

**A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION INTO DISCOURSES  
THAT CONSTRUCT ACADEMIC LITERACY  
AT THE DURBAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**of**

**RHODES UNIVERSITY**

**by**

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**April 2004**

## **Abstract**

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This thesis examines the construction of academic literacy at the Durban Institute of Technology through a discourse analysis of interviews with educators and learners. Academic literacy comprises the norms and values of higher education as manifested in discipline-specific practices. Students are expected to take on these practices, and the underlying epistemologies, without any overt instruction in, or critique of, these ways of being.

Lecturer and student discourses are identified and discussed in terms of their impact on the teaching and learning process. This broad context of educator and student understandings is set against the backdrop of the changing educational policies and structures in post-Apartheid South Africa. The changes in approach to academic development are also traced as a setting for the institutional study.

The discourses about the intersection between language and learning were found largely to assume that texts, be they lectures, books, assignments etc, are neutral and autonomous of their contexts. Difficulties some learners experience in accessing or producing the expected meaning of these texts were largely ascribed to their problems with language at a surface level rather than to their lack of shared norms regarding the construction of these texts. The study provides an analysis of how the 'autonomous' model is manifested

and illustrates the limitations on curriculum change imposed by this understanding of how texts are constructed and interpreted.

Discourses of motivation presume that students' difficulties in taking on the literacy practices esteemed by the academy are related to attitude. This discourse assumes that learners have a fairly fixed identity, an assumption that did not bear out in the data. The multiple identities of the learners often presented tensions in the acquisition of discipline-specific academic literacies. The learners were found not to invest strongly in an academically literate identity, or were found to experience conflict between this target identity and the identities they brought with them to the institution.

The elevation of academic literacy practices is questioned if the surface features, characteristic of these practices, are valued without a concomitant claim to knowledge production. The rapid emergence of a high skills discourse in Universities of Technology in South Africa is also interrogated, given the current emphasis on training for economic growth over discourses of social redress and transformation.

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## Acknowledgements

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The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the National Research Foundation.

No PhD thesis is completed without the researcher becoming indebted to a number of people along the way, this is especially true of researchers who are also juggling full-time jobs and parenthood. I am very grateful to all of those who enabled me to take this enjoyable journey. In particular I want to mention:

The educators and learners who gave me their time and reflections during the difficult period of the formation of the Durban Institute of Technology. I was warmly welcomed into classrooms and was overwhelmed by the generosity with which the people of DIT shared their thoughts. My thanks go to Chris De Beer, Carol Potter, and the other educators who wish to remain anonymous, Thulani Dlamini, Ronnie Kenny, Dawood Williams, Zama Mashiya, Vhugala Mbedzi, Mngadi British, Bongwiwe Thabede, Slindokahle Ngeleka and the other learners who wish to remain anonymous.

The wonderful women of PaperHeads who challenged and supported me in so many ways. In particular I thank Liz Harrison for reading and commenting on much of my writing.

Dawn Greeff who transcribed the often faint and scratchy recordings of the interviews and assisted in the formatting of this thesis.

Janice Rimbault who acted as editor under severe time constraints.

My colleagues at DIT, especially Professor Nqabomzi Gawe, Nicky Muller, and my great friends in the department in which I work, which will by the time they read this have changed names yet again!

My family and friends who put up with my absence, my father who began every conversation in the last few years with the question 'How is the thesis going?', my mother who manages to make me feel as if I am doing her a favour when I get her to babysit and Bertina Lushaba who kept our home going.

My children, Roxanne and Joshua Tammadge, whom I love with all my being.

Most of all, I thank Chrissie and Wayne. My supervisor, Professor Chrissie Boughey complimented me generously when I was on track and just kept asking questions and suggesting more readings when my arguments were taking tangents. She is a friend I am honoured to have. Wayne Tammadge believed I could do this when I wasn't so sure; the errors are all mine but the determination I borrowed from him.

## **Acronyms**

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AD – Academic Development

AL – Academic Literacy

CHED – Centre for Higher Education Development

CCFO's – Critical Cross-field Outcomes

DIT – Durban Institute of Technology

D.o.E. – Department of Education

ESL – English Second Language

EAP –English for Academic Purposes

SAQA – South African Qualifications Authority

SLA – Second language acquisition

CTP – Committee of Technikon Principals

OBE – Outcomes-based education

MOI – medium of instruction

NLS – New Literacy studies

SAAAD – South African Association of Academic Development

SAQA – South African Qualifications Authority

SAUVCA – South African University Vice-Chancellors' Association

## **Chapter One – Introduction**

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### **1.1 Background to Study**

Cracking the code of academic literacy, be it for the purposes of a first-year essay or a PhD. dissertation, is an essential criterion for success within higher education. This study considers what that code is and how it is constructed or resisted in the discourses of lecturers and students at the Durban Institute of Technology. This first chapter serves to locate the study within broad theoretical constructs. It begins with a background to the way in which texts are understood in this research, by detailing the autonomous and ideological models of text, with an autobiographical sketch which positions me within the ideological model. The next section discusses the notion of discourse, followed by a discussion of academic literacy, giving an explanation of how these terms are used in the dissertation. The chapter ends with a look at the aims of the thesis and an outline of the structure of the thesis.

This study occurs at a time of immense change in South Africa, taking place as it does seven to nine years after the first democratic elections. The change from the Apartheid system to a democratically elected government has resulted in massive changes not only at the level of national structures, but also at the level of institutional ethos and individual identity. The impact of the fundamental shifts at macro-level has filtered down to all aspects of South African life and includes a redefining and repositioning of higher education, technikons, and the



various social groups that comprise the institution in which this study takes place. This broad socio-political context is not the focus of this study but greatly influences it and will be alluded to throughout the thesis.

This study analyses lecturer and student discourses to establish how academic literacy is constructed or resisted at the Durban Institute of Technology. The data, in the form of course evaluations, interviews and field notes, can all be called texts in the broad sense of the word. Much of the data comprise texts which are themselves about texts such as books, assignments, exams, oral presentations, lectures and so forth as lecturers and students reflect on these texts produced and interpreted during the higher education process. The thesis thus begins with a discussion about texts, literacy and meaning.

It can be said that there are two major understandings about how text meaning is constructed. One understanding is that the rule-bound structure of text captures meaning in pre-determined ways. The meaning is thus determined by the lexicon and syntax forming the spoken or written (or signed) text. The meaning is seen to be 'in the text' (Olson 1977: 258) which is therefore autonomous of the context in which it is produced or interpreted. In contrast to this autonomous model is an understanding of meaning construction as being determined by the knowledge the creator and interpreter bring with them to the text (Street 1984, 1993, 1995). While this may include knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical structures, it also depends on contextual and personal knowledge that the speaker/ writer/ signer/ listener/ reader/ interpreter brings to

the text. This ideological model (Street 1984, 1993, 1995) holds that texts are constructed and interpreted within particular socio-cultural contexts and the acquisition of the literacy which gives rise to any particular text is dependent on the acquisition of the underpinning values. Texts are perceived by Fairclough (1992a) as social systems in institutional and cultural groups embodying a complex arrangement of power relations.

These different understandings have major implications for higher education; implications that are of prime interest to this thesis. The belief that literacy is a neutral ability involving the decoding and encoding of script is the basis of a powerful discourse<sup>1</sup>, which reinforces certain teaching methods and rationalises student failures. This is because this pervasive discourse holds that accessing meaning is solely dependent on students' language proficiency in the medium of instruction and their reading/ listening skills.

### **1.1.1 Autonomous Model**

Where meaning construction rests solely on language proficiency, students can be held individually responsible for all problems encountered in attaining shared meaning in the classroom. The literacy of the class is seen as neutral and value free. The literacy is believed to be available to all, independent of values, attitudes and norms. Lindemann defines writing as a '... process of communication that uses a conventional graphic system to convey a message

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<sup>1</sup> This discourse is discussed in Chapter Four 'Language as an instrument of communication'.

to a reader' (1995: 11). The conductor-message-interpreter model is taught to this day in many Communication classes. The problem with the model is that it leads to an emphasis on students' ability to reach the same interpretation of texts as intended by the text writer or the educator, as if the message was neutrally 'contained' inside the text waiting for decoding.

Academic texts are often held to be autonomous texts as they supposedly report facts in decontextualised, fairly formulaic constructions. The specialised use of written academic language is held as an ideal for literacy generally and occupies a socially elevated position. This form of literacy is taught in middle class schools (Heath 1983, Scollon and Scollon 1981) and literacies other than the privileged forms are not considered to be 'alternative literacies' but are regarded as 'wrong'. Prinsloo and Breier (1996), Gough (2000) and Thesen (1997) explore literacies that fall outside of those elevated within our education systems. For children from homes where dominant forms of literacy are not practised, learning at school requires more than the ability to decode and encode texts but also the development of the shared understandings implicit within decontextualised school texts. Literacy is seen to be a unitary phenomenon in the autonomous model where it corresponds directly to language proficiency. Where there is a perception that literacy is a neutral set of skills that can be taught, there is usually a strong call for add-on language classes, as is described in cycle 1 of Chapter Three, and again in Chapter Four.

However as far back as the late 1800's, Dewey questioned the teaching of language as a separate subject for the transfer of correct usage or grammar skills to students. "Think of the absurdity of having to teach language as a thing by itself" (1916). Dewey criticised school discourse as a one-way, teacher-centred transmission of class-restricted materials and called for language use as a vehicle for making knowledge and for nurturing democratic citizens through a philosophical approach to experience.

The autonomous model fails to address the relationship between formal literacies of educational institutions and the power structures within these institutions and society in general. It is able to do this by constructing these literacies as neutral. However research based on the ideological model (Breier and Sait, 1996; Gibson, 1986; Wickham 1998) has shown that there is a complex interplay between text construction and power distribution. Cazden (1989) is dismissive of the autonomous model but Geisler (1994: 26) warns us not to underestimate the power of the autonomous text because the autonomous text is a 'driving myth, the paradigmatic accomplishment toward which scientists strive'.

The autonomous model has resulted in most research within literacy studies being at the level of evaluating approaches designed to develop technical literacy skills (Larson 1996). There has, until recently, been little debate about how literacies are socially constructed and how dominant literacies are privileged. The autonomous model constructs literacy as a technical ability to

decode and encode text and this has allowed literacy research to be seen as objective and politically neutral.

### **1.1.2 Ideological Model**

Where literacy is understood as a unitary skill, educational research legitimately evaluates the best techniques for developing that skill. But when literacy is seen to be a set of social practices, each of which is embedded in a specific context, then it is no longer possible to separate literacy from the people who use it. Researching literacies therefore involves seeking an understanding of the groups and institutions that socialise people into their specific literacy practices. The focus of the research of this thesis is thus on how academic literacy is constructed by educators and how students respond to the various discourses that construct it in this way. The research reflects the ideological model's concern with how individuals relate to society by focusing on the concept of ideology and particularly on the way in which ideology is often perceived as 'common sense'.

The 'common sense' status of dominant literacies allows true interests and injustices to be concealed. The attitudes, values and norms embodied within the socially prestigious forms of literacy are seen to be neutral and apolitical and therefore above question. Ivaniç and Simpson (1992: 169) question the 'common sense' structures of academic writing: 'We are looking at ways in which the standardised conventions of academic writing often leave people out.'

A lot of academic writing is impersonal: it doesn't appear to be about people, and it excludes readers and writers who aren't familiar with it.'

The idea that there can ever be context-free writing, even in the academic arena, has been challenged by a number of researchers (for example Clark and Ivaniç 1997; Geisler 1994; Street 1995). Most literacy researchers now acknowledge that all writing is embedded in and dependent on the direct social context in which it is written as well as the wider cultural context (Clark and Ivaniç 1997). Halliday (1985) names these the context of situation and the context of culture (Halliday and Hasan 1989).

In the context of situation, three features determine the text-producer's choices: field refers to 'what' is being spoken or written about, tenor refers to 'who' is participating in the interaction and mode refers to the 'how' of the text, that is, is it written or spoken. The context of culture then sets further constraints to determine the appropriate genre. While the context of situation lead the text-producer's choices through the questions 'what', 'who' and 'how', the context of culture provides the 'why' (Eggins 1994). The most important aspect of Halliday's model is the organisational links between the structure of language and the structure of the context.

The model indicates how activities relating to language are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural contexts in which they occur. The idea that literacy is a unitary phenomenon is thus replaced by an understanding of the multiplicity of the

varieties of literacy. A higher education discipline's literacy is thus not a context-free explanation of truths, but a set of discourses determined by the context of situation and culture. Content is socially constructed by the discipline's members and "intimately related to the rhetorical processes underlying the reading and writing of texts" (Geisler 1994: 211). If knowledge were understood as something that is constructed, then domain content would be seen to interplay with rhetorical processes. Ballard and Clanchy (1988) indicate that the rules and conventions that define the construction of knowledge have to be understood because the texts, which embody an institution's knowledge, do so within these rules and conventions.

Nystrand (1986, 1989) refutes an autonomous understanding of texts that assumes that the purposes and strategies of the writer are embedded within the text but likewise cautions against an 'idealist approach' which locates meaning as being entirely flexible and dependent on the reader. Instead Nystrand presents a 'reciprocity principle', which is a Gricean type formula in which the writer and reader approach the text with 'mutual co-awareness'. The reciprocity principle is said to hold true for any social act. The participants base their actions on certain standards that are taken for granted as rules of conduct by the social group to which they belong. Difficulties arise when the writer and reader share few understandings about how texts are constructed and what it is that they meant to do in that context.

The ideological model of literacy, which opposes dominant understandings and identifies literacies as ranging from socially prestigious to unvalued, is largely the result of research by the New London Group in the early 1990's. This model is not without its opponents, the three major criticisms being: relativism, romanticism and relevance. Street (1996) has responded to these criticisms in some detail.

'Relativism' questions the valuing of literacies that are inappropriate for a modern, globalised world. This criticism argues that empowerment comes with the acquisition of dominant discourses rather than the affirming of alternative literacies. The ideological model, according to this criticism, contributes to oppression by denying access to powerful genres. Street (1996) states that the ideological model holds that local literacies are sometimes more appropriate and more efficient than dominant, formal literacies. However, the ideological model does not call for dominant discourses to be disregarded or for access to them to be hindered. Rather it calls for access to be made more streamlined through overt awareness of how dominant literacies operate. The model seeks to increase access while simultaneously developing a widespread understanding of how discourses function to reinforce social, economic and political structures. This raises questions about teaching methodologies at a fundamental level.

Street's rebuttal to the criticism of romanticism is that the ideological model does not seek to preserve the status quo. It does not romanticise non-



mainstream literacies in a “vision of rural paradise left pure and unsullied by urban or modern interference” (1996: 6). The aim of the ideological model is empowerment of people. A careful understanding of how literacies and context relate enables an identification of which literacy practices best meet the needs of the people concerned.

The view that the dominant discourses are the most appropriate throughout the globalised world is the basis for the criticism of ‘relevance’ frequently levelled at the ideological model. Literacy practices of the lower classes, the developing world, and any non-mainstream group could, by this argument, be rejected as irrelevant. This argument fails to account for the interconnectedness of societal groupings in constructing literacy practices. (Street 1996:8).

Gee (2000) has detailed that the New Literacy Studies have been one movement among many to make the “social turn” away from a focus on individuals and their behaviours towards interaction and social practice. He identifies a number of other fields such as sociolinguistics, ethnography, psychology, cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics as all embracing a shared theory that reading and writing and many other behaviours make sense only when studied within the social and cultural practices of which they are part.

Gee describes the relationship between working within an ideological model and bringing about social change. Researching the dominant language practices and understanding the ideological foundations thereof ‘can protect all

of us from harming others and from being harmed, ... because it is the very foundation of resistance and growth' (1990: 192). Although my concern as a researcher has shifted from a critical to a post-structural perspective (this is discussed in Chapter Two), a desire to unpack the ideological foundations of academic literacy has remained important to me throughout this study.

### **1.1.3 Autobiographical Sketch in Relation to Models**

My dissatisfaction with the autonomous model arose when I first began teaching and a desire to find a better understanding of what was happening, or not happening, in my classes has grown since this time. From 1988 to 1993 I taught Saturday school to Zulu high school pupils in Umlazi, alongside my University studies and subsequent teaching at a white girls' high school. Apartheid was still in force, which made for very different weekday and weekend teaching experiences. During this time I drilled learners from Grade 8 through to 12 in English grammar, Shakespeare and poetry. The washback effect of the Senior Certificate examinations led to a very skills-based approach to teaching.

About once a month I would set aside our rote-learning worksheets to spend the Saturday morning having a debate. Formal debating practices are rigidly structured with formulaic phrases and processes. The debating norms of developing arguments and the rules of what counts as knowledge in this context were well known to me, albeit largely at a subconscious level. While the

debates were underway my role was the comfortable one of telling students when they were 'wrong' and teaching them how to debate 'correctly'. But in the group work discussions leading up to the debate, I frequently felt uneasy. It was at this point that I discovered what I later learnt to call alternative literacy practices.

The Zulu students approached the group work tasks of determining arguments they could use in the debate and devising tactics very differently from the way in which the white English-speaking students went about the same activity. At the time I put my feelings of disquiet down to my language difficulties with the code switching which was characteristic of this informal group activity. Years later I wondered if the particular way in which the Zulu students grappled with the topics and the manner in which they worked was perhaps indicative of their home literacies, of which I was completely ignorant. As a middle class white woman, my home literacy overlapped extensively with my school literacy. I believed that my 'way of doing things' was 'natural' and 'common sense' and that my task as teacher was to teach students to do things in these same ways. But the differences in the ways that my students were doing things during these discussions was not easily ascribed to their lack of language proficiency and this is what led to my uneasiness.

These alternative literacies were not an issue for me during our usual lessons since I worked within an autonomous model of texts. I therefore perceived my role as that of correcting students' 'misreading' of texts, whether it be a

misunderstanding of a test question, an 'incorrect' interpretation of a passage or an 'inappropriate' way of responding. Even when these misunderstandings were definitely not language based, a difficult differentiation to make, I simply perceived them as 'wrong'. Where students did things differently, not because they had failed to understand the English, but because that student believed her way of doing things was the correct way, I simply pointed out to her the 'common sense' way that she should do it in future.

One example of this was in an oral presentation in about 1990 when a Grade 10 student began a presentation on AIDS by quoting various medical definitions and descriptions and followed this by showing a graph of the spread of the disease. Although her English was flawed, her presentation fell within expected norms up to this point. But she then gave a heartfelt and personal narrative about an uncle who was dying of AIDS. She followed this up with the argument that AIDS was a myth perpetrated by whites to maintain flagging power over the black population of South Africa. As well as pointing out the 'wrongness' of giving a personal account in a formal speech, I pointed out the 'common sense' that she couldn't present conflicting views on a topic without stating which one she held to be true. The class could not seem to understand why I was insisting on what to me seemed an obvious need for consistent points of view. The students seemed to perceive the self-contradictions of her presentation as adding value, rather than confusion, to her talk. An ideological understanding of texts would have been most useful to me at this time. Instead of engaging them

further on this issue, I resorted to giving feedback on tone and register and the need to refer only to recognised texts.

In 1992 I began lecturing Communication at Mangosuthu Technikon in Umlazi. The syllabus centred on business communication, although some remedial English was included. There was little consideration of the complete lack of background knowledge students had about the business world. This, coupled with students' low English proficiency, severely limited their choices in both the context of situation and the context of culture. The teaching of agendas, minutes and reports focused on format and surface level correctness. Where tone and register were considered, it was usually in terms of the 'common sense' approach of the autonomous model. Students were frequently told to be 'more formal' or to 'use an appropriate style' with no awareness by the lecturers of students' home literacies or of the values and attitudes embedded in the expected 'Letter of complaint' or 'Memo to the supervisor'.

In 1994 I moved to Technikon Natal where I was hired as an English Second Language Lecturer on the basis of my Mangosuthu Technikon experience and my acceptance into a Linguistics Masters course. For much of my time at Technikon Natal (now Durban Institute of Technology (DIT)) I have been journeying from a belief in text construction as autonomous to an ideological understanding. The changes in my work at Technikon Natal/DIT form the basis of Chapter Three and serve to contextualise this thesis. A corollary to my developing understanding of texts as ideologically created is a shift from a

positivist concept of knowledge construction to a post-positivist, and specifically a post-structuralist perspective. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. I now move on to discuss two terms that are central to this thesis, 'Discourses' and 'Academic Literacy'.

## **1.2 The Nature of Discourses**

The use in this study of a discourse analysis of interviews with lecturers and students to ascertain how they talk about academic expectations and behaviours is based on a particular understanding of the role of discourses. A discourse could be seen simply as the set of statements about a given area. In this case however, the understanding goes further and these 'sets of statements' are regarded as giving expression to meanings and values; they are regarded as having the power to organise how a topic is talked about, understood and acted upon (Kress 1989). Discourses, in this understanding, structure both knowledge and social practices.

This interpretation of discourses hinges on an ideological model of texts because language is seen to be a place where social structures are reflected and constructed. Foucault (1980: 100) uses the term discourse to describe how institutions name, define and regulate their practices such that a discourse is the place where "power and knowledge are joined together."

While the power of a discourse rests in the ways it constructs its members by “determining how they can behave and what they can say, the members, by acting and saying in those ways, reconstruct the discourse” (Bouhey 2002a:).

Thesen (1998: 38) describes the power of discourses as follows:

...knowledge and social practices are structured by systems of thought (power/knowledge) and their associated patterns of communication, which operate in different domains such as medical science, gender relations, educational institutions and the media. These discourses do not only reflect social relations, but shape them by positioning people in certain ways.

Gee (1990:143) defines discourse as “...a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'.”

Gee draws a distinction between Discourse and discourse. Discourse (upper case ‘D’) refers to ways of being in the world, and discourses (lower case ‘d’) are the language components of a Discourse.

People are restricted in the ways that they use discourses by the limited repertoire of discourses that they have internalised. They are also constrained by the conventional expectations around the way in which these discourses should be used. Fairclough terms these expectations “orders of discourse” (1989: 24).

Fairclough (1989) describes how discourses acquire the power to construct the “rules of the possible” when these orders of discourse assume common sense or natural status. Once a discourse is dominant, popular or elevated, it takes on the position of being seemingly obvious and without any ideological or political implications. Gramsci (1971) asserts that hegemony, the dominance of one social class over others, is achieved by the ability of the socially powerful group to project their way of seeing the world as both appropriate and unquestionable. Discourses reinforce the position of the socially dominant group and identify problems experienced by less powerful groups as ‘unnatural’. ‘Each Discourse protects itself by demanding from its adherents performances which act as though its ways of being, thinking, acting, talking, writing, reading, and valuing are right, natural, obvious, the way good and intelligent and normal people behave’ (Gee 1996:190).

When someone writes or talks in ways that do not conform to these dominant discourses, the ‘Discourse insiders’ think of them as ‘abnormal’ (Gee 1996). When students fail to read and write in ways that have been made ‘common sense’ by the dominant discourses of the lecturers and their disciplines, these students are problematised. The expectations we have of our students to use our discipline-specific academic literacy norms often function in hegemonic ways, to maintain a social order based on differences of home literacy and access to elevated secondary literacies. This is exacerbated by racial issues in a country like South Africa where access to elevated literacies was previously controlled by law.



One of the focuses in this thesis is discourses that have 'normalised' a particular understanding of the difficulties students have with the use of discipline-specific academic literacies. The discourses of the lecturers are not the only discourses that exist in an institution; the discourses of management, national policy and the students are among many that combine to create the institutional context. But it is probably the lecturers' discourses more than any other that determines classroom behaviour. The hierarchical structural relations of the classroom ensure that it is the social values created by the lecturers' dominant discourses that are reinforced and legitimised. The discourses of the lecturers thus shape possibilities for students (and the lecturers themselves) not only through institutional rules, but also by determining the 'rules of the possible'.

Literacy involves knowing how to use language within a Discourse. Since there are many Discourses there are also many literacies. Being literate (for example having a discipline-specific academic literacy) involves existing successfully within the Discourse (capital 'D'). A variety of discourses co-exist to construct any particular literacy.

### **1.3 The Concept of Academic Literacy**

The concept of literacies as practices emanating from discourses stems from the New Literacy Studies (NLS) (see, for example, Barton 1994, Gee 1996,

Street 1995, 1996). The complexity of the issue is captured in Levine's definition of literacies as an "amalgam of psychological, linguistic and social processes layered one on top of another" (1986: 22). Similarly Baynham defines literacy as "social practices that are complex, multifaceted and ideologically loaded" (1995:8).

Literacies in general are understood as "social action through language use that develops us as agents inside a larger culture" (Shor 1999). The 'rules and conventions' of a literacy are regarded as a social construct and not presumed to emerge naturally. Because of the emphasis in literacy studies on the specificity and shifting nature of social, cultural and political contexts, it is common to refer to literacies rather than literacy. Knowledge, be it in an educational or other context, is not seen as a unitary immutable set of facts but rather as differing across time and place and determined largely by the literacy practices of those who construct it.

Dominant literacies are those that are used by people who hold an elevated status in society. Powerful literacies are thus unequally distributed along lines of economic privilege and disempowerment. When learners come to the classroom they bring with them literacy practices that may or may not be considered appropriate. Literacy thus describes not only knowing languages at the grammatical and vocabulary level, but also knowing how to use the language appropriately within the particular social context.

In the case of academic literacies, the particular social context is higher education and, more specifically, the discipline and institutional context. The NLS take academic literacy to encompass all aspects of the ways of doing things in higher education. Much of the NLS research has been on higher education's peculiar reading and writing norms (for example the requirement of referencing and evidential support).

However, academic literacy goes beyond this, in that it encompasses epistemological and ontological norms too. These are what Bartholomae (1985) means when he talks about students 'inventing the university'. Academic literacy embodies the very norms of behaviour in higher education, the things that each discipline values and the behaviours it does not. In order to gain access to the academic literacy of his or her discipline the student has to 'invent' the expectations within the lecturer's mind. 'The student has to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community' (Bartholomae 1985:134).

In systemic terms this relates to tenor, that is the relationship between language users in the particular situation (see, for example, Eggins 1995 and Halliday 1985). The lecturer's expectations are rarely made overt and frequently act as the gatekeeper for success in higher education.

In line with an ideological model of texts, this thesis considers academic literacy from the perspective of a set of cultural understandings to which students are expected to conform. These understandings encompass more than just the structural and textual conventions of any particular academic discipline and include definitions of what counts as knowledge, how knowledge is constructed and how it can be talked or written about (Boughey 1993: 24).

Academic language is often described in discrete linguistic terms rather than on a broader discourse-level of analysis. Academic literacy can be seen to include the level of basic language skills but there is also the overlapping operation of using the skills within a social situation with its complex relationships between institutions and discourses. It “encompasses the strategies language users use to engage with texts and takes into account the ways previous experiences with text influence these strategies” (Boughey 1999: 23). An understanding of literacy in higher education that moves beyond surface level correctness of students’ language to “statements about the ability to satisfy the intellectual demands of communication in varied subject disciplines” (Nightingale 1988:66) is largely the result of a debate between language as grammar and language as meaning.

Some definitions of academic literacy are fairly functional and focus specifically on the tasks expected of students. “Academic literacy is ... the attainment of professional standards of writing in specific disciplines” (Bock 1988: 25). But academic literacy is seen to encompass more than just the ability to read and

write, and includes the ability to do so 'effectively within the university context in order to pass from one level to another' (Leibowitz 1995:34). It is the activity of 'cracking the cultural code' (Ballard and Clanchy 1988:11) within the specific social context of academia in general and the discipline in particular.

By defining academic literacy as having to do with "epistemological access to higher education" (Morrow 1993: 3), academic literacy is seen to be related to specific cultural contexts and associated with the power and ideological relationships at play within those contexts. Academic literacy thus has to do with "ways of using language but also the beliefs, attitudes and values of the group" (Gee 1990). Literacy studies in general, as well as in the educational arena, are thus positioned within the socio-cultural approach. They are also termed "socioliteracy studies" (Gee 1996), "socio-cultural literacy" (Gee, Hull and Lankshear 1996), and "the 'New' Literacy Studies" (Barton 1994; Gee 1996; Street 1995).

Academic literacies are arguably context reduced (Cummins 1981), and text producers and interpreters are required to share a significant amount of background knowledge for successful meaning making. Cummins (1981) introduced the idea that Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) was required for the production and interpretation of academic texts while it was not needed for conversational language. The "contextual support available for expressing or receiving meaning" in informal settings is far greater and only Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) were required (Cummins

1981:11). McLoughlin (in Golebiowski 1997: 72) agrees that “the demands of academic literacy are quite unique to the context of university culture.”

The exact specifics of academic literacy are hard to determine and there has been much discussion in the research as to what constitutes academic literacy (Bartholomae 1985; Bizzell 1991; Elbow 1991; Harris 1989). Part of the difficulty stems from differences in norms and expectations across academic disciplines, leading to the use of the term academic literacies rather than academic literacy. Harris (1989:20) suggests that disciplines should be seen as a “polyglot” where competing beliefs and practices struggle for dominance.

Because academic literacy requires that students take on particular vocabularies, ways of reading, writing, speaking and listening, and also ways of seeing the world and ways of behaving in it, academic literacy can be seen to construct its own cultural community. The idea of culture suggests that engagement and immersion are integral to the process of becoming part of that culture. Students have to acquire an understanding of how the culture works if they wish to become members. Bartholomae (1985: 4) describes this process of acculturation thus: “The students have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as though they were members of the academy, or historians or anthropologists or economists; they have to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language. . . They must learn to speak our language.”

If we are simply expecting students to become familiar with the concepts, theories, knowledge-making rules and writing conventions of academic disciplines and fields (Warren 1998), then the issue for educators is how to assist students in this experience. But if we are expecting them to do more than become familiar with our ways of being and to acculturate completely into our ways of being then other ethical questions come to the fore. If we discuss academic literacy at a purely functional level, then we expose ourselves to a totally assimilationist position whereby students are required only to conform to the practices of the institution. Failure to take a critical stance in a reflection on academic literacy “can lead to higher education students becoming 'reproducers of knowledge' engaged in 'knowledge telling discourse' rather than 'knowledge producers' engaged in 'knowledge generating discourse'” (Bartholomae 1985).

Generally educators do not have a clear understanding of academic literacy; much less a neat definition, but the discourses that construct each educator's notions of academic literacy have a major impact on their teaching. As Johns (1997: 3) points out: ‘We practitioners, and our students, come to classes with theories about what it is to be literate and how literacy is explored. Despite the hidden and sometimes incomplete nature of these theories, they influence how literacies are taught and learned’.

The recent focus on the impact of academic literacy has led to a reflection on the expectations and norms of educational discourse. A number of conferences have recently been held specifically concentrating on the issue of tertiary

literacy. The research increasingly addresses the concept from the position of literacy practices, rather than technical skills, and looks at methods aimed at mediating entry in academic literacy with an emphasis on academic writing.

The research frequently considers how students' home literacies interface with the academic literacy norms of higher education. The interaction between student identity and academic writing raises the issue of power relations in the process of academic literacy acquisition (Clark and Ivaniç 1997; Lea and Street 1998; Thesen 1997).

Having described how the terms discourse and academic literacy are used in this thesis, I will now discuss the aims of this thesis and the structure through which I will endeavour to meet these aims.

#### **1.4 Aims of the Thesis**

This study will examine the way in which the discourses of students and lecturers construct academic literacy at the Durban Institute of Technology<sup>1</sup>. As such it seeks to research students' constructions of themselves as learners and how they conceptualise themselves within the academic context as well as lecturers' constructions of themselves as teachers within the academic context.

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<sup>1</sup> Technikon Natal and M. L. Sultan Technikon merged on 1 April 2002 to form the Durban Institute of Technology.



Interviews with the lecturers regarding their expectations, coupled with classroom observations, provide evidence of the dominant understandings of students' literacy-related experiences and the ideologies that underpin these understandings. These discourses are considered in the light of the larger institutional discourses.

Interviews with students are used to establish the discourses they use to construct their literacy-related experiences and their perceptions of the academy's expectations. Research literature is used to provide discussions on the contrasts between lecturer and student discourses.

Discourses are context specific and teleological and this study does not therefore seek to offer generalisable findings but rather to understand the particular ways in which discourses related to academic literacy function in five departments at the Durban Institute of Technology. This may in turn offer insights for the broader context of higher education in South Africa.

There are three main research questions to be answered in this thesis:

- How do lecturers and students construct notions of academic literacy?  
This is answered through a discourse analysis of interviews with some reference to classroom observations.
- Are there inconsistencies in the discourses used to construct academic literacy?

Contradictions between and within the discourses used by the various stakeholders are analysed.

- Are there other ways of constructing academic literacy?

The literature review and discussion of academic development interventions in the relevant departments is embedded throughout the thesis, and is the particular focus of Chapter Three, in order to create a dialogue between the dominant and alternative discourses.

### **1.5 Structure of the Thesis**

This chapter provided an introduction to the thinking underlying this thesis in the brief discussion of the autonomous and ideological models. The terms 'discourse' and 'academic literacy' were then explicated and the aims and research questions followed.

It is convention that Chapter Two of a thesis provides a literature review and that Chapter Three is the research methodology chapter. I have chosen to switch these chapters around. The reason for this is that my literature review is written alongside an historical overview of my work in academic development. I have included some data analysis in Chapter Three, which necessitated my providing the reader with an explanation of the research approach I take in this thesis. Chapter Two is thus my discussion of the research methodology of this

thesis<sup>1</sup>. In this chapter, I explain why I place myself within the post-structural paradigm and how this has determined the research framework. I then provide details about the research process of this thesis with particular reference to discourse analysis.

A local context to this study is provided in Chapter Three<sup>2</sup>. In this chapter I use a combination of historical overview and literature review to discuss dominant understandings of academic literacy and to trace the shifts that have occurred in these understandings over the last decade. The major issues in the literature are discussed in conversation with changes that occurred in academic development at Technikon Natal/DIT from 1991 to 2002.

“Meanings are found in language” (Connole 1998: 22) and this study is thus concerned with the language of the discourses used to construct academic literacy. The unit of analysis is therefore the emerging discourses, which are identified through their iteration within the various data sources. In Chapter Four I discuss discourses that construct a particular understanding of how language, literacy and learning interact. Chapter Five considers the prevalent discourses around issues of learning, motivation and identity. Chapter Six discusses the discourses that emerged around the Technikon environment and how these

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<sup>1</sup> Extracts from Chapter Two have been published as ‘Paradigms of curriculum design: Understanding the implications for South African educators’ in *Journal for Language Teaching* 37(2): 2003 pp215-222.

<sup>2</sup> Extracts from Chapter Three have been published as ‘Changing discourses of academic development’ in *South African Journal of Higher Education* 17(2): 2003 pp60-67.

serve to construct academic literacy in very particular ways. Chapter Seven concludes the thesis with a reflection on the implications of the findings.

## Chapter Two - Research Methodology

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### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the paradigm, approach and methodology of the research reported in this thesis. In Chapter Three I use evaluations of academic development interventions from 1991 to 2002, minutes from meetings and my own reflections as the data. This data was not exhaustively analysed but is quoted as a backdrop to the literature review by providing an historical context of academic development activities and the views of various stakeholders about these activities. In Chapters Four to Seven, the data used was elicited in interviews and subjected to careful data analysis in order to identify and discuss the emerging discourses.

Each of the steps I have taken along this process reflects my perception of what is valid and what is important. This chapter on the research methodology serves to make my reasoning behind these choices transparent and to discuss how I have positioned myself within the research. I begin the chapter with a description of the various research paradigms and then give an overview of the post-structural paradigm within which I work. I then move on to a detailed discussion of the processes of data collection and analysis used in Chapters Four to Seven.

## 2.2 Paradigms

In this section I describe the four major research paradigms in order to position myself in this particular research project and contextualise much of the 'how' and 'why' of my research methods. This discussion of research paradigms also serves another purpose: I use it to discuss how the epistemology and ontology of the researcher acts as a determinant of the research approach. The choice of research paradigm is certainly influenced by the research itself and the qualitative or quantitative methods used would certainly be dictated by the research question, but the worldview of the researcher is, in my opinion, a major factor in determining the positioning of the research. With this understanding of research paradigms, it is incumbent on me to discuss the paradigms and to place my research within this discussion.

The detailed discussion of the research paradigms, which follows, can be seen as descriptions of four views of how knowledge is constructed, that is, of what counts as 'truth'. Adherents to a new paradigm adopt a new way of observing, reflecting on and describing the world. Kuhn (1972) holds that the effect of a paradigm shift is to produce a division among researchers such that they are no longer able to debate their positions due to fundamental differences in terminology, conceptual frameworks and views on what constitutes the legitimate questions of science.

Carspecken (1996:1) captures this point aptly:

These days, trying to learn about social research is rather like walking into a room of noisy people. The room is full of cliques, each displaying a distinctive jargon and cultural style. There is, of course, a large group talking quantitative research much as it has been talked for decades. But there are new, flashy groups heatedly discussing 'constructivist', 'postmodern', 'postpositivist', and 'critical' research. Most of these people are talking about qualitative social research, but they disagree with each other on such basic issues as the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge, and the concept of truth. You cannot get more basic than that!

I believe it is on the issues of "the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge, and the concept of truth" that paradigm designations prove most useful. Guba (1990) shows that paradigms reflect basic epistemological assumptions, which should be exposed to discussion. By classifying and discussing research in terms of paradigms such assumptions become open to debate. However, any discussion of paradigms is flawed and contrived; as you will see in the academic development curriculum cycles described in Chapter Three, the division of research into discrete segments bears little resemblance to reality. Lather (1991) writes of the "untidy reality" of research and many researchers combine aspects of various paradigms. I acknowledge that "neat categories are the realms of texts and courses in research methods" (Avison, 1997:92).

Habermas (1972) describes various types of knowledge and states that knowledge is constructed according to three fundamental human interests. He

calls these the “technical”, the “practical” and the “emancipatory” interests. The names of research paradigms associated with each of these interests vary from textbook to textbook. For the purposes of this thesis I shall call the research paradigm associated with technical interests, positivist. I use the term interpretive to discuss research associated with practical interests and the term critical in my discussion of the paradigm based on emancipatory interests. Lather (1991) uses the aims of the research to characterise four paradigms, the first three of which are based on Habermas’ categories. Lather distinguishes approaches that seek to predict (positivist), approaches that seek to understand (interpretive), approaches that seek to emancipate (critical) and approaches that seek to deconstruct (post-structural). I shall now discuss these four paradigms in turn.

### **2.2.1 Positivist**

This paradigm identifies a reality that can be discovered, measured and manipulated. The technical interest is served by the generation of laws allowing control of the environment. The methods used in this paradigm are empirical and quasi-experimental and great value is placed on objectivity. Knowledge is seen to be value-free and neutral, and is attained by the objective observation of reality, which is ‘out there’ (Guba 1990). This paradigm is said to serve technical interests in that it seeks instrumental knowledge, which will “facilitate... technical control over natural objects” (Carr and Kemmis 1986:135).



The greater the distance between the subjective researcher and the objective reality the more the subsequent knowledge is perceived to be valuable and authentic. Because reality is perceived, in this paradigm, to exist independently of the researcher, language is seen to simply be a vehicle by which reality is transmitted.

The positivist paradigm is often termed the 'default paradigm' and its assumptions are frequently used as the criteria against which all research is assessed. While this paradigm should be credited with almost all scientific and technological advancement, it is denounced as lacking internal critique by focusing on methods and outcomes without asking questions about the research process itself (Usher 1996:13). Increasingly there is criticism of the failure of positivist research to address issues of meaning and social impact (Johnston et al 1996). But hard-line positivists such as Ayer (1936) argue that all assertions about moral, aesthetic and religious values are scientifically unverifiable and therefore neither true nor false, but simply meaningless.

### **2.2.2 Interpretivist**

While positivism seeks to control the environment, research in the interpretive paradigm seeks to extend human understanding thereof such that we can exist harmoniously within it. The practical interest relates to the desire to take "the right action ('practical' action) within a particular environment" (Grundy 1987:13). The practical interest generates knowledge in the form of interpretive

understanding which can inform and guide practical judgement (Carr and Kemmis 1986:135). In this paradigm reality is seen as a construction, which is relative to its context. The focus has shifted from the prediction and generalisation of positivist research to interpretation and meaning making (Usher 1996).

The purpose of research in the interpretive paradigm is to understand a specific context as it is. In common with the other post-positivist paradigms, this paradigm does not attempt to generalise or replicate. Another characteristic of this and other post-positivist paradigms is the belief that no research is objective or value free: “this orientation stresses the importance of discovering the meanings which research participants give to their own activities” (Quinn 1999).

### **2.2.3 Critical**

The critical paradigm has much in common with the interpretive paradigm (Guba 1990) except that here the researcher is not satisfied with understanding multiple perspectives but seeks to challenge and transform the perspectives of power. This emancipatory paradigm seeks to bring about independence from influences outside of the individual. The emancipatory interest is centred on methods whereby critical theories are generated about the processes of ideology and power that inhibit freedom.

The critical paradigm is the basis of most feminist research which aims not only to understand the structural shaping of experience but to do so in order to effect change. Critical research criticises most mainstream research for reinforcing the socio-economic status quo, which is 'unfair, unequal, and both subtly and overtly oppressive for many people' (Carspecken 1996:7). Critical theorists, such as Carr and Kemmis (1986), move the focus from the small local context of research to the broader structural implications thereof.

In both critical and post-structural research, the subjective influence of the researcher's identity is seen as unavoidable because no methodology creates the researcher as the tabula rasa sought by the positivists. Where research is expressly concerned with human perceptions the need for the researcher to be aware of and expose her prejudices becomes crucial.

The critical paradigm is accused of seeking to replace one powerful worldview with another (see for example Lather 1991, Usher 1996). Critical research may seek to resist hegemonies but detractors suggest that it is an ideology of its own seeking to overthrow the present regime and instil a new order.

#### **2.2.4 Post-structural**

"Advocates of postmodernism [post-structuralism] have argued that the era of big narratives and theories is over: locally, temporally and situationally limited narratives are now required" (Flick 1998: 2). As with the other post-positivist

paradigms, post-structural research takes the contextually bound, socially constructed nature of reality as its starting point. Reality is not seen as omnipresent and immutable but rather as transcendental and contextualised.

