

**Crossing Boundaries:
Facilitating conceptual development in relation to culture
in an English for Academic Purposes course.**

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts (English Second Language)

Rhodes University

by

Arona Dison

December 1997

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	iv
<i>Abstract</i>	v
Chapter One: Introduction	1
1. Background to the research project	2
2. Concepts underlying the Culture course	5
3. The structure of the thesis	6
Chapter Two: Methodology: Finding a research path	8
1. Research paradigms	8
2. Action research	13
3. Some key issues in research	17
4. Confronting questioning voices	21
5. Outline of the research process	23
6. Some choices about representation	29
Chapter Three: Crossing Boundaries: A Theoretical framework	31
1. The social construction of knowledge	31
2. How do we understand underpreparedness?	34
3. A three-level model of cognitive processing	38
4. Some Vygotskian theories about cognitive and conceptual development	41
5. The relationship between language and learning	47
6. Academic literacy*	54
7. The role of voice in conceptual development	56

Chapter Four: Students' conceptual development in relation to Culture	60
1. The Culture course	60
2. Students' initial understandings of culture	64
3. Tracing students' development	67
Chapter Five: Students' learning and staff development	84
1. Facilitation of students' learning	84
2. Students' reflection about learning and knowledge in the course	88
3. Some outcomes of the course	95
Chapter Six: Conclusion	104
1. Participatory action research — the involvement of the tutors	104
2. Development of the students	105
3. Challenges for EAP courses	106
4. Implications for curriculum development	107
5. Tensions, limitations and gaps in the research	108
Bibliography	110
Appendices	

Acknowledgements

I would like to firstly express my appreciation to my supervisor, Sarah Murray, for the positive energy which she radiates, the structure that she provided, and the affirming yet challenging feedback that she gave me on many drafts of this thesis.

The ELAP tutors, Helen Alferts and Fleur Theophilus, became much more involved in this project than I expected, and I thank them for their enthusiasm and the support they have given me. I express my gratitude to the ELAP students, particularly those who were involved in the research, for the important contribution which they made.

Thanks to those involved in the UCT EAP course; particularly Rochelle Kapp and Lucia Thesen deserve acknowledgement for the course materials that were used or adapted in the Culture course, and for the influence that they have had on this project. I would also like to acknowledge Rochelle Kapp for the use of the concept of 'boundaries' in the title, as she drew my attention to this image in Ramphele's article.

I would like to thank all my colleagues in the Academic Development Centre at Rhodes for their support, particularly Lynn Quinn, for providing me with feedback, and for the strong moral support, as well as the very practical support which she gave me. Thank you to Nomzamo Matyumza for helping with the transcribing, and to Jo-Anne Vorster for proofreading.

I am grateful to Chrissie Boughey for her valuable feedback, and I'd like to acknowledge the influence of Mary van der Riet in relation to socially situated theories of cognition.

I cannot resist mentioning my dogs, Modja and Angie, for their therapeutic company whilst I was writing this thesis.

Lastly I want to thank my partner, David, for the space that he's helped to create, that has enabled me to do this.

Abstract

This research was undertaken as the first cycle of an action research project. The aim was to develop a course within the English Language 1 for Academic Purposes (ELAP) course at Rhodes University, which would facilitate the conceptual development of students in relation to the topic of Culture. The implementation of the course was researched, using students' writing, interviews, staff meeting discussions and video-taping of certain classes. Ten students volunteered to 'be researched'.

The types of initial 'commonsense' understandings of culture held by students are outlined and the conceptual development which they underwent in relation to Culture is examined. Students' perceptions of the approaches to learning required in ELAP and the Culture course in particular are explored. The involvement of the ELAP tutors in the course and in the research was a learning experience for them, and this became another focus of the research.

The findings of the research support the argument for using challenging subject matter in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, provided that the learning process is carefully scaffolded. An underlying assumption is that ways of thinking and learning in university courses need to be explicitly taught to students and the study concludes that lecturers of mainstream courses could also learn from the findings of research such as this. The study also shows the potential power of participatory action research to involve practitioners in research and enhance their understandings of aspects of their practice. Finally, it notes the need to value subtle developments in students and to see them as being part of a longer term process.

1. Introduction

... my experience of how I've learnt at school, it differs a lot from now. Now I can get involved, like I can get personally involved, and that at least gives me motivation to be more — , to try to be at your best 'cos the information as I can understand — it all lies in me, but I don't know what block it from coming out.

Zandile

At the end of the day ... I finally realise that there is no right and wrong in culture specifically. I thought there was a wrong and right. Only it opened up my mind for other possibilities. There's not one particular answer for a question.

Carmenita

Comments of students involved in the research.

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses have been an important area of English second language (ESL) teaching in South Africa since the early nineteen-eighties (Agar *et al* 1991:14). However, there has been a trend in Academic Development and EAP courses at some institutions of moving away from seeing the needs of students as purely 'second language problems' and giving a more central place to concepts such as academic literacy, discourse and language and cognition. Murray (1993) observes an international shift towards more social constructivist approaches to EAP in the nineteen-nineties. The concept of academic literacy has been influential in Academic Development in South Africa, in particular the argument that there are particular literacies linked to specific disciplines (Taylor *et al* 1988). Thus the language of a discipline is closely linked to ways of knowing and thinking in the discipline.

There have been a number of fascinating studies emerging in South Africa of the discourses which students have acquired and those which they need to acquire at university (Thesen 1994, Volbrecht 1996, Boughey 1997). There has been valuable research done in the Academic Development field on socially situated cognition (Craig 1991, 1989, 1996; Moll and Slonimsky 1989 and others). However, research on the relationship between language and conceptual development or cognition has mainly been in relation to Science students (Inglis 1992; Inglis and Grayson 1992) and little research has been done which is concerned with the

link between language and conceptual development in the curriculum in the Arts and Social Sciences.

The aims of this research project were firstly, to develop a course within the English Language 1 for Academic Purposes course (ELAP), which facilitated conceptual development of students in relation to the topic of Culture. Secondly, I aimed to research the implementation of the course, through various means. Thus, my broad objectives were to contribute to the process of curriculum development in ELAP, with the purpose of facilitating students' conceptual development and to gain a deeper understanding of this conceptual development.

1. Background to the research project

The research context was the ELAP course at Rhodes University. ELAP is a one-year credit-bearing course, which aims to improve competence in English and develop academic skills of largely ESL students who are required to register for the course by the Deans of their faculties. The course is offered to students in Arts, Social Sciences, Religion and Theology and the Commerce and Science Foundation courses. It is compulsory for Commerce Foundation students.

From the inception of ELAP, a main aim was seen as teaching English and academic skills (ELAP Course Guide 1994). However, it has always been seen as important to situate the skills-building curriculum of the course within a content base (Dison and Law-Viljoen 1995:499). Boughey argues that language skills cannot exist outside a context of meaning, and she stresses the need "to see reading and writing as a means of exploring and constructing knowledge, rather than as 'skills'" (Boughey 1994:27). Whilst the concept of skills development has continued to play a central role in the thinking of the tutors in ongoing course development, we recognised that these 'skills' need to be embedded in content "which is academically useful and challenging, which facilitates concept-building, and sustains students' engagement" (Dison and Law-Viljoen 1995:499).

Selecting relevant content for the course has been difficult because of its position as a general

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course. Much of the content has been drawn from the Arts and Social Sciences. This is likely to have been influenced by the tutors coming from Arts and Social Sciences backgrounds and choosing content which interested them, and which they were familiar with. (This could be seen as problematic because most of the students doing the course are in the Commerce Foundation Programme.) There has also been a module on the Environment, which has been relevant to disciplines from all the faculties and has been popular with students (Rosenberg 1994:2).

Our current position with regard to content is based on the assumption that there is a common academic literacy that students need to develop, and that we cannot, in a general course, aim to teach them the specialised literacies of specific disciplines. We try to teach a critical approach to learning, not only because it is required in the Arts and Social Sciences, but also because we believe it is a crucial life skill, which will assist students in life-long learning. This corresponds with the aims of the new Outcomes Based Education curriculum which is to develop creative problem-solving abilities as well as the ability to analyse and critically evaluate information (Department of Education 1997).

