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## Towards Evaluating a Higher Education Residence Environment that is Conducive to Learning, Development and Success

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### Abstract

The higher education residence environment has traditionally been perceived as mere buildings that provide accommodation to students, especially in Africa. However, for more than a decade now, research on Living Learning programmes has shown how residence-based programmes can create inclusive communities where the academic project of institutions is successfully integrated with the living environment of students. This integration creates an environment that is conducive to learning, development, and success. The aim of this article is to analyse some of the latest empirical research on Living Learning programmes and then make a comparison with the theory on student learning and development, in order to enable practitioners to evaluate their own residence environments to become more conducive to learning, development, and success. Ten questions are generated through this comparative analysis and it is recommended that practitioners in Africa use it as an evaluative framework within their institution's residence environment.

### Résumé

Les résidences estudiantines dans les établissements d'enseignement supérieur ont toujours été perçues comme de simples lieux d'hébergement pour les étudiants, plus particulièrement en Afrique. Cependant, depuis plus d'une décennie maintenant, la recherche sur les programmes d'apprentissage de la vie a démontré la façon dont les programmes basés sur la résidence peuvent créer des communautés inclusives où le projet académique des institutions est intégré avec succès dans le cadre de vie des étudiants. Cette

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intégration crée un environnement propice à l'apprentissage, au développement et à la réussite. Le but de cet article est d'analyser certaines des dernières recherches empiriques sur les Programmes d'apprentissage de la Vie et ensuite de faire une comparaison avec la théorie sur l'apprentissage et l'épanouissement des étudiants, afin de permettre aux praticiens d'évaluer leurs propres cadre de vie pour pouvoir le rendre plus propice à l'apprentissage, à l'épanouissement et au succès. Dans le cadre de cette analyse comparative, une liste de dix questions a été générée et il est recommandé que les praticiens en Afrique s'en servent comme un cadre d'évaluation de l'environnement de résidences estudiantines au sein de leurs institutions.

### **Introduction**

During the past five years the Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa has released two ministerial reports that underline the important role of a higher education residence environment in the learning, development and success of students (Department of Education 2008; Department of Higher Education and Training 2011). Both these reports consequently emphasise that residence environments should be inclusive, welcoming and safe on the one hand, and on the other hand should also facilitate the integration of the academic context and social context of the student (Department of Education 2008:118-119; Department of Higher Education and Training 2011: xv-xvi, 141-142).

The notion of inclusive communities that integrate the academic project of institutions with the living environment of students has been endorsed by Living Learning (L/L) programmes since 1999 (Inkelas, Zeller, Murphy & Hummel 2006:11-12; Schein 2005:83-88). These residential communities have become known for their residence-based programmes which aim to improve student learning, development and success at higher education institutions all over the world.

However, traditionally, residences at higher education institutions in Africa have only been perceived as buildings that provide accommodation, and many of these institutions have not yet implemented the principles that support a residence environment that is conducive to learning, development and success (De la Rey 2010; Swartz 2010). It is therefore crucial that practitioners, especially in Africa, understand how to evaluate whether a given residence environment supports student success in the best way possible (De la Rey 2010; Swartz 2010). The question at the hub of this research paper is: 'In which ways can the residence environment become more conducive to student learning, development and success?'

The aim of this research article is to analyse some of the latest empirical research on L/L programmes and then to compare them with the theory on student learning and development. This will enable practitioners to evaluate

their own residence environments in a new way. Documents that will be used in this regard are those of Inkelas, Soldner, Longerbeam and Leonard (2008) and the National Study of Living Learning Programs (NSLLP 2007), because they contain some of the latest empirical data analyses on L/L programmes. The interpretation of this L/L programme document analysis will then mainly, but not exclusively, be compared to the theory of student learning and development of Chickering and Reisser (1993) and Keeling (2004). This comparative analysis will serve as a point of reference against which the residence environment at institutions of higher learning can be compared.

The type of study which will be undertaken to provide acceptable answers to the overarching research question is a qualitative research study from an interpretivist perspective; thus a non-interactive analytical research study. This qualitative research will focus on an in-depth and contextual understanding of L/L programmes which may provide valuable knowledge for future evaluations of residence environments.

The underlying assumption of this study is that there are strong similarities between the methods utilised in L/L programmes and a healthy residence life system which combines an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere with student development and success. It is therefore a research project to determine which aspects of L/L programmes are likely to contribute to the development of an evaluation framework for higher education residence environments.