Language is a central issue in post-structural research. Unlike positivism, which sees language as transmitter of facts, or critical research, which sees language as representing ideologies, post-structural research examines the way in which language constructs reality. The role of language in organising thought and constructing 'reality' is thus paramount in this research orientation (Lather 1991:13).

Language is not seen as a mirror held up to the world passing on the meaning of a separate external reality (Usher: 1996). Instead language, embodied in discourses through text structures, concepts and conventions, is seen as the system by which meaning is made and which dictates what can be known and communicated.

In this paradigm research is not regarded as freeing individuals from the power of dominant discourses because the discourse of the research will have its own "will to power" (Lather 1991: 13). In response to the emancipatory aims of critical research, post-structuralists argue that all research, including critical and post-structural research, aims to discipline and normalise behaviours.

According to this paradigm in which I work, the texts that are the products of research are biased and partial, prejudiced as they are by the researcher who produces them. These texts are then added to or held up against texts produced within the subjectivity of other researchers. Post-modern approaches foreground the impossibility of eradicating bias and focus instead on making it explicit.

Post-structuralist researchers consider the way in which academic disciplines, and their related research modes, use systems of norms, manifested in discourses, to delimit enquiry and polarise alternative norms as being of limited value. Researchers reinforce the powerful norms of their disciplines whenever they work within them. It is in the interests of the discipline to normalise their privileged account of reality and suppress alternative knowledge forms. In the critical paradigm, there is an aim of emancipating individuals from these powerful and 'false' accounts of reality. In the post-structural paradigm the purpose is to deconstruct how the accounts of reality are created by discourses within a particular context at a particular time.

The post-structural paradigm can ascribe such value to the shifting multi-perspective nature of discourses that the study of texts begins to preclude their fixing any discourses to a particular context or a timeframe. This strong version, also known as 'Ludic' post modernism results in the indefinite focus on different perceptions and is forever without destination (Carspecken 1996, Ebert 1996, Lather 1991, Knoblauch and Brannon 1993). Bakhtin (1994) calls for a re-

mapping of the Ludic landscape within the lived social reality of language. There is a weaker version of the post-structural orientation, 'resistance postmodernism', that is concerned with the way in which language structures reality but seeks to analyse a reality as it is, however contextual, subjective and temporal that reality may be (Carspecken 1996, Knoblauch and Brannon 1993, Lather 1991). Resistance postmodernism accepts that knowledge is always provisional, open-ended and relational but grounds itself in an epistemology of difference based on social struggle rather than an endless deferment of meaning.

Connole reminds us that beneath the jargon, there is a familiarity to each of these paradigms:

In the everyday world of less than strictly scientific enquiry it is possible to see all of these approaches at work. Most of us are inclined to empiricism when deciding which bank will lend us money most cheaply or where to insure our car. When we are trying to understand a friend who is recounting an upsetting incident we are much more likely to operate in an interpretive mode. The appearance of a politician on our television screen tends to trigger a shift into the critical approach as we probe for distortions and hidden agendas. When questioning the tenacity of gender roles in the division of housework we may want to adopt a deconstructionist approach towards our own ambivalences. Thus none of these approaches is wholly unfamiliar.

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However, academic disciplines and the individuals within them have particular conceptions of knowledge and meaning and this is reflected in the preferred paradigm from which they tend to teach, learn and research. The above discussion of paradigms therefore not only provides the framework for this project's methods but, because each discipline's academic literacies have evolved out of particular views of knowledge, it describes possible approaches to knowledge construction that become evident in the lecturer and student discourses discussed in subsequent chapters. In line with this approach, I briefly discuss in Chapter Three how the discourses of particular paradigms construct curriculum theory. I now move on to explain why I position this study in the post-structuralist paradigm.

### **2.3 The Paradigm used in this Study**

My readings about research paradigms have helped me to understand the way in which research methodologies impact on claims made by my research and the way in which my worldviews and theories impact on my methodological choices.

Following Foucault, I ask questions about what the research methods reveal about the researcher's interests and how my own discourses co-construct the realities perceived to be in my data. Because "post-modern modes of understanding allow for a plurality of interpretation" (Kvale 1996: 210), I have to

acknowledge that my freedom within the research is curtailed by my own worldview.

I have a social constructivist view of the world and this view “emphasises the cultural and social dimensions which enter into the formation and constitution of language and of texts” (Kress 1993:22). Because I believe that there are no meta-narratives that will make sense of the world, I am left with an understanding of knowledge as emergent, temporary and contested. I see knowledge as sometimes bound by and sometimes fighting against the powerful discourse norms of the context in which it is constructed. My interest is in how knowledge is constructed within texts, be they written, spoken or signed, and specifically the contexts in which the text is constructed and interpreted. Like Johns, I believe that there ‘is no artificial separation between what is in a text, the roles of readers and writers, and the context in which the text is produced or processed’ (1997:15).

I follow Carr and Kemmis’ injunction that educational research should not just affirm scientific knowledge but should ‘rather expose and eliminate the inadequacies of the beliefs and values that are implicit in educational practice and that are regarded as self-evidently true by educational practitioners’ (1986:123). However, as I do not work strictly within the critical paradigm, my aim is to consider how discourses construct the ‘self-evidently true’ values and beliefs rather than to present alternative empowering discourses.



If I took a strong post-structural stance there would be little value in my analysing educational discourses because my discussions could never amount to more than one set of perceptions and interpretations. Instead I use a resistance post-structural paradigm in which I seek to better understand discourses, not in the sense of revealing a single reality but rather in the sense of describing multiple ontological constructs.

As previously expressed, I am aware of and concerned about the extent to which my beliefs, norms and values dictate my description of the discourses that emerge from the data and cast doubts on the validity of my research. “The participants speak and I record and selectively re-present their voices...I hear their voices in my ears, but I speak my words, conditioned by my place in historical social movement and by the language and analytical resources available to me” (Wexler 1992: 2). The validity of post-positivist research rests largely on the achievement of consensus. Lather (1986) identifies four ways in which consensus can be achieved; I shall list them and refer to how I have addressed each in this research.

1. Use of multiple sources and methods and triangulation of these.

I elicited data from both educators and learners across five departments in four faculties on three campuses. While my data comes primarily from interviews, I also include classroom observation. This spread is not for the purposes of generalisation but rather to provide a fuller picture. While triangulation has been heralded as a means of reducing bias and improving validity, it “implies

that there is only one true social reality, and researchers simply have to decide on the most appropriate methods to measure or describe it” (Arksey and Knight 1999: 24). Because I believe in a reality that is socially constructed, I do not believe that increasing the number of sources or methods of data will ensure the validity of my findings but will provide more representations, that is “the picture will become more complete” (van der Mescht 2002: 6).

2. A check on the validity of constructs by constantly looking for the weak points of theories being used.

In this I have looked to previous research and sought to question areas of both alignment and difference. Apart from comparing my findings with those previously published, I have also presented aspects of this research at national and international conferences during the process to elicit feedback from peers.

3. Establishment of face validity by recycling findings back to participants in the research process for verification.

This was especially difficult given the subtle nature of discourses in general and the unconscious nature of academic literacy discourses in particular (see section 3.4.1). I did on a number of occasions discuss my findings with the participants on an informal basis, but the nature of discourses made it difficult for them to comment. Carspecken (1996) states that consensus is not only achieved through feedback to participants but through consultation with peers. I subjected my work to two peer groups for comments. The one group was my departmental colleagues and the other my PhD support group, PaperHeads,

which comprises nine women engaged in teaching and research in the higher education context. Their comments helped me to establish face validity.

4. An attempt to establish action through the research.

In drawing up this list of four tests for consensus, Lather was focusing on the emancipatory aims of critical research. As this is post-structural research, my aim was less moving my participants towards action and more attempting to deconstruct discourses in the hopes of increasing awareness of how these construct our higher education context at DIT. This research attempts to do this in that it underpins my activities at DIT and those of my AD department.

## **2.4 The Research Process**

This research is qualitative in that it places “emphasis on processes and meanings rather than measurement” (Quinn 1999). Qualitative research considers “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 3). My concern is not with counts or generalisations but with meanings created by discourses, in this case lecturers’ and students’ discourses about academic literacy.

Chapter Three, my literature review, includes a number of quotes from course evaluations and minutes of meetings. The course evaluations were completed by students who attended our add-on interventions, and by mainstream

lecturers commenting on our interventions. My main data source, for the remainder of the thesis, was interviews. I analysed the transcripts from these in terms of the emerging discourses. I used Nvivo as a data management tool for my discourse analysis. In the remainder of this chapter I will describe each step of the research process in an attempt to make transparent the choices I made.

#### **2.4.1 Data Collection: Lecturer Interviews**

I chose the lecturers whom I interviewed on the basis of having worked with them on various academic development interventions. I further extended this to include lecturers across a range of faculties and across the three biggest campuses at Durban Institute of Technology. The lecturer participants are thus not randomly sampled nor are they intended to represent a generalisable picture of discourses at DIT. Instead I have tried to honestly reflect some of the discourses that do exist and consider how these interact with the discourses of students.

I conducted interviews with ten lecturers from five departments. In all cases I first had a lengthy interview, which usually lasted one and a half to two hours. In many cases this was followed up by informal interviews with the participants and in some cases there have been further casual conversations about issues that have been raised by my research. In a few cases I have worked alongside the lecturer in a team-teaching classroom environment at some stage in the past four years and have also been able to reflect on this experience. These

team-teaching experiences, coupled with my own individual teaching experience, made me sensitive to some of the dominant understandings of the teaching and learning process.

The power of the default paradigm, positivism, has resulted in my feeling concerned at times that my closeness to the process may have a negative effect on the research. I have been concerned that I looked in the data for evidence of my own biased beliefs, hunting for discourses that I have experienced rather than allowing them to emerge from the data. The issue of my own subjectivity needs to be addressed before I relate the details of the interview process.

I begin considering my lack of objectivity by acknowledging the existence of multiple realities. At the risk of falling foul of what van der Mescht (2002: 4) calls the “please forgive me for writing in the first person” syndrome, I would like to clarify that I am unavoidably present in my own research and my reality will of necessity mould the reality created in this thesis. In order to make my own identity transparent and to expose my prejudgements to the reader, I have tried to include an “intellectual autobiography” in various ways to this point (Roseneil 1993). In Chapter One, I included a brief narrative of the journey that led me to this research, in Chapter Three I discuss the literature in terms of evaluations by various stakeholders of the work I have been engaged in, and in this chapter I have discussed four paradigms or approaches to research and overtly

positioned myself with the post-structural approach. In all these ways I have striven to reveal my values in terms of the subject matter of this thesis.

Despite my definition of reality as partial and perceptual, my discussions of the discourses make claims of reality. The discourses emerge from lecturer and student data and I verify the existence of these discourses through the use of direct quotes from the data. However, it has to be acknowledged that I am not neutral and that I have a great influence on what reality is revealed in this thesis. Researchers make “a series of decisions about which methods to use, where to be and what to record ... their account therefore represents a positioned view of a particular culture or cultural setting” (Scott 1996: 150). This is not to say that the honest acknowledgement of subjectivity within any research gives carte blanche to researchers to use any methods they like. We still have to be methodological (organised and careful) and systematic (consistently operating within well defined and transparent guidelines) (van der Mescht 2002: 8).

Scheper-Hughes (2000: 132) points out “the question...about the dangers of ‘losing one’s objectivity’ in the field is really quite beside the point. Our task requires of us only a highly disciplined subjectivity”. In my interviews I attempted to use a highly disciplined subjectivity by listening as carefully as possible to my participant’s talk and allowing them to direct much of the conversation. Interviews are based on “an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience”

(Seidman 1991: 3). I had a set of fairly structured questions / items that I used as a prompt for myself (see Appendix B), but I did not use this list as the format for the interview. If I found the interview was not proceeding in the casual way of a conversation, I used the questions to touch on relevant issues. I generally encouraged participants to talk informally about their own experiences of the teaching and learning process. The participants had ample flexibility as the interview followed a semi-structured format held to be ideal for qualitative research (Carspecken 1996, Kvale 1996, and Quinn 1999).

I began most of the lecturer interviews with a piece of written text as a stimulus to conversation (see Appendix A). This piece gives two different responses to an economics question, 'Name and discuss the three forms of taxation.' While not all the lecturers were familiar with the content of the question or answers, they were able to discuss the two very different styles in which the students responded. This stimulus piece provided a context in which the lecturers were able to begin their discussion interviews with me. In two of the interviews, the stimulus piece was not that shown in Appendix A but were pieces of work by their own students, which they had to hand at the time of the interview.

Because academic literacy is constructed by such subtle, unconscious discourses it would have been difficult to elicit understandings of it without the aid of the stimulus piece. In preliminary interviews with other lecturers prior to these PhD interviews, I experimented with other ways of getting lecturers to discuss the academic literacy norms of their disciplines. This proved near

impossible. Lecturers were either unable to understand clearly what it was I was referring to or denied that their discipline had particular academic literacy norms. By using the stimulus piece, I was able to elicit data about the lecturer's perceptions of academic literacy through their discussions of the student responses. The stimulus piece also provided an external focus for the commencement of the interview and made it easier for the interviewee to launch into discussion. After a discussion of the stimulus piece, the conversation generally moved naturally to other related aspects of their teaching and learning experiences.

The two responses in the stimulus piece are authentic in that they comprise genuine student responses to a real tutorial question. The first response (Student A) is transcribed exactly as the student submitted it. Bar a few minor punctuation changes made by the student, this first response is also a direct copy of the relevant section in the textbook. The second response (Student B) is actually a compilation of three students' responses. I chose aspects of student responses that specifically portrayed a use of literacy norms that I knew to be considered inappropriate by the academic literacy norms of economics. I did however choose to blend responses that, I believed, showed some degree of understanding of the question and the topic.

In a few cases the interview also included a discussion of some student material related to the discipline of the interviewee. In two cases I had this material ready for discussion by virtue of my work in that department. In two other



cases, the lecturer either had student material in her bag or on her desk and chose to show it me during the interview to illustrate a point she was making.

Following an informal discussion on teaching and learning, I would quickly scan my list of guiding questions and raise any issues which I had covered in this list and which had not been covered during the fairly naturalistic interview process. This list was extended to include the issue of University versus Technikon literacies after this had become evident as an interesting issue that occurred in the first few interviews. In this way, some of the issues discussed were raised by the lecturers themselves and others were raised by myself. However, as my analysis is concerned more with the discourses used rather than the topics discussed I do not believe it to be problematic that each interview extended to fairly different topics.

Despite the freedom given to the interviewees to direct the conversation, I am aware that no interview is a 'reciprocal interaction of two equal partners' (Kvale 1996: 126). I was the one who organised the interviews, on most occasions the interviews took place in my office, the interviews were being tape-recorded, I introduced the conversation etc. In all these ways, I had a higher level of power than the person being interviewed. Despite my contributing significantly less of the talk and using frequent verbal affirmations and encouragements, I can also see in the transcripts that the conversational pathway was largely at my direction. This was somewhat ameliorated by my close relationship with many of the interviewees, the semi-structured nature of the interviews, and the

relaxed atmosphere I attempted to evoke by such things as beginning by offering tea, allowing interviewees to answer at their own pace, nodding frequently and reassuring them when they interrupted their own talk to ask such questions as 'Is this the kind of stuff you're interested in?'

I used a transcriber to type up the tapes of each interview and checked the accuracy of the typing by replaying the tapes while editing the transcripts. I also referred to my notes taken during the interviews but these were generally sketchy as I was unable to write lengthy notes while having what amounted to a conversation about teaching and learning. I wrote up brief notes about each interview as soon as it was complete and added these to my personal PhD journal, which acted as a reflective diary throughout the doctoral process.

The transcripts follow the format of a dialogue and do not record conversational nuances (see the excerpts in Chapters Four, Five and Six). Sarcastic raisings of the eyebrows and other physical attributes of the interviews are lost in the transcripts and this is certainly a limitation. Had I been specifically concerned with the emotional responses of lecturers, I would need to have annotated the transcripts and made video tapings of the interviews. Instead I chose to simply use audio taping and focus on how the discourses are constructed through language alone and disregard how semiotics affects this process. Likewise the records do not include linguistic transcript norms to indicate pronunciation, pauses etc. I have indicated where the lecturer and I interrupt each other but I exclude other detailed linguistic coding.

### **2.4.2 Data Collection: Student Interviews**

The fifteen students who participated in this study were contacted through the lecturers who had been interviewed. This was for pragmatic reasons only and was not done in order to correlate specific lecturer data with the data of the students from their class. I also interviewed a group of students who were not in classes with any of my lecturer participants. This was simply because I had ready access to this group.

Students were not particularly keen to participate in my research given that it often involved making their way across campus to an office in a building with which they were not familiar. Despite my explaining that my research sought to consider the student perspective on teaching and learning in order to better address their needs, they were concerned with the question 'What's in it for us?' a justifiable question often faced by researchers (Volbrecht 1995).

I was happy to pay them a small amount of money to attend the interviews but was concerned that this could result in more participants than I could deal with. In the end I asked whole classes of student to submit their contact details to me should they be willing to be interviewed and remunerated R20 per two-hour interview. I then randomly contacted one or two students from each class. I was not particularly concerned that payment would skew my data as I made it clear that it was highly unlikely that I would ever lecture them as my work is now almost exclusively with staff. Nonetheless, as discussed in regard to the lecturer interviews, I was aware that all interviews have an imbalance of power

and that students may attempt to provide me with the answers they assumed I was looking for. I believe that the open-ended discussion style used in the interviews worked against this and, as with the lecturer interviews, I endeavored to get the students to narrate their experiences rather than to simply give their opinions on a set of topics.

The interviews followed much the same format as the lecturer interviews, and began with a reflection on the stimulus piece. The conversation arising from this usually carried the interview and provided the context in which the students spoke about their own experiences in meeting the demands of study at DIT. I used a similar series of interview prompts<sup>1</sup> to guide the process where this was necessary because the conversation was flagging or to bring the interviewee and I back on track if we were discussing something tangential to the learning experience. Generally, however, this was not necessary as the interviews with the students proceeded smoothly with the students pleased to have the opportunity to reflect on some of the difficulties and successes they had experienced.

### **2.4.3 Data Analysis: Discourse Analysis**

I used Nvivo software to manage the data analysis. Computer assisted qualitative data analysis is considered fairly controversial by some but I believe it to be simply a broadening of how technology has already influenced and

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix B for the Interview prompts.

extended the use of qualitative analysis, such as through the ability to record interviews and transcribe them in type. Wolcott (1994) distinguishes between the use of software for data management, which is concerned with the more effective handling of data, and analytic procedures, where features and relationships are revealed. My use of NVivo falls into the former category as I used the software to allow for easy coding of the transcripts and the subsequent collation of quotes illustrative of each of the discourses I identified.

My understanding of how discourses function to construct social norms and structures has been discussed in Chapter One section 1.2. In my data, I expected to find a number of discourses, which form a discursive complex that I could identify and discuss. I endeavored from my analysis to theorise how the complex of discourses emerging from my data defines the nature and practice of academic literacy at the Durban Institute of Technology.

Fairclough (1989: 24) takes the analysis beyond the text itself by looking for the values, beliefs and assumptions of the 'process of social interaction', which produces and interprets the text. Each discourse community provides the set of norms concerning textual forms, roles and acts. Text producers internalise these norms and draw on them, and their community's awareness of the norms, in producing texts, be they written, spoken or signed texts. When they do this, the text reproduces the norms of the discourse community. The analysis of the discourses used to construct the texts can then reveal the social norms and processes occurring in the context in which the texts are constructed.

Fairclough (1989) states that discourse analysis moves back and forward between the three levels of description of the text, interpretation of the relationship between the productive and interpretive processes and interpretation of the relationship between discourse processes and social processes. Discourse analysis thus looks for traces of the process of production such that we can find traces of other texts; Bakhtin refers to these traces as “multivoicing”. He writes “...the word does not forget where it has been and can never wholly separate itself from the dominion of the contexts of which it has been part” (1973: 167).

I was aware of the dangers of forcing data into discourse categories that I already had in mind rather than letting them emerge from the data (Seidman 1991: 101). In identifying, grouping and discussing the discourses in the following chapter I acknowledge that I read the data through my own discourses, the only discourses to which I presently have access. The sense of validity that I sought in this research was in Carspecken’s sense of the soundness of argument rather than the truth of statements (1996: 56). I endeavored to ensure this validity through continuously questioning, checking and theoretically interpreting the findings (Quinn 1999).

The approach to discourse analysis that I have used in this study is not purely linguistic because the data was not analysed in a purely linguistic manner. While a linguistic analysis may include a detailed reflection on the speaker’s intent, it fails to acknowledge the constraints of power and ideology on

discourse (Wilbraham 2001). But this thesis may be guilty of the criticism leveled by Widdowson (1998: 137) at Critical Discourse Analysis, that it is not the “systematic application of a theoretical model, but a rather less rigorous operation, in effect, a kind of ad hoc bricolage which takes from theory whatever concept comes usefully to mind.”

However, a careful discourse analysis that considers only the linguistic specifics of the transcript texts, while being more methodologically systematic, would be guilty of another criticism posed against discourse analysis. The criticism is that some discourse analysis studies isolate the textual material as a discrete object for analysis thus extricating it from the context in which it is constructed. By analysing the interview transcripts alongside a context of classroom observation, I have endeavored to keep my analysis embedded within its specific context.

Once the idea of discourses as sets of statements is discarded and replaced by an understanding of discourses as constructing social realities, then it is no longer possible to separate discourses from the people who use them and the contexts in which they are used. While I have carefully checked my identification of the discourses, by both the thorough checking of the interview and observation data and by using the four consensus checks discussed in Section 2.3, I also bring to the analysis my experience of working within the broad discourse community of higher education for the past twelve years.

As in any analysis of discourse, I was aware of the need to be cautious of the trap of casting the discourses themselves into such powerful roles that the humans who use them are seen to be either powerless or blameless. On the one hand, we may create the world and ourselves in it according to the way we have learned to think about society and the language we have been taught to use about it. On the other hand, people retain agency to transform discourses and to push against certain literacy practices. The issue of agency within discourses is addressed in Chapter Five.

I had planned to write up each chapter about a separate department or discipline, building up a picture of a particular discourse community by identifying the ways in which the lecturers and students of that department construct academic literacy. But as my enquiry proceeded and interview transcripts accumulated, it became clear that some of the most interesting features of the investigation lay in the comparisons and contrasts between different discourses. I decided that the process of discussing these comparisons and contrasts demanded an analytic approach, rather than a successive portrayal. The decision to focus on recurrent and apparently significant sets of discourses in Chapters Four, Five, and Six brought another change to the structure of the thesis. I then needed to integrate the research findings of others more regularly into my text and not focus solely on my data.



## 2.5 Ethics

There were a number of ethical issues that I had to address in the process of writing this thesis. The stages of gaining access to the data, obtaining informed consent and interpretation of the data all contained ethical concerns.

In the interviews I spent some time framing the interview by giving the purpose of my study, explaining how the interview would be taped, anonymity guaranteed and how the data would be analysed. This framing (Kvale 1996) served the ethical purpose of ensuring informed consent and also helped to focus the interview's topic, which was especially necessary given that in some cases I dictated very little structure during the interview. All participants also completed the letter of consent (Appendices C and D) indicating that they understood the process.

I used a transcriber to type up the interviews and explained to her the need for confidentiality of the participants' identities. I have also expunged all references to particular people, departments and subjects from the quotes used in this thesis. I was able to do this because I was interested in building a broad picture of some of the discourses constructing academic literacy at DIT rather than evaluating the academic literacy practices of a particular department or faculty.

Having discussed the research methodology, I now move on to the literature review, which incorporates an overview of my work at DIT and uses course evaluations and minutes of meetings as its data. This provides the context for

Chapters Four to Seven in which I discuss the discourses identified in this study.

## Chapter Three - Historical Overview and Literature Review

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### 3.1 Introduction

Traditionally a thesis has a literature review<sup>1</sup> that serves to contextualise the study without simultaneously engaging in a discussion of the data, which is saved for subsequent chapters. In this case however, the literature is reviewed within an overview of academic development interventions at Technikon Natal (and latterly Durban Institute of Technology) in the ten years preceding this study. This chapter's overview of academic literacy is thus both from the point of view of national and international research and from the local perspective of an analysis of course evaluations by students and lecturers between 1991 and 2002.

The local data used to contextualise and review the national and international literature was predominantly in the form of course evaluations. The course evaluations were mainly in written format and were completed by students who attended the 'language interventions' and by mainstream lecturers invited to comment on our interventions. Notes from discussions with mainstream lecturers and minutes from AD meetings have also been used. On reading this data, clear shifts in approach become evident. The data in this chapter track

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<sup>1</sup> The review is usually placed directly after the introduction and before the chapter on research methodology. In this case however, I needed to put the research methodology first as the literature review includes some data analysis.

the changes in interventions at Technikon Natal<sup>1</sup>/ DIT from remedial, voluntary tutorials to integrated academic literacy projects. This is done in order to illustrate the teleological nature of the discourses elicited from the interviews and described in subsequent chapters. Discourses are fluid and subject to change, they do not spring forth fully formed but evolve over time. The present day discourses that are discussed in Chapters Four to Seven are often clearly evident in the course evaluations completed by lecturers and students over the past ten years.

It is interesting to note how the literature 'talks back' to these changes, the integration of historical overview, via the course evaluations, and literature review makes this conversation between local changes and international research more comprehensible. The conversation also provides a richer basis from which to consider the lecturer and student discourses that make up the data of subsequent chapters.

The data and discussion is presented in the form of three curriculum cycles. These three cycles of 'language interventions' are presented here as if they were discrete units with clear distinguishing characteristics; as if one form of 'language' intervention was scrapped as another was embraced. The reality was naturally far messier with a great deal of overlap between the phases and with many small adaptations to the curriculum occurring every year. Indeed it is

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<sup>1</sup> In 1994 academic development at Technikon Natal comprised two divisions that worked separately. One division was tasked with quality, course registration and convenorship etc, and the other worked with "at-risk" students, predominantly in the area of language.

only in hindsight that I am able to trace the three phases of the curriculum that mark our development to this point. I have named the cycles according to the institutional nomenclature and national norms.

The first phase was that of English Second Language tutorials which lasted from 1991 to about 1998<sup>1</sup>. The second phase, English for Academic Purposes, ran from about 1999 to 2001. The third phase, Academic Literacy, was introduced in 2001 and it was greatly extended in 2002. Within each phase, contrasting and shifting discourses characterise the evaluations.

Academic development in the form of student interventions has undergone significant curriculum change nationally over the last decade. In the early 1990s our interventions were located in the individual student who presented as 'under prepared' or 'disadvantaged', and who were therefore diagnosed as needing input in terms of 'language proficiency' or 'study skills'. The manifestation of this phase at Technikon Natal is described in detail in the first two of the three curriculum cycles that follow. However, we slowly became aware, as cycle three will show, that the problem needed consideration at the level of social context. As Vilikazi and Tema argued "we insist that the diagnosis of the problem widely accepted in white universities is largely incorrect. Our greatest most fundamental error is the assumption held, stated or unstated, that

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<sup>1</sup> No course evaluations are available from 1991 to 1993 and it is unclear if any were undertaken. However, minutes of meetings and institutional documents provide evidence of the type of work being done during this time.

the problem is, first and foremost, with the black student or with most black students” (1985: 19).

As this gradual shift to a focus on the need for institutional transformation occurred, changes at national level had an impact on academic development initiatives. The establishment of outcomes-based education (OBE<sup>1</sup>) as a national educational policy has meant a focus on skills development and globalisation. Academic development is thus now being “framed not by considerations of equity but by those related to efficiency” (Boughey 2003: 5). These most recent changes will be discussed in more detail in the last chapter of this thesis.

Staff and student evaluations of these interventions indicate their responses to curriculum change and record calls for further change. At times, however, an evaluation discourse is not in favour of curriculum change but argues strongly against it. The quotations used in this chapter have not been quantified in any way and the inclusion of this data simply indicates that a particular individual was using a particular discourse. It would be untrue to suggest that each of the three types of stakeholder who completed course evaluations (students, AD practitioners and mainstream lecturers) formed a homogenous group in their use of a particular discourse. Frequently within a particular group within a

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<sup>1</sup> Outcomes-based education was introduced in 1996 by then Minister of Education, Prof. Bhengu, as a transformative policy after the previous racially divided system of education.

particular time, there are contradictory understandings of issues and antagonistic ontologies.

The data indicates that curriculum change does not necessarily emanate from either student or staff course evaluations but may result from any number of factors. A perusal of the minutes of the institution's AD meetings over the last decade clearly indicates that curriculum changes are not only the result of student or lecturer discourses. Changes are equally as likely to be the result of an individual staff member's teaching theory or as a result of managerial decisions about what form institutional academic development interventions should take. However, as a discourse sways towards a particular model of language intervention, the teaching and learning practice seems to follow. This indicates that changes are discourse based; a concept that will be unpacked further in subsequent chapters.

The term 'language intervention' is frequently a misnomer because the curriculum cycles from 1991 to the present, described below, trace a move away from structured language input to a focus on developing students' academic literacy in discipline-specific practices. While the major focus of the present phase, Academic Literacy, remains 'language' it is in the broader sense of the academic language practices of each student's discipline.

The data shows that evaluations by different stakeholders are often contradictory. When in 1996 some mainstream lecturers were adamant that

students needed to 'go back to basics of spelling and grammar', students were calling to '...move onwards. No more school English'. Students' comments about the need for 'More help in writing my [mainstream] assignments and reading my textbook' came in the same year that a mainstream lecturer said: 'I'll teach my subject and you teach English'.

Language interventions have generally moved in the direction called for in student evaluations: moving from add-on grammar classes to academic literacy development integrated into the mainstream. However, this has been a very slow process, occurring as it has against the dominant discourse that has identified the student body as being in need of remedial support and any changes being made to the curriculum as lowering standards. This discourse allowed the mainstream curriculum to remain largely unchanged as structures, such as add-on ESL tutorials, were put in place for students' needs to be met elsewhere.

Discourses are used to reinforce the position of the socially dominant group and to identify problems experienced by less powerful groups as 'unnatural' (see for example Gramsci 1971, Foucault 1986, Fairclough 1998). The discourse that identified students' problems as being a lack that rested solely with them, and with their poor English proficiency in particular, is still in use by many lecturers but is no longer as widespread as it was in the early 1990s when few students at the then Technikon Natal were not first language speakers of English. Whether this slight decrease has been as a result of a better understanding of



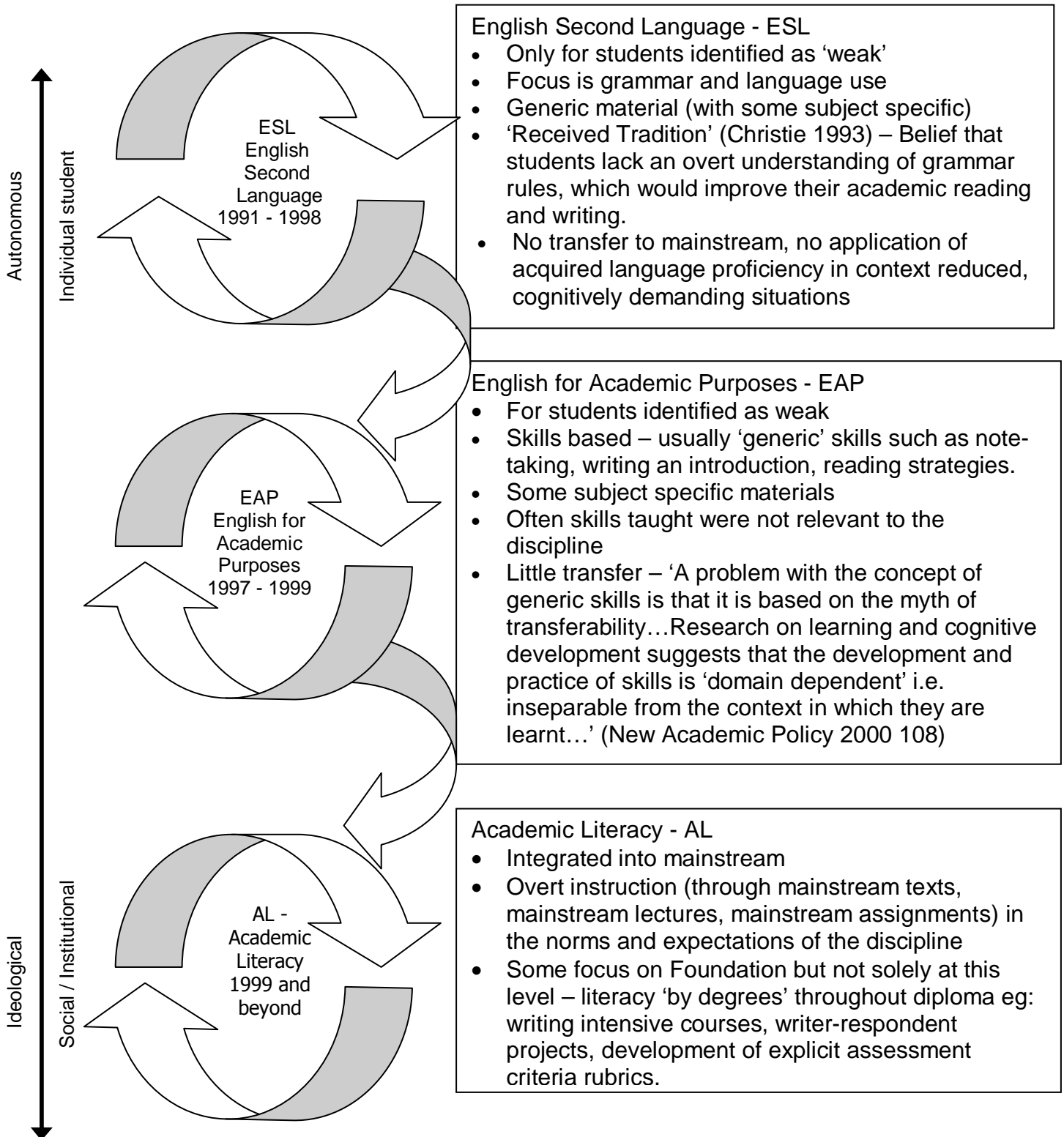
the need for thorough curriculum change or is simply the lecturers' tired acceptance that almost all our students now belong to the group considered weak, is unclear. There is some evidence in the lecturers' course evaluations of a decrease in the discourse that simplistically identifies attrition and failure rates as 'the student problem' or 'their language problem'<sup>1</sup>. However there is not much evidence of an acknowledgement of a "...need for systemic changes (that is, changes in 'curriculum and the structure of degrees and diplomas' as well as 'pedagogy') in HE rather than just peripheral compensatory or 'remedial' measures" (Scott 2001: 4).

Each of these cycles is discussed in more detail in the rest of this chapter using quotes from student and lecturer course evaluations and departmental minutes. The relevant issues in the literature are examined in counterpoint to each cycle.

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<sup>1</sup> However, this remained the most frequently coded discourse in my interview data and is discussed in some length in Chapter Four.

## MODEL OF THE CURRICULUM CYCLES OF LANGUAGE INTERVENTIONS



### **3.2 Cycle 1: ESL – English Second Language**

This phase began with the appointment of an externally funded part-time language tutor who commenced work in 1989. However, this phase really took off in earnest in 1991 with the creation of the ESL Unit where the language intervention was in the form of voluntary tutorials (described in detail in M<sup>o</sup>Kenna and Rawlinson 1994). While groups of students were encouraged to attend tutorials during timetabled periods for the duration of their first year of study, the reality was erratic attendance coupled with students being sent to join ESL tutorials throughout the year.

The major issues raised in the evaluations by students, mainstream lecturers and the AD lecturers responsible for teaching the tutorials are discussed below in conjunction with a discussion of the relevant literature. The first section, section 3.2.1, describes our work within the context of English language teaching internationally and some of the criticisms of the ideologies underpinning this practice are considered. Section 3.2.2 moves to a description of 'Received Tradition', which holds that language should be taught with a focus on structure. This discourse justified the existence of the ESL Unit offering add-on tutorials. The multilingualism and multiliteracies of our students and how these were, or were not, taken into consideration during Cycle One are discussed in section 3.2.3. The discussion of the ESL cycle ends by considering the privileged nature of academic literacy and literacy in general, with a focus on how this elevated status undermines the value of orality and other literacies.

### 3.2.1 The English Language Teaching Industry

The students attending the ESL tutorials, which had an emphasis on remedial English language, were almost exclusively black Africans<sup>1</sup>. This was a matter of great contention by students who felt stigmatised by their attendance and the following comments indicate that this was clearly perceived to be a racial issue.

‘Why do only black students do this course?’

‘I was put here because of my colour.’

‘Lecturers think all black students need remedial. Mr [-] he just said at the [registration] interview to come to ESL because I cant speak good English but I have never spoken or written anything for him.’

‘Many students failed the [first-term mainstream subject] test. The blacks were told to come to ESL. The whites were told to work harder.’

‘Why must we do all the work as the whites and now some more?’

Given that the focus of the course was explicitly remedial English, these student complaints may seem off the mark. If only the black African students had difficulties with their English, then clearly only they needed to attend this course. But already in the student statements quoted above, the issue of racism is plainly differentiated from that of language development. Two books that draw connections between racism and English Language teaching (ELT) are of interest. Phillipson’s *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992) and Pennycook’s *Cultural*

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<sup>1</sup> It is very difficult to avoid the use of racial tags in a post-apartheid South Africa. I have, where necessary, used the known terms White, Indian, Coloured and African or black African. The term black African is used to distinguish African students whose ancestors are indigenous to South Africa from those whose ancestors come from Europe, India etc. I am aware of the contrived nature of these terms and the limited way in which they categorise people.

*Politics of English as an International Language* (1994) both consider how ELT has been made into an industry, which works to reinforce the curricular division of the world into the dominant Western countries and the dominated underdeveloped countries. Galtung (1980:128) has termed this the divide between the “Centre” and the “Periphery”. The protection of the Centre’s interests through English language teaching is facilitated by the separation of language development from mainstream education. The use of Centre-trained language educators and curricula strive to develop language in isolation of other literacy practices in the educational institution or elsewhere (Pennycook 1994). Language is thus taught as if it were neutral, disconnected from political, social and economic forces.

At Technikon Natal at this time, there were three white English-speaking South Africans (of whom I was one), who worked as ESL lecturers. Towards the end of this cycle we were joined by a British lecturer. Although the three South Africans should have been aware of the cultural backgrounds and home languages and literacies of our students, our Apartheid upbringing left us as ignorant as any foreigner. Our Centre-based education with its autonomous model, meant we brought a fairly technicist approach to improving our students’ levels of academic success.

The strategies that we had experienced in our own schooling and in our teacher training left us in the state that DiPardo (1992) calls “insufficiently curious”. We did not question the language norms of higher education. Phillipson and

Pennycook might argue that we had internalised the process of social regulation and felt constrained to reinforce the status quo. The emphasis on learning English in this skills-based way has resulted not only in other languages being undervalued in the educational arena, but has also resulted in prescriptive norms in terms of the literacies which are deemed acceptable<sup>1</sup>. Our teaching was not only decontextualised but can be seen to have propagated Centre-generated ideologies. Pennycook (1994:146) states that “teaching practices ... represent particular visions of the world and thus make the English language classroom a site of cultural politics, a place where different versions of how the world is and should be are struggled over.”

Mass education first came into existence in Europe during the industrial revolution, a time when children were no longer in demand in such great numbers as labour and needed to be occupied and ‘disciplined’ for hours at a time. Prior to this, education was available only for those of the upper class, and comprised a very different curriculum, one that emphasised philosophy, rhetoric and argument. Much of the move from rhetoric to grammar is attributed to the increase of scribal literacy<sup>1</sup> and the development of a fixed form of written language with rules of spelling and grammar being set down.

Dewey (1916) states that the curricula division between mass and elite education had its origins in the class divisions of ancient Greece. Dewey

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<sup>1</sup> An example of work from this cycle is found in Appendix E.

criticises the mass education of his time, with its emphasis on the three R's and job training, as stemming from the class distinctions of his society.

The idea still prevails that a truly cultural or liberal education cannot have anything in common, directly at least, with industrial affairs, and that the education which is fit for the masses must be a useful or practical education in a sense which opposes ... appreciation and liberation of thought...The notion that the 'essentials' of elementary education are the three R's, mechanically treated, is based upon ignorance of the essentials needed for realisation of democratic ideals.

Dewey 1916:192

That mass education and the international teaching of English does not serve to empower the lower classes is highlighted by Faigley (1997 in Shor 1999) where the increasing inequity between classes is described as “the revolution of the rich.” However, it was not on political grounds that we came to question our practice but because of the lack of transfer between the remedial tutorials we were running during this ESL phase and the students’ mainstream practices. Another reason was that while most international ESL research fell within a Centre-based philosophy and provided reassuring support for our work, we were increasingly being exposed to alternative understandings in some of the research. Forerunners in academic development in South Africa (such as Mehl, Leibowitz, Volbrecht, Walker, Boughey, Clarence-Fincham and Thesen) were

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term ‘scribal literacy’ to denote anyone who can read and write. I do this to distinguish this understanding of the term ‘literacy’ from the broader definition used throughout this thesis, where all people are understood to have a range of literacies to call on.

engaged in academic conversations at SAAAD<sup>1</sup> conferences that left us feeling dissatisfied with our fairly straightforward construction of the language problem.

We began to ask what would happen if we focussed on the theoretical underpinnings of our work rather than on the strategic practicalities. What if, instead of looking at how the students are different to our expected norms, we tried to find out about their norms and understandings? This was the beginning of a very slow and frustrating process. Our white, middle class practices are so normalised that we often found them very difficult to question and were often incapable of regarding ourselves as the 'other'.

### **3.2.2 Received Tradition**

During this ESL phase of language intervention at Technikon Natal, most mainstream lecturers' comments indicate that student difficulties were seen to be directly related to their inability to use English proficiently:

'The black students don't respond to questions – they don't seem to understand.'