When ELAP was started in 1994, there was a content theme on Civilisation, looking at different civilisations and aiming to broaden students' minds in relation to different cultures. Students' responses to this were negative for reasons such as a lack of relevance to their other courses or that they found it boring (Dison and Law-Viljoen 1995:498). In 1995 this content theme was changed from "Civilisation" to "Culture". The Culture theme introduced the concept of culture from a broad anthropological perspective and then looked at various aspects of culture such as traditional African music, culture and religion, and culture and healing. The module was entitled "Timbuktu - Is it the end of the world?" which related to "how our view of reality is influenced by our cultural background and where we position ourselves" (Dison and Law-Viljoen 1995:498).

Reflecting on the course, Dison and Law-Viljoen wrote:

[The theme] allowed us to explore two of the important aims of the course, that is to draw on the students' background knowledge and also to help build up background knowledge required at university. It was in this module that we specifically started

challenging the fixed view of knowledge, which is inculcated by DET education, and tried to build up a sense that different and conflicting views are part of the substance of academic disciplines. (498)

In 1996 a similar module was run and the students in their feedback at the end of the year rated it as the least interesting content theme.

As a tutor on the course, marking their exam essays on Culture, it struck me that the students had started the course with a narrow, fairly superficial idea of culture as traditions and customs and at the end of the course, they hadn't developed their ideas any further. The content of the course had just been used as a vehicle for developing academic skills such as essay-writing, but conceptual development related to the content of the course had not been facilitated.

This was the germ of the idea to design a module¹ on culture, which specifically aimed to facilitate conceptual development in relation to the topic of culture as well as develop academic and language skills related to this. The aim was to encourage students to move from the commonsense understandings of culture that they tended to bring to the course, to more complex, critical understandings of culture. The topic of culture seemed to provide useful subject matter for facilitating this process of conceptual development, because it is a broad, abstract concept and is open to many interpretations. It also seemed to be a concept that plays an important role in many Arts and Social Science disciplines. For the purposes of the research, I decided to focus on the needs of students in the Arts and Social Sciences faculties.

I consulted with Helen Alfors, the Course Coordinator, about this idea. (At the end of the year there was a change of staff, and she and I were the only tutors who were staying on). Although up until that point it is unlikely that this had been a very pressing concern for her, she was very open to the idea and extremely supportive. She and Fleur Theophilus, who started tutoring at the beginning of 1997, became very involved in the project.

¹ I use the term module interchangeably with course to refer to a self-contained block within the ELAP course.

In early 1997, I consulted with Rochelle Kapp and Lucia Thesen from the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at UCT, about a course that they ran on Culture in their EAP course. Their course seemed to fulfil the aims which I felt needed to be met, and they agreed that I could use materials from it. Most of the materials that I have used for the section of the course being researched thus originally come from the UCT EAP course, though some of them were adapted or added to by me.

2. Concepts underlying the Culture course

The course which we implemented aimed to challenge students' commonsense² concepts of culture and to facilitate the development of more complex and critical understandings. At the outset of the project, my own ideas about these issues were vague and I had to research and read about culture to sharpen my understanding. I will briefly outline some of the background to tensions in understandings of culture which exist, and situate the understandings that ELAP students tend to have in relation to these. For the sake of brevity, I will greatly simplify the issues.

Culture is commonly thought of as belonging to particular ethnic groups, for example, "'Culture' concerns the *way of life* of the members of a given society — their habits and customs, together with the material goods they produce" (Giddens 1989:31-32). This idea originates in the Romantic period of European history in the nineteenth century. The Romantic idea of culture is of an "*organic* product of a people or a nation" (Thornton 1988:21). These ideas spread to Southern Africa through colonialists such as administrators and missionaries and various historians have argued that ethnicity was created in Southern Africa by these colonialists (Thornton 1988:21; Alexander 1995:212). Under Nationalist Party rule in South Africa, the idea of different cultures of different ethnic groups was exploited to bolster the Nationalist government's separate development policy. Thus culture became strongly associated with the culture of different "tribal" groups such as the Xhosas or the Zulus (Thornton 1988:17-18; Alexander in Moore 1994:247). A conception of culture

² I use the term 'commonsense' in relation to Craig's (1991) commonsense theory of knowledge, which is explained in Chapter 3.

as different cultures belonging to different ethnic groups seems to have become *the* dominant view of culture which is common knowledge in our society. This is evident in the way most ELAP students see culture. Moreover, as I discuss below, there is a tendency to see culture as only the traditional rituals and customs. These form the basis of the concepts of culture which the course set out to challenge, largely through exposure to selected articles, including Robert Thornton's. How these were challenged and how students responded will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The research focused on students' development in the Culture course both in terms of how their understandings of culture changed or developed and also in terms of the approach to learning and learning strategies which were fostered by the course. The latter issues were investigated through interviewing students about their perceptions of approaches to learning at school, university and in the ELAP Culture course. The perceptions of the tutors which emerged in ELAP staff meetings also provided valuable insights into students' learning.

3. The structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured in the following way: In Chapter 2, the research is situated as being the first cycle of an Action Research Project and it is located in relation to various paradigms and approaches to research. The research process is also outlined.

Chapter 3 contains an outline of the theories which I have used in the research or which provide a background to it. The social construction of knowledge is discussed as a central theme which emerged during the course of the research; social theories of cognitive psychology are explored in order to develop an understanding of students' learning; the relationship between language and learning is discussed, and academic literacy; and lastly, the contribution of Bakhtin's theories of semiotic mediation is briefly outlined.

I have separated my discussion of data into two chapters, 4 and 5. Chapter 4 investigates students' conceptual development in relation to culture. This is done through, firstly, discussing students' initial understandings of culture, as revealed in their definitions and group discussion on video. Secondly, students' conceptual development is traced through

various pieces of writing and interviews, in relation to particular themes which emerged. In Chapter 5, students' learning in the course is examined from three different angles. The mediation of conceptual development, students' views on the type of learning which was developed in the course and the effects of the course on students and tutors is discussed.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the methodology used in this project.

2. Methodology: Finding a research path

This chapter starts with a discussion of research paradigms. This research project is located in relation to those paradigms, although it is not located directly within a single paradigm. I discuss action research, which is the orientation towards research which has been used in the project; I explain why I've chosen to use it, but also explore problems which I have with conceptualisations of action research within a critical paradigm which I have encountered. I then discuss the concepts of objectivity, validity and ethics in relation to how I approach them in the research and discuss questions raised by poststructuralist voices in relation to my research. Finally I describe the research process which was undergone.

1. Research paradigms

The common use of the term, paradigm, in relation to research, is attributed to Kuhn (1962, cited in Janse Van Rensburg 1994). Guba (1990:17) defines the term 'paradigm' broadly as "a basic set of beliefs that guides action, whether of the everyday ... variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined enquiry".

Patton (1978:203) in Lincoln and Guba (1995:15) describes a paradigm as:

... a world view, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world. As such paradigms are deeply embedded in the socialization of adherents and practitioners: paradigms tell them what is important, legitimate and reasonable. Paradigms are also normative, telling the practitioner what to do ... But it is this aspect of paradigms that constitutes both their strength and their weakness - their strength in that it makes action possible, their weakness in that the very reason for action is hidden in the unquestioned assumptions of the paradigm.

I believe that in doing research, one needs to be aware of what paradigm/s one is being guided by, so that one is conscious of how one's beliefs influence how one frames the research, how one goes about doing it and how one interprets the findings. I don't think a paradigm can be used in a prescriptive way to stipulate exactly how one goes about doing the

research.

I will very briefly discuss the relationship between paradigms, methodologies and methods. Guba and Lincoln (1989) criticise researchers who see a paradigm as a collection of a certain type of methods, as this view ignores the ontological and epistemological differences between paradigms, that is, the understandings of the nature of reality and of the construction of knowledge (157). They see methodologies as overall guiding strategies for doing the research, while methods are the tools and techniques used. It is not the methods themselves which are tied to particular paradigms but the way those methods are used (1989:158). Smaling (1992) questions the monolithic nature of social science research paradigms and the argument that they are completely incompatible. He argues that pragmatic factors as well as paradigmatic factors need to be taken into account when selecting research methods.