The design can be defined as a conceptual study with a comparative element. This implies that this article has a strong element of concept analysis and document analysis to penetrate the deeper meaning of concepts related to residence life. A critical comparison with current practice and models will illuminate the conditions under which a holistic formation in residence life takes place. A theory-based purposeful sampling process will be used as method to gather data.

The viewpoint of this research is that residence life in higher education can be improved to create an environment that is inclusive, welcome and safe, as well as one that is conducive to learning, development and success. Methods and practices deployed in L/L programmes can greatly assist to make these two aspects of a residential environment come together.

### **Development of the Living Learning Concept**

L/L programmes developed as a distinctive category within the broader framework of learning communities since 1999. During the past decade a number of different L/L typologies were identified of which the structural L/L types of Inkelas *et al.*, (2008) are the latest and most empirically grounded. A comparison of these structural L/L types with certain student developmental outcomes yielded significant statistical differences which are relevant to the

objective of this article, namely to establish residence environments that are conducive to learning, development and success.

The National Study for Living Learning Programs (NSLLP 2007:1-2) defined L/L programmes for the purposes of its study in 2007 'as programs in which undergraduate students live together in a discrete portion of a residence hall (or the entire hall) and participate in academic and/or extra-curricular programming designed especially for them'. In the same vein, Inkelas *et al.*, (2006:11) argue that most L/L programmes have the following common characteristics: 'Participants (1) live together on campus, (2) take part in a shared academic endeavour, (3) use resources in their residences environment that were designed specifically for them, and (4) have structured social activities in their residential environment that stress academics'. In summary: L/L programmes are an intentional residence environment which facilitates purposeful collaborative learning experiences between the academic and social contexts of residence students.

L/L programmes can be placed within *the larger framework of learning communities*. Inkelas *et al.*, (2008:495-498) give an appropriate summary of how the initial initiative in higher education, to improve student learning, development and success through learning communities,<sup>1</sup> has evolved into the subset of L/L programmes. Although a variety of typologies exists, learning communities in general are conceptually based on bringing learning to the centre of the student's campus experience. Learning communities 'create small group interaction among participants, provide networks of support, promote curricular integration, offer a vehicle for academic and social integration, and intentionally cultivate key learning outcomes' (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:496).

Shapiro and Levine (1999), together with Lenning and Ebbers (1999), were the first to separate L/L communities as a distinctive category in the broader framework of learning communities (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:495-498). Although similarities exist between L/L communities and their counterpart, curriculum-learning communities, several distinctive differences separate them. Curriculum-learning communities integrate student learning through 'student enrolment in clustered courses, team teaching, student cohort-based learning, and similar arrangements', but they do not require students to stay together (Inkelas *et al.*, 2006:11). Students in L/L communities do not only have a shared academic experience, but also live together in campus residences (Inkelas *et al.*, 2006:11). In L/L communities students live together and learn together. Although Shapiro and Levine (1999) and Lenning and Ebbers (1999) identified L/L communities as a separate type of learning community, neither of them went further to list the different kinds of L/L programmes within the L/L cluster (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:495-498).

Typologies of L/L communities became more explanatory when Zeller, James and Klippenstein (2002) subdivided L/L communities on grounds of their structural features and outcomes into residential colleges, living-learning centres, residential learning communities, academic residential programmes, theme housing programmes, and first-year experience programmes (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:495-498). Two years later Laufgraben and Shapiro (2004) used the level of academic and co-curricular integration as a measure to subdivide L/L communities into residential colleges, residential learning communities, and residential education programmes (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:495-498). The National Study of Living Learning Programs of 2004 (NSLLP 2004) identified 26 different thematic typologies of L/L programmes, a number that increased to 36 in the study of 2007 (NSLLP 2007).

