

An account of student mentors' 'modes of reflexivity' during an e-mentoring programme at a university

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Abstract

This article focuses on the reflexive deliberations of student mentors during an e-mentoring programme at a South African university. Based on semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with student mentors, located in a number of different student residences, this article examines how they engage with their learning and use information and communication technology (ICT) and/or social media, such as Mxit,¹ Facebook and cellular phones for their learning socialisation. I draw on Margaret Archer's (2007) concept of 'modes of reflexivity' to highlight their ability to navigate their educational and personal circumstances within the university's context. I show that student mentors' reflexive stances are essential for understanding the nature of ICT use and their learning engagement in mentoring programmes. The article discusses the reflexive stances of four selected student mentors in relation to their ICT use on a mentoring programme. It discusses the impact of exigent conditions at various sites in the university on their ICT navigations. I show how each of the student mentors establishes viable mentoring platforms in the context of a difficult learning context. The article analyses how each mentor's reflexive modes informs his or her engagement and interaction with ICTs. The key conclusion of the article is that student mentors tend to adopt similar stances towards their ICT usage, e-mentoring and their own learning. They establish formative relations between their ICT usage and e-mentoring practices in relation to their own learning. The specific nature of each mentor's reflexive mode explains his or her type of interaction with ICTs and the university's learning environments more generally.

INTRODUCTION: STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN AN E-MENTORING PROGRAMME

This article focuses on student mentors' reflexive deliberations while using ICTs in an e-mentoring programme. Studies by Loots (2009) focus on the role of mentoring and another study by McLean (2004) highlights the importance of the curriculum in mentoring. Rather than focusing on the role and nature of mentoring, I concentrate on student mentors and their dispositions towards mentoring using the lens of modes of reflexivity to analyse their engagement in the mentoring process. It is situated against the backdrop of discussions about access to higher education of a diverse range of

students over the last two decades (see Bitzer 2010; Van Schalkwyk 2007; Akoojee and Nkomo 2007; Heagney 2008). I am particularly concerned to understand how students are socialised into university learning. This article is an exploration of student engagement with aspects of such socialisation via an e-mentoring programme. The focus of this article is thus on aspects of students' learning engagement, specifically students who work in a mentoring capacity at a university. They are involved in a range of interactive processes with their mentees in the context of the university's mentor programme.

The article draws attention to what is known as the 'digital divide' in reference to the gap between the ubiquitous availability of, and access to, computer technologies, on the one hand, and their uneven application and use in high schools and university learning environments, on the other (Guomundsdottir 2003). It primarily explores the reflexive stances of student mentors, specifically the mediated ways in which they engage with various ICT forms during the mentoring process. In other words, I consider the specific expressions of agency or reflexivity that each of the four selected student mentors whom I interviewed exemplify in their use of ICTs for mentoring purposes. The purpose of the article is thus to understand the reflexive bases upon which they engage with the university and how they navigate their ICT use. I will suggest that student mentors' agency and reflexive capacities play a crucial role in the way they engage with ICTs on the mentoring programme.

Brown, Czerniewicz and Williams (2009) show that ICT use is particularly differentiated by socio-economic status. They suggest that students adopt strategies and make choices in their everyday engagement with ICTs. My focus is on the interaction between the mentors' reflexive capacity and their engagement with ICTs and their learning. I employ aspects of Margaret Archer's (2003) theoretical position on structure and agency, specifically what she calls 'modes of reflexivity' (2007, 93) to highlight the student mentors' ability to navigate their educational and personal circumstances within the university's socialising context. The article is based on a qualitative exploration of purposively selected student mentors' use of ICT interactive formats and their learning engagement during their mentoring interaction with their mentees.

REFLEXIVITY AS THE MEDIATORY REQUIREMENT FOR AGENCY

The literature on e-mentoring highlights its potential to break down social class barriers and allow for more equal exchanges between parties (see Bierema and Merriam 2002; Sproull and Keisler 1986; Hollingshead and McGrath 1995). What remain largely unproblematised in the literature are the dispositional bases in terms of which people access e-learning and ICT platforms. A recent thesis by Chen (2010) focuses on the dispositional dimension of students who engage in online learning. Chen locates her study at the intersection of students' dispositions and their pedagogical practices. My examination of the student mentors' relational dispositions in the light of their ICT use on the mentor programme has a similar focus. Margaret Archer's

(2000; 2003; 2007) work on structure and agency provides a useful theoretical framework for this type of analysis. Archer problematises the relation between social contexts and human behaviour and advances a particular conceptualisation of the notion of reflexivity to explain how human beings engage with their social context. I suggest that this notion (reflexivity) is apposite for understanding student mentors' socialisation into university learning.