There are different ways of categorising paradigms. I will use the broad categories of the empirical-analytical or positivist paradigm, the interpretive and critical paradigms. These three approaches coincide with Habermas' categorisation of all human rationality into three 'knowledge-constitutive interests' (Lockett 1995b). There are also postmodernist/poststructural approaches to research emerging, which are characterised by reflexive inquiry, in which the researcher reflects on or deconstructs her own approaches to enquiry (Janse Van Rensburg 1994:8). This broad approach will be discussed under paradigms and later in the chapter I will discuss a poststructuralist critique of critical pedagogy and use this to interrogate my own doubts about the research project.

1.1. Positivism

Lather (1986:260) argues that positivism in the social sciences is characterised by the belief that "the aims, concepts and methods of the natural sciences are applicable to the social sciences". One can draw out a number of assumptions on which it is based. These include: the ontological assumption of a single reality 'out there' that can be broken apart into pieces capable of being studied independently; this reality is driven by fixed natural laws which researchers can discover and generalise from; the researcher can take a distant, objective stance towards the object of research; an assumption that enquiry can be value-free and that

the methodology used should ensure this (Lincoln & Guba 1985:28; Janse Van Rensburg 1994).

Although the positivist approach has been discredited in many contexts, particularly in the social sciences, it has still had a pervasive influence on the way research has been conceptualised (Lincoln and Guba 1985:15). I think this is particularly true in the South African research community.

A modified form of positivism is viewed by some as another paradigm, otherwise referred to as post-positivism. Proponents of this position recognise that it is inappropriate to apply positivist principles to human situations and attempt to temper, but not abandon these principles. They see "objective reality" as an ideal to strive for, even if it cannot be attained (Janse Van Rensburg 1994:5).

1.2 The interpretive paradigm

The interpretive paradigm is also called the constructivist, symbolic or hermeneutic paradigm. Proponents of this paradigm believe in the theory-ladenness of facts - "'Reality' exists only in the context of a mental framework (construct) for thinking about it"; and the value ladenness of facts, that is, that inquiry cannot be value free (Guba 1990:25). According to this paradigm, objectivity is not possible and the results of an inquiry are always shaped by the interaction between researcher and researched. Knowledge is viewed as a human construction or mental representation and there are multiple constructions of any situation. There is no foundational process by which the ultimate truth or falsity of these constructions are determined, thus one needs to take a relativist position. Guba argues that constructivism "intends neither to predict and control the 'real' world, nor to transform it but to *reconstruct* the 'world' at the only point at which it exists: in the mind of constructors" (27). This approach has been criticised by proponents of the critical paradigm as failing to account for the external conditions which constrain actors' understandings, and failing to provide actors with ways of overcoming the constraints on their action (Carr and Kemmis 1986:181). Carr and Kemmis reject the view that "transformations of consciousness are sufficient to produce transformations of social reality"(181).

The relativism of such an approach is criticised by Phillips (1990:21-22). Citing Popper, he argues that in spite of the abandonment of the notion that knowledge is built on an unshakable foundation, it doesn't mean that the traditional notion of truth has been abandoned. Popper compares 'truth as correspondence to the facts' to a mountain peak that is permanently, or almost permanently, wrapped in clouds:

The climber may not merely have difficulties in getting there — he may not know when he gets there, because he may be unable to distinguish, in the clouds, between the main summit and some subsidiary peak. Yet this does not affect the objective existence of the summit ... The very idea of error, or of doubt ... implies the idea of an objective truth which we may fail to reach.

Popper (1968:226) in Phillips (1990:22)

Thus Phillips argues that by rejecting foundationalism, one rejects the assurance that we can know when we have reached the truth, but we do not have to abandon the *notion of truth*. This has implications for objectivity, which I will discuss briefly under that heading.

1.3 The critical paradigm

This paradigm is briefly discussed here as it will be discussed further under Section 2 on Action Research. Research based on critical theories rejects the idea that inquiry can be value-free and sees all social practice including research as being ideological (Janse van Rensburg 1994:7; Guba 1990:24). The aim of inquiry is emancipatory; the role of the researcher is to raise the consciousness of the participants in the situation being researched and thus to act as a catalyst for the participants to transform the situation. Research tends to be conducted through a dialogical approach that seeks to eliminate "false consciousness" and rally participants around a common point of view (Guba 1990:24). An aspect of the critical paradigm, which I find problematic, is encapsulated in this quotation from Fay (1977, quoted in Carr and Kemmis 1986:156-7):

...it names the people for whom it is directed; it analyzes their suffering; it offers enlightenment to them about what their real needs and wants are; it demonstrates to them in what way their ideas about themselves are false and at the same time extracts from these false ideas implicit truths about them;

I am deliberately using a very limited extract from the quotation, to make my point, and I

don't think that Carr and Kemmis (1986) use the discourse of false consciousness in such a crude way, but nevertheless it underlies this approach. Guba (1990) points out a logical disjunction between the ontology implied by the term "false consciousness" and the subjectivist epistemology of the critical paradigm, which recognises that the values of the enquirer mediate the enquiry. The phrase "false consciousness" implies that there is an objective reality and that there is a "true consciousness" most likely possessed by the enquirer (24-25).

1.4 Postmodernist/poststructuralist approaches

I do not intend to discuss these approaches in great depth, nor to explore the origins of these terms, thus I will use the terms interchangeably to refer to the emerging reflexive discourses and practices in research (Lather 1991, Janse Van Rensburg 1994:8). Lather (1991:5) points to the difficulty of defining postmodernism, which she describes as "a conjunction of often contradictory ideas and practices which have come to be coded with the name 'postmodern'". In offering ideas *toward* a definition, she refers to "grand narratives" of legitimation, identified by Lyotard (1984), which are no longer credible in the postmodern condition:

By "grand narratives" Lyotard means ... overarching philosophies of history like the Enlightenment story of the gradual but steady progress of reason and freedom ... [and] ... Marx's drama of the forward march of human productive capacities via class conflict culminating in proletarian revolution.

Fraser and Nicholson (1988:86) in Lather (1991:5)

Fraser and Nicholson (1988) foreground the postmodern break with totalizing, universalizing "metanarratives" and the humanist view of the subject which underlies them. A humanist approach sees "the subject as an autonomous individual capable of full consciousness and endowed with a stable "self" constituted by a set of static characteristics such as sex, class, race, sexual orientation" (Lather 1991:5). It is this concept of the subject that has been at the heart of the Enlightenment project of progress via education, reflexive rationality and human agency. According to postmodernist/poststructuralist approaches a subject is seen rather as a site of conflict, "inscribed by multiple contestatory discourses" (5). Instead of invoking

"grand narratives", all situations are seen as "historical and contingent, and knowledge as emergent, temporal and contested" (Janse van Rensburg 1994:8).

Ellsworth (1989:316) criticises the approach of critical pedagogy to subjects when she writes:

Conventional notions of dialogue and democracy assume rationalized, individualized subjects capable of agreeing on universalizable "fundamental moral principles" and "quality of human life" ... Yet social agents are not capable of being fully rational and disinterested; and they are subjects split between the conscious and unconscious and among multiple social positionings.

The concept of discourse is central in a poststructuralist approach. Drawing on Foucault, Pennycook (1994) defines discourses as:

relationships of power/knowledge that are embedded in social institutions and practices. They are ways of organizing meaning that are both reflected and produced in our uses of language and the formation of our subjectivities. ... to engage in the social practice of language use is always an act situated within some discourse.

(Pennycook 1994:32)

Thus according to a poststructuralist approach, language is seen as a productive, constitutive force rather than a transparent reflection of a reality which exists "out there" (Lather 1991:25).

Postmodernist/poststructuralist approaches are characterised by reflexive inquiry, in which the researcher reflects on/deconstructs her own approaches to inquiry (Janse van Rensburg 1994:8). " ... to write 'postmodern' is to write paradoxically aware of one's complicity in that which one critiques" (Lather 1991:10).