However, using structural features, outcomes and the level of academic and co-curricular integration as ways to build L/L typologies can be problematic and confusing. Inkelas *et al.*, (2008:497) argue that the formal structures provide the most rational way of categorising L/L types; 'the ways in which they are organized and maintained can be largely comparable' (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:508). This data analysis<sup>2</sup> was the first to link empirical data with the descriptive nature of previous L/L literature. Out of almost 300 L/L programmes, Inkelas *et al.*, (2008:497) identified three structural L/L types:

- Small, limited resourced, primary residential life programmes (cluster 1). These programmes have an average of 48 students, are administered by residence administration ('residence life') and have a primarily programmatic focus, although L/L programme activities are limited. Little collaboration with academic affairs, and correspondingly little academic resources, exist. Institutions with this type of L/L programme are most likely to be classified as Research-High institutions, according to the Carnegie Classification.<sup>3</sup>
- Medium, moderately resourced, student affairs/academic affairs combination programmes (cluster 2). These programmes have an average of 100 students and demonstrate greater collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs. Activities in these L/L programmes are more consistent and revolve around team building, multicultural programming, community service and career workshops. Institutions with this type of L/L programme are most likely to be classified as Research-Very High institutions, according to the Carnegie Classification.
- Large, comprehensively resourced student affairs/academic affairs combination programmes (cluster 3). These programmes have an average of 343 students who have a variety of resources in their residence environments that are designed specifically for them (study spaces,

faculty offices in the residence, etc.). Programmes and courses are fully integrated with academic affairs with a large number of courses and affiliated faculty. Institutions with this type of L/L programme are most likely to be classified as Research-Very High institutions, according to the Carnegie Classification.<sup>3</sup>

More important for this article is that Inkelas *et al.*, (2008:500) compared these structural L/L types with three desired learning outcomes, namely: *growth in critical thinking*,<sup>4</sup> *overall cognitive complexity*,<sup>5</sup> and *appreciation for liberal learning*.<sup>6</sup> This comparison yielded significant statistical differences (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:506-507). This result is important for the purpose of this study.

Students in larger, student affairs/academic affairs collaborations (cluster 3) outperformed students in small residential life programmes (cluster 1) and medium, student affairs/academic affairs combination programmes (cluster 2) in all three categories of learning outcomes (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:503-507). Although no significant differences occurred between students in cluster 1 and cluster 2 with regard to critical thinking skills, students in small, residential life programmes (cluster 1) were found to achieve higher scores in the areas of overall cognitive complexity and the appreciation for liberal learning (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:503-507). What is more interesting is that no significant differences occurred between students in cluster 1 and cluster 3 with regard to scores in overall cognitive complexity and the appreciation for liberal learning (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:503-507).

These comparisons are important for this article in two ways. The data analysis showed, firstly, that bigger, well resourced L/L programmes are not necessarily better than smaller, modestly resourced programmes; success is not determined by size or money (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:508). Secondly, cluster 3 strongly coordinated partnerships between student affairs and academic affairs and in doing so yielded the strongest learning outcomes (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:508). This provides valuable evidence of the value of partnerships between practitioners in student affairs and academic affairs (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:508-509). The L/L programme in residences is the environment for building these partnerships. It is important, however, to keep in mind that only a loose affiliation between student affairs and academic affairs, combined with larger groups and moderate resources, yielded the weakest results with regard to learning outcomes (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:508). In such a case it is better to have a small intimate group with a residence life focus (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:508).

In summary: L/L communities are a distinctive category in a larger framework of learning communities, aiming to improve student learning and development through academic and social integration where purposeful group interaction cultivates key learning outcomes. Since 1999 different categories and typologies of L/L programmes developed, of which the structural L/L

types of Inkelas *et al.*, (2008) are the latest and most empirically grounded. Of the three structural L/L types, the large, comprehensively resourced student affairs/academic affairs combination programmes (cluster 3) yielded the strongest learning outcomes and the medium, moderately resourced, student affairs/academic affairs combination programmes (cluster 2) yielded the worst. Small, limited resourced, primary residential life programmes (cluster 1) lagged slightly behind cluster 3 but did substantially higher in two learning outcomes than cluster 2. These results point towards the fact that the success of an L/L programme is not determined by its size. Collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs proves to be important for cultivating learning outcomes.

But how do these empirical results relate with the theory on student development and success?

### **Student Development: Chickering and Reisser, and Keeling**

These statistical results from Inkelas *et al.*, (2008) become even clearer if compared to Chickering and Reisser's (1993:265-281) key influences on student development. Chickering and Reisser (1993:265) argue 'that educational environments do exist and can be created that influence students in powerful ways'. What they mean hereby is that institutions have the ability (and responsibility) to create an environment that is conducive to learning, development and success. Chickering and Reisser (1993:165) list the following seven key ingredients of such environments: institutional objectives; institutional size; student-faculty relationships; curriculum; teaching; friendships and student communities; and student development programmes and services.