'Their English is terrible, I can't understand anything they write.'

'They write in a long-drawn out way that does not answer the question.'

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<sup>1</sup> The South African Association of Academic Development was formed in 1985/1986 and became defunct in 1998. An annual Academic Development conference was revived in 2000.



Interestingly the use of the 'they' and 'their' is often without referent and one is left wondering who the writer intended. Did 'they' refer to students who have a poor English proficiency or to black students in general?

Students were sent to the ESL Unit with notes from lecturers such as: 'Please improve Themba's English.' These notes are reminiscent of Christie's (1985) 'Language as an instrument for communication'<sup>1</sup>. Christie argues that this model of language is superficial as it denies the powerful role language plays and instead assumes that thoughts and beliefs are constructed independently of language which is then the conduit for communicating to others. The job of the ESL Unit was thus to fix the language conduit after which all would be well with Themba's studies. There does not appear to be an understanding that Themba's difficulties may go far beyond his low English proficiency and that his very thoughts and beliefs may not be aligned with those valued by the discipline in which he is studying.

Boughey (2002a) argues that students fail to appreciate the significance of using the "standard forms within the academy" and do not link success in higher education to the use of dominant discourses. She questions why educators do not address this and why the focus in the classroom is instead on the teaching of English grammar. The material used in our ESL tutorials focused on structural grammar rather than language use within the academic environment

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Language as an instrument of communication' discourse is still very dominant and a discussion of its present use and the implications thereof forms the basis of Chapter Four.

in general or the discipline in particular. While minutes of AD meetings indicate a desire to 'use discipline-specific material'; this was in terms of the examples chosen to develop students' grammatical proficiency. The model was thus remedial with the focus being on the student as having a language problem needing corrective structural input outside of the mainstream curriculum.

Nonetheless, mainstream lecturers obviously thought this was not being done properly or was not transferring to students' mainstream work as their comments called for more language input: 'They need to go back to basics – you should teach basic sentence structure and grammar.'

This is an example of a very prevalent discourse that calls for the remedying of grammatical problems as if a conscious knowledge of the surface rules of language is what students were lacking and that if these rules were made available to students their problems would disappear. Christie (1993) has termed this the 'Received Tradition' and she shows how much of the focus on the fixed form of grammar arose with the mass availability of the written form of language. Christie (1993) indicates that the dominance of 'Received Tradition' is closely linked to the use of education to maintain socio-economic structures. The Received Tradition separates language learning from the mainstream curriculum and advocates the kind of skills-based work we were undertaking. The main implication of the Received Tradition discourse is that problems students encounter in meeting mainstream expectations can be remedied by improving their language proficiency in an add-on English classroom.

At staff development workshops run by some of the ESL lecturers at this time, extracts of student evaluations and responses to questionnaires were read to the mainstream lecturers present. In this way, lecturers were confronted with the student voice, which clearly showed “the extent to which different frames of reference impinge on the learning process” (McKenna and Rawlinson 1994: 279). However, some lecturers responded by expressing the opinion that the necessary changes should take the form of additional student support and no individual change on the lecturer’s part was seen to be needed.

‘Spelling is an important issue that you’re not focusing on enough, especially the jargon of the field.’ The irony of the spelling error in this last quotation from a lecturer’s evaluation of our courses draws attention to the fact that mainstream lecturers may have been pointing to surface language issues simply because they were at a loss as to what else could be done to help students cope with their studies. Because most South African educators are recipients of Received Tradition (Hutchings 1989:149), it is not surprising that they cannot envisage the development of language within the mainstream or the implications of academic literacy on student success. Studies have found that many of our notions of teaching from both an ideological and methodological perspective are resilient; we thus teach as we were taught. This can be true even where staff development interventions encourage different methods. Cuban (in Labaree 1992: 139) found that our methods are “remarkably impervious to the kind of pedagogy urged upon them as part of their teacher education”. It would appear

that “pedagogical tradition carries more weight than research-based evidence on effective teaching techniques” (Wickham 1998: 27). Mainstream lecturers thus continued to call for adjunct language courses even as we were offering them. The assumption in teaching these courses was that academic writing involves the conscious use of the language awareness we were attempting to develop.

The idea that the isolated study of language can develop students’ use of English in mainstream assignment writing was widely held throughout the institution and, as is shown in Chapter Four, is still in evidence today. Because it is difficult to conceive of approaches different to one’s own experience, it is hardly surprising that many mainstream lecturers denounce integrated language development and repeatedly call for add-on language interventions.

During the ESL phase, AD lecturers seem to have been working predominantly within a positivist skills model with a focus on giving students the reading, writing, speaking, listening skills they were lacking. In fact these were the syllabus headings of the ESL course outline. Like mainstream lecturers, the AD lecturers also expressed concern about the lack of articulation between ESL tutorials and mainstream classes both in terms of the materials used and in terms of students transferring the skills taught in ESL tutorials.

‘Students switch off or don’t attend language classes. They are demotivated and do not see the tutorials as relevant to their studies.’

‘Even if they complete the worksheets correctly they make the same errors in context-reduced, cognitively demanding situations.’

‘There is no transfer.’

Only one or two students called for assistance with grammar, these students did not resist the construction of them by the dominant discourses; but the vast majority of students were clear that they wanted changes to be made to the form of the language intervention. ‘We have done grammar at school’. ‘We don’t need more English we need help with our studies’.

It can be questioned whether students adopted this stance as a resistance to the Received Tradition discourse or whether they were simply uninterested in the fairly traditional language content of these tutorials. There are a few references in student evaluations to the ineffectiveness of the tutorials in assisting them with their higher education studies. While most students commented that the ESL intervention was ‘very good’ and ‘Nothing wrong’, they simultaneously recorded that they ‘attend not very much’ and that they want more ‘help with [mainstream subject]’.

AD lecturers at the time often used the numerous examples of students’ spelling and grammar errors to refute these requests from students. So fixed were we within the Received Tradition discourse that I can remember an AD meeting where we responded to a set of student course evaluations by identifying all the language errors that occurred within them. Our focus on the message was very

much secondary. The language errors in the evaluations were seen to be clear evidence that the students needed more grammatical input despite their calls for change. Increasingly however, some AD lecturers raised questions about this stance.

### **3.2.3 Monolingualism and Multilingualism**

One mistake we avoided in our ESL tutorials that was prevalent in ESL models was the banning of students' home languages from the classroom. But although we allowed students to use their first language in group discussions, this was tolerated rather than seen as a language resource. In a study I undertook in 1994 and 1995, students indicated that their home languages were undervalued in higher education generally (McKenna 1995).

While other languages were 'allowed' in the ESL tutorials, there was little attempt by lecturers to learn these other languages or to engage with students at the level of consciously discussing the literacy norms they brought with them regardless of their home language. However, the students were very positive about the methodology used in ESL tutorials. From the start these tutorials aimed to be student centred with activities geared towards active student participation.

'Here we are free to talk.'

'My point of view is valued.'

‘She doesn’t treat me like a blacksomebody. God would know I was lying if I said she was a racist.’

‘The lecturer thinks we can achieve so we try our best.’

It may possibly be that the verbal, interactive nature of the ESL tutorials was fairly uncommon in the student experience of the time and that, with the advent of Outcomes-based Education in South Africa, such methods are now becoming more widespread in the mainstream classroom.

One mainstream lecturer suggested an ‘English only’ policy for the campus in a belief this would rectify the high failure and attrition rate, which was perceived to be simply a language problem. This lack of understanding of the psychological impact of having one’s home language devalued to such an extent is widespread (Boughey 2002a: 169). It is worth noting that the Received Tradition discourse, with its emphasis on language proficiency for student success in mainstream subjects, fails to engage with issues of multilingualism. Phillipson (1992) argues that the motivation for English only textbooks is in the interests of the ELT industry rather than the students of English around the world. Similarly the ‘English Only’ practice, advocated on the basis that increased exposure to the language increases proficiency, favours the “many teachers working on what might be termed the ‘international circuit’ [who] have little or no knowledge of the languages spoken by their students and are thus unable to work in multilingual classrooms” (Boughey 1999: 3). This is equally valid in post-Apartheid South Africa where most language teachers, and indeed

most lecturers, in higher education's historically advantaged institutions speak English as their first language and very rarely speak an African language.

In South Africa, student difficulties are seen to relate merely to their inability to manipulate the language of instruction rather than the need for them to do so in ways peculiar to the norms of the institution, the discipline and the department. And yet the use of other languages is rarely debated as a partial solution to this problem.

The South African context has added a political dimension to the understanding of students' language problems. If the problem is seen to be one of language proficiency, it steers clear of issues of cognition. Where student difficulties are understood as related to different literacies, and therefore different ways of thinking, then the potential for political criticism is great. The call for the Africanisation of the curriculum touches on the idea that the problem is not just students' lack of English proficiency but also relates to the differences between the literacies they bring with them and those expected by the institution. Research clearly shows that socially constructed differences in ways of thinking exist (Geisler 1994; Scollon and Scollon 1981, 1995), but this raises political and social curriculum issues that can be avoided if language is seen simply as a neutral conduit for information.

There is a parallel between our avoidance of the notion that thinking and language use are socially constructed and the public response to the work of



Bernstein (such as 1960 and 1962). When Bernstein began his work on restricted and elaborated codes in language, he was roundly criticised. He drew a contrast between middle classes using elevated codes of language and working class people trapped in their socio-economic group not least because of their use of “restricted codes” of language. This notion that speech patterns respond to strong social pressures was considered shocking at the time but has recently become widely supported. Likewise, as our Apartheid history recedes into our past and there are changed understandings of the socio-economic divisions in our society, we are now able to confront the socially constructed nature of language in a way we were unable to do during this first cycle of language interventions.

#### **3.2.4 Literacy versus Orality**

Related to the notions of superiority of monolingual English proficiency over our students’ multilingualism are notions of the superiority of scribal literacy over orality. The purported connection between being academically literate and being intelligent is discussed in some depth in the literature.

The lack of recognition of other literacies and languages includes a lack of respect for the orality that students may bring with them. An opportunity to use this strength as a resource in the educational process is thus missed. The extent to which our students can still be considered to be part of an oral culture can be debated and it seems that students themselves may be learning to

disregard the ways in which the oral tradition of their forebears constructs meaning (see Chapter Five). However, the orality-literacy divide debate has great pertinence here not least because many arguments against it hinge on the recognition that the ability to read and write successfully is misunderstood to mean the ability to use middle class literacies.

In 1784, Astle made his view of the social importance of being scribally literate quite clearly: “The noblest acquisition of man is speech, and the most useful art is writing. The first eminently distinguishes man from the brute creation; the second from uncivilized savages”. While not many people would describe their views in these terms today, few would deny the social status accorded to scribally literate individuals, especially if their way of writing falls within the particular literacies of Western middle class society.

Definitions of literacy that focus on the written language not only exclude other forms of text but also simplify the separation of written texts from other texts (spoken, signed, pictorial etc). The term “literacy event” (Barton 1994:190) is more inclusive as it indicates that sometimes “reading and writing are entwined with spoken language and other means of communication”. Intertextual studies focus on how written texts relate to one another and also address the relationship between written and spoken texts.

Scribal literacy has increasingly been described in terms of its contribution to social development, with scribal academic literacy being seen as the most

advanced form thereof. Ong (1982) describes the “great divide” between literate and oral cultures. The great divide theory holds that the advent of literacy marked an important stage in human development as it brought with it changes not only to the socio-economic environment but also to the mental processes of literate individuals. This theory has its origins in the Vygotskian premise (1978) that the mind alters the stimuli from which it is constructed. Luria (1976) provides an example of how literacy develops thought in his much critiqued description of an illiterate person’s response to a seemingly logical argument.

Researchers such as Goody (1977) and Ong (1982) have drawn links between being literate and being capable of complex cognitive processes. Havelock (1986) points to literacy to account for the linguistic and cognitive development of the Greek philosophical tradition. It is put “forward that literacy makes for a ‘great divide’ between human cultures and their ways of thinking ... and modes of cultural organization” (Gee 1996: 49-50). Literacy is believed by researchers supporting this theory to be the major factor that “enables the transition from ‘primitive’ to ‘advanced’ culture” (Lankshear 1999: 4).

Goody (1977) claims that the qualities that distinguish ‘advanced’ cultures from ‘primitive’ cultures are related to changes in communication, especially writing. As Gee explains, Goody believed the development of writing led to ‘the growth of individualism, the growth of bureaucracy and of more depersonalised and more abstract systems of government, as well as to the development of the

abstract thought and syllogistic reasoning that culminate in modern science” (Gee 1996: 51).

However, Scribner and Cole (1981) use their research on Vai literacy in Liberia to contest whether there is any cognitive advantage to being literate and argue that there is not any link between literacy and high order thinking. While the use of other languages is shown to include the use of many varied literacies, many of which are elevated, there was no indication that those who were scribally literate were engaging in more complex cognitive processes. The only link they could find between the development of a logical argument and language was related to the use of English, particularly the elevated literacy within English associated with Western middle class schooling. Literacy’s alleged benefits were shown to be related not to cognitive abilities but rather to the use of a particularly valued literacy.

Street’s studies (1984, 1993) and Barton’s work (1991) are among many which reject literacy as an autonomous technology that marks out literate societies as entirely distinct from pre-literate ones. Researchers such as Finnegan (1989) and Olson (1996) suggest that the great divide theorists often considered human developments that covered a wide scope of topics. This may be one reason for their overestimation of the ‘extent to which text simply causes changes in cognition, regardless of the context, purpose or the mode of its use’ (Klein and Olson 2001).

Barton states that much of this research was based on "... the idea that a literate culture shakes off the seeming inadequacies of oral culture and develops distinctly different ways of making meaning and communicating" (1994:90). There is in fact a great deal of overlap between spoken and written discourse with a range from formal to informal within each. Barton concludes, "writing has developed no syntactic structures which are not also found in spoken language" (1994:90). Indeed, in reading transcripts of spoken language, such as those quoted further on in this thesis, it becomes clear that writing follows a more clearly delineated, if not simpler, structure than spoken language.

Tannen's study considers different strategies used in text construction and concludes that the differences are "not limited to orality vs. literacy, and certainly not to spoken vs. written language, but rather can be seen to interplay in spoken and written discourse in various settings" (1982: 4). Her studies (for example 1982, 1985) contradict the theory that the acquisition of literacy confers significant cognitive gains. Heath's *Ways with Words* (1983) studied language patterns and effects within community, home and school settings across different social groups in an area of America. She shows that written and spoken language is often so entangled that it is impossible to categorise them in any clear-cut way.

Gee (1990) differentiates between primary and secondary discourses where primary is that acquired through face-to-face communication with intimates and

secondary are learned through interaction in social institutions. Gough's South African study (1990) shows the philosophical implications of assuming that secondary discourses always equate with Western discourses. Gough's research in the Xhosa community shows that some learned secondary discourses are oral. Furthermore, these highly elevated discourses are seen to be similar in organisation and structure to "colonial discourses" (1990: 51). Chafe (1981) drew similar conclusions that many oral language communities produce oral texts that exhibit features of formal written texts in other communities.

The ideological model calls for a replacement of the literacy versus orality distinction with an understanding of how some texts are elevated, formal and ritualised while others are of an informal nature; either of which can be written or spoken or both. An ideological model of literacy questions the socially prominent status of writing simply because it is writing, and calls for the recognition that some oral texts serve similar functions in certain language communities.

Researchers within the New Literacy Studies are thus disparaging of reductionist arguments for a great divide between spoken and written language use and between oral and literate cultures. They also emphasise that the type of literacy, in terms of mode, format, style etc, is situationally determined. The "ecological" view of literacy is that all language use is contextualised (Barton 1994: 91). "With a text, the shared knowledge, which all human understanding

depends upon, is part of the context. This is knowledge concerned with the context of the text; it is also knowledge of the genre, the conventions of the discourse” (Barton 1994: 92).

Street (1995) and Prinsloo and Breier (1996) support the idea that there are many literacies each of which is rooted in socio-cultural practices. They caution that the linear division between literate and illiterate results in a conjecture that literacy is superior and should be sought by those wishing for progress and development. Street shows that being literate can in fact have distinct disadvantages as it can foster “uncritical belief in specific 'modern' renderings of the world [and lead to] a weakening of the kinds of sensibility and scepticism that may have been fostered in oral tradition” (1995: 66).

Street points out that when a ‘standard’ view is taken towards literacy then the rich forms and meanings of various literacies across different cultures and literacy events are “marginalised and treated as failed attempts to access the dominant standard form represented by western-type schooling” (1996: 4). The fact that written texts, particularly formal written texts, such as academic texts, hold the greatest status is an issue addressed by most researchers within the field of New Literacy Studies. Cope and Kalantzis explain that ‘...the most powerful genres are those generically and grammatically most distant from orality - for example, scientific reports which attempt to objectify the world, or arguments which are specifically designed to persuade’ (1993:6).

Lectures are particularly interesting as they fall between the traditional view of oral as being informal conversation and literate as being formal academic writing (Biber 1988, 1995). The function of lectures is generally to transmit a high degree of informational content in a fairly formal academic style. But because of the face-to-face nature of lectures, they are subject to revisions and changes as they occur. This results in a mix of oral and literate characteristics.

Brandt's *Literacy as Involvement: The Acts of Writers, Readers, and Texts* (1990) shows the appeal of a simplistic divide between orality and literacy to teachers who want to 'do good'. If we believe teaching our students to read and write in ways we deem appropriate will increase their cognitive abilities, then we can significantly improve their lives. Brandt suggests that the expectations of the academic literacy of schools and higher educational institutions rests on the assumption that it is completely unrelated to their use of language in other surroundings. Socially valued academic language use is understood to be decontextualised and dichotomous, demanding that students separate themselves from their other language experiences or literacy events. Students who do not succeed in becoming literate in the ways deemed appropriate are seen to be illiterate or unacademic.

Brandt argues that it is in fact through social involvement in the new context that literacies are acquired. The teacher should be seen as 'craftmaster' who apprentices the student into the new norms. Brandt builds on Flower and Hayes' work (1981) to argue that acquiring literacy is about learning to keep



processes moving, knowing what is expected to be done next, “and such knowledge can only come from a sense of shared human activity” (in Bizzell 1991: 5). Brandt states, “Learning to read is learning that you are being written to, and learning to write is learning that your words are being read” (1990: 5).

In summary, it can be seen that the add-on tutorials of the ESL Unit aimed to ‘fix’ students’ reading and writing skills. They were largely based on an unspoken (and possibly unconscious) notion that certain language practices and types of language teaching are correct rather than socially constructed responses to particular environments and sets of circumstances. Mainstream lecturers’ evaluations at this time called for an increased focus on grammar. AD lecturers’ evaluations voiced concern over the lack of impact the tutorials were having on students’ mainstream work and called for the use of more subject-specific material. Students’ evaluations, however, gave the clearest call for curriculum change:

‘The lessons when we worked on [our discipline] were very good.’

‘I [need] ... help with my assignments.’

### **3.3 Cycle 2: EAP – English for Academic Purposes**

The data shows that this second phase began gradually during 1997 and 1998. At this stage, language intervention at Technikon Natal had developed such that it became a fully-fledged annual academic course consisting of four periods a week. Initially it comprised part of the coursework mark for English/

Communication but subsequently became a course on its own. Students whose marks on the PTEEP<sup>1</sup> test indicated a low level of academic literacy were registered for this course in addition to their first year subjects. This move was not driven by a call for integration but, rather, was a direct result of AD staff seeking more recognition for their subject, and wanting the job security of offering a credit-bearing course. The minutes of various meetings leading up to the formalisation of this course do not refer to the issue of job-security but this was discussed informally amongst ourselves. It is of interest to note that personal interests can contribute to the promotion of dominant discourses.

As in the discussion of the previous cycle, excerpts from course evaluations are interspersed with the literature review of pertinent issues. In section 3.3.1, I discuss our practice of teaching academic literacy as if it were a discrete set of skills, which students could acquire outside of the mainstream classroom context. This practice hinges on the belief that language, and academic skills, are neutral which I discussed in section 3.2.2. The final section of the EAP cycle discussion considers our teaching methods at the time.

### **3.3.1 Academic Literacy as a Set of Skills**

The move from ESL to EAP brought with it a move away from the teaching of surface language structures to the teaching of academic skills. It was still, however, within the positivist paradigm of the autonomous model in that it

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<sup>1</sup> Placement Test in English for Educational Purposes developed by the Alternative Admissions

assumed that students lacked academic skills, which could be given to them by AD lecturers in classes added on to the mainstream curriculum. The students, it was assumed, would then use these newly acquired skills within their mainstream courses.

The notion of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) arose from the functional notional grammars which identified lists of academic functions and exponents (and their related skills) to be found in academic language. Munby (1978) drew up a needs analysis approach to syllabus design that was concerned with the functions required of students in the academic context. The resultant methodological approaches were imported wholesale into periphery contexts such as South Africa without much consideration from how different our students and environment was from the Centre in which the skills approach developed. During this stage of our history, South Africa was fairly isolated as a result of its racist laws. This led to a sense of inferiority and it was common practice to look elsewhere for best practice.

Another issue that hampered our EAP efforts was a perceived need to cover a long list of these language functions, expressed in terms of academic skills. It was not possible to devise activities requiring time-consuming independent learning and problem solving when we had a lengthy, albeit self-imposed, syllabus to get through.

Literacy as a range of “social practices that are complex, multifaceted and ideologically loaded” (Baynham 1995:8) was refuted. Instead literacy was perceived as limited to a set of basic, neutral processes, skills or competencies that are present or absent within individuals. Attention is focussed on whether or not these processes occur in the individual student, or in other words, whether or not the student possesses the required skills. Therefore the solution is seen to be remedying this deficit by making the required skills available. The work of psycholinguists, (see for example Edelsky, Altwerger and Flores 1991; Goodman 1992; Goodman, Y 1989; Goodman, G 1989; Goodman and Goodman 1979 and Watson, 1989) provides strong evidence, however, for the theory that skills cannot be learnt except in a contextualised form.

The materials we used to teach these skills were, as far as possible, specific to the students’ field of study. Evaluations by AD lecturers indicate that the move to EAP did, to some extent, bring with it the academic legitimacy of teaching in a ‘real subject’ but it also exacerbated two problems that were inherent in the ESL tutorial system.

Firstly, more than ever, mainstream lecturers saw the work being done by the AD lecturers as falling outside of the mainstream domain and as unrelated to their practice as educators. As Zamel (1993: 42) indicates the add-on model “sets up the unrealistic and unwarranted expectations that ESL and writing courses will complete the process of ‘initiation’ and that in the case of students who are found ‘under prepared’ or ‘deficient’, these courses will serve a gate-

keeping function in the institution.” The students who are targeted to attend EAP and similar courses are seen by the institution as outsiders who do not have the “requisite values, knowledge, and skills to belong, ... [they] lack these necessary qualifications” (Cooper and Holtzman 1989: 204).

Secondly, the problem inherent in the ESL cycle that continued to plague the EAP cycle was that AD lecturers’ evaluations still reflected that the work being covered in their classes was not being transferred to mainstream work. In the ESL phase students were able to complete a worksheet on pronouns successfully only to repeat the ‘he/she’ confusion in their mainstream work. In the EAP phase, students who could write perfect essay introductions according to the criteria taught in EAP classes, failed to do this in an essay assignment for a mainstream subject<sup>1</sup>.

An underlying problem was that students’ lack of awareness of academic literacy norms was often coupled with poor English proficiency. A paper that I co-presented with Wendy Rawlinson at the International Language in Education Conference in Hong Kong (M<sup>c</sup>Kenna et al 1999) showed our students’ results on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Many of the conference delegates expressed shock at the low levels our students received in this test of language proficiency. However an interesting conversation with a Chinese professor of Literature highlighted for me that the issue was not simply one of language ability. He indicated that he was inclined to admit Chinese

students from certain schools with similarly low IELTS results even though he would generally not accept students with these levels in this test, which they used as an entrance exam. The reason for this, he explained, was that the students from these particular schools spoke very poor English but had been schooled in information literacy and essay writing in their mother tongue. They therefore generally understand how functions such as describing, hypothesising and speculating are used in academic discourse and need only acquire ways of expressing those functions in English.

In South Africa the situation was sorely different. Our students may have come to us with a rich repertoire of literacies but unfortunately they lacked the literacy valued by higher education, their academic literacy was practically non-existent in either English or their first language. As Boughey explains of the students in her University of Zululand study: “Both linguistic and conceptual knowledge therefore has to be developed and any course which sets out to merely teach the form of the functions in the additional language does not address the problem” (2001: 159).

The dominant discourse that constructed the students’ need as a need for neutral, a-social, a-cultural set of ‘skills’ is based on an autonomous model of literacy. This results in a belief that academic literacy ‘skills’ can be acquired separately from the mainstream context in which they will be used and will then enable students to retrieve the meanings encoded in texts.

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<sup>1</sup> An example of work from this cycle is given in Appendix E.

The failure rate of our so-called 'disadvantaged' students thus continued to be regarded as an issue to be addressed through add-on interventions in areas such as language development and study skills. This was a view common to many historically white institutions (for example see discussions in Lazarus 1987, Mehl 1988, Boughey 1999). The view persisted despite a number of studies, notably Brice Heath's 1983 study, which showed that reading and writing are not comprised of a set of basic skills but are a cultural activity, with richly diverse forms across communities.

The problem with the 'skills' approach to developing academic literacy is that it fails to take into account the socially situated nature of language in use that forms the basis of the ideological model. Our EAP skills development took writing as its focus and attempted to inculcate students into an academic writing genre assumed to be generic across disciplines and divisible from the content about which the student was writing. The teaching of referencing skills, topic sentences, compare and contrast paragraphs etc. formed the basis of similar work across South Africa at around this time (for example see discussions by Pinto and Rutherford 1994, Starfield 1994, Drewett 1994).

Our understanding of academic reading and writing as linguistic activities divorced from the social contexts in which they occur meant that any 'successes' we had were limited to the EAP classroom. Mainstream lecturers continued to complain about students' poor writing abilities. The lack of

transferability of these newly taught skills was because “reading and writing are not merely ‘skills’, which can be dealt with in a remedial fashion; they constitute the very means through which academic learning and knowledge construction occur” (Warren 1998:77).

Many of our worksheets were focussed on the development of essay writing<sup>1</sup>, even though a number of mainstream departments did not require essay writing. The essay topics were chosen because of their general knowledge content and their perceived applicability across disciplines. Academic writing was thus seen as having to do with formulas of construction dependent on operations that exist independently of the context in which they are used.

Bock expresses the misdirection of our interventions well,

It is not difficult to explain to a student that quotations have to be placed in an evaluative frame, or to give examples of linguistic terms with rules of thumb for their use. But it is impossible for the student to apply these rules with any degree of precision unless the texts have been read with appropriate purpose and skill; and the question whether they are read in this way is determined less by innate intelligence than by prior conceptions of what an essay is and should do.

1988:29

Our focus on reading as a set of learnt skills was equally problematic and left students very confused as to the purpose of some of our exercises. As one student commented: ‘Skimming and scanning didn’t make sense for me



because I don't know why we rashed through the dictionary and telephone book for a English class.'

Our teaching of reading skills required that students read a whole text and elicit the main idea or identify the topic sentence of each paragraph. The focus was thus on developing metaknowledge about styles of writing and appropriate strategies for reading. Our work on reading skills was based on a notion that all cultural groups share a joint understanding of the purpose of texts and are exposed to the same types of texts. Likewise our notions about the processes used by writers were also assumed to be shared across cultures. We augmented our work with lessons on PLATO, a computer program devised to improve students' reading and writing skills through similar means as we were using in our EAP classrooms.

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the skills-based theory of literacy is that the ability to produce and interpret academic reading and writing is seen to be a simple matter of acquiring a set of skills. If students continued to find academic texts unreadable and their writing continued to display characteristics deemed inappropriate for academia, then these students were perceived as either unmotivated or intellectually incapable of acquiring the skills.

Elbow shows that academic writing is not just a case of acquiring the jargon and formulaic language constructions, but requires 'doing the discipline' (1991: 138).

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter Six, section 4 considers the use of the academic essay in a technikon.

Unfortunately, it is fairly common for disciplines (or other literacy communities) to be described in terms of their language, conventions, and genres rather than in terms of their beliefs about knowledge construction or their dominant discourses. Students may then fall into the trap of taking on these conventions with little understanding of how they function and with little scope for making their own new meanings within the discipline. Elbow (1991) argues that the reductionist teaching of academic language is not appropriate because students' appropriation of this language masks a lack of genuine understanding. Bartholomae (1986: 11) states that learning in this way results in "imitation or parody [rather] than a matter of invention and discovery".

Our focus on academic writing construction and our autonomous understanding of texts failed to address the issues revealed by students' writings in the mainstream and their evaluations of our courses. In their evaluations, the call for closer liaison between the add-on interventions and what they had to do in other classes in order to succeed remained constant. The lack of transfer of the skills we were teaching to the mainstream academic context also continued to dog our work. Mainstream lecturers frequently made it clear that they could perceive few, if any, improvements in student writing despite our EAP interventions. In contrast, research, particularly that of the New Literacy Studies, clearly indicated that students' literacy-related difficulties could only successfully be addressed through the mainstream curriculum. It is only in this context that issues such as the specific expectations of text construction and

text meaning, the relationship between reader and writer, and the specific strategies of knowledge construction can be meaningfully addressed.

Other skills that we attempted to address were those of critical thinking and logic although this focus was secondary to our teaching of reading and writing skills. Researchers such as Toulmin (1972) and Willard (1983) criticise this type of teaching because the formal teaching of thinking skills cannot occur outside of the mainstream curriculum within which those particular thinking skills are valued. McPeck (1981: 7), in discussing the isolated teaching of reflection, critical thinking, scepticism etc, states, “the criteria for the judicious use of scepticism are supplied by the norms and standards of the field under consideration”. McPeck goes on to describe the variety of logics that have been developed in the last century and argues, “The very proliferation of these logics testifies to the fact that different areas of human inquiry require different methods of validation. No single logical system can capture the validation procedures of every discipline, nor all the problem areas within a single discipline” (1981: 31). Atkinson describes critical thinking as a kind of social practice that has its origins in culturally determined sets of behaviours that cannot easily be defined by its users (1997: 72).

Wells (1987:110) defines the basic skills level understanding of literacy as the ability to “encode spoken messages in written form [and to] decode written messages into speech”. Freebody and Luke (1990:8) describe it as relating to “the technology of written script” that allows people to understand spoken

sounds and written symbols. As has been shown above this reduction is problematic in that it separates the means of communication from its context. This means that the ways in which language constructs and distributes knowledge is ignored (Levine 1986); that the socio-cultural practices in which literacy practices are learnt are undermined (Grant 1986) and the role of social practices in creating particular literacy events (Baynham 1995) is not brought into consideration.

The assumption that academic literacy is limited to a set of skills results not only in a deficit model but in an assimilationist position where students are forced to conform to behaviours valued by the discipline. A central argument against the teaching of academic skills is that this effectively imposes on students the dominant ways in which language is used and knowledge is constructed within the discipline. By devaluing rhetorical processes and discourses that the student may bring with them from their other literacies, there is little space for agency in which the student can challenge the discipline's ways of knowing.

De Castell, Luke and MacLennan (1986:12) state that the teaching of literacy as a means of making students 'fit' into the norms of the institution creates a "readily manipulable populace characterised by passive acceptance of information and prescribed behaviour". Baynham (1995), Grant (1986) and others argue that this type of teaching is in fact only possible where language is assumed to be a neutral set of skills which can "enable adults to 'fit in' and

‘function’ in society. This in turn raises a question about what it means to ‘fit in’ to society” (Stevenson 2000).

### **3.3.2 Language Use as Neutral**

Hymes was the forefather of the Communicative Language movement, which called for the teaching of the “rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless” (1972:278). Hymes challenged Chomsky’s ‘ideal speaker’ model and emphasised that speakers are flawed and belong to heterogeneous speech communities and stated that the focus of linguistic study should thus be on performance. This was, essentially, the basis of the EAP cycle where the focus in terms of performance was the language functions expected of first year students.

In an academic essay, for example, students were taught that hedging can be phrased as ‘It could possibly be seen that...’ or ‘One conclusion that could be reached is...’. Likewise, students were taught to use signpost words such as ‘therefore’, ‘although’, and ‘in conclusion’. These components were taught to students in whole units as a means of, in the first instance, hedging a direct statement or, in the second, directing their lecturer’s reading. Students read through texts underlining examples of the exponent being taught, completed passages with missing exponents and created their own texts using the taught exponent. This was a fairly substantial change from our earlier work, as we no

longer focussed on language structures as such but on those structures in use within a text.

Although this was a leap forward from more traditional language teaching, it was undertaken in a fairly unreflective unconscious manner in our EAP course and thus did not go far enough. The exponents of academic functions were taught by us and practised by our students with little discussion of why these exponents were valued or what the ideologies were that underpinned them.

Academic language functions have been listed in a number of inventories (for example Wilkins 1976) and include such items as explaining, generalising and classifying. But these studies rarely address issues of whom this meaning is created for. Norton Peirce (1995:11) citing Bourdieu (1977), argues that competence should include “an understanding of the way rules of use are socially and historically constructed to support the interests of a dominant group within a given society.” A glance through many EAP textbooks, including the worksheets we devised for our course at Technikon Natal, shows that the use of language being taught is confined to that deemed appropriate in Western mainstream environments. The meanings and linguistic forms students brought with them in their own literacy practices were not considered and were often actively discouraged.

The ideological model of literacy studies shows that the discourses of the socially dominant class are elevated to the position of ‘correct’. Students who

come from other classes with alternative literacy practices are expected to take on the elevated usage themselves if they are to be accepted into the community, in this case the academic community of their chosen discipline. Larson (1996) states that the autonomous understanding led to the focus in literacy acquisition being technical skills development. Hymes' communicative approach (1972) was a challenge to the structural linguistic language teaching of the time but it was not critical of discourse practices and continued to describe language and its effects in neutral terms. While Hymes led to a move away from a pure focus on linguistic structure, there was still a focus on formulaic language use. There was no understanding about how literacy practices privilege certain forms to which many people are denied access because of the social class into which they are born.

Advocates of a critical literacy approach would argue that language use cannot be perceived as neutral, and that our teaching of academic skills as if they were neutral results in the subversive acculturation of students. Teaching in general is seen as encouraging students to be one kind of person rather than another. "Every educator, then, orients students towards certain values, actions, and language with implications for the kind of society and people these behaviors will produce" (Shor 1999). Bruner states that:

...the medium of exchange in which education is conducted--language--can never be neutral...[because it] imposes a point of view not only about the world to which it refers but toward the use of mind in respect of this world. Language necessarily imposes a perspective in which things are viewed and a stance toward what we view...I do not for a minute believe

that one can teach even mathematics or physics without transmitting a sense of stance toward nature and toward the use of the mind.

1986: 57

Johnston, Lee and McGregor (1996) describe the power of dominant discourses within the discipline of engineering. “Practitioners commonly believe themselves immune from the influence of theory or philosophy, but the discipline of engineering remains to a great extent captive to the sorts of ideas developed within positivism, due to the overwhelming dominance exercised by positivism in the development of scientific thought during this century.” Few engineers may be in a position to discuss notions of positivism but their discourses reveal the extent to which it determines their thinking. Language can hardly be considered a set of neutral skills if it has such a hold over our worldviews. Keynes (1936 in Johnston et al 1996) in a similar context stated “Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.”

Academic literacy was thus taught as if the AD classroom was a remedial space where neutral language skills could be belatedly acquired. Giroux and McLaren (in Popkewitz 1987: 273) give this intriguing description of a classroom:

... a cultural terrain where a heterogeneity of discourses often collide in an unremitting struggle for dominance, schooling is often encountered in these programmes as a set of rules and regulative practices which have been laundered of ambiguity, contradiction, paradox and resistance. Schools are presented as if they are free of all vestiges of contestation,



struggle and cultural politics. Classroom reality is rarely presented as socially constructed, historically determined and mediated through institutionalised relationships of class, gender, race and power.

Our courses sought to empower students by equipping them with the 'rules of use' but we approached these rules as neutral and correct and did not touch on why these rules existed or whose interests they served. Johns' description of the traditional view of literacy acquisition is that it occurs "through directed practice, focused on the production of perfect, formally organised language patterns and discourses. Good learning is good habit formation, . . . [the] learner is a passive recipient of knowledge and direction" (1997: 7). This sums up our standpoint during the EAP cycle and indicates the conceptualisation of language use as a neutral activity.

Cope and Kalantzis' description of traditional views of literacy shows how language is seen to have no power but performs an unbiased task of communication, "the world can be described in terms of 'facts', rules and regularities epitomized in tables to conjugate verbs or decline nouns" (1993: 3). A characteristic of both our ESL and EAP interventions was that language was perceived to be neutral and was not understood in terms of discourses that have the power to construct and reinforce societal structures.

### **3.3.3 Teaching methods**

The previous two sub-sections of this EAP cycle describe the unconscious ideology underpinning the work we were doing. The discussion will now turn to examine how these ideologies manifested themselves in our academic development classroom practice, with a brief discussion on teaching methodology generally.

Positive comments about the increased use of subject specific material in the EAP cycle can be found in evaluations from AD lecturers, mainstream lecturers and students. However, while all AD staff now recognised the need for subject specific material, they had mixed views regarding how integrated their work should be with the mainstream. Using subject-specific materials obviously greatly increases the workload for AD practitioners; separate material on referencing, for example, needs to be developed for each discipline. Often a template worksheet would be created and each AD lecturer would insert subject specific paragraphs, graphics etc.

There were great discrepancies in the degree to which AD staff worked with mainstream lecturers. Such integration is not only time consuming but it brings with it interpersonal issues of working across disciplines. Where the integration was significant, with AD lecturers working with students on mainstream assignments, the comments by mainstream staff were the most positive:

‘The assignment was far better worded with less plagiarism.’

The students were uniformly positive about the use of discipline-specific material: 'Working together on an assignment has been the best help.'

'The lecturer makes one do the work but does not think I know all about analyse and references.'

Quinn (1999: 30) states that "Academic literacy can only be achieved by engaging with the discipline content, especially in writing." However, integration with the mainstream, even just at the level of the use of subject-specific materials, was a matter of some debate. Some AD practitioners believed it to be an idealistic, and perhaps unnecessary, impossibility and others argued that it was imperative. This was a time of struggle within our department.

We encouraged 'interaction' and group work in our ESL and EAP classes, but we did not ask questions about the extent to which student difficulties were "related to their conception of knowledge and to the way in which resilient common sense understandings of concepts are affirmed by discourses both inside and outside the [institution]" (Boughey 1999: 312). Class discussions were expected to follow our norms and expectations and were often thwarted by students' refusals to participate. Our methods clearly attributed students' academic difficulties to their low English proficiency or their lack of awareness of academic skills. As has been shown, our common sense understanding of the student problem within this positivist framework was affirmed by the discourses of mainstream lecturers in their evaluations of our work.

By ignoring the cultural, social and economic environments in which language is embedded, we were able to focus on technicist deliberations about which method would best result in more proficient and academically skilled students. Pennycook (1994:109) describes how this simplistic understanding of literacy has resulted in a pseudoscientific development of methods. We were thus able to reassure ourselves with ELT readings that our work was both neutral and beneficial to our students. We did not question whether the skills taught in this cycle were appropriate to the contexts from which our students came and in which they learnt. The appropriateness of the Western communicative functions our worksheets were designed to imbue in students was not a matter for reflection.

We did begin to engage with notions of constructivist teaching; the facilitation of conditions that allow the learner to construct rather than a process of simply transmitting information. But we had great difficulties on a practical level as we were unsure how to go about this other than through group work activities to increase students' opportunities for interaction. We strongly opposed the way in which most classrooms were set up to decrease interaction. Classrooms often set up physical power relations "by arranging students in rows, all eyes facing front, directly confronting the back of a fellow's head, meeting the gaze only of the teacher, the discipline of the contemporary classroom deploys the look as a strategy of domination" (Grumet 1988: 111).

We were, at this stage, consciously moving away from a transmission mode of teaching. We were moving towards an understanding that academics should be guiding more and lecturing less. The role was shifting to that of a mentor tasked with arousing interest. But even while using materials designed to increase student participation, we were doing so in a very uncritical way. Pennycook (1994: 174) calls the supposedly student-centred ELT methods a 'version of masked authority' as the student was placed at the centre without any understanding of who the student is or in what context she studies.

I believe we were not in a position to devise lessons where learning is understood to be a process of constructing knowledge until we could envisage academic literacy as something other than a set of skills. Our attempts at creating tasks within Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978) were flawed by our limited understanding of how literacies work to construct meaning.

It was clear to some AD practitioners that neither the language focus of ESL nor the skills teaching of EAP was having a significant impact on students' abilities to meet discipline expectations. At the same time some lecturers were recognising the limitations of their traditional methods of covering and assigning course material and some were beginning to approach a number of curriculum issues in new ways.

During this time I began to work with one of my AD colleagues on a number of staff development workshops. This was perhaps the beginning of a move away

from the add-on remedial model and towards helping staff develop students' academic literacy in the mainstream class, the focus of our integrated AL cycle described in the next section. Our workshops used a number of quotes elicited from our students describing their perceptions of higher education expectations and the challenges they experienced in their attempts to meet these expectations.

In a small way our workshops sought to “create an identity crisis for white middle class students and teachers by inviting them to scrutinize their entitlements and denaturalise their merits” (Grimm 1998: 21). The motivation for commencing staff workshops, described in a paper entitled ‘Past success, present failure’ (McKenna and Rawlinson 1994: 276), was that “[We] are determined that in spite of the impotency of our present methods our students' needs should be met. We have therefore decided to challenge practice by working with academic staff through workshops.” It is impossible to measure the success, if any, of these workshops in terms of revealing differences in stakeholder perceptions but they did prepare us for our later more integrated work.

Increasingly during this EAP cycle, student evaluations called for complete integration of academic development within their mainstream subject:

‘When my lecturer says to do the essay I don't know what to do. I come here and then I know.’

'If only this lecturer can teach my diploma subject and make it clear to me what I must do.'