I will return to some questions that these approaches pose for this research project when I discuss Ellsworth's critique of critical pedagogy. In the next section I will discuss action research, the approach to research which I have chosen to use.

2. Action research

I chose to use the concept of practitioner action research (as used by Winter 1989) as a broad orientation for this project. I chose this approach, firstly, because I was doing research on a course which I was involved in teaching and developing and, secondly, because I was introducing a new section into the course, researching its implementation. Both of these factors seem to be more consistent with action research than with other methodologies or approaches.

Action research is a form of research as praxis. Carr and Kemmis (1986) define praxis as having "its roots in the commitment of the practitioner to wise and prudent action in a practical, concrete situation. It is action which is considered and consciously theorized and which may reflexively inform and transform the theory which informed it" (190).

They define action research as "a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (162). It is carried out through a self-reflective spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

The main aims of action research are to improve practice, to develop practitioners' knowledge and understanding of their practices and to involve those who are active participants in the situation being researched, in the research process (165). My main aims in this project were, firstly, to improve practice, in that the research would make a contribution to the process of curriculum development in the English Language for Academic Purposes course (ELAP), and, secondly, to develop a deeper understanding of the focus of the study, which was conceptual development of students within the course. The project was collaborative to a large extent, as the ELAP course is developed on an ongoing basis and taught through a collaborative process, and the research was linked to this process. The ELAP staff were consulted about the design of the materials, and participated in the implementation of the module and in ongoing reflection on the innovation. I realised that the nature of the project, which was for degree purposes, situated me as the central agent of the research and I was unsure to what extent the other ELAP tutors would participate (in the research). However, they became more involved than I had expected, which will be discussed further in Chapter

5.

Carr and Kemmis argue for the need to widen participation in the project gradually, to include people affected by the practice (165). I had hoped that the students who were involved in the research, would play a role in which they also reflected on processes being researched and were not just research subjects. I tried to provide channels for this, by giving students copies of a draft of my discussion chapters and inviting comment. However, I am aware of the time constraints on students and factors such as lack of confidence, which would limit their involvement. This will be discussed further in Section 6.3.

Cameron et al (1993:92) suggest that in action research, the main or only criterion of value of issues being researched is utility to the researched. However, many of the questions of interest to researchers are entirely without interest or utility to the research subjects. This is of relevance to my project as many of the questions which I am exploring would not be of great interest to students. This doesn't mean that they are not worth pursuing, but one couldn't expect students to necessarily want to become centrally involved in doing the research.

Action research has been used within different paradigms. Winter (1989) points out the positivist echoes in Lewin's (1946) cycle of planning, action and "fact-gathering" (Winter 1989:31). Carr and Kemmis outline three different types of action research - technical, practical and emancipatory which seem to correspond broadly to the positivist, interpretive and critical paradigms (202-204). Carr and Kemmis situate themselves clearly in a critical paradigm. They use the term *critical educational science*, which views educational research as "critical analysis directed at the *transformation* of educational practices, the educational understandings and educational values of those involved in the process, and the social and institutional structures which provide frameworks for their action" (156).

As part of a critical educational science, action research needs to be emancipatory. Participants take action on the basis of their critical and self-critical reflection and engage in "the struggle for more rational, just, democratic and fulfilling education" (Carr and Kemmis 1986:205). In the context of a historically white university in South Africa in the early post-

apartheid years, I am aware of the injustices in the system and the history of inequalities, systematic oppression and repression which have affected education and society more broadly. Furthermore, the ELAP course is a politically sensitive area of the university, as those students who have been educationally disadvantaged and who have not achieved the entrance requirements of the university are required to do it. How one goes about assisting these students to cope with the language (English) and academic demands of the university is also a politically sensitive issue. The role of English in education is itself politically loaded. As Pennycook (1994:13) points out, it is "the language of power and prestige" and acts as "a crucial gatekeeper to social and economic progress". The role of English in perpetuating unequal power relations is particularly evident in South Africa, where African languages have been systematically underdeveloped.

I do not however see my research as having an emancipatory aim, because I feel it would be too ambitious and sweeping to be realistic in the context of this project. My research is to be on one aspect of the ELAP course, which exists within the context of the university, a powerful institution. Although the university is embarking on a process of "transformation", I would argue that it remains essentially a conservative institution, which doesn't hold issues relating to students from disadvantaged communities high on its agenda. Thus engaging in research which has the transformation of the university as an overarching goal or the conscientisation of students towards that end would be underestimating the extent of the imbalance of power relations in the university. I also have to recognise that I am a part of the university system, even though I am opposed to it in many ways. The aims of this research are more small-scale and modest and they are related to providing disadvantaged students with quality education in EAP which strives to meet their needs, make them more conscious of the types of learning required at university, and equips them to cope with these types of learning. Although this research project is certainly not going to transform Rhodes University, it has the capacity to influence the ELAP tutors and the course in a significant way.

Action research can be used as part of a hermeneutic approach to curriculum development, which adopts a social constructivist view of the curriculum. Curriculum construction is understood as "an ongoing activity that is shaped by various contextual influences within and

beyond the classroom and is accomplished interactively, primarily by teachers and students" (Cornbleth 1990:24 in Luckett 1995b:133). Theory and practice should work together in a dialectical relationship so that the curriculum development process becomes recursive and self-reflective. Reflective practice is central to this approach as "it serves to bring to consciousness those theories, assumptions and values which are taken-for-granted in everyday teaching practice" (Luckett 1995b:133). While reflective practice would be seen as a necessary component of good teaching within a hermeneutic approach to education, action research would be taking this further through a more formalised and systematic process.

I end this section by summing up what approach/approaches to action research, I have drawn on. I can identify to a large extent with critical approaches to educational practice and research because of my awareness of the educational injustice and inequalities that I have referred to. However I have expressed my reservations about the emancipatory aim within a critical paradigm.

I locate this research most closely in relation to Winter's (1989) model of practitioner action research which seems to fit into an interpretive paradigm. Central to this approach is the concept of the practitioner, who reflects on her own mental models and becomes critically aware of her own position and thus more open to change. I also appreciate his emphasis on making modest claims, in contrast to the ambitious emancipatory aims of critical education research.

I believe that the challenges posed by postmodernist/poststructuralist approaches to research have much to contribute to postpositivist research.³ During the course of the analysis and writing I became increasingly influenced by these approaches.

3. Some key issues in research

³ I use "postpositivist" here, in the sense of being opposed to positivism, not in the sense of practising a modified form of positivism.

In this section, I will discuss objectivity, validity and ethics and consider how I have dealt with them in my research. I will locate myself broadly within a postpositivist framework.

3.1 Objectivity

Scientists firmly believe that as long as they are not *conscious* of any bias or political agenda, they are neutral and objective, when in fact they are only unconscious.
(Namenwirth 1986:29 in Lather 1986:257)

With the recognition that inquiry is value-laden, there has been the growing legitimacy of a "scholarship which makes its biases part of its argument" (Lather 1986:259). She is specifically concerned with practice-oriented inquirers seeking emancipatory knowledge. From a hermeneutic perspective, Smaling (1989) sees objectivity as a goal to be aimed at, with the recognition that it is never reached in the absolute sense (160-161). Some features of alternative conceptions of objectivity such as this, are the notions of 'letting the object speak' and the "personal experience of the researcher is not just seen as a possible threat to objectivity, but as an instrument: objectivity is an intelligent learned use of our subjectivity, not an escape from it;" (157).

Ely *et al* (1991) elaborate on this, arguing that:

as qualitative researchers, we must educate and re-educate ourselves to practice detailed observation without reading in our own answers, our own biases. That process entails becoming increasingly more aware of our own 'eyeglasses', our own blinders, so that these do not color unfairly both what we observe and what we detail in writing (54).

Phillips contests the argument that objectivity is dead and makes a distinction between objectivity and truth. He sees objective inquiries as those that meet certain procedural standards, for instance where evidence has been carefully gathered, as compared to those where an observer just draws on her own responses. However, he stresses that objectivity does not *guarantee* that the results of inquiries have any certainty (1990:23).