Although all seven influences are valuable, four (institutional objectives; institutional size; student-faculty relationships; friendships and student communities) are significantly important and relevant to the purpose of this article, namely to establish residence environments that are conducive to learning, development and success.

### ***Clear and Consistent Objectives***

'Impact [on student learning and development] increases as institutional objectives are clear and taken seriously and as the diverse elements of the institution and its programs are internally consistent in the service of the objectives' (Chickering & Reisser 1993:266).

This argument about internal consistency despite diversity, and the positive impact it has on student learning and development (Chickering & Reisser 1993:266), is emphasized by Keeling (2004:1-2). He makes a case for learning and development to be reconsidered as elements that are intertwined with a campus-wide focus on the whole student experience. Learning, according to Keeling (2004:1-2), is holistic and should be transformative. Transformative

learning considers that learning and development is an ongoing process, where the academic context,<sup>7</sup> institutional context<sup>8</sup> and social context<sup>9</sup> are constantly, simultaneously and in an infinite number of ways interacting with one another and with the student (Keeling 2004:10-16). The student takes centre stage in this learning process, leading to the construction of knowledge, the construction of meaning and the construction of self in society (Keeling 2004:14-16). Through this argument Keeling not only reveals the varied elements of the institution and its programmes, but also the importance of internal consistency to reach clearly defined objectives. Keeling (2004:19-22) offers one of the best outlines of what the goals and outcomes of transformative education should be, and Biggs and Tang (2007) provide the best explanation on how to integrate these learning outcomes into quality learning and development.

The study of Inkelas *et al.*, (2008) indicated that students in larger, student affairs/academic affairs collaborations (cluster 3) outperformed students of the other two clusters in all three learning outcomes. From our previous arguments it is clear that the cluster 3 L/L type had the strongest alignment, through partnerships and collaborations, with academic affairs. The integration of different contexts into one L/L programme yielded very positive results. Inkelas *et al.*, (2008:508-509) emphasised in the interpretation of their data analysis the importance of collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs. This is a confirmation of the arguments of Chickering and Reisser (1993:266-267) and Keeling (2004) about the importance of clarity and consistency in learning and developmental outcomes. Institutional learning outcomes should be clearly defined, and consistently pursued by student affairs and academic affairs alike; collaborating as two equals pulling toward one goal.

In order to assess whether the residence environment is conducive to learning, development and success, the following important questions may be asked:

- In which ways is it ensured that there are clearly defined learning and developmental outcomes for the L/L programme in the residence?
- In which ways are the L/L programme outcomes consistent with the institutional outcomes?
- In which ways does the L/L programme in the residence partner with academic affairs to reach institutional outcomes?

### ***Institutional Size***

Chickering and Reisser (1993:268) connect institutional size with redundancy and argue that the development of student ability, healthy interpersonal relationships, identity development, and integrity decreases as redundancy increases; size influences impact. Redundancy is here defined as ‘the situation

where the number of persons for a given setting exceeds the opportunities for active participation and satisfying experiences' (Chickering & Reisser 1993:268).

This line of argument about redundancy confirms the results of Inkelas *et al.*, (2008). Their study revealed that medium, student affairs/academic affairs combination programmes (cluster 2), which had an average number of 100 participants, lagged behind in their scores on learning outcomes compared to small residential life programmes (cluster 1) with an average of 48 students. The number of persons in the small residential life programmes (cluster 1) was naturally on par with opportunities for active participation and rewarding experiences. It can also be argued that the redundancy effect that hit cluster 2, due to its size, was reversed in cluster 3 (larger, student affairs/academic affairs collaborations with an average of 343 students) by an intense focus on facilitating participative and collaborative learning opportunities and experiences; something which required many and varied resources.

Active participative learning was one of the initial key focuses in creating learning communities. But when these communities, like L/L programs in cluster 2 (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008), become too large, and there is no real institutional commitment with human and capital resources, redundancy sets in and defies the whole objective of the L/L programme.

The goal of this study is to determine whether the residence environment is conducive to learning, development and success. One important influence on student development is institutional size. The following questions might lead to the improvement of a residence environment that is more conducive to learning, development and success:

- In which ways can it be ensured that the number of students in the residence does not exceed the opportunities for active participation and satisfying experiences?
- In which ways does the L/L programme facilitate opportunities for active participation and satisfying experiences so that redundancy does not set in?