Some mainstream staff wanted the academic development intervention to return its focus to pure language teaching:

'They need English classes not fancy academic skills. This is a Technikon not a University.'

This comment indicates an epistemological assumption that at Universities knowledge construction is somehow more complex than at a Technikon<sup>1</sup>. Again, problems that arise in this positivist paradigm are then explained through the 'Language as an instrument for communication' discourse:

'They can't do their work because of their weak English.'

It is very difficult to question the assumptions about student deficiency constructed by this discourse, which is discussed in some detail in Chapter Four, because they have become naturalised. It is useful to recall Fairclough's description (1989) of how the more dominant and popular the beliefs, the more natural and commonsensical they appear until the discourse itself appears to be without any ideological or political implications. When all discussion about 'the student problem' rests on an assumption that knowledge is a-cultural and objective and that language is an a-political tool for transferring this knowledge, it is difficult to use discourses of critical education, which acknowledge the power of various literacies.

### **3.4 Cycle 3: AL – Academic Literacy**

The move to the third phase of student development, which I call the Academic Literacy phase, was a continuation of the move from a ‘Received Tradition’ discourse and towards a discourse of ‘discourses’. Gee (1990) describes discourses as being about identifying oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group, involving the sharing of beliefs, values and behaviours. The ‘discourse’ discourse calls for the explicit induction of students into academic literacy practices and their related discourses by mainstream lecturers.

When language interventions rested on the common sense notion that students do not succeed because they lack language or academic skills, the responsibility for their success effectively resided with the students, and the institution’s role was to provide them with remedial programmes. Now the focus shifted to a need for systemic change designed to induct students into the literacy norms of each discipline (and to question those norms.) The earlier ‘common sense’ strategy was more effective in maintaining the status quo; the latter strategy often results in fundamental questions being asked about the syllabus, teaching methods and other aspects of the curriculum.

Students are often unfamiliar with the literacy or cultural context that lecturers take for granted as the norm of higher education. The discrepancies in cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Present discourses about technikons are the subject of Chapter Six.



context of the lecturer and the student are often immense. The cultural capital of the learners does not match the behaviours expected of them in the classroom. To discuss these differences overtly is to challenge many aspects of the curriculum because, as Knoblauch (1990) indicates, the concept of literacy moves beyond skills and into the realm of values. This is one reason why there is often conflict surrounding the integration of academic literacy at the level of lecturer, student and institution. Embedding overt academic literacy instruction in the mainstream curriculum, particularly when this is done in a critical way, means questioning everything within the discipline that is subtle, hidden and not open to discussion.

The issues pertinent to this AL cycle, as raised in the evaluations and considered in the literature, will now be discussed. The unconscious nature of academic literacy is described followed by a look at how it reflects a powerful ideology. The academic literacy norms of higher education will, to some extent, be extricated before an overview of our academic development interventions during this cycle, with a discussion on how academic literacy can be taught in a critical mode. Our interventions at Technikon Natal / DIT during this cycle, included team-teaching, Foundation courses and writer-respondent projects.

#### **3.4.1 Unconscious nature of academic literacy**

While the lecturer may be capable of producing and interpreting texts within the cultural code of her discipline's academic literacy (and even this is rarely the

case<sup>1</sup>), she probably has difficulties discussing her discipline's academic literacy explicitly with her students. We now move to a discussion of how the unconscious nature of literacy norms makes them difficult to deal with overtly in the classroom.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis theorises that thoughts and behaviour are determined, or are at least partially influenced, by language. Neither Sapir nor Whorf formally wrote the hypothesis nor supported it with empirical evidence, but a study of their writings (for example Sapir 1921,1929, Whorf 1940, 1956) reveals the two main ideas of Linguistic Determinism and Linguistic Relativity.

Linguistic Determinism refers to the idea that the language we use to some extent determines the way in which we view and think about the world around us. Linguistic relativity states that distinctions encoded in one language are unique to that language alone, and that there is no limit to the structural diversity of languages (see for example Rossi-Landi 1973 and Slobin 1974).

While these ideas have been modified to incorporate a broader understanding of what is meant by language, they remain important in understanding the way in which knowledge construction and worldview are entwined with the discourses we use. Fairclough (1998) shows that discourses act as social

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<sup>1</sup> If research output is taken as indicative of the use of elevated discipline-specific, academic literacies, then it is possible to show that many technikon academics are not producing texts in this literacy. According to the D.o.E's proposed benchmarks, technikon academics should be producing 0.5 SAPSE publication units per year. From 1998 to 2000, Technikon Natal, the third highest performing technikon in SA, produced 0.07 SAPSE units per full-time academic.

strategies in a mesh of power relations. These discourses go beyond a narrow understanding of language as comprising simply grammar and lexicon, language is seen to help to constitute social structures. "Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning" (Fairclough 1992b:64). Discourses are seen to exert power and to do so through other forms of semiosis as well as language: visual images in particular are an increasingly important feature of contemporary discourse (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996).

Sharing such understandings of how discourses construct 'reality' have a profound effect on teaching. Students need to be made aware of the ways in which their discipline uses particular discourses to "position and construct worlds on the basis of ideologies and would [be allowed] to resist the subject positions set up for them" (Bouhey 1999: 54). The difficulty is that the link between ideology and language is not a conscious one.

Most technikon lecturers<sup>1</sup> are hired for their content knowledge and may never have reflected on the philosophical and ideological basis of this content. Lecturers may therefore be unaware of the extent to which academic literacy is a determinant of what they consider to be 'appropriate knowledge, appropriately expressed'; i.e. the beliefs, values and attitudes underpinning their epistemology. As Angelil-Carter (1995) points out academic discourses are

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<sup>1</sup> Most University lecturing advertisements call for demonstrated research output which assumes an implicit knowledge of academic literacy.

deeply, yet often unconsciously, understood by lecturers but they are seldom made explicit to students. Many academics have assimilated their discipline's literacy to the extent that "disciplinary matrices...are more than just intellectual coigns of vantage but are ways of being in the world" Geertz (1983:155). Furthermore because dominant discourses are hegemonic, insiders see the rules and conventions as common-sense, overtly teaching these norms would be teaching the obvious. "We [higher education educators] are not very good at teaching the discourse of our discipline. We are often unable to unpack the academic literacy norms which we have acquired" (Winberg 2002). This makes it particularly difficult to create an educational context that is inclusive, representative and empowering.

Whether these literacy norms are unconscious or kept secret can be debated but they are certainly not written down, and yet they mediate crucially between the student's own knowledge and intentions and the knowledge and potential meanings that exist within the university. Becoming fully literate in the higher education institution means coming to terms with its rituals, norms, values, language and behaviours. These cultural understandings are rarely addressed directly by academics and their students (Ballard and Clanchy 1988:8).

The discourse community to which students are trying to gain membership has a set of norms concerning, among other things, textual forms, roles and acts. Lecturers and academic writers have internalised these norms and use them to construct texts, be they spoken or written. It follows, according to the

ideological model of texts, that listeners or readers need to have an understanding of these norms in order to draw on them in interpreting the texts. Bock (1988) indicates that language rules are reinterpreted in terms of disciplinary content as the text producer/interpreter becomes more expert in the field and acquires the academic literacy norms. “These reinterpretations can come to be seen by the subject specialist as rules of ‘general English’ or ‘the common language’ and they can be ingrained, difficult to pinpoint and subtle in effect” (1998:36).

This understanding of reading and writing as a means of constructing knowledge or exploring other people’s constructions of knowledge was a major factor in the move from ESL and EAP skills teaching to the third cycle of AL. However such conscious understandings of the ways in which language, academic practices and the discipline’s ideologies intertwine are hard to come by and harder still to incorporate into the mainstream curriculum. But research nationally and internationally is helping to facilitate this process.

“According to SAUVCA, research to date suggests that competence in academic literacy in the required medium of instruction (usually English) and in Mathematical literacy are the key factors determining academic success” (NAP 2001: 101). There is therefore a need for mainstream lecturers to develop curricula aimed at enhancing students’ academic literacy acquisition. It is in the role of facilitating this process, that academic development is increasingly placing itself. This third cycle thus saw a tentative move towards staff

development as the AD lecturers became more aware of how academic literacy discourses determine students' success or failure. "Experience has shown the value of having a core of specialist academic development staff with these attributes, as well as institutional structures that enable them to develop academically and professionally" (Scott 2001: 5).

As one AD lecturer at DIT put it:

I think we can no longer just complain about what the students can or can't do but we need to reflect on what we expect students to be able to do at the end of their studies and take on the role of developing students to that point as a three or four year process in which we are all responsible – mainstream lecturers, us and the students themselves.

In an attempt to delineate the unconscious way in which literacies, such as academic literacies, function, there have been a number of studies as to how texts are constructed. One approach in linguistics has been to propose simplified models of what people are like and how communication between them might occur. Various linguistic features are then studied as providing support for or against the simplified model. Grice's Co-operative Principle (1975, 1989), Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1978, 1987) and Nystrand's Reciprocity Principle (1986, 1989) are examples of such models. But as Myers (1999) indicates we are still left with problems defining how people act in different social contexts using different conventions.

Analysts using Systemic Functional Linguistics have greatly extended the approach by looking at how the interpersonal is constructed. Halliday (1985, 1994) states that linguistic choices are made against a cultural and situational background that determines their appropriateness. Where the parties in the communication do not share cultural and situational backgrounds, the potential for miscommunication is great. In the higher education context the implications are grave because students are expected to make linguistic choices deemed appropriate by the discipline's academic literacy in order to succeed.

### **3.4.2 Academic Literacy as a Powerful Ideology**

It is within the discourses of higher education that higher education's power is vested. Popkewitz (1981:23) states that power "circulates through institutional practices and the discourses of everyday life". Power is seen to be both relational and regional and "intricately bound to the rules, standards and styles of reasoning by which individuals speak, think, and act in producing their everyday world" (1991: 223). Giroux (1987:7) also makes the link between power and discourse when he argues that "the issue of literacy and power...begins with the fact of one's existence as part of a historically constructed practice within specific relations of power."

Williams (1977:87) states that the power wielded by discourses is not only the setting of limits; but also by the exertion of pressures. These pressures are internalised to form "a compulsion to act in ways that maintain and renew" the

social context. Loewen (1995) points out in his discussion on school discourses, that the perceptions of middle class teachers have been dominant for so long that they are completely naturalised and that they can thus, in the words of Foucault (1979: 184), “impose homogeneity”.

Flax (1993: 96) argues that it is the process of normalisation that “functions to create and justify social organization and exclusion” which then justifies the creation of groups of experts whose function is to sort people. The powerful naturalised discourses in higher education can, according to this argument, be seen to play an important role in “legitimising stratification and inequality in everyday common sense, recruiting people to particular understandings of the world without their realising it” (Flax 1993: 97). The analysis of how power and literacy practices intersect in the educational arena has been the subject of much research.

As Freire states in *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (1987:73): “this way you speak also includes the question of power. Because of the political problem of power, you need to learn how to command the dominant language, in order for you to survive in the struggle to transform society”.

### **3.4.3 Academic Literacy Norms of Higher Education**

In higher education in the United States, black American graduation rates are seen to fall behind those of white students despite their having English as their



first language (Gose 1998). In the United Kingdom, similar results are found for students from working class homes (Furlong and Forsyth 2003). The discrepancies between home and school or academic literacies and the particular nature of academic literacies are now becoming an area of research.

Comber (1994: 664) points out that we need to ask “What kind of literacies are being taught in educational institutions and to what extent [do] these literacies maintain and reinforce dominant ideologies”. This could be seen as the central question of this thesis. For the purposes of this section however, I will look at how the academic literacy of higher education has been researched in the literature.

There appears to be a dichotomy between educational practices aimed at making students producers of knowledge and those aimed at making students reproducers of knowledge. Bartholomae (1985:144) states that “Much of the written work that students do is test-taking, report or summary, work that places them outside the official discourse of the academic community”. Students are tasked with replicating and admiring the knowledge of others rather than engaging in a common enterprise with the aim of full participation in a dialogic manner (see also Geisler 1994). I would argue that this is an apprenticeship phase that functions as a gate-keeping mechanism to ensure that those who gain full membership of the academy, through post-graduate studies or employment in a higher education institution, have fully acquired the discourses deemed appropriate.

This knowledge-telling discourse is developed largely through tasks and tests calling for the memorisation of concepts and their reiteration by students within the writing and speaking practices of the discipline. The successful completion of a course is linked to mastering the linguistic norms of that course, which implies understanding how the discourse is structured. Students are thus instructed to 'Give your opinion on...' but, to get good marks, this opinion has to be expressed within the norms of the discipline thereby ensuring that the opinion falls within those deemed appropriate by the discipline. When students fail to use these discipline-specific language norms, which have not been overtly taught, their lack of performance is often seen to rest in their failing to improve their English through remedial instruction offered by the institution.

The use of the written academic literacy norms of higher education is often confused with the ability to think in a higher order. The link between the type of critical thinking valued by many universities and the rhetoric of essay assignments is not as unproblematic as writers such as Brooke (1987) would have us believe. The process of writing may help students to reflect, but not all writing necessarily develops critical thinking. Some kinds of writing may function to question the academic literacy norms and act as critical texts, but not writing in general. Most writing within the academy exemplifies the values of the discipline rather than resisting them.

The academic literacy norms of higher education ensure that meaning is constructed within particular discourses. There is little argument with Phelps' definition of writing (1988) as a rich cultural activity or Heath's description of writing (1983) as a complex social pursuit. The problem arises in the social or cultural arena of higher education when students' writing does not adhere to the expectations of the discourse community because it is not expressed within the powerful structures of academic literacy. As Finch points out (1997: 152 in Brennan and Shay 2000:17): "The whole of the academic enterprise depends on there being a reasonably clear collective understanding between academics in a given discipline that a particular piece of work counts as good and something else is less good. Without that collective understanding, academic disciplines really do not exist".

Disciplines, it seems, are held together not so much by their content but by the shared understanding of what counts as content. "Although there can be no final judgement regarding what counts as knowledge or 'good' practice, it doesn't mean that 'anything goes' " (Quinn and McKellar 2002: 75).

Each discipline has its own set of norms, determined by the "critical gaze of [one's] peers" (Barnett 1992 in Quinn and McKellar 2002: 75). But there are some norms that are common across many disciplines. One common academic norm is the sense of objectivity formed by the use of the third person passive voice. Unlike many norms of academic literacy, this one is overtly called for in various DIT texts, perhaps because it is relatively easy to identify as

something found in academic texts that is different from most other texts. But the underlying ideology from which the norm arises is not open to discussion or critique. The following excerpt comes from one of DIT's faculty research methodology guide for Bachelor of Technology students:

Research work has to be free of cultural bias so do not use words that only your culture understands. If in doubt, define what you mean. There is no "I" or "me" or "they" or "we" in research work. It is what they call "third person passive." Often research reports are basic and sterile. That is what they should be.

Even where students are given the grammatical form of both third person and passive voice in some detail, this norm is very difficult to attain, as it is not expressed in terms of what the form is trying to do. If students were told to use this form in order to hide the fact that conclusions are based on the researcher's choices, perceptions or manipulation and that the form increases the illusion that research uncovers scientific truths that are beyond discussion, students may become more critical of this grammatical norm.

Students are often further confused by being simultaneously instructed to be objective and to 'Give your own examples'. The issue of voice in student writing is very difficult, as the authoritative voice of formal academic writing is often unfamiliar to students. Student writers often seem voiceless or muddle an informal narrative voice with an authoritative anonymous voice<sup>1</sup>. This is particularly true when students have yet to acquire the discourse of the

academic community and have not established the norms of gaining the floor, building an argument, etc. Students from societies in which memorisation and mimicry are valued find themselves accused of plagiarism and copying. They are not only having difficulties in engaging with complex and abstract concepts, but find themselves expected to do so in new and unfamiliar ways.

“Functions such as 'giving an opinion' and 'saying what you think' no longer mean what they used to in discourses outside the university. ... Their struggle goes beyond the need to find an appropriate way to give an opinion, however, since “knowing” itself is no longer what it used to be” (Boughey 1999: 281). Students thus find themselves without the “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1977) favoured by the institution.

Many teachers reject authoritarian education and strive to inject criticality into the curriculum. This means doing what Ohmann (1987) called “literacy from below” that questions the way the discipline works and makes space for alternative representations. Educators thus face the challenge of being “pedagogical clerks” (Giroux and McLaren in Popkewitz 1987:279) who reinforce the status quo or being “agents of transformation” (Davidoff and van den Berg 1991 in Wickham 1998).

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter Five provides more discussion on how various student identities (or voices) are not given space in higher education.

#### **3.4.4 Teaching Academic Literacy from a critical perspective**

By teaching language or skills in an isolated add-on manner, as we did in cycles one and two, we can become guilty of preparing students for the academy without ever raising questions about what they do in the academy. Zamel (1993) points out that this can force “conformity and submission and limits and undermines both our own expertise and that of our students”. Rather than providing adjunct additional educational input, academic development at DIT began to work in a more integrated manner during this third cycle<sup>1</sup>. This was, in part, in an attempt to make space for alternative literacies in the curriculum and to get students to interrogate the notions of literacy demanded in mainstream classrooms.

There was a tension between wanting to assist students more effectively in acquiring the dominant discourses of academic literacy and developing students’ ability to challenge these discourses. Kramer-Dahl (1995:21) challenges the teaching of the “conventions of the socially privileged discourse of academia and the public sphere [or we become] complicit in the cultural task of education, reproducing existing knowledge and power relations”.

The department faced this dilemma, for example, when we assisted students with their writing tasks, through methodologies such as writer-responder projects (see 3.7 below). We asked ourselves whether our focus was on inducting students into the discipline’s literacy or whether we were helping to

develop critically thinking students who use language to question knowledge, experience and power in society. The evaluations by AD practitioners at this stage indicate that our concern was largely at the level of induction rather than developing criticality, as revealed by this quote: ‘There is a secret code that isn’t taught and our job is to teach students that code so they can be let into the club – the academic club.’

We sought to make clear the connection between knowledge and power while only just becoming aware of this connection ourselves. As we looked to making academic literacy overt to students, we began to see the social nature of knowledge construction and began to question whose economic, social and political interests such knowledge construction was serving. If critical literacy functions, as Aronowitz and Giroux (1985:132) state, “as a theoretical tool to help students and others develop a critical relationship to their own knowledge” then as AD practitioners we were just beginning the process of developing such a relationship ourselves.

For the first time we began to raise questions about the nature, value and purpose of academic discourse. These questions led to a debate about the entire curriculum and the role of multiple languages and literacies within the curriculum. In a teaching portfolio, an AD practitioner expressed how this debate impacted on her work:

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<sup>1</sup> An example of work from this cycle is provided in Appendix E.

At times I feel strongly enough about academic literacy to adopt a critical stance toward departments where no review of the curriculum ever takes place and where suggestions about change are met with blank stares or refusals. But engagement with academic staff on team-teaching remains as challenging for me as motivating a new crop of learners every year.

Mankowski 2002

Pratt (1991: 38) argues that when all legitimate literacy practices in the classroom are defined by those with power, the classroom becomes 'homogenized with respect to the teacher'. If academic ability means taking on the middle class norms of each discipline then this power is appropriately used. If, however, the ability to negotiate differences, to appreciate various discourses and to communicate across literacy practices is what is to be valued, a classroom where only the teacher determines which discourses are deemed permissible would be a damaging situation. Teachers have difficulty encouraging alternative literacy practices because the "inability to see that what is normal is really cultural prevents white middle class from entering the contact zone" (Grimm 1998: 3).

The introduction of overt literacy training can thus be seen as reinforcing the power of the normal. Foucault calls 'the normal', the "principle of coercion in teaching' (1979: 184). Using Foucault's definition, one could argue that overt academic literacy teaching increases the power of the dominant discourses by highlighting their acquisition as the path to success in higher education.



However, such teaching should never take place as if the discourse being highlighted is culturally neutral and intrinsically valuable.

Good literacy teaching deconstructs the particular literacy practice as one of many possibilities and thereby exposes it to be not a cloak of gold and shimmering colours but only the emperor wearing his underwear. Bloom (1996:671) argues that educators have an obligation “to respect the world's multiple ways of living and speaking” while they are providing their students with access to the dominant ways. There is a line between literacy indoctrination and literacy teaching. I would argue that the most common teaching at present does neither of these. Instead it simply fails to overtly deal with the culturally specific norms of academic literacy practices while holding them as the key to success. This is the most dangerous form of teaching in terms of its capacity to demand acculturation or exclusion.

When Stuckey (1990) describes literacy schooling as “acts of violence” in which those who are to be dominated are put into their economically exploited place in society, we can perhaps look to our present system where students are expected to ‘catch on’ to the expected norms without ever having them transparently taught. Making such norms transparent should work towards demystifying rather than empowering the norms. A comment by a writer-respondent at DIT on a draft of student writing shows how this balancing act can occur:

You are expected to provide a reference when you write such a bold statement. In all academic writing you either have to give reasons for the conclusions you reach or reference others who have already made such conclusions and have published their findings. This is true for all bold statements like this one, even if you think that everyone agrees that Mozart was the greatest composer of all time. I am not saying that I disagree with this statement, only that you would be expected to follow the academic norm if you want your readers to accept your conclusion.

Likewise this writer-respondent's comment draws the student's attention to a required academic literacy norm without elevating the norm to common sense or normal:

Great! I like the way you've grabbed the attention of the reader in your introduction and I enjoyed the way you set the essay up as a kind of mystery. But there could be a problem with this because you haven't told me what your essay will be about or what structure you'll use in it. It is an academic norm that an introduction provides the reader with a 'word map' stating what will be discussed in what order in the essay. In a narrative style of writing (for example stories rather than academic essays), the introduction almost never tells the reader what the writing will be about. If you want to keep the narrative mystery style used in your essay, first chat to your lecturer about why you think it would be more effective to break the norms of a formal academic essay.

We began, during this cycle, to question whether there shouldn't be a change in the curriculum to ensure that the subject matter reflects a wide range of life experiences. But Thesen (1999) cautions that the critical development of academic literacy goes beyond text selection to a responsive methodology. Students should be given opportunities to critique texts, to select their own texts

and to produce texts. “In addition, the range of languages involved should be explicitly marked. This will require new communities of practice” (1999: 12). The notion of new communities of practice in the academic arena is one to which I return in Chapter Five. I now move on to a discussion of our attempts, in this third cycle of academic development, to provide students with a range of text producing opportunities and tasks aimed at marking the range of languages within these texts. One place in which we did this was in Foundation courses.

### **3.4.5 Academic Literacy in Foundation Courses**

Since 2002, our interventions are all totally integrated into the mainstream curriculum; the only time an AD practitioner is found on her own in a classroom with students is at Foundation level. At present the Foundation courses in which we are involved have been devised and are run by specific faculties or departments and are not nationally registered courses. The process of developing nationally funded foundation courses is well underway.

It is of great concern, however, that some of the convenors<sup>1</sup> of the nine Foundation Programmes presently being SAQA registered for Technikon offering<sup>1</sup> were of the opinion that academic literacy could be ‘done’ in the first semester and the mainstream subjects could be offered thereafter. The concern is that academic literacy is seen as discrete and generic, as “technical,

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<sup>1</sup> The Technikon system requires that the syllabus for every Technikon offering is set nationally by convenor technikons. This system is being scrapped in 2004.

linguistic, skills based, instrumental, neutral and autonomous” (Grant, 1986:6). I fear that it is seen as just another set of skills to be learned. There is an increasing understanding of the importance of the role of academic literacy but it is misunderstood as being a foundation for knowledge acquisition and dissemination. Indeed in a skills-based interpretation of academic literacy, knowledge is a neutral product that is acquired and literacy becomes a tool, which is instrumental for this knowledge acquisition.

Furthermore, the mainstream subjects of the Foundation certificates were in some cases seen to be opportunities for offering watered-down, remedial versions of first-year content. I suggested to one member of a planning team for a national Foundation course that he embed the course into the mainstream programme with a focus on developing ‘the ways of thinking and knowing in the discipline’. He was clear that ‘our course doesn’t have ways of thinking, it just has facts and our students come to us without any of these facts. Foundation year is our chance to pump them full of these facts.’ I am aware that quoting this person seems dismissive but he is simply stating the dominant discourse, which is based on an understanding of knowledge as set of facts and teaching as the transmission of these facts.

Our AL module at Foundation level is as integrated as possible within the constraints of the present model and is no longer as skills-based as our work in

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<sup>1</sup> This was a Committee of Technikon Principals’ initiative. I was responsible for advising on academic literacy issues for these Foundation programmes. The comments made here relate to draft versions of some of the certificates.

the first two cycles. It flexibly addresses the expectations placed on students in their various mainstream subjects. Our Foundation module does not have its own subject content and is not generic across faculties. Instead it uses students' mainstream assessments as the framework for developing discipline-specific literacy practices.

The AL module is assessed through the completion of discipline-specific portfolios and numerous scaffolding exercises constructed, in collaboration with mainstream lecturers, to build towards larger mainstream assignments. The detailed, formative feedback given on such tasks is designed to develop students' understanding of mainstream assignment expectations. The feedback from students on these tasks is excellent. In cases where the mainstream assignment is completed by both students doing the Foundation AL module and other students doing purely first year subjects, the Foundation students are quick to point out the benefits of the scaffolding tasks:

'The rest of the class just muddles the points but our [Foundation] group had learnt the planning and had discussed the readings.'

'The library sessions helped us not just to find the books for the assignment but also how to reference the different readings in one paragraph.'

By completing numerous discipline-specific reading and writing tasks in the AL class, the students have an advantage over peers who are not in the Foundation course but who have to complete the same assignment. The Foundation students have been given feedback on smaller tasks in the form of

questions and commentary rather than editing or corrections. The centrality of writing in the academic arena is demonstrated to students by its use as a developmental tool rather than just a testing mechanism. This is one way in which we attempt to address a common complaint made by lecturers in course evaluations:

‘There is no culture of reading. It is no good telling students to read something because they just don’t.’

‘We use all MCQs [multiple choice questions] and we hand out notes because our experience shows students do not do any reading and don’t know how to write properly. Most of them don’t even bother to buy the textbook.’

Our previous use of generic materials has been all but abolished. While we acknowledge that there are some common practices, goals and values among discourse communities (Kuriloff 1996: 487), we avoid assuming that the practices of the disciplines in which we work have many similar norms. In our attempts to make students “familiar with the specialist concepts, theories, knowledge-making rules and writing conventions of academic disciplines and fields” (Warren 1999 in Thesen 1999), we also try to value the literacies they bring with them. This is a tall order but occurs to some extent by the inclusion of a range of genres (written and spoken) in the portfolio and coursework. There has been some debate about this amongst the AD practitioners, some of whom believe that making space for praise poems, traditional narratives and so forth proves confusing for students trying to come to grips with the quirks of their discipline’s academic literacy. Other AD practitioners believe it is only by

valuing and discussing alternative practices that students can be open to an understanding of the way in which the discourses construct academic literacy.

Apart from our direct teaching in the Foundation course, we are involved in other projects in which we work closely with mainstream lecturers. In the remainder of the discussion on this third cycle, I will describe two of our interventions: team-teaching and writer-respondent projects.

#### **3.4.6 Team-teaching interventions**

The third cycle, AL, saw a shift in focus away from the 'autonomous model of literacy', which sees language use as a cognitive skill relatively autonomous of social context. In Cycle One the focus was on grammar and Cycle Two the focus was on skills. In both cases little cognisance was taken of the social contexts of the discipline, the institution, the classroom etc., in which the learner and lecturer found themselves. In the third cycle, there has been a significant shift towards the 'ideological model of literacy'. The concern is thus specifically with the context of literacy practices. Because we have come to this understanding that academic literacy is inextricable from its discipline, our role as AD practitioners has become one of helping mainstream lecturers to make overt to students the ways of using language considered appropriate in their particular discipline.

In 2001, integrated academic literacy projects began with a combination of team-teaching and add-on tutorials. The add-on tutorials were problem-based and used group work to ensure that students grappled with the language of the discipline. Writing was an integral part of these tutorials with students having to write at least one paragraph within their discipline's discourse in every tutorial. The tutorials were largely the remnants of the add-on EAP model and were abandoned in 2002. The focus of our projects is now only on what happens in the mainstream classroom.

Towards the end of 2001, AD lecturers became more than silent observers in the mainstream classes and began instigating student activities. 'End-notes' were used, whereby students spent the last few minutes of the lecture reflecting on what they had heard and writing a response to a general question posed by the mainstream lecturer. The AD lecturer then gave written responses to these pieces, usually in the form of questions designed to probe student understanding or develop student awareness of their discipline's literacy norms. The evaluations by students were very positive, particularly regarding the problem-based activities and interactive nature of our interventions.

'It makes me a little bit tired that here we are always having to talk and write, but it does help me about [subject] thinking.'

The mainstream classes followed lecture format only and students made it clear they wanted more opportunities to be actively involved in their learning in class. A problem with team-teaching approaches is that they are perceived largely as



a means for weak students to get corrective attention within the mainstream class and not as an opportunity for re-curriculation.

The primary focus of this project remains on the student as it uses scaffolding tasks and draft feedback to develop students' writing to meet discipline-specific expectations. Mainstream lecturers are encouraged to see assessment tasks as one place to develop learning and to induct students into the academic literacy norms of the discipline rather than just as a means of making summative judgments. Unfortunately, even where this is grasped, it is seen as a remedial effort rather than as good educational practice. It has become evident to us that our dealing with academic literacy as if it were a student issue excludes mainstream academics from understanding how academic literacy functions and prevents them from taking the responsibility for teaching reading, writing and critical approaches. As Zamel (1993: 6) states "...taking on the responsibility, as if this were possible, of teaching someone else's curriculum serves to marginalize us [in academic development] as well as our students".

Ideally the integrated academic literacy projects should assist mainstream lecturers in making curriculum changes aimed at facilitating students' acquisition of academic literacy. These changes may be at the level of methodology, syllabus or assessment etc. The first step is always becoming aware that one's role as an educator includes more than just the transmission of content. Outcomes-based education sought to articulate some of the other areas to be developed in higher education through the critical cross-field

outcomes (CCFOs)<sup>1</sup>. These national CCFO's clearly indicate the broad range of an educator's responsibilities but these are often neglected when planning or evaluating a programme. As one educator commented:

'I am a [subject] lecturer. My job is to teach them [subject]. Teaching students how to learn is not my job.'

Mankowski et al (2001) state that:

All academics, including language practitioners, have been encouraged to see themselves as specialists, trained to define the range and limits of their respective territories. But the development of more critical approaches in education and the entry of OBE into the equation have required academics to review many basic assumptions as to what constitutes their work. There has been a move away from the short-term solution of language interventions to 'fix' students towards developing departmentally owned projects aimed at systemic change to improve students' academic literacy.

Students are expected to restructure their understandings within the academic environment according to the academic literacy norms of their discipline. In order to do this, they need to question their own common sense understandings, which are very resilient (Boughey 1999: 209). For example, the following quote comes from a student's writing about forms of tax: 'Progressive tax is the only fair tax and he must use it because it is too good.' The need for justice was never mentioned in the student's lectures on tax and only briefly referred to in an oblique, formal, academic fashion in the textbook.

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<sup>1</sup> These are listed in Appendix F.

But the student's own ideas about fairness and the legitimate use of democracy remain prevalent throughout his work, and the academic understandings are not constructed. Activities designed to assist students in acquiring the academic literacy norms are time intensive, and this means less time available for the transmission of a content heavy syllabus. Few mainstream lecturers are willing to forgo any aspect of content.

There is a fine line between indoctrinating students into the dominant discourse of academic literacy, and enabling students to "respond to the informational and organizational demands of various settings. Instruction needs to provide a scaffolding so that students can progress toward more academically valued ways of writing, learn content material, and have a better chance to experience success at school" (Martin 1989: 35). Within the objective of improving students' educational success by making academic literacy overt is the risk of acculturation. We need to guard against developing students into well-educated passive acceptors who can only behave according to acceptable norms. However, Gee (2000) reassures us that it is possible to critique the Discourse while acquiring the discourse. Students are well placed to critique their discipline's Discourse but unless they have mastered the discourse with which to do so, it is unlikely that their critique will be valued.

The AD practitioners were the only ones who expressed a concern about acculturation through overt discourse instruction. A corollary concern expressed by some mainstream academics was that a curriculum, which has

academic literacy acquisition as a focus, may lower standards. The concern is that providing students with the type of instructional scaffolding (Langer and Applebee 1987) that develops students' academic literacy (and thereby student autonomy) will make the mysteries of academia too simple and too accessible. The following comments came from academics at a workshop on the use of scaffolding tasks:

'Nobody gave us all this help and we made it through.'

'If you spell out exactly what you want from them every time, you'll never sort the sheep from the men.'

'The bright ones figure it out.'

The need for mainstreamed, research-based projects that address these concerns and the dominant discourses that reinforce, or create, them is evident. The academic literacy of any discipline is of course "never anyone's mother tongue, even for the privileged classes" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977:115). But I would argue that the shared values of the middle class, coupled with particular school and home literacies eases the induction of these students into the valued academic literacy. Thesen (1999: 13) points out that "It is possible that much of this continuity between middle class homes and schooling is not so much the result of continuity of textual resources but has more to do with the mediating role played by language such that there is an easy move from language as commentary at home to language as commentary in school."

To some extent the integrated academic literacy projects are an attempt to address this. Some of the evaluations by mainstream lecturers of these projects indicate a shift is occurring:

'I've realised how much needs to be explained about what I expect. I've always thought students will just "get it" but actually when I went to 'varsity, I was totally confused about what the lecturers expected. And I'm a mother tongue speaker.'

### **3.4.7 Writer-Respondent Projects**

Writer-respondent projects are based on the idea that detailed developmental comments and questions on students' draft writing can assist them in acquiring the peculiar norms of academic literacy. Our respondents are trained by Lynn Quinn from Rhodes University, who completed a Master's thesis on the use of such interventions. Respondents do not edit or correct students' work, but provide students with an audience prepared to draw their attention to the academic norms of writing. Bartholomae suggests that "Teaching students to revise for readers, then, will better prepare them to write initially with a reader in mind" (1985:139).

Earlier excerpts from some comments by respondents (Section 3.2.1) illustrate how the target literacy is introduced as a norm that could be accepted or rejected. The process also aims to help students see that writing can be a useful means of clarifying one's thoughts. Students, who are used to submitting

work without even reading through it, make enormous strides when working in a writer-respondent project as construction of knowledge rather than consumption of knowledge is encouraged.

As with our other interventions, much depends on the capacity of the AD practitioner (or, in this case, the respondent) and the extent to which the mainstream lecturer acknowledges the theory underpinning the intervention. In some of the more successful writer-respondent projects, the mainstream lecturers have revised their modes of assessment as a result of the intervention.

The extent to which some lecturers were themselves confused by academic literacy norms was evident in these evaluations:

‘The writing project [writer-respondent project] has helped me to see how to write academically. I’ve always been unsure about when and why to quote. I’m sure it’s helped the students too.’

‘I know with a gut feel if an essay is well written. The comments on my students work have helped me pinpoint what exactly I’m looking for. I’m able to use some of these in my assessment rubrics.’

### **3.4.8 Curriculum Theory**

In this section I link the notion of research paradigms to teaching and learning approaches and describe how the evaluations of three cycles described in this chapter (ESL, EAP and AL) can be categorised within the particular paradigms

presented in Chapter Two. In this chapter I have described cycles of curriculum change in academic development. I wove educator and learner quotations from course evaluations into this historical overview in an attempt to show some of the discourses in use at different times by different stakeholders. I would now like to briefly return to the outline of the four research paradigms and link that discussion to this recent outline of the three cycles of academic development.

Curriculum development can be considered from a number of perspectives. Much as one's research is delimited by one's research paradigm, so too is the way in which an educator reflects on and makes adjustments to the curriculum. Hartman and Warren (1994), Grundy (1987) and others have applied Habermas' epistemological theories to the context of curriculum theory. Lockett's discussion of curriculum theory (1995) is particularly pertinent and considers this from the South African perspective.

Educators often consider themselves free of the influence of theory or philosophy. They are thus unaware of the extent to which their paradigm or worldview dictates their particular approach to the curriculum. Johnston, Lee and McGregor 1996 refer to this as being held captive by the dominance of the discipline's paradigm. In considering our approaches to curricula in terms of research paradigms, we can become aware of "the extent to which different frames of reference impinge on the learning process" (McKenna and Rawlinson 1994: 279). I move now to a brief consideration of how a paradigm or worldview determines one's understanding of teaching and learning. The use of

paradigms in discussions of curriculum design is not in order to judge which is best but rather “the question should be understood as a matter of values and ethical choice. We have to choose which paradigm(s) to work within and we do so on the basis of our values” (Luckett 1995: 131).

The traditional or positivist paradigm would result in a reflection on teaching and learning that is fairly empirical. Positivist studies in curriculum development are usually technical in nature and concerned with being able to predict and control the environment. Knowledge, in this paradigm, is regarded as a set of facts to be transferred from the educated lecturer to the uneducated student.

The curriculum could be simplified to the following equation:

$$\text{objectives} + \text{inputs} = \text{outputs}$$

If the objectives of the course are carefully structured and the input (by student, lecturer, textbook etc) carefully measured, then one should be able to establish the output or pass rate. As Luckett points out, it is the product or plan emphasis that makes this paradigm so attractive to “university executive and academic staff who are under enormous strain to make their education systems more efficient and to produce more graduates with considerably fewer resources” (1995: 131).

Where OBE is implemented within this paradigm, it is perceived as the technician acquisition of a set of skills and facts, which are taught by the educator and then demonstrated by the student. The immediate, measurable



and methodological aspects of the curriculum are valued highly. Some examples of this positivist approach to teaching and learning were given in the evaluation quotes in this chapter. For example, 'Please improve Themba's English' seems to indicate that the inputs can be addressed in an isolated and measured way. The whole, in this case, being simply the sum of the parts. Another lecturer quote which suggests a positivist approach to education is '...our course doesn't have ways of thinking, it just has facts.' In a positivist approach, the practices of higher education are viewed as unconstrained by ambiguity, contradiction, critique and resistance.

The interpretive paradigm is context-driven and curriculum design within this paradigm tries to understand teaching and learning in terms of the environment in which it takes place. Knowledge, here, is seen to be a process of making meaning through interaction. The curriculum is not viewed as a linear equation but is rather seen as an ongoing activity shaped by interaction between the educator, learner, classroom and broader context. Cornbleth (1990: 24) shows how interpretive curriculum design is 'an ongoing activity that is shaped by various contextual influences within and beyond the classroom and is accomplished interactively, primarily by teachers and students.' A few quotes by students in the previous chapter seem to indicate that the lecturer concerned used an interpretive approach in her classroom: 'Here we are free to talk.' 'My point of view is valued.'

The critical paradigm has been developed largely through feminist studies and, in terms of curriculum theory, has a concern with the emancipatory function of teaching and learning. The epistemology of this paradigm is that knowledge is socially constructed, and as such may either serve or critique existing social structures. Curriculum development would have an overt aim of exposing the ideologies of the educator, learner and those embedded in the subject matter. The curriculum would be scrutinised for ingrained power relations<sup>1</sup>. The questions asked of the curriculum would be “whose interests are served by the curriculum, what curriculum would promote greater equity, emancipation and social justice, how is power distributed in the teaching learning process and how can it be more equitably distributed” (Grundy 1987: 122).

There were few comments in the evaluations used in this chapter that related to content aspects of the curriculum and it was therefore not surprising that no quotes are available that specifically refer to how classes may or may not have addressed the issue of ideology and power. However, the many references to race show that the students of that time were critical of some of the power imbalances they perceived in the curriculum: ‘Why must we do all the work as the whites and now some more?’, ‘She doesn’t treat me like a blacksomebody. God would know I was lying if I said she was a racist.’

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<sup>1</sup> Much curriculum work was done in this paradigm at UWC in the early 1990’s. There was a move towards developing a curriculum for Africa, which did not disadvantage the disadvantaged as the previous curriculum was seen to do. See, for example, Walker 1993.

Post-structuralists believe reality is languaged into being. Their focus is therefore predominantly on discourses. Educationalists who work within the post-structural paradigm would seek to make the discourses embedded in the curriculum overt so that students could have access to them, particularly the dominant discourses that act as gatekeepers in higher education. Students would then have the agency to act out discourses, thereby strengthening them, or to refute them, thereby weakening them. This understanding of curriculum was evidenced in the quote from an evaluation by an AD practitioner: 'There is a secret code that isn't taught.'

As can be seen from the above discussion, it is impossible, and undesirable, to place each group of stakeholders who completed the evaluations within any one paradigm. Within the evaluations completed by students, academic development lecturers and mainstream lecturers over the years were a broad range of discourses indicating a lack of shared paradigm. This is undoubtedly one of the factors operating against a curriculum that meets the expectations of all lecturers and students.

If one were to embark on curriculum design and to use the stakeholders' evaluations as a basis for this exercise, the approach to the data would vary greatly depending on the curriculum designer's paradigm. Allow me to continue this line of argument in order to further illustrate my contention that one's paradigm goes beyond research methodology and in fact reflects one's worldview and the way in which one approaches everyday life.

If an educator were faced with the evaluations from which I have quoted and tasked with a curriculum exercise, the undertaking would be greatly influenced by her paradigm. In a positivist paradigm, the task would be to determine which set of perceptions expressed in the evaluations were correct and true and which were in fact misconceptions. Curriculum changes could then be made in support of the 'correct' perceptions. In an interpretive paradigm, the task would be to contextualise the various opposing perceptions and to try to realise the reasons for these differences in order to increase shared understandings, rather than 'truths', between the various stakeholders. In the critical paradigm, the questions raised by the evaluations would revolve around power and the researcher would seek to critique whose agenda was being promoted by the various perceptions. In the critical paradigm, curriculum changes would then be designed to expose any false ideologies the perceptions indicate to be inherent in the curriculum.

In the closely related post-structural paradigm, the discourses used in the evaluations would be analysed to determine discrepancies between stakeholder discourses. Why, for example, were the student and lecturer discourses so different? Which discourses are dominant and powerful? The focus would be on how these discourses construct the realities experienced by the students, AD lecturers and the mainstream lecturers and whether all stakeholders have access to the various discourses. Curriculum change would be made to ensure

students had better access and assistance in acquiring and critiquing the target discourses.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The changes in language interventions at Technikon Natal, and later the Durban Institute of Technology, have been tracked alongside quotes from AD lecturers and students and mainstream lecturers. Because the discourses of the mainstream lecturers are the most powerful and have been the slowest to change, the move towards integrated academic literacy has been unsystematic and is still considered contentious. While student evaluations consistently call for subject specific materials and integrated teaching, data from lecturers show contradictory shifts towards the integrated model and back to add-on tutorials<sup>1</sup>.

It is only when our common sense understandings of the 'student problem' are questioned that we can consider other perspectives of teaching and learning. It seems we, as educators, need to adopt other discourses, or at least be exposed to them, before we can consider alternative understandings of how to improve student success.

Having given this literature review and broad overview, I now move on to the analysis of the main data of this thesis. As explained in Chapter Two, I have

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<sup>1</sup> In the DIT Senate minutes of 20 February 2003 it is stated that the TELP test will be used to "determine if it is necessary for them to obtain assistance in English". The discussions at faculty level in November 2002 clearly showed an understanding that this assistance would take the

written each chapter around discourses evident in the data that I believe to be related in some way. The next chapter addresses those discourses connected to language and learning.

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form of remedial grammar tutorials. This recommendation came from within DIT's newly merged AD units.

## Chapter Four - Language and Learning Discourses

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### 4.1 Introduction

Academic literacy is one of numerous literacies that can be acquired, but unlike many home and work literacies, academic literacy is seen to hold a particularly powerful, elevated position in society. Students are expected to read in very particular ways in the academy, ways with which many students may be entirely unfamiliar. If students' home and school literacies did not value the ability to scan a document for key phrases, it is quite probable that students will not be aware that this is common practice in academic reading. If students' home and other literacies value anecdotal and evocative narrative, it is quite probable that these students will have great difficulties taking on the academic norms of linear writing in which all references to the writer and her experiences are semantically hidden in the interests of objectivity.

These examples and the discussion in the previous chapter about what constitutes academic literacies illustrate that the issues are not just those of language proficiency but of the acquisition of discipline-specific literacies. Disciplines develop their own specific ways of representing their own specific ways of knowing. As Kaplan (1965 in Nightingale 1988: 75) writes, "Logic is evolved out of a culture; it is not universal", and the ways in which language is used to construct and communicate that logic is a product of the culture itself.

Bakhtin (1981:273-274) expresses the interconnection between language and meaning making in terms of tastes, “All words have a ‘taste’ of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in ... socially charged life”. Ivanič considers the works of Fairclough and Halliday when she shows the connections between context and language. She also extends Bakhtin’s view by pointing out that it is not only words but also grammatical structures that “taste of contexts” (1998: 43).

The issue of language proficiency is not ignored by NLS researchers but is contextualised within this broader understanding of proficiency that encompasses more than just grammatical and lexical competence. For example, academic conventions such as linear structure, emphasising relevance, avoiding digressions, abstaining from repetitions, and so on, which are characteristic of preferred Anglo-Celtic discourse structures (Nightingale 1988: 75) may not be familiar to all our students.

The low English proficiency level of some students should not be underestimated and clearly has a major bearing on students’ success or failure. Various tests have repeatedly indicated that among the student body at DIT are many whose levels of proficiency in the medium of instruction are disastrously low. South African studies (such as Huysamen 1999) show the poor reliability of matriculation scores, such that success in school English does not necessarily indicate proficiency in the language. As the students indicate in the



extract below, the reality of some students' school experience is that English was the medium of instruction in policy rather than practice.

Student 10 - Well at your high school you learn some um it depends I think on your high school level, some go to multi-racial schools. I think that also plays an important role and some come from rural areas and/

Student 11 - And the thing in the rural areas like the teachers they don't like teach the subjects like in English, they they just teach it in Zulu, and you understand/

Student 10 - /like even Afrikaans. In Afrikaans they just teach it in Zulu! [both laugh].

The focus in this study on academic literacy acquisition in no way contradicts the understanding that a certain level of proficiency in the MOI is necessary for success in higher education. Volbrecht (2002: 229) describes one particular intervention as having the assumption that "...there was a determinate and prerequisite level of entry-level literacy in English, and that students operating below this level would be incapable of attaining acceptable levels of English academic literacy in the tertiary context." The need for a basic proficiency prior to their acquisition of the many literacies required of them in higher education is thus clearly articulated.

While a number of different discourses emerged in the interviews, a group of discourses related to language proficiency and learning were of particular

interest to me. This was in part because of the prevalence of these discourses, but also because of my background in ESL teaching. The discourses under discussion in this chapter were strongly evident in various ways across all lecturer interviews and dominated one interview completely. However, in another of the lecturer interviews, there was some doubt expressed by Lecturer E<sup>1</sup> about the ideologies underpinning some these 'language' discourses and he seemed to be 'in conversion' to an alternative discourse. The student interviews were markedly different from the lecturers' in their lack of focus on language proficiency.

## **4.2 Language as an Instrument of Communication**

This discourse was given its name by Christie (1985) and centres on the perceived need to master the formal rules of the language as a means of decoding and encoding meanings in texts<sup>2</sup>. Christie distinguishes between an understanding of language as a resource and language as an instrument of communication. In the latter, meaning is perceived to be constructed independently of language, which is then used as the technical means of transferring or communicating meaning. Christie argues that this model of language is superficial as it denies the powerful roles language plays "in the ordering of experience" (1985: 1). A corollary to this discourse is Street's autonomous model of literacy discussed in detail in Chapter One. The

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<sup>1</sup> All identities have been disguised. Lecturers are identified by letter (A to J) and students by number (1 to 15).

<sup>2</sup> This discourse was introduced in Chapter Three, Cycle Two.

language as an instrument of communication discourse stems from an understanding of texts as autonomous of their contexts<sup>1</sup>.

This discourse has already been identified in other South African research (Boughey 2001). The main way in which this discourse became evident in the lecturer interviews in this study was in the clearly and frequently articulated assumption that if students had better control of English, the medium of communicating ideas and thoughts, they would not encounter problems in engaging with study at tertiary level. By implication, this discourse avers that students have an understanding of what meanings are appropriate to the academy and know how to construct them but simply lack the skills in the communication tool (language) used to transmit such meanings. In an echo to the findings of Volbrecht's (2002) consideration of lecturer discourses at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in the 1990's, the DIT lecturers interviewed for this thesis generally perceived 'the language problem' to be the main obstacle to student success. There was little understanding of the dialectical relationship between language and material reality "in which the latter is always already at least partially linguistically or discursively constituted" (Volbrecht 2002: 108). Lecturers described students' language use purely in terms of spelling and grammar, which they regarded as 'very weak', 'disgraceful', and 'the main problem'. The frequent reference in my lecturer data to the 'student problem' being predominantly a 'second language problem' further assumes that students have sufficient control of their home language in

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<sup>1</sup> A discussion of autonomous and ideological understandings of text is given in Chapter One.

order to construct meanings appropriate to the academy in that language. The focus on language as a conduit of meaning rather than as constructing meaning is evident in the following extract<sup>1</sup>.

Lecturer F - In fact they still think I'm being pedantic because I emphasise, well, I don't penalise them for spelling but if the spelling is not correct the meaning of the word is distorted, I mean if any word in the English language you can just alter with a single letter, so the entire meaning is distorted, therefore their fact or their thought is not communicated properly, therefore it is meaningless so it cannot get a mark. Anyway, that's my particular marking philosophy.

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Lecturer F - [Referring to stimulus passage B, see Appendix A] Again it shows no understanding of the meaning of words, so again for me the meaning of words, sentence structure, is important because it conveys the contents.

Sioux - It doesn't come down to an understanding of the concept? It doesn't come down to an understanding of the philosophy of your field? You wouldn't even consider any of those issues or you would/

Lecturer F - /Those issues are all secondary, the primary, as I see it, the primary tool to come into technikon is language skills. With language skills you can understand any concept. You can understand the economic concept, you can understand the management concepts, you can understand botanical concepts.

Much of the lecturers' criticisms of response B in the stimulus piece (see Appendix A) revolved around perceived errors in the language structure rather

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from the interviews have been transcribed as accurately as possible and include repetitions, self-corrections etc. Pauses and hesitations are indicated by ..., interruptions are indicated by / and --- indicates where sections have been omitted for the sake of brevity.

than issues of literacy norms. The following extract is an example of the focus on surface features of the language.

Sioux - In terms of learning or understanding, um, has Student um Student B understood the contents of this topic? Have they learnt/

Lecturer J - Um, I don't think so. Student B's grammar is so poor that it's, you can try and work out what they're saying but then we might be wrong in trying to make an assumption. --- It's shocking. I mean I wouldn't mark that.

The discourse of language as an instrument of communication, external to the process of meaning making, was sustained even in the face of internal contradiction. Where lecturers explained that 'language is the real problem' and 'if the language could be rectified there'd be no problem', they also bemoaned the inability of first language speakers of English to meet their expectations. For example, the next extract is from an interview with a lecturer who repeatedly indicated that the problem students had was not related to norms of higher education or of his discipline but with students 'inability to use English, that's the main issue'.

Lecturer F - White students<sup>1</sup> are actually not too much better on the whole. Indian students, highly articulate when it comes to verbal skills. When it comes to written skills, weaker than the Blacks...Quite surprising, quite surprising.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Kwa-Zulu Natal, South African context, most "White" students and "Indian" students can be presumed to speak English as their home language.

Where students' inability to write in the ways valued by the context were understood to be purely related to their lack of ability to manipulate the language, this was accounted for in terms of the fact that the majority of our students do not speak English as their home language. However, when I expressly asked two of the lecturers if that meant that the minority of students who do speak English as their primary language are able to meet the lecturers' expectations, they were emphatic that it did not. The first accounted for this by explaining that the 'English speaking students maybe don't care or aren't motivated, but of course there are those that do well, very well'. The second lecturer explained that the problems these students had in meeting the lecturers' expectations were still related to their lack of language proficiency, despite their first language status:

Lecturer B - I was appalled when I started off here and I looked at the spelling and the grammar, and that's Black, White, pink, green, everybody. Um, I just there's certainly a certain level that I look for in spelling and grammar.

While nine of the ten lecturers spontaneously discussed language proficiency, not one of the students did. In all fifteen student interviews, it was I who raised the possibility of language proficiency as an important issue in student learning at DIT. After I had raised it, eight students denied that it was of particular consequence.

Student 4 - Ja, ja that's what I'm saying. Maybe to some students it might be language, ja, but mostly it's not language, it would be the concept, and the subject matter.

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Student 15 – No problem. Maybe some are a bit weak but it's not a real problem, not a big problem.

After I had raised the issue of language proficiency, two students stated that language proficiency was low among some students as a consequence of poor schooling. However, their description of that schooling indicated that the problem went beyond the acquisition of surface language learning.

Sioux – So the multiracial schools prepare you better? Because of the better English you learn there?

Student 11 – I didn't go to a model C<sup>1</sup>. But it is the English, and also better teachers and books and different things like as how they learn there. I don't know really I can't say. Maybe just different somehow.

Student 6 - Like, for instance, students, they wouldn't know how to write an essay because a matric and a tertiary essay is totally, is really not the same.

In my understanding, discourses are not just our way of talking about things, but they are a powerful force over our actions. Freire describes literacies as “cultural politics” (Freire and Macedo 1987) and argues that an overemphasis on the technical acquisition of reading and writing skills prevents us from

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<sup>1</sup> In 1990, schools previously designated “Whites only” were permitted to admit black learners under limited conditions that included the provision that the school remain 51% white and the “ethos and character of the school was maintained” (Human Rights Commission 1999). These schools were known as “Model C” schools. Although all such legislation became defunct with the National Schools Act of 1996 the term remains in frequent use to designate historically advantaged schools.

looking at literacy as “a set of practices that functions to either empower or disempower people”. The discourse of language as an instrument of communication normalises the way in which academic departments act. Language in this discourse is not perceived as making meaning or presenting meaning in discipline-specific, culturally particular, socially created ways; it is seen simply as the neutral mechanism for transmitting meaning from the teacher to the learner. The process of normalisation of academically specific ways of using language means that those who act (write/ speak/ read etc) in ways that are different can be perceived as ‘other’ or ‘abnormal’. There is little impetus for reflection on how language embodies and structures the discipline’s norms, philosophies, values and so on, if it is perceived simply as an instrument of communication. Where language is perceived to be divorced from meaning or content (which is the lecturer’s domain), sorting out the language problems becomes someone else’s problem. Language is seen to be the technical means of communicating meaning or content, so the major implication of this discourse is thus the call for add-on language classes.

### **4.3 The Call for ‘Add-on’ Classes**

The ‘language as an instrument of communication’ discourse thus purports that students’ difficulties in accessing and constructing meaning result primarily from their low language proficiency in the medium of instruction and their poor reading/ listening/ writing/ speaking skills. Tied closely to this is the ‘Received Tradition’ discourse (Christie 1993). This very prevalent discourse calls for the



remedying of grammatical problems by the direct instruction of those rules. It implies that a conscious knowledge of the surface rules of language is what students lack and that if these rules were made available to students their problems would disappear. This discourse highlights the understanding that language should be taught on a grammatical basis with a focus on structure and form rather than function.

The majority of present day academics will themselves have been schooled in the tradition with the result that it is not surprising that they find it difficult to conceive of any other form of language development, shy away from attempts to develop language within mainstream curricula and insist on the existence of adjunct service courses such as Practical English.

Boughey 1999:46

Some level of language proficiency is undoubtedly required in the medium of instruction before students are able to study in that medium. However, the lecturers provide ample examples of how this discourse presumes that it is specifically in the technical issues of language that students need assistance. By disregarding the ways in which language creates meaning, this discourse denies transparent access to powerful discourses of academic literacy.

Lecturer J - I think academic literacy should be one of the main components of that [Foundation] course. Academic literacy, scientific and numeric skills, numeric literacy/

Sioux - And what do you see academic literacy as being?

Lecturer J - Be able to construct a complete sentence, be able to look up words in the dictionary, antonyms and synonyms, as well as to understand the context in which words are used, to understand the meaning of text and to be able to summarise text, comprehension skills, all the basic skills, ... those type of issues.

The main implication of this discourse is the call for add-on language classes. The discourse emphasises that the content of these classes should be focused on language structure (and not discipline-specific meaning making). The discourse assumes that students will transfer their newly acquired language skills to the mainstream classroom; an assumption that research strongly refutes<sup>1</sup>.

As one lecturer put it, 'It should be taught somewhere but certainly not in [my subject]'. The discourse of language as an issue external to the mainstream classroom was very strong in my interviews but hardly singular to DIT. As Volbrecht notes in his UWC study "...in the case of those staff who felt that AD practitioners or language specialists should 'fix' the problem, it is an instance of the common view that language and literacy 'problems' are not properly the object of the everyday, specialised or reflexive discourses of 'mainstream' academic staff" (2002: 222).

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter Three, sections 3.2 and 3.3, discusses in some detail the difficulties in addressing academic language needs outside of the academic environment in which it is used.

Sioux - But I was just thinking in terms of the specific problems that you talk about, “students not knowing how to put a paragraph together”, and all of that kind of thing. To what extent is that not aggravated by having big [class] groupings?

Lecturer I - Uh, no, I think that’s something that they should have learnt at school, I mean putting a paragraph together, that’s not my department, it’s not my responsibility. I’m certainly not going to teach them English and I’m not going to teach them how to spell, um, or anything like that. I firmly believe that that’s not my responsibility. My job is to get [my subject] concepts across to them, not how to write about [my subject].

This discourse exempts educators from looking too deeply for other reasons to account for student difficulties in succeeding in higher education. Because students are seen to require a standard syntactical and grammatical ability above all else, the issues of how language functions within the mainstream content classroom to construct meaning, to position issues and to describe reality are not seen as relevant. Students are described in the lecturer data as ‘needing basic English’, which should take place ‘in Foundation classes’ or ‘compulsory English classes’. One lecturer indicated that students didn’t have the ‘basics of spelling, grammar and business writing, introduction, conclusion, headings, subheadings’, which should, she believed be taught in the subject ‘Communications, that’s their job there’. Another lecturer put it thus: ‘If English is the medium of instruction, they need to be taught English’.

Lecturer F - I fail to see why everything should be put in the ball of the lecturer. Why should the lecturer have to basically do remedial teaching of tertiary level

education? Because that's what it actually boils down to... uh, standard six English. It's all remedial action so they can understand the context in which our topic is being taught.

There were exceptions to this understanding: three lecturers (Lecturers A, C and E) did not use the Received Tradition discourse. Lecturer A indicated that the students' language needs are linked to the ways in which they use language at the technikon, rather than an understanding of the formal rules of the language. But she still indicated that the needs should be addressed in an adjunct fashion. For example, in the next extract although lecturer A is conscious of the need for a more specific literacy development, she still perceives this as needing to occur outside of the mainstream class.

Lecturer A - Yes, as I say, it [a previous EAP intervention] was language based rather than specific to what they're eventually going to have to use their language for, um, which may be a problem and it becomes a problem for the institution because how do you make up academic improvement courses for every single course that we offer, how do you make it specific for every single course, um, it becomes a logistical nightmare.

Lecturer C indicated some understanding that the discipline-specific nature of language use was problematic and that this needed to be addressed from within the mainstream. This is explained in the next extract.

Sioux - So, you integrate that kind of thing [writing expectations of the department] into your course?

Lecturer C - Ja. We just start with it in first and second year, and it's not that critical if they can't do it properly, but by the time they reach third year level, we start becoming quite strict with it.

Lecturer E indicated that the language needs of the students should be addressed in the classroom 'where possible and provided they have basic English' but also said that he had reduced the writing to a minimum in the class. He uses continuous assessment of all the students' practical work and gets them to discuss their work 'in their own way, find their own meaning'. He was emphatic that the students didn't need to have 'perfect English' and that they didn't need 'academic writing to be successful'. Because he did not see academic writing as relevant to success in his field, he had re-curriculated so that students did very little writing at all, and where they did it was in a most informal style.

#### **4.4 The South African Context**

The two discourses related to language and learning discussed here, 'Language as an instrument of communication' and the call for add-on classes that focus on the surface structures of language, work together in a way which is particularly expedient in South Africa's political environment. They function to absolve the academy from dealing with politically sensitive issues of culture, by indicating that the difficulties students have all relate to a lack of English

instruction. Perhaps our labelling<sup>1</sup> of student difficulties as being due to language problems has been in part an attempt to distance us from Apartheid-based ideas that difficulties relate to differences in cognition (Boughey 1999).

The language discourses release us from politically sensitive discussions about the social construction of our norms of how and why to read, write, speak and listen. Instead the discourses demand more extracurricular teaching of syntax and semantics. That these social constructions of reading, writing etc vary from one cultural and socio-economic group to the next (Heath 1983) are neither acknowledged nor explicated within the mainstream syllabus.

In South Africa, as elsewhere, access to elevated literacies parallel socio-economic and cultural divisions. In South Africa such access also conveniently parallels language divisions. Convenient in that it is far more comfortable to use discourses that account for student difficulties in terms of their home language rather than in terms of their socio-economic or cultural backgrounds. However, even in countries without our racially divided history, these discourses are expedient. By linking success in higher education primarily to language proficiency rather than the acquisition of concealed practices and values, these discourses normalise the discipline-specific forms of knowledge construction. That access to these concealed practices and values is more readily available to certain socio-economic groups than others is not the subject of reflection, despite ample research on the topic (such as Baynham 1995, Ivanic 1998 and

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<sup>1</sup> A brief discussion on labelling/naming is found in Appendix G.

Stuckey 1990). The academy is absolved of such reflection by the normalising effect of these discourses. The complicity of higher education in retaining the socio-economic status quo through the use of gate-keeping literacies is not open to deep reflection as this is not within the 'rules of the possible' determined by the two powerful discourses described thus far.

An alternative discourse would be based on the perception of students' 'problems' as embedded in their position as outsiders to academic discourses. [An] understanding that students are experiencing difficulties with academic literacy and not with language *per se* calls into question many of the language intervention programmes which have been established on the assumption that what students lack is tuition in the structures and vocabulary of English, the additional language which is the medium of instruction at the majority of South African tertiary institutions.

Boughey 2002a 15

#### **4.5 Academic Literacy Development**

It may seem that I am laying the blame for student difficulties solely at the feet of lecturers. It may appear that I am accusing them of callously choosing to use discourses that allow them to hide from difficult educational issues and exempt them from the rearticulation required for integrated, critical academic literacy development. However, the normalising effect of these powerful discourses means that finding lecturers who question them would be unlikely. Much has been written on the agency we all have to overturn the discourses acquired during our ongoing socialisation process, but until the iniquitous aspects of

these dominant discourses have been highlighted, it is improbable that many academics are likely to refute their common sense status.

Furthermore the subconscious nature of literacies, such as academic literacy, mean that most academics will have difficulty expressing exactly how it is that language functions to create the norms of their discipline. So even where lecturers are aware that being able to take on the type of reading, writing and other behaviours expected by the academy involves more than technical language proficiency, they may not feel capable of assisting their students in acquiring these norms.

Lecturer D - ---yet they would go off in a tangent and talk about something totally unrelated to the case, and I thought it was so easy that they would just crack it, and the ones that did understand what to do did, did crack it, others didn't, um, they don't seem to read it, they don't seem to understand what's expected of them, and I really felt I explained it clearly and, or else the way they put it across, um, it's put across in such a way that it doesn't have meaning.

Students are no more capable of expressing how the literacy practices expected of them are strange and difficult to access. However, they referred to difficulties they had in achieving well despite doing everything they thought was expected of them.

Student 4 – [The lecturer's] style, and I mean approach to the subject is different because I think [she] takes things for granted that we know whereas you don't like, you know nothing about a subject...--- because maybe she thinks



that this is a general thing so we all might know like, we don't have an idea of what she's talking about and so we don't participate a lot in class so uh, we don't have notes or textbooks like this [indicates book on desk] and she just give us bits and pieces of paper you know, and, I don't know, but that, so many things are confusing there.

Although the student in the next extract focuses on the acquisition of jargon, he hints at the discipline-specific norms of language use.

Student 5 – Yes, I have [had difficulties with the language expectations of the Technikon] and some of them are still having them, difficulties, because each subject has got their own language so you have to understand the language of the subject, besides the English and the stuff, the level of the subject, so you have to go to the library or you have to ask your lecturer like what does this word mean, because they might be words that you don't understand, it's just that they can even mistake you.---The subjects have different languages.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

Before we can begin the discussion as to the form an integrated, critical academic literacy development programme<sup>1</sup> should take, educationalists need to use a discourse that embraces the difficulties students experience in acquiring academic literacy, rather than the present simplistic 'language problem' discourses. As Morrow (1993: 4) points out: "if South Africa is to create a more equal society, the crucial issue is not of granting *formal* access to

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<sup>1</sup> Ironically, the term "Academic literacy" has been appropriated in South Africa to fit within an autonomous model to the extent that many institutions offer "Academic Literacy Skills" modules.

the institution but rather of granting *epistemological* access to the processes of knowledge construction which sustain it.” It is thus imperative that academic development, and higher education as a whole, addresses these issues as a matter of urgency.

## Chapter Five - Motivation and Identity as Discourses of Success

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### 5.1 Introduction

Two discourses that were prevalent in the interviews were those related to motivation and identity. I initially coded these as two separate discourses. However, as this chapter will elucidate, I now see motivation as a dominant discourse, which, like the alternative discourse of identity, provides an explanation for the success or failure of student acquisition of the required ways of being in higher education. The relevance of these discourses to a doctoral thesis on how academic literacies are constructed needs discussion. If we accept that literacies are constructed of many discourses such that they become 'ways of being' in a Discourse<sup>1</sup>, an argument I have built over the previous chapters, then we need to see how people take on or resist these ways of being.

That I find myself dealing with the link between identity and the discourses constructing academic literacies would have been expected by many of the theorists in the field. Cummins (1995), Ivanič (1988), Thesen (1997), Gee (1996), Hymes (1996), Norton (2000), Miller (2003) and many others have already studied the association between identity and discursive practices. Miller (2003: 7) points out that the "problem of identity continually surfaces in any attempt to explore the relationship between speakers and discursive practices."

Gee (1990: xv) explains that simply taking on a particular discourse is insufficient because “It’s not just what you say or even just how you say it. It’s also what you are and do while you say it. It is not enough just to say the right ‘lines’, one needs to get the whole ‘role’ right”.

Taking on a literacy, constructed by various discourses, is thus about taking on a role or an identity. People’s identities are determined by their discourses; that is they are discursively constructed. However, identities are sites of struggle where individuals use their agency to take on certain discourses or to resist them. This chapter investigates the identity of academic literacy and the extent to which students invest in this as a target.

There was a strong discourse in the data that framed students’ success or failure in terms of their motivation. I begin this chapter by looking at how the notion of motivation is described in the data and consider theories of motivation alongside theories of investment in a socially constructed identity. I then move on to discourses of identity in the data and consider how multiple identities can facilitate or inhibit the acquisition of academic literacy practices; practices which construct a particular identity. Lecturers frequently referred to students’ lack of participation in class; I examine this behaviour as an example of a literacy practice in the light of my discussion of motivation and identity. I look next at how students choose to perform certain literacy practices without seeming to

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<sup>1</sup> Gee’s differentiation between ‘discourse’ and ‘Discourse’ is given in Chapter One, Section 1.2 ‘The nature of Discourses’.

take on the related identities. While they do not buy into the expected practices or identities, they play the game by performing them. This section also considers ways in which some students resist becoming academically literate. Another issue of identity, raised by both lecturers and students, was that many students failed to identify with the future careers for which they were studying. I end the chapter by considering this career identification in the light of investment in workplace literacy practices.

## **5.2 Discourses of Motivation**

There was a strong discourse of motivation as being the crucial factor in determining a student's success. This motivation discourse was second in frequency only to the language proficiency discourse discussed in the previous chapter. This discourse described motivation as being a fixed characteristic that was either present or absent in the student. In spite of their using motivation to explain failure, I found that the students in this study were in fact highly motivated to succeed in their studies and to get their diplomas and that the concept of motivation fails to account for the difficulties they have in attaining the academic literacy of their discipline.

In all of the interviews, the students spoke about their desire to do well in their studies. A few students linked this directly to their aspirations of becoming qualified in their chosen field but all gave clear evidence that they were motivated in the sense of having an integrative and/or instrumental orientation

towards their studies. The distinction between these two orientations (Gardner and Lambert 1972) has been widely used by theorists to account for success in language learning. The integrative orientation relates loosely to learning the language in order to take part in the culture of its people and the instrumental orientation relates to learning the language for a career goal or other practical reason. Along the same lines as Gardner and Lambert, Deci and Ryan (1985) developed the intrinsic / extrinsic motivation theory. Intrinsic learners, who are interested in learning tasks and outcomes for their own sake, rather than for extrinsic rewards, are theorised as being more effective learners. Both intrinsic motivation and integrative motivation were described by their proponents as being rooted in the personality of the learner, while the instrumental / extrinsic orientation of the respective theories is seen to be dependent on external fallible factors. Ely (1986) argues that it is not always easy to distinguish between integrative and instrumental motivation. A second problem he argues is whether the integrative / instrumental conceptualisation captures the full spectrum of student motivation.

I found these concepts of motivation incomplete as they failed to fully account for why many students did not take on the academic literacies expected of them in their studies. Definitions of motivation in the research literature fail to go far enough in accounting for why some students met lecturers' expectations and others did not. The definitions do not capture the role played by identity and power.

Noel, Pelletier, Clement, and Vallerand's study (2000) showed that "To foster sustained learning, it may not be sufficient to convince students that language learning is interesting and enjoyable; they may need to be persuaded that it is also personally important for them." This may seem like common sense related to the need to motivate learners, but to reframe their finding I believe what this study tapped into was the need for learners to identify with the literacy deemed by the assessors to be the target literacy. Or, to reframe it yet again, the need for assessors to re-curriculate the learning in terms of the identities the students perceive to be their target. As Nakanishi (2002) puts it, the students "need to ...vision themselves in terms of future prospect, or job-related salaries and so forth". While the students in my study were motivated to succeed, I will argue that some were not invested in the identities associated with being academically literate.

Bandura (1977, 1997) emphasises the social nature of behaviour and the importance of observation in the acquisition of new behaviours. His theories would seem to account for why some hidden, untaught behaviours, such as how to read in a particular academic discipline, are difficult to acquire. They are not observed and therefore cannot be modelled. His theory is also far less simplistic in its explanation for why some students may take on new behaviours in that he indicates that there are a complexity of factors at play rather than simple motivation. He terms this reciprocal determinism.

The main criticism of Bandura's model is that it lacks cohesion. Concepts such as observational learning and self-efficacy are presented without explaining how these concepts interrelate. Perhaps the concept of investment in an identity would act as the unifying factor. For example, he gives the characteristics necessarily present in the observer for successful attention to occur without explaining how these characteristics come into play; attention being part of the process of learning outlined in Bandura's model. If he used the idea of identity and the degree of similarity (or difference) between the learner's present identities and the target identity, the model may have the unifying factor the critics of his model identify as lacking.

Both lecturers and students accounted for success or failure in higher education through the notion of motivation. Motivation is described in the data as a unitary characteristic that is either present or absent in the learner. I have coded motivation and attitude together despite their being some debate as to their relationship. Gardner and Lambert (1972) define attitude as persistence in striving towards the goal, and thereby somewhat distinct from their definition of motivation, but Gardner (1980) suggests that attitudes are closely related to motivation.

Lecturer F – 'What will we have to know for the exam?' That's all it boils down to. 'Tell us what we need to know for the exam.' No real commitment. Commitment percentage in the class maybe, maybe, maybe ten percent...I'm being generous...of core committed students who are willing to make an effort.



Sioux - Now what makes those students different from the other students? What makes that ten percent? ... Is it attitude?

Lecturer F - Yes. They want to work so they put in the effort. [Describes in some detail the studies of a Chinese student] --- She was so persistent she camped in my office the whole time until eventually I gave in. She's failed the first semester, she's come back for the second shot, she's just scraping through, but she's in the library, she pestering the lecturers. You know she actually wants, she's making the effort. --- Her English was worse ...it's still very poor but at least she's...then I'll give her the credit because she is making the effort...she's got the commitment.

The extract above shows the recurring problem with the notion of motivation in the data. The lecturer describes the students as being motivated to pass and get a diploma (the students are described as wanting to know what is in the exam i.e. what they have to do to pass) but as lacking commitment in that they do not take on all the practices the lecturer deems appropriate indicators of successful learning, such as visiting the library and interacting with their lecturers.

Lecturer F - Well they feel that it's going to be a lot easier than what it is. They are not prepared to make the effort, and when they start failing they look around for people to blame, blame their parents, blame the system, blame the government, blame their lecturers... typical juvenile behaviour.

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Lecturer F - And I think the bulk of people who come through wanting some sort of qualification, they don't have the drive. I'd say 80% of my class don't have the drive to succeed.... at the end of the day.

Lecturer A - um but I found that the students have tended to have a very lackadaisical attitude towards their studies and a lot of times I think [colleague] and myself will, maybe they think we're tyrant, because we want we expect them to be motivated.

Lecturer J – You can tell which ones are motivated. Right away when you go in on the first day. You can even tell as they walk along the corridor.

The concept of motivation here rests largely on a notion of the learner having a fixed, consistent identity, with a concomitant level of motivation. In my study I found no evidence of student identities bearing such characteristics. Student identities were shown in the data to be multiple and fluid and if the characteristic of motivation is perceived as a rather simplistic desire to succeed in their studies, then this was evident in every student interview. Students described themselves as 'hard-working', said they 'put time to my studies', and 'I want to succeed'.

Lecturer B - ... you're getting the students who are really passionate about the subject and want to be there and they sit with all the chaff. And they've got to, they get terribly impatient, I think it actually does a lot of disservice to the institution itself, because you've got to spend a lot more time with them and they're sitting there being terribly bored, and then the the big gap between those who know what's going on and those who don't is enormous ...

The notion of attitude, 'want to be there', is linked by the lecturer in this extract to 'knowing what's going on' indicating that understanding is perceived to be a

function of students' levels of motivation. The discourse of motivation, as a key ingredient for success, is thus consistently that of a fixed characteristic that is dependent on a student's desire to succeed. Occasionally the conflict in this dependency, how can they simultaneously want to succeed and be described as unmotivated, is expressed, as in the next extract:

Lecturer D - Mostly it's self-discipline, it's the motivation, it's they want to do well, um, I'm sure others want to do well but don't have the motivation, you know, some motivation to do it.

Lecturer A - Um, attitude. A lot of it with our students is attitude because it's not an extremely rocket scientist difficult course but it does take a lot of application and dedication. Um, I find that the students that always attend lectures, always do their assignments or their homework, whatever, just follow what has to be done, do extremely well. Um, and those students that have a very student like attitude to life, um, tend to battle, so I think a lot of it has to do with attitude and their passion for what they want to do. Um, I think maturity, knowing where they want to be and why and what their goals are, and have a great impact on where they eventually get to. I think it's the less mature students that actually have a problem on the course. Those that don't have a goal on where they want to be and how they're going to get there...I think those are the ones that seem to have a problem.

The lecturer lists attitude as the major factor leading to success in the course. Motivation is described as a specific characteristic that the student can choose to take on if she wishes to, and one that the older students have taken on. It is interesting that she ties the issue of attitude to that of a 'student like attitude'. I

would frame this as awareness that students may be more invested in a social rather than an academic identity.

Lecturer A - It can be overcome. They have to have a certain level of language proficiency...they do have to have a certain level, um, but they can overcome that through their passion and attitude, um, for example we spoke about Samuel and Themba<sup>1</sup> where they didn't have the schooling background, they didn't have the academic background, they didn't have the language background, but their passion to succeed in life overcame any academic problems they may have had. Yes, it took them a bit longer, but they had it in them, you know, it wasn't that they lacked ability, they just lacked language, so I think that as long as that ability is there and the passion is there, they shouldn't have a problem.

Motivation is used to account for students who succeed against all the odds. As one lecturer put it: "You can see the ones who are bright eyed and bushy tailed and they're going to make it, whatever their backgrounds." The two students described by Lecturer A above, were perceived as overcoming language problems through an act of will in order to succeed. I lectured Themba for two years and got to know him fairly well. In the process I found out that Themba was a first generation student from a close-knit rural family who positioned him as the educated son. The extended family had invested much time and money in Themba and was extremely proud of his scholastic achievements and inclined to boast about them and show off his schoolbooks despite being functionally scribally illiterate themselves. I believe that Themba's investment in

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<sup>1</sup> All names have been changed.

his studies was largely structured by this identity as the 'educated member of the family'.

Lecturer G - Because they want to do better, they want to ... their goal and vision is more than 50%. I think that's maybe something else that we're missing, is that the lower students' vision is different

Sioux – How?

Lecturer G - Well, the other students' vision is to get through the exam with like a distinction or something and even if they slip up, they're still going to pass/

Sioux – Mm

Lecturer G - /because they're aiming a bit higher ...They're doing more than enough work.

Success is again described as a fixed attribute of the student. In this case it is phrased in terms of goal setting. I found the use of the word 'vision' particularly interesting. While the lecturer uses it to describe a lack of motivation on the part of students, I perceive the students as being highly motivated to succeed but as frequently resisting or being uncertain about the attendant 'vision' or identity of the academically literate persona.

Student 3 - Because I'm hot headed I go straight down to the point but the lecturer, they want a broader picture, they want me to expand work much better. I just go straight to the point and give them what they, well what they basically

need to know, but not the broader picture, which will give me the total marks. You can't be a hot headed person here.

Student 4 - Uh, I'm trying to, I don't understand the style of marking, but I'm getting along very well ---you know, speaking and writing is different, you know, I can speak words but when it comes I can't write down what I'm, ja, sometimes I find that I'm an easy person who speaks a lot but my writing...

Sioux Okay, but, but you have said that you don't think it's language that's the major issue.

Student 4 – Ja, not precisely, it's just that as I said that, it's different then you must be, well, because, it's like, I communicate a lot in class and I ask people questions but when I write, it's different...

Like the lecturers, the students also ascribed success to motivation; they frequently stated that the desire to do hard work was a requirement of success. They made comments about the need to 'put in the effort', the need to 'make time for your studies' and were critical of students who had 'no time for hard work'. Two of the students who were doing particularly well in their studies both described successful students as being 'motivated' and defined this as 'attending all the lectures' (Student 1) or 'always being in class' (Student 9). However, both of them told me at a later point in their interviews that they regularly skipped classes. The discourse of motivation was thus used even when it failed to account for their own success.

The notion of motivation fails in particular when success in higher education is considered in terms of socio-economic class. Statistics from America<sup>1</sup> indicate this link to be as follows: “A child whose parents earn \$70,000 or more (top quartile) has an 80% chance to graduate college by age 24, while a child whose family earns \$22,000 or less (bottom quartile) has about an 8% chance” (Mortenson, 1995; Viadero, 1998 in Shor 1999). Something other than the drive to succeed has to be at play.

If motivation is perceived as either instrumental or integrative, it is understandably frustrating for lecturers that students seem to be lacking this attribute. This would mean that students lack instrumental desire (to get a diploma, to get a job) or integrative desire (to be a member of the target community). If their behaviours are recast as the result of the investment (or lack thereof) into the social identities valued by the lecturers as target ways of being, the picture becomes more complex and satisfying.

“A logical extension of reconceptualizing notions of the individual in SLA [second language acquisition] theory is the need to problematize the concept of motivation” (Norton Peirce 1995: 16). Although this study does not fall within the field of SLA, I argue that the changes in our understanding of identity also bring valid questions about motivation to literacy studies. Norton Peirce goes on to explain her preference for the concept of investment:

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<sup>1</sup> See Furlong and Forsyth (2003) for a similar socio-economic correlation to higher education success in the UK.

The conception of instrumental motivation generally presupposes a unitary, fixed, and ahistorical language learner who desires access to material resources that are the privilege of target language speakers. In this view, motivation is a property of the language learner- a fixed personality trait. The notion of investment, on the other hand, attempts to capture the relationship of the language learner to the changing social world. It conceives of the language learner as having a complex social identity...they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in the learner's social identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space.

1995: 18

While our students are not at DIT to learn English but rather to attain a higher education diploma, I believe that the issue of their social identities remains pertinent. Do our students invest in the identity of the academically literate? Or is their lack of investment the reason for what is perceived as lack of motivation and bad attitude? Despite being highly motivated ('I want a good job', 'I have a goal', 'I know inside myself I will get this diploma' 'I work hard, very hard'), students were often unlikely to take on the norms valued by the lecturers.

Dornyei (1996) comes closer to developing a notion of motivation that gels with the data of this study when he claims that the same learner in the same learning situation might show a strikingly different degree of motivation depending on what the target is. I do not contest the importance of motivation, the inner drive,



impulse, and emotion or desire that moves one to a particular action in learning (Brown 1987). However it did not always articulate with the data in fully accounting for why students took on or did not take on the target literacy practices.

Krashen (1981, 1982) states that the affective filter is a major variable in language acquisition; this affective filter is seen to comprise the learner's motivation, self-confidence and anxiety state. But, as Norton Peirce points out (1995: 11) these variables all "pertain to the individual rather than the social context". Schumann (1978) argues that language acquisition has a social dimension, which is the extent to which the target culture is similar to the culture of the language learner. But this still makes a distinction between the individual and the social. Perhaps this is even more pertinent in South Africa where the class divides, and thereby access to privileged literacies, parallel those of language and ethnic group.

Three of the students who accounted for success in terms of a 'good attitude to your work', 'have time for your work' and 'want to do well', all claimed these characteristics for themselves, and yet also readily admitted to failing tests or having to repeat subjects in the year in which I interviewed them. It may be that in any conversation with lecturers or students on the topic of higher education, motivation is given as the primary reason for success because of its dominance as a discourse and because of a lack of alternative discourses to account for what is perceived as 'bad attitude' on the part of the student.

Motivation, as a function of the degree to which the students desire to succeed, is less useful in an analysis of this data than an understanding of the extent to which students invest in the identity of the target literacy. It is to this notion of identity that I now turn.

### **5.3 Discourses of Identity**

When individuals take on a literacy, such as an academic literacy or a workplace literacy, they are investing in the identity constructed by that literacy. Such investment is not an all or nothing affair, but changes over time and space dependent on conditions of power and compatibility between the target literacy practices and the individual's current multiple identities. This understanding of identity is based largely on the work *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity, and educational change* (Norton 2000), which I use to discuss the data in this study related to identity and the construction of academic literacy.

Investment in an identity may seem initially to have much in common with the idea of integrative motivation, but the concept of motivation presupposes that the learner has a fixed and unitary identity, and that she has fixed purposes for learning. Investment, on the other hand, accounts for the complexities of diverse and contradictory approaches to learning by the same learner. The ethnographic studies of McKay and Wong (1996), Norton Peirce (1995), Heath (1983) and others all emphasise that learning is not a skill acquired through

desire to succeed and practice, but involves complex social interactions and power differentials that engage the identities of the learners. While many of these studies have focussed on language learning, the issues of identity construction are no less vital in all learning contexts. Individuals' identities, Norton (2000) stresses, must be understood in relation to the larger social structures in which they live. The issue of power, or access to resources within these social structures, is therefore an important factor in determining which identities are available to individuals and also which are valued. Learners are not always free to engage with the environment (their texts, fellow students and lecturers) in whichever ways they would choose since they are constrained by power imbalances, available discourses and shifting notions of their own multiple identities. The discourses of the learning environment position learners in particular ways, enabling some identities through valuing the literacy practices constructing those identities, while simultaneously rendering other identities unacceptable.

Our literacy practices are historically constructed. Students' early literacy events seem to be a major determinant of their later educational success (Wells 1986). As Heath (1983) showed, students from middle class backgrounds are more likely to use interaction patterns with texts that are similar to those expected at school. If my childhood setting valued the reading of newspapers and highbrow novels and biographies, then I would be more likely to take on similar practices myself, thereby making the transition to reading academic texts easier, given that these texts have much in common both stylistically and structurally. The

identity of the academically literate persona was thus more readily accessible to me, given its commonalities with an identity I already held. I would therefore need less of the scaffolding Gee calls for when he states that discourses are mastered by “enculturation ('apprenticeship') into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse” (1990: 147). “Adult immigrants, however, differ from native-born speakers in that they do not have easy access to the linguistic codes or cultural practices of their local communities” (Norton Peirce 1985: 26). The legacy of Apartheid and the dominance of western literacy practices in South Africa’s higher education mean that our students may also not have easy access to these codes and practices. As in Heath’s *Way with Words* study (1983), there is frequently a significant difference between the literacy practices at home and those expected of students at DIT.

Alternatively, the target identity may be very foreign, as it undoubtedly was to Themba, a student referred to previously, but his history still had an important role to play in his acquisition of the new identity despite the odds. While the identity may have comprised literacy practices very foreign to Themba’s various identities on entering the institution, he was raised by a family that clearly articulated that being ‘an educated person’ was something to be aspired to. Themba once jokingly told me that he wished he wore glasses because ‘all doctors and lawyers wear glasses’. He was thus fairly conscious of the need to take on certain practices to attain the target identity. His acquisition of academic literacy went beyond being motivated to do well or to attain a diploma,

and included a desire to behave in all ways like his (and his family's) perception of 'an educated person'. Themba claimed the right to speak in class, albeit very quietly, where others felt compelled to silence, and to subtly reframe the power relations of the classroom through his target identity as 'an educated person'.

Students made reference to feeling alienated by the higher education curriculum, they felt that their 'ways of being' or their identities were not given space in the classroom. Student 1 commented, with reference to response A in the stimulus piece (Appendix A), that most language at the Technikon was 'so jigglish, even though it's English, it is so jigglish...like a professor wrote it'. Student 8 said that writing at the Technikon consisted of 'discuss and explain, not give your point of view of these things'. In describing his strategy for success, Student 4 said he 'associated with successful students' and learnt from them 'how to behave'. He thus modelled his identity on theirs and even overtly discussed this with these successful students, 'So I get the information that in order to be a success you have to do this, you have to do that...'

Students made frequent, albeit oblique, references to their multiple identities throughout the interviews. In particular, at the outset of the interviews, when discussing the stimulus pieces (Appendix A), the students made numerous reference to their identities not being acknowledged in the institution. For example, all eleven of the black African students interviewed clearly identified with response B despite ten of them indicating that response A was more

appropriate to the Technikon environment and more likely to be awarded high marks.

In an excellent article about students' sense of an "African identity" at a neighbouring higher education institution, de Kadt and Mathonsi state that "writing as an African presupposes a very specific content and audience" (2003: 99). This content and audience relates, in the words of the students in their study, to "the ills of the African people...hunger, hardships, violence, poverty etc", "Your response is biased to the poor and less fortunate" (2003: 99). This idea that a literacy practice of the African identity includes a concern with social issues was clearly made in the student data in this study. Students made comments that response B was written by someone who 'has her voice' and who is 'saying what she feels is right' and 'she shows her care for poor peoples'. Fourteen of the total fifteen students, however, were clear that response B would attain lower marks than response A, with a number indicating of B that this 'style of writing is not right for the tech' and could result in the piece 'not getting enough marks for passing'. In the following two extracts, two lecturers indicate the unacceptable nature of this particular literacy practice in the educational environment.

Lecturer I - Ja, very jumbled. Also what I find and maybe it's because of stuff, the way I pick it up from my students as well, which might not come through in this, but it's got nothing really to do with what they're talking about, you know, it's all about taxation and the effect of tax but then they're honing in on, maybe it's a personal thing for them to use roads and hospitals, you know something

that they feel should be done but it's not necessarily what that's not answering the question either but it's not what should be done, you know what I mean, they bring in their own personal stuff, and that's quite weird. Umm.

Lecturer H - ...she's taken the basic economic ideas there and then grafted propaganda, I suppose, really after that. Um, because she's definitely departed from explaining the points and gone way into subjective evaluation.

Bringing in 'their own personal stuff' has been recorded as an important way of understanding that falls largely outside of Western epistemology, which values the divorce of subject and object. Moodie (2003: 9) describes how the "insidious process of disparagement served, and continues to serve, to suppress ways of understanding the world that fail to meet the criteria of the dominant 'enlightenment' worldview". Our academic literacy practices have been so normalised that alternate practices very easily seem to be 'weird' or 'propaganda'. "Academic knowing and contextualized understanding are taken to be at odds" (Geisler 1994: 29). So the ways of knowing that stem from students' identities or literacy practices outside of the classroom are often not valued in the class. In the extract below, Students 1 and 2 describe a lecturer whom they cite as being very different to the rest of their lecturers and whom they frequently refer to as being an excellent educator. This lecturer<sup>1</sup> not only uses examples from the students' lives but also makes the content accessible to them by phrasing it in terms of their present identities.

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<sup>1</sup> Because the students mentioned this lecturer by name I know the following interesting, although possibly unsurprising, facts about her: the lecturer is a White, middle class female but has a fluent grasp of Zulu and is involved in a number of community projects.

Student 1 - She does umm she makes it into our every lives, our everyday scenario sort of thing/

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Student 1 - Not really, I wouldn't say language, sort of thing, because then they would be, you mean, what I mean is it isn't like she comes and says, 'Hey, hey wazzup?' but I mean like simpler language.

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Student 2 - Like for example she might say like some things [we have] experienced/

Student 1 - She makes an effort to find out what's going on in the our life like, um, ... She makes an effort and she thinks, you know, this sort of age group what are the things that they like and stuff, so this is more relevant to whatever that I would like to explain to them, d'you see?

Sioux - Oh.

Student 1 - Then when she talks about...you know you go 'Oh it's that! I know that!', sort of thing. Because that's like what almost everything is, it's stuff that you know but you just don't know that you know, sort of thing.

Sioux - But if it's not, if it's not put like that you don't know that you know?

Student 1 - Mmhm. No, no, no, you just become more confused and you like 'I'm never going to get this.'

Student 2 - And you never ever find out that you already know the stuff.



Nightingale (1988: 75) makes a point that is particularly relevant to most of the students interviewed for this study: “The importance of the student’s own cultural background; ...[is] most noticeable in students who enter higher education in a different culture from that of their earlier education”. Nowhere is the discrepancy between different school backgrounds, and the preparation of such backgrounds for the academic literacies of the technikon, more clear than during the interview with Student 1 and 2. These students, classmates who were interviewed together, came from very different school backgrounds. Both speak isiZulu as their first language but Student 1 came from a middle class background, attended a private school and usually spoke English to her friends, while Student 2 came from a rural background and says ‘Like, I wasn’t in a model C school. I went to a black school’.

Student 2 - No, I didn’t know [what was expected of me] because I’m from high school, first from high school, you know high school is totally different.

Sioux - So you didn’t know what they expected?

Student 2 - Ja

Sioux - And do you think that the lecturers made it clear to you what they expected?

Student 2 - Not really, not really. But they gave us scope and stuff. But the scope here is different from the scope I know from high school...it’s not the same.

Student 1 - I don't know, I think it just depends what kind of person you are and what kind of background you come from. Like okay, everything is really different from high school, but it's not really that different, because my school, even though they like...they fed you a lot of stuff but they wanted you to be like more independent and they want, they expected you to like to come up with, um, to go the extra mile sort of thing, so here at tech it's just the same go that extra mile in order to meet the stuff. Like my teachers at high school they always wanted you to surprise them, they always say, 'Surprise me students, surprise me, show me what you're made of'. So here at tech we have to do the same thing, go the extra mile but surprise them a bit.

The educational environment is not neutral; it has the objective of imbuing particular values, skills and ways of knowing into its learners. But some learners bring with them the cultural capital of specific literacy practices and values recognised and valued by the higher education system. For these learners, the transition phase during which they fathom and adopt the target identity is easier and less characterised by feelings of alienation. Heath's work, *Way with Words*, best encapsulates the different literacy practices of different communities. She sums up the relationship between the students' present literacies and those of the learning environment by describing the easier transition of the middle class townspeople as follows: "Their socially determined habits and values have created for them an ideology in which all that they do makes sense to their current identity and their preparation for the achievements which will frame their future" (1983: 368).

A few of the lecturers described the type of student that they perceived were suited for their particular discipline. These descriptions were sometimes in terms of fixed personality characteristics, similar to their discussions of motivation, but the descriptions do indicate some awareness of the extent to which success is related to issues of identity. Furthermore the lecturers explicitly stated that having the attributes described was necessary for success.

Lecturer A - ...what I've found is that the area that I lecture is very much based on people that are analytical, the people that do [career] are generally analytical, very precise, um, very, let me try and think, they're the sort of people who like to have things done in a certain way, and a lot of our students are not necessarily that way inclined, but it is a part of what they have to learn for the course.

Lecturer I - You've got to be very well spoken, well presented, very aggressive in your, your...

Sioux - Driven?

Lecturer I - Driven. Very outgoing, very dynamic. You can't afford to be a shy person at all, or introvert, you know it's like [career] is very people orientated and you're out there building relationships, networking, constantly trying to get clients and things like that and ...

Sioux - It seems to clash with the way you were describing your students, so how does that/

Lecturer I - Well, now that's the thing, so now when I talk to the students, and I constantly, uh, well not constantly, but I often will bring in how close they are, in

terms of years, of getting into the industry, and how under-prepared they are, and I think they don't like me, or they don't like the fact that I do that, but I keep saying to them it's not your knowledge that's going to get you the job at all, it's your passion, it's your drive, your motivation, your enthusiasm and how you express yourselves, that's going to get you the job, and if you go for an interview and you've got a guy who knows all the theory but then you come along and you're driven and you're excited, that's who they want working for them ..

Lecturer I - Well when I tell them that...I get a lot of students sitting there and going, 'Well I'm everything that he... I'm everything not what he's describing', I don't know how to put that, but they say, 'But I'm not that, I'm quiet and I'm shy and I'm not that' and I get quite harsh and I say, 'And if you're none of these things, deregister, go and do another course, because you're going to battle, unless you change'. And then I tell them, 'Now is the time to change. Start talking to me, you know, make your mistakes now...Let us laugh at you, so what if we laugh at you, um, because you'll be the one laughing at the end because you've now grasped it', you know?

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Lecturer I - I think half the time, I'm still like, I sound like my father! [laughs] Ja, but I do hey, I try and drive them a lot like this, but then you know I often, well not often, but I get a lot of students who come and say thanks for that, because you've given us a better idea of what they're looking for. Ja. I do it quite aggressively and boldly, but to get the point across, you know all I exaggerate it, but they can sit and think 'Oh well, maybe this is who we should be, we've got to start adjusting ourselves, if we want to be successful'. Um, so ja, I've used very much but I do battle because these guys are not...But then having said that I'm going to contradict myself now. When you go to graduation and we've just had the [Faculty] graduation last week and you see the guys graduating and you just go, you know, 'Wow!'

Sioux - Is that the same guy?

Lecturer I - Yeah! Is that the same person? They're so loud, they're outgoing, they look different, they dress different, they, and you talk to them and you like ...

Sioux - Now, is it because they're now out of context or is it just a few months out there?

Lecturer I - Both. All of it, um, maybe we're too domineering as lecturers, you know?

Sioux - Maybe they always were like that and they didn't show it in class?

Lecturer I - And they don't show it in class, absolutely. I mean, I have no doubt that a person in class could be sitting there and just taking it all in and then get out the class, he's this loud mouth, cocky person, I have no doubt, but, um, but those kind of contradictions, when you see them you just go jeeppers, you know?

But even if the target identities are described in a surface manner by the lecturer as in the extract above, it is very difficult for students to invest in the identity when most of the literacy practices constituting the identity seem so alien or hidden. Most of the students expressed some difficulties in gauging and meeting lecturer expectations.

Student 10 - Ja, we just have to make up/

Student 11 - Make up what we want. Make up what you want and you end up not understanding what's really wanted.

Student 10 - Ja, you know/

Student 11 - You end up confusing yourself.

Student 13 - Exactly what I said before because lecturers want you to put it, they want you to put big words to it to impress them and to impress...I don't know who but ... to prove, but for them if you understood it, it means coming out more intelligent somehow.

This next quote may indicate the student's lack of understanding of the academic literacy practice of evidence based reasoning (using literature, such as the textbook, to validate a claim), or may reflect a student who understands exactly what is expected by her lecturers, which is no more than uncritical memorisation of the accepted text.

Student 15 -They want you to write exactly what they told you or what is written in the textbook. They don't like you to use your own thinking, your own understanding of the content, you know.

I do not believe that lecturers fail to make overt the expected literacy practices through a conscious policy of exclusion to such practices but rather that such practices are subtle and normalised. I am also not suggesting that the literacy practices with which middle class, English speaking children are familiar from their home and school literacies are identical to those of the higher education environment. Each discipline has its own norms and values, manifested in its own range of literacy practices. Becher terms the discipline-specific identities

“academic tribes” and points out that “exclusion also operates in those disciplines ...which pride themselves on not being ‘jargon-ridden’, since the communication here none the less creates what linguists would call its own register—a particular set of favoured terms, sentence structure and logical syntax—which it is not easy for an outsider to imitate” (1993: 24). Becher describes academic tribes as defining their own identities and defending their academic ground through the use of practices devised to exclude “illegal immigrants”. Geertz (1983) describes membership through the acquisition of the group’s identity as a “cultural frame that defines a great part of one’s life”. True membership occurs when the socially constructed identity is ‘owned’ by the individual (Clark and Ivanič 1997, Ivanič 1998 and Norton 2000). This involves integrating the new identity with those of the individual’s current multiple identities such that they “weave ... into a single coherent narrative” (Cameron 2000: 5). But it may be very difficult for students to achieve this coherent narrative if, as Geisler indicates, the undergraduate qualification has the aim of “inculcating the virtues of an upper-class liberal culture. Only with these declarations of cognitive and sociological affiliation in place will they be invited to cross the great divide” (1994: 92). The great divide, in Geisler’s sense, relates not to the orality-literacy divide discussed in Chapter Three Section 3.2.4, but rather to a divide with “experts on one side with a complete if disjointed practice of expertise, and laypersons on the other side facing what seems like a choice between buying into the formal culture of the schools or remaining loyal to their indigenous home cultures” (1994: 90).

While there will always be shifts in one's repertoire of identities, problems arise when a target identity is constructed of literacy practices that are so different from one's present ways of being that to take on such literacy practices results in feelings of alienation. While van Heerden (2001) argues that no such feelings of alienation were experienced by the students in her study, students whose educational, social and ethnic background have much in common with those of this study, I would argue that examples of such tension are evident in the data quoted in her article. The higher education institution does not engage students in ways where their personal experiences are relevant, instead it may seem to "require an abandonment of indigenous home culture, a trading of everyday concepts in favor of the formal culture of books" (Geisler 1994: 91).

Certainly the students in this study expressed difficulties in meshing their owned identities and those required for success in the Technikon, although they did not do so as overtly those in de Kadt and Mathonsi's study. Students in their study are quoted as saying "I am trying to get my degree. It gives you no choice, but to write what the lecturer wants – It has nothing to do with the African writing" and "the mainstream culture kills our cultures" (2003: 97). De Kadt and Mathonsi conclude that the students perceive the African culture as fixed and unchanging and that any changes in their own identities can only involve a change away from the African culture.

"Judgements about identity and discourse may also intersect with issues of race, class, gender and socio-economic status" (Miller 2003: 8). This is



particularly pertinent in post-Apartheid South Africa where the demographics of our student population have rapidly changed to reflect those of general society but the staff complement lags behind in such changes. Even when lecturers share the race of the students, they can feel unable to value the literacy practices of the African identity when performing the role of educator. A Zulu colleague expressed concern that he had to do more to get students to write in an academic way when writing for him than I did because the students expected him, as the assessor, to be 'one of them'. When I asked if he meant that the students expected him to be 'like a fellow student', he explained 'No, like a fellow African.'

Unfortunately the literacy practices of the African identity are not those valued by the institution, as one lecturer said, referring to what she termed 'students nowadays': 'um, they don't have a good ethic in how they conduct themselves as students'. Bourdieu (1977) argues that the fit between the cultural capital students bring with them and that expected of them in the educational environment are far more consequential than purportedly innate aptitude or intelligence in determining educational success and subsequent employment. While the next extract from a lecturer interview does not show an understanding of how inequitable power relations result in poorer students not having access to the cultural capital valued by the institution, it does show a sympathy with the students' unequal access to physical resources.

Lecturer G - I don't think you can spot it by the way, you do get an impression that, to a large extent, depends ...well I'm really talking about commitment. It also depends on the resource base of where they're coming from. Um, something else, what resources do they have when they go home? Do they have lights to work by, these are questions I cannot ... what I've been thinking about lately is like when we set that assignment we said it had to be typed, um, the cost of that typing again or redoing it again or... some people don't have money ... R50 is a lot more money, and we don't realise it. Um, not everybody has access to computer labs either. So you slowly become aware of these other things that start playing on people, the distance they travel, um, I think there are a few other underlying things that mean students don't do badly, or do badly. I mean they are basic things, are they eating properly, are they looking after themselves, how do they dress, what's their attitude.

One lecturer, who used a number of different discourses from the other lecturers, Lecturer E, questioned the academic norms of the higher education environment. He spoke of the need for students to respect many ways of knowing, not just those of the academy. One way in which he encouraged this was to bring in expert lecturers who were scribally illiterate and who frequently spoke no English. An isiZulu speaking student translated what the expert was teaching. Lecturer E sought out these experts, often from distant rural communities, in a range of design areas that related to his discipline, instead of bringing in commercial or industrial experts. The reasons for this were reflected in his comment that students shouldn't be prepared for 'little lives' by being trained simply in the techniques of a discipline. He hoped to engage the students in terms of their personal identities, which he referred to as 'their real selves', 'what they really think', 'who they actually are, you know, as people'.

This lecturer was very dismissive of response A in the stimulus piece as being 'straight from the textbook and the student probably doesn't even understand this'. The student who wrote response B, on the other hand, was seen to be 'intelligent', 'reflective' and 'puts the theory in line with his own life'. Lecturer E was also the only lecturer who expressed an understanding of the extent to which taking on the ways of being demanded by his discipline, had an impact on students' identities.

Lecturer E - The key to success is ...well, it depends how you define it. If they must just be there every day, just come in every day and do what you're told and then you'll pass, but you probably won't enjoy it. If success is that...well... But you see I have students that don't do very well, but they have such a nice time. They enjoy what they're doing, they're busy grappling with things, they get about 65 at the end of third year. That's the kind of student that I really want, is someone that has enough of the technical skills, but is really interested and busy trying to put the two together, and the way that they feel about things and the way they go about things and the skills that they are busy learning is development itself.

Sioux - So they might be more successful/

Lecturer E - That to me is the real success... Ja, so it's in terms of growth and incorporating the information and knowledge that comes from here, with their own background, their own life, and taking it wherever they want to go, like applying it, so if they can get involved, then they'll be successful.

#### **5.4 Participation as a Valued Literacy Practice**

The 'academically literate student' identity, which I have been referring to in the section above, is, of course, not a fixed, clearly defined identity. It is constructed from academic literacy practices that differ from discipline to discipline. While engineers may value the practice of writing objectively described steps in chronological order, fine artists may value the practice of articulating the connections between the artist's thoughts and their product. There are also discrepancies in the literacy practices of novice and expert members of the academy. For example novice readers of academic journals have been found to scan journal contents pages for relevant topics, while experts first scan for recognised authors (Boughey 2002b). However, one practice that was expressly valued across all disciplines by the ten lecturers interviewed for this study was class participation. I therefore discuss class participation as an example of a target literacy practice that students may or may not take on.

The lecturers complained that students failed to participate in class. 'They would look at you blankly and there's just no response and that's just how it is'. 'I'll ask them ten times "Any questions? You can agree with me, disagree with me", and they all just sit and stare at me. Sometimes I just ask one of them something, you know, "What do you think of that?" and they hate that, they hate it.' The practice of asking questions in class was ascribed to successful students who 'want to do well', 'want to find out more' whereas the majority of

students who did not ask questions were perceived as having a 'don't care attitude'.

While all complained about lack of interaction by students in class, there seemed, in the lecturer discourses to be slightly different motives for wanting this practice. In some cases it was as a means of checking understanding so the lecturer felt confident she had 'covered the section thoroughly enough', 'you assume that because they haven't asked questions that they understand though after a few years of lecturing, you know better'. But for at least three of the lecturers, interaction was valued as indicating that students were engaging critically with the knowledge.

Sioux – [Discussing subjective nature of the discipline in which Lecturer E works] Do the students ever rebel against that subjectivity? Do they respect your view and or do they say 'I don't agree with you?'

Lecturer E - I wish they would. I think this year is a bit of a problem because I have a bunch of girls that are so subservient.

The absence of the practice of asking questions was seen as evidence that the students were not constructing knowledge: 'they tend not to think for themselves', 'they don't ask...they're not switched on, you know'. The lack of participation was linked, by some lecturers to the students' school experiences: 'if they're coming directly out of the school environment very few of them seem to be able, uh, to verbalise their thought processes', 'They seem to have been spoon-fed, you know, you sit and listen, shut up and I'll do the talking, and they

find a very different experience when I actually say to them 'Well, what do you think?' And a lot of them have a problem with that, where they say, they say 'Oh but you're the lecturer'.'

There were also a number of references in the lecturer interviews to an understanding that the lack of class participation has a cultural origin. 'I also appreciate the whole cultural aspect, especially the Black girls, who don't like to talk, because of that whole thing, you only speak when you're spoken to concept, but I'm noticing a change in that.' The following two extracts show a similar link made between class participation and culture.

Lecturer C - There is. It feels like that almost every year. I don't know about our first years, it's a bit too soon to say, but generally the Black student will come for less help, ... much less. There'll be very few, we've had in the past the odd one or two that have always come and asked, and that's been really nice. Um, I don't know if it's, the one's that are quite well spoken seem to come and ask, but the ones who are unsure of themselves probably don't come and ask as much. And even if you try and get them...if you try and make the atmosphere very friendly in the class and open, like an open discussion instead of...'Let's sit in a group and discuss, we don't stand on a pedestal and talk to you' and, we sit in a group and we chat and try and share things and make it as relaxed as possible, and even then they still, you know there's no, they don't engage and they don't ask or do anything like that.

Sioux - But you don't know why.

Lecturer C - No, no idea, it would be nice to know.

Lecturer I - ...When I first started teaching here, it was, majority of my class was White, and ...Now I'm not saying that Whites are cleverer than Blacks, I'm not saying that at all but they are more expressive. They definitely are more willing to part with their ideas and challenge, you know. I don't know, maybe you get classes now that will feel well what he says is right, and just leave it at that, you know. And I can't believe they...I mean, half the time it's just my philosophy on something and it's what I believe, and who knows if that's right, you know. 'Tell me what you guys think'. Very difficult, you know.

With large class sizes, it was seen as difficult to keep class discipline while encouraging students to participate.

Lecturer I - Just control the class. Ja, absolutely. I mean, ja, there're so many techniques, you can just stop talking, or glare at them, that's what I do

Sioux - But the only problem with that kind of thing, and it's such a thin line, is that then they might reinforce this, 'You sit and be quiet and I lecture'.

Lecturer I - Ja, absolutely, I mean they're too scared to raise a question or something. No it's subtle, I agree, I agree. I've often thought well maybe the guys aren't answering because they're just too scared, you know, or they think I'm going to shoot them down, or something like that.

Sioux - Ja

Lecturer I - But, as much as you say to them, I mean I regularly will stop after every point and I will say, 'Any questions or any comments, ask a question or make a comment on what I've said'. So I give them plenty of opportunities, but ja, I do often think they may be very scared, you know.

As one lecturer pointed out, interaction in the form of questions is valued as indicative of interest and intelligence, to the extent that guest lecturers from industry may ask to interview students who have participated well in class. Lecturers were also aware that fear of speaking in a additional language also played a role in students' reticence in class.

Lecturer D - It's attitude, it's motivation. I think some of the students are somehow discouraged from asking questions? They're definitely scared of being mocked.

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Lecturer D [to two students who have just walked in<sup>1</sup>]: You're a student, why don't you why don't students ask questions in class?

Student X - I always ask questions but some others/

Student Y - I think you don't want to make a mistake/

Lecturer D - You're scared?

Student Y - Yeah, you're scared if you ask the wrong question or something stupid the others will laugh at you after class. [unclear] You may seem forward, always talking you've got a lot to say.

Sioux - And that's not a good thing?

Student Y -No [laughs], like a 'knows everything'!

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<sup>1</sup> As Lecturer D pointed out to me later, the very presence of these students in her office indicates that they are among the minority who actively seek assistance.



Lecturer D - It's always the same few students who ask questions and I promise you they are the top students.

Eight students spoke about the need to ask questions and seek clarification from their lecturers. Without exception these students described their lecturers as being approachable using terms such as 'nice and friendly', 'willing to help', 'always there for you', 'very understanding', 'we feel free to ask them anything'. However six of these students indicated that their practice of asking questions was not the norm and that they usually approach the lecturer outside of class. Three other students indicated an unwillingness to engage with the lecturer at all.

Students explained the lack of participation in a number of ways. In some cases the lecture format was not seen as conducive to interaction, 'normally lecturers lecture', 'They do the talking and you just listen', 'you're listening and like underlining important stuff from the text'. Fear of saying the wrong thing was also a common explanation: 'I think it is, ja, they are afraid to ask if they don't understand, especially Africans, I mean we as blacks sometimes we feel inferior.' 'The big problem obviously is when you want to express yourself and you're scared, maybe the people will hear if your English is good, because even in high school you want to say something but you are scared so it is up to you to say whether I'm wrong or right I have to ask this question. You frame the question and you make sure that it is correct.'

Student 6 - The students, well I don't know, maybe they think you're too stupid if you ask him, some of them laugh at you, and you're the one who's going to suffer.

Sioux - Do most students rather not ask?

Student 6 - Ja, most students they feel like maybe they're stupid. They wait for another day when it's going to be a test to ask the lecturer but your mind can't grasp a lot of things in a short space,

Students told of difficulties in determining which questions could be asked and when, they sometimes felt 'not sure if this is a right kind of question'. I observed a student ask a question about the previous day's lecture in response to the lecturer's request for questions. I was aware of the 'inappropriateness' of the question and witnessed the frustrations of the lecturer whose intention it was to check on understanding after a five-minute explanation of a concept. He responded by telling the student that 'We're not dealing with that now' and reprimanded the class by saying 'Come on now, guys, focus on this.'

Bourdieu (1977) writes of the "power to impose reception", or the right to speak. Perhaps the students with the lower English proficiency are in the complex process of second language acquisition alongside learning an elevated academic literacy. In this precarious position, they do not speak for fear of not having their meaning heard as they intended it.

Student 10 - And they, maybe they can ask you during the lecture, 'Do you all understand?'

Sioux - Ja

Student 10 - And you'll say 'NO', 'What you don't understand?' and you'll like 'Everything!'

Student 11 - Yes, it's always like that because maybe you just don't understand a single thing.

Student 10 - And you find that they're cross 'cos they think you're bluffing them all the time/

Student 11 - Like you're just joking but you're not/

Student 10 - /and, whereas you were really serious that you don't understand, you know.

Some students explained that asking questions was a literacy practice that they would take on over time: 'No, I'd prefer to go to a friend [to get help with an assignment]. Maybe later I'll go to a lecturer', 'but at the beginning of the year you are scared [to ask questions], but now you aren't'. For these students the practice of class participation was aspired to and associated with the identity of the successful student but was, nonetheless, a difficult practice to take on. Student 4, who associated with successful students, had learnt from these students that 'in order to be a success...you don't have to be afraid of your lecturers, you have to be friendly with them, you have to ask them questions'.

The lecturers' suggestions that culture may play a role in students' lack of participation seems to show a valid insight into the literacy practices of many of the students. Questioning the lecturer was seen to be difficult to do because it could, according to some of the students, be misconstrued as their questioning the lecturer's authority or teaching abilities, as revealed in the following statement: 'She's so nice and kind and I don't want to show I still don't know'.

As a result of the literacy practice described above, students who did speak out and ask questions were regarded by their fellow students as being cheeky. 'He thinks he is too clever and asks too many questions', 'I didn't like her...because she was always making comments in class, ja, and asking questions'. Student 1, a Zulu female with a private school background explained that her classmates were critical of some of her practices, such as class participation, 'It's just that I ask if there's stuff I don't understand and [fellow students] get annoyed with that'. She explained that she had been called a 'coconut or Oreo, you know [laughs] but they are just jealous'. The terms 'coconut' and 'Oreo' are used to describe students who are Black Africans, but who are perceived by their fellow students as behaving like Whites (both coconuts and Oreo biscuits are dark on the outside and white inside). Students who take on the literacy practices of white middle class students are also regularly termed Model C's, an historical term referring to the first white government schools to take in non-white scholars during the Apartheid regime. To invest in the literacy practices of

higher education, such as class participation, can therefore be a difficult choice if it is perceived as disinvesting from one's African identity.

Was the silence in class a form of resistance to the academic literacy practices expected of students; a conscious result of students' lack of investment in the academically literate identity? I didn't find significant evidence of this but rather saw students as being unable to participate given the power relations of the class, given their perceived low language proficiency and their uncertainty as to what constituted appropriate verbal interchanges. In some cases it seems to be a lack of familiarity with the literacy practices and a lack of empowerment to experiment with these and in a few others, an action of resistance.

### **5.5 Investment, Role-play or Resistance to Discourses**

Gee describes discourse use as positioning individuals as insiders, outsiders or colonised (1990: 155). While all the students in this study were outsiders to the academic literacy of their chosen course of study in the higher education environment, some had more familiarity with the requisite literacy practices by virtue of their home, schooling or other literacies. As discussed above, it may be easier for such students to invest in the target identity because it is less strange or alienating to them than to some of their fellow students. But regardless of the difficulty or relative ease by which students acquire academic literacy, they are not mere puppets of the powerful social forces of the Technikon.

Gee sees the acquisition and use of discourses as an “identity kit” that marks group identity. Students are seen to have many literacies, which overlap, and to be in the transitional phase of adopting the academic literacy of their discipline and institution. Ballard and Clanchy observe that “Academics who complain of students’ general ‘illiteracy’ are sometimes reminded, disturbingly, that other cultures of literacy exist...few seem to recognize the problem for what it is, an unsteady transition between cultures” (1988: 13). Thesen (1997) has difficulties with Gee’s use of the term ‘colonised’ arguing that “Students are very aware of being in or out of discourses, but the problematic category is the middle one-colonised - which suggests a lack of awareness of power relations” (1997:204).

When faced with a new literacy practice, students can take it on as part of their investment in the target identity. This happens in equivocal ways as individuals try on new literacy practices for size. Alternatively, it seems that some students are not invested in the target identity expected of them by the educators, but they are prepared to role-play or act out the primary practices in order to succeed. Finally students have the option of resisting a literacy practice because they are neither invested in it nor are they prepared to act it out in a pragmatic fashion. Such choices are neither necessarily conscious nor definitive, they occur in a shifting, ambiguous and contradictory fashion as students are exposed to various literacy practices of the target identity. The

choices reflect the agency individuals have within socially constructed discourses. It is to the choice of resistance that I now turn.

It has been noted that many students are uncomfortable with the discursive limitations of their educational experience without understanding why (Taylor and Johnston 1991). This discomfort may result in their resisting the academically literate practices, even when they are inducted into them. Giroux defines 'voice' as the way in which students "produce meaning through the various subject positions that are available to them in the wider society" (1990: 93). If the literacy practices of students in the higher education environment are confined to their being recipients or reproducers of knowledge, there is not much space for their voices as they are allowed only to report on what has already been said. Bartholomae (1985:144) commented that students' written work is usually confined to test-taking, report or summary writing, where they are expected to mimic the discipline's discourses rather than participate in its construction and change. They engage in a knowledge telling discourse which, according to Lemke (1988: 90) stresses "answering questions above asking questions, solving problems above posing problems, following instructions above giving instructions, and above all, reading the words of others above writing our own words".

The students expressed this positioning as reproducers of knowledge in a number of ways. They said that higher marks were given for when 'you write word for word', or 'straight from the textbook'. 'They want you to write exactly

what they told you or what is written in the textbook. They don't like you to use your own thinking, your own understanding of the content, you know'. This was despite a belief expressed by the students that response B, in the stimulus piece (Appendix A), showed evidence of real learning as revealed in the comment: 'I mean she'll be fifty and she'll still know like what tax means'. The two students in the extract below believed that there were lecturers who expected students to produce knowledge and those that only accepted reproduction, but that students had to figure out which literacy practices were expected by which lecturers.

Student 6 - I can't say he [the student who wrote response A in the stimulus piece] knows nothing, but not much.

Student 7 - Ja

Sioux - Okay. Ja, Student A has just written it 'word for word' as you say.

Student 6 – Word for word

Sioux - And yet you said Student A is the one who must get the good marks?

[Both laugh and nod]

Student 6 – Ja. In a way, in the lecturer's way, that's what most of them want, but not all the lecturers. But most lecturers, like my last year's [subject] lecturer, that what she wants.



Sioux - She wants, even if it's just crammed. Put it in your head, put it on the paper?

Student 6 - That's it, because they can get the good marks. But the problem with Student A, you can ask her and she doesn't know a thing about tax.

Student 7 - Actually they always say in [subject] you're never wrong as long as you can explain it.

Sioux - Explain it?

Student 6 - Ja

Sioux - So in some cases they are actually happy with the people who can explain it.

Student 6 - Ja ... You can have your A, just state the facts, even if you don't understand it, state your facts, to get more marks, but for some [lecturers] if you just put the facts as they are you can't have a good mark

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Student 7 - I had a teacher for Geography in matric. If you just take the book and present it to him, he's just going to give you a negative. That was the only one, he said just state the fact but show me you understand.

Sioux - So he made that clear to you? The teacher at school?

Student 7 - Ja. Even if you have forgotten the fact but as long as you can explain what it is regarding that was the most important thing.

Student 6 - Ja, because this here in A, they don't understand a thing about taxation. If you can ask him today he knows nothing, but Student B will know this thing for the rest of his life, you see, because these are his words, it is his understanding, so B's, I'm not saying he is going to score more marks but/

Student 7 - Well, he might score/

Student 6 - He might score it depends on the lecturer, how do they mark the scripts.

Discourses are constituted by the actions of individuals. While the power of discourses is great, discourses do not exist outside of human action. The individual needs to be remembered in any discussion of the discourse, it is through her actions that social institutions are reproduced or subverted. Identities provide agency to take on or reject certain discourses. Identities play an important strategic role in determining which discourses students buy into or out of. In Price's response to Norton Peirce's (1995) article, he suggests that "for Peirce, discourse and power facilitates or impedes the taking up of different identities/positions but does not seem to be involved in the construction of them" (1997: 333), but I did not read Norton Peirce's article as disputing the role of discourse in shifting identities. I do, however, agree with Price that sometimes reconstructions in student identities seem be closely connected to the discourses in which they find themselves. As one student put it: 'They want you to be their way. You must write an essay, like an essay is not like at school for putting your feelings. You must do all these things like a different person now'.

While we undoubtedly construct our identities based on the way we have learned to think about the world and our place in it, human thought and action can never be entirely under the control of the status quo. Human agency is never completely erased; even in the most controlled environment, people will always find ways of resisting their positioning by discourses in which they are not invested. Canagarajah (1995: 592) argues that in any study of the power of the discourses of the Centre within the Periphery<sup>1</sup>, there needs to be an understanding of the individual and the limited agency within which the individual constructs her identity: “It is important to find out how linguistic hegemony is carried out, lived, and experienced in the day-to-day life of the people and communities in the periphery”.

Many lecturers made the point that their students were not interested in ‘real learning [but just in] doing what it takes to pass’. According to one lecturer students were interested only in ‘What will we have to know for the exam?’ That’s all it boils down to. ‘Tell us what we need to know for the exam’’. The interviews with students reiterated the idea that there were certain practices required of them to pass their qualifications which they were willing to appropriate, even if they did not invest in the target identity. ‘You just do what you have to do, you know, to pass the test or the assignment or whatever’. The “gestures and rituals of the academy” are reproduced as the students

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<sup>1</sup> These terms are discussed in Chapter Three, Section 3.2.1.

surrendered their own authority “to those other authorial voices” (Sommers 1992: 28).

Freire realised the need to appropriate discourses when he instructs the reader “Look, in spite of being beautiful, this way you speak also includes the question of power. Because of the political problem of power, you need to learn how to command the dominant language, in order for you to survive in the struggle to transform society” (1987: 73). He goes further when he explains, as Gee has done, that as it is only the voice of the insider that has power, individuals need to be familiar with the discourses of power if they are to question the status quo. “The need to master the dominant language is not only to survive but also better to fight for the transformation of an unjust and cruel society where the subordinate groups are rejected, insulted, and humiliated” (Freire 1993:135).

However, many students do not master the dominant language of higher education. They resist the literacy practices by writing in their own voice, by knowing in unvalued ways, and by refusing to take on the approved ways of being. As Geisler warns: “As long as students think that they have to abandon the resources of their indigenous cultures in order to succeed in school and in the professions, a significant portion who refuse to take the move will be forced to drop out. A significant portion who do take the move will be crippled” (1994: 94).

Some curriculum designs result in students either forfeiting valued and valuable identities or opting out of higher education by resisting the identities deemed target by the system. Lillis questions which practices are valued in higher education and why and calls for the reconception of “higher education as a site of diversity, with the potential to draw on and enact a range of discourse practices and identities” (2001: 167). I find myself asking whether our literacy practices are so embedded within a European model that there is little investment by our African students?

Students identities are a site of struggle, at times students invest in the identities positioned by the dominant discourses, at others they resist such positioning. Such resistance can lead to their dropping out of the formal education system but should not be seen simply as a weak position. The resistance by students to take on mainstream ways of being should be understood not only in relation to the words that are said but in relation to the larger structures of higher education and South African society generally; a society in which Africans often struggle for acceptance in the middle class milieu. “Although a person may be positioned in a particular way within a given discourse, the person might resist the subject position or even set up a counterdiscourse which positions the person in a powerful rather than marginalized subject position” (Norton Peirce 1995: 16). I turn now to an identity construction in which the students all seemed highly invested, one which seems at least in part constructed by a counterdiscourse to that of the ‘academically literate student’.

## 5.6 The 'Social Student' as an Alternative Target Identity

While my discussion thus far has been on academic literacy as the target identity, another identity was frequently referred to by students as one in which they were highly invested. I term this the 'social student identity', the development of which means taking on the literacy practices of the institution that are not academic literacies but relate to the social networking of the students. The 'social student' is, like the 'academically literate student', not a fixed identity with a clear list of defining attributes. It varies across time and context. By labelling these identities in this way (and I later add 'workplace literate student'), I run the risk of making them seem finite and readily identifiable. Instead, target identities are imagined by individuals desirous of membership who are in the process of taking on the literacy practices that they, through experience and observation, consider as integral to that identity.

Students invested in a 'social student identity' (and my data indicates that these are target identities for all the students I interviewed) take on the requisite literacy practices, which vary among the group of friends in which they wish to gain membership. Amongst other practices mentioned were the use of cell phones, use of extensive code-switching with primary language being English, use of American slang<sup>1</sup>, activities such as 'partying' and 'going to the gym', and 'wearing cool clothes'. There are thus formal and informal literacies within the institution with which students need to become acquainted. This is not to say

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<sup>1</sup> Terms such as 'girlfriend' and 'sister' by one female student to another, accompanied by an American accent, seem to indicate that this was a target practice.

that students invested in a social student identity are not also invested in academically literate identity, just that induction into the higher education environment is extremely complex. Wexler (1992: 128) observes “how much in fact of all school life, for the students, centres around the daily project of establishing a social identity”. Likewise, Thesen found the students in her study to often be “alienated from the curriculum, tending to invest more in their social lives than in their academic identities” (1997: 505).

The lecturers made frequent reference to the students’ concern with social issues rather than academic ones. The following extract is typical:

Lecturer A - I mean, all students as we know, bunk lectures, go out for evenings on the town and whatever and feel a bit under the weather the next day, um but I found that the students have tended to have a very lackadaisical attitude towards their studies and a lot of times I think [fellow lecturer] and myself will, maybe they think we’re tyrants where we say to them, you know, you have to be here, you have to do your homework, otherwise you’re not going to cope, and they don’t see it as a part of their own, when they do start failing or that they’re not coming up to their expectations or ours when it comes to being assessed. That is a problem. And I don’t know how you change that culture. I’ve looked at myself as a student and I look at the students now and maybe it’s just the whole society. As students fifteen years ago, we never had money for anything, you know, we all had extra jobs in the afternoons or whatever, but we didn’t wear fancy clothes or whatever. I find a lot of my students wear the latest fashion clothing, um, they have their hair done regularly, they all have cellphones, um, they smoke, and I think how can you afford to, um, so the whole emphasis of what is important in their lives, seems to be mixed up. And as I said, it may not necessarily be a student thing coming from their schooling

ethic or necessarily from their home ethic, it may just be a general societal change, that society is putting more emphasis on what you look like and who you are and what you do...

Lecturers also complained about the loudness of students outside the classroom in comparison to their lack of communication in the classroom. In an article I wrote in 1995, I traced ESL students' perceptions of speaking volume norms, norms that many students expressed in terms of an African identity (McKenna 1995). Two students in that study explained their quiet classroom behaviour thus: "An African...cannot shout when they speak to someone dignified or respectful" and "It is rude to just ask the lecturers questions". One student explained the loud volume used in the corridors thus: "We have to shout outside because Africa is the land of black people with...pride" (McKenna 1995: 735). De Kadt (1994: 57) has written on the speaking patterns of traditional Zulu society and concludes that these norms "could have serious consequences for classroom instruction". Students were very articulate in their accounts of how the development of their social student identity was often at the expense of their studies.

Student 11 - And some of us think like we're in the tertiary now we don't have to study more, and then you end up failing, and you only realise a year later when everybody else has things going or the graduation and you don't realise it, you only think about the social.

Student 2 - There's too much freedom



Sioux - Okay!

Student 1 - Too much freedom in like, like you have a long rope to drown yourself, I mean to hang yourself.

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Student 1 - Like last week [laughs] the whole week I did not attend. So what? No one cares, it was just I didn't attend. I like it, I like it, I mean I wouldn't have it any other way.

Student 2 - - With lecturing, you can nobody will ask you questions, you know?

Sioux - If you stay away?

Student 1 - If you just want to stay by the house

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Student 2 - Ja. In the [subject] lectures too, there should be a register so that everybody who comes to school, because they know that if they don't they won't be able to/

Student 1 - No, no, no, this is not high school, I don't want any registers, I even have a tough time coming up to tuts and everything. No I don't think there should be registers. I mean, I think it's quite nice, the fact that you know, if you put more work in you can make it, if you don't you won't.

The process of establishing a network of friends and determining the appropriate practices necessary for acceptance can be difficult, as explained in the next extract.

Student 4 - Yes. Mmm, first of all it was like you don't know all these people, they're from different schools and there are very few students who are from my

area. I wish I was always with them, like all of the people who you know; you don't want to meet the people who you don't even know. So, I got used to it because I have to go to attend my lecturer, my lectures and we had tutorials for, you ask some people what's your name, what are you doing, are you first year, second year, you end up having friends. Sometimes you've got friends with the same surname or like family names so you end up having friends. ...so we end up having friends you see, but now I'm finding it very fine

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There is, like when you come to a tertiary institution and then like I was at the first time, you are just confused, you don't even know, like you don't even know your lecture theatres, so you end up being late. Sometimes you are scared to ask, you think, 'Oh my god they are going to laugh at me and say where do you come from', you see, all those things, and the other thing is that when we come from home, different homes, then we come to a tertiary institution, we make new friends, some of them they go drinking and they go and do drinking, that can make a student fail. Ja, I think that is partly and we've got many parties around here and if you keep on cultivating more independence, then we do the stuff, so is it better if you like entertainment make sure that you don't forget about your work, because independence is important too, like you can't keep on studying all for your life, it's only when you finish your work then you can go to take a drink.

The student has to make decisions not only about how she spends her time, as indicated in the warning from the student above, but also in how she behaves. She has to continuously choose which identity she wishes to display and to judge which practices are best suited to that purpose.

### **5.7 'Workplace Identity' as an Alternative Target Identity**

There was frequent mention by the lecturers that students did not have much understanding of the field for which they were preparing. This, according to the lecturers, contributed to the students' negative attitude and to their not 'being passionate about their studies'. Lecturers explained that many students took on their diplomas by virtue of their being a place for them on the course or because they did not meet the entrance criteria of their preferred choice of study. They signed up for whatever diploma 'took their registration fee or had the shortest queue [at registration]', 'A lot of them are here just because it's better than standing in the streets'. While these students were motivated to succeed in terms of attaining a higher education qualification, they were not particularly invested in the identity of the workplace for which they were preparing. Without their investment in the identity for which they are being prepared, there is little commitment to the details of their study because, as one lecturer put it: 'The class stuff is not grabbing them and saying 'This is what I want to do, who I want to be''.

Four lecturers were particularly adamant that students lacked commitment to their studies because they did not have a clear idea of the target workplace identity. These students were seen to lack exposure to the business environment. Students were described as having no prior knowledge of what the subject was all about and merely 'window shopping'. In the extract below students were seen as investing with only some, surface aspects of the workplace identity such as wearing nice clothes and working in an office.

Lecturer D - Well, take something like chiropractic, you don't do chiropractic because there's a space left. You do it because you're an A student and it's exactly what you want to do. Whereas in [faculty], students just look at the list of courses and think well, I want to be some kind of [career]. I want to have my own office, wear nice clothes ... or else, they want to do some course but they can't get in because they left it until the last minute so they just go around and see who has got space. Our requirements aren't as high as other courses.

The identity of some courses was, according to the lecturers, fairly specific and there was a concern that the students did not match the identities.

Lecturer B – Well, there're some kids in the class that I don't think will ever be ... I mean they would make a lot more money if they went out to be a model. Um, you know they come in in in high shoes and tight denim dresses to work in [the workshop] when you've told them to come in overalls and and what have you, but, um, well maybe we're looking for a down to earth person.

The students were also quick to acknowledge that their studies were often not in the field of choice and that this impacted on their interest: 'It was my fifth choice', 'I didn't really be um sure what it is all about'. One student expressed his success in terms of his investment in the workplace identity: 'I put myself in that place as I study of maybe when I will be a [qualified person].'

School counselling or better course placement would, however, not sufficiently address this problem, although two lecturers suggested these mechanisms. This is because the ability to take on the target workplace literacies is based on

some understanding of what those practices are. For students from the lower socio-economic group, their exposure to these workplace practices has been limited. The distance between home or school literacy practices and those of the academy have been found to disadvantage non-middle class students. Their lack of exposure to the workplace identities for which they are preparing is a further burden. Lecturer H shows an awareness of this in the next extract.

Lecturer H - I don't think they get enough exposure from a very early age...

Sioux - Mmmm

Lecturer H - ... but I'm talking about stuff that I learnt from seeing my parents work or/

Sioux - Yes, you were exposed/

Lecturer H - /or have an older sister and seeing her work environment and seeing the way she now thinks accordingly, you know,...

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Lecturer H - ... they need to be shown people in the working world and/

Sioux - And where do they get that, is that also/

Lecturer H - Well, I think our, I think a lot of people are fortunate to get it from their home environment and from their schooling environment. Um, but I don't know how you would supplement it for people who don't have that. Maybe more industry case studies or something like that, or maybe just more of a reality check in terms of, you know, this is the unemployment rate, this is the job availability rate, this is how many of you will pass, this is how many of you will

get jobs. Make sure that you, if you could impress that upon them, but at that age it doesn't make much of an impression.

This chapter has considered the notion of investment in identity as explaining why some students take on literacy practices and others don't. It has also considered the congruence between the identities some students bring with them to the higher education environment and the practices expected of them in this environment. All Technikons in South Africa have a vocational slant to their curricula, as indicated by the period of co-operative education that most students spend in industry and by the close liaison between most departments and industry. The workplace identity is therefore arguably more valued at Technikons than at Universities, which place more emphasis on the academic literacies. This seemed to be the case in some instances but not in others. This is discussed further in Chapter Six, when I discuss how Technikon literacies are constructed by the discourses under study.

## Chapter Six - Tensions between Academic and Training Discourses

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### 6.1 Introduction

Throughout this thesis I have described academic literacies as elevated practices that act as gate-keeping mechanisms in higher education. But I have also flagged problems with the assumption that the target literacy practices at DIT are always academic. In my discussion of the social student identity and workplace literacy in the previous chapter I suggested that students are frequently not invested in an academically literate identity. I have also questioned the extent to which all academics are themselves academically literate or value the practices of academic literacy. In this chapter I consider the extent to which the data shows academic literacies to be valued and to consider other literacy practices that are targeted in this environment.

During the final stages of my writing this thesis, the Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, announced on 21 October 2003, that, as part of South Africa's higher education restructuring process, technikons would be renamed Universities of Technology. The merged M.L.Sultan Technikon and Natal Technikon had already been named Durban Institute of Technology and it seems unlikely at this stage that it will be renamed, even during the imminent merger with Mangosuthu Technikon. However, the changed nomenclature of technikons in South Africa raises questions about the literacy practices of these institutions. The renaming is, as in the similar process of the formation of the

“new” Universities in the UK, an attempt to rightly award technikons the same status as universities. The question I ask in this chapter is, to what extent the elevated status accorded universities is perceived to be tied to their use of elevated literacy practices? And if it is, does the renaming of technikons indicate a desire to take on these practices?

The frequent discussion of merger issues in my interviews was inevitable given the timing of this research, but was for the most part irrelevant to a discussion of how academic literacy is constructed at DIT. There was nonetheless an aspect which bears consideration and that was the comments on the clash of academic practices of the merging technikons as perceived by the lecturers and students in this study. I begin this chapter by discussing this issue of merging practices; I then consider examples of various academic practices of DIT as a whole and discuss what these signify as valued behaviours. I end the chapter with a consideration of technikon literacies of either an academic or a workplace nature.

## **6.2 Merging Practices**

I have emphasised the discipline-specific nature of academic literacies throughout this thesis. If academic literacies are about discipline-specific knowledge claims and rhetorical devices like hedging and referencing are ultimately linked to the rules of knowledge construction (Geisler 1994), one would presume that the merger entailed the coming together of like



departments that, although with historical differences and comprising individual people with their own norms and values, shared the norms and values of their field of expertise. But our merger of two technikons brought a complex and difficult melding of literacy practices. There were numerous references to the merger in terms of differences in ways of being and doing.

Sioux - And is it the same across the whole technikon? Is there a certain style of writing/

Student 7 - Nooo!

Student 6 - No, no I don't think so. I'll give you an example, like for [diploma], there was this thing called negative marking. Ja. You earn for if you are right, if you are wrong then minus one. But there in [Technikon A] they didn't apply that and the students are pissed off about that, and they all said they'll go to hell, if he'll apply that, that's what they are saying. That's why I think most [Technikon A] students just park like that, because ...

Student 7 - They do nothing.

Sioux - Do you think that, are you saying it was easier for them but/

Student 6 - Yes, it was very much easier for them. Everything in their way of doing was easier.

Initially this may seem to be a simple issue of slightly different marking procedures but Student 6 indicates that the issue was around 'Everything in their way of doing'.

Student 6 - Ja, I think the lecturers also, um I don't want to be racist but like, for example, White lecturers and Indian lecturers. White lecturers want students to apply what you maybe did, but as for Indian lecturers, they just tell you what they want in the textbook 'Go and study this, this is what you have to read and pass. If you don't read this then you're going to fail', you see, like they're spoon-feeding us. That's why we feel like, uh, like sort of ex-[Technikon A] students were boosted in a way, because like they just...we've merged okay, that's fine. But what about us, ex-[Technikon B] students who were not used to that kind of a, to be told what to study, to be told so what am I going to do in the paper. I know, this I'm going to see in the paper, this is going to be a question, the exact words, the exact question.

Sioux - You just go and memorise the answer?

Student 6 - Just go and memorise the answer. What about if like - let's say that we finish everything, I've got my diploma, what am I going to do with it in fact?

Student 15 - Um, I don't know, maybe you know I am being political, but since there's been this merger at Technikon Natal and Sultan, it should have maybe, for example I feel that, um, so I was used to, well, I failed [subject] and then the merger so a new lecturer took over for [subject] and I was studying and I wrote according to my last year's lecturer, and I thought I'd passed big time, but I got only 50, I was very shocked.

Sioux - Why didn't you get the marks you expected?

Student 15 - Um, I don't know, but according to last year's lecturer, I would have maybe scored something like 70 according to that one. --- No, I think the way of writing. I used my, I think it was the way of writing, the way of writing that I used.

Student 14 - I think it was the manner of answering.

Sioux - What was the difference? What was the one lecturer last year, what manner did they use and what manner does this year use?

Student 14 - My last year's lecturer wanted us to answer like this one.

Sioux - Like [stimulus piece, response] A?

Student 14 - Like A.

Sioux - Just the facts?

Student 14 - Just the facts and this new lecturer wants us to apply the, give a practical South African examples.

Sioux - So the new lecturer expected an applied answer?

Student 14 - Mm. Last year's lecturer wanted us to answer the, just to write according to what he told us.

A word of caution is needed here. I am aware that these students are expressing controversial opinions, and opinions per se are not the subject of this study. I do not want it to seem that my findings are simply a collection of opinions, as we are warned against by van der Mescht (2002). But if one looks beyond the opinions, there are interesting comments being made about how practices are perceived to differ.

At this point of upheaval in the newly formed institution, the merger became a scapegoat for all concerns. Any difficulties students may have experienced in acquiring new literacy practices could therefore have been attributed to the merger. If the data had been collected at another time, differences in lecturer expectation etc. may have been attributed to individuals, rather than to differences in the merging institutions. In my data differences in expected literacy practices were also attributed to lecturers' ages, race groups and their university or technikon backgrounds. The next excerpt is interesting in that it also identifies the issue of different practices in the two merging institutions but goes on to call for uniformity in terms of content rather than practices, because the lecturer is seen to be the fount of all knowledge.

Student 15 - ---the way they teach, for example, my last [subject] teacher, Mr [Y from Technikon A] and my last year's [subject] teacher, Mr [X from Technikon B], they were very different. They even had a fight. Mr [Y] told Mr [X] that his teaching was nonsense. He's using the same old book that was used by Shakespeare. That's what he said. This information is not used in real life, in our days. How we must do things in our days. We had a tough time. 'cause what a lecturer is telling us in class that's what we believe that is true.

### **6.3 The Role of Knowledge in the Curriculum**

It is clear to me, both through my interviews and through the many lectures I have observed at DIT over the last few years, that students are exposed to a variety of target literacy practices and are expected to take on those valued by the lecturer for whom the summative assessment is being written. Students are

in an unequal power relation with their educator-assessors in terms of the power continuum described by Poynton (1985). Poynton uses Halliday's (1985) term 'tenor' (see Chapter One, section 1.1.2) to indicate the relationship between the reader and writer and identifies the power continuum as one means of analysis. Students, particularly at the undergraduate level, are expected to meet the demands of the educator, but are "thwarted by their lack of understanding of academic culture" (Boughey 1999: 250).

A number of researchers have studied the different conceptions of knowledge and how these conceptions relate to an understanding of the purpose of writing (for example Entwistle 1987, Entwistle and Ramsden 1983, Marton et al 1984, 1993). There was a strong difference in my data in lecturers' epistemological stance about the relationship between student learning and knowledge. On the one end of the continuum was the view that knowledge needs to be created by students. I found evidence of this understanding in only one lecturer interview. Somewhere in the middle of the continuum came the more commonly expressed view that the literacy practices of students should reflect that they have internalised the knowledge given to them by lecturers and 'made it their own'. Three of the lecturers interviewed seemed to have this understanding of knowledge in the learning process. The most frequent view, at the other end of the continuum, was that knowledge was something for the students to receive and understand, with five lecturers expressing this view. These three views of knowledge in the classroom are illustrated in the following three excerpts. Interestingly one of the lecturers who said her job was to 'cover the content so

that they know the basic stuff' also intimated awareness that this was not considered an acceptable understanding of the place of knowledge in the classroom, as is shown in this first extract.

#### Reproduction of knowledge

Lecturer D - You know, I think what I find and I'm still battling to adapt, I'm still working through this in my mind, I know outcomes-based education is the future and I should be moving towards a more applications-based, more modular kind of form et cetera um, but I find, you know with a class of 100 or so --- Um, and then to actually you know, sort of work with a more empowerment based, more assignment-based application based sort of thing, you find firstly the numbers prohibit it, and then secondly/

Sioux - Mmmm/

Lecturer D - take those overheads away and see what happens to the students...There's a huge outcry because they don't have textbooks, they feel that the only way they can cope is to write down ...as soon as you take the overheads/

Sioux - When you say overheads, you mean the notes in your lectures?

Lecturer D - Ja, I put overheads up on the screen and as I lecture they take down the notes. Um, and I don't think it's always the best form. It's like chalk and talk in some ways but um...

Sioux - They want to write notes?

Lecturer D - As soon as you take the overheads away there's a complaint and I've tried. They want to write notes, and they want **your** notes, and they don't

feel that they can cope with note taking without those. And then at least you can be sure they've written down all the points correctly to learn for exams.

#### Internalisation of knowledge

Lecturer B - I don't know, I think the bottom one [stimulus piece, response B] the person has sort of, you know sort of ...you know, it's sort of gone through his system. He's looked at it and seen that it's... I think it's meaningful to that person, even though the English is possibly not very good. Um, he's sort of digested it and made it his own, whereas the top one looks just like a whole lot of jargon to me, as though he's actually just learnt it off by heart and I lean more towards the bottom one, because it's more, he's certainly taken it in and sort of made something of it. I don't understand either but I mean the bottom one is more understandable.

Sioux - Okay, and now, why do you value this one more? Because it is more understandable to you, or do you think it's because you value this notion, you use the words "gone through the system", "digested", "made your own", that's what you put value on in learning?

Lecturer B - I don't want to know what they think they ought to know, I want to know what they know about the whole system, and it seems as though this person has actually gone through the whole thing and understands it better, learnt something that can count. They must learn what we teach them but then see how those facts apply in real life, in their life.

#### Construction of knowledge

Lecturer E - I think I've become more aware of the notion of developing people, trying to get them to appreciate what they have and what they are as opposed to them...but it's an ongoing issue as opposed to them looking at me for all the answers. I'm trying to make them more self-sufficient, more self-contained

aware of the fact that they, well if they don't have anything but they mustn't come to me looking for it, they must go and find it, go and find themselves, so that it can come up... they just need to open themselves up a bit more, to find themselves better ways to work as opposed to seeing themselves as a little container and there's nothing in the container. I think that's more or less where we are now, trying to, um, help them... we're busy trying to find where exactly are they as designers and where exactly **they** propose to be. We do try to, we try and ...I don't know if it's developing or just making them aware of what they are. We have a lot of Black students and I look at the personal diaries designed by these students. They have to go out, encapsulate how you feel about this and what you think about this and what would **you** say is a good design, what would **you** say is a bad design. Put that all together and draw from that for this project. They're not, I don't know.

Sioux - As long as there's reflection in the diary, you don't assess their drawings?

Lecturer E - We don't assess, we do assess those diaries but more in terms of 'What do you think about it? What are you doing about this?' I can't tell them what they feel, they must teach me. They must teach me how they respond to something. Let me learn about them and how who they are makes them look at a design in a certain way. They can physically make something new and emotionally too, if they make the class see the design in a new way.

Sioux Okay

Lecturer E - It would be more ....

Sioux - So that literacy which you said earlier that you don't expect them to write. But that's actually quite a bit of writing, but it's not/

Lecturer E - But those diaries are all pictures, you know to all...



Sioux - ... so it's not much writing?

Lecturer E - There's not much writing, there could be 'I like this because it's blue' or 'I did this differently to the last one'. But it's almost all drawing or talking, discussing.

Sioux - So you ask them in those diaries to reflect on things, are your students able to reflect? That's something that you have to develop?

Lecturer E - That's something that **they** have to develop. We'll say, we'll use things like "juxtaposition" and we'll say find something that looks out of place, and to them it looks out of place, but not to us, and then we say 'Okay, why did you choose this picture' And then, you know, kind of like that, they form the actual context for themselves, they get there without us explaining it to them.

The task of the academy is to generate consumers of knowledge at undergraduate level and producers of knowledge at post-graduate level. These contradictory tasks, with regard the expertise of the academy, "required inculcating a respect for expertise and delimiting its proper areas of operation all without actually transmitting the expertise itself" (Geisler 1994: 82). In response to the gate-keeping nature of academic literacy, Geisler (1994) provides a model of problem spaces to "open up expertise, to make it explicit and more available to those who are not born to it in apprenticeship training" (1994: 88). I have argued in this thesis that texts are constructed according to understandings about knowledge and that literacy practices rest on assumptions about the function and nature of knowledge. The students

expressed their understanding of lecturers' expected literacy practices on this knowledge continuum as falling primarily along the 'knowledge reproduction' end. There were a few references to being asked to apply knowledge to a new situation but most references indicated an understanding that the desired literacy practices involve memorisation of chunks of knowledge. Because I did not link particular students with particular lecturers in this study, I am unable to tell whether students took on the knowledge telling practices for the lecturers on that end of the continuum, the knowledge owning for the lecturers expecting those practices and the knowledge making practices for the one lecturer in my study who expressed that he valued those practices. The following three extracts show an articulate understanding of the reproduction of knowledge mode.

Student 10 - Mostly, I say that because I think preferring the knowledge from the textbook you know ... it's not wrong, you know, giving your own opinion but mostly it's the teachers when, the lecturers, when you're giving your answer you have to stick more to the textbook to what it says, than to what your opinion is, you know.

Sioux - So, [you are saying] we've got two different things here. You're saying you can digest it and come up with your own understanding but you're saying but **actually** what you have to do is/

Student 1 - Like just cram it.

Sioux - So what do you mean when you say you 'cram it'? What do you mean by that?

Student 1 - Like you learn it.

Sioux - But if I've never heard that word 'cram'. Can you explain what you mean?

Student 2 – Okay, like you read it, not with understanding, just to know/

Student 1 - Word for word

Student 2 - and then write it.

Student 11 - Sometimes because like learning word for word/

Student 10 - /word for word from the textbook, it's very difficult/

Student 11 - /it's very difficult, so, like maybe when you're studying you just give your own opinion and views but when we have to write on the paper, they don't want that, they want the words from the book but you can't learn the whole book now/

It would seem that students are being expected to reproduce the surface structures of academic texts without engaging in claims to knowledge that are the cornerstone of academic literacy (Geisler 1994). I now consider how elevated academic literacy practices function within the institution, given the continuum of understandings of the role of knowledge in the classroom I have just illustrated.

#### 6.4 Elevated Academic Literacy Practices

Outcomes-based education focuses on what the student can do at the end of a programme of study. This emphasis on demonstrable knowledge is interpreted by supporters of OBE as indicative of education's shift to the knowledge construction end of the continuum described above. But according to the lecturers I interviewed, few programmes follow OBE principles and according to the students no DIT departments have implemented OBE. All the students were uncertain about what the national policy of OBE means and those five students who gave hesitant understandings were all fairly negative about it.

Student 5 - It's a new way of studying, like, maybe you are doing science and then we practise, we do the practical part of the study and not that we do the theory only. I heard of that at high school.

Sioux - And they don't have it here yet?

Student 5 - I'm doing [diploma], so I don't think how can it be to do that in practicals? Maybe if I was doing something in [faculty].

Student 9 - I'm not sure what it means, but what I see it as meaning is, the powers that be, the Dean, or the Minister of Education will come to the Technikon and say 'You've got to pass this amount of people at the end of each year and within each department', um, outcomes being a result, so perhaps the standard of education must equal the standard of the students, um, so whatever that intake is, if that intake is not particularly bright, they'll drop the standard so a certain percentage of students can pass, um just to fill in a number on a form so that this many people have passed so the Tech can get their grant or whatever the next batch of students..

The students all verbalised a desire for more opportunities to engage with the content of their discipline than were presently presented. This offers a contrast to the 'unmotivated student' described by many of the lecturers in Chapter Five. But I have also regularly experienced the frustration of asking students to do more than merely reproduce knowledge and finding them unwilling to do so. Students were very clear that it was not generally expected of them to do more than passively 'listen and then write it back to them' and so they had 'not got the habit of that thing'. They indicated that there was 'no culture of reading, so we don't'.

Student 4 - Ja, we have a lot of lectures we are not, not discussing. I mean discussing because as from last year we thought we are going to have something like tutors, you know?

Sioux - You were expecting to come to the tech to have some discussion, tutorials or something?

Student 4 - Ja, because that is where we have ...have to explore, I mean like these lectures are to explore these problems we are encountering along the um... but this is not happening.

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Student 4 - I think it's better [to have tutorials]. Rather than coming to class waiting for a teacher to teach. You find the teacher, she's saying nothing or he is saying nothing and you don't understand him and Ja, or you just like I know how to read a book. Page by page

Sioux - You don't need to go to the lecture for that?

Student 4 - I can do that.

Sioux - Now tell me, some of the lecturers, not actually in my interviews but I know from working with lecturers and students, they tell me "Oh but the student won't do the reading. If you tell them to go and read this, they won't do it".

Student 4 - Ja, sometimes. It's just because, this thing is becoming a culture, you know, ja, because they don't, like, give us time to do that. They want them, I mean, they want to give us the information. They want to give us information. They want us to listen to them at what they are going to say and we are used to that now, so I am going to pick up my exam pad so I can listen and write and they don't give us books, they give us handouts, notes like this, so I have to get my notes and then wait for him or her and write those stories. So they don't have to go in the library and take a book and just pick up a book and go through it, I don't have time for that because I wasn't told to do that.

Sioux - So it's not that you don't have time, it's not because you've got no time in the day, but you don't have time because you, it's not your timetable. It wasn't, it hasn't been made into the 'culture'?

Student 4 - Yes. That is why you find that most of the students they don't write their assignments because to write an assignment you have to go through a lot of books. So when you, like, when they're given an assignment sometimes you have to read certain books so that you can get more information in that content, and you find that most of the students they don't do that, because they don't want to read, they don't have time.

Sioux - What do you mean 'They don't have time'? They've got time; they're all sitting around?

Student 4 - That's the only time that we have as students, we have time for sitting around and you wake up when it's too late.

The lecturers noted that attempts to engage the students or to expect them to do more than memorise texts was met with resistance. The students were seen as used to being 'spoon fed so it is wasting your time to ask them to read something before a lecture so we end up just reading it in the lecture'. At the same time, the students called for more opportunities to grapple with the material and content. They complained that lecturers 'just read the textbook to us'.

Student 1 - Um, I think, like there's one thing that they [the Universities] have tutorials. I think it would be better if they had tutorials for every subject, sort of thing.

Sioux - Tutorials for every subject

Student 1 - Ja, because we have to tutorials for [subject A] and [subject B] and they're so much fun, because you know, you're so glad they put you in/

Student 2 - You get a chance to do your stuff, you know

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Student 1 - Ja, because you're so relaxed that and they do group work and stuff and before you know it, we're learning, sort of thing

Student 2 - You understand much better than in lectures

Sioux - so you actually learn more from the relaxed/

Student 1 - Ja because you learn without you knowing you're learning and that's so much more fun. So at the end of the day, "Oh my gosh, I understand that."

Student 2 - Ja, for example, if like they've given you like notes, when you're writing a test where they ask questions, they expect you to write exactly what they've given you on their notes.

While the range of literacy practices I observed and discussed with lecturers and students was broad, there were a number of similarities across many of them. One of the main similarities was in terms of modes of assessment. Rowntree (1987: 1) tells us "if we want to discover the truth about an educational system, we must look into its assessment procedures...the spirit and style of student assessment defines the *de facto* curriculum". While there were exceptions, most lecturers I interviewed use only summative assessment, largely through the use of written tests and exams. Students were critical of the use of written exams to assess for practical abilities.

Student 9 - Well, fortunately our lecturers set our exams, very fortunately because I think a lot more people would come a cropper if it was external. Um, so we, they know, we do know what to write down, very definitely but not applied, well not enough applied questions, applied to the workplace. Look it's difficult to apply because it's very hands on and then to try to give applied questions to be answered on paper!

Sioux - Do they have to examine you on paper?



Student 9 - They do and then but they are now beginning to have pracs that do cover the practical side of things so, but that's not for marks. If you do something in the [workshop] then you must describe the process in writing in the exam.

One lecturer was also critical of the use of written exams to assess for practical outcomes.

Sioux - How do they get tested on that? (Work done in practicals)

Lecturer B – Well, normally they just get tested in theory.

Sioux - In a written exam?

Lecturer B - In a written exam. Also, we do have continuous assessment in the prac but it's not worth much. I'll give them a mark on basically their attendance and their interest, their aptitude, and how well they've done the small tasks that I've given them to do, but when we've got 25 kids at a time in one afternoon and, it's difficult to actually keep tabs on how well they're actually doing the task. I mean those that stick out that have got a bad attitude, you can mark them down on that, um, but they then sort of work in their different groups.

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Lecturer B - /the actual way they are examined in term of ... the most important is actually written...Ja.

Sioux ... so they write about how to [examples of practical applications of course]?

Lecturer B - Ja...I won't ask them that sort of nitty gritty question if I feel we've covered that, um, but that's why I wanted to give them a prac exam. But it's very difficult to do a prac test.

Sioux - Is that why it's not done? Because presumably if you're talking about their ability to do something in industry, you're talking about being able to do practical stuff but you're testing it actually in a way that is not to do with [industry] at all, it's to do with pen and paper, so why isn't it tested like that?

Lecturer B - Why is it tested with pen and paper, do you mean?

Sioux - Mmm

Lecturer B - I don't know. I mean I feel quite happy that I now do have a prac test at the end of this course.

Where continuous assessment is theoretically used, it is through the use of a number of smaller summative tests or assessment tasks at the end of each section of content. In most cases, there is extremely little feedback given to students and no opportunities for learning through assessment or for students to rework assessments after their evaluation. The main reason for this is pragmatic and relates to class sizes and time constraints, a problem which the lecturers record as exacerbated by the merger.

Lecturer D - But you can't do that [provide feedback or prepare students for assessments] with the classes we have. A writer-respondent is a similar thing.

Sioux - So the reason the mainstream lecturer cannot do it is not because they don't have the expertise but because they cannot cope with the class sizes?

Lecturer D - Ja...well, we could to some degree but we can't do it all. I think that's where outcomes-based and continuous assessment has a lot of merit. I really believe. But we can't, impossible, sadly.

In some cases, it would appear that there are philosophical reasons for the continued use of summative assessment only. While formative assessment serves a developmental purpose, summative assessment performs a gate-keeping role.

Lecturer I – No, I wouldn't mark [stimulus piece, response B], um I have this problem about saying 'Look I don't understand a word of this'.

Sioux - And do you have to do that a lot?

Lecturer I - Ja, and I do.

Sioux - And what happens if it's, you do all summative marking, hey? So I mean that's the mark, and if you cross them out, they get nought.

Lecturer I – Ja, that's it. That's their chance to prove themselves or not.

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Lecturer I - Ja, they do fall short of expectation because either, I don't want to ever lower what I'm trying to teach the guys, you know. I still have a certain standard that sort of projects from way before and I do believe that's very important, um, I've got a reputation to protect and stuff like that, and I appreciate that we've got students, disadvantaged students and things like that, I mean I do appreciate that, but then I've also got to be quite hard and say, but you must raise yourselves to our level. I'm going to do my best as your lecturer

for the year to do that, you know, and so when their assignments aren't good, they get nailed. I have no problem nailing them, but I never doubt their effort.

The call for authentic and integrated assessment in OBE seems to be a call for more than knowledge reproduction, but some of the lecturers seem to resist this shift and value the traditional assessment mode of exams. Exams are elevated as an educational practice associated with maintaining standards. Where exams have been dropped, the change has, as indicated, been to the use of multiple summative tests. This change has been brought about by the lecturer perception that 'students can't do them [exams], because of the change in the type of student we have, disadvantaged'. Or for the pragmatic reason that 'it's easier to mark a few shorter tests during the year than to cope with a mountain of exams at the end'. The discontinuation of a final exam has thus not occurred because it does not function as a learning activity in itself. Nor has it been dropped because it has been found to assess for knowledge reproduction only, or because it assesses for elevated literacy practices that have no capital outside of the institution.

Another literacy practice that is still in use by a number of departments is the academic essay. One lecturer pointed out the status associated with this practice in saying 'Essays are important for higher education thinking. The universities almost only use essays to assess'. Most of the comments by the lecturers about essays were in negative terms of students' inability to express themselves 'properly' and 'logically' in an essay format, without an

understanding of the socially constructed norms determining the nature of a proper or logical formatting of essays. Much has been written about the specific norms of this prestigious practice (for example Clark and Ivanič 1997, Johns 1997, Paxton 1998). Three lecturers spoke of discarding the essay but changing to paragraph questions ‘because [the students] can’t hack an essay’, ‘they just can’t write on one topic’. Most departments use essays as an assessment only once a year because of class sizes and ‘they take so long to mark, sometimes you just look for key words in the muddled writing’. The once-off nature of the essay task means that few students are inducted into the specific norms of academic writing, such as hedging (Geisler 1994: 283, Johns 1997: 60) and referencing (Angelil-Carter 1995: 99, Thesen 1994: 30). Such devices are ultimately linked to the academic literacy rules of knowledge construction and, according to Geisler (1994), give other experts access into the text to assess the validity of the knowledge claims. It would seem that students are expected to reproduce these devices because the lecturers value the devices as indicative of elevated academic literacies, without the lecturers necessarily being in a position to make knowledge claims themselves.

One lecturer admitted that she also ‘had problems writing essays at University’ but still believed it to be an essential academic practice. When I asked those lecturers who valued the essay format why they used it, they indicated that a ‘good essay shows clear thinking’ and that ‘essay writing shows they have really understood the work’. In the extract below, Lecturer A justifies the use of the essay on the grounds that it develops workplace literacies, while simultaneously

acknowledging her difficulties with this academic practice despite many years in the industry.

Sioux - It's quite interesting to me, something that you keep doing is mixing, well not mixing, I actually want to ask you is this the same thing, the notion of business language and academic language?

Lecturer A - I think there's a very strong parallel between the two. Umm having worked in industry for ten years, well, I, academic language, I battle with academic writing [laughs]/

Sioux - [laughs] Ja

Lecturer A - I still do. But I think I would have battled more if I hadn't had the business experience that I had.

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Sioux - Tell me, the one thing in the academic side, you were talking about it just now, is the essay, you were saying the paragraphs, [the students] they don't know how they work/

Lecturer A – Ja

Sioux - /Ja, now is there, is there something like, is there an equivalent to that in the business place?

Lecturer A - Ummm, there was for me because we used to do monthly reports and then I had to do an annual report, where I would have to put, you know, I'd have to actually say 'Well these are the problems that are happening in the following areas' and you know, you'd have to introduce your report and then, so, yes it would have the same sort of things.

The similarities between academic literacy and other literacies being cited here are at a superficial level, such as the use of formal language, and the use of signposting words that direct the reader through the writer's argument. The point that academic writing is hinged on knowledge claims in a way that other formal writing is not, is not addressed. It is useful at this point to consider Geisler's studies (1993, 1994, 2003) of the professionalisation of careers and how this has impacted on literacy practices in higher education. Geisler (1993: 36) explains that the professionalisation of certain careers has created "a Great Divide between expert and layperson". This process of professionalisation "required inculcating a respect for expertise [in the layperson] and delimiting its proper areas of operation - all without transmitting the expertise itself" (Geisler 1993: 36).

Literacy practices are used to separate expertise into two distinct dimensions of knowledge: the dimension of domain content and the dimension of rhetorical process. These dimensions are "both susceptible to either a naïve representation fairly close to everyday understanding or a more abstract representation characteristic of expertise. In the problem space of domain content, expertise reconfigures naïve and everyday objects into more abstract entities with different features and different relationships" (Geisler 1993: 39). Novices seem to approach texts as autonomous repositories of knowledge, "explicit in their content but utterly opaque in their rhetorical construction" (Geisler 1993: 40). Experts on the other hand manipulate the texts in abstract

ways, taking note of features that novices ignore and ignoring those to which novices attend. Geisler notes that the process of acquiring the academic literacy practices of the expert occurs gradually during higher education and is more likely to occur among students from middle class backgrounds whose upbringing includes “a whole host of interaction patterns with texts that are not common in other indigenous cultures” (1994: 48). Geisler cautions that the development of these two distinct spheres of domain knowledge and rhetorical processes should not be accounted for as the result of human processing limitations. They are rather an “important mechanism by which our society delivers expertise to some while withholding it from others” (Geisler 1994: 45).

It is within this context of the development of academic literacy that I question the elevated status accorded it in my data. Only one lecturer said he did not use much writing in his curriculum because academic writing had no capital in his industry.

Lecturer E - I don't think they have to be able to write at all for [my] industry. Their drawing of the design is much more important and, sort of analytical type drawings, explanatory type drawings for design where they focus on an area that is more relevant than another area, or if they have to do a drawing for [industry], ---/

Sioux - No written explanation?



Lecturer E - /and that's not something you can really talk about or write about, you know, you have to do it and then discuss it, so the test in industry would really be can [a qualified person] understand your drawing or ..

Sioux - Mm

Lecturer E - Writing is never important. The writing will only be important if they come back and lecture, which is something I have become very aware of ...For most... producing future lecturers that go to other departments or they come back here, and for web page or advertising your work.

Sioux - Okay, so it's more like copy. And copy isn't really academic writing? It's a different type of writing?

Lecturer E – Ja, it does not require a careful explanation. Academic writing like essays and things, it's just not, well, it's not relevant.

If academic literacy is, as I have outlined above, linked to the making of knowledge claims in a socially exclusive mode, it is perhaps pertinent to ask whether knowledge claims are a target practice. In many cases, the target practice as expressed by lecturers and discussed in the next section of this chapter, seemed rather to be training based.

Many lecturers spoke of the occupational nature of technikon studies as is indicated by the name 'Durban Institute of Technology'; nevertheless the academic practices associated with higher education remain elevated. Many lecturers and students explained that university students are 'better' or 'stronger', and therefore cope with the 'focus on theory' in universities. This

seems to indicate that the focus on practical learning and application in the technikons is perceived to result from students' inability to cope with theoretical academic writing, which is hinged on knowledge construction. Lecturers and students also gave many positive reasons for a practical emphasis, as discussed in the next section of this chapter, but the defensive comments about the use of traditional academic literacy practices indicates that these practices remain elevated over practical practices.

Student 10 - But then from what I've heard it's like in university they have more theory there, in like at the tech you have to go to the thing, go look to the work and have practical things through the job and stuff at that, but whereas in the university it's always theory, theory, theory. Always school, always, you can't just/

Student 11 - And they expect you, they expect you, they expect more from you than here at tech, you know.

Sioux - What do you mean, they expect more? Expect more what?

Student 10 - Like because it's like, you can't get in if you don't have distinction.

Lecturer I - Well, I think varsity is way ahead of us on that [formal writing as opposed to informal reporting]. They really emphasise it, this is what I think, I don't know, emphasise the whole idea of get into the library and read this book and they test that in their assignments, they're almost doing academic literature reviews and that. I don't know whether they've got to do that, but it shows that...

Sioux - Do you think our students need to be able to read and write in an academic kind of way?

Lecturer I - I'm not sure. At B.Tech they have to. It's quite weird because in their first three years we pump application, they come to fourth year, boom, pure academic skills. Students, I'm sure they get like, 'But hang on, you've been pushing practical before'.

Literature reviews, which the lecturer above indicates are one of the practices expected of students at a university, require the writer to evaluate opposing knowledge claims using traditionally accepted text devices to express the evaluation. The way in which the students and lecturers positioned technikon literacy practices along the continuum of the role of knowledge in the classroom, indicates that such an evaluation of knowledge claims would be inappropriate but that status is nonetheless, still accorded to the surface text devices. Interestingly, this lecturer seems to elevate the literacy practices of the university but then questions whether the Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech) shouldn't be more applied, in keeping with the literacy practices of a diploma. He then asks the question "But if the B.Tech, even the M. and the D., I mean if they are practical and applied, are they really masters' and doctorates?"

Discourse communities in the higher education setting are usually conceptualised as disciplines (for example Taylor et al 1988, Becher and Trowler 2001) but they can also be the departments or programmes, which use certain discourses. One department seemed to have a clear divide between

university educated and technikon educated lecturers, with each group valuing quite different literacy practices.

Sioux - You sound like there's almost a, been a split in the two groups of lecturers?

Student 9 - There is.

Sioux - Those that you spoke about developing passionate students/

Student 9 - Yes, very definitely

Sioux - /and those who...

Student 9 - And others who have been here too long, they've been university trained, for a start.

Sioux - So that's a factor?

Student 9 - They're getting university degrees salaries, but they don't even like...I don't even know. They really, really, shouldn't be...

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Student 9 - It's over education, having to sit up for 24 hours learning for an exam, then they come out of it they can't even communicate with the common person because they are ...um --- they just can't communicate, purely because they've been taught in such a manner, um. I mean, [diploma], it is, a, the career is passion, so your lecturers should be passionate, every one of them, I'm sorry, for the fees that I'm paying.

Lecturer B - ---You know, really, that's ridiculous [asking students to remember specific scientific details] and the funny thing is that I've managed not knowing every scientific detail in the industry, and those people who are lecturing to the last scientific detail, know stuff-all about the industry, they've never been out there and they could never make it out there anyway, you know, so I don't know.

If our students bring with them home literacies that are not utilised or valued in higher education, and if they will later need workplace literacies that are not as institutionally elevated as the surface features of academic practices, are we not misdirecting our efforts in developing such features, especially if we are not doing so within an understanding of the way in which academic literacies function to make knowledge claims?

“The literacy practices of experts in the academy are organized around the creation and transformation of academic knowledge; the literacy practices of novices, on the other hand, are organized around the getting and displaying of that knowledge” (Geisler 1994: 81). There is an increasing call for technikon lecturers to upgrade their qualifications and to undertake research; perhaps within this appeal is the hope that lecturers assume the creation and transformation of academic knowledge. There is certainly incentive to produce research in technikons with a large percentage of the SAPSE<sup>1</sup> payment for publication being allocated to the lecturer's research account. But I am concerned that the elevated nature of surface features of academic literacies

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<sup>1</sup> In 1985 the Department of Education introduced the South African Post-Secondary Education (SAPSE) system to stimulate and measure research output at universities by paying institutions

will be even more privileged with the name change to 'Universities of Technology', and that an environment where such literacies are especially difficult to access by students, and to some extent by staff, they may be inappropriate. The elevated status of academic literacies in such an environment may result in a slavish adherence to their textual devices, even where they can be used in a knowledge reproduction manner only and do not attempt to make the claims to knowledge associated with academic literacy. While a broad understanding of the term 'university' would not dictate the use of elevated academic literacies, a narrow understanding might. Knowledge construction in an applied, practical mode may be less valued if the name 'University' indicates an aspiration to elevated academic literacies. I question the induction (or failure of students who are not inducted) into elevated academic literacies to which our students have had little or no prior access, by virtue of their socio-economic group or, given South Africa's history, their race group<sup>1</sup>.

I am conscious of the criticism of romanticism (Street 1996: 2) of alternative literacy practices and agree that where fluency in elevated academic literacy is a requirement for success and this fluency is related to academic literacy's function to make claims to knowledge, it is the role of the educator to scaffold such fluency. But we also need to question where the requirement stems from, the relevance of this requirement and whose interests the requirement serves.

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for publications in approved journals etc. At the time, technicians were not expected to produce research as a core function.

## 6.5 Industry Literacy Practices

The tail end of the new nomenclature, 'Universities of Technology', seems to focus on the link with industry, a discussion to which I now turn. All of the lecturers made reference to their industry norms and their working relationship with industry. The direct curriculum link between technikons and industry is highly valued by lecturers and students, and was expressed as a defining factor in constructing the literacy practices of the institution.

Student 8 - And most people say from what I heard, they say the students are better...that Technikon students are better than a university student because technikons include lots of practical work.

Sioux - So Technikon students are better prepared? That's the practical/

Student 8 - The technikon students have an understanding that is straightforward for the work.

Student 9 - Um, again, techs are very practical, hands-on, you're going to go out into the workplace and know what to do. --- I sort of have a working knowledge of what universities are and a lot of my friends went to universities and I just don't see, there is no practical application from the university graduate. All employers moan about university graduates.

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<sup>1</sup> The rapid emergence of a black middle class since the democratic elections has decreased the correlation between race and class, but it is still significant.

Lecturer A - The whole philosophy behind the course is not just to give them information about [discipline], but to first of all make sure that whatever they are learning about is what the industry wants them to know, so, we have a very close relationship with industry. --- Absolutely, we do, um because otherwise what are we here for? If we're not supplying industry with what they want, then why do we have the course?

Sioux - So your goal is less academic in a sense, uh, maybe that's the wrong word, um. It's not your/

Lecturer A - It's not theoretically driven, it's not academically theoretically driven. It is industry driven; it is what is the industry looking for? Are they looking for more [one aspect of discipline] people or are they looking for [another aspect] or what particular skills must the students have.

Van Heerden (2001:10) states that "In class [learners] know vicariously, learn by memorization, and write by copying and shifting information - because this is what they perceive the lecturer requires. In industry they know directly, learn by doing and write by transforming knowledge." Technikons have traditionally tapped into the industry's ways of 'knowing directly' through an experiential learning component, through the use of industry representation on Advisory Boards to reflect on and advise in curriculum issues and through the extensive use of part-time and contract lecturers from within industry.

In the previous section, I raised concerns about the exaltation of academic literacy practices within technikons. But the student and lecturer discourses about industry, coupled with emerging discourses in national documents, have



made me equally cautious about the way in which workplace literacies are framed in technikons. A number of comments indicated the dangerous potential for technikons to become industry trainers such that we become producers of uncritical skilled labour.

Lecturer A - ---but again all of those outcomes were based on meetings that we had with industry, so we looked at what were the industry outcomes and then/

Sioux - You're working backwards from your final product or rather your final person that Industry wants/

Lecturer A - Yes

Sioux - And you say industry wants it to be like this and you work backwards?

Lecturer A – Ja

Lecturer B - We're trying to equip them to find a job, so I'm not really interested in the theory side, I mean you know as long as they know how to [practical skill], they've got a feel for [the industry] ---, to me that's good enough, that's going to give them a good grounding to start off.

Lecturer F - But at the end of the day we've also got an industry check on them as well which, in our subjects, which is quite, in our field is quite practical. We have an external industry check, uh, with the national exam board, and they do not get their diplomas until they've passed that. So we always teach to prepare them for that exam.

By bringing into question the appropriateness of certain elevated academic literacy practices to DIT, we must beware a pendulum swing to a technician interpretation of workplace practices. There is clearly a need to develop in our students a critical response. Criticality is however often associated with elevated academic literacies. One student said that university graduates have 'become over-educated, um, and they're taught, to think a little bit too much, to think above your average Joe, they're taught to think way above the average Joe. They cause problems in society'. One lecturer commented, 'Our job is to teach them to do the job, not to analyse the job. If they can even get a job with our unemployment they must be able to run with it. To do what is expected of them'.

In the South African environment, the demand is for skilled labour, a demand which higher education has a clear responsibility to meet. However, this demand should not result in the development of a skilled labour force that is unable to meet the need for the advancement of knowledge.

South Africa's HE institutions have sanctioned a remarkable degree of state intervention – a situation that would have been unthinkable a decade ago. This has happened because the cultural politics that anchored the discourse over higher education in the old South Africa has yielded to the idea of the primacy of economics as the basis for all social relations. As a result of this transaction, tertiary education has been turned away from the free, rational advancement of knowledge towards the production of professionals to build a competitive economy

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It is hard to argue against the primacy of economics in a country so obviously in need of economic growth, but there are many dangers inherent in the increasingly exclusive focus in higher education on immediate industrial training needs, as this could be achieved at the expense of space in the curriculum for the development of creative, critical thinkers. While eight of the lecturers indicated significant influence on the curriculum by industry, two lecturers referred to concerns regarding the construction of academic literacy as being primarily about meeting industry norms. They both indicated a resistance to this.

Lecturer C - The technicians are always run down [in our industry], because we don't know how to teach the students the 'right things' and...

Sioux - So there isn't a good relationship with industry, you would say?

Lecturer C - There isn't in general, but I've been going out, and every year I get closer and closer to top, top of people in industry so, and we've started developing quite a nice sort of relationship with some of them, but I'd say, and a lot of ex-students that were at tech have now started their own [businesses in the industry] and they've started employing technician students as they graduate, so it improves. It's improving the industry as well; I think.

Sioux - What has industry got against what you do? Why do they/

Lecturer C - They prefer to have, they think that we're messing students around by getting them to [design and discuss issues pertaining to the industry] and, they want [the graduates] to be [skilled artisans] and to sit and just work.

Sioux - Okay, so industry is happy with this move [away from formal writing]? --- It seems like you feel you've got a lot of freedom?

Lecturer E - And I'm the head of department so in a way I have all the freedom but there is also this huge responsibility of trying to produce people that can go out and do meaningful, development work of a nature that hasn't been done before, so I have to try and identify what to do.

Sioux - What do you mean by the 'nature that hasn't been done before'?

Lecturer E - Um, we're not really just training people to go into [industry] and fulfil a standard role. --- The nature of the work out there changes quite dramatically and we prepare someone to be able to adapt to all that. They should be able to do all of those things or maybe none of them. We don't know, and they don't know when they leave here, what it is they're going to do.

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Lecturer E - So in a way we have to develop all these skills that industry wants and also try and identify what exactly needs to be done with our students, and a big factor is the fact that we are in Durban, uh... there's so much indigenous stuff to tap into, a fact that we often look at. Industry doesn't look at that.

The "incursion of market forces" (Fataar 2001) into higher education could result in an imbalance in the power relations between industry and technikons. In this next extract, one student reflects on the need for a higher education curriculum to address more than just technical industry skills.

Student 13 - I think tertiary education is, that's where the conscience is going to come from eventually. --- Conscience should be instilled into students, very definitely.

Sioux - Okay, but is 'conscience' valued at present in the curriculum?

Student 13 - I don't know umm, the general curriculum?

Sioux - Mm, well I suppose you can only look at your own experience.

Student 13 - Well, I mean ....not really. We must just learn things.... umm...

Sioux - The kind of behaviours, let me put it this way because it might not be what you call conscience, the kind of behaviours that you think are important for a successful life, whether it's good morals or whether it is being punctual or whatever you think it is that society needs or that the workplace values. Are those things in the curriculum here? Are you being prepared for them?

Student 12 - (tape unclear) I think we are (tape unclear) given the skills to, how to do (unclear) if the boss could tell me what to do, I would be able to do it.

Perhaps it is the issue of 'conscience' that is addressed in the focus on attitudes and values in OBE. However, the current emphasis on economic imperatives over educational goals could result in a neglect of these aspects of higher education. Singh (2001: 9) warns that the "broad notion of social accountability and social responsiveness in the discourse on higher education transformation is being thinned down and reduced to the terms of market responsiveness".

This danger is more immediate in the case of technikons, or Universities of Technology, because of their potential overlap with the TOP QC, as it is identified by the consultative document entitled *An Interdependent National*

*Qualifications Framework System* (July 2003). This discussion document, developed jointly by the Department of Education and the Department of Labour, provides a detailed framework for the positioning of education in South Africa within QCs (Qualification and Quality Assurance Councils). The three QCs identified in this document are the TOP QC, the General and Further Education and Training QC (GENFET QC) and the Higher Education QC (HI-ED QC). The TOP QC functions to co-ordinate all workplace-based learning and is accountable to the Department of Labour. The GENFET QC and the HI-ED QC would answer to the Department of Education.

The TOP QC would be responsible for generating standards, developing qualifications etc for trade, occupation and professional practice and 'qualifications unique to the workplace' (Interdependent NQF system 2003: 52). The TOP QC will operate at all qualification levels (1 – 10) within one pathway (ibid: 17) and will be able to design qualifications at all levels of this pathway so that learners do not have to leave the workplace in order to study at the higher levels. AD practitioners at DIT have expressed, in response to this document, a concern that:

While increased control of education by the Department of Labour may impact positively on South Africa's immediate training needs, it could have negative long-term effects. Industry may be less likely to value areas such as critique and research in the curriculum. Also there is the very real possibility that the presently collaborative relationship between industry and technikons may experience a power-shift such that training becomes technicist rather than technical, thus ensuring a workforce that is non-critical and incapable of self-development ...The proposed model

loses the discipline focus of the New Academic Plan model and becomes more like a job description. There has been a shift in focus from knowledge construction to occupational context. The potential result of this simplification of H.E. is to restrict the value placed on innovation and critical development.

Powell, Harrison and McKenna 2003: 4

The present industry discourses at DIT make the institution especially susceptible to an emphasis on workplace skills over the need for the development of socially responsible, critical graduates. These discourses have been given further dominance by the post-merger Audit Information Management System (AIMS) project being undertaken at DIT to address the dire financial situation of the institution. The decisions being taken are based on a model of higher education as business with the viability of programmes determined primarily in terms of profit and income generating potential. “Invoking notions of efficiency to make higher education less wasteful and self-indulgent may well produce important pedagogical and social benefits”, writes Singh (2001: 9), but she goes on to express apprehension about the trend of narrowing the contexts and concerns of such notions “and the disturbing implications of such trends for the broader values and purposes often associated with higher education”.

The economic needs of post-Apartheid South Africa, coupled with the increasing demand for globalised knowledge and skills, make it difficult to argue against the primacy of training practices. “The role of higher education in

facilitating social benefits is viewed mainly through the prism of responsiveness to the 'market'" (Singh 2001: 11). Participation in a global economy cannot occur along terms that take no cognisance of our country's history or social development needs.

The narrowing down of the multiple social purposes and goods of higher education to economic imperatives is particularly worrying in contexts where democratic dispensations are new or fragile, and public institutions of higher education have broader social development responsibilities than their counterparts in more stable political and economic systems, which usually have a range of social institutions and agencies to draw on for the sustenance of a democratic culture.

Singh 2001: 11

The immediate needs of the labour force may be met by uncritically training students in workplace practices, but in the long-term, higher education as a whole, both at Universities and Universities of Technology, needs to generate the critical reflection required by a society in transition.



## **Chapter Seven – Conclusion**

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The timing of this research had major implications on the data and subsequent focus. Nationally, the transformation of higher education within an emergent democracy positions all the discourses as being 'in transition'. Because the norms and values of our society are 'up for grabs', the discourses constructing education are in a state of flux. Institutionally, the creation of a merged Durban Institution of Technology has been beset by financial difficulties with the concomitant increase in use of pure economic and business discourses over those of social redress or education. With these dynamics in mind, I will, in this concluding chapter, evaluate the contribution of this thesis to the field of academic development and to higher education generally.

### **7.1. Implications for Academic Development**

SAAAD was set up as an organisation for academic development practitioners engaged in the business of being change agents in various South African higher education institutions. In Chapter Three, I discussed how my first few SAAAD conferences made me aware of the transformation discourses. I was aware that the discourses of this group were quite different from the ones that underpinned and constructed our practices at Technikon Natal but it is only with hindsight that I can see that the conflict was between the equity discourses of some of the historically disadvantaged institutions and the ESL support discourses of my historically advantaged institution. However, over the last ten

years, academic development discourses have shifted from equity based to those of efficiency (Boughey 2003).

Volbrecht (2002: 115) indicates that the conflict between discourses within academic development make it difficult to promote the inclusive approach to literacy development which he outlines in his thesis and I have tried to do justice to in the third cycle of Chapter Three. Using Morphet's three SAAAD discourses (1995) of support, policy and capacity, Volbrecht contends that these three discourses continue to play out today and result in the incoherent nature in which mainstreaming of academic development is described in the White Paper on Education and Training (Department of Education 1997). Because our work is still perceived as a remedy for ailments, AD practitioners are forced to do what Volbrecht (2002: 149) calls "tout their wares". They have to be evangelists working with the enthusiastic few because there are no development plans in the institution.

In Chapter Three I described how the acquisition of academic literacies has been seen as a function of student development, and one that is perceived to be closely linked to or equated with language development. I believe a shift has to occur in academic development in which literacy development becomes the primary task of staff development so that educators are made aware of the role academic literacy acquisition plays in student success, and that staff are supported in their own ongoing acquisition and critique of academic literacies. The focus on educator and learner discourses in the subsequent three chapters

of this thesis positioned academic development within an integrated concept involving the development of educators, learners, curricula and institutions.

Chapter Four considered the discourse of the 'student problem', where high failure rates are linked to specifically students' low language proficiency, resulting in their difficulties in interpreting texts perceived to be neutrally autonomous. "Our greatest, most fundamental error is the assumption held, stated or unstated, that the problem is, first and foremost, with the black student, or with most black students" (Vilakazi and Tema 1985: 19), without reflecting on the problems caused by our "troubled social structures" (Vilikazi and Tema 1985: 21). My thesis proposes that AD practitioners address this by working with colleagues across disciplinary perspectives. "One way of describing an academic field is in terms of its dominant discourses " (Rowland 2003:17). Academic development needs to take on an awareness-raising task through which educators are encouraged to question how the dominant discourses of their disciplines function to delineate areas of enquiry and determine appropriate rhetorical processes.

Rowland identifies the dominant discourse about teaching and learning in the United Kingdom to be a "generic, a-theoretical and non-academic activity" (2003: 20). "The assumption seems to be that teaching is not a proper subject of scholarly research and can exist in a social world almost entirely devoid of intellectual enquiry" (Gosling 2003: 71). My thesis provides evidence of the need for educational research by discipline specialists who thereby become

critically aware of the norms and values underpinning their ways of being. Following Rowland (2000) and Zuber-Skerritt (1992), I argue for educational research as a mode of transformation. Specifically, I argue that literacy studies conducted by educators can be the means by which traditional educational discourses are questioned. “The values which teaching supports and the values which are embedded in the curriculum choices need to be made explicit and examined” (Gosling 2003:71). Unless we focus on the discourses constructing the institution and each discipline within it, assumptions remain unchallenged or unjustified.

The challenge Chapter Four puts to AD practitioners is thus one of staff development. Educators need to be confronted by the dominance of the autonomous model of texts and supported in their questioning of the literacy practices constructing their discipline. In this way educators can begin to provide more equitable access to the dominant discourses to which success in higher education is so closely linked, while simultaneously developing a critical awareness of how these discourses function to construct power relations.

In Chapter Five, I considered the difficulties experienced by educators and learners in developing an ‘academically literate identity’, and the tensions between this and other identities valued by educators and learners. This has important implications for the field of academic development in that we are confronted by the shortcomings of notions of motivation as an explanation for student success. Where success is understood as the acquisition of the literacy

practices constructing the particular discipline within the particular institution, questions are raised as to how and why students are or are not invested in acquiring these practices. My thesis raises questions as to how the curriculum can better induct students into a new identity, be it an academically literate identity or workplace literate identity, without requiring students to reject the socially constructed ways of knowing that they bring with them to the institution. I echo the question of Clarence-Fincham et al: "How do we harness our learners' diverse experiences in the classroom and use all the resources they bring to it?" (2002: vii).

In an article published almost ten years ago, I concluded with the statement "ESL students are, by-and-large, expected to fit into the norms of the L1 Technikon. This is clearly problematic and alienating for many ESL students. Re-curriculation is necessary in order to include more students in the content of the classroom" (McKenna 1985: 739). While my subsequent readings, experiences and studies have led me to develop my understandings beyond those of language use per se, I believe my conclusion still holds true. As Chapter Five indicates, the changes required are at the level of increased access to the ways of being expected by higher education. Similarly Cope and Kalantzis argue: "For those outside the discourses and cultures of certain realms of power and access, acquiring these discourses requires explicit explanation ... Students from historically marginalised groups, however, need explicit teaching more than students who seem destined for a comfortable ride into the genres and cultures of power" (1993:8). But my thesis argues further

that change is also required at the level of questioning whose interests are served by the ways in which higher education discourses are presently constructed.

Volbrecht is very clear that literacy development needs to acknowledge the interplay between “competence, identity and power relations” (2002a: 131). The use of literacy development as a means of acculturation is thus cautioned against. His emphasis on lifelong learning as the focus of academic development work ensures that literacy development is not perceived as a revised version of student support but is integral to staff development, curriculum development, student development and policy development. My thesis makes similar claims through my consideration of how academic literacy is constructed by educators and learners and where gaps exist in these constructions.

In Chapter Six, I raised concerns about the elevated nature of academic literacies while also expressing my disquiet at the increasing use in higher education of economic discourses over those of social transformation. AD practitioners will have a valuable role to play in mediating and critiquing the high skills discourse, particularly as they are called upon to assist in the re-circulation required for SAQA registration. At DIT this shift was picked up to a limited extent by curriculum development practitioners while staff development practitioners battled to shift from the workshop model focussing on teaching methodology. My thesis provides some indications as to where academic

development will need to focus if it is to provide the institution with a critical voice. There is an argument that the work of academic development is to enhance the intellectual capital of institutions. In developing the literacies of both learners and educators, academic development can play a role in the growth of both the human and structural forms of intellectual capital. Chapter Six highlights areas of concern in terms of which literacies are to be valued and developed.

In her consideration of the shift in focus from equity to efficiency, Boughey indicates that many of the changes in higher education, and specifically in academic development are “symbolic of economic rather than egalitarian concerns” (2003: 6). At a meeting of CHED<sup>1</sup> at DIT on 8 August 2003, the Vice-Principal: Academic expressed the shift in very clear terms: “I will not interfere in your projects so long as they relate to the task of teaching and learning. And your work with teaching and learning must be focussed on increasing pass rates, increasing throughput, increasing retention. This should be the only focus of CHED’s work.”<sup>2</sup> Chapter Six of this thesis supports the call for increased efficiency but calls for a contextualisation of education within a developing South Africa that critiques notions of academic literacy and training discourses, while also avoiding the traps of the ‘three R’s’: romanticism, relevance and relativism (Street 1996: 2).

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<sup>1</sup> The Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) was formed at DIT in 2003 to encompass the various academic development units from the merged institutions.

<sup>2</sup> The new funding formula is linked to throughput.

In concluding this section on the implications of this thesis for the field of academic development, I return to the central argument of the thesis: Education is a social activity. Because education is a social activity, it raises questions about the relationship between education and society and the nature of both education and society. Gosling (2003: 72) warns that academic development which focuses only on the technical aspects of embedding key skills into the curriculum without addressing these fundamental questions will be impoverished and naïve.

The focus in this thesis on the socially constructed nature of educational practices, stressed the ways in which these practices function to exclude some students. Unfortunately, education is not generally perceived as theoretically based so few educators are encouraged to reflect on the exclusionary nature of these practices. Rowland (2003) cautions that while everyone acknowledges the differences between subject disciplines, many assume that teaching, learning, and even research are generic. This results in a view that “teaching and learning is primarily a practical, rather than theoretical, activity” (Rowland 2003: 15). In this view, the skills of this practice can be learnt with a bit of effort from the academic whose intellectual efforts should be concentrated on discipline related research. Research in general is extremely limited within technikons, and the little that occurs is within discipline areas rather than higher education. There is a conformist approach to interdisciplinary studies or research that is not directed within the traditions of the discipline. "During most of this century [last century] there developed inside South Africa a distinctively



conservative research tradition which has defined what counts as appropriate knowledge in the various disciplines" (Jansen 1991: 3). This conservative tradition has closed education as a valid area of research. Until recently, qualifications in the field of higher education held by educators were considered horizontal rather than vertical and thus were not recognised for promotion purposes. Higher education is still considered a contentious area of study by educators who are not in the Education department.

In cases where education is seen to be a theoretical field, the field is understood to belong to researchers within the teacher-training Education department and not to have immediate relevance for higher educators across all disciplines. The emphasis, in this thesis, on the impact of our practices on students' understanding of and access to higher education practices, advocates that all educators engage in reflection on the epistemological base from which they act. It is the obligation of academic development to introduce other educators to the body of knowledge about higher education practice, and to emphasise that the socially constructed practice of higher education is open to "disciplined inquiry and study, and to demonstrate that academic work, in common with other forms of professional activity, has scholarly foundations" (Candy 1996 in Volbrecht 2002: 106).

In the formation of CHED at DIT during 2003, there was much debate as to the need for a designated Research department within CHED specifically for educational research. The majority view was that it was the central work of the

whole of academic development to encourage and develop reflective practice and educational research in the institution and that a separate department for this purpose was contradictory. Ironically, the separation of research from other areas of academic development work was supported by two very different groups of AD practitioners, the one viewed research as paramount and therefore needing the recognition and credibility of a separate department, and the second viewed research as being outside of their job descriptions. In the end research was subsumed as part of all academic development work for the pragmatic structural reason that only four Head of Department allowances were allocated to academic development<sup>1</sup> and there would thus only be four functional areas. Within both CHED and the institution's management was the misunderstanding that research referred only to discipline-specific research as opposed to educational research and little understanding about how educational research could be integrated into literacy development. I believe this thesis has highlighted the need for educational research into our practices as a collaborative effort by mainstream lecturers and AD practitioners.

## **7.2. Implications for Higher Education**

In Chapter Four, I presented data showing an understanding of texts as autonomous and an understanding of language as the neutral means by which meaning is communicated. Student competence was seen to comprise

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of going to printing, this has been further reduced to two HOD allowances as part of an institutional cost-cutting exercise and CHED, along with a number of other departments, has been placed "under further investigation". Also a number of departments have been recommended for closure or put under probation.

primarily of a generalised proficiency in Standard English. As a result of this, there is little questioning in higher education about how the literacies of students, staff and subject content interrelate. The theorising in this thesis of these relationships needs to be disseminated more broadly and “discursive space” (Jacobs 2003) needs to be made in the curriculum for critical awareness of these relationships. An awareness of these literacies, “embedded in approaches to teaching and learning and other institutional and professional practices, need to be developed in order to promote the acquisition of student literacies” (Volbrecht 2002: 225).

In Chapter Five, I considered the identities students bring with them to the institution and the identities that they are expected to adopt within the academy. Because identities, constructed by literacy practices, hinge on norms and values, there is often conflict in the acquisition of new identities. Equally problematic is the subtle ways in which literacy practices are taught. The unconscious nature of many of our expected norms makes them extremely difficult to make overt for the purposes of teaching or critique. However, I believe I have made a strong case for the explicit examination of the values underpinning teaching and embedded in the curriculum.

Outcomes-based education calls for the clear curricularisation of attitudes and values. Attitudes and values are inherent in every curriculum and the call for transparency is valid, because when such values are hidden in a supposedly neutral curriculum they become less accessible to some and privilege others

whose ways of being outside of the academy are similar to those embedded in the literacy practices of the academy. But this thesis also highlights the need for caution in the endeavour to promote transparent induction into values and attitudes. Higher education must consistently ask itself questions such as: Whose values and who is served by a society with these values?

Chapter Six questioned the elevated status of academic literacies at DIT while also expressing concern about the rise in training discourses that lack a critical aspect in higher education generally. Kraak (2001) identifies a shift in higher education policy in South Africa from a progressive redress discourse to a conservative capitalist discourse. As Lemmer points out "higher education policy is a species of second-order consequence of change elsewhere in the political and social fabric" (1998: 18).

The post-industrial nature of present higher education is "characterized by turbulent change, information overload, competitiveness, uncertainty and, sometimes, organizational decline" (Becher and Trowler 2001: 4). Becher and Trowler state that this period of fluctuation and change has led to, amongst other consequences, the search for new academic identities and substantive discipline growth. I humbly suggest that this thesis adds my voice to this search.

### **7.3. Personal Concluding Comments**

In Chapter One, I indicated that this thesis seeks to research students' constructions of themselves as learners and how they conceptualise themselves within the academic context as well as lecturers' constructions of themselves as teachers within the academic context. A major concern of this study has been to explore the implications in higher education of the ongoing process of literacy development. But the thesis writing process has also been a personal journey of literacy development, which itself relates to the research question..

As one takes on the discourses of 'the expert', the literacy practices become everyday; the complex text structures begin to seem straightforward. Texts that seemed distant and difficult now seem easy to read and the metadiscourse of academic texts now become spaces for the expert reader to analyse and critique the elevated discourse. In short, "Professional identity becomes part of personal identity" (Larson 1977). My supervisor phrased it as "I realised that I had internalised academic literacy practices when I could read an academic journal as I was cooking or lying in bed".

One problem with becoming comfortable with the academic literacy of one's discipline, such that one can produce texts according to those norms, is that we become party to what Geisler (1994: 94) calls "sociological dynamics legitimising professional privilege". In this thesis I have attempted to meet the academic literacy norms of a doctoral thesis in order to construct knowledge

about academic literacies. But there has been a certain tension between this developing thesis writing practice and my questioning of the ways in which literacy practices (such as those of this thesis) are difficult to access by those whose primary discourses may not be valued by the academy. Working within a post-structural paradigm has allowed me to resolve this tension by foregrounding the student and educator voice in the data and striving for a writing style that “reflects the historical situatedness of human knowing” (Geisler 1994: 94).

In allowing discourses to emerge from the data and then going to the literature to assist in my analysis, I have had less control over the discourses with which I engage in this thesis. I found myself investigating discourses of identity and motivation in Chapter Five and the training discourse in Chapter Six, neither of which I had foreseen when I embarked on this study. This has led to uncertainty on my part as I engage with academic fields outside my realm of ‘expertise’. My post-structural stance, explicated in Chapter Two, gave me the reassurance that all knowledge is open to contestation.

Any feelings of expertise that I may have had at the beginning of the research process were in the realm of the intersection between language and literacy investigated in Chapter Four. But these were soon diminished by the difficulties I experienced in analysing the data. Furthermore the post-structural orientation I have used in this thesis made it imperative that I consider the discourses of language and literacy, discourses with which I felt familiar, in the light of the

other emerging discourses of identity, motivation, the Technikon context, OBE, the workplace etc.

My own identity as a writer of a doctoral thesis has been transitional. My supervisor refused to engage in a relationship based on a large power differential. Her feedback was in the form of debate and rarely in the form of correction. While this was good for my confidence, it lacked the reassuring teacher-pupil dynamic whereby she would tell me what to do next. I was thus expected to take on the role of fellow academic rather than student; I found this intimidating but important in terms of my developing academic identity. My supervisor frequently told me that I had found the 'doctoral voice' in my writing, an indication, I believe, that I was beginning to feel comfortable with the post-structural identity of portraying a partial representation of knowledge.

Earlier in the thesis writing process I was extremely anxious that my understanding of a reading or interpretation of the data might be 'wrong': an anxiety that often paralysed the writing process. My supervisor was quick to draw my attention to this misplaced desire to work within objective notions of presenting the 'reality out there' when she commented that I had unconsciously slipped into the 'Royal We' in a paragraph about which I felt uncomfortable. I was not only hiding my identity because of feelings of insecurity but also in transition between the identities of 'positivist scientific researcher' and 'post-structural qualitative researcher'. While the latter identity is one in which I am highly invested, the former is the default academic identity valued by my family

and colleagues. I complete this phase of my academic journey with many questions but also with a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in the construction of literacies in higher education.



## Appendix A – Stimulus Piece<sup>1</sup>

Name and discuss the three forms of taxation.

A) South Africa uses progressive, proportional and regressive taxes. Progressive tax, (e.g. South African income tax), is when the ratio of tax paid to taxable income increases as taxable income increases. Proportional tax (e.g. South African Company tax) is when the average tax is always equal to the marginal rate. Regressive taxes are usually indirect. Example VAT. And sins tax. The rate is the same however since low-income consumers spend a greater proportion of their income on goods which carry VAT than high income consumers the rate between tax paid and income is greater for low-income households.

Name and discuss the three forms of taxation.

B) Progressive tax is the only fair tax and he must use it because it is too good. If you earn more you must pay more tax and that is right because we need police and roads and hospitals and the poor people cannot pay for this things. But the goverment must make this things with the money from the rich peoples. But even the poor can pay but not so much because they are sufering. Then proportional tax is when the percent you pay is the same but that makes a different amount because maybe you might earn more than your next-door neighbour so then you can pay more. If your country is rich like in America this is a good tax but if you had apartheid then you have too many poor people and he must have progressive tax. Then regressive tax it is too bad because the rich people have extra money for savings and for big bonds (on there mansions) so they are not paying VAT on that wheras the poor only buying things with VAT.

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<sup>1</sup> These pieces were used to begin most of the interviews (see Chapter Two, Section 4). This is a genuine tutorial question and response A is a direct transcript of a student's response (which is, in turn, a copy from the textbook), while response B is a genuine but composite transcript from a few students' responses selected for the non-academic nature of the literacy practices.

## **Appendix B – Interview Prompts<sup>1</sup>**

### **Lecturer Interviews**

- 1) Respond to stimulus piece. Which piece is written better? Which would achieve higher marks? Which piece do you prefer?
- 2) Written assessments – Do students meet written expectations? If not, where do they fall short?
- 3) What is your experience of (student) learning? How/what do you learn? Problems?
- 4) What is the lecturer's role in terms of student learning?
- 5) What are the main outcomes of your course? What is the rationale for these outcomes? Can your students meet these outcomes?
- 6) In terms of texts, can students understand the texts? Where do problems lie? Can students begin to write in ways considered appropriate and modelled in the texts?
- 7) Do you have an assessment policy?
- 8) What are the main factors leading to a students' success in your department? What leads to failure?
- 9) What policies / interventions should the institution put in place to improve student success? What can / does your department do?

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<sup>1</sup> These questions were not used verbatim but acted as a memory prompt for me when the interviews were drawing to a close or if the interview was not flowing smoothly. Other issues that came up regularly were: merger issues, OBE and a comparison between universities and technikons. Following this pattern, I began introducing these topics myself in later interviews.

## **Student Interviews<sup>1</sup>**

- 1) Respond to stimulus piece. Which piece is written better? Which would achieve higher marks? Which piece do you prefer?
- 2) Written assessments –Can you achieve as you would like to in written assessments? Do you know what is expected of you? Problems?
- 3) What is your experience of learning? How/what do you learn? Problems?
- 4) What is the lecturer's role in terms of student learning?
- 5) What are the main outcomes of your course? What is the rationale for these outcomes? Can you meet these outcomes?
- 6) In terms of texts, can you understand the texts? Where do problems lie? Can you begin to write in ways considered appropriate and modelled in the texts?
- 7) What is the assessment policy in the department in which you are studying?
- 8) What are the main factors leading to a students' success in your diploma? What leads to failure?
- 9) What policies / interventions should the institution put in place to improve student success? What can / does the department in which you study do?

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<sup>1</sup> The exact wording of these questions was never used and the inappropriate wording was thus of no consequence. These functioned as memory prompts for myself if needed.

## Appendix C – Lecturers' Letter of Consent

Consent to participate in research study and to publication of results

1. I understand that Sioux M<sup>c</sup>Kenna is conducting PhD research into aspects of teaching and learning. She will be interviewing both students and lecturers to elicit their perceptions.
2. I have been asked to participate in this research study. I understand that my participation will consist of the following:
  - being interviewed at least twice by Sioux
  - providing Sioux with background information about myself and my previous educational experiences.
  - Allowing Sioux to observe a few of my classes
  - Allowing Sioux to interview some of my students on the understanding that their participation is also voluntary and their full consent will also be sought.
3. I accept that the results of this research study will be used towards a Doctoral degree through Rhodes University. In addition, the results may be used for writing papers for presentation at conferences or publication in academic journals.
4. I understand that if I wish, my real name does not need to be used in any report describing the research study. But if I want to, I can be acknowledged in any reports on the research.
5. I agree to participate in the research study but I understand that if at any point I change my mind, I am entitled to withdraw my agreement to participate.

## Appendix D – Students’ Participation Request and Letter of Consent

May I interview you for my research?

Please first read this whole page carefully before deciding whether you are interested.

I am doing research with lecturers and students to find out their views about teaching and learning. I am looking for students to interview for this research. I will telephone you to set up the interview, which will last about 1 ½ to 2 hours. If you are willing to be interviewed, please complete the details below and then hand in this page to your lecturer. I will pay R20 to each student that I interview, on completion of the interview. I will only be interviewing a small random sample of students and you might be contacted me in this regard or you may not hear from me. I appreciate the time you have spent completing this form.

Name:

Phone number:

(Please indicate what time would be best for me to call if this is a home number)

Diploma:

Date:

(If you are contacted to do the interview you will be asked to sign the letter below at the interview.)

Consent to participate in research study and to publication of results

1. I understand that Sioux M<sup>c</sup>Kenna is doing research about teaching and learning. She will be interviewing both students and lecturers to hear their views.

2. I have been asked to take part in this research study. I understand that Sioux will interview me and she will tape record the interview.

3. I accept that the results of this research study will be used towards a Doctoral degree through Rhodes University. In addition, the results may be used for writing papers for presentation at conferences or publication in academic journals.

4. I understand that if I wish, my real name does not need to be used in any report describing the research study. But if I want to, I can be acknowledged in the preface to the thesis.

5. I agree to participate in the research study but I understand that if at any point I change my mind, I am entitled to withdraw my agreement to participate.

Name:

Date:

Course of study:

Year of study:

Wish to be acknowledged by name (thanked) in thesis (no data will be linked to your name):

YES / NO

## Appendix E – Examples of Worksheets from Cycles in Chapter Three.

The following three extracts are illustrative of the shifting understandings in the three cycles described in Chapter Three.

### Cycle One – ESL Cycle

This example is an extract from a test.

Circle the appropriate synonym for each of the following words as it is used in the passage on the previous page.

1. incursion-      a      raid  
                              b      invasion  
                              c      attack
  
2. brand-            a      imprint  
                              b      product type  
                              c      classification
  
3. restricted-      a      limited  
                              b      classified  
                              c      confidential
  
4. haven-                       a refuge  
                              b      harbour  
                              c      vehicle

There are nine errors in the passage below. The student who wrote the passage made a mistake by including an unnecessary word and made eight other mistakes related to grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Cross out the unnecessary word in the passage. Use the spaces 1 to 8, provided below the passage, to make the other corrections.

Speed should be carefully controlled in areas where a large amount of people leave. Speed control bumps are disliked by the drivers. This leads to driver frustration that increases with the number of bumps installed. In addition, it has been found that drivers tend to speed up between the bumps or as soon as they leave the controlled area bumps can also cause a great inconvenience to milk lorries, delivery vans and long wheel based vehicles.

It is however felt that speed bumps placed along Marsh Road near the shops and children's playing field would increase the drivers frustration, cause them to drive recklessly, and cause drivers to speed in nearby areas. As a result, the installation of speed bumps is not recommended.

If speed barriers must be installed, rumble strips would be far more effective. This consist of rough-hewn granite strips which protrude above the road

surface. They give a slightly uncomfortable ride if crossed at a high speed, and thus encourage drivers to slow down.

Far more effective would be to consider slowing down the traffic by other means. There is a need for more signs warning drivers to watch out for childrens and pedestrians. There is also a need for traffic officers to go into the nearby schools and warning the children about the dangers of the road.

### **Cycle Two – EAP**

This is an extract from a generic worksheet.

#### **Paragraph Structure**

A paragraph should develop an idea (and only ONE idea) and should guide the reader through the writer's thought processes by using joining expressions where appropriate (for example: although, however, therefore). The sentences should fit together properly to form a paragraph. If a sentence does not relate to the topic sentence, it should NOT be in that paragraph!

#### **Exercise 1**

The information contained within a paragraph is based on the topic sentence of a paragraph. The topic sentence is usually the first sentence of a paragraph and expresses the main idea that is then developed within the paragraph.

Look at the topic sentences below and discuss what kinds of information you would expect to be included in the paragraph.

- 1) South African music can be divided into three main types.
- 2) Legislation of the taxi industry will decrease taxi violence.
- 3) When lodging a grievance against one's employer, one must follow the proper procedure.
- 4) The design of buildings, jewellery and clothing is determined by the society of the time.
- 5) Governments will sometimes intervene to control prices.
- 6) The Environmental Health practitioner is no longer considered merely a "rat catcher".

The following are some basic paragraph structures:

- ✓ reasons for a point of view
- ✓ steps in a process
- ✓ supporting details (first, second, third, etc.)
- ✓ practical examples

Which of these paragraph structures do you think will follow each of the topic sentences above?

### **Cycle Three- AL**

The following is an extract from assignment instructions written for Music Foundation students.

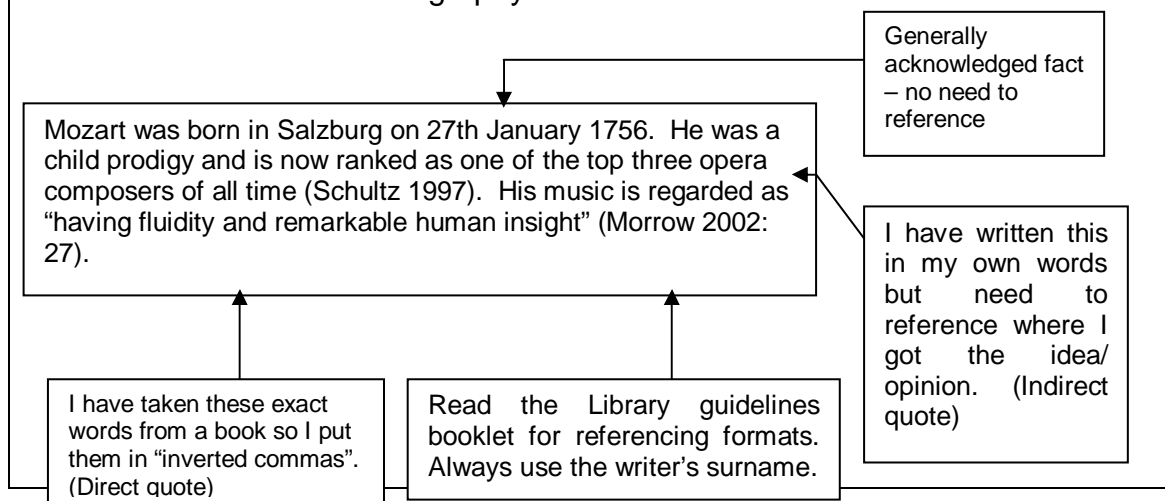
Assignment One – A Famous Jazz Artist

Your first assignment will be researching and writing about a famous Jazz musician. You have already written a music review, completed a worksheet on the history of Jazz, worked in the reference section of the library and completed a library worksheet. You have also written a few endnotes and self-initiated pieces about your work here at DIT. These experiences should all help you in completing this assignment.

Different genres of writing have very different formats and norms, even when they are all in the same language. One particular difference lies in expectations regarding referencing. A story or a newspaper article will rarely reference someone else's writing. In the genre of academic writing, on the other hand, referencing is highly valued and seen as a sign that the writer has read widely on the subject. It is also valued as a means of providing evidence that the views expressed by the author are built on previous research.

Referencing can be by direct quote or indirect quote. Whenever you use the exact words that come from another book, article, web site etc you need to put those words in "inverted commas" and follow them with the original author's surname and date when the original piece of writing was published. But you need to remember to reference even when you are using your own words but are describing an idea that comes from another author. The passage in the box below includes a "direct quote" and an indirect quote.

It is often difficult to tell what should be considered a quote and when a quote is needed. A simple, generally agreed upon fact does not need a quote even if you found it from a book you read. Mozart's date of birth in the extract below, for example, is not quoted. If you use an opinion or point of view from one of your readings, then it should be correctly referenced. The description of Mozart's works as "having fluidity and remarkable human insight" is an example of an opinion that needs referencing. Using the words or ideas of other authors without referencing them is plagiarism and will not be accepted later in your studies so you need to develop proper referencing skills now. The reference booklet available from the library gives details about how to reference in your text and how to write a bibliography/reference list at the end.





The issue of when it is necessary to include a reference (either by direct or indirect quote) is very tricky and not one you will come to grips with immediately. Generally, if you are making a bold statement, you will need to provide evidence that the idea is based on previous research. In academic writing, having your own ideas is encouraged (such as giving your personal response to music) but you do need to indicate an understanding of what previous writers have said about the topic.

## Appendix F – Critical Cross-field Outcomes

The critical cross-field outcomes, set by the Dept of Education, are generic and should be integrated into every programme of study. SAQA requires that all qualifications submitted for registration address these outcomes by ensuring that they are embedded within the different unit standards making up the particular qualification (Government Gazette 1997: 46). The CCFOs are as follows:

1. Identify and solve problems in which responses display that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made;
  2. Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, community;
  3. Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively;
  4. Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information;
  5. Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written persuasion;
  6. Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others;
  7. Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation;
  8. Reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively
  9. Participate as responsible citizens in the life of the local, national and global communities
  10. Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts
  11. Explore **education** and career opportunities
  12. Develop entrepreneurial opportunities
- (SAQA, 1997)

## **Appendix G – A Note on Labelling and Naming.**

In Chapter Three in my discussion of the change from the term “academic support” to “academic development”, I examined the importance of labelling, however a brief additional note is necessary. Clearly labelling is a necessary part of communication, but labelling also plays an important role in identity construction. We need to be ever vigilant about how naming such as 'disadvantaged' serves to categorise people, and we have to keep the naming processes open to discussion and change. This particular label was used in six of my lecturer interviews, and, as Thesen (1997: 490) points out, is 'institutional shorthand for historically excluded students'. Despite such students now comprising the majority of the student population at DIT, the institutional discourse still includes such terms as 'disadvantaged student' in a categorisation of 'other'. Ndebele (1995 in Thesen 1997) cautions, in reference to the term 'disadvantaged' that 'The namer isolates the named, explains them, contains them and controls them.'

The term 'mainstream' also remains a powerful one, the irony is that the number of students perceived by lecturers to fall outside of the mainstream now comprise most of our students. Despite this, the nature and function of the 'mainstream' remain fairly closed to reflection and transformation.

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