this level is derived from the observation that service learning as a strategy is restricted to harmonising institutional resources with the pressing needs of local communities only on paper and in the hearts of university representatives. In their good intentions and theorisation about service learning, the higher education institutions operating within

this mode do not systematically involve local communities in the various stages of executing service learning; in fact whenever this happens, it is carried out on an **ad-hoc** basis.

1.7.5 Service learning as a pursuit of socio-academic justice

The last level of positioning is a more progressive approach in service learning and is referred to as the socio-academic level. This level, in the context of this study, involves an enhancement of progressive engagements and interactions of higher education institutions with their catchment areas. It relates to a socio-academic relationship between the world of academia and local communities that is informed by such principles as reciprocity, reverence, inclusivity and empowerment practices, and serves to ensure that such principles guide the operationalisation and carrying out of service learning in a **socially conscious, inclusive** and **participatory** manner. In this kind of positioning, higher education institutions are able to rise to levels of being indisputably **responsive** to the socio-academic and political **imperatives** and **imaginations** of national transformation and reconstruction initiatives on paper, in their hearts and in practice.

1.8 Related literature

The study is located within current epistemologies, ideological bases, reflective critical studies and academic comments about the concept of service learning. In this endeavour, the study interrogates related literature, thus reflecting on progressive conceptualisations of service learning as opposed to retrogressive and/or technicist

and, perhaps, hegemonic and categorising concepts of service learning. In so doing, the study moves from the premise that, despite high levels of interest in civic matters within and among institutions of higher learning in South Africa, service learning as a vehicle for the transformation of teaching and learning, seems largely neglected, under-theorised and, at times, disguised as a tool for the reproduction of inequalities (van Wyk, 2004).

Related studies purport that the challenge for academics as reflective practitioners is to engage the discourses entailed in service learning, especially how they shape the way academics think and produce understanding and critical engagement of service learning practices in their various local contexts (van Wyk, 2004). The characterisation of service learning as an exclusive academic practice has been challenged and modulated by contemporary scholars of emancipatory discourse.

The epistemology and social justice of the concept are also used as a pedagogical construct that can enhance the goals of service learning practices and programmes that are social reconstructionist in nature (van Gunten, 2002). The concept highlights excerpts from action research assignments in service learning activities, and probes how the attitudes of practitioners and students have been challenged to better understand the complex transformative socio-cultural environments in which diverse cultural populations work and live. Students are encouraged to discern how it is that they make meaning of their own lives, what their lives mean in relationship to the lives of others, and how the educational concepts they embrace are derived from the meaning that they make of such relationships (van Gunten , 2002).

1.8.1 Theoretical postulations from critical emancipatory theorists

This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a means of analysing similar postulations from a number of scholars on the situatedness of service learning. CDA, as used in this study, is a relevant and preferable framework for developing a theoretical basis for service learning. The concept of CDA offers service learning practice a refreshing approach in examining more fully the relations of power and ideological positioning between the **dominant** and the **subaltern** groups and the function of language and/or text in the reproduction of social structures (Billig, 1979; van Dijk, 1988, 1997, 1999).

The CDA methodology is perceived not as providing tangible, scientifically researched answers to problems, but rather as enabling access to the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind a statement or monological text. It is further regarded as a method that enables researchers to **reveal the hidden motivations** behind a text or choice of a particular method to interpret that text. In this particular context, it can be regarded as nothing more that a **deconstructive reading** and **interpretation** of a problem or text (Billig, 1979; van Dijk, 1988, 1997, 1999).

1.8.2 Theoretical postulations from intellectual practices

The positionality of service learning as practised at higher education institutions can also be probed through the concept of intellectual practices. The process of defining the concept of intellectual practice has always been fraught with inconsistencies and contradictions, to say the least. At the helm of these inconsistencies are questions that

centre on the issue of whether the definition of intellectual practice can and should be kept radically separate from moral, social and political questions. Some scholars argue that it has always been known that the pursuit of social knowledge involves not only intellectual questions, but socio-economic and political questions as well (Wallerstein, 1996).

As a means of postulating further about intellectual practices, the study goes further to draw the 'battle-line' between **subaltern** and **dominant** intellectual discourses (Duncan, Gqola & Hofmeyer, 1992; Fairclough, 1992) or between the **organic intellectuals** and **traditional intellectuals** (Gramsci, 1971). The subaltern and/or organic category of intellectuals has positioned itself as equal and respectful community partners who prefer to locate their intellectual and academic inputs (teaching, learning and research) within the domain of emancipatory discourse, development practices and counter-hegemonic intellectual practices. This is the framework and lens through which the social transformation agenda can be advanced in the form of reciprocal practices such as service learning.

The **dominant discourse** (traditional intellectuals), in the context of this study, are represented by privileged and/or affluent academics, learners and researchers most of whom have been cushioned by vestiges of past exclusive, hegemonic, discriminatory and non-reciprocal academic practices. They construe knowledge production in negative, **monopolistic** and less constructive and progressive terms, and most probably perceive the community and community structures as unequal objects that they can selfishly use to advance their academic aspirations.

1.9 Sampling

The identification and selection of respondents as primary sources is strongly influenced by the postulations of qualitative and discourse analytical researchers. From their point of view, one of the major differences between discourse analysis (qualitative in nature) and other more traditional (quantitative) methods of research relates to the identification and number of respondents (Duncan, 1993; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

The assumption is that, regardless of the size of the sample, what is important is the depth of one's hermeneutics (interpretive knowledge). A discourse analytical study usually involves a relatively small sample, because a large number of respondents could easily lead to the analyst becoming bogged down by unwieldy masses of data that could be difficult to interpret (Duncan, 1993; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Against the foregoing discussion, the sample for this study consists of two South African higher education institutions (the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the University of the Free State (UFS)). The choice of the two institutions was influenced by their history of involvement in service learning and curriculum repositioning processes. The target institutions are located in the provinces of Gauteng (University of the Witwatersrand) and the Free State (University of the Free State).

1.10 Research methodology and data collection procedures

1.10.1 Quantitative procedures

Although this author recognises the need for and importance of quantitative, statistical and experimental methods in some instances, there are a number of research problems and contexts that, for one reason or the other, do not lend themselves to such quantitative, positivistic approaches. This study preferred not to use quantitative procedures, but instead incorporated quantitative data from studies carried elsewhere, as a way of providing a broader statistical overview learning as practiced by the selected institutions.

1.10.2 Qualitative procedures

This study lends itself to the use of qualitative procedures for gathering data. The strength of a qualitative research design lies in its validity or closeness to the truth. This means that good qualitative research, by using diverse data collection methods, should actually touch the core of the phenomenon being researched, rather than just skimming the surface of the facts. The validity of qualitative methods is greatly improved upon by using a combination of research methods. This process is known as triangulation, and includes independent analysis of the data by more than one researcher.

1.10.2.1 Significance of the qualitative approach

A qualitative approach is considered significant in contributing to rich, informed and insightful research results as a result of the following:

- It is oriented towards the respondents' perspective.
- It emphasises the contextualisation of the process of knowledge construction.
- It presents itself as an open and flexible method in the area of research design.
- Validity and reliability of the research results tend to depend to a large degree on the researcher's skills and sensitivity.
- The scope of such research tends to be on a small scale.
- It creates synergy among respondents, as they build on each other's comments and ideas.
- It creates an opportunity for a researcher or interviewer to observe, record and interpret non-verbal communication signs which are valuable during interviews or discussions and analyses (Patton, 1990; Hoepfl, 1997; Meulenberg-Buskens, 1997).

Over and above the foregoing justification, it should also be observed that qualitative methodology recognises that the subjectivity of the researcher is intimately involved in scientific research. Subjectivity guides everything from the choice of topic that one studies to formulating hypotheses, selecting methodologies and interpreting data. With qualitative methodology, the researcher is encouraged to reflect on the values and objectives he brings to his research, and how these affect the research project.

Other researchers are also encouraged to reflect on the values that any particular investigator utilises (Gergen, 2001).

1.10.2.2 Collecting data from written texts

In order to ascertain the current status of service learning at the selected higher education institutions, exploratory textual data collection and service learning documentary research were employed as methods of gathering data. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected by interrogating written documents that were compiled by the two institutions on matters of service learning.

1.10.2.3 Significance of the textual data collection procedure

The significance of the textual data collection procedure lies in the observation that it involves the use of texts and policy documents as source materials: publications sourced from the internet, institutional policies on curriculum development and, specifically, on service learning, minutes of meetings held to define processes and procedures, publications in journals, learners' diaries and innumerable other written, visual and pictorial sources in paper, electronic, or other hard copy form. Along with surveys and ethnography, documentary research is one of three major types of social research and has arguably been the most widely used of the three throughout the history of sociology and other social sciences. It has been the principal method and indeed, sometimes the only one, for leading sociologists (Scott, 1991, sourced form (http://www.sagepub.com/book.aspx?pid=10521).

The key issues surrounding types of documents and our ability to use them as reliable sources of evidence in the social world must be considered by all who use documents in their research. The paucity of sources available until now means that compendia such as those available on the internet are invaluable to social researchers (Ibid).

1.10.2.4 Collecting data from one-on-one interviews

A verbal technique that was used in this study to collect data is the Free Attitude Interview (FAI) method. This technique is said to have developed its characteristic form during industrial psychology research, the so-called Hawthorne Research, in 1929 in the United States. The FAI technique involved preliminary informal discussions with interviewees (policy officials, lecturers, service partners and community representatives) to ascertain trends, innovations and opinions with regard to issues of exclusion, hegemony and marginalisation, as they relate to service learning.

A subsequent category of interviews involved carefully planned discussions designed to obtain perceptions from participants around themes that emerged in chapter two. The researcher interrogated and critically inquired into the problems and limitations, contradictions and incoherencies, injustices and inequities as to how they as human beings had formed, reformed, and transformed themselves, each other, and the local communities, cultures, societies and worlds in which they live.

1.11 Data analysis

1.11.1 Analysis of the texts and transcripts

An analysis of the influence of power relations in academic transformation and curriculum development was carried out by means of a **Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis** (TODA) as propounded by Duncan (1993); Chouliaraki & Fairclough, (1999) and other social scientists. The technique involves using text as evidence to expose socially constructed **preferences** and **exclusions**. The approach further entails providing explanations and chains of reasoning which can be deconstructed and made explicit. Such deconstructions are crucial in illuminating the ideological and hegemonic features of discourse on academic practice by bringing out elements of legitimation (Duncan, 1993; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

The analysis of texts and transcripts involves breaking down responses into smaller meaningful chunks, so as to interrogate and sift out the contradictory themes emerging from them, and offer alternatives as a researcher. This technique offers a radical departure from other non-discursive, traditional and empirical procedures (mostly quantitative) that emphasise **triangulation** and **controlled verification of data**.

The primary preoccupation of analysis of texts is an exposé of social injustices and how to transform inequitable, undemocratic and oppressive social relations. Such relations are mostly intangible and could not be understood and exposed by scientific methods such as triangulation and controlled verification of data.

1.11.2 Using critical discourse analysis for textual analysis

The study has purported to pursue a critical discourse analytical framework as a means of understanding trends and patterns in service learning as carried out at selected higher education institutions in South Africa. As explained in section 1.7 this framework is preferably used as the lens for this study as it provides the basic tenet for an interpretative and analytical discourse (Giroux & McLaren, 1994). It is also regarded as a valuable framework that thematises issues of power relations in academic practices, and provides an outlet to discriminatory academic practices (Giroux, 1994).

Over and above this observation, the framework appears consistent with the critical discourse analytical postulations of facilitating the deconstruction and rescaling of social relations in accord with the demands of an unrestrained, inclusive, reciprocal and acceptable academic practice as it relates to curriculum development (Fairclough, Pardoe & Szerszynsky, 2001).

1.12 Significance of the study

The study will contribute significantly to the practice of higher education service learning in a number of ways:

- it will inform the current quests and efforts of the government to genuinely bring about redress, equity, effectivity and efficiency in higher education;

- it will broaden current enquiry into the role of higher education institutions in civic responsibility;
- the issues unraveled in this enquiry are likely to provide some guidelines to other universities with similar research interests;
- the study will contribute to the growing body of research on finding alternatives to the negative effects of academic hegemony and non-progressive academic tendencies; and
- these contributions will be valuable to the supervisor of this study, who is a director in the curriculum development units of various institutions in the country.

1.13 Summary

This chapter provided an outline of the entire study, beginning with the background of the study. The research problem in the context of a transforming higher education system was presented, for the purpose of laying the basis and justification for conducting such a scientific enquiry.

The purpose of this study was presented, followed by specific objectives that served as the inspiration for this study to be carried out. The study uses scholastic and relevant theories from the literature to illustrate contradictions between the dominant and subaltern (dominated) discourses that underpin the conceptualisation and implementation of service learning as practised by two selected higher education institutions in South Africa.

The chapter also outlined the research design and methodology used in this study, namely qualitative textual data collection, free interviewing and textual as well as textual and/or documentary analysis.

CHAPTER 2: THE POSITIONALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SERVICE LEARNING: BACKGROUND, DEFINITION AND DISCUSSIONS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical framework (the lens) for this study. The discussion begins by presenting the historical background of higher education curriculum repositioning in relation to the concept of service learning and community development in the context of a changing and transforming South Africa. Thereafter, the chapter attempts to conconceptualise **service-learning** and **positionality.** The purpose is to critically and scientifically reflect on the positionality of the concept of service learning as practised at higher education institutions, and further to illustrate the different levels of positionality and the operationalisation thereof within the confines of selected universities and in their catchment areas. In so doing, the study attempts to illuminate the paradoxical nature of the practices undergirding the concept of service learning by way of critically reflecting on **inconsistencies**, **contradictions** and **challenges** faced by selected universities that are involved in the practice of service learning as an academic activity.

Furthermore, as prefaced in chapter one, the study explores selected theoretical postulations by scholars from a variety of discourses, who purport that: (i) service learning as a **discursive practice** in higher education has the potential of reproducing issues of exclusion (Greenberg, 2004), (ii) that service learning is riddled with ideological contestations and intellectual tensions (van Wyk, 2004) and (iii) that the notion of knowledge production and service learning has no impartiality and no

neutrality in the debates about transformation of higher education (Patel, 2003). The foregoing critical reflections intend to probe whether the outcry against service learning could be a guise for simply complying with issues of policy, with little or no intention of contributing to issues of community empowerment. Such an approach relegates service learning to the status of maintaining historical and acquired academic privileges. Furthermore, the study also investigated whether the operationalisation of service learning is carried out as a welfare and/or charity disposed academic pursuit or as a genuinely collaborative, mutually beneficial and empowering academic pursuit.

2.2 Background of higher education deficiencies in South Africa

Before the advent of democracy in the country in 1994, higher education institutions were considered to be educational establishments that were traditionally geared up to focus on expert-oriented academic pursuits. They were regarded as exclusive sites for conducting socio-economic inquiries and, as such, knowledge production activities were seen as exclusive privileges carried out by those who had gone through rigorous academic processes and programmes that prepared them professionally to carry out such inquiries.

Universities were seen to embrace educational and academic values that transmitted the legislated social, economic and political aspirations and preferences of apartheid-capitalism. In this way, they were seen to promote the dominant views and hegemonic academic principles of the apartheid institutional landscape, thus upholding the intellectual dominance of white people over other races, especially the black majority

of the country (Africans, Coloureds and Indians), who were subjected to inferior educational offerings, subservient academic sites and academic marginalisation.

The foregoing deficiencies in the pursuit and orientation of higher education in the country prior to 1994 are comprehensively captured in a National Commission of Higher Education (NCHE) report (1996). The report reveals that, even after 1994, the higher educational establishment was still underpinned by characteristics of the old institutional dispensation, in that it carried with it the following deficiencies:

- There was a chronic mismatch between higher education's output and the needs of a modernising economy. Discriminatory practices gave limited access to black students and women into fields such as science, engineering, technology and commerce, which has been detrimental to economic and social development.
- There was a strong inclination towards a closed system of discipline-specific approaches and programmes that led to inadequately contextualised teaching, learning and research. The knowledge produced and disseminated was consistently insufficient to respond to the problems and needs of the African continent, the southern African region or the vast numbers of poor and rural people in our society. Similarly, teaching strategies and modes of delivery had not been adapted to meet the needs of surrounding communities, larger intakes of students and the diversity of lifelong learners.
- There had been a tendency for higher education institutions to replicate the ethical, racial and gender divisions of the wider society. This had limited

> the role of higher education in constructing a critical civil society with a culture of tolerance, public debate and accommodation of differences and competing interests; neither had the higher education system as a whole contributed significantly to a democratic ethos and sense of citizenship defined around commitment to a common good (NCHE Report, 1996).

The deficiencies outlined above are revealing in that, at the time the NCHE report was compiled, higher education institutions were fundamentally flawed in terms of deficiencies that inhibited their potential to meet and play roles in the reconstruction and nation-building imperatives of a democratic South Africa. Furthermore, the higher education system was positioned as an expert-oriented and exclusive entity that, by its hegemonic nature and domineering role, served as the main site of the transmission of an effective **dominant culture**. This limited the possibilities of it unleashing an **emancipatory praxis** that is so critical in the context of a transforming South Africa. This hegemonic orientation of educational institutions had the effect of permeating relations within institutions and between institutions and local communities. It had further degenerated into **hostile** and **apprehensive** power relations between the **subaltern** and the **dominant groupings**, namely between the hegemonic higher education institutions and local communities.

The historical deficiencies and hegemonic orientation of the South African higher education system induced a quest to reposition higher education with the purpose of putting in place a model that would respond to the transformational imperatives of the country.

2.2.1 Towards a repositioned higher education system

In the wake of the foregoing deficiencies, there was a need to reposition the higher education system in the country and put in place a new system characterised by visible and increased participation by all sectors of society; by greater institutional response to progressive policy imperatives and by a new set of co-operative relations and partnerships between higher education institutions and the broader society (NCHE Report, 1996; Lazarus, J. 2004). This imperative suggested that the positioning of higher education institutions as centres of dominant power had to be curtailed in one way or another, by implementing a progressive higher education system that decentralised its power.

The perpetuation and upholding of exclusive and domineering principles that were derived from the educational distortions of the apartheid social order had to be purged as a means of making way for a new system of higher education. The new system should be characterised by increased participation by all sectors of society, as well as by greater institutional responsiveness to the moral, social and economic demands of a transforming South Africa (NCHE Report, 1996; Lazarus, J. 2004). The envisaged repositioning of higher education institutions was conceived along the lines of community engagement and specifically by the integration of a strategy such as **service learning**.

2.3 Background and context of service learning practice at higher education institutions

A programme for the Transformation of Higher Education document (Education Draft White Paper 3) (1997), the legislative driver towards the repositioning of the South African higher education system from a mode of deficiency to a responsive mode, laid the foundation for making community service an integral and core part of higher education in South Africa (JET, 2000). As revealed in a service learning capacity building manual for academic staff, the White Paper (1997) promoted a transformed higher education system that:

- demonstrates social responsibility and commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes;
- pursues the goal of promoting and developing social responsibility and awareness among students of the role of higher education in social and economic development, through community service programmes;
- shows receptiveness to the growing interest in community service programmes for students and accommodates in principle support for feasibility studies and pilot programmes that explore the potential of community service in higher education.

The foregoing White Paper legislative directives resulted in the integration and practice of service learning at a significant number of higher education institutions. The real practice of service learning in South African higher education is, however, traceable to the initiatives by the Joint Education Foundation (JET), through the

establishment of a Community Service in Higher Education Project in 1977, funded by the Ford Foundation. The project was conceived in response to higher education institutional attempts to link community service with the core functions of teaching, learning and research. The motivation to harmonise these core functions of higher education institutions is similarly traceable from the broader South African nation building and transformation agenda, which required various role players in the country, including higher education, to play visible roles in the redress of inequalities and discriminatory practices that were inherited from the past social order (Perold, 1998).

2.3.1 Defining service learning

As illustrated in chapter one, service learning has historically been defined from a variety of perspectives. This study prefers to locate the definition of service learning within three universal definitions that are considered appropriate and progressive in accordance with the purpose of the study. Bringle and Hatcher (1996), define service learning as:

> *…a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organised service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. Unlike extracurricular voluntary service, service learning is a course-based service experience that produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related to course material through reflection activities such as directed writings, small group discussions, and class presentations* (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p.2).

In the *Criteria for Institutional Audits (*HEQC) (2004), service learning is defined as:

> *applied learning which is directed at specific community needs and is integrated into an academic programme and curriculum. It could be credit-bearing and assessed, and may or may not take place in a work environment* (CHE, 2004, p. 26).

Eyler and Giles (1999), cited from the national service learning clearinghouse, define service learning as:

> *…a form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students work with others through a process of applying what they are learning to community problems and, at the same time, reflecting upon their experience as they seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves* (www.servicelarning.org/welcome_to_service-learning/service_learning-is/inde...p.2).

From all the foregoing definitions, it is clear that service learning is perceived as being coordinated between institutions of higher education, or community service programmes and the community. It is seen as a practice that helps foster civic responsibility, and is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of students, or the education components of the community service programme in which the participants are enrolled. It also provides structured time for students or participants to critically reflect on the service experience (National and Community Service Trust Act, 1993; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Essential Service Learning Resource Brochure, 2002).

The engagement in service learning involves individual participants in activities that combine both community service and academic learning. Furthermore, it is regarded as a teaching method that combines community service with academic instruction

through its focus on critical, reflective thinking, thus benefiting communities. In this way, service learning programmes are designed so as to involve students in structured and organised community service in order to address local needs, while developing their academic skills, sense of civic responsibility and commitment to the community (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

Due to its structured and academic nature, service learning thus becomes a credit-bearing, educational experience, in which students participate in an organised service activity that is intended to meet identified community needs, while allowing for preparation and reflection on the service activity. Such preparation and reflective practice is intended to enable students to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline and its purpose, and, subsequently, an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

The HEQC definition of service learning (CHE, 2004) suggests that service learning should not be seen as a replacement of other forms of learning and teaching. Rather, the approach is a complementary one and is intended to augment the range of strategies available to achieve excellence in teaching and learning.