### ***Student-Faculty Relationships***

Chickering and Reisser (1993:269) argue that an environment that is conducive to student learning, development and success facilitates regular and pleasant interaction between students and academics within various settings which makes room for diverse roles and relations. In their argument, Chickering and Reisser (1993:269) refer back to their seven vectors that provide an overall direction for student development.<sup>10</sup> One of these vectors is 'moving through autonomy toward interdependence' (Chickering & Reisser 1993:38), in which healthy and open interaction with other adults develops students away from emotional dependence, poor self-direction and rebellious independence toward relationships of mutual respect within the larger context of society (Chickering

& Reisser 1993:38). In the same vein, Keeling (2004:10) emphasises that 'learning, development and identity formation can no longer be considered as separate from each other, but rather that they are interactive and shape each other as they evolve' (2004:10). Keeling (2004:11) continues that student affairs (and thus the residence environment) become integral to this kind of learning process. The L/L programme can become the intersection where different contexts interact.

Important for this study is that a correlation exists between the statistical results of Inkelas *et al.*, (2008) and the importance that Chickering and Reisser (1993:69) place on student-faculty interaction. The data analysis of Inkelas *et al.*, (2008:508) specifically indicated that large, comprehensively resourced student affairs/academic affairs combination programmes (cluster 3) had fully integrated programmes and courses with faculty. This environment of student-faculty interaction yielded the strongest learning outcomes in all three areas (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:508).

One such an L/L programme is Unit One, housed in Allen Residence Hall on the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign campus (Shein 2005). Established in 1972, Unit One has developed to be one of the best examples where an L/L programme creates an environment of interaction between students and faculty (Shein 2005:73-74). Shein (2005:83-84) refers to the following comments<sup>11</sup> made by academic affairs personnel involved in Unit One:

Really knowing your students, having lunch with students, knowing their names, knowing what they want and [what] their personal and professional goals are, establishing meaningful relationships with students, more opportunities to guide or suggest other classes or courses, ability to develop comfortable relationships [... Unit One] protects the notion of a liberal arts community where teachers and students can engage in meaningful dialogue and reap benefits of intellectual, personal, and professional growth ... The larger University context does not easily allow for or promote opportunities for meaningful and comfortable relationships with students to be established or nurtured.

I lectured on civil rights to a mixed, diverse group and I couldn't shut them up. Unit One builds a sense of community.

The interaction with the students is better than I have experienced elsewhere so far. They are ready to discuss, interrupt me to ask questions, and also indicate issues they wish to know more about. We always have discussions and everyone talks.

Students at Unit One know each other and feel comfortable in sharing ideas and are very willing to engage in discussion ... students speak up and are not afraid to ask questions ... Student engagement, interactive classrooms and open dialogue allow for the exchange of ideas and critical thinking.

These comments make it clear that L/L programmes create in a unique way an environment where student-faculty interaction can take place. This kind of learning environment challenges students toward engagement and commitment; to become active learners (Shein 2005:83).

In order to assess if the residence environment is conducive to learning, development and success, the question may be asked about which ways the L/L programme facilitates student-faculty relationships.

With regard to friendships and student communities, one of the recommendations Shein (2005:14-15) makes to improve undergraduate education through L/L programmes is to foster a sense of community among students. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993:275) 'when students are encouraged to form friendships and to participate in communities that become meaningful subcultures, and when diversity of backgrounds and attitudes as well as significant interchanges and shared interests exist, development along all seven vectors is fostered'.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) hereby emphasise the importance of a meaningful cultural environment that facilitates interaction, not only between students and faculty (as previously argued), but also among students themselves. This kind of interactive environment influences students in a powerful way.

The reason for this influence, according to Chickering and Reisser (1993:275), is because students tend to identify with a particular group. If this identification is supportive of the individual's goals, and as previous identification attachments slacken, this new community becomes both an anchor and point of reference that influences thinking and behavioural patterns in a powerful way (Chickering & Reisser 1993:275). This influence extends further towards identity formation and purpose: 'When friendships and the intimate exchanges that accompany them are valued and promoted, identity and purpose becomes clearer' (Chickering & Reisser 1993:176).

Secondly, Chickering and Reisser (1993:275), as well as Shein (2005:14-15) emphasise that interaction amongst students should entail a 'diversity of backgrounds and attitudes'. This exposure to a variety of people and experiences, combined with observation, reflection and purposeful feedback, helps students to carve out a sense of self within the broader society (Chickering & Reisser 1993:276). If the residence culture does not facilitate a diverse array of personal interactions, 'or assigns second-class citizenship to certain types of students or relationships, stereotypes are reinforced', and the residence environment becomes non-conducive for learning, development and success (Chickering & Reisser 1993:276).