Lather stresses developing methodological techniques to guard against a subjectivity where one finds only what one is predisposed to look for. This emphasises the need to confront

issues of empirical accountability, to offer grounds for accepting a researcher's description and analysis and to search for workable ways of establishing the trustworthiness of data (259-260).

In this project I have aimed to "let the object speak" by including a large amount of relevant extracts from the data, thus presenting the views of the students and tutors as they express them. I have tried to base my interpretations on careful consideration of all relevant data, and used triangulation where possible. Giving drafts of chapters to students and tutors to read has also been a technique for checking my interpretations against others' views. I have also included samples of important data such as the writing and interviews of the students whose development I trace, so that the reader can make her own interpretations of the data if she chooses.

3.2 Validity

Cameron *et al* (1993:87) argue that with the move away from a belief in a reality 'out there' waiting to be discovered by a neutral, detached observer, the problem of validity loses its centrality. Other researchers see validity as still playing an important role in research, but argue that concepts of validity and how it is achieved have to be reformulated for postpositivistic research. Smaling (1993:8) sees validity as referring to the absence of unsystematic and systematic errors, and to the correspondence between research actions and results on the one hand, and the aim of the research on the other hand.

Lather (1986:270), making a case for the need to formulate new validity criteria, argues that researchers should "formulate self-corrective techniques that check the credibility of data and minimize the distorting effect of personal bias upon the logic of the evidence" (270); and the need to construct research designs that demand a vigorous self-reflexivity. She stresses four aspects of validity which are appropriate for research which is oriented towards social change.

Firstly, *triangulation* can be used to establish data-trustworthiness. This is the comparison of data from different sources, gathered by different methods, triangulation of investigators or

theories (Lincoln and Guba 1985:305). The types of triangulation which I have used in my research are triangulation of sources of data and methods, which I discuss below. For example, I have compared the writing of a student over various assignments and related the developments in their writing to comments that they have made in interviews.

Secondly, *construct validity* is related to theory-building. Lather argues for a systematized reflexivity to guard against theoretical imposition on people's own experiences of their daily lives (1986:271). Thirdly, *face validity* is tied to construct validity. Face validity is undertaken by going back to respondents (or at least a subsample of them) with tentative results and refining them in the light of the respondents' responses (271). I have done this with the ELAP tutors and students as part of the action research process. However, I haven't aimed to get a consensus on the findings and I do not believe that is necessary to ensure validity.

Lather's fourth category *catalytic validity* refers to the degree to which the research facilitates change in the situation being researched. This could refer to the impact which the research has on the development of the course, and on the understandings of the tutors, as well as the students who are involved in the research. It is difficult to evaluate to what extent change will be facilitated in the long term as this is only the first cycle of an action research project. However, the extent to which the tutors were affected by their involvement in this project indicates that it is likely to have an impact on future course development.

3.3 Ethics

There were two groups of people that I was working with in this research project, the ELAP tutors and the students who volunteered to be involved in the research. Conducting the research in an ethical way in relation to the tutors is more straightforward than in relation to the students. The research was carried out in a collaborative way with the tutors, involving them in the process. They were given drafts of the discussion chapters at two stages in the research, and their feedback was asked for. The tutors benefited from the research project in terms of what they learned from being involved in the process, and they also initiated a paper for a conference based on the research.

Thesen (1994:13) compares the exchange between researcher and student subjects as "mining" in the way that it is often carried out. "The often stark taking of information leaves very little in exchange for the student". In this project, I have consciously tried to avoid treating students as simply research subjects. I have communicated with them what the research was about, and I have tried to keep channels of communication open, so that they could talk to me or let me know if they had any concerns about the research or anything that they wanted to communicate (See Appendix B1). I have given students drafts of my discussion chapters (See Appendix B2). Even though they did not give me feedback on this, they could see how they had been represented in the discussion, and see something of the product of the process that they had been involved in.

I did not plan for students' ongoing involvement in the research and did not set "empowerment" as a goal of my research, but was very conscious that it should not objectify or disempower them. I believe that students did get something out of their involvement, in terms of seeing their contribution to the production of research, and feeling that they had something of value to contribute.

4. Confronting questioning voices

Ellsworth (1988) gives a strong critique of critical pedagogy from a postmodernist/poststructuralist perspective. I will discuss some of the issues that she raises in relation to the assumptions underlying my research, as she articulates many of the doubts which have been partially submerged in my consciousness, thus allowing me to attempt to confront them.

The ELAP curriculum is not practised from one coherent paradigm. There are elements of a traditional objectives-based approach, which seeks to teach students skills to use in their university studies. This could be called a technicist approach. There are elements of a hermeneutic approach, aiming to facilitate students' construction of knowledge and there are aspects of a critical pedagogy. Thus there are multiple and sometimes conflicting voices within the curriculum. These voices do not necessarily correspond to particular tutors in the

course, for one may consciously draw on these different approaches for particular purposes, or do it unconsciously, without reflection. In doing research aimed at development within the curriculum of the course, I recognise that there is a need for these different elements, and what I am aiming for is perhaps more conscious awareness about them on the part of myself and the other tutors.

Ellsworth criticises critical pedagogy for its underlying rationalist assumptions which have led to goals such as "the teaching of analytic and critical skills for judging the truth and merit of propositions" (1988:303). She argues that poststructuralist research in many fields has found strong evidence of the extent to which myths of universal rationalism have been oppressive to those who are not white, male, middle-class heterosexual etc., to those who are "Other". The ELAP course strives to teach logical skills such as the development of argument, not with an emancipatory aim, but because such abilities will be required in students' mainstream courses. My aim of facilitating students' conceptual development in relation to culture could be seen as wanting to silence the understandings of culture which students bring, and as privileging a "white, western, academic" approach to culture, which they are required to appropriate. However, I think that the relativism implicit in the poststructuralist view articulated by Ellsworth would not result in "disadvantaged" students getting access to the genres of the university disciplines and in the development of the literacies required for success in the university.

Ellsworth argues that critical pedagogies have acknowledged socially constructed and legitimated authority that teachers/professors hold over students. Yet they have failed to launch a programme for reformulating institutionalised power imbalances, or challenging the essentially paternalistic project of education itself (306). As a teacher/researcher I need to be aware of the power imbalances that exist in the ELAP course. While my aim is not to transform these power imbalances, I think one needs to be conscious of these issues as a teacher, and as a researcher one needs to consciously work at reducing the power imbalances, whilst also recognising their existence.

Ellsworth (1989:308) argues for the need to enter into a sustained encounter with currently oppressive formations and power relations "in a way that owned up to my own implications

in those formations and was capable of changing my own relation to and investments in those formations". This expresses the self-reflexiveness which is a crucial aspect of postmodernist research.

From past experiences I have observed that there are shifting power relations in doing research with students. Angelil-Carter (1994) refers to this as passing the skeptron. At times one's power as a researcher is lessened and the student is the person with knowledge, who has a choice whether to share it with you. (Cameron *et al*, 1993: 89-90, also refer to this phenomenon.) However, this can easily revert to a more conventional teacher-student relationship.

Cameron *et al* argue that a very important form of power is the power to determine how people are represented. At the point when the researcher sits down to write up her research, the negotiations that positioned researcher and researched during fieldwork are pinned down and "fluid and multiple subjectivities become unified and fixed by the writer who must mediate the talk of their subjects for the readers" (90). There is no easy solution for this problem, but they suggest presenting findings to the respondents as was discussed above.

5. Outline of the research process

In this section, the research process will be outlined. This will include an outline of the ELAP course which was researched. The research was done as one cycle of an action research process. It began with reflection on the problem or need for development, planning of the new section of the course on culture, implementation of the course and observation of this and reflection on the implementation of the course.

5.1 Groundwork for the research project

The need for developing a course on culture which aimed to facilitate students' conceptual development was initially identified by me, arising out of two years of experience of teaching ELAP (See Chapter 1). I consulted with the ELAP tutors and they were willing for me to

design the course in the second term in order to try to meet this need. They also indicated their willingness to develop sections of the course and an enthusiasm for being involved in the project.