Gottlieb and Robinson (2002) are of the opinion that service learning has the capacity to offer the greatest potential for fostering **civic responsibility**, because it provides opportunities for students to **critically engage** directly in their communities and meet community needs, while enhancing their course work. They further observe that, through this student-community engagement, students purposefully explore what civic responsibility means and develop an understanding of the importance of the benefits, while embracing the concept.

The assumptions emerging from all the above definitions are that there is a sense of dual **benefit** in the **student-community engagement**. However, the question still remains regarding the **nature** and **essence** of this engagement. As a means of unraveling the mutuality purpose, Morton (1997) advocates a distinction between service learning positioned within the ethics of **charity,** service learning executed within the lines of a **project** and service learning situated within the dictates of **social justice.** This study refers to the latter as **socio-academic justice** in order to emphasise the mutuality element.

Morton (1997) probes these ideas further by posing the question as to whether a genuine relationship really exists between higher education institutions and those that are served through service learning. Are the community members positioned as collaborators and partners, or objects of our inquiry and our largesse … do such institutions see themselves as stakeholders in a mutual project on common ground … or are they engaged primarily in projects of self-fulfillment? Do they see themselves as being **in** the community — at best **visitors** or at worst **intruders** — or **of** the community — that is, are they aspiring to if not holding a kind of **membership,** then at the very least being a **joint stakeholder** in the community's well being (Morton, 1997)?

The preceding questions and attempts to answer them carry important implications for essentialising the positionality of higher education institutions in pursuit of service learning as a strategy to engage with local communities. Service learning could be carried out in a sense of being **in** the community as sole **benefactors** bringing expert knowledge and a **bag full of academic answers** to the exclusively and perhaps

unilaterally defined needs of local communities (charity), or in a sense of being part **of** the community (academic-social justice). In the latter sense, service learning translates to an academic strategy that collaboratively engages communities in the identification and definition of needs with the purpose of creating a **mutual benefiting** engagement, thus positioning service learning as a strategy towards social transformation, social empowerment, social usefulness and meaningfulness. These differentiating levels of interpretation are discussed in detail in section 2.4.

The conceptual tension emerging from the concepts of **charity, project** and **socio-academic justice** provides three contradictory levels and/or positioning that can be used by higher education institutions to (de)construct their relationships with those they purport to serve. The three paradoxical levels can be used as measurements and/or indicators to (re)position local communities, either in terms of **respected collaborators and partners** (socio-academic justice) in service learning pursuits, or in terms of **objects** (charity and project sense) of service learning intentions and academic inquiries (teaching, learning and research). Most importantly, they serve as measurements and/or indicators of the distribution of power in the relationship between higher education institutions and their community partners.

2.3.2 Significance of the differentiated discussion of service learning

The differentiated discussion of service learning (charity, project and socio-academic justice) serves to unravel the postulations of academic writers and scholars on the discourse of service learning. It also establishes **themes** to be used as **progressive models** of service learning in a developing context, which serve as **'good practice'**

frameworks, self-evaluation guides and substantiations of exposing power imbalances and ideological influences in the implementation of service learning. These differentiations facilitate the sifting out and disclosure of embedded contradictions in different positionalities of service learning, eventually providing clarity and a well-thought of positioning of service learning that is used as a preferred framework in this study.

2.3.3 Service learning in relation to positionality (positioning discourse)

Considering that service learning has a history of being operationalised and considered relative to some preferential ideological hegemonic positioning (Malecki, 2000), this study links the foregoing discussion as demonstrated in chapter one, to probe whether the outcry against service learning could be a guise for simply complying with issues of policy, with little or no intention of contributing to issues of community empowerment. Such an approach relegates service learning to the status of maintaining historically acquired academic privileges. This study also investigated whether the operationalisation of service learning is carried out as a welfare and/or charity disposed academic pursuit, or as a genuinely collaborative, mutually beneficial and empowering socio-academic justice pursuit. The latter level of positioning, as seen from the point of view of the **subaltern** (dominated discourse) representatives, regards service learning as a valuable academic mechanism that should be used to genuinely empower and improve the quality of life of disadvantaged communities within the catchment area of higher education institutions.

Positionality, as was explained in chapter one, refers to situationality or the practice of placing something in a context or set of situations and showing its connections. Consistent with the operational definition provided in chapter one, the concept investigates the relational process between higher education institutions and communities. Furthermore, it puts into perspective the contradictory and incongruous levels of such localisation with regard to claims and attributions made by higher education institutions regarding their position in relation to surrounding communities in the context of service learning. The essence of this understanding is that higher education practices are always **situated** in terms of their relationship with local communities, and teaching, research and service activities are carried out by **positioned** actors working in/between all kinds of **locations** and **relationships** (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Hartsock, 1987; Harraway, 1988).

The view advanced here is that positionality, as attested by the findings and contradictions highlighted in chapter four, tends to locate higher education institutions and traditional role players (lecturers, students and researchers) within the dictates of their ideological preferences and orientations, thus rendering them epistemologically biased in terms of their interactions with other social players. Simply put, who they are and the kind of ideological preferences and ideological inclinations they have, tend to influence what they know, understand and perceive of others in the social milieu (Cook, 2005).

The findings and contradictions highlighted in chapter four confirm that, like other social beings, higher education players tend to live much of their lives in their preferred epistemologies. They have their own life experiences, beliefs, historical,

educational and economic experiences and preferences that factor into their positionalities. These ideological preferences and inclinations therefore position them within different modes of execution in their practice of service learning.

A positioning discourse reflects on the imbalance of power between the historically hegemonic higher education services (academics, learners, researchers and policy makers) and the **disempowered** local communities and service providers who have a stake in higher education (Takacs, 2002). The discourse of positionality challenges the world of academia and perceives it as failing to address issues about the disadvantaged and disempowered, from the voice of the disadvantaged. The discourse compels the world of academia to rate and position itself on issues of class, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality, and to further rate and position itself in relation to social, political, historical and economic conditions of its milieu. This rating and positioning should ultimately translate to a means of 'committing class suicide' on the part of academia.

The kind of rating and positioning adopted by higher education institutions is crucial to understanding the subjectivity and/or objectivity of academics, learners, researchers and policy makers. It assists us to understand their biases and assumptions in their interactions with local communities. It provides us with the lens of unraveling how higher education institutions understand, define and relate to their catchment areas. It probes whether the catchment area is understood and defined in terms of fixed identities, or in terms of its location within shifting networks of relationships which can be analysed and changed by experts from the world of academia (St. Louis, 2002). In addition, the positioning discourse argues that education, learning and

service learning should be seen as strategies to combat oppression and exclusion. Education and learning should work to empower all people, not only those who can 'understand' academic jargon (Takacs, 2002).

It is also important to note that understanding the concept of positionality has the effect of enabling us to relate well to issues of reciprocity (issues of power relations), intimacy, and locus of control in a focused way, so as to facilitate understanding of the core pillars of service learning, namely preparation, action, reflection and evaluation as they manifest themselves or are operationalised at various levels of complexity (Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005).

2.3.4 The discourse of positionality in relation to margin and centre descriptors

As shown in chapter one, the practice of power relations in higher education has, over the years positioned people, and this includes local communities, in the execution of academic practices such as service learning, research and policy development. As a result of this positioning, it has become a predisposition, for example, to refer to people as belonging to the **centre** or the **margins**. Researchers, policy developers, lecturers and learners alike have positioned themselves in terms of preferable epistemologies and have positioned 'others' in terms of making academic inquiries and assumptions about the nature of their relationships with others and the world. The **margin-centre dichotomy** as evidenced in the world of academia is useful in terms of analysing positionality as a construct to determine the disproportionality of the locus of power in **socio-academic** relationships.

The margin-centre dichotomy is sketched comprehensively by Hooks (1984) who observes that those in the margin and centre are often very aware of their positionality in relation to the others. She further observes that those in the centre tend not to realise the power dynamics as much, because they are the beneficiaries of the outcomes of power relations, and as a result they tend to perpetuate the marginalisation of those who are in the margin. Furthermore, she observes that those in the margin either find ways to join those in the centre or resort to accepting that they will never be able to be part of the centre (Hooks, 1984).

As proposed in chapter one, positionality, in terms of the margin-centre dichotomy, is therefore regarded as some kind of a mobility from one position to the other – once those who perceive themselves to be on the margin begin to perceive of themselves as being in a position of inferiority, they then strive for some place and acceptance in the centre, which is positioned as a locus of superiority. This dichotomy enables us to position higher education transformatory practices and curriculum repositioning as being carried out by centered, biased and theoretically positioned practitioners. It also enables us to critically investigate the genuineness of pronouncements about higher education engagements in service learning – to ask questions as to whether engagements with communities and service partners are carried out in relation to a centre versus margin type of engagement, with the purpose of benefiting the centre to the disadvantage of the margin.

2.3.5 Implications of the margin-centre dichotomy for service learning practice

The margin-centre dichotomy reflects two positions at universities wherein the practice of service learning might be located, namely whether it occurs within the centre-oriented position or within the margin-inclined position. These two alternatives serve as vehicles toward positioning and understanding the actual intentions of higher education institutions in pursuit of service learning as a strategy to engage in with local communities. They also serve as a means to investigate whether higher education institutions, in their pronouncements about progressive interactions with communities, have become the means by which **structural inequalities** are hidden behind the notions of 'civic responsibility' and 'community engagement and involvement', which are nothing more than **patronage, charity** and **welfare** issues (Harn, 2003).

2.4 Different positionalities of service learning

As a measure of probing whether the outcry against service learning could be a guise for simply complying with issues of policy, with little or no intention of contributing to issues of community empowerment, this section explores the different positionalities of service learning. This section identifies three levels of service learning positioning as a measure of unraveling conceptual tensions and contradictions underpinning the practice of service learning at the selected higher education institutions.

The first level is service learning as a **charity** as influenced by neo-apartheid and/or neo-colonial theoretical postulations. The second level is service learning as a **reformist** academic pursuit (**project** purpose), as influenced by neo-liberal luminaries such as Dewey (1933 & 1938). The third level is a **counter-hegemonic** and **emancipatory** positioning that sees service learning as a **socio-academic justice** pursuit, as influenced by such luminaries as Morton and a host of emancipatory critical discourse scholars (Morton**,** 1995, 1997; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997; Keene & Colligan, 2004). The intention of this study is to investigate whether the operationalisation of service learning is as a welfare and/or charity disposed academic pursuit, as a reformist and project-oriented activity that is not sustainable and benefits only students, is pursued along the lines of both charity and socio-economic justice, or is a genuinely collaborative, mutually beneficial and empowering academic practice that seeks to accomplish social justice.

2.4.1 Service learning at a charity level

The discussion of service learning at a **charity level** is best carried out if preceded by a definition of charity and localisation of this definition in relation to service learning as an academic strategy to engage in with local communities. This discussion is intended to provide a deepened understanding of the erroneous nature of opting for this positioning. The point of this analysis is to facilitate the deconstruction and rescaling of academic-community relations in accordance with the demands of unrestrained, inclusive and progressive academic practice as it relates to service learning as an academic strategy to foster civic engagement (Morton**,** 1995, 1997; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997; Keene & Colligan, 2004).

2.4.1.1 Defining charity

Charity is defined as a voluntary act of giving to those in need, some kind of alms giving, a demonstration of benevolence, tolerance or kindness to those who are in need. In this context, a charity organisation or institution is one that shows tolerance in judging others, and gives voluntarily to fellow human beings as a measure of kindness and/or benevolence, thus providing short-term relief for those circumstances that triggered this charitable purpose (Moore, 1997; http://www.cdi.gov.au/report/cdi_chap2.htm).

Franklin (2000) hints that the concept of charity finds its roots in the religious practice of giving alms, that charity is **ameliorative** and thus lacks an **empowering** thrust. The writer further observes that the essence of charity lies in its nature to acknowledge that all is **not right** in the community; yet it does not create conditions for the examination of the wrongs, nor does it intend to position itself to challenge the sources of the wrongs. This kind of understanding suggests to us then that charity is in essence **non-empowering.**

Franklin further notes that the concept of charity serves as a means to **smoothen** the socio-economic stumbling blocks and brutalities of the world. The smoothening does not, however, have long lasting effects. The stumbling blocks and brutalities are smoothened in the short term, but they soon rebound. The smoothening approach has the apparent effect of focussing on the symptoms of the socio-economic brutalities, but has no sustainability and instead can fake the purging of such negativities. Apart

from its religious point of reference, charity has also emerged as a consequence of the dominant group's tendency to get rid of their privileged guilt by demonstrating benevolence and generosity to the dominated (*ibid*., p.1).

2.4.1.2 Institutionalised charity practices in the context of service learning

Institutionally, the foregoing definition of charity translates to a condition where service learning is practised by higher education institutions to express **tolerance** to local communities, and to **voluntarily** provide symptomatic, window dressing service to such communities as a means of expressing kindness and/or benevolence in the form of a non-lasting healing intention. This service learning positionality, that was made obvious earlier in chapter one, and is referred to as a charitable purpose of service learning in this section, describes the pursuit of service learning in which the power of the higher education institution is at its maximum, and as such positions university-community engagement in terms of a non-empowering engagement giving very little recognition to the contribution of the local community. It affords little value in recognising them as important partners towards the advancement of the cause of service learning. Higher education institutions operating within this mode tend to understand and relate to local communities from a technicist point of view, and a big gap exists between the knowledgeable higher education institution and the fallen community (poor, ignorant, needy, less fortunate, etc.) (Morton, 1995, 1997; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997; Keene & Colligan, 2004; Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005).

The foregoing positionality and charitable sense of service learning is further exposed by Keene and Colligan (2004) who argue that:

> *a university by its very nature operates in an elevated position, materially, knowledge and know-how, wise, etc and thus to assume otherwise is an impossibility or at worst a pretense, a fake and a kind of dishonesty. Because the University staff and its students now constitute a different class, possessors of material wealth and exposure and immersion in 'higher' forms of knowledge, going down to the community and pretending to be on the same wavelength and socio-economic status is a lie* (p.8).

The notion of a charitable purpose of service learning carries with it negativities and illogical annulments in the area of constructing acceptable, respectful and equitable socio-academic relationships. It is a kind of understanding that positions service learning as a charity and/or welfare academic quest, in which traditional participants in an academic activity (lecturers, researchers, students and policy developers) are seen to be 'visiting' the so-called poor, ignorant, needy and less-fortunate local community. They carry with them bags full of **academic answers** to dispense with some superfluous and/or unwanted artefacts, as a means of getting rid of the **symptoms** of socio-economic stumbling blocks. This practice is also intended to rid the university of its **privileged guilt** by demonstrating benevolence and generosity to the underprivileged and dominated communities (Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005).

2.4.1.3 Implications for the preparatory phase at the level of charity

In essence, there are four critical pillars of service learning, namely preparation, reflection, action and evaluation. A successful service learning programme involves well conducted preparatory activities by lecturers and students. It is during this phase that students are prepared in terms of discussing their objectives and opportunities to

engage with local communities. This kind of lecturer-student interface empowers and equips students with the necessary **knowledge**, **approach** and **attitudes** for the envisaged engagement with local communities. The preparatory phase explores various levels of positioning students in relation to local communities and identifies various approaches of defining and understanding community needs It provides students with the institutional epistemologies and theoretical positioning needed to perform the service activity.

Considering that the practice of service learning involves taking students from the isolation of lecture halls and locates them in a community setting that they often find new and are unfamiliar with, it is considered vital to prepare them (students), theoretically and otherwise, to be able to handle such encounters. As Keene and Colligan (2004) observe:

> *Inasmuch as students need to learn about service learning they also need to learn about cultural difference, power, alterity, positionality, ethnocentrism and their own deeply-held assumptions about difference, they also need to learn a lot about themselves before they can use the tools they are given* (p.10).

This understanding suggests and propagates a construction of **social consciousness** and **reciprocity responsiveness** on the part of students. It reminds us that, if service learning is practised for a **charitable purpose,** it facilitates the creation of conditions and opportunities for learners to explore the personal and individual benefits and/or gains of service learning, as opposed to examining **larger social benefits** in the pursuit of service learning as a strategy to engage local communities. At a charity level, the preparatory phase creates conditions where students explore methodologies

of engaging local communities in the capacity of ‘visitors’ to the so-called poor, ignorant, needy and less fortunate localities. This is likely to decipher into an operational context that causes learners to develop biased and **erroneous models** of relating with communities, when they are cautioned about:

> *…the dangers of going into such negatively conceived notions of conditions within communities (disadvantaged, poor, horrendous, ignorant, needy, unbearable, less fortunate and perhaps desperate), that certain kinds of dressing as an example may attract say mugging or rape or some other criminality usually associated with poverty, desperation and poor/disadvantaged communities. Cautioning them about imposing measures of ensuring that insurance forms are properly completed and submitted in case of some anticipated trouble within such negatively construed communities. Preparation at this level will emphasise what the students from the university should/ will benefit out of the service learning exercise* (Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005, p.9).

The foregoing discussion suggests that preparation at the charity level of service learning centres on measures of protection of the interests of university staff and students, without due regard for local communities. It suggests a kind of tinkering with the lives of people within the catchment area of the institution, without effecting improvement of the quality of their lives. In this context, the preparatory and/or planning process of allocating slots for community ‘visits’ eventually translates into the shortest possible periods of time being spent in the communities. As a result, because of the resourceful nature of higher education institutions, money or material presents are handed out as a gesture of benevolence and/or kindness to cultivate and maintain patterns of dependency. In short, preparation is superfluous and limited only to cosmetic and/or surface issues (Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005).

To conclude the discussion on this matter Mahlomaholo and Matobako (2005) paraphrase Keene and Colligan who note that:

> *CSL has a well developed vocabulary for partnership and its own set of best practice that suggest communities should have control in setting the agenda in their university collaboration….often our students enter the field and engage people as subjects….rather than as meaningful partners. Such irony is predicted by simple logistics of short-term class projects which work against the kind of sincere relationship building that would allow us to be more <u>of</u> than <u>in</u> the community doing our work* (p.9).

2.4.2 Service learning at a project (moderate) level

At the level of a project, service learning is considered to have risen above the level of a voluntary act of giving to those in need (alms giving). It is deemed to have transcended the demonstration of **patronage**, **benevolence**, **tolerance** and **voluntarily** provision of academic service which characterises service learning at the level of charity. At this level the higher education institution envisions service learning with honest and progressive intentions of synchronising institutional resources with the needs of local communities. As observed by Mahlomaholo and Matobako (2004)

> *Within this level, the higher education institution wants to become one with the less fortunate communities, to operate on the same wavelength with them, be emphatic to their experiences and genuinely looking forward to bettering the lives of communities* (p.9).

This level is, however, considered to be moderate in the sense that it borders somewhere between a **charity mode** of service learning and a **socio-academic justice** mode of service learning. The moderate positioning of this level is derived from the observation that it is restricted to service learning as a strategy for harmonising institutional resources with the pressing needs of local communities only on paper and in people's hearts. In its good intentions and theorisation about service learning, the higher education institutions operating within this mode do not systematically involve local communities in the various stages of executing service learning. In fact, wherever this happens, it is carried out on an **ad-hoc** basis. This level of commitment translates to a state of affairs where the benefits of service learning are mutual, but have no sustainability as a result of the non-involvement of local communities. It also has the potential of service learning being reduced to 'lofty' ideas that remain on paper only or in the hearts of university people. In this way, service learning translates only to a means of giving very little recognition to the contribution of the local community. It affords very little value in recognising them as important partners towards the advancement of the cause of service learning (Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005).

2.4.2.1 Implications for the preparatory phase at the level of a project

As was the case with service learning at the level of charity, service learning practised along the lines of a **project purpose** is also likely to create conditions and opportunities for learners and lecturers to explore personal and individual benefits and/or gains of service learning, as opposed to examining **larger social benefits** in the pursuit of service learning as a strategy to engage local communities. As evidenced in

chapter one, preparatory phase at this level creates conditions where students explore methodologies of engaging local communities in capacities of ‘visitors’ to so-called needy and less fortunate localities, carrying with them bags full of **academic answers** to dispense with some superfluous and/or unwanted artefacts.

The project purpose of service learning at the preparatory phase is also likely to decipher into an operational context that causes learners to develop biased and erroneous models of relating with communities. They are cautioned about issues such as completing their service learning in time, as a project is time-bound, and that they will need to ‘visit’ communities in their capacities as knowledgeable and budding experts. Lastly, such preparation focuses on the symptoms of problems in their local communities, instead of rather critically reflecting on the bigger picture, namely the socio-economic diseases that created those symptoms.

2.4.3 Service learning at a socio-academic justice level

In line with the reflections made in chapter one, social justice purpose of service learning in the context of this study involves an enhancement of progressive engagements and interactions of higher education institutions with their catchment areas. It is a kind of socio-academic relationship that is informed by such principles as reciprocity, reverence, inclusivity and empowerment practices, and serves to ensure that such principles guide the operationalisation and carrying out of service learning in a **socially conscious, inclusive** and **participatory** manner. In this kind of positioning, higher education institutions are able to rise to levels of being

indisputably **responsive** to the socio-economic and political **imperatives** and **imaginations** of national transformation and reconstruction initiatives.

At this level of engagement, as Mahlomaholo and Matobako (2005) observe:

> *…the operationalisation and carrying out of service learning hinges around issues of "social justice" requiring expansions of focus from the poor to "structural conditions, mechanisms of structural violence, and the global forces that create poverty". The positioning of service learning is in terms of a reflection on achievements or lack of it in ' terms of sharing power with community partners and overtly challenging the dynamics of power, including those of the ivory tower'* (p 11.)

This kind of positioning stands in direct contrast to the charitable and project purposes of service learning, in that the power of the higher education institution is levelled at par with that of the catchment area. As a result, the university-community engagement translates to affording instances of equitable recognition of the contribution of local communities to the improvement of the quality of their lives. Furthermore, it attaches value in recognising them as important partners towards the advancement of the cause of service learning. Higher education institutions operating within this mode tend to understand and relate to local communities from a progressive, informed and non-technicist point of view. The gap between the knowledgeable higher education institution and the knowledge discharged from such communities is meaningfully bridged and, therefore, the relationship assumes a value-adding direction.

2.4.3.1 Implications for the preparatory phase at the level of socio-academic justice

If service learning is carried out along the lines of **socio-academic justice,** it facilitates the creation of conditions and opportunities where learners explore broader social benefits, as opposed to personal and individual benefits and/or gains of service learning. Preparation entails a situation where students are sensitised to the importance of transcending self-centred aspirations of engagement with community partners, so as to progress to levels of **socially conscious, inclusive** and **participatory** aspirations. Such an approach repositions them as organic learners that are **responsive** to the socio-economic and political **imperatives** and **imaginations** of issues of national transformation and reconstruction initiatives taking place within their catchment area. As a socio-academic justice pursuit, preparation creates conditions where students will commit '**class suicide**' so as to be engaged in understanding the bigger picture – the disease and not the symptoms – that created the horrendous and appalling conditions that characterise local communities. They are equipped to explore appropriate models and methodologies of engaging local communities in the capacity of organic and equal partners. As Mahlomaholo and Matobako (2005) purport:

> …*service learning dictates that preparation should be of an exceptionally high quality, starting with a very intensive critical introspection covering such issues the real, genuine or apparent motive for wanting to be engaged with the community. How can one ensure that the community is empowered or at least not harmed by one's service learning participation? Preparation would handle such issues as how does one step off the high horse when it comes to service learning activities. Preparation is a very intense experience in anticipation of the*

> *negotiating of boundaries as we move into other people's space. Preparation is about humility, about learning "to question one's own privileged, priorities, and colonial baggage" and hence, is able to engage in a truly shared endeavour* (p.10).

Within the context of this understanding, preparation then translates into an empowering action for both the community and the students, thus making service learning a well-conceived and noble strategy for harmonising socio-academic relationships.

2.5 Comparable postulations from the concept of reciprocity

The differentiation of service learning along the lines of positioning has also gone beyond the three levels identified in the preceding section. Some scholars argue that service learning should be seen and understood from its basic principle of reciprocity. Others argue for a level of understanding that sees it not as a neutral activity, but rather as being associated with the social, economic and political developments that envelop its operationalisation.

The principle of reciprocity is considered to be central and obligatory for the successful operationalisation of a service learning programme. The centrality of this principle is derived from the observation that it carries with it related concepts of respect, approbation and tolerance for those regarded as members of the triad arrangement in service learning. In fact, the concept of reciprocity is considered to be central in promoting a dialectical and interdependent relationship between students, service providers and local communities in the practice of service learning (Porter & Monard, 2001).

The principle of reciprocity reflects a situation where the university (lecturers, students and researchers), the service partners and community partners are perceived to be equally worthwhile in realising the purpose of service learning. It translates to a situation where there is respect, trust and interdependence amongst and between the server and those served (http://www.coop.ucf.edu/?go=aboutservice). It is, furthermore, imperative to note that the principle of reciprocity enables students to discontinue seeing themselves as a separate entity, but rather as members of a community and broader society who are just operating on a different terrain, but have some organic relationship with the needs of the community. This principle also serves as a measurement and/or indicator to enable students to perceive local communities as being **respected collaborators and partners** (socio-academic justice) in service learning.

This level of understanding enables local communities to be included in the planning processes of service learning, as well as in the identification of needs which will form the agenda/programme of service activities. Porter and Monard (2001) observe that students and academics are perceived as colleagues as they nurture mutuality by fostering respect and collaboration between themselves and community partners. They generate meaning by effectively linking formal reflection and hands-on engagement. Interdependence between constituent elements is very important for an effective service learning programme (Porter & Monard, 2001).

2.5.1 Postulations of critical emancipatory theorists

Critical emancipatory discourse presents itself as another relevant and preferable framework in developing a theoretical base for service learning. The concept of critical emancipatory discourse offers service learning practice a refreshing approach to examine more fully the relations of power and ideological positioning between the **dominant** and the **subaltern** groups and the function of language and/or text in the reproduction of social structures (Billig, 1979; van Dijk, 1997, 1998).

In an effort to systematise the conceptualisation of this kind of examination, it becomes more appropriate to unbundle this concept within the context of research methodology. Critical emancipatory discourse analysis is packaged as a research method for approaching and critically thinking about a problem under investigation. Some scholars tend to avoid classifying it either as quantitative or qualitative, but rather as an approach for questioning the basic assumptions of both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Billig, 1979; van Dijk, 1997, 1998).

This methodology is further perceived not as providing tangible answers to problems based on scientific research, but as enabling access to the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind a verbal statement or written text. It is further regarded as a method that enables researchers to **reveal the hidden intentions** of a text or choice of a particular method to interpret that text. In this particular context it can be regarded as nothing more than a **deconstructive reading** and **interpretation** of a problem or text (Billig, 1979; van Dijk, 1997, 1998).

Studies about Critical Emancipatory Discourse have discovered that many of our social practices are imbued by ideologies. Individual social actors and groups alike may exhibit various forms of ideologies such as exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination in interaction with others. Class ideologies can affect many aspects of the interactions between affluent groupings and/or affluent establishments, and deprived communities. It is also likely that people of different educational backgrounds often exhibit discriminatory ideologies. Professionals and/ or intellectuals have their typical professional and/or intellectual ideologies, and they are likely to exhibit such ideologies as they interact with those regarded as not belonging to their social grouping (Billig, 1979; van Dijk, 1997, 1998).

It is clear that as soon as social actors organise themselves as members of social groups, they are likely to bare their ideologies in their actions and interactions. Differentiated group members may typically marginalise, exclude or problematise the members of other dominated groups, at times in subtle ways. They may do so by paying less attention to them; by not admitting them to their intellectual spaces; by negating and not accommodating their views and by exhibiting arrogant, domineering and paternalistic tendencies as they interact with them (*ibid*).

The foregoing postulation of critical emancipatory discourse has profound implications for understanding relationships in the practice of service learning at higher education institutions. Higher education institutions are likely to exhibit various forms of ideologies such as partiality, exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination in interaction with members of local communities. Their ideological positioning can affect many aspects of the interactions between themselves and those

communities that they might regard as the poor, ignorant, needy and less fortunate. In the practice of service learning, lecturers and/or students have their typical academic and/or intellectual ideologies which they are likely to exhibit as they interact with those regarded as not belonging to their exclusive world of academia. Typically, as shown in previous sections, they are likely to marginalise, exclude or problematise the members of local communities, which in some instances, is done in subtle ways.

2.5.2 Ideas from the discourse of knowledge production and critical emancipatory discourse

The concept of knowledge production in relation to the complexity of academic hegemony has, over the years, dominated intellectual discussions the world over. A more interestingly interrogative and sifting of the ideological hegemony theme is presented by Gramsci (1971), cited in Giddens (1997), who argues that, although the concept of **ideology** is generally seen as referring simply to a system of ideas, it is also closely tied to the concept of **power** (Giddens, 1997).

In this context, Giddens (1997), quoting Gramsci, defines ideology as “shared ideas or beliefs, which serve to justify the interests of the dominant group”. He further notes that the linkage of ideology to power is that it legitimises the differential power that groups hold and as such it distorts the real situation that people find themselves in (Gramsci 1971; Giddens, 1997; Burke, 1999).

A similar postulation is found in the Gramscian concept of hegemony, which entails the permeation of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has

the effect of supporting the status quo (domination) in power relations. In this sense, hegemony is seen to translate to a categorising principle that becomes diffused by the process of socialisation into every area of people's daily lives. Gramsci (1971) detects the menace that this positionality brings in relationships. The danger lies in the fact that the prevailing consciousness becomes internalised by the subaltern, local communities, with the potential of degenerating into what is commonly called **common sense,** to an extent that the philosophy, culture and morality of the dominant group tends to be regarded as the natural order of things (Gramsci, 1971).

Gramsci notably warns that educational institutions such as universities could fit into the hegemonic category, as some of an institution's practices are quite clearly coercive (compulsory education, the national curriculum, national standards and qualifications), whilst the practices and offering such as a hidden curriculum are not (Gramsci, 1971).

2.5.3 Implications for South Africa

Apartheid South Africa did not escape the foregoing contestations. The last two centuries, for instance, have witnessed an unfolding of the conceptual tensions between the two contradicting discourses (hegemony of universal knowledge vis-a-vis recognition of local/indigenous knowledge) between higher education (which assumed the dominant identity) and civil society (which assumed the identity of the subaltern).

Prior to the advent of democracy in south Africa, higher education institutions were regarded as restricted confinements and ivory tower establishments for conducting scientific and expert oriented inquiries and, as such, knowledge production activities were seen as exclusive privileges carried out by those who had gone through rigorous academic processes and programmes that prepared them professionally to carry out such inquiries. Some scholars, however, hold that knowledge production as carried out exclusively by '**experts**' at higher education institutions, has a tendency to assume a fixed and unchanging orientation and that the emphasis on the notion of expertise that seeks to uncover a pre-existing universal reality ignores the changing and dynamic nature of the social context (reality).

Furthermore, the deterministic use of the notion of expertise is seen to ignore the importance of the **interactive** and **reciprocal** nature of knowledge creation. The interactive approach purports that research, teaching and learning are no longer self-contained, **quasi-monopolistic practices** carried out in relative institutional isolation. It needs to be emphasised that higher education institutions are only a few amongst the many actors involved in knowledge production, and that this interaction can also be triggered off in the catchment area of higher education institutions (*ibid*.).

2.5.4 Drawing linkages from studies of higher education and intellectual power

The role of higher education institutions in the context of local and socio-economic developments provides a good premise for the analysis of the reconfiguration of power. This assertion is derived from the conceptualisation of institutions of higher education as **spaces of power** and, therefore, intentionally transcends the

conventional perception of higher education as an entity that is an internally consolidated domain to be understood as being exclusive from other organs of civil society (Greenstein, 2003).

The concept of academic culture, like other forms of social dispositions, has been used as a tool to reproduce inequalities and exercise subtle dominance against the subaltern. The concept has, for instance, been defined from varying approaches, and such definitions are carried out based on ideological preferences. Williams (2000), for example, defines academic culture as higher education systems and discursive practices through which a higher education order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored. Students, academics and researchers, therefore, tend to regard academic culture as more than merely a system, but rather an exclusive and wholly lived process.

Central to these academic practices is the concept of academic language and terminology. William (1994) argues that language assumes two kinds of consciousness, these being a practical consciousness and actual social practice. He sees language as practically impinging on the struggle to confront hegemony in the thread of the self. This observation is strengthened by Bakhtin (1998), who purports that language should be seen as an activity rather than simply an expression of formal systems.

In further exploring the relationship between language and academic culture, Bakhtin (1998) reminds us that colonial cultural intrusion brought with it the imperialist language, certainly as formal outer speech in all dominant domains of public life,

which carried over into post-colonial societies. What becomes evident in most post-colonial societies is that there is simultaneously an authoritative discourse and an internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1998).

2.5.5 Drawing linkages from differentiated intellectual discourses

As evidenced in earlier sections, the process of defining the concept of **intellectuals** has always been loaded with inconsistencies and contradictions. At the helm of these inconsistencies are questions that centre around the issue of whether the definition of intellectuals can and should be kept radically separate from moral, social and political questions. Some scholars argue that it has always been known that the pursuit of social knowledge involves not only intellectual questions, but socio-economic and political questions as well (Wallerstein, 1996).

In the contemporary context there has been extensive discussion about how the foregoing questions relate to each other. In particular the debate has, for at least two centuries, centered around the issue of whether one can and should keep radically separate intellectual, economic and political questions from one other. Either the term **intellectual** is treated as implicit and rarely elaborated or, at the other extreme, painstaking care is poured into producing abstractions that are hardly ever used beyond the context for which they were postulated. The literature on intellectuals abounds in such definitions of the concept. To the man on the street, or even to the intellectuals themselves, the term hardly requires much elaboration (Wallerstein, 1996).

Some kind of shared meaning suffices in day-to-day activities. An observable exception, as in the present case, is in any serious study of intellectuals, in which the contemporary term imposes all kinds of abstractions, definitions and complexities of meaning. The attempt of this section is not to straighten out the problem, but to problematise and theorise further. It probably raises more questions and probes further, rather than answering them. It is, however, hoped that through this exercise defining and categorising intellectuals will become slightly easier.

A deeper illustration of the ideological inclination between intellectuals (service learning practitioners and learners) and community members is derived from Kellner (2000). He sees intellectuals in modern societies as conflicted beings with **contradictory social functions,** and thus locates them as belonging to different categories. One category is critical and/or oppositional intellectuals who focus their intellectual skills on denouncing existing injustices in societies and the abuse of power, and who agitate for truth, justice, progress and any other positive value that can change existing social ills (Kellner, 2000; Habermas, 1989). The other category is those who **reproduce the ideology of domination** by focusing their intellectual disposition on the legitimation of forms of class, race and gender domination and other forms of inequalities in modern societies. Those politically assigned intellectuals who serve the political purpose of defending and legitimating the existing discriminatory and exclusive social order belong to the latter category (http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/intellectualsnew technologies.pdf; Kellner, 2000; Habermas,1989).

Sartre (1975), on the other hand, notes that intellectuals waver between serving a **conservative** and a **progressive** function. At the one extreme, he perceives intellectuals as traditionally having been assigned the role of preserving and transmitting culture, thus often legitimating and fortifying the dominant ideologies and serving the interests of maintaining the existing social order. Present day intellectuals, Sartre (1975) elaborates, are increasingly becoming technicians of practical knowledge who are positioned to serve the technocratic function of devising efficient means to secure society's ends. This understanding positions intellectuals as playing an instrumental role in providing the intellectual means, ideas and technologies that will strengthen and streamline established societies (Sartre, 1975; Kellner, 2000).

For ease of reference and purposes of identity, the dominant discourse (traditional intellectuals) is represented by privileged and/or affluent academics, learners and researchers, and the subaltern (dominated) discourse is represented by community representatives. The organic (progressive) discourse is represented by those academics and learners who are perceived to have committed 'class suicide' (Gramsci, 1971; Fairclough, 1992). Each of these discourses is explored in the following subsections.

2.5.5.1 The dominant intellectual discourse

The dominant category exhibits the ideological inclination of those intellectuals who have been cushioned by vestiges of past exclusive, discriminatory and non-reciprocal academic practices, and have the tendency to interpret knowledge production in

negative, exclusive and less constructive and progressive terms, and most probably perceive the community and community structures alike to be unequal objects that they can selfishly use to advance their academic aspirations.

They furthermore claim to use **value-free** scientific enquiries as the lens through which higher educational transformation agenda and curriculum repositioning may be advanced. This category regards academic and intellectual practices as **expert-oriented** activities that can be carried out by those who have undergone extensive education and training, and have acquired qualifications that render them capable of engaging in such practices (Gramsci, 1971; Fairclough, 1992).

2.5.5.2 The dominated intellectual discourse

The dominated discourse category is perceived and prejudiced as not belonging to the **high-order and sophisticated** thinking category and can therefore not be partnered with, in practising any educative activities. Typically, this category is marginalised and excluded by members of the dominant groups, at times in subtle ways. The dominant group may carry out this exclusion and marginalisation by paying less attention to those belonging to the dominated category; by not admitting them to their **intellectual spaces**; by negating and not accommodating their views and by exhibiting arrogant, domineering and paternalistic tendencies as they interact with them. In fact, in most academic practices, this category is used as guinea-pigs to advance selfish academic interests of the dominant group (Billig, 1979; van Dijk, 1993, 1997, 1998).

2.5.5.3 The organic intellectual discourse

The organic discourse category has positioned itself as equal and respectful community partners who prefer to locate their intellectual and academic inputs (teaching learning and research) within the domain of emancipatory discourse, development practices and deconstructionism. They use these philosophies as the framework and lens through which they can advance the social transformation agenda by means of reciprocal academic practices such as teaching, learning and research.

A striking feature of this postulation is its power to interpret conditions, issues and events in favour of the subaltern. In fact, the community is seen as the organic pan from which scholastic practice derives its agenda. The problems, and indeed any measure of negativity that characterises communities, inform curriculum development processes. Equally, locally derived knowledge is afforded special recognition and space in carrying out academic business. In this way, contributions from the subaltern groupings are interpreted in positive terms and contribute to the empowering efforts of academia.

2.5.6 Drawing linkages with the concept of institutionalised hegemony

In order to unravel the complexity of the concept of hegemony, the themes of hegemonic institutions and institutionalised knowledge are investigated in this section. Boyd (1999) offers an interesting point of departure when she observes that higher education institutions are, by design, the main agencies of the transmission of an effective **dominant culture** (Western?). They are, therefore, hegemonic and have

the potential for limiting the possibilities of emancipatory praxis. This hegemonic orientation of educational institutions has had the effect of permeating relations within institutions, and has further degenerated into hostile power relations between the **dominant** and the **subaltern groupings**, that is, between the hegemonic higher education institutions and local communities respectively.

Boyd (1999) traces the theme of hegemony from the concept of cultural hegemony and regards the latter as a generally theoretical concept that situates Western cultural hegemony as a specific process within post-colonial societies. This Western-derived cultural hegemony has created dominant hegemonic processes that have disadvantaged people in the catchment areas of higher education institutions (the subaltern), that have marginalised the knowledge systems of the subaltern (indigenous knowledge systems), that have stifled creative thinking and, over and above, have devalued life meanings and values of the subaltern (Boyd, 1999).

These conditions necessitate the re-shaping of emergent intellectual formations in post-colonial societies so as to effect a break with Western (dominant) cultural hegemony. In this endeavour, educational institutions and institutionalised knowledge serve as important domains in which dominant hegemonic culture could be challenged (Boyd, 1999). But then, it needs to be asked as to what constitutes institutionalised knowledge?

Boyd (1999) parallels institutionalised knowledge along the following lines:

> *…formal and specialized knowledge that is developed and sustained in higher education, organized into disciplines and subjected to a process of rationalization. It should, however, be*

> *cautioned that this knowledge formation should not be seen as a fixed set of ideas or propositions that becomes mechanically employed by its agents. On the contrary, the transmission and reception of such should be understood to involve complex and often contradictory processes, and this also applies to hegemonic institutions* (Boyd, 1999, p.3).

It should be noted that, as a process in action, tensions are likely to develop between what is dominant and authoritatively acquired wisdom and another consciousness located in practical reality. Knowledge is continually adapted and even transformed by its interpreters. Over and above these observations, institutionalised knowledge, the full baggage of what constitutes legitimate knowledge within institutions, is not neutral nor is it in a passive relationship with the recipients and interpreters. It forms part of the cultural-intellectual process of selectivity, incorporation and exclusivity reproduced in these institutions (Boyd 1999).

2.5.7 Drawing linkages from the writings of van Wyk and van Gunten

Contemporary research studies indicate that interest in service learning as a field and as a philosophy, is multiplying, which indicates the need for a theoretical basis for service learning. Some scholars have already started tracing a theoretical base from van Wyk, van Gunten (2002) and other educational and social philosophers who are identified as relevant to the development of a theory of service learning, including learning from experience, reflective activity, citizenship, community and democracy.

Contemporary scholars like van Wyk and van Gunten (2002) have located the concept of service learning within current epistemologies, ideological bases, reflective critical studies and academic comments. They locate and interrogate theorisations about

service learning within the dichotomy of **counter-hegemonic** and **retrogressive** and/or **technicist** contexts of service learning. In so doing, most of them purport that, despite high levels of interest in civic matters within and among institutions of higher learning in service learning as a vehicle for the transformation of teaching and learning, the concept seems to be loosely used, under-theorised and, at times, disguised as a tool for the reproduction of hegemonic higher education practices (van Wyk; van Gunten, 2002).

In addition, they challenge academics at higher education institutions to position themselves as reflective practitioners, so as to critically understand and counter the hegemony of higher education practice and to promote a progressive service learning model of operationalisation. This kind of positioning is intended to influence the way academics think and produce understandings and critical engagements of service learning practices in their various local contexts. In this context, the characterisation of service learning as a hegemonic and exclusive academic practice is thus challenged, undermined and modulated by contemporary scholars of emancipatory discourse (van Wyk, 2004).

Van Gunten (2002) and van Wyk (2004) observe in common that the counter-hegemonic epistemology and social justice concept of service learning can be used as pedagogical constructs to enhance the goals of service learning practices and programmes that are socially reconstructive in nature. Borrowing excerpts from action research assignments in service learning activities, the foregoing scholars probe how the attitudes of practitioners and students have been challenged to better understand the complex transformative socio-cultural environments in which diverse cultural

populations work and live. Students are encouraged to discern how it is that they make meaning of their own lives, what their lives mean in relationship to the lives of others, and how the educational concepts they embrace are derived from the meaning that they make of such relationships (van Gunten, 2002; van Wyk, 2004).