Thirdly, Chickering and Reisser (1993:275) emphasise the 'significant interchanges and shared interests' that must happen within student friendships and communities. In this they suggest that students should work and engage together in interdisciplinary topics or linked courses around common themes.

The idea is to balance ‘separate knowing (objective analysis, debating positions, weighing evidence)’ with ‘connected knowing (honouring feelings, personal experiences, and subjectivity)’ (Chickering & Reisser 1993:276).

Chickering and Reisser (1993:276-277) conclude their argument about the influence of friendships and student communities on student development by listing five vital characteristics for these communities in order to facilitate optimum student development:

- (i) It encourages regular interactions between students and provides a foundation for ongoing friendships.
- (ii) It offers opportunities for collaboration – for engaging in meaningful activities and facing common problems together.
- (iii) It is small enough so that no one feels superfluous.
- (iv) It includes people from diverse backgrounds.
- (v) It serves as a reference group, where there are boundaries in terms of who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’. It has norms that inform those with different roles, behaviours, and status that they are ‘good’ members or that what they are doing is unacceptable.

This argumentation of Chickering and Reisser (1993:275-277) confirms the study of Inkelas *et al.*, (2008) in a unique way. Small residential life programmes (cluster 1) outperformed the medium, student affairs/academic affairs combination programmes (cluster 2) in the areas of overall cognitive complexity and the appreciation for liberal learning (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:503-507). This could point toward two important interpretations. The small number of students in cluster 1 (an average of 48) made everybody feel needed and involved, while in cluster 2 the combination of a larger group (average of 100) with a loose affiliation between student affairs and academic affairs made some students feel superfluous. This effect in cluster 2 was altered in the larger, student affairs/academic affairs collaborations (cluster 3) by an intense focus on programmes and courses that facilitated peer interaction. The partnership between student affairs and academic affairs in cluster 3 proves to be vital in order to establish opportunities for collaboration where students could engage in significant and common activities. Cluster 3, where these collaborative activities were purposefully facilitated, yielded the highest scores in all three learning outcomes (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:508-509).

In order to assess if the residence environment is conducive to learning, development and success, the following important questions may be asked:

- In which ways does the residence environment facilitate positive interaction between students?

- In which ways does the L/L programme facilitate collaborative meaningful engagement and joint problem solving?
- In which ways does the L/L programme ensure that participants are from diverse backgrounds?
- In which ways does the L/L programme define itself to become a reference group for participants?

It thus becomes clear in comparing the argument of Chickering and Reisser (1993) about four key influences on student development with the study of Inkelas *et al.*, (2008) that L/L communities can create a residence environment that is conducive to student learning, development and success. L/L programmes do so by facilitating meaningful interaction, not only between students, but also between students and faculty. It is important is to have clear and consistent objectives that are aligned with those of the institution and to ensure that the size of the L/L programme does not create redundancy. Meaningful interaction becomes vital for the formation and existence of the learning community.

But who must take responsibility to make any L/L programme work? Schein (2005:87-88), argues that learning, development and success does not happen automatically in L/L programmes. The success of an L/L programme hinges on two important factors, namely: the students need to buy into 'the concept that intellectual growth and the lively exchange of ideas are important', but it also comes from staff members who foster this community (Schein 2005:87-88). Schein (2005) therefore shows that residential learning does not happen by itself, but has to be nurtured and fostered by students and staff members. Careful planning, the design of activities and of group demographics are of vital importance for learning and development to take place.

The responsibility to buy into, foster and carefully plan L/L programmes is highlighted by the study of Inkelas *et al.*, (2008). The fact that medium, student affairs/academic affairs combination programmes (cluster 2) lagged behind in the results on all three learning outcomes, confirms Schein's (2005:87-88) argument that residential learning does not happen by itself. Programmes in cluster 2 reflected weak affiliation between student affairs and academic affairs and moderate resources were used to address the needs of their larger groups.

### **Recommendations**

The purpose of this article is to make a contribution towards the establishment of residence environments that are conducive to learning, development and success. The comparative analysis of this study laid out a framework for such a learning and developmental residence environment. This framework forms an evaluative tool for the future assessment of higher education residence environments.