Archer argues that reflexivity is 'the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their social context' (2003, 342). In other words, the ability to act independently is mediated by the reflexive capacity of human beings. She further argues that 'the subjective powers of reflexivity mediate the role that objective structural or cultural powers play in influencing social action and are thus indispensable to explain social outcomes' (Archer 2007, 5). Kamler and Thomson refer to the notion of reflexivity as a referent for 'looking for the social in the individual account, asking how particular events, categories and assumptions might have been produced through discourse, culture, political affiliations, and/or social practice' (2006, 66–67). Reflexivity can thus be understood as the active process of engagement of individuals with their social circumstances. Archer's (2003) social realist approach to human agency provides a compelling framework for understanding student mentors' social and relational bases in their engagement with ICTs in their lived contexts. She emphasises the study of the relationship between structure and agency. For her, 'structure' refers to the way in which society is organized, including the norms, patterns, customs, traditions, ideologies and material conditions that co-constitute social life. 'Agency', in turn, refers to the ability of individuals to act independently and to make their own choices. She argues for the interdependence of structure and agency (for without people there would be no structure) and claims that structures have the potential to constrain as well as to enable agents. Archer suggests that agents' responses are conditional rather than deterministic (2003, 4). In order to understand the actions of individuals, it is necessary to analyse the formative interdependence between structure and agency. For Archer 'reflexive deliberations' (2003, 15) are a key factor in determining the actions of individuals.

Human reflexivity serves as a means to mediate the influence of the structural conditions that influence social action. Archer argues that human reflexivity is 'our personal capacity to reflect upon ourselves and our concerns in relation to our social circumstances' (2003, 342). She regards reflexivity as the most important 'personal emergent property' and regards it as central to the process of mediation (2003, 9). She proposes four modes of reflexivity, each characterised by a different way of engaging in reflexive relationships in relation to the structural constraints experienced by agents. She explains that 'human beings adopt generically different stances towards society and that these stances are articulated through their modes of reflexivity' (2003, 342). Each mode represents a distinct way of engaging in the reflexive relationship. She further argues that reflexive behavior is activated by the structural and cultural enablements and constraints of our social context. Archer

proposes four primary modes of reflexivity, or 'stances to society' (2003, 342; 2007, 93). In Table 1 is an illustration of each mode of reflexivity.

Table 1: Modes of reflexivity (Archer 2007, 93)

Communicative reflexivity	Those whose internal conversations require completion and confirmation by others before resulting in courses of action. (2007, 93).
Autonomous reflexivity	Those who sustain self-contained internal conversation, leading directly to action, (2007,93)
Meta-reflexivity	Agents are critically reflexive about their own internal conversations and critical about effective action in society (2007, 93)
Fractured reflexivity	Describes the (perhaps temporary) state of a type of reflexivity which intensifies "distress and disorientation rather than leading to purposeful courses of action" (2007, 93)

Human beings are able to demonstrate a range of states of reflexivity at different times or a particular expression of more than one type of reflexivity, depending on the objective circumstances they find themselves in. Archer suggests that the effect of agents' subjective engagement with their contexts is to 'evade, adopt a strategic stance or to subvert their social context' (2003, 349, 350, 351). They are able to subjectively mediate their objective circumstances by means of the mode of reflexivity they adopt.

Archer's four modes of reflexivity can lay the basis for an understanding of how and why student mentors use ICTs for mentoring. She claims that 'everyone is a reflexive being. This means that we deliberate on our circumstances in relation to ourselves and, in the light of these deliberations, we determine our own personal courses of action in society' (2003, 167). These modes of reflexivity thus provide a lens for understanding mentors' agentic bases for their dispositions towards ICTs on an e-mentoring programme.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The project focused on how an e-mentoring programme could enhance a mentorship programme offered to student mentors in university residences. A key part of any mentoring programme is effective communication between mentors and mentees (Terrion and Leonard 2007). The literature on mentoring programmes indicates that mentors often experience difficulties such as insufficient time for mentoring and difficulties in maintaining contact with mentees (McLean 2004; Johnson 2002; Terrion and Leonard 2007). The main aim of the e-mentoring programme was to establish and sustain contact between mentors and mentees. The programme followed a 'blended learning' approach (see Gülseçen, Ersoy and Nutku 2005), which consisted of face-to-face mentoring as well as virtual mentoring.