2.5.8 Drawing linkages from international trends

Internationally, service learning is practised under the banner of 'community service'. Although substantial differences exist in terms of the conceptualisation of service learning and its relation to community service, attention needs to be drawn to the observation that the goals of such programmes, whether they are embedded within community service or not, appear to be the same. The central goal of the pursuit of service learning internationally is to address issues of socio-economic development. It is further discernible that central to the pursuit of service learning internationally is the quest to develop a sense of civic responsibility within universities and to build connections between academic pursuits and knowledge of and exposure to conditions in local communities. The purpose is to implement intervention measures to overhaul those conditions that need to be changed for the better.

Research carried out by the Joint Education Trust on community service in higher education discloses that in most developing countries, both community service and service learning programmes were initiated and in some instances, also administered and managed by governments, at national, regional and local levels. In most instances, government agencies, and at times parastatals and non-governmental establishments, administer and manage such programmes. In certain instances, universities

themselves independently initiate, administer and manage such programmes, although funding can be derived from government. Table 1 provides a summary of service programmes in nine countries:

Table 1: Summary of international practices

COUNTRY	RESPONSIBILITY		FUNDING
	Initiated by	**Managed by**	
Botswana	Gov.	Gov., parastatal and NGO	Gov.
Costa Rica	Univ.	Univ.	Univ.
Ghana	Gov.	Gov.	Gov.
Indonesia	Gov.	Univ.	Gov. and Univ.
Israel	Gov.	Gov.	Gov.
Mexico	Gov.	Univ.	Gov.
Nepal	Gov.	Univ.	Gov and UNICEF
Nigeria	Gov.	Gov.	Gov.
United States	Gov.	Gov and Univ.	Gov, Univ. and donors
South Africa	Univ.	Univ.	Univ. and donors

SOURCE: (JET, 2000, Discussion document)

KEY: Gov. = Government

Univ. = University

2.5.8.1 Drawing linkages from the concept of 'learn and serve' in the United States of America

Service learning in the United States is promoted through the project **'learn and serve America'**. Through this project, the country recognises that young people and students have the desire, energy and ability to impact on their communities. Service learning, in the context of lean and serve America, makes available opportunities for higher education students to get involved in visible ways in the integration of **community service projects** with **classroom learning**. In this way, the pursuit of service learning engages students in the educational process, using what they learn in class to solve problems in the catchment area of their institutions (http://www.learnandserve.gov/about/lsa/principles.asp).

In the context of learn and serve America, the conceptualisation of service learning is intended to promulgate an integration of service with learning, in which both learning and serving are emphasised and treated with sameness. For this to be realised, both these concepts need to be understood and conceptualised in line with the principles of learn and serve America, which are defined as follows:

(a) **Meeting the nation's needs**: Service learning projects put the talents and energies of America's young people to work solving real issues in their communities; taken together, these programmes make a significant national contribution. Learn and serve America is committed to addressing the nation's education, public safety, environmental and homeland security needs through its service learning grants and services.

(b) **Improving participants' lives**: students' lives are enriched through service learning as they become engaged in their own educational process, see the work they do benefit those around them, and become actively contributing citizens and community members. Learn and serve America is dedicated to ensuring that higher education programmes improve the lives of every participant, building academic, civic and character excellence – and that participants develop a lifelong learning commitment to public service. Programmes and participants are highly diverse and every effort is made to increase the participation of disadvantaged youth.

(c) **Strengthening communities**: Service learning projects bring together students, lecturers, parents and service provider organisations to improve their community. By working together towards common goals, participants build trust and strengthen community ties. Learn and serve America is committed to stimulating strong, sustainable partnerships among higher education institutions and service organisations within communities in order to improve communities' abilities to meet their ongoing needs.

(d) **Continuous enhancement management:** Learn and serve America is committed to improving the quality, reach and sustainability of service learning programmes. Improvements to the management structure are continuously initiated to increase accountability, strengthen performance measurements, provide for an effective workforce and put the needs of educational partners first (hhtp:/www.learnandserve.gov/about/principles.asp).

The foregoing principles guided the operationalisation of the three primary objectives of learn and serve America, which are:

- to engage students in addressing the needs of communities;
- to enhance students' academic learning, sense of social responsibility, and civic skills through service learning; and
- to increase the number, quality and sustainability of opportunities for students to serve.

As a means of ensuring the accomplishment of the foregoing goals, the National and Community Service Trust (NCST), a statutory body legislated by the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, awarded grants to higher education institutions and a small number of community organisations, with the intention of developing and improving courses or programmes that involve students in service as part of their education. Under the framework of learn and serve America, higher education institutions are required to put in place courses and programmes that specify the ways in which such programmes will encourage the development and fostering of civic knowledge, skills, responsibility and engagement with communities. From the fiscal year 1995 through the fiscal year 1997 learn and serve America awarded approximately 10 million dollars in direct grants to about 100 higher education institutions and community organisations (Gray, Ondaantje & Zakaras, 1999).

The learn and serve America project discerns itself as a national undertaking in propagating a type of civic conscious service learning in the United States. It focuses its attention on essential components such as civic knowledge, intellectual knowledge and civil disposition. Together, these components are believed to make up the

essential elements of civic oriented service learning. The emphasis on fostering civic knowledge and responsibility perpetuated by learn and serve America conveys an interesting focus on the nature of service learning espoused by the project. It prompts one to begin to appraise and examine the inner sense of what constitutes fostering civic responsibility and its connectedness to the concept of service learning.

For service learning policy makers, students and service providers of service learning to be able to demonstrate a sense of civil consciousness in their pursuit of service learning, they therefore need to develop a deepened understanding of **civic knowledge**. Although no single definition of **civil responsibility** exists, it has become clear that it is not merely a matter of sympathy or a charitable act of providing immediate assistance to individuals as a way of demonstrating compassion.

Civil responsibility is best understood as an empowering process of enabling beneficiaries of service learning to participate in addressing their needs. Much of the evidence about service learning that lacks civic consciousness suggests that one of the difficulties facing higher education institutions is that they tend to have a poor understanding of the problems they are trying to tackle. They tend to forget that local communities have a very clear view and understanding of problems they are subjected to, such as unemployment, social injustices, unpleasant conditions in their localities, crime, HIV-AIDS, and so on.

A **civic conscious** model of service learning promotes a participatory and reciprocal understanding of community needs. Through such a model, service learning ensures that genuine needs that are important to the community being served are addressed.

The model ensures that students, service organisations and lecturers engage the community as equal partners to identify needs and avoid making assumptions as to what is best for those being served. This process helps students to understand service learning beneficiaries more deeply, strengthens relationships between them and the larger community, and generates service activities with a tangible developmental impact.

Through such a civic conscious model, connections to learning objectives are established. In this way it is ensured that service learning doesn't merely supplement existing curricula, but plays an integral role in the learning process. Students and lecturers carefully tie projects to specific learning objectives, often connecting multiple subjects. Learning becomes a process of deepening students' understanding of the material world.

The civic conscious purpose of service learning further ensures that students use critical and creative thinking to ensure that the learning they are subjected to makes sense and has meaning for them and their communities. This reflective mode of civil conscious service learning can be used to appraise the positionality of students, so as to help them internalise the learning. It provides opportunities for them to voice their concerns and share their feelings, and to evaluate the project.

Furthermore, a civic conscious service learning model creates a strong sense of reciprocal partnerships between students and the broader community. This kind of partnership can be limited to those being served or extended to include service organisations and/or community-based organisations. By bringing people together in

collaboration, these partnerships can bridge inter-generational, racial, and cultural gaps; provide young people with strong role models; and strengthen community infrastructures.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided a theoretical framework (the lens) in an attempt to locate the positionality of the practice of service learning. In so doing, the study started from the premise of conceptualising **service learning** and analysed selected theoretical postulations by scholars from a variety of discourses, as well as from other luminaries with an interest in service learning. The chapter sketched an argument showing that service learning is riddled with **ideological contestations** and **intellectual tensions**.

In illustrating this argument, this chapter drew the 'battle-line' between various levels of service learning, namely service learning as a charity; service learning as a project; and service learning as a genuine progressive engagement (Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005) between **subaltern** and **dominant** intellectual discourses (Duncan, Gqola & Hofmeyer, 1992; Fairclough 1992); between **progressive** and **traditional** intellectual positioning; and between **traditional** and **organic** intellectual positioning.

From these 'battle-lines' two distinct levels of positioning emerged and were used to distinguish between differing discourses (themes) of service learning. These discourses were used to generate various themes which will be later on used for purposes of analysing data in subsequent chapters. Table 2 provides a summary of these discourses (themes):

Table 2: Differing categories of service learning

Dominant and/or hegemonic discourse	Progressive discourse
- Dominant intellectual discourse	- Civic knowledge
- Conservative	- Civic responsibility
- Contradictory	- Learn and serve
- Monopolistic practices	- Organic intellectuals
- Expert oriented	- Interactive
- Exclusivity	- Inclusivity
- Charity purpose	- Participatory
- Patronage	- Socio-academic justice
- Project conscious	- Emancipatory
- Eronous models	- Community of Progressive
- Academic priviledges	- Socially inclusive
- Structural inequalities	- Stakeholder conscious
- Bag full of academic answers	- Stakeholder responsive

In short, the chapter provided a theoretical background and detailed the postulations of academic writers on the discourse of service learning. It drew out **themes** that are intended to be used as **progressive models** of service learning in a developing context. These models serve as a 'good practice' framework and self-evaluation guide in providing evidence of exposing the power imbalances and ideological influences in the implementation of service learning programmes.

CHAPTER 3: THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter represents and discusses the methodological approach selected for this study. As a point of departure, the study analyses two contesting research methodologies in the area of scientific research. Specifically, the chapter describes and discusses **quantitative and/or traditional** research methodology, and makes distinctions between this positivistic methodology and the **qualitative** methodology. The purpose of the discussion is to ascertain the appropriateness of the latter in investigating the positionality of the concept of service learning in higher education institutions. In so doing, the chapter reflects on the trade-off and/or dichotomy between qualitative approach and quantitative approaches in order to justify using the latter as the most appropriate one for this study. Thereafter, the chapter provides a rationalisation for using qualitative methodology.

3.2 Defining and discussing the traditional quantitative methodology

Quantitative methodology derives most of its meaning from research procedures applied in the natural sciences, and the most dominant philosophical concept associated with it is positivism. As a philosophical concept, positivism was developed by the French philosopher, Auguste Comte at the beginning of the 19th century and its main point of departure is that:

The only authentic knowledge is scientific knowledge and that such knowledge can only come from positive affirmation of theories through strict scientific method (Pickering, 1993).

Since the qualitative tradition derives much of its meaning from positivism, it has historically been used and/or conceptualised interchangeably with that philosophy. The following three features are keys to an understanding of what constitutes quantitative or positivistic research methodology:

- it focuses on science as a product of research and relies on a statistical set of statements;
- it insists on at least some statements being testable, that is, amendable to being verified, confirmed or falsified by the empirical observation of reality;
- it holds that science is markedly cumulative, rests on specific results that are dissociated from personality and social position of the investigator, thus emphasising objectivity and absolutism.
  (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Positivism)

The method is purported to use experimental, empirical and statistical methods and measures to test hypothetical generalisations. This type of approach probes the question ***why*** and looks for a comparison of groups; for example, it probes whether Group A is better as an issue under investigation than Group B. At times, it is geared to exploring the relationship between variables with the purpose of ascertaining an association, to establish a relationship or to discover cause and effect in things; for example, it investigates whether variable **X** explains what occurred in variable **Y** (Creswell, 1998). It is also important to note that experimental, empirical and

statistical methods, as carried out by quantitative and/or natural scientists, place great emphasis and value on what they call **objective knowledge**. This objective knowledge is purported to fit into a scheme with which scientists are familiar, and about which they claim and pronounce have certainty.

3.3 Why a quantitative approach is not operationalised in this study

This study, while recognising the need for and importance of quantitative, statistical and experimental methods in some instances, observes that there are a number of research problems and contexts that, for various reasons, do not lend themselves to a quantitative/positivistic approach. This observation is confirmed by Shaeffer (1982) cited in Konyana-Bam and Imenda (2000), who contends that:

> *The world of educational research, especially in the developing world, continues to be dominated by research traditions and paradigms that emphasize quantitative methods. While recognizing the need for and importance of such methods, researchers in many parts of the world are practicing and developing other approaches more qualitative, ethnographic and anthropological in nature. Such research is based on quite different traditions, paradigms and definitions of knowledge and is quite different in its characteristics, small in scale, but set within a broad contextual framework, intimate and intensive in method, and richly descriptive in outcome* (Konyana-Bam & Imenda, 2000, p.2) .

It is also important to note that the claims and pronouncements of quantitative researchers about the principles of **objectivity, quantification** and **absolutism** are not appropriate for thematising about issues of power relations such as **hegemony**, **domination**, **exclusivity, ideological inclination and discursion** which are probed by this study**.** Mahlomaholo (1998) also confirms that positivistic pursuits,

particularly in countries and localities where domination by one group over the other is customary, have been used to **mystify** and **mask** information as well as knowledge under the pretext of objective facts (Mahlomaholo, 1998).

This observation becomes even more essential when it is related to the purpose of this study, this being to critically and scientifically reflect on the positionality of the concept of service learning as practised at higher education institutions: and further to investigate different levels of conceptualisation and the operationalisation of the same concept within the confines of universities and in the catchment areas and local communities. This research endeavour, attempts to illuminate the paradoxical nature of the practices undergirding the concept of service learning by way of critically reflecting on **inconsistencies**, **contradictions** and **challenges** faced by human beings or groups (academics, learners and policy developers) at selected universities who are involved in the practice of service learning as an academic activity.

Such an attempt will not be conducted successfully within the empirical and statistical dictates of a quantitative methodology. The fact that a quantitative tradition positions a researcher as the only dominant and know-all person in the investigation, whilst the researched are relegated to levels of quantifiable objects, makes it even more difficult for a quantitative approach to understand the **dynamic** nature of human experience. The argument is that the dynamism of human nature and experience lies in the observation that it cannot be reduced to levels of **objects** that are empirically investigated and **manipulated** in laboratories by the domineering researchers. such laboratory based and manipulative research is considered as **artificial** by qualitative

scholars as it fails to realise that people react differently in other contexts, especially in their own natural contexts.

Manipulative laboratory practices can also produce undesired effects in that those being researched could be influenced by the researcher to the extent that conclusions would not be sound and realistic, especially when compared to research as carried out in natural settings. The same argument can be advanced with regard to issues of hegemony, exclusion, ideological contestations, power relations and intellectual tensions that this study intends to investigate. The argument again is that these issues are multifaceted, complex, dynamic and fluid and thus cannot be reduced to laboratory artefacts. On the concept of objectivity, Mahlomaholo (1998) further reminds us that positivistic researchers miss the point in their claims and pronouncements about absolutely objectivity, especially when studying human beings as they too do interpret the fluidity of human experience in a particular way which is not necessarily neutral (Mahlomaholo, 1998).

The claims and pronouncements of quantitative researchers are capable of creating some form of **dependency** conditions and/or attitudes on the part of the researched. They promote a researcher-researched condition in which the researcher emerges supreme and dominant in the production of knowledge, whilst the researched are positioned as objects that should just be used to benefit the academic or research aspirations of the researcher. This dependency condition tends to render insignificant the contribution of the researched and leads to a situation in which they remain disempowered, continue to be peripherised, marginalised and subordinated in the area of knowledge production, to the advantage and benefit of the researcher.

3.3.1 Deficiencies in the quantification principle

A quantitative approach is said to be strong in its reliability or the repeatability of the pattern of data. The same measurements should yield the same results every time. This pattern of repeatability is, however, regarded as **reductive** empirical theory by critical researchers. The argument advanced is that all **quantification** is a human and political process of discarding information from the incredibly rich and complex fabric of human life. Hoepfl (1997) succinctly notes that with this kind of approach, critical information can become casted off and eventually lost when situated human behaviour and experience is reduced to processes of **quantification** and worse still, vital information can also lost and discarded when **text** and **wording** become reduced to numbers (Hoepfl, 1997).

The obsession with the quantification principle is perceived to be unrealistic as further claimed by Hoepfl (1997) who purports that the **quantification** is likely to become both **politics** and **poetics**, especially when slanting towards **prediction**, **power** and **social control.** Quantification tends to translate into unwelcoming poetics when it leaves behind the joy and human suffering lost by the pursuit of **numbering** and **numerology**. For this reason, critical researchers, ask the potent question: why do researchers have to turn to numbers and quantifications when such pursuit accomplish the outlined damage to the larger process of knowledge production? Hoepfl suggests that answers to this question tend to be countless as are the uses of the research to which statistical inference is applied (Hoepfl, 1997).

The poetic argument about the statistical prediction and precision of a quantitative researcher is misleading in the sense that it fails to recognise that responses are derived from people, and it is not possible to be so precise with people who are not objects, but dynamic human beings. It needs to be emphasised that people change, and the social situation is too complex and fluid for them to be subjected to numerical description.

It could also be claimed that, with the false confidence of quantification, there comes the false hope of controlling social life. Most importantly, it needs to be well thought through that data are not always inherently quantitative. Data cannot always be expressed in numbers, but can be bits and pieces of almost anything. Data can be in the in the form of words, images, impressions, gestures, or tones which represent real events or reality as it is seen symbolically or sociologically (Patton, 1990; Hoepfl, 1997). Frequency distributions and probability tables would, therefore, not be appropriate to be used in certain contexts.

3.4 Discussing the advent of qualitative methodology

The qualitative methodology materialised as a result of identified **limitations** and **shortcomings** in the quantitative tradition**,** most of which were described in the previous section, especially in the area of making scientific assumptions and inquiries about the complexities and experiences under-girding humanity and social events. The advent of the qualitative methodology saw to the rejection of quantifying, laboratory confined experimentations that have over the years guided positivistic practices. As a result of such rejections, positivistic scholars and researchers started to

challenge the usefulness of qualitative methodology as a genuine scientific methodology. The outcry and protests about its scientificity revolved around issues such as data gathering, verification and generalisation techniques, as well as on issues of **validity** and **reliability** (Konyana-Bam & Imenda, 2000). According to the observation of the latter scholars:

> *Positivistic researchers argue that a qualitative methodology has gone too far in abandoning scientific procedures of verification, and in giving up hope of discovering useful generalizations about behavior* (Konyana-Bam & Imenda, 2000, p.3).

These protests and outcries about the qualitative approach by positivistic scholars, however, appear to be missing the point. They are themselves ill-derived and informed by the absolute and dictating orientation of the quantitative approach, this being the uninformed and ignorant fixation and mainstreaming of the statistical dictates of quantitative methods. They tend to pay no heed to the importance of recognising the multifacetedness, complexity, dynamism and fluidity of dealing with human experience and social events like discursive practices in service learning. On this aspect Merriam (1988), cited by Konyana-Bam and Imenda (2000), cautions that the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalise along quantitative lines, but to form a unique interpretation of social events.

3.4.1 Approach to defining qualitative methodology

As some scholars have observed, it has become difficult to define **qualitative research,** since it does not involve the same terminology as formal science disciplines. The simplest definition is to define it as a digression from quantitative

research. From this aberration angle, it is defined as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification.

Where quantitative researchers seek causal determination, prediction and generalisation of findings, qualitative researchers instead seek illumination, understanding and extrapolation to similar situations. Qualitative analysis results in a different type of knowledge than does quantitative inquiry (Patton, 1990; Hoepfl, 1997). This definition positions qualitative methodology as being **dependent** on what constitutes a quantitative methodology. Its dependency lies in the observation that it is regarded as a technique generated outside the framework of a quantitative approach.

3.4.2 The trade-off between quantitative and qualitative methodologies

In line with a dependent definition of qualitative methodology, as shown in the preceding section, it has become increasingly popular for researchers to derive much of the meaning of a qualitative approach from the qualitative-quantitative research dichotomy prevalent in research discourse. Accordingly, **quantitative** and **qualitative** research methods represent two distinctly different ways of conducting research. The trade-off between these two research methodologies has dominated the knowledge production area, in that researchers have long debated the relative values of qualitative and quantitative inquiries (Patton, 1990; Hoepfl, 1997).

Both the terms qualitative and quantitative to refer to techniques, methods, methodologies and paradigms in research (Meulenberg-Buskens, 1997). As illustrated

in this section, the dichotomy between the two is, however, as simple as it may seem. Qualitative research is seen to use a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings. A quantitative research, or logical positivism, on the other hand, uses experimental methods and quantitative measures to test hypothetical generalisations, as revealed in preceding sections. Each of these approaches represents a fundamentally different inquiry paradigm, and researcher actions are based on the underlying assumptions of each paradigm (Oskowitz & Meulenberg-Buskens, 1997; Patton, 1990; Hoepfl, 1997).

McBride and Schostak (1994) provide major points of contrast and debate between the broad categories of qualitative and quantitative research by observing that:

> *Where a quantitative researcher might seek to know what percentage of people do one thing or another, the qualitative researcher pays much greater attention to individual cases and the human understandings that feature in those cases. Nevertheless, one finds the latter using terms such as 'frequently' and 'the majority of people' and so on* (McBride & Schostak, 1994, p. 9).

A further point of difference between the two is found in Hoepfl's (1997) observations:

> *Whereas quantitative researchers seek* ***casual determination***, ***prediction***, *and* ***generalization*** *of findings, qualitative researchers seek instead* ***illumination***, *deepened* ***understanding*** *(own emphasis), and* ***extrapolation*** *to similar situations. Qualitative analysis results in a different type of knowledge than does quantitative inquiry* (Hoepfl, 1997, p.2).

This discussion concludes that the difference between the two approaches should not necessarily translate to levels where one approach translates to being more important than the other. On the contrary, as indicated in the previous section, researchers need to be mindful of the reality that data are not always inherently quantitative, and that frequency distributions and probability tables would not be appropriate in certain social and human related contexts (Hoepfl, 1997).

3.4.3 Towards a sympathetic definition of a qualitative methodology

This study avoids using the dependant negatively inclined definition of qualitative methodology. Rather it opts to confine itself within the unbundling structure of a more sympathetic and subjective definition. From this angle, qualitative research is perceived as involving methods of data collection and analysis that are sensitive to the fluidity and dynamism of human experience and social events (Lofland & Lofland, 1984). This definition of a qualitative approach needs to be contextualised within its focus on **'quality'**, a term referring to the essence or ambience of something (Berg, 1989). In the context of this definition, qualitative methodology is an approach that focuses on how individuals and groups view and understand the world and construct meaning out of their experiences.

Creswell's definition is also fitting in this instance:

> *A qualitative methodology is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting* (Creswell, 1998, p.1).

In the context of the foregoing definition, data collected through a qualitative approach are not subjected to **formulaic** and **statistical** analyses for the purpose of generating projections (Adler & Adler, 1987). Furthermore, qualitative research most often is associated with critical theory, generated from the premise of critical analysis.

According to Meulenberg-Buskens (1997), a qualitative approach derives its meaning from the following characteristics:

- it is oriented towards the respondent's perspective;
- it emphasises the contextualisation of the process of knowledge construction;
- it presents itself as an open and flexible method in the area of research design;
- Validity and reliability of the research results tend to depend to a higher degree on the researcher's skills and sensitivity;
- The scope of research tends to be on a small scale;
- It creates synergy among respondents as they build on one other's comments and ideas;
- It promotes a less structured but dynamic environment in an interview or group discussion process that engages respondents more actively than is possible in more structures interviews;
- It creates an opportunity for a researcher or interviewer to observe, record and interpret non-verbal communication signs which are valuable during interviews or discussions and analysis (Meulenberg-Buskens, 1997, p.1).

3.4.4 A qualitative approach in relation to critical theory

This study selects to pursue a **qualitative research** as an appropriate methodology to collect and critically make reflections on the positionality of service learning as practised at selected higher education institutions. The study moves from the observation that there are different forms of qualitative methodology, which tend to overlap. It is further observed that there are categories of perspectives or schools of thought that tend to define and interpret qualitative research in different ways, and these include empiricism, critical theory, phenomenology, feminism, critical discourse and structuralism (Schostak, 2003).

The study, however, intends not to become deeply immersed in the foregoing perspectives, but prefers to restrict itself to unbundling the concept of **critical theory** as it links well with the purpose of this study, namely to reflect on the positionality of service learning as practised at higher education institutions. This requires a deepened conceptualisation of the concept of critical theory and its power to interrogate the complexities and experiences undergirding humanity and social events. Investigating the concept of critical theory serves to enhance and further deepen our understanding of the qualitative approach, selected as appropriate for this scientific enquiry on service learning practices. This approach also provides the context justifying qualitative methodology in the collection and interpretation of data, so as to understand trends and patterns in service learning practices (Schostak, 2003).

3.4.5 Unbundling the concept of critical theory

Critical theory can be defined as one of the categories of perspectives or schools of thought that has been used to define and interpret qualitative research. Its definition is more traceable from the Frankfurt School, specifically in the discipline of sociology and philosophy; it has at times, has been referred to as 'critical theory of society' or 'critical social theory'. As in the case of the quantitative-qualitative dichotomy, its definition has been pursued in contra-distinction to the traditional theories, that is, those theories in the positivistic, scientific and observational modes of understanding research. As in the approach adopted in defining qualitative methodology, this study avoids this aberration-oriented and dependent definition of critical theory. Rather, this study adopts a more **sympathetic** and **subjective** definition of critical theory.

From this perspective then, critical theory is understood to refer to a series of pathways for intellectual inquiry intended to challenge and question the status quo. It seeks to challenge and question the obviousness, naturalness and simplicity of the world around us, in particular it positions itself in challenging the state of things that we are able to perceive through our perceptive senses and reflectively understand through the application of our power to reason (Nowlan, 2001).

A more interesting characterisation of critical theory is the one that positions it as a theory that seeks to:

> *…question and challenge the passive acceptance that the way things are—or the way things seem. In the context of this understanding, critical theory is posited to question and challenge the conviction that what is, or what is in the process of becoming, or what appears to be, or*

> *what is commonly understood to be, or what is dominantly conveyed to be, is also at the same time right and true, good and just, and necessary and inevitable: critical theory does not accept any of these. It is always particularly concerned with inquiring into the problems and limitations, contradictions and incoherences, injustices and inequities in how we as human beings, operating within particular kinds of structures and hierarchies of relations with each other, facilitated and regulated by particular kinds of institutions, engaged in particular kinds of processes and practices, have formed, reformed, and transformed ourselves, each other, and the communities, cultures, societies, and worlds in which we live* (Nowlan 2001, p.1).

What the foregoing extract proposes is some kind of critical inquiry and positioning of ourselves by means of using our ability to make sense of the world around us and to challenge ourselves to engage in our relations with the world on the basis of how we make sense of it and our relationships with one other.

As its name implies, critical theory refers to a theory that criticises the social order, and which is inclined towards radicalising social change. In pursuing genuine developmental and/or progressive changes in South Africa and elsewhere in the world, studies about transforming higher education and its functions have been carried out by a significant number of scholars to explore the challenges faced by universities in engaging themselves more closely with surrounding communities. In the main, such developments are prompted by the growth of social problems and by the growing **disparities** between the rich and poor, what this study refers to as the **dominant** and **subaltern** or the **centralised** and **marginalised** social groupings.

The study pursues a critical discourse analytical approach as a means of understanding trends and patterns in service learning as practised at selected higher

education institutions in South Africa. This theoretical approach is underpinned by **critical luminaries** such as van Wyk (2004), Patel (2003) and Malecki (2000), whose views were explored in chapter two.

3.4.6 Signification of qualitative methodology

The strength of qualitative research lies in its validity or closeness to the truth. That means that good qualitative research, by using a diverse number of data collection methods, should actually touch the core of the phenomenon under investigation, rather than just skimming the surface of the facts. A qualitative approach also contributes to rich, informed and insightful research results as a result (Meulenberg-Buskens, 1997).

Besides contributing to rich, informed and insightful research results, qualitative methodology recognises that the subjectivity of the researcher is intimately involved in scientific research. Subjectivity guides everything from the choice of topic that one studies, to formulating hypotheses, to selecting methodologies and interpreting data. In qualitative methodology, the researcher is encouraged to reflect on the values and objectives he brings to his research, and how these affect the research project. Other researchers are also encouraged to reflect on the values that any particular investigator utilises (Gergen, 2001).

A key issue that arises with the recognition of subjectivity is how it affects objectivity. Ratner (2002) explores subjectivity and objectivity in detail. Objectivity is said to negate subjectivity since it renders the observer a passive recipient of external

information, devoid of agency. The researcher's subjectivity is said to negate the possibility of objectively knowing a social psychological world. The investigator's values are said to define the world that is studied. One never really sees or talks about the world, per se. One only sees and talks about what one's values dictate. A world may exist beyond values, but it can never be known as it is, only as values shape our knowledge of it (Ratner, 2002).

From the viewpoint of critical discourse, it is equally notable to observe that a qualitative research approach has the ability to serve as an exposé of social injustices, and can transform inequitable, undemocratic and oppressive social relations. Such forms of which are mostly intangible, and could not be understood and exposed by scientific methods such as triangulation and the controlled verification of data. This consideration becomes imperative when one observes that contemporary language theory teaches us that words and texts are not neutral (Wilbraham, 1994; Fairclough, 1995). Rather, words are 'multifunctional', always simultaneously represent the world (ideational function) and enact social relations and identities (interpersonal).

3.5 Operationalising qualitative methodology

Qualitative methodology and related data collection instruments is extensively used in this study. In using the qualitative methodology, the researcher observed that there are different forms of qualitative instruments that are appropriate to be used in data collection procedures so as to investigate issues of **disparity** and **inconsistencies**, **contradictions** and **challenges** which face academics, learners and policy developers

at the selected universities that are involved in the practice of service learning as an academic activity.

The operationalisation of service learning is underpinned by language and meaning, and these are in some way construed as social constructs. This then requires a discourse-oriented type of data gathering, analysis and interpretation. For this reason, this study has opted for those data collection techniques that engage with the discourse of **language** and **meaning**.

3.5.1 Collecting data from written text

Using a qualitative approach, data was collected by interrogating written documents that were compiled by the two institutions on matters concerning service learning. Data were drawn from documentary sources such as the following:

- community Higher Education Service Partnership (CHESP) report findings (a pilot project that was commissioned by the Joint Education Trust (JET) in 2004);
- service learning policy documents (e.g. A Policy for Community Service at the University of the Free State and Wits' Community Higher Education Service Partnership Revised Strategic Plan);
- minutes from service learning strategic meetings, and
- reports on activities carried out by the institution (e.g. UFS Higher Education Institution Narrative Report, 2003, central community

service committee minutes and institutional Audit on Community Service learning at Wits, 2000).

Data from these documents were selected on the basis of their relevance to the themes outlined in chapter two, such as the nature and influence of power relations in initiating service learning. The documents were further selected the basis of being fit to be subjected to a Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis (TODA), as propounded by Duncan (1993), Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) and other social scientists.

3.5.2 Interpreting, analysis and discussion of data

In order to analyse and make sense of these textual documents in the context of our research question as sketch out in chapter one and of the foregoing models of positioning, a Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis (TODA) was used. The TODA technique involved looking at the written word as text to be analysed and as evidence for meanings to be gleaned there from (Fairclough, 1993). While dissecting these words, one was at the same time looking out for discursive practices informing the production and dissemination of that text.

Interpretation and analyses of the foregoing documents involved breaking down responses into smaller meaningful chunks so as to interrogate and sift out the contradictory themes emerging from them and offer alternatives as a researcher. This technique offered me as a researcher a radical departure from other non-discursive, traditional and empirical forms of procedures (mostly quantitative) that emphasise **triangulation** and controlled verification of data.

The primary preoccupation of analysis of **documents** was to expose issues of social injustices and contradictions, and how to transform inequitable, undemocratic and oppressive social relations, the forms of which were mostly intangible, and could not be understood and exposed by scientific methods such as triangulation and controlled verification of data.

The final meaning and understanding was arrived at by locating the text and discursive practices within social structural issues to lift out patterns of meaning. I took turns with the research assistant to have an understanding of where to locate a particular text and/or extract in terms of service learning as charity or service learning as project and service learning as socio-academic justice. Together with the assistant, we discussed and compared our notes at the end of this exercise to check if there were any diverse understandings or significant differences between our interpretations.

This approach mostly concentrated on sifting out appropriate extractions emerging from the discussions with respondents and paying less importance on the quantity of their responses. For this reason quite a few extractions were considered relevant for purposes of incorporating them as evidence for illustrating **contradictions.** These extractions, despite, their perceived constricted value from a quantitative point of view, were however considered valuable to be used to interrogate and position the two institutions in relation to the three model and/or pursuits of service learning, this being the charity model, the project model and socio-academic model as illustrated in chapter four.

In view of the foregoing, a discourse analytical study like used a relatively small amount of respondents. The importance of this is derived from the observation that a large number of respondents could easily lead to the analyst being bogged down by unwieldy masses $of data that could render it difficult to make precise sense (Duncan, 1993, Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

3.5.3 Significance of textually oriented discourse analysis

This framework is preferably used as the lens for this study as it provides the basic tenet for an interpretative and analytical discourse (Giroux & McLaren, 1994). It is also regarded as a valuable framework that thematises issues of power relations in academic practices and provides an outlet to discriminatory academic practices (Giroux, 1994).

Furthermore, the framework appears consistent with the critical discourse analytical postulations of facilitating the deconstruction and rescaling of social relations in accord with the demands of an unrestrained, inclusive, reciprocal and acceptable academic practice as it relates to curriculum development (Fairclough, Pardoe & Szerszynsky, 2001). Studies about TODA have discovered that many of our social practices are imbued by ideologies. Individual social actors and groups alike may exhibit various forms of ideologies such as exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination in interaction with others. In the context of this understanding, members of different racial groups, for example, may manifest racist or antiracist ideologies. Class ideologies can affect many aspects of the interactions between the rich and the poor; people of different ages can often exhibit ageist ideologies;

professional and/or intellectuals who have their typical professional and/or intellectual ideologies are likely to exhibit such ideologies as they interact with those regarded as not belonging to their social grouping (Billig, 1979; van Dijk, 1993, 1997, 1998).

In this regard, it becomes clear that, as soon as social actors organise themselves as members of social groups, they are likely to promote their ideologies in their actions and interactions. In this way, group members may typically marginalise, exclude or problematise the members of other dominated groups, at times in subtle ways. They may do so by paying less attention to them; by not admitting them to their intellectual spaces; by not negating and not accommodating their views and by exhibiting arrogant, domineering and paternalistic tendencies as they interface with them (Billig, 1979; van Dijk, 1993, 1997, 1998).

Over and above the foregoing, the significance of a TODA approach is derived from the observation that words and texts are not neutral (Wilbraham, 1994; Fairclough, 1995). Rather, words are 'multifunctional, always simultaneously representing the world (ideational function) and enacting social relations and identities (interpersonal function)' (Fairclough, 1995, p. 25). They engage with the phenomenon as representative and descriptive of the academic world. To better understand service learning, however, it is also necessary to consider the social relations and identities that are reproduced in the term itself.

3.5.4 Collecting data from free attitude interviews

An interesting scientific method that was used in this study to collect data is the Free Attitude Interview (FAI method). The term 'Free Attitude Interview' is a translation of the Dutch term '*Vrije Attitude Gespprek'* commonly used by Vrolijk, Dijkema and Timmerman (1980). This technique is said to have developed its characteristic form during an industrial psychology research, the so-called Hawthorne Research in 1929 in the United States (Meulenberg-Buskens, 1997).

When interviewers used this kind of interviewing technique which, by its nature, allows respondents the freedom to speak, they discovered that the information obtained tended to become more relevant than when they use a structured questionnaire (Meulenberg-Buskens, 1997). Such an open type of interview provides the type of information which can be used to solve problems in a deepened sense, particularly in educational contexts (Meulenberg-Buskens, 1997).

3.5.5 Characteristics of free attitude interviews

Meulenberg-Buskens (1997), describes an interview as a verbal technique for obtaining information. The concept of focus group interviews was introduced by social scientists in the late 1930's as a result of doubts about the accuracy of traditional information gathering methods in research (Kreuger, 1988). Concerns were raised that, in traditional forms of interviews, information gathering methods were likely to generate a scenario where the interviewer assumed a **dominant** position with

data obtained from such interviews. The free attitude interviewing technique was thus suggested and advanced as a significant alternative to traditional forms.

The FAI Technique refers to a carefully planned discussion, designed for assembled groups or individuals who share some form of commonalities in the area under interrogation. It is likely to reflect the dominance of the preconceived ideas of the interviewer.

3.5.6 How data was collected through the free attitude interviewing approach

In concretising the assumption that there is no neutrality in the usage of the notion of service learning in the development academic programs for learners at both the university of the Free State and of the Witwatersrand, the researcher pursued the FAI technique as a primary method of collecting qualitative data to ascertain perceptions and positionalities of the two institutions in terms of the centre and margin of service learning as a measure of charity or social justice.

The FAI technique involved preliminary interviews where informal discussions were held with interviewees (policy officials, service partners and community representatives) to ascertain trends, innovations and opinions in the area of issues of **exclusion, hegemony, and marginalisation**, as they relate to service learning. The dialogue was less formal to allow more flexibility and freedom for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Interview questions focused on known situations in which interviewees were actively involved, with the researcher having explored and analysed these areas prior the interview.

The second category, involved carefully planned discussions designed to obtain perceptions from participants around themes that emerged in chapter two. This included interrogating and critically inquiring into the problems and limitations, contradictions and incoherences, injustices and inequities on how they as human beings, while operating within particular kinds of structures and hierarchies of relations with each other, facilitated and regulated by particular kinds of institutions which are engaged in particular kinds of processes and practices.

3.5.7 Ethical considerations with regard to free attitude interviews

The interviewing process was carried out in a permissive, non-threatening environment. In carrying out this process, a number of key considerations that described ethical protections were observed as a measure for protecting the rights of research respondents and other participants. The principle of **voluntary participation** was central and was used to guide the carrying out of this research project. This principle required that people not be coerced into participating in research. Closely related to the notion of voluntary participation was the requirement of **informed consent**. Essentially, this meant that prospective research respondents were to be fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in research, and had to give their consent to participate. Ethical standards also required that researchers not put participants in a situation where they might be at **risk of harm** as a result of their participation. Harm would be defined as both physical and psychological.

There are two standards that were applied in order to help protect the privacy of research participants. Almost all research guaranteed the participants **confidentiality**.

Respondents were thus assured that identifying information would not be made available to anyone who was not directly involved in the study. The stricter standard of the principle of **anonymity** was also observed. This essentially meant that the participants were assured that they would remain anonymous throughout the study - even to the researchers themselves, if they so chose. Although, the anonymity standard was a stronger guarantee of privacy, many respondents chose not to remain anonymous. Increasingly, researchers have had to deal with the ethical issue of a person's **right to service**.

3.6 Sampling

The identification and selection (sampling) of respondents as primary sources were strongly influenced by the postulations of progressive and discourse analytical scholars and researchers. From their point of view, one of the major differences between discourse analysis (qualitative in nature) and other more traditional (quantitative) methods of research relates to the identification and size of respondents (Duncan, 1993, Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

The assumption is, while you will sacrifice depth if you spread yourself so thinly, and considering the size of respondents is not necessarily the issue now, what is important is the **depth** of ones hermeneutics (interpretative knowledge). In view of the foregoing, a discourse analytical study like this will use only two sampled universities and a relatively **small amount** of respondents in the area of external validity. The importance of this is derived from the observation that a large number of respondents could easily lead to the analyst being **bogged down** by unwieldy masses of data that could render it difficult make precise critical sense (Duncan, 1993, Potter &

Wetherell, 1987). Against the foregoing, the study then preferred to select only **two** South African higher education institutions (Universities of the Witwatersrand and the University of the Free State).

3.6.1 Justification of selecting the two institutions

The choice of the two institutions was influenced by their **history of involvement** in service learning and curriculum repositioning processes. The two institutions, the University of the Free State and the University of the Witwatersrand, are respectively located in the cities of Mangaung in the Free State and Johannesburg in the Gauteng province. The University of the Free State was established in 1904. The University of the Witwatersrand received its full university status in 1922 and incorporated the then Transvaal Technical institute as well as the archaeological site of the Sterkfontein caves. With the process of mergers of higher education institutions which was initiated in South Africa in the late 1990s and completed in the 2000s, the University of the Free State, previously known as the University of the Orange Free State, retained its status and incorporated two former Vista campuses (Mangaung and Welkom) and the former campus of the University of the North, the Qwaqwa campus, situated in Phuthadithjaba. The University of the Witwatersrand merged with the then Johannesburg College of Education, and retained its head office at Johannesburg as well as its historical name.

These universities carry with them old baggage of being perceived to be **dominantly white** in terms of student intake and staff complements. During the apartheid era, for example, like other historically white institutions, they were regarded as strongholds

of **Afrikaner** and **English supremacy** respectively. They were seen to embrace educational values that transmitted the legislated social, economic and political imaginations and preferences of apartheid-capitalism. In this way, they were educational sites that promoted the dominant views and hegemonic academic principles of the time, thus upholding the intellectual dominance of white people over other races, especially the black majority (Africans, Coloureds and Indians) of the country. The latter were relegated to levels of inferiority educational offerings, subservient academic sites and practices of academic marginalisation.

With the advent of democratic changes in the country, the two institutions are said to have repositioned themselves to respond well to issues of transformation and development. Over and above this, the two institutions are purported to be doing well in the area of service learning within each province and are therefore regarded as appropriate point of reference sites for the pursuit of service learning in South Africa.

Respondents from these institutions constitute the following categories:

- Office bearers of service learning departments from each of the two higher education institution selected for this study;
- Civil society (community) representatives from organisations that are purported to have partnered with the selected universities, and are located within the catchment area of the two higher education institutions.

Similarly, the choice of the foregoing categories of respondents was based on their involvement in their capacity as policy developers, lecturers and partners in the operationalisation of service learning.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter facilitated the discussion of the research design and methodology pursued. As a point of departure, the study discussed two contesting research methodologies in the area of scientific research. Specifically the chapter discussed **quantitative** and/or **traditional** research methodology, and made a distinction between this positivistic methodology and the **qualitative** methodology. This attempt was carried out as a measure of extenuating the appropriateness of the operationalisation of the latter in making an inquiry on the positionality of the concept of service learning at higher education institutions.

In so doing, the chapter commenced from the premise of reflecting on the trade-off and/or dichotomy between a qualitative approach and quantitative approach as a measure of showing the significance and the justification of using the former less in carrying out a study of this nature, and using the latter approach as the more appropriate one for carrying out critically oriented research of this nature. Subsequently, the chapter discussed the data collection procedures as well as the method pursued in interpreting and analysing data collected.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the presentation, analysis and discussion of findings from document analyses and interviews. The chapter commences with the presentation of quantitative data collected from Community Higher Education Service Partnership (CHESP) pilot project that was commissioned by the Joint Education Trust in 2004 and then proceeds to the presentation of qualitative findings.

The presentation of statistical data provides a broader picture of service learning trends in the country and a comparative analysis of the positionality of the two institutions under study in the practice of service learning. The statistical data is then used to analyse and interpret subsequent qualitative data. This first level of comparative statistical representation, it should be noted, is conducted not in order to show contradictions, as numbers themselves are incomplete in being used for such purposes.

The presentation of quantitative data is followed by the presentation of the second level of qualitative findings. Qualitative data were collected from service learning documents at the universities of the Free State and the Witwatersrand, as well as from one-on-one interviews conducted with various members of the **service learning triad**. This level of qualitative data presentation involves the interpretation, analysis and discussion of qualitative findings as a means of establishing the contradictions

and positionality of the two selected institutions in the practice of service learning. The organising principles of the purpose, nature, justification and examples or instances of the pursuit of service learning by the two selected institutions are analysed in line with the themes that were discussed in chapter two of this thesis.

4.2 Presentation of quantitative data

As explained in chapter 3, data was collected through a presentation of quantitative report from the Community Higher Education Service Partnership (CHESP) pilot project that was commissioned by the Joint Education Trust (JET) in 2004. The quantitative methodology, as explained in earlier sections, approach was operationalised so as to present broader statistical service learning trends and patterns at the two sampled institutions. This is done with the intention of developing a statistical picture that will make us understand the extent and level of involvement of these institutions in the areas of initiating service level programmes, and getting them accredited.

Although this study is not a comparative pursuit, it should, however, be noted that, for one to get a sense of level of involvement of an institution in service learning, one has to do this within the dictates of a comparative analysis type of approach. For this reason, presenting a statistical analysis of the level of involvement of the two institutions selected for this study helps to construct a counter-balance approach with regard to the assumptions that will later be made from a qualitative point of view. In other words, the usage of this statistical approach is intended to complement the qualitative assumptions and analyses that will accrue from qualitative methodologies.

This integrating approach further enables the researcher to lay bare facts and issues that could be intensively pursued through a quantitative presentation of data so as to gain deeper and richer insight of the state of things (Mahlomaholo, 1998).

The JET situational analysis report reveals that there is significant progress in the level of participation in community service as practised by South African higher education institutions. Furthermore, the JET situational analysis report presents the following observations:

- most higher education institutions in South Africa have included community engagement in their mission statements;
- few higher education institutions have developed service learning policies and explicit policies or strategies to operationalise this component of their mission statement;
- most higher education institutions have a wide range of community engagement projects; and
- generally these projects do not show any measure of community involvement, as they were found to be initiated solely by innovative academic staff and students, and not as a deliberate institutional strategy for community engagement.

As a means of finding ways to address the gaps highlighted by the results of the survey, JET received a further grant from the Ford Foundation to specifically address the issue of getting communities directly involved in such initiatives. The Community – Higher Education – Service Partnerships (CHESP) Project was established to pilot

community involvement in higher education service learning initiatives. The aims of the pilot project were:

- to support the development of pilot programmes that give expression to the community engagement mandate of the White Paper;
- to monitor, evaluate and research these programmes; and
- to use the data generated through this research to inform higher education policy and practice at national, institutional and programmatic levels.

As a result of the CHESP initiatives, the Higher Education Quality Committee has accredited **182** service learning programmes, which are purported to have involved communities in terms of the development thereof. These programmes were developed by a number of institutions with an interest in service learning, including the Universities of the Free State and the Witwatersrand. The Joint Education Trust has supported these institutional initiatives over the past four years. The level of support covers such areas as the conceptualisation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and research of these accredited service learning academic courses. The accredited courses are purported to be initiated within the confines of the principles of service learning, thus linking teaching, learning and research to local community development priorities. Table 3 shows institutions with accredited service learning programmes that have been supported by JET over a period of four years:

Table 3: Institution-based service learning courses supported by JET (from 2001 to 2004)

INSTITUTION	YEAR				
	2001	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**	**TOTAL**
CUT	X	X	X	7	**7**
PENTECH	X	X	X	7	**7**
RAU	X	X	X	5	**5**
UCT	X	X	X	6	**6**
UFS	12	18	4	8	**42**
UND	5	7	2	1	**15**
UNITRA	4	7	6	5	**22**
UNP	12	14	X	X	**26**
UWC	2	6	9	7	**24**
WITS	5	15	6	2	**28**
TOTAL	**40**	**67**	**27**	**48**	**182**

(Source: Lazarus, 2004, http://chesp.org.za/topnav.asp)

KEY:

CUT=Central University of Technology

UND=University of Natal-Durban (currently known as the University of Kwazulu-Natal)

PENTECH = Peninsula Technikon (currently known as Cape Peninsula University of Technology)

UNITRA= University of Transkei (currently known as Walter Sisulu University)

RAU = Rand Afrikaanse University (currently known a the University of Johannesburg)

UNP = University of Natal (PMB) (currently known as the University of Kwazulu-Natal)

UCT = University of Cape Town

UWC = University of the Western Cape

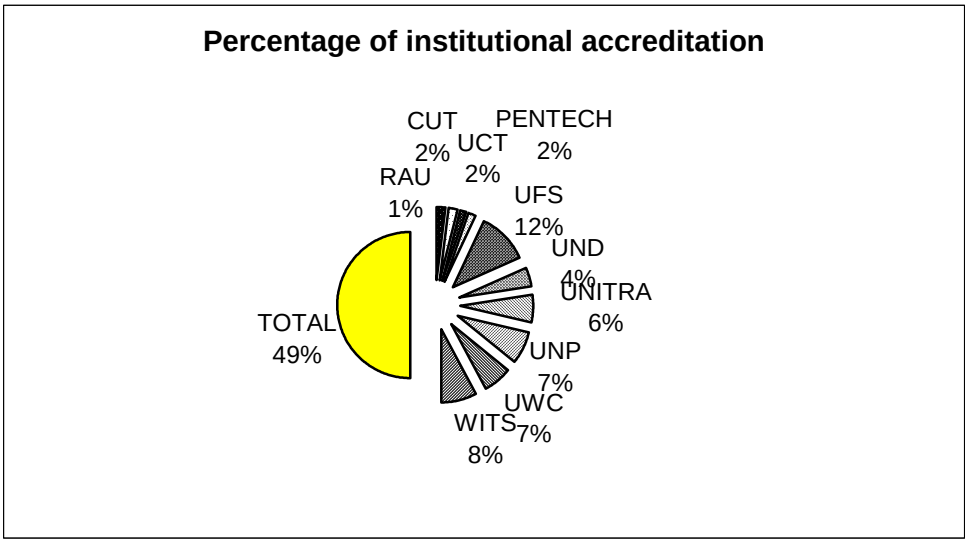
UFS = University of the Free State

WITS = University of the Witwatersrand

4.2.1 Discussion of statistical data

The JET report shows that 10 institutions of higher learning in South Africa have initiated and accredited a total of 182 service learning courses (see Table 3). The universities of the Free State and the Witwatersrand have submitted a total of 42 and 28 courses respectively for accreditation, out of the total of 182. The University of the Free State has the most accredited courses whilst the Rand Afrikaans University (now the University of Johannesburg) has the least accredited courses out of the ten listed institutions. Most of the University of the Free Sate courses were accredited in 2002 (18 courses), with the least number of courses (4 courses) being accredited in 2003. The number increased slightly to 8 accredited courses in 2004. The University of the Witwatersrand also managed to accredit the most courses in 2002 (15 courses), with the least number of courses being accredited in 2004 (2 courses).

Table 4: Percentage of institutional accreditation



(Source: Lazarus, 2004, http://chesp.org.za/topnav.asp)

In terms of percentages, the University of the Free State reflects 12% of accredited courses, whereas the University of the Witwatersrand stands at 8%. This comparison shows the level of involvement of the two institutions in service learning. Table 5 provides a statistical picture of student participation in service learning programmes, per level of study, per institution.

Table 5: Institutional student participation in accredited courses supported by JET

INSTITUTION	**STUDENT LEVEL**					
	1st year	**2nd year**	**3rd year**	**4th year**	**Masters**	**TOTAL**
CUT	25	8	109	10	X	**152**
PENTECH	175	140	60	61	X	**436**
RAU	X	X	X	542	X	**542**

UCT	X	X	120	259	101	**480**
UFS	864	432	256	449	232	**2233**
UND	186	128	158	61	23	**556**
UNITRA	241	144	322	151	X	**858**
UNP	10	54	319	45	9	**437**
UWC	X	X	51	567	18	**636**
WITS	76	187	204	93	40	**600**
TOTAL	**1 577**	**1 093**	**1 599**	**2 238**	**423**	**6 930**

(Source: Lazarus, 2004, http://chesp.org.za/topnav.asp)

Table 5 shows that, between the years 2001 and 2004, a total of 6930 students from a total of ten higher education institutions participated in accredited service learning courses. The **highest number** of students participating in such courses are from the **University of the Free State** (**2233** enrolments) with the least number being from the University of Cape Town (152 student enrolments). The University of the Free State had 864 students enrolled in 2001, which declined to only 232 students in 2004. The participation rate at the **University of the Witwatersrand** stands at a total of **600** enrolments. At this institution, a higher number of students participated in 2003 (204 students), which declined to only 40 students in 2004. Both institutions experienced a decline in the extent of student participation over the years 2001 to 2004.

The large total for the University of the Free State in the area of student participation reflected in Table 5 could be attributed to a frantic effort by the institution to bring into its fold **more and more service learning programmes** and **more and more student numbers** in such service learning programmes. This would be a way of demonstrating the institution's acquiescence to the new statutory dispensation and legislative requirements. It is a way of **projecting a positive image** for an institution that was historically associated with racial exclusivities and selective negativities of the past; a historically white institution that was established to advance the political and economic aspirations of the apartheid system that afflicted the education, political, social and economic arrangements of the country so badly. Such efforts to increase the numbers of service learning programmes and participating students could also be attributed to desperate efforts to win the hearts and minds of education officials and other students across racial barriers.

4.2.2 Caution in drawing conclusions with regard to statistical analysis

It needs to be cautioned that figures alone are not enough to lay bare factual information to support the foregoing inferences, or to provide evidence of contradictions in terms of the level of participation and genuine commitment of the selected institutions in their pursuit of service learning. As mentioned earlier, the issues of positionality, hegemony, counter-hegemony and accruing contradictions that are at the centre of investigation in this study are too **fluid** and **dynamic** to be measured by statistical means.

What this means is that the foregoing figures are not adequate in finding answers to questions posited in this research study. The figures presented in the foregoing tables cannot confirm that service learning as practised at the Universities of the Free Sate and the Witwatersrand does/does not genuinely connect their rich resources to local communities' most pressing social, civic, cultural and ethical problems, to their children, their youth, their schools, to local teachers and to townships in their catchment area.

The presentation and discussion of quantitative data, it should be noted, merely demonstrate some of the assertions in chapter three, namely that figures are unable to ascertain whether the two universities are still focused on just more and more compartmentalised programmes, or genuinely on socio-academic justice.

4.3 Presentation of qualitative data

An investigation of the **purpose** of service learning is central in pursuing a model of service learning that moves away from the higher educational flaws and defects that were brought about by the hegemonic and domineering educational legacies of the past. The quintessence of the **purpose** of service learning is located in how institutions of higher learning **define** the concept of service learning.

As illustrated in chapter two, service learning has historically been defined from a variety of perspectives and at times from contradictory positions. This section attempts to use textual evidence, both spoken and written to dichotomise meaning construction and illustrate the various **forms of textual contradictions** and

inconsistencies through the use of Textual Oriented Discourse Analysis (TODA). In order to accomplish this, Fairclough's (2004) three levels of analysis were used, namely **textual analysis**, **discursive practice** and the **social structural level** of analysis.

4.3.1 Linguistic (textual) analysis

The linguistic (textual) analysis technique involves using language analysis by working on the language of a text at various levels. Linguistic analysis assists us to expose the not so obvious socially constructed **contradictions**, **preferences** and **exclusions** enclosed within words. Such an analysis explores the choice of vocabulary, semantic relations between words (e.g. synonyms, hyponyms), denotative and connotative meaning, collocations (i.e. patterns of co-occurrence) and metaphorical uses of words (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). The essentiality of language (textual) analysis further enables us to reveal how words are constructed. This reveals cases in which particular **hegemonic** and **domineering** perspectives are expressed delicately and euphemistically, so as to make dominant expressions covert and elusive. Such forms of expression are a way of steering clear of direct challenges from any opposing discourse, by retreating into mystification (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001).

The textual analysis approach provides explanations and chains of reasoning which can be deconstructed and made explicit, to demonstrate how the purpose and definition of service learning differs from one entity to another. This enables a researcher to expose the hidden mechanisms of hegemony and dominance in the

pursuit of service learning. The value of such an exposé is that ideological and hegemonic features of the **purpose** and **definition** of service learning are exposed to show the genuineness (or otherwise) of institutions of higher learning in aligning themselves with the pursuit of the socio-academic empowering model of service learning. This approach reminds us that texts have an indeterminate and slippery relationship with the realities they depict.

To unravel the essence of the purpose and conceptualisation of service learning by the selected institutions, three universal definitions to which this study subscribes, were used. In so doing, an attempt was made to carry forth the textual analysis, as well as to interrogate the ideological underpinning of the text that were analysed. The definitions below are preferred and subscribed to because of their **counter-hegemonic**, **anti-domineering**, and **progressive** logic.

Bringle and Hatcher (1996) define service learning as:

> *…a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organised service activity that **meets identified community needs** and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an **enhanced sense of civic responsibility**. Unlike extracurricular voluntary service, service learning is a course-based service experience that produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related to course material* (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p.2).

The South African Joint Education Trust (JET) defines service learning along the following lines:

> *…a thoughtfully organised and reflective service-oriented pedagogy that focuses on the development priorities of communities through the interaction between and application of*

> *knowledge, skills and experience in partnership between community, academics, students and service providers within the community for the benefit of all participants. Reciprocity, mutual enrichment and integration with scholarly activities are central characteristics in service learning* (Joint Education Trust, 2000).

The National and Community Service Trust Act define service learning as:

> *…a method under which students learn and develop through thoughtfully organised service that: is conducted in and* ***meets the needs of a community*** *and is coordinated with an institution of higher education, and with the community, helps* ***foster civic responsibility****; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students enrolled, and includes structured time for students to reflect on the service experience' American Association for Higher Education (AAHE).* (adapted from the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993).

The foregoing definitions are useful in showing that words in a text are ideologically contested. Words can for instance advance a **hegemonic** and **domineering** function, or an opposing **counter-hegemonic** and **anti-domineering** purpose. Key **counter-hegemonic** and **anti-domineering** concepts that accrue from these definitions and that outline the **progressive purpose** of service learning are:

- *meet identified community needs*
- *focuses on the development priorities of communities*
- *reciprocity and mutual enrichment*
- *meets the needs of a community*
- *foster civic responsibility*
- *enhanced sense of civic responsibility.*

These counter-hegemonic purpose-oriented words denote that service learning should be coordinated between institutions of higher education, or community service programmes, and the community. From this level of definition and purpose, service learning is seen as a practice that helps to foster **civic responsibility** and engagement, meets the needs of a community, is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the education components of the community service programme in which the participants are enrolled.

Findings from an interrogation of written documents from the selected institutions are presented in this sub-section, as a means of finding out whether the **definition** and **purpose** of service learning as pursued by these institutions advances a **hegemonic** or **counter-hegemonic** agenda. A critical examination of a seemingly innocuous textual definition and purpose of what constitute service learning is carried out. The University of the Free Sate prefers to use the concept of service learning interchangeably with that of community service learning and thus defines it as:

> *…denoting the mutual obtaining of competencies (knowledge, skills and dispositions/attitudes) by all members of the community service partnership (UFS lecturers, students, members of communities and service sectors) in teaching/learning and research programmes aimed at a better understanding, handling and solving community needs and challenges by means of available expertise, resources and infrastructure. Viewed in the light of the immediate socio-economic context within which the UFS functions, a predominantly development-oriented approach to community service will enhance the relevance and value of community service programmes* (A policy for community service at the University of the Free Sate, 2002, p.3).

The above definition positions the particular institution on the path of an innocuous and convincingly faithful and devoted pursuit and advancement of a counter-hegemonic form of service learning. It is the kind of definition and sense of purpose that ostensibly repositions the institution from its defective legacy to a **newly titivated institution** with a purposeful sense of social empowerment and co-existentialism.

Furthermore, it is a definition that, on the face of it, uses carefully constructed text to portray a socially committed institution that is characterised by a visible and increased quest to ensure participation by all sectors of society; by greater institutional response to transformational and developmental imperatives of the country; by a new set of collaborative relations and partnerships between itself and the broader society; and by greater institutional responsiveness to the moral, social and economic demands of a developing South Africa.

Despite these seemingly innocent and innocuous pronouncements and claims about a progressive and counter-hegemonic pursuit of service learning, the question remains regarding the **nature, essence** and **choice** of words (text) used in the definition of service learning by this institution. To unravel the essence of the kind of service learning that the institution purports to embrace, the researcher cross-examined and exposed selected words used in the definition of service learning. Expressions in the text that immediately catch attention as being **linguistically** contested are the following:

- *a better understanding, handling and solving of community needs and challenges;*
- *by means of available expertise, resources and infrastructure;*
- *development-oriented approach to community service.*

The first textual expression selectively and warily uses two nouns, 'understanding' and 'handling' and transitive verb 'solving'. The word 'understanding' is used to clandestinely convey a **sympathetic** positioning and **skewed relationship** between the institution and communities. The concept 'understanding' and/or its related adjective, 'sympathetic', implies that the institution has a **perceived power** over the community and that it intends to 'handle' and 'solve' its needs and challenges. The word 'handling' resonates with the idea of **treatment** and represents some form of benevolence that is directed to the community in need.

4.3.2 Contradictions in terms of the discourse of charity

The word 'handling' and its related concept 'treatment' are associated with the concept of **charity**. Charity, as explained in chapter two, is defined as a voluntary act of giving to those in need, some kind of alms giving, a demonstration of benevolence, tolerance or kindness to those who are in need. In this context, the institution positions itself as a charity institution that shows tolerance in judging others, and gives voluntarily to others as a measure of kindness and/or benevolence.

The relationship between 'handling' and 'tolerance' with **charity** finds expressive value in the hegemony-enmeshed charitable purpose of service learning. In this case,

the power of the higher education institution is at its maximum: the university-community engagement accords very little recognition to the contribution of the local community, and very little value in recognising communities as important partners. As suggested in chapter two, higher education institutions operating within this mode tend to understand and relate to local communities from a technicist point of view. A big gap between the knowledgeable higher education institution and the fallen (poor, ignorant, needy and less fortunate) community exists (Morton**,** 1995, 1997; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997; Keene & Colligan, 2004; Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005).

The thrust of this understanding and selective usage of the foregoing words is that service learning in this particular institution, as was suggested in chapter two, is practised under **situated** terms with regard to the relationship between the institution and the communities. Words like **understanding, handling** and **solving**, are antitheses of **reciprocity** and **mutual enrichment**, central principles in a progressive and unadulterated concept of service learning. The use of these words reveals that, despite the pronouncements by the particular institution about a well-intended concept of service learning, service learning is still held terminally captive by the institutional legacies of unstated domination, supremacy and hegemonic discourses.

4.3.3 The discursive practice

The discursive level of analysis is embarked upon so as to expose conflicting genres and discourses that are drawn upon in a text, and furthermore to illustrate how they are worked together through text. Underlying this level of analysis is the inference that text muddles up diverse genres and discourses. The quintessence of this inference

is that a text can embody a **hegemonic** or a **counter-hegemonic** discourse, a dominant or subaltern preference, a central or marginalised positioning. In this way we can talk of a text in terms of power relations or the situatedness of different entities.

A text that immediately catches attention in terms of the envisaged discursive exercise which reveals how meaning is constructed and understood, is traceable from the minutes of the second meeting of the Central Community Service Committee (CCSC) of one of the institutions selected for this study:

> *….the school of Medicine (Health Sciences) reports that the new curriculum entails students not only working "in" communities, but also "with" communities. New projects are created almost every day and students' enthusiasm knows no bounds. The benefits of community-based learning are undeniable; for students, the community and the service* sector (CCSC Minutes 13/2003/03).

Once more, despite these seemingly progressive and counter-hegemonic pronouncements and claims about students not working 'in' the community but 'with' the community, some extreme ideological contestations are implied. The structure of the text portrays a progressive picture for the intentions of the School of Medicine in its pursuit of service learning, but the actual practice of service learning by students of the same school cancels out this positionality. An **interview** with one of the members of the triad substantiates this differing discourse:

FS-R3 *Courses are done alone. We are not invited. Some students don't feel secure.*

RR *Why do you think they feel insecure?*

FS-R3 *Maybe gangsterism…maybe the township itself…there are many things.*

RR	*In your opinion…do you think they were well prepared for the realities of communities?*
FS-R3	*No…it's like they were not prepared well for locations.*
RR	*Any reason why you say so?*
FS-R3	*When they are not doing anything …they don't interact socially…but prefer to sit inside the office of the sister in charge.*
RR	*Do you believe that a person who is afraid of your area can empower you?*
FS-RR	*No…I don't think so.*
RR	*Please explain why do you say so…*
FS-R3	*I think they only come to get more marks and pass exams…because we were told that they get marks for coming there. You can see that they are always nervous when they are here and become happy when they are about to go back to the university.*

In line with the discourse analytical approach, the researcher interrogated (interpreted and analysed) the above textual findings represented by the two contesting concepts and sifted out contradictory issues emerging from the differing voice of respondent FS-R3. The intention was to illustrate the paradoxical nature of two oppositional discourses within the service learning triad.

A key **counter-hegemonic** and **anti-domineering** concept that accrues from the minutes and that outlines the **progressive purpose** of service learning is:

- *'with' communities.*

However, key **hegemonic** and **domineering** concepts that accrue from the dialogue with the respondent and that retain the defective legacy of service learning are:

- *some students don't feel secure;*
- *they don't interact socially;*

- *they only come to get marks;*
- *they are always nervous when they are here.*

The first category was found to serve as a counter-hegemonic discourse that is intended to serve as a representative voice of the community. The second category was found to represent a hegemonic discourse which represents the actual voice of the institution that has recently surfaced from negativities of the past and thus wants to portray itself as a genuinely committed pursuant of service learning.

4.3.3.1 Contradictions in terms of the discourse of positionality

As stated in chapter one, this study is about the nature and/or positionality of relationships, in particular, between universities and communities in their catchment areas. Against this background, the interrogation of two contesting discourses was investigated with the understanding of unearthing the genuineness (or otherwise) of the claims and postulations made by one of the institutions under study, in terms of making commitments and enhancing the benefits and contributions on the part of the community.

Accruing from the minutes, it became clear that the service learning committee disguises its hegemonic nature by using concepts that are associated with a progressive and counter-hegemonic notion of service learning. A concept like ‘with’ the community is cunningly used in the report of the School of Medicine to disguise the lack of genuineness of the institution in terms of the discourse underpinning its pursuit of service learning. The differing perspective from respondent FS-R3 enables

us to uncover the lack of genuineness by the institution in terms of a progressive notion of service learning. As Freebody (2003) observes, text embodies a number of purposeful choices about how reality is displayed and these choices have consequences for what it is that a text can afford about reality.

The reality portrayed by the minutes under interrogation appears to be consistent with the counter-hegemonic discourse of service learning. The institution, in terms of its use of the concept of 'with' the community, portrays itself as an institution that wishes to become one with the less fortunate communities, to operate on the same wavelength with them, be emphatic to their experiences and genuinely look forward to bettering the lives of communities.

An extract from a service learning policy document of the same institution provides added evidence of this cunningly portrayed sense of genuine commitment:

> *Community service learning in the UFS is regarded as social accountability and responsiveness to the development needs of society by means of the key functions of teaching and research in close cooperation with national and local communities* (UFS Higher Education Narrative Report, 2003, p.4).

Another respondent from this particular institution reported the following about the positionality of the institution in terms of its pursuit of service learning:

FS-R2 *In our current policy, reciprocity is stated on objective four (4)…where we are linking partnerships as a means to exhaust the true depths and meaning of community service or community service learning. UFS is very serious about this. We are serious in the sense that, when we do (not audible)…in a partnership…we are not there for the sake of doing it or getting information from the members of the community…then disappear…but we are there because it has a reciprocal value…be it in learning, teaching or research. And…therefore we have identified…uhmm…up to now five (5) flagships to service learning.*

4.3.3.2 Contradictions in terms of the use of the discourse of community service

Despite the seemingly good pronouncements and claims of the particular institution about a civic engagement and responsive model of service learning, some inherent incongruities in terms of the use of concepts, especially in terms of the meaning of service learning, appear to characterise the institution. There seems to be a **slippery relationship** between the text in policy documents and reality. The institutional good intention about a commendable model of service learning is invalidated and compromised by the consistent use of the term 'community service'. Although community service implies community involvement, it differs significantly from the concept of service learning. It needs to be pointed out that although there are many types of community involvement interventions, some vital distinctions exist between service learning and other forms of community intervention.

Service learning is much more than well-meaning than **community service**. Service learning engages learners with the phenomenon under study, rather than just limiting their learning experiences to sensational exposure to social issues and problems. Community service differs from service learning in that it emphasises community service activities that are non-curriculum based and does not engage learners in pedagogically grappling with the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, community service has the potential of assuming voluntary and charity points of reference.

The foregoing incongruities between the concepts of service learning and community service are embossed further by a respondent from the same institution who stated:

FS-R1: *Community service learning to us is not a piece of welfare…it is neither voluntarism (pause) because voluntarism has in it the notion of I do it when I like to do it….I do it because it gives me satisfaction (pause). Voluntarism is not community service learning. Furthermore, it then brings to the fore where the service learning as a pedagogy can be charity (pause)…I don't think so…because it clashes. Community service on its own can be charity. Community service, not community service learning can be charity.*

A visible paradox emerges between what is espoused in terms of policy directives and what is verbally echoed by a representative voice of the institution. The policy says one thing whilst the policy developer says another thing. One senses that there is some measure of ingenuity on the part of the institution in terms of pursuing the desired and preferred model of collaborative and reciprocal service learning. This ingenuity could have undesirable implications for the four steps or elements characterising service learning, which are Preparation, Actioning, Reflection and Evaluation (PARE).

4.3.4 The social structural level

This level of analysis is pursued so as to reflect on the social structural contradictions hidden in the findings of this research and also to illustrate how these differentiations are worked together through text. The root of these contradictions is traceable from the apartheid education legacy that was portrayed in chapter two. The social structural level uses findings of this research study to probe whether the selected institutions are simply 'jumping on the bandwagon' of service learning as a measure of complying

with issues of policy, with little or no intention of contributing to issues of community empowerment.

A textual expression from a respondent from one of the selected institutions provides us with a point of departure to sift out contradictory social practices on the level of social structural analysis:

FS-R1: *At the present moment…if I got an issue about service learning I refer it to a management meeting. We have put in place different management structures and different forums on campus, which bring in smaller, bigger…bigger groupings of different levels of influence. I don't call communities to such meetings because issues of academic concern will bore them. They don't have any stake in this. But we are considering having broader meetings to get the opinion of…of members of whatever community, be it service learning sector or whoever…and we have made arrangements to this effect. We are constantly asking…are we doing the right thing? Are we doing the right thing? Are we doing the right thing?*

A quick response to the question put forward by the responded FS-R1 is a big NO…the institution does not seem to be doing what it has purported to do on paper. It certainly does not translate to 'doing the right thing' if the institution says one thing in its policy and acts differently in practice. It certainly does not amount to 'doing the right thing' when the institution enunciates reciprocal and socio-academic forms of service learning on paper, but carries out an exclusive and marginalising model of service learning in practice. A notable contradictory discourse and/or conceptual tension is embedded in the words of a respondent from the service agency that is purported to be a partner in the implementation of service learning by the institution under study:

FS-R3 *Courses are done alone. We are not invited. Some students don't feel secure.*

From the words of respondent FS-R3, it appears that the institution under study tends to understand and relate to both service agencies and local communities from a technicist point of view. A gap appears to exist between the knowledgeable higher education institution and the fallen (poor, ignorant, needy, less fortunate, etc) community and service agency (Morton, 1995, 1997; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1997; Keene & Colligan, 2004; Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005).

The mere fact that respondent FS-R1 suggests that communities are not invited to participate on issues that are perceived to be exclusive, could imply that very little value is attached to recognising communities as important partners toward the advancement of the cause of service learning.

The contradictory echoes from respondent FS-R3 are corroborated by another key respondent from the same institution who suggested that:

FS-R4 *In our experience at the university, it has become clear that our partnerships with service providers have not yet been fully explored or exploited.*

It could be added that the gap which exists between service partners and the community is related to unbalanced and prejudiced identities within shifting networks of relationships, which regard those operating within universities as the sole experts and knowledgeable people who can ‘fix’ social problems.

Another expression from a key respondent further corroborates the observation that the commitment of service learning has until now been on paper only, and is yet to be realised in practice. This positionality has resulted in service learning benefits

becoming skewed towards the institutions under study. The following enunciations from respondent W-R1 typify this observation:

W-R1 *At the end of the course…students have to write a report on how they benefited on the site. That's where we are talking exactly about what you learnt….where you integrate the value of service learning to the students. What did they learn from the community…because we…we are not yet doing it at Wits in the sense of what did the community benefit….but in my previous employer we said…ok…we used to have the community come and we used to have the students come….sit together and we used to have faculty come…and then to say …ok…now you tell us from the community now ….you know…what did you benefit and was it worthwhile? Will you use this type of a project next year? Even when you use it…what you want changed? What you want kept in place? Then you talk to the students to say…as the students what did you not like so that next years' students don't have the same problem? Then you talk to the faculty staff members…where were your problems and things like that? That is where you evaluate your module and you come up with a better solution for the following year. But at Wits we haven't been doing that yet….uhm…we still are looking forward to that kind of approach.*

The preceding articulations from respondent W-R1 came as a result of a question to find out whether communities are visibly involved as reflected in the strategic documents, and whether they are sensitised about the kind of benefits they might enjoy for their participation in service-related activities. The response, however, indicates that there are inconsistencies relating to the operationalisation of the noble concepts of reciprocity and participatory principles that are central to the positionality of service learning as a socio-academic pursuit, as committed to in the policy document.

The response shows a proper understanding of how service learning should be operationalised, as well as possession of appropriate background and experience. The assertions from the respondent indicate a level of understating about the crucial role that communities should be playing in terms of contributing an element of excellence in the execution of service learning. The assertions, however, have not been translated into practice at the institutions under study.

4.3.4.1 Contradictions in terms of the expert-oriented discourse

Contradictions in terms of the expert-oriented discourse in the sense of service learning as practised by the two institutions under study are postulated by Keene and Colligan (cited in Mahlomaholo and Matobako, 2005), who argue that:

> *A university by its very nature operates in an elevated position, materially, knowledge and know-how, wise, etc and thus to assume otherwise is an impossibility or at worst a pretense, a fake and a kind of dishonesty. Because the University staff and its students now constitute a different class, possessors of material wealth, exposure and immersion in 'higher' forms of knowledge, going down to the community and pretending to be on the same wavelength and socio-economic status is a lie* (Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005, p.8).

As discussed in chapter two institutions of higher learning that operate in elevated positions because of their knowledge and know-how tend to fake honesty. Instead, they carry themselves as expert institutions that are less connected to communities. The notion of an expert purpose of service learning has the tendency to be submerged with negativities and pretenses in the area of constructing an acceptable, respectful and equitable socio-academic relationship between higher education institutions and communities.

It is a kind of positioning and understanding that conceptualise service learning as a pursuit of either a project or at worst a charity and/or welfare academic quest. There are grave consequences of pursuing such an expert embedded model of service learning in terms of the impact that it can have on the part of service learning students.

The voice of respondent FS-R3 echoes this observation further:

FS-R3 *One white student resigned because of being confronted by a number of black faces. So they paired them with blacks.*

RR *So you are saying that some white students don't feel safe and comfortable at the clinic?*

FS-R3 *Yes…I think it has to do with culture. The student might not be used to be in a place where there are many blacks. During lunch we even tell them not to go to the shops alone…you could see that they are not feeling safe.*

The foregoing responses suggest that preparation at this level of skewed positioning (the expert pursuit of service learning) centres on measures to protect the interests of university staff and students, without due regard for local communities. It suggests a kind of tinkering with the lives of people within the catchment area of higher education institutions, without effecting improvement in the quality of their lives. In this context the preparatory and/or planning process of allocating slots for community 'visits' eventually translates to the shortest possible periods of time being spent in the communities because of cautioning in terms of safety and security.

These findings present evidence of an **imbalance** of power relations between the historically **hegemonic** higher education institutions and the **disempowered local** communities and service providers who are supposed to have an equitable stake in higher education. Another respondent corroborates this:

RR *Other than the discussions what other roles do you play?*

FS-R3 *Courses are done alone.*

The exclusion of communities from service learning planning and operationalisation processes by the two institutions bears testimony to the fact that they are not yet addressing issues about the disadvantaged and disempowered from the voice of the disadvantaged. The two institutions are still yet to rate and position themselves in relation to the social, political, historical and economical conditions of their milieu. This rating and positioning could only be effected if it ultimately translates to a measure of 'committing class suicide' on their part.

This 'paper and heart' commitment on the part of institutions causes them to focus on the **symptoms** of problems in their local communities, instead of critically reflecting on the bigger picture, this being the socio-economic diseases that caused those symptoms. The institutions will only be able to get a bigger picture of the nature of problems when the local community has been engaged, provided with space within the domain of the institution, not only on paper, so as to enable them to share the essence of the bigger picture with the university.

As further accentuated in chapter two, positionality, in the context of this study, was said to refer to situationality or the practice of placing something in a context or set of situations and showing its connections. The positionality professes to investigate the relational process between higher education institutions and communities and, furthermore, putting into perspective the contradictory and incongruous levels of such localisation and identification with regard to claims and attributions made by higher education institutions regarding their position in relation to surrounding communities in the context of service learning.

Positionality tends to situate/locate higher education players within the dictates of their ideological preferences and orientations, thus rendering them biased in terms of their epistemologies in their interactions with other social players. Simply put, who you are and the kind of ideological preferences and ideological inclinations one has, tend to influence what one knows, understands and perceives of others in the social domain (Cook, 2005).

4.3.4.2 Contradictions in terms of the discourse of positionality

As highlighted in chapter two, the thrust of positionality is that higher education practices are **situated** in terms of their relationship with local communities, and teaching, research and service activities are carried out by **positioned** actors working in/between all kinds of **locations** and **relationships** (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Hartsock, 1987; Harraway, 1988; Angus, Cook & Evans, 2001).

The positionality discourse compels the world of academia to rate and position itself on issues of class, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality, and to further rate and position itself in relation to social, political, historical and economical conditions of its milieu. This kind of rating and positioning is crucial to understanding the subjectivity and/or objectivity of academics, learners, researchers and policy makers at higher education institutions. It assists us to understand their biases and assumptions in their interactions with local communities. It provides us with the lens of unraveling how higher education institutions understand, define and **relate** to their catchment areas. It probes whether the catchment area is understood and defined in

terms of fixed identities or in terms of their location within shifting networks of relationships, which can be analysed and changed by experts from the world of academia (St. Louis, 2002). In addition, it argues that service learning as a strategy should be seen as a tool to combat oppression and exclusion. Service learning should work to empower all people, students and communities and not only those who can 'understand' academic jargon (Takacs, 2002).

It is also important to note that understanding the concept of positionality has the effect of enabling us to relate well to issues of reciprocity (issues of power relations), intimacy, and locus of control, but in a kind of a focused approach so as to facilitate the understanding of core pillars of service learning, namely; preparation, action, reflection and evaluation as they manifest themselves or are operationalised at the various levels of complexity (Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005).

An expression from a respondent emphasises the contradictory nature of positionality:

W-R2 *It depends on how you define charity….charity is to do good…for free…service learning as a pedagogy must be continuous. Therefore, your question of a general continuous level makes sense only if you then link it to (uhmm)…academic program. There you have sustainability…(not audible)…I'll distinguish again also between program and project.*

The essence of the foregoing words could translate to the reality that the institution under study hides the fact that service learning could be a means to smoothen the socio-economic stumbling blocks and brutalities of its catchment area. As a member of the dominant entity, the respondent might be defending the concept of charity so as to get rid of the privileged guilt on the part of the institution, by demonstrating

benevolence and generosity to the subaltern through their programme of service learning.

Another respondent from a partnership arrangement with one of the institutions under study corroborates this:

FS-R3 *University sends students to us and they are taken care by a tutor who is a sister by profession. Our role is just mentoring. For the first time…when they come in ba tla ba orienteita. (lecturers from the University accompanying students orientate them during the first day) …then they hand them over to the tutor.*

RR *In your opinion who benefits?*

FS-R3 *The benefit is mutual in the sense that at times there are instances where the sister, students and lecturers discuss. During the discussion its where now o tlo tla bona hore ke leka mona le mane (it is during this discussions that one is able to see that one is trying here and there).*

Despite their good intentions and theorisation about service learning, higher education institutions operating within this mode believe that the benefit is mutual, but what is ignored is the sustainability of such benefits. If the benefit it is non-sustainable then it is non-empowering. Simply put, empowerment cannot be divorced from sustenance. For empowerment to be sustainable communities should be systematically involved in the various stages of practising service learning. Within the project purpose of service learning, wherever this happens, it is carried out on an **ad-hoc** basis (Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005).

To corroborate the sustainability or non-sustainability essence of service learning, another respondent from one of the institutions under study stated the following about the project purpose of service learning:

RR *And what's your view on service learning as a project?*

FS-R2 *In answering that, I'll distinguish again between program or project. I don't think service learning can be a project…because a project has a timeline.*

RR *Yes….*

FS-R2 *It starts on a specific date and ends on a specific date. A program is a continuous thing (pause). So if we are serious about enriching academia….be it on the level of research, be it on the level of teaching, and be it on the level of integration of teaching and service (pause)…surely it must have…uhmm…uhmm…basis of continuity built in. So…there's also a variable of service learning as an…as a mode of pedagogy.*

Although respondent FS-R2 rightfully observes that a project-based model of service learning has no sustenance and that a only programme-based model has an element of sustainability, this positionality comes in at a theoretical level only. In practice, as accentuated by respondent FS-R3 the theoretical aspirations of a programme-based model by respondent FS-R2 are not realised and/or put in practice by the both institution under scrutiny. On the contrary, as per accentuations from respondents from both institutions, the practice of service learning has taken a project-based service learning.

4.3.4.3 Contradictions in terms of the discourse of positionality in relation to margin and centre descriptors

As conveyed in chapter two, power practices between higher education institutions and local communities have resulted into margin and centre positioning. Precisely because of this positioning, it has become a tendency, to refer to people as belonging

to the **centre** or the **margins**. Researchers, policy developers, lecturers and students have also positioned themselves in terms of preferable epistemologies and have positioned 'others' in the area of making academic inquiries and assumptions about the nature their relationships with others and the world. The **margin-centre dichotomy** as evidenced in the world of academia is thus seen as a useful construct to discern the disproportionality of the locus of power in **socio-academic** relationships.

The **margin-centre dichotomy** enables an interesting level of analysis in the practice of service learning. It implies that some kind of mobility from one position to the other, in terms of the relationship between higher education institutions and local communities, is possible. In the essence of a progressive concept of service learning, this means that those who perceive themselves to be on the margin must begin to perceive of themselves as being in a position of inferiority and they should then strive for some place and acceptance in the centre, which is positioned as a locus of superiority.

The genuineness of pronouncements about higher education engagements in service learning can be critically investigated by asking questions as to whether engagements with communities and service partners are carried out in relation to a centre vs margin type of engagement, with the purpose of benefiting the centre to the disadvantage of the margin.

One of the selected institutions in this study constituted a central community service committee in 2003. The committee was established as a means of considering the strategic directions of service learning, as well as ensuring community representation

on issues related to service learning. To date, as evidenced by minutes from the sittings of this committee, no community representation has been accomplished and worse, there is little talk about ensuring that such representation is realised. The following analysis of attendance bears testimony to this observation that, over the years, communities have been marginalised on matters of service learning and strategic planning.

Table 6: Summary of university-community representation at strategic meetings

YEAR	UNIVERSITY REP.	COMMUNITY REP.
2003	7 Faculty and 2 CS: directorate	None
2004	7 Faculty and 2 CS: directorate	None
2005	7 Faculty and 2 CS: directorate	None
2006	7 Faculty and 2 CS: directorate	None

Key: CS= Community Service
REP.= Representative

The above table provides a year to year analysis of attendance at meetings, from 2003 when service learning was conceived at the institution, to 2006. It serves as a means of finding out whether the institution has well meaning intentions in the area of positioning itself as a partner with local communities in the pursuit of service learning, by probing whether service learning occurs within the centre-oriented position or within the margin-inclined position. It appears that the university under study has placed itself in the centre, in terms of the centre-margin dichotomy.

Yet again, despite the seemingly good policy pronouncements and claims by the institution under study about a cooperative, reciprocal and community-academic partnership oriented model of service learning, some inherent incongruities are

traceable from **articulations** from respondents. The institutional good intention about a socio-academic justice model of service learning is invalidated and annulled by contradictory stories and reverberations from documents and respondents from the two institutions under study.

The only time that the institutions could be able to get a bigger picture of the nature of problems is when the local community is in practice, provided space within the domain of the institution, not only on paper, so as to enable them to share the essence of the bigger picture with the institution. The picture painted by findings is that the two institutions are still yet to carry out service learning in a sense of being part **of** the community (academic-social justice). In the latter sense, service learning, therefore, translates to an academic strategy that collaboratively engages communities in the identification and definition of needs with the purpose of creating a **mutual benefiting** engagement at the output level of the service practice, thus positioning service learning as a strategy towards social transformation, social empowerment, social usefulness and meaningfulness.

Against this background, particularly in terms of policy undertakings, and in cognizance of the themes previously outlined, both institutions are seen to be **bordering somewhere between charity level and project purpose of service learning**, in terms of its operationalisation of community service learning.

Why a charity mode

- Although the contributions of communities are known as expressed by respondent W-R1 they are, on the other hand, accorded insignificant

recognition in terms of participating in service learning planning processes;

- From the point of view raised above, local communities are, therefore, understood and related to from a technicist point of view, thus creating a big gap between the knowledgeable university and the 'less knowledgeable community';
- The knowledgeable and less knowledgeable dichotomy peripherises the local community and locates the two institutions at the centre of power;
- In their preparation and reflection activities students from the two institutions position themselves in capacities of experts who go to the community carrying bagfuls of solutions to alleviate problems in the community;
- Service learning students from both institutions are exploring personal and individual benefits as opposed to larger social benefits.

Why a project mode

- The two institutions might have risen above the voluntary act of giving and executing benevolent acts of kindness to communities, but overlooking their exclusive participation in service learning planning processes creates a gap for the university to be positioned in the socio-academic mode;
- The two institutions envision service learning within honest and progressive intentions of relating with local communities on paper and not in practice;

- Both institutions intend to devote their resources to the needs of local communities, but this is only reflected in strategic and policy documents with a negligent operationalisation of what appears on paper taking place.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from document analysis and interviews. The study moved from the premise of presenting quantitative data collected from Community Higher Education Service Partnership reports. The quantitative approach was pursued as a measure of providing a broader picture on service learning trends in the country as well as providing a comparative analysis of the situatedness of the two institutions under study. This level of comparative analysis and statistical representation of data was not pursued to show contradictions as numbers themselves are unable to be used for such purposes.