It is recommended that current residence environments should be evaluated in the following ways:

- Firstly, the structural L/L type of a residence environment should be determined according to the classification of Inkelas *et al.* (2008). This evaluation should reveal, on grounds of the study performed by Inkelas *et al.*, (2008), what the efficacy of a given residence environment is in terms of the three learning outcomes defined by these authors.
- Secondly, it is recommended that a specific residence environment is evaluated in the light of the ten questions generated through the arguments of Chickering and Reisser (1993) and Keeling (2004) on student development.
- Lastly, it is recommended that the evaluation of residence environments should reflect on student learning and development within a diverse African context. Although the authorities and literature used in this study are extremely valuable in understanding learning, development and success and the role the residence environment must play in this process, all of these studies were performed in non-African contexts. Future studies need thus to focus on the contextualisation of the evaluation of residence environments.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this research article was to analyse some of the latest empirical research on L/L programmes and then to make a comparison with the theory on student learning and development, in order to enable practitioners to evaluate their own residence environments to become more conducive to learning, development, and success. Consequently the following ten questions emerged as an evaluative framework:

- (i) In which ways is it ensured that there are clearly defined learning and developmental outcomes for the L/L programme in the residence?
- (ii) In which ways are L/L programme outcomes consistent with the institutional outcomes?
- (iii) In which ways does the L/L programme in the residence partner with academic affairs to reach institutional outcomes?
- (iv) In which ways is it ensured that the number of students in the residence does not exceed the opportunities for active participation and satisfying experiences?
- (v) In which ways does the L/L programme facilitate opportunities for active participation and satisfying experiences so that redundancy does not set in?

- (vi) In which ways does the L/L programme facilitate student-faculty relationships?
- (vii) In which ways does the residence environment facilitate positive interaction between students?
- (viii) In which ways does the L/L programme facilitate collaborative meaningful engagement and joint problem solving?
- (ix) In which ways does the L/L programme ensure that participants are from diverse backgrounds?
- (x) In which ways does the L/L programme define itself to become a reference group for participants?

It is recommended that the findings of this article are applied and contextualised in higher education institutions in Africa. If practitioners understand how to evaluate correctly residence environments, they can optimally position these settings to be conducive to student learning, development and success. The evaluative framework developed in this article can become a power instrument in the hands of practitioners that are committed to the success of their students, especially in Africa.

### Notes

1. For more information on this discourse see Lenning and Ebbers (1999), and Shapiro and Levine (1999), as well as Gabelnick, F., MacGregor, J., Matthews, R. S. and Smith, B. L., eds, 1990, 'Learning communities: Creating connections among students, faculty, and disciplines', *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, (41), San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Tinto, V., 2000, 'What have we learned about the impact of learning communities on students?', *Assessment Update*, 12(2): 1-2, 12.
2. This 'analysis considered a number of structural building blocks that prior literature had identified as possibly important, including: (a) program size, (b) budget source, (c) the number of program faculty, (d) courses offered by the program, (e) the administrative affiliation of the program's director, (f) special resources offered by the program, and (g) co-curricular activities offered by the program' (Inkelas *et al.*, 2008:501).
3. For more information see <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/index.asp>.
4. This refers to 'students' perceptions of their critical questioning and reflection abilities'.
5. This refers to 'students' self-reported abilities in using critical thinking to pursue new ideas and applications of their knowledge'.
6. This refers to 'students' openness to multiple perspectives and appreciation of diverse social and cultural viewpoints'.

7. The academic context refers to the following: 'Opportunities for reflective judgement and critical thinking; Constructivist classroom teaching methods; Brain based learning; Interdisciplinary courses; Experiential learning; Integrative conversations with faculty in all domains' (Keeling 2004:15).
8. The institutional context refers to the following: 'Opportunity/reward structure-leadership roles, work study positions, teaching and laboratory assistantships, off-campus connections to service and learning; Campus culture-ethical codes, judicial processes; norms of behaviour; annual rituals and celebrations, geographic and economic location' (Keeling 2004:15).
9. The social context refers to the following: 'Personal relationships; Group memberships; Inter-group connections' (Keeling 2004:15).
10. These vectors are: developing competence; managing emotions; moving through autonomy toward interdependence; developing mature interpersonal relationships; establishing identity; developing purpose; and developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser 1993:38-39).
11. Shein (2005) makes use of data in the following unpublished source: Grayson, T. E., 'Evaluation of Living and Learning Communities, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign', Unpublished paper, Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs, 2003.

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