The student mentors from Residence A were trained in the use of the learner management system (LMS) in order to maintain communication with their mentees.

The idea was that the LMS would serve as a tool through which student mentors could communicate with their student mentees. The mentor training consisted of, inter alia, a consideration of how e-mentoring and the LMS could be used to ensure better communication between mentors and mentees. Student mentors were trained in the use of the LMS and were encouraged to access it regularly. This meant that mentors would be in position to maintain contact through face-to-face contact as well as through ICTs.

Simultaneously, student mentors from Residence B were trained in using Facebook to maintain contact between mentors and mentees. The student mentors established a mentors' Facebook group as a form of support, which they used to maintain contact with mentees. Student mentors from Residence C were not trained in any specific ICT and were encouraged to use any means of communication.

Mentors who were actively involved in the mentoring programme were purposively selected for interviews. Purposeful selection 'emphasizes information-rich samples rather than generalising to the broader population' (Struwig and Stead 2001, 124.) The four selected student mentors, two males and two females, lived at three of the university residences. At the start of the project the mentors were second and third year students. Three of the student mentors came from the Eastern Cape and one from the Western Cape. Three of the student mentors were studying in the Business Faculty and one in the Applied Sciences Faculty. The student mentors had all attended disadvantaged schools and came from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. I have given the student mentors discussed in Table 2 pseudonyms.

Table 2: Profile of student mentors

Mentor	Residence	Gender	Region	Language	Year of study	Faculty	ICTs used
Sipho	Group A	M	Eastern Cape	Xhosa	2nd year	Business	Blackboard (LMS), MXit, Facebook, Cellular phones
Siya	Group B	M	Eastern Cape	Xhosa	3rd year	Business	Facebook, Cellular phones
Zuki	Group C	F	Eastern Cape	Xhosa	4th year	Business	MXit, Cellular phones
Denise	Group B	F	Western Cape	Afrikaans	3rd year	Applied Sciences	Facebook, MXit

The mentors were first-generation students for whom English was a second language. They were relatively mature students who entered the university with a diverse range of experiences and backgrounds.

The interviews with the four mentors were preceded by three focus group discussions that I conducted with twenty-five student mentors from the three residences. Kingry et al. (1990) claim that there are several advantages to focus groups, such as the ability to have an in-depth discussion in a secure environment, without the fear of criticism. I elicited the individual interview themes from these

focus group interviews. These themes were used to guide my interviews with the student mentors.

The data from these interviews were coded using the constant comparative method of coding (Struwig and Stead 2001; Glaser 1965) and analysed based on an inductive method of analysis. Important concepts and themes were extracted from the data and patterns of data were highlighted. The units of meaning in the data were identified, compared and categorised. The themes highlighted were: 1) structural constraints and personal interactions with regard to high school learning experience; 2) navigating and learning about ICTs; and 3) community engagements around educational endeavours. Another broad theme elicited from the interviews revolved around the navigation and expression of agency with regard to approaches to learning, mentoring, use of technology and the use of social networking sites. The ensuing discussion is a consideration of the mentors' dispositions, or modes of reflexivity, with regard to their appropriation of ICTs during their mentoring processes.

CONSTRAINTS AT UNIVERSITY

This section is based on the student mentors' accounts of their use of technology at the university, specifically how they navigated the constraints that they experienced with ICT access. Rayjee (2007, 30) points out that technology can be significant at universities, but that factors such as 'colonial histories, division of universities by race, the inherited inequalities and academic cultures' can have an impact on the teaching and learning experience. In the light of this, student mentors have to navigate structural constraints such as limited resources, inadequate systems, limited exposure to technology and limited e-learning opportunities. The interviews demonstrated the impact of mentors' experiences while at university and showed how they negotiated these circumstances in order to achieve their goals. This is the pertinent backdrop against which their reflexive modes with regard to ICT use can be understood.

Student mentors had access to technology at the university, but had an ambivalent attitude to towards its use. Zuki commented in an interview that at university 'they show you the real computer, what the computer does and how you use it – so it's everything'. She said that she believed that she learned most of what she knew about computers while at university. At the same time the interviewees spoke about the limited access to ICTs that they had on campus. The computer laboratories, for example, were mostly accessible for only 30 minutes between classes as most departments used the computer laboratories for lectures. While student mentors had access to a 24-hour e-learning laboratory, they complained about the difficulty of having to deal with the high demand for space. In addition, there were difficulties with a lack of transport to take them back to the residences late at night, if they intend using the laboratory after classes. Of the three residences in which I conducted this study, only one had a computer laboratory. The student mentors complained in the interviews about the lack of printers, computer hardware and a general neglect of the

laboratories on campus. One student mentor reflected her frustration by explaining that,

if students do not have access to computers, they're [the mentees] not going to do all of their studies. And it's difficult for students to come to campus on weekends, and when you get there only e-learning and the libraries are open. And at e-learning most of the computers do not have network cables and a mouse, so even if they do come, they can't do any work. So it's really boring. (Residence Group A, focus group discussion).

The interviews showed that, while ICT use can enhance teaching and learning, specific conditions that existed in the mentors' learning socialisation led to their dynamic engagement with the ICTs. The student mentors, however, spoke of applying creative ways to deal with stumbling blocks in their learning environments. All students at the university in the study received 50 megabytes a month for use related to their course work. If they ran out of megabytes, they often asked friends for the use of their accounts; in addition, they had access to cellular phone technology which they occasionally used to access the internet. Student mentors, however, used cellular phones as a last resort because of the high cost of air time. In an analogous study Czerniewicz (2009, 75) reported that students from poor socio-economic groups were increasingly using their cellular phones for academic purposes. It became clear that student mentors would have to use their own time, effort and resources for academic purposes in order to supplement the university's limited megabyte supply. Archer describes conditions where action can only be taken at the person's own expense as the 'opportunity costs' (2003, 136) that agents have to carry so that they can address the constraints they face. Because not all the mentors were prepared to carry these opportunity costs, the consequence was a sporadic and uneven use and application of ICTs in the e-mentoring programme.

AGENCY IN MENTORING: ICT USE

While student mentors experienced many structural constraints, they were able to exercise agency within the constraining environment. I now discuss the four student mentors' engagement with ICTs, drawing on Archer's reflexivity framework. I provide a brief account of the background of each mentor, then go on to discuss each of their interactions with their mentees, the nature of the engagement with ICTs, their attitude to ICTs and the ways in which they engage with their learning at university.

SIPHO AND SIYA AS EXAMPLES OF AUTONOMOUS REFLEXIVE AGENCY

Sipho was a second-year Sports Management student mentor. He lived at one of the residences that did not have a computer laboratory. Sipho was able to buy a laptop in his second year by working and earning some money. He was, however, largely dependent on the NFSAS loan that he received. He says,

I'm the second boy, so ... and I'm the only one who's in tertiary level. I'm not coming from that fortunate family where there's like everything that you need. Because since we are that large family but we only one person who was working and that was my father. My mother would just have the chars, working here and there but not working as a regular employee and stuff. But my father is the person who was actually working for the past 17 years for one of the companies in Cape Town. But after he had a heart attack, from there he was retrenched. (Sipho, Interview).

Sipho displayed a positive attitude to his learning. He is an example of a first-generation university student who is eager to obtain a higher education qualification. He says that

I've developed myself in terms of looking after myself, not like searching to the parents, it is actually me trying to search for, the potential I have and the challenges that I'm facing in terms of trying to accomplish all what I have. I'm always saying to myself, what if something happens – because I know at least I have developed that sense of knowing that I can do it on my own. (Sipho, Interview).

Archer (2003, 299) defines active agents as 'people who exerted some control over their lives'. Sipho took control of his life by working part time in a supermarket and taking leadership opportunities such as peer mentoring and peer educator roles.

As a student mentor, Sipho relied on the use of MXit and Facebook as means of communication between himself and his mentees. He found the use of Blackboard (LMS) an ineffective strategy as many of his mentees were not familiar with this platform, while Facebook and MXit were used extensively. He explains that

MXit, it was useful in the manner in which we conducted our meetings; even if that day maybe it's inappropriate that I see them, MXit would be the recommendation because whatever that they want to say they can say it via MXit, and then maybe at a later stage when we meet in person then I can be able to respond. (Sipho, Interview).

Sipho explained that the mentors used MXit to ask questions about the mentees' well-being and their studies. The mentees in turn also indicated their social or academic problems by communicating via MXit. Kekwaltelswe (2007, 104) refers to mobile learning support as a form of 'social presence awareness'. She suggests that social awareness is a mental concept where a learner becomes aware of the social network that follows him or her while moving across the different learning contexts. The mentees and mentors made use of MXit extensively as a way of interacting with their emergent social network around issues related to their learning socialisation, in particular the conceptual challenges related to their courses. Most importantly, in the absence of ubiquitous computing technology at the university, student mentors relied on available ICTs such as MXit and Facebook as a way of staying in touch with mentees.

Siya is a third-year Human Resource Management student mentor who grew up in the Eastern Cape. He came to live in Khayelitsha, Cape Town to complete his high

school. Siya was dependent on a government NFSAS loan to fund his studies. He was appointed as a head mentor and took leadership responsibilities in the residence. Siya described himself as someone who came from the townships:

But mostly those that were from the townships, which really helped a lot, because we didn't know how to research or how to type in the web thing on top. It was just a big problem how to use Google, how to use Gmail and all those things. (Siya, Interview).

He stayed in a residence that was equipped with a computer laboratory. He did not own a computer or a laptop, but spoke of acquiring one as soon as possible.

Siya explained that technology was largely absent from the home where he grew up. He says that 'since I'm not coming from that much privileged family, so stuff like cell phones – it was even difficult for us to get a television into the house' (Siya, Interview). He acquired a cellular phone when he was in Grade 12. He has access to computers at residence, but he often borrows a laptop from friends if he needs one. In the community where he grew up, he would on occasion use the library if he needed a computer.

Siya is also a devout Christian. He uses his religious resources as motivation for positive interaction with his mentees. He prefers Facebook as means of staying in contact with his mentees. He explains that 'So now if I'm on Facebook and I'm just doing my thing or I see my mentee in, and then that's when we start talking' (Siya, Interview). He spoke very positively about his experience with computer technology at the University. He believed that it helped him to acquire the skills needed to survive in his first year at university. He explained that he had to start more or less from scratch in learning how to access and use ICTs. He credited a short course in ICT that he did during his first year on campus as being 'really helpful' in inducting him into ICT use.

Siya believed that he had to be actively engaged during his lectures and that his role should be 'to listen and ask information and interact, write stuff down – ja, and learn' (Siya Interview). Siya spoke very passionately about his studies, about what higher education meant to him and his future employment prospects. As Siya put it: 'because as much as companies would love to see outcomes, productivity and make profit and all those things, but their greatest asset is human. So I've learned to appreciate people more and learn how to deal with them more, because productivity depends on the human aspect' (Interview). Siya also had some progressive views about teaching and learning, which he attributed to the influence of the lecturers:

I would round it off to facilitation – not the teacher-learner kind of setting, but the facilitator, to just lay down the theme or the topic for the day and then facilitate the discussion. So what do you think about the topic? How does this apply to the modern world? And then we're coming with our own information. And then we go back and research and then we bring the information that we have, and then the lecturer facilitates the learning process. That's how it works out for me. (Siya, Interview).

The reflexive mode that Siya and Sipho display can be regarded as autonomous, because it is based on their active engagement and strategic navigation of their existing social learning environments. Siya spoke positively about ICTs at the university despite the limitations he encountered. Archer refers to this as 'getting on' (2007, 192) and as typical of those who adopt an autonomous reflexive mode. Siya approached his own learning in a similarly active manner by claiming that it was his responsibility to acquire the knowledge through research, rather than depending solely on the lecturer. Similarly, Sipho's active approaches to learning are captured in the following:

I think for me I acknowledge the fact of using brainstorming when I learn a concept, breaking it down and trying to find out what it is and what is the main aim of that particular concept – so I would make sure having that idea of knowing that what is it that I'm being taught. So for me one of the tools that I'd use is to brainstorm the information and to also go and search for it, look out for more information – not only focus on the information given to the class but going out and searching for more. (Sipho, Interview).

Both student mentors participated actively in all the workshops and discussions organised by the mentoring programme. According to Archer (2007, 118), autonomous agents attempt to cope strategically with constraints and enablements. Both Sipho and Siya had the capacity to reflect on their circumstances and were able to confidently engage with their environment by using their personal resources. Sipho and Siya showed signs of self-reliance which, according to Archer (2007), is an essential feature of autonomous reflexivity. For Siya, his love of people was aligned with the Human Resource Management course he was studying and with his Christianity, which he used as a personal motivational resource in his interaction with his mentees. Sipho acted strategically by taking several student leadership positions, for which he was paid a nominal fee. Both Siya and Sipho took leadership positions and displayed 'upward mobility' which, according to Archer (2007, 192), is one of the characteristics of autonomous reflexive agents. Their autonomous reflexive capacities enabled them to engage with their educational context in deliberate and strategic ways.

ZUKI AS AN EXAMPLE OF COMMUNICATIVE REFLEXIVE AGENCY

Zuki was a Xhosa-speaking senior university student mentor from the Eastern Cape, who had attended a formerly coloured school with boarding facilities. Her exposure to computer technology occurred when she attended computer classes on Saturdays that were arranged by the school. She was then exposed to basic computer programs such as MS Word. As a student in the Faculty of Business, Zuki explained that, while she had some exposure to computers before she came to university, she had used the internet for the first time while at university.