I began to collect reading material on culture and multiculturalism, as I needed to inform my own understanding about culture, and to develop a clearer idea about what would form the actual subject matter of the course. In early 1997, I consulted with Rochelle-Kapp and Lucia Thesen, who are centrally involved in UCT's EAP course, to find out about their course on Culture. It seemed to fulfil the aims that I was wanting to be met, and they agreed that we could use materials from their course. Most of the materials that were used for the section of the course being researched thus originally came from the UCT EAP course, though some of them have been adapted or substantially added to.

I intended to consult with selected lecturers from the Arts and Social Sciences faculties about their perceptions on what types of development in understanding of culture would be useful for students entering or in their disciplines. I had one meeting of this type, and felt that there wasn't enough common ground to base discussion on, as the issues were still too abstract. I didn't continue with further consultations as I predicted that they were not going to be particularly useful. In retrospect, I think it may be more useful to go to lecturers with aspects of the course and use that to generate discussion.

I developed a curriculum for the course, and a set of materials to be used in it, drawing strongly on the UCT materials. I circulated the materials to the ELAP tutors to get feedback on them and revise them before presenting them to the students. (See Chapter 4, Section 1 for a description of the course.)

5.2 The research process

As well as teaching as one of the tutors of the course, I researched the implementation of it through a number of methods, which I will discuss below.

Selection of students to be researched

Within a positivist paradigm, a sample of research subjects is selected that is in some sense representative of a population, so that the researcher can generalise the results to be valid for that population (Lincoln and Guba 1985:200). In contrast to this, in naturalistic inquiry, the object is not to generalise, "but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor" (201). Thus, the purpose of sampling is to include as much information as possible. For this research project, I believed that one could get the richest source of information from students who volunteered to be involved in the research, as they would be interested in the topic of the course and motivated to share their experiences with me. I recognised that this might mean that their responses tended to be more positive than if I had selected a random sample and this needs to be taken into account when interpreting the research findings.

Before the start of the course, I asked for volunteers from the students who would permit me to have access to their writing and their journals and who consented to be interviewed and video-taped in some class discussions. There were nine students who volunteered and who continued to be involved in the research. I also approached one student from my class and asked him if he would be prepared to be involved. I did this because he struck me as a student who was not a high-achiever at the outset of the course, but who seemed to have potential and applied himself to his work in a very serious way. I asked students how they would prefer to be named in the research. Most of them said I should use their real names. Only one student asked me to use his nick-name. I did not pay students for their involvement in the research, but took them out for "tea" to express my appreciation for their contributions.

The use of students' writing

I examined the writing of the selected students in their course assignments and dialogue journals. At the start of the course, before the students had been exposed to any of our materials on culture, the students were asked to write in their journals on what their understanding of culture was and what role it played in their lives. They were also asked to construct joint definitions of culture in groups. The definitions of a wide range of students were read in order to identify common trends in students' understandings of culture.

Students were required to do a number of pieces of writing in the course, using different

genres. These included initial definitions of culture and a later journal entry which asked them to reflect on their earlier definition to see if their ideas had changed. They were also required to respond to definitions of culture which they had been given, choosing those which they found most useful and explaining why. In the two tasks related to the articles, they had to consider which aspects of the writers' argument they agreed or disagreed with and they had to identify how the three writers Biko, Achebe and Ramphele saw culture and discuss which understandings of culture they found most useful. These two tasks led up to an essay. In analysing the writing of a student over these various pieces of writing, it was possible to trace developments in their understanding of culture, and also to perceive areas where students experienced conflict between different ways of understanding culture.

Interviews with students

I conducted interviews with the student volunteers towards the end of the course to see whether their understandings of culture had changed or developed. I also wanted to hear their perceptions about what type of learning or approach to learning was being fostered in the course. The interviews were intended to be group interviews, but as it turned out there was one group interview (four students), one pair interview and a number of individual interviews. This was because some students missed the set interview times or came at different times. There were advantages and disadvantages to the group interview. The group interaction generated lively discussion, but certain students tended to dominate. The interviews were tape-recorded and these recordings were transcribed in full.

Tutors' reflection on teaching

The ELAP tutors held a meeting once a week, in which we reflected in depth on the teaching of the previous week. The relevant sections of these meetings were tape-recorded and then later transcribed. All the tutors kept journals on their teaching, and these informed the discussions. I had intended to interview ELAP tutors, but felt that this was unnecessary because it was likely to have duplicated the discussions that took place in the meetings. I kept a research journal, which I mainly used as a teaching journal, to reflect on my experiences of teaching the course.

The tutors on the course were inspired to write a paper for an Academic Development conference reflecting on their experiences in teaching the course. The collaborative process of writing the paper provided further opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Video-taping of classroom interaction

I arranged for group discussions in three classes to be video-taped. This gave me insight into how students engaged with the teaching materials, with the teaching/learning process and with each other. It also gave me access to how one of the tutors helped to mediate students' understanding of the material. However, I mainly used data from one of these video-recordings in my analysis, and even then I did not make thorough use of it. I tended to concentrate on the data from students' writing, interviews and tutors' meetings. This is because these sources generated so much data, and I had to prioritise what I was going to use. In future, if I use video-taping as a research method, I need to learn more about how to analyse the data from it, and put more effort into doing this.

I had intended to have parts of group discussions translated if students spoke in Xhosa or other African languages. I had told the tutor whose class was being taped that the students should communicate as they normally would. However, nearly all the discussion that was recorded was in English. In some cases this was because there were students in the group who couldn't speak Xhosa or other African languages. In other cases, students may have felt that they needed to speak English because they were being filmed. I observed that in other classes some groups used code-switching in their group discussions.

Validation techniques

I used triangulation of data from different sources and from different methods. For instance I compared how concepts were understood in different pieces of writing of the same student and related the conceptual development which I saw to students' perceptions of how their ideas had changed, which were expressed in their interviews. I was also interested in how the perceptions of the students about their learning in the course related to the perceptions of the tutors.

I have also used information from a student evaluation of the course that was conducted at the end of the second term. I felt that this provided a broader perspective on the course from the whole class. This put the responses of the ten students who volunteered to be involved in the research, into a broader context.

I gave a draft of two discussion chapters based on data gathered from students and tutors to the students involved in the research. I did this in order to be accountable to them in relation to how I used the data. I also asked them for feedback in terms of whether they agreed with my interpretations. I have given drafts of my discussion chapters to the ELAP tutors at various stages. I have mentioned that I did not get feedback from students to the drafts that I gave them. I am aware that I did not make feedback from students a priority. I did not initiate a meeting to get feedback from them, and relied on them taking their own initiative. If I had done this, I am sure that I would have got feedback, but students' ongoing involvement in the process was not central to the project. I understood students' lack of response as I was aware from the outset of the project that there are limits to how much involvement there is likely to be from first year students, who are coping with a new environment, grappling with their own studies and have their own pressing concerns. As I have mentioned, students probably lack confidence to respond to a piece of academic writing and there is also a power imbalance with me being perceived as a tutor/lecturer, even though I have tried to lessen it.

In one case, I approached a student, Abel, to ask him whether he agreed with an observation that I had made from his writing that his views on culture had changed during the course. He felt that his views had not changed and I found it difficult to revise my interpretation in the light of his perception.

I gave a draft of my discussion chapters to the ELAP tutors so that they could read my interpretations of the data and inform me if they had any disagreements or anything to add. I also wanted them to see how they had been represented in the discussion and inform me if there was a problem. Helen indicated that she was satisfied with my interpretations and the way in which she had been represented. Fleur commented on a number of my interpretations and I took her comments into account where I could.

5.3 Analysis of data

I started by immersing myself in the data. I watched the video which I'd decided to use, read through all the students' writing, the transcripts of interviews, staff meetings and videos. While doing this I made notes. I was particularly interested in developments in students' writing through their various pieces of writing. Garner in Ely (1991) suggests various stages that a researcher can go through, starting with applying thinking units (Lofland and Lofland 1984), then establishing categories which the data fits into, and then developing themes.