The collection of these quantitative data was followed by the discussion of the same data in preparation for the second level of qualitative data presentation. Subsequently, a presentation of qualitative findings was collected, using service learning documents and respondents from the institutions under study. The qualitative data presentation was followed by interpretation, analysis and discussion of the same data, as a measure of sifting out emerging contradictions from the said documents and interviews, with an intention of further establishing the positionality of the selected institutions in relation to the themes that were established in chapter two of the study. In line with the findings, the two institutions borders somewhere between a charity and a project purpose of service learning and the study has found out that they still have to do more

in terms of repositioning themselves within the level of service learning as a socio-academic justice.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, CRITIQUE, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of all the chapters in this thesis and an overview of the major emphases and highlights of the findings. In so doing, the chapter sums up the aims of the study, research procedures and findings that emerged. This exercise is followed by a critique of the limitations that emerged during the progression of the study. Thereafter suggestions and recommendations for future relevant research are presented.

5.2 Recapping the aims of the study

As pointed out in chapter one, this study is a critical scientific enquiry on the positionality of the concept and practice of service learning at selected South African higher education institutions, in particular the Universities of the Free State and of the Witwatersrand. The study attempted to elucidate the paradoxical nature of the euphoria and practices undergirding the concept of service learning. In doing so, the study critically reflects on **inconsistencies**, **contradictions** and **challenges** faced by the two selected higher education institutions in their practice of service learning as an academic activity.

5.3 Recapping the objectives of the study

As further itemised in chapter one, the study was geared towards addressing the following specific objectives:

- To conduct a situational analysis of service learning and curriculum development practices in the context of transforming higher education practice;
- To critically analyse (redefine?) the power relations characterising academic practices at selected South African higher education institutions, through a critical reflection of the tensions, paradoxes and contradictions in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of service learning;
- To expose the contradictions and inconsistencies characterising the notion of service learning and practice in relation to the concepts of participative and inclusive knowledge production, genuine civic responsibility and social empowerment as opposed to disempowering concepts like charity, welfarism and patronage;
- To demonstrate how the use and emphasis on the expert-oriented, charity and patronage concepts in service learning practices can be seen to contribute to the **reproduction** of the ideologies of **disempowerment**, **domination**, **categorisation** and **exclusion**;
- To present viable and informed recommendations intended to undermine efforts that are geared toward frustrating transformation initiatives in the country.

5.4 Recapping the theoretical framework (the lens) adopted in this study

As emphasised in chapter two, the study used writings of critical discourse scholars as the lens and theoretical framework for the purpose of critically understanding various perspectives of the practice of service learning, with the intention of sifting out progressive views on the concept. The study began by discussing the historical background of higher education in relation to the concept of service learning and community development in a changing and transforming South Africa.

Thereafter the study conceptualised **service-learning** and **positionality** as a means of developing a progressive understanding of the former in relation to the latter. Four levels of positionality – margin-center descriptors, charity, project and socio-academic justice – were used as indicators about different positionalities of the distribution of power in the relationship between higher education institutions and their community partners.

5.4.1 Summarising the theoretical concepts of margin and centre descriptors

As highlighted in chapter two, the practice of power relations in higher education has positioned people and local communities in terms of **margin** and **centre** localities. It was further explained that it has become a tendency to relate to people and local communities as belonging to the **centre** or the **margins** in the pursuit of academic practices. Researchers, policy developers and learners, for instance, have positioned themselves in terms of preferable epistemologies, and have also positioned communities in the area in terms of making academic inquiries and assumptions about

the nature of their relationships with others and the world. The **margin-centre dichotomy** as evidenced in the world of academia is useful in terms of analysing positionality as a construct to determine the disproportionality of the locus of power in academic-community relationships.

As highlighted in earlier chapters, positionality in terms of the margin-centre dichotomy, is regarded as some kind of mobility from one position to the other. Once those who perceive themselves to be on the margin begin to perceive of themselves as being in a position of inadequacy, they then make every effort to be accorded some place and acceptance in the centre, which is positioned as a locus of pre-eminence. This dichotomy enables us to position higher education transformatory practices and curriculum repositioning as being carried out by subjective, biased and theoretically positioned practitioners. It also enables us to critically investigate the genuineness of pronouncements about higher education engagements in service learning. Furthermore, it enables us to probe whether higher education engagements with communities and service partners are carried out in relation to a centre versus margin type of alliance, with the purpose of benefiting the centre at the disadvantage of the margin.

5.4.2 Summarising the theoretical concept of charity

In chapter two it was suggested that the outcry against service learning could be a guise for simply complying with issues of policy, with little or no intention of contributing to issues of community empowerment. This study illustrated that service learning pursued along the lines of **charity** involves a condition in which higher

education institutions express **tolerance** towards local communities, and **voluntarily** provide academic service to such communities as a measure of kindness and/or benevolence.

The charitable purpose of service learning, in which the power of the higher education institution is dominant, positions university-community engagement in terms of giving very little acknowledgment to the contribution of the local community. It affords little value in recognising them as important partners towards the advancement of the cause of service learning. Higher education institutions operating within this mode tend to understand and relate to local communities from a technicist point of view, and a big gap exists between the knowledgeable higher education institution and the less knowledgeable (poor, ignorant, needy, less fortunate, etc.) community (Mahlomaholo & Matobako, 2005).

The use of the concept of positionality therefore enables us to investigate whether the operationalisation of service learning is carried out as a welfare and/or charity disposed academic pursuit, or as a genuinely collaborative, mutually beneficial and empowering academic practice that seeks to accomplish social justice.

5.4.3 Summarising the theoretical concept of a project (moderate level)

The second level of positioning service learning, as discussed in chapter two, is the **project** purpose of service learning. This level is considered to be moderate in the sense that its precinct is somewhere between a **charity mode** of service learning and a **socio-academic justice** mode of service learning. The moderate positioning of this

level is derived from the observation that it confines the pursuit of service learning to a strategy for harmonising institutional resources with the pressing needs of local communities only on paper and in the hearts of university representatives.

5.4.4 Summarising the theoretical concept of socio-academic justice

As shown in previous chapters, the fourth and last level of positioning was identified as a more progressive approach in service learning and referred to as the **socio-academic** level. This level, in the context of this study, involves promoting progressive engagements and interactions of higher education institutions with the communities in their catchment areas. It relates to a socio-academic relationship between the world of academia and local communities that is informed by such principles as reciprocity, reverence, inclusivity and empowerment practices. It serves to ensure that such principles guide the operationalisation and practice of service learning in a **socially conscious, inclusive** and **participatory** manner.

In this kind of positioning, higher education institutions are able to rise to levels of being indisputably **responsive** to the socio-economic and political **imperatives** and **imaginations** of national transformation and reconstruction initiatives. Institutions operating within this mode tend to understand and relate to local communities from a progressive, informed and non-technicist point of view, and the gap between the knowledgeable higher education institution and the knowledge contributed from the communities is effectively bridged.

5.5 Recapping the research methodology operationalised in this study

As a means of collecting data for purposes of analysis and interpretation, the study operationalised a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach was considered relevant in constructing a counter-balanced approach with regard to the objectives of the study. The study further noted that the claims and pronouncements of quantitative researchers about the principles of **objectivity, quantification** and **absolutism** are not appropriate for thematising about issues of power relations such as **hegemony**, **domination**, **exclusivity, ideological inclination** and **discursion** which are probed by this study.

Rating a quantitative approach as being inappropriate for this study was also informed by the purpose of the study, this being to critically and scientifically reflect on the positionality of the concept of service learning as practised at higher education institutions. A further purpose of a non-quantitative nature was to investigate the different levels of conceptualisation and operationalisation of the service learning concept within the confines of universities and in their catchment areas and local communities.

The study established that reflecting on inconsistencies and contradictions could not be conducted successfully within the empirical and statistical dictates of a quantitative method. Amongst other things, this results from the observation that a quantitative tradition positions a researcher as the only dominant and know-all person in the investigation, whilst the researched are relegated to levels of quantifiable objects. This makes it difficult for a quantitative approach to understand the **dynamic** nature

of human experience. The argument is that the dynamism of human nature and experience cannot be reduced to levels of **objects** that are empirically investigated and **manipulated** in laboratories by domineering researchers. Such laboratory-based and manipulative research is considered to be **artificial,** and fails to note that people react differently in other contexts, especially in their own natural contexts.

The study also established that manipulative laboratory practices have the potential to produce undesirable effects, in that those being researched could be influenced by the researcher to the extent that conclusions would not be sound and realistic, especially when compared to research carried out in natural settings. The same argument was advanced with regard to issues of hegemony, exclusion, ideological contestations, power relations and intellectual tensions that were central to this investigation. Such issues are multifaceted, complex, dynamic and fluid, and thus cannot be reduced to laboratory artefacts. Positivistic researchers may miss the point in their claims and pronouncements about absolute objectivity, especially when studying human beings, as they erroneously interpret the fluidity of human experience in a particular way which is not necessarily neutral (Held, 1981; Mahlomaholo, 1998). The study further observed that the claims and pronouncements of quantitative researchers are capable of creating some form of **dependency** conditions and/or attitudes on the part of the researched.

Therefore, on the basis of the above arguments, a qualitative approach was considered to be more viable than a quantitative approach for a study of this nature. A qualitative approach enables the researcher to expose facts and issues and pursue meanings

intensively, so as to gain deeper and richer insight into the state of things (Mahlomaholo, 1998).

5.6 Recapping the sample of the study

As a means of embarking on a scientific enquiry about the positionality of higher education institutions in relation to service learning, the researcher selected two South African higher education institutions (the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of the Free State). The choice of the two institutions was influenced by their history of involvement in service learning and curriculum repositioning processes. The target institutions are located in the provinces of Gauteng (University of the Witwatersrand) and the Free State (University of the Free State).

The study found that historically, the higher education system in South Africa was hegemonic and entangled in deficiencies. This **hegemonic** and **deficiency** enmeshed higher education model, as echoed in chapter two, has had the effect of saturating socio-academic relations between higher education institutions and local communities. It has further degenerated into **contradictions**, **hostile** and **apprehensive** power relations between the **subaltern communities** (the subjugated and disempowered local communities) and the **dominant higher education institutions**.

5.7 Recapping the presentation of quantitative data

Quantitative data were presented from reported findings of the Community Higher Education Service Partnership (CHESP) pilot project that was commissioned by the Joint Education Trust (JET) in 2004. This approach constructed a comprehensive basis for engaging a qualitative and critical analysis of the subsequent qualitative data. The presentation of quantitative data indicated that over a period of four years the Higher Education Quality Committee accredited **182** service learning programmes from a significant number of institutions with an interest in service learning.

The Joint Education Trust (JET) had supported these institutional initiatives over the past four years. The level of support covered such areas as the conceptualisation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and research of these accredited service learning academic courses. The accredited courses were purported to be initiated according to the principles of service learning, thus linking teaching, learning and research with local community development priorities.

5.8 Recapping the operationalisation of the qualitative methodology

Consistent with the methodology outlined in chapter three, qualitative data were collected primarily through the procedure of interrogating written documents (policy documents and minutes), and interviewing service learning policy officials, service partners and community representatives (spoken texts). This methodology enabled the

researcher to ascertain trends, innovations and opinions with regard to issues of exclusion, hegemony, and marginalisation, as they relate to service learning.

5.9 Summarising the qualitative findings

The research findings in chapter four indicated that the two institutions under study responded to calls to reposition themselves in the area of synchronising their academic offerings with the reconstruction and developmental imperatives of the country. The research established that the two institutions produced strategic policy documents with regard to service learning, as a means of responding more appropriately to the needs of communities. The implementation of such documents was intended to enable the two institutions to develop service learning policy positions, thus making an institutional commitment to operationalising service learning.

The study found, however, that there are **gaps** and **inconsistencies** in terms of the commitments and engagements of the two institutions in their pursuit of service learning. The two selected institutions have limited the extent of their commitment to paper and heartfelt pronouncements. In one of the institutions under study, for instance, a policy document on community service learning that makes a commitment towards ensuring student participation and contribution to knowledge production was developed. What was found wanting, however, was ensuring that this is done taking cognisance of the needs of communities. As uncovered and reported in chapter four, there seems to be a **slippery relationship between the text depicted in policy documents and reality.**

Institutional good intentions about a meaningful model of service learning are invalidated and compromised by the lack of community participation in service learning policy and programme development. These results in skewed service learning benefits, in that students benefit more that do communities. Exposure to such programmes has benefited students in the following ways:

- they develop an increased awareness of community life and challenges;
- they experience personal growth (Erasmus & Jaftha, 2005).

This approach to service learning has generated a situation in which the two institutions are focusing on the **symptoms** of problems in their local communities, instead of making critical reflections on the bigger picture, these being the socio-economic diseases that created those symptoms. Institutions will only be able to get an overview of the nature of problems when the local community is provided space within the domain of the institution, not only on paper, so as to enable them to share the essence of the bigger picture with the university. Against this background, particularly in terms of policy undertakings, and taking cognisance of the themes outlined in this research, the two selected institutions are positioned somewhere between the charity and the socio-academic levels of service learning.

5.10 Summarising findings on the levels of service learning positionality

The theoretical concepts of the different levels of service learning positionality were presented in this chapter, in section 5.4. In this section, the findings are summarised

in terms of the **preparatory phase** at the levels of a project and/or charity (section 5.10.1), and socio-academic justice (section 5.10.2).

A successful service learning programme involves well conducted **preparatory activities** by lecturers and students. It is during this phase that students are prepared in terms of discussing their objectives and opportunities to engage with local communities. This kind of lecturer-student interface empowers and equips students with the necessary **knowledge**, **approach** and **attitudes** for the envisaged engagement with local communities. The preparatory phase includes exploring various levels of positioning students in relation to local communities, identifying various approaches of defining and understanding community needs, and providing students with the institutional epistemologies and theoretical positioning needed to perform service activities.

Considering that the practice of service learning involves taking students from the isolation of lecture halls and locating them in a community setting that they are often unfamiliar with, it is considered vital to prepare them (students), theoretically and otherwise, to be able to handle such encounters (Keene & Colligan, 2004). Adequate and relevant preparation will facilitate the construction of a **social consciousness** and **reciprocity responsiveness** on the part of students.

5.10.1 Summarising findings on the preparatory phase at the level of charity and/or a project

If service learning is carried out at the level of an **expert** and **exclusive positioning,** it facilitates the creation of conditions and opportunities where learners explore personal and individual benefits and/or gains of service learning, as opposed to examining **broader social benefits** in the pursuit of service learning as a strategy to engage local communities.

At an expert-oriented and exclusively academic level, the preparation phase creates conditions where students engage local communities in capacities of 'visitors' to the so-called poor, ignorant, needy and less-fortunate localities, carrying with them 'bags full of **academic answers'** to dispense with some superfluous and/or unwanted artefacts. This approach is likely to decipher into an operational context that causes learners to develop biased and **erroneous models** of relating with communities. For example, negatively conceived notions of conditions within communities may result in students being cautioned about the dangers of going there, or that insurance forms should be properly completed and submitted in case of some anticipated trouble within such negatively construed communities.

The implications for institutions that are confined to a charity and/or project pursuit of service learning are that service learning students want to complete their service learning in time (time-bound). This level of service learning positions students as a separate entity requiring safety insurances and assurances to go into communities, instead of positioning them as an integral part of the community.

5.10.2 Summarising findings on the preparatory phase at the level of socio-academic justice

If service learning is carried out along the lines of **socio-academic justice,** it facilitates the creation of conditions and opportunities where learners are enabled to explore broader social benefits, as opposed to personal and individual gains of service learning. This kind of positioning stands in direct contrast to the charitable and project purposes of service learning.

At the level of socio-academic justice, preparation should entail a situation where students are sensitised to the importance of transcending self-cantered aspirations of engagements with community partners so as to become organic learners that are **responsive** to the socio-economic and political of issues of national transformation and reconstruction initiatives taking place within their catchment area. Socio-academic justice preparation creates conditions where students are engaged in processes of understanding the bigger picture – the disease and not the symptoms – that created the horrendous and appalling conditions that characterise local communities. Within the context of this understanding, students are enabled to explore appropriate models and methodologies of engaging local communities in capacities of organic and equal partners. Such preparation translates into an empowering action for both the community and the students, thus making service learning a well-conceived and noble strategy for harmonising socio-academic relationships.

5.11 Limitations of the study and critiquing thereof

Service learning is a fairly new practice in the field of South African higher education. Conducting research of this nature to establish the positionality of two South African universities in terms of the three levels identified in the study (charity, project (moderate) and socio-academic justice), and from a critical discourse perspective, was a cumbersome exercise. The researcher made a number of efforts to find sources that focus on the emancipatory nature of service learning in a developmental context, but found that only a negligible number of studies with an emancipatory agenda have been pursued in the country. This reality presented the researcher with some measure of difficulty. The study, then, had to rely on textual data in policy and strategic documents and feedback from a small number of respondents.

A study of this nature required a counter-balanced approach, in which the three categories of representatives in the service learning triad, students, service organisations and community representatives were interviewed. This intention was not accomplished in this study, as a result of the non-availability of community members and some lecturers. The researcher made a number of efforts to interview members of these groups, but it was not easy to secure appointments. For example, only one representative from a service organisation in Mangaung managed to accord the researcher an appointment.

Many responses then accrued from the perspective of service teaching policy developers, which would have distorted results. To bring in a balancing measure in

terms of data collection, the researcher had to rely strongly on textual (written) reports from service learning audits carried out by other researchers employed by the institutions under study, and also on reports published on the institutions' websites. Nevertheless, the data from these sources were utilizable and appropriate for this study.

5.12 Recommendations

The theoretical exercise that was pursued in this study has revealed that service learning as an academic entity has the potential of unleashing an emancipatory praxis that is critically needed in a developing South Africa. Against this background, it is recommended that higher education institutions that are actively involved in the practice of service learning, including the universities of the Free State and the Witwatersrand, need to move on from the heart-and-paper commitment to service learning. They need to move away from expert-oriented, domineering and hegemonic service learning practices. Such positionalities imprison institutions as sites for the transmission of a **dominant culture,** which in turn limits the opportunities for such institutions to embrace a desirable emancipatory praxis.

The study further recommends that institutions of higher learning need to create an alternative level of repositioning service learning on the socio-academic justice level that has been propounded in this study. The following are the main features of the said level:

- Service learning is operationalised within the dictates of principles such as reciprocity, reverence, inclusivity and empowerment which guide the practice

of service learning in a **socially conscious, inclusive** and **participatory** manner.

- The operationalisation and conduct of service learning hinges around issues of social justice requiring the expansion of focus from the poor to broader structural conditions, such as mechanisms of structural violence and the global forces that create poverty.
- The power of the higher education institution is on a par with that of the catchment area. As a result, university-community engagement translates to equitable recognition of the contribution of the local community in the improvement of the quality of their lives, and furthermore, recognises them as important partners in advancing the cause of service learning.
- During the preparation and reflection processes, students are sensitised to the importance of transcending self-centered aspirations of engagements with community partners. This enables them to progress to levels of **socially conscious, inclusive** and **participatory** aspirations and repositions them as organic learners that are **responsive** to the socio-economic and political **imperatives** and **imaginations** of issues of national transformation and reconstruction initiatives taking place within their catchment area.
- Higher education institutions create conditions where students 'commit class suicide', thus engaging in processes of understanding the bigger picture, the disease and not the symptoms, that create the horrendous and appalling conditions that characterise local communities. This enables them to explore appropriate models and methodologies of engaging local communities in the capacity of equal partners.

- Higher education institutions systematise the participation of local communities in service learning processes. The contribution of and benefits to all members of the triad arrangement are evaluated in a systematic way.

The foregoing features are highly recommended as principles and indicators that should underpin the practice of service level by those institutions that genuinely desire to be positioned at the level of socio-academic justice. These principles recognise that service learning benefits and contributions can be encouraged and promoted in the catchment areas of higher education institutions.

5.13 Conclusion

Through the pursuit of service learning, the defective model that was historically perceived to continuously and perpetually uphold **hegemonic** and **domineering** principles derived from the educational distortions of the apartheid social order can be **curtailed.**

It is only when local communities are provided space within the domain of higher education institutions in reality, not only on paper, that universities will themselves be empowered, as well as empowering others, to share the essence of the real diseases that have negatively impacted on the quality of life within communities. The socio-academic model of service learning is a means of enabling an empowerment sensitive system of higher education that is characterised by increased participation by all sectors of society, as well as by greater institutional responsiveness to the moral, social and economic demands of a developing South Africa.

5.14 Suggestions for future research

Since service learning is regarded as fairly new in South Africa, researchers need to embark on further research in this field. Research of this nature puts local communities on a par with institutions of higher learning and, as such, promotes an emancipatory praxis that has over the years eluded higher education practice in South Africa. The various models presented in this study (charity, project and socio-academic models) are equally essential for researchers to consider adopting in pursuing future research.

The findings from the two universities under study (Universities of the Free State and the Witwatersrand) are likely to characterise other institutions in the country. Only future research and findings accruing from such initiatives will reveal whether other institutions have progressed towards the socio-academic justice level of operationalising service learning, or whether they still have to make efforts to be positioned within this mode.

The three models can also be used as criteria for measuring best practices in service learning and, as such, future research becomes indispensable in ensuring that these models are developed further than their current levels. Future recommendations on the use of the models will also provide appropriate points of reference for purposes of empowering universities to accomplish best practices of service learning. This would further reposition them to play visibly significant roles in the continuing reconstruction and development initiatives taking place in the country.

5.14 Final words from the researcher

This scientific exercise was both challenging and empowering. It helped the researcher to understand phenomena from various angles, including the perspective of service partners. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations emerging from this study will be of value for the purpose of accomplishing best practices in service learning. The following quotation presents itself as an important finality to this study:

"*An injury to one is an injury to all*" (anonymous)

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