Zuki engaged actively in the mentoring programme. She formed a close bond with her five first-year student mentees. The residence where she was based caters for female students. It seemed from her interview that Zuki saw herself as a mother figure for these mentees with whom she was in constant contact through MXit. Zuki offered strong moral support to her mentees, whom she treated as friends. She said, 'I am inspiring my mentees in many ways because I don't drink, I don't go out, I don't do many things, I stay in my room and study. And I always tell them that I came to Cape Town for my studies – so I'll study. If I want to do all these things that people do outside, I'll do it after I'm done.' (Zuki, Interview).

Zuki explains her experience of mentoring using MXit:

When you talk to someone on MXit it actually feels that the person is there, you're sitting with this person who's there. You share and then you exchange words, it's very good. And there are emotions – if she's saying that she's crying; she's going to put that crying emotion, now I'm crying. So I'd respond – don't cry because your Mummy is smiling back at you – and then I would put a smiley face, then I will send it to her. (Zuki, Interview).

She believes that 'you don't call people when you're on MXit, because it feels like you talk to them every day, so you don't even call them because they're always on MXit' (Zuki, Interview). In a way that is typical of communicative reflexive agency; she avoids any conflict, does not seek an active social life on campus and shares a close bond with her mentees. Archer uses the notion of 'communicative reflexivity' to refer to someone who 'creates a group of "similar and familiars" with whom they could and would share "thought and talk"' (2007, 145).

Zuki spoke about working in her field of study and within the local structures of her social network. She elaborated on this as follows: 'I told myself that if I'm taking this route, then I'm definitely going in the right direction, so it's best that I do what I came here for and then I move' (Zuki, Interview). According to Archer, there are three features that are characteristic of the way in which communicative reflexives go about their lives. These are 'contextual continuity, dovetailing of concerns and a desire for contentment' (2003, 170). It was apparent that Zuki displayed these characteristics in her contentment with the circumstances in which she found herself. She imagined working within the narrow confines of her field of study and stated that that 'I want to be a director; I hear it is possible when you do Public Management, it's possible that you can be a director' (Zuki, Interview). She seemed to be contented with the course she studied and drew a narrow functional link between the course and her future-orientated job status.

Zuki relied on her lecturer's notes for her studies and would use the internet and other sources as supplementary material. She explains that:

[The lecturer] gives you notes to study like for an assignment, I can't only use what she told me to use – I go to the library, Google on the internet. Actually, I'm doing it

not to have the same assignment as the people in class, because if we all use the notes that she gives us in class then obviously our assignments are going to be the same. So it's best that you get other sources like books, or you Google your thing – but you must know how to reference. (Zuki, Interview).

She adopted what could be regarded as an instrumentalist approach to university learning by an over-reliance on lecturers' notes and using the internet for secondary sources. Zuki preferred to complete class assignments by closely following the lecturer's requirements. She did not seem to approach her learning in a deep or critical manner. As a communicative reflexive agent, her commitment to the course and approaches to her learning were thus minimalist and instrumental with respect to the narrow requirements of the course.

She displays contentment with her circumstances and loves the supportive interaction with her mentees. With regard to becoming a mentor, she explained that:

for me it's a beautiful experience, it's a beautiful thing that was introduced, especially for us to interact with the first-year students. Because, yes, looking at the problems that they have, it's really good to have someone that you know you can talk to. (Zuki, Interview).

She developed a trusting relationship with her mentees and she revealed that she benefited from mentoring relationships. Archer (2007, 194) suggests that 'trust in others is the basis of a communicative reflexive agent'. Her concern for localised personal contentment is what characterises her reflexivity and ICT usage and interaction.

DENISE AS AN EXAMPLE OF FRACTURED REFLEXIVE AGENCY

Denise was a third-year Environmental Health student mentor who lived at a residence with a computer laboratory. She comes from Mossel Bay in the Western Cape Province, where she attended an Afrikaans-medium school. She describes her limited access to computer technology at school:

They teach you basics like how to go into the stuff basically and just how to operate, where to click and where not to click. No, there wasn't like typing. We did mathematics on the computers where we had to put on the earphones and listen to the lecture, so it was basically mathematics. (Denise, Interview).

Denise became actively involved in the mentoring programme and made use of MXit and Facebook to stay in touch with mentees. During the interviews conducted with her, Denise displayed a type of fractured reflexivity when she explained her interaction with her mentees, engagement in class and attitude to computer technology. Fractured reflexivity describes the (perhaps temporary) state that intensifies 'distress and disorientation rather than leading to purposeful courses of action' (Archer 2003, 93). It was apparent that Denise's intermittent and confusing

interaction with her mentees and her limited understanding of her role as a mentor in the interaction process pointed to a distressing and disorientating engagement with ICTs in the mentoring process. She describes her experiences of using ICTs at the university as follows:

I can't remember but I know when I started typing I really typed slow and it took forever and you are so embarrassed to sit in a computer lab while everybody is typing fast and you're typing slowly finger for finger. It was an issue for me to use a computer because I never really used one at school. (Denise, Interview).

The way in which she interacted with the mentees and her attitude towards her studies showed that she had a passive relationship with her learning environment. Denise felt that in the lecture hall it was important for her to listen carefully; as she put it:

I wouldn't say interrogate but just make sure that by the time you leave the class you understand what you did there. So even if you have to ask dumb questions, you just have to make sure that you personally understand. I just listen. (Denise, Interview).

Denise would never ask questions or give comments in the lecture. During Facebook encounters they would comment on each other's status and get involved in other casual interchanges. She lost contact with one of her mentees and never attempted to contact him again. MXit was used to establish meeting dates and casual chatting. She gave a vague response about the nature of their conversations and said that it would 'sometimes be continuous and sometimes it's the once-off' (Denise, Interview), which suggests that she did not engage deeply with her mentees through ICTs.

She had a positive view towards technology, but could not provide substantial reasons why it was important in her life and was uncertain about the importance of technology. 'I think it's better than using books. Just because – I can't give you, I don't have a reason, but, ja, it's just better, because I don't know anything else' (Denise, Interview). According to Archer, agents who display a fractured reflexivity 'cannot define what they seek in society and they often display uncertainty' (2003, 304).

Archer (2003, 303) describes the internal conversation of fractured reflexivity as 'primary expressive' rather than purposeful. Denise describes her goals in these expressive terms:

I think I would like to do more research regarding my field, which would entail reading, which I don't do a lot about environmental health. Right now I just want to finish my diploma, do my community service. I don't want to work in Mossel Bay, I want to work somewhere else where I can build myself to a position where I can say I know what I'm doing, I know my job to an extent – and maybe then go and work in our place, community work. (Denise, Interview).

Denise conveyed her desire to do more research and to pursue her ambitions in a hopeful way, but also expressed concerns, such as her lack of reading in her field

of study and was hesitant about where she would like to work. She seemed very indecisive about her goals. Typical of fractured reflexive agency, people like Denise's 'inner dialogues go around in inconclusive circles' (Archer 2003, 303). Denise relied on the internet for most of her resources and viewed the library in negative light:

in the library there's so many books that really I don't have the energy to search for the books. But sometimes I check on the internet, they also give part of books, you can search for a book. But not physically go – it's too much. I will never find a book, I know. (Denise, Interview).

She did not actively engage with her learning environment and expressed her insecurity about her learning context. Although she used Facebook and MXit during the mentoring programme, she did not establish close ties with her mentees.

REFLEXIVITY

The narrative accounts of the selected student mentors highlight the difficulties they faced while using ICTs. The structural constraints were rooted in their limited economic and material conditions. Rather than being dominated by the limited circumstances, student mentors found ways to address difficulties. Student mentors experienced many constraints, such as the lack of computer laboratories in residences, limited megabytes and limited access to computer laboratories on campus, but at the same time they displayed the ability to act despite the conditions in which they found themselves. They were also able to make calculated decisions about their learning environment. Three of the four mentors were not constrained by their limited access to technology. They were introduced to the Blackboard (LMS) platform to communicate with their mentees, but found it ineffective. They then switched to more accessible social media such as MXit and Facebook to engage with their mentees. They used their own personal resources despite of the limitations experienced in their learning environment and, above all, they were able to think critically about their circumstances and make strategic decisions. Archer refers to this as the 'interplay between structural properties, represented by the nascent concerns of ... young people' (2003, 348). However, Denise's fractured reflexivity did not allow her to engage with the social context of her learning environment and to act autonomously. Besides, Denise, the other student mentors were able to exercise their agency within a constraining environment, but moreover were able to adopt certain reflexive 'stances' towards their learning environment.

According to Archer, stances are the 'basic orientations of subjects to society' (2003, 343). My analysis shows that student mentors' adopt stances towards mentoring which are similar to the stances that they adopt towards their own learning. Denise showed a superficial level of engagement during lectures and, similarly, did not engage deeply with her mentees. On the other hand, Sipho spoke about approaching his studies through brainstorming and doing more research. As a mentor he tried

a variety of social media and also participated in Blackboard-based mentoring. Siphos disposition towards his learning was also similar to the way he approached his mentoring. Zuki approached her learning in an instrumentalist manner, which was very similar to the way she used MXit to communicate with her mentees. Table 3 illustrates the reflexive stance of each mentor, as well as the variety of social media that student mentors' preferred.

Table 3: Summary Table

Structure	Agency	Modes Reflexivity	Stances towards learning engagement	Stances towards mentoring:
ICT Use	Sipho: Worked part-time, bought a laptop	Autonomous	Extend beyond the classroom	MXit, Facebook, Blackboard (LMS), Cellular phones, SMS
	Siya: Religious networks	Autonomous	Engaging and problem solving	Facebook, Cellular phones, SMS
	Zuki: Mentees regarded as a close circle of friends	Communicative	Instrumentalist approach	MXit, Cellular phones, SMS
	Denise	Fractured	Unengaged	Facebook, MXit

Zuki, who saw herself as a mother figure, used MXit because it ensured immediate responses from mentees and she was able to access her mentees at any time. The communicative reflexivity she showed emphasised her need for close networks. Siya, the head mentor, preferred using Facebook because he had access to computers at the residence where he lived; but was also in contact with his mentees via SMS. Similarly, Siphos used MXit, Facebook, Blackboard and SMS. The autonomous reflexivity which both Siphos and Siya displayed emphasised self-reliance, the ability to 'get on with it' (2007, 192), engagement and strategic decision making. They were able to engage with their learning environment in a confident manner. Denise on the other hand, used Facebook and MXit to stay in touch with her mentees. She interacted with her mentees in a superficial way and often failed to initiate contact with them. The fractured reflexive stance that she adopted could be seen by the way in which she participated in her own learning as well as her mentoring. She approached her mentoring in a similarly superficial manner, failing to engage actively via Facebook or MXit. She felt herself to be constrained by the limitations of her social and learning environment.

These mentors developed particular dispositions towards their education context. They are able to either engage or disengage with the educational environment depending on their reflexive stance. Based on their personal concerns, educational backgrounds, motivations and wishes, student mentors' were able to participate in varying degrees in the opportunities and were not constrained by the limitations

within the educational context. Their level of perceived agency enabled them to take on particular learning dispositions based on their reflexive stances.

CONCLUSION

This article focused on the reflexive deliberations of student mentors during an e-mentoring programme at a university. Conceptually, the article was concerned to show that student mentors' socialisation into the learning environment of the university, specifically the reflexive bases from which they navigate the unevenly resourced terrains of university life, can account for the 'stances' that they are likely to take towards mentoring. The focus on the 'modes of reflexivity' displayed by selected student mentors in their engagement with ICTs to support their mentoring highlighted a number of diverse dispositional relations and interactions. Student mentors' reflexive stances were analysed in relation to their use of social media such as Facebook, MXit and cellular phones, drawing on Archer's four reflexive modes as an analytical framework for understanding the reflexive nature of each of the four mentors. It became apparent that the complex, uneven and often resource-constrained environment of the university impacted on e-mentoring practices considerably. The mentors, nonetheless, were able to exercise varying forms of agency in dealing with the exigent constraints and possibilities within their environment, in effect establishing viable platforms for e-mentoring engagements. The article discussed the reflexive modes of each of the four student mentors' with regard to their dispositions to e-mentoring. It was evident that the nature of their e-mentoring practices could be tied directly to their own reflexive modes. In other words, each of the student mentors' specific reflexive stances impacted directly on their engagement with ICTs, their mentoring practices and their own learning engagement more generally. The analysis suggests that the mentors adopt similar stances towards ICT usage, e-mentoring and their own learning. The claim made is that there is a relationship between ICT usage, e-mentoring and the way that they position themselves in relation to their own learning. The research thus implies that it would be important for student mentors' to develop their level of reflexivity for success at university more generally. Based on the specific research findings, it is recommended that higher education practitioners take student mentors' current modes of reflexivity into consideration when appointing mentors, as the type and level of the mentor's reflexive 'stance' is likely to impact on the success of mentoring programmes.

NOTE

1 MXit is an online mobile instant messenger and social network. A cellular phone is essential for MXit. Users are able to make new friends and create a community and join groups of people. MXit is easily accessible and relatively cheap.

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