My first step toward structuring the data was developing a broad structure for my discussion chapter, which in retrospect seemed to correspond broadly to thinking units. These included, briefly: students' initial conceptions of culture; the development of students' understandings of culture; the facilitation of the development of students' understandings; students' perceptions of the course; tutors' perceptions of the course.

I found it difficult to know exactly what would constitute categories and themes in my research, and how they could be distinguished from each other. Nevertheless, I developed a list of what I thought were themes that emerged in the research, under three general headings: initial understandings of culture; development of understanding and development of academic literacy/ conceptual development (See Appendix G). I coded the themes and went through the data, noting where they occurred. There were about twelve themes, some of which were changed during the process. The structure discussed above and the themes provided an initial structure for the collation of data and the writing up of the research.

6. Some choices about representation

It is necessary to explain certain choices which I made in relation to firstly, how I referenced quotations and secondly, selection of extracts for the appendices.

6.1 Referencing of quotations

I have introduced quotations, referring to students by their first names, but used initials at the end of quotations to show whose utterance it is and in what context it was made. For example 'AXM Essay' refers to Abdul's essay, 'YV 20/5' refers to an interview with Yekani that was conducted on 20 May 1997.

I introduce the ELAP tutors, Helen Alfes and Fleur Theophilus by their full names and subsequently refer to them by their first names. I reference quotations from weekly ELAP meetings with the date of the meeting, for example, 'Meeting 12/5'.

6.2 Appendices

I will explain here why I have chosen to include certain materials and extracts from the data in the appendices. I only discuss those which I feel need explanation. I have chosen to include in my appendices the core materials from the section of the Culture course, which was researched, as I feel they are of central importance to this study (Appendix A). I included all the writing of the two students whose development I traced, so that the reader can make her own interpretations if she wishes (Appendix C). I have included transcripts of the interviews with the students whom I focused on most closely (Appendix D). Lastly, I have included extracts from two tutors' meetings (Appendix E), mainly to give the reader a sense of the type of discussion that went on in the meetings.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the theoretical approaches which have informed my research and which I have been drawn to in the process of making sense of the research data.

3. Crossing Boundaries: A Theoretical Framework

The previous chapter was concerned with how this research project has been conceptualised in relation to broad approaches to research. In this chapter I lay out a framework of theory which underpins the research and which has been drawn on in analysis and discussion. I have used literature from a number of disciplines as the field that I am located in, Academic Development, is itself multidisciplinary. I have found social theories of cognitive development from Psychology to be particularly relevant, and have drawn on some theories from Applied Linguistics. The theoretical framework of Academic Literacy needs to be included in any discussion related to EAP. There is a strong thread running through most of the theories discussed — they support the view that language and cognition are inextricably linked and that they are socially situated and develop in a social context. This is the central understanding of language and learning which informs this research.

During the course of the research, a central focus that emerged was the concept of the social construction of knowledge. I will outline three different constructivist approaches to knowledge and learning in order to clarify what social constructivism is. The issue of underpreparedness of students for university will be explored from different angles in order to conceptualise it in a theoretically sound way. Some Vygotskian concepts about learning will be discussed, focusing on the Zone of Proximal Development and scientific and everyday knowledge. The relationship between language and learning will be explored and issues of academic literacy. The contribution of Bakhtin's theories relating to semiotic mediation will also be discussed.

1. The social construction of knowledge

The ELAP course has been developed based on a broad constructivist⁴ view of knowledge,

⁴ I have chosen to use the term 'constructivism' which I understand to mean the same as 'constructionism' (Burr 1995:2).

although this has not been clearly defined. This understanding was reflected in the tutor meetings in which the course was discussed, and some of the comments made by the students in their interviews related to the construction of knowledge. However, there are different understandings of constructivism and the tutors had not located themselves within a particular view of constructivism. It would be useful to briefly outline different approaches to constructivism in order to situate my own theoretical approach.

Ernest distinguishes three different forms of constructivism: information processing constructivism, radical constructivism and social constructivism. Von Glasersfeld distinguishes two basic principles of constructivism. The first principle is common to all constructivist positions: "Knowledge is not passively received but actively built up by the cognizing subject" (Glasersfeld 1989:182 in Ernest 1992:2). Information processing constructivism recognises this first principle, but rejects the second principle which underlies radical constructivism. This principle states that "the function of cognition is adaptive and serves the organization of the experiential world, not the discovery of ontological reality." (Glasersfeld 1989:182 in Ernest 1992:2). Thus, it totally rejects the traditional notion of "Truth" as it is conventionally defined (Stahl 1995:17). According to this approach, a person generates cognitive schemas to guide actions and represent her experiences. These are tested according to how well they fit with her experience. The best fitting of the schemas are tentatively adopted and retained as guides to action (Ernest 1992:2).

Radical constructivism seems to fit with Dewey's progressivist pedagogy, which was opposed to knowledge being imposed from above and outside. It stressed "expression and cultivation of individuality, ...[and] learning through experience". (Dewey 1938 in Kalantzis and Cope 1993:45). Dewey also argued that instead of being a passive receiver of facts, a child should assume the role of questioner and experimenter (Kalantzis and Cope 1993:45).

In order to come to terms with social constructivism, I will refer to Lave's concept of *situated social practice* or *situated learning* as it seems that this is a similar concept to social constructivism and is clearly explained by her (Lave 1991:67). This view claims that "learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people engaged in activity *in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world*" (67). This world is itself socially

constituted. Thus the meaning of a concept is generated "in dialectical relations between the social world and the persons engaged in activity; together these produce and re-produce both world and persons in activity" (67).

Burr (1995:2) explains the idea of knowledge being sustained by social processes in the following way: The interactions between people in the course of their everyday lives are seen as the practices during which their shared versions of knowledge are constructed. Thus "our current accepted ways of understanding the world, is a product ... of the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other" (4).

Brown *et al* (1989) help to clarify how one can understand the dialectical relationship between socially and culturally structured world and the learner. They see academic disciplines as communities or cultures and argue that:

[communities of practitioners] are bound by intricate, socially constructed webs of belief, which are essential to understanding what they do (Geertz, 1983). The activities of many communities are unfathomable, unless they are viewed from within a culture.

(Brown *et al* 1989:33)

Using the metaphor of a set of tools for conceptual knowledge, they argue that "the culture and the use of a tool act together to determine the way practitioners see the world; and the way the world appears to them determines the culture's understanding of the world and of the tools" (Brown *et al* 1989:33).

Language plays an important role according to a social constructivist approach, as it is seen as a necessary pre-condition for thought. The conceptual frameworks and categories of people in a culture are encoded in language. These concepts and categories are acquired by people as they develop the use of language, and are reproduced by them in their use of language. Thus "the way people think, the very categories and concepts that provide a framework of meaning for them, are provided by the language they use" (Burr 1995:7). I will explore this further below.

In ELAP we have set ourselves the task of trying to teach students the ways of thinking

required broadly in the university. The argument outlined above of language being a precondition for thought shows how closely connected language and conceptual development are. Of course students come to university, having developed understandings of a concept such as culture, which are, in most cases, rooted in their first languages and are framed by their home discourses. The Culture course aimed to work with students' understandings of this topic and to assist them to construct more complex understandings of culture, providing scaffolding in this process.

What are the implications of following a social constructivist approach for the research? Wertsch (1991a:86) identifies two ways in which human mental functioning can be socially situated. Firstly, such functioning may be carried out through the social interaction found in dyads or other small groups. Secondly, cognition may be viewed as being situated in broader institutional and cultural settings. In this research project, I did not focus on the social interaction in pairs or small groups. However, I have analysed the learning of students in relation to the learning practices which they have developed at school, and in terms of the approach to learning which they have been encouraged to develop within the Culture course, an approach which is closer to that which is required at university, particularly in the Arts and Social Sciences. The research has also been concerned with common-sense knowledge, and the influence of home discourse on students' understanding of the concept of culture and how this may conflict with some academic conceptualisations of culture. Thus it takes account of the influence of broader institutional and cultural contexts.

Thus I have situated my approach to learning within a social constructivist framework. I will home in on a university context and attempt to formulate an understanding of underpreparedness, which is central to this research.

2. How do we understand underpreparedness?

When universities have to deal with the question of providing access to previously disadvantaged students, one of the most apparent problems to mainstream lecturers and the

university authorities is "the language problem". The assumption here is that students' English is poor, they have been exposed to poor English teaching at schools, and they have not been exposed to enough English in their communities. In order to cope with university studies through the medium of English, the focus needs to be on developing their English. These are all valid claims, but I think this approach lacks understanding of the extent of disjunction between students' learning histories and the types of demands made on them in university courses. In contrast to this, a social constructivist approach would not just separate language as a factor isolated from other aspects of learning and the context of students' learning, both past and present, would be seen as crucial. At the other extreme, one should not neglect the development of English, or underestimate the important role that it plays.

Another common emphasis in academic development, the "study skills" approach, also tries to address students' learning needs in a superficial way. The underlying assumption of teaching study skills is that a skill like notetaking can be taught discretely and applied to any learning situation. Boughey (1995) argues that notetaking as a "skill" cannot exist outside a context of meaning. For example, "...in order to take notes, a student needs knowledge of the content area of the text, knowledge of how the text is organised or a structured 'goal' for taking those notes" (10). Therefore it cannot be taught discretely. She argues that what we label academic skills should be taught within the context of mainstream teaching, for example, by the lecturer identifying the structure of her lecture at the beginning of the lecture.

Before I go on, I would like to raise a problem about discussing underpreparedness. There is a tendency to generalise about disadvantaged students and what are seen as their deficits. On the one hand, it is problematic to generalise about humans in any context and one should not allow one's preconceived ideas about students to blind one to their abilities. On the other hand, black students who have come through the ex-Department of Education and Training (DET) system do tend to manifest real problems which are a result of apartheid education. One has to identify trends and categorise these problems in order to be able to design programmes which can facilitate development of students.

Moll and Slonimsky (1989:161) talk about the rote-learning context which disadvantaged

students come from and how the patterns of activity which they have developed in the educational institutions which they come from "in turn construct their cognition and learning" in an academic context such as Wits University. They argue that educational contexts have certain *groundrules* which students are required to master in order to succeed. A rote-learning context invokes only surface processing, that is basic forms of cognitive activity such as perceiving, reading and memorising. In contrast, a university course in the Humanities is likely to assume deep-processing, that is "sophisticated forms of cognitive activity which entail a number of different levels of abstraction..." (1989:161).⁵

Craig and Kernoff (1995:24) argue that many black students are underprepared because of the lack of appropriate socio-educational opportunities, or inadequate mediation into the world of text. They refer to studies which have shown how pre-school children from highly literate cultures are socialised into literacy by their adult caretakers and teachers by participating in literacy events. However, in black working-class and rural communities, it is likely that literacy is not well-entrenched in people's practices and institutions for a number of reasons, including oral traditions, poverty and a history of educational disadvantage.

Craig (1996) refers to learning and teaching as magical processes that she attempts to unpack. She does this, using Pascual-Leone's neo-Piagetian approach to cognition (cf. Pascual-Leone & Goodman 1979). Pascual-Leone makes a distinction between what s/he calls our "structural mental capacity" or Ms for short, and our "functional mental capacity" or Mf for short.

Ms involves our given, innate mental power - the size of our engines, so to speak. Whereas Mf is the ways we have learned to 'use our engines'. In other words, our functional mental capacity is that with which we mobilise our innate, human capacities. This distinction goes to the heart of the capacity and ability to know, to learn and adapt to new situations.

(Craig 1996:50)

Craig explains structural mental capacities as being that with which we are born. These capacities develop through different stages until a plateau is reached round about puberty or

⁵ The categories of *deep* and *surface approaches* to learning were originally identified by Marton and Saljo (1976; cited in Entwistle and Ramsden 1982).

young adulthood. In contrast, our functional abilities involve knowing how to use our engines or, more literally, our heads. We learn to "use our heads" in many ways from birth onwards, from our parents and the people that we relate to, and from our environments. Our environments influence the ways that we learn to "use our heads". For example, a child who grows up in an enriched and stimulating environment *learns how to learn and know*, whilst this is out of reach for a child who is materially and educationally disadvantaged. "The point is, whatever our human mental capacities, these rely on learning, development and explicit teaching in order to be available for performance" Craig (1996:50). This echoes Vygotsky's view that learning results in cognitive developmental processes that would not take place without it (Vygotsky 1978:84-91).

Moll and Slonimsky (1989) seem to use similar concepts to structural mental capacities and functional mental capacities, which they refer to as cognitive structures and cognitive skills respectively. They appeal for a cognitive theory that does not assume that all disadvantaged students lack the cognitive structures (Ms) on which university performance depends, but rather can explain how and why they find it difficult to mobilise the appropriate contextual skills (Mf) adequately in a university context (162).

They argue against working from a deficit model and attempting to provide students with abilities which are missing. They believe that students generally have developed the cognitive structures (Ms) necessary for university, but that:

the DET has effectively trained students not to use these skills in an academic setting ... by its emphasis on rote learning and uncritical regurgitation, which are components of surface processing. Deep processing has not been encouraged in DET schools and has probably been discouraged. As a result, the cognitive skills involved...are not often used in school work, and the school is a new student's basic model of academia (Slonimsky & Turton 1985; in Moll & Slonimsky 1989:162).

One of the factors contributing to the emphasis on rote learning in what were Department of Education and Training Schools may have been the fact that students were taught through the medium of a second language from Standard 3 onwards. The findings of Macdonald's Threshold Report were that children were ill-prepared in the first four years of school for the transition to English. In Standard three they became overwhelmed with masses of text in

English. The teachers themselves were not only poorly equipped with English and a command of their subject matter; they also had no training to deal with this problem. "As a result the teaching often consists of rote learning of simplified summaries which the teachers make from the text books" (Murray 1990:24).

Craig argues that education can be thought of as "that process which exploits our structural mental capacities and equips us with the necessary functional abilities to perform at a level and in a manner appropriate for our age and other aspects of our lives" (Craig 1996:50). Thus, a certain gap between Ms and Mf is not only normal but necessary for learning. However, if the gap is too big, it renders learners unprepared for normal adaptation to new and strange tasks and situations and thus "underprepared". In this case, more creative teaching strategies or curriculum interventions are required.

3. A three-level model of cognitive processing

In this section, I will discuss *epistemic cognition*, an important aspect of the cognitive development of university students, which is often taken for granted by lecturers. Strohm Kitchener (1983), describes cognition as operating at three levels. *First level cognition* refers to the level at which the individual uses those competencies which have already developed, such as calculating, using spoken or written language. *Metacognition* is the conscious monitoring of progress in learning or engaging in a task. *Epistemic cognition* is the activity of consciously interpreting the nature of a problem and defining the limits of any strategy for solving it. It involves the nature and limits of knowing and knowledge. Epistemic cognition "includes conscious awareness of and an attempt to pay heed to what may count as a claim to knowledge in a particular discipline, course or topic" (Craig 1989:169). It includes what may count as evidence for the claim(s) advanced; the certainty of knowing and knowledge as well as limits of knowing and knowledge; and the criteria by which knowledge or claims to knowledge can be evaluated.

Strohm Kitchener distinguishes between two different types of problem-solving situations - puzzles and "ill-structured problems". Puzzles "have two distinguishing characteristics: (a)

there is only one correct final solution, and (b) the solution is guaranteed by using a specific procedure" (224-225). "Ill-structured problems" on the other hand are problems for which "there is not a single, unequivocal solution which can be determined at the present moment by employing a particular decision-making procedure" (224). The latter is typical of the kind of problem-solving situations encountered in Arts and Social Science studies at university level (Craig 1991:138).

Strohm Kitchener argues the processes that are involved in constructing a solution to an ill-structured problem "include making judgements about arguments and evidence on what may be opposing sides of the issue ... evaluating information from inconsistent and imperfect data sources ... and developing and arguing for a reasonable solution" (225). She claims that "for ill-structured problems a reasonable solution is often the one which creates the best fit with our current knowledge of the issue ... or that redefines a problem in such a way that opposing perspectives are synthesized into a new framework" (225).

Furthermore, individuals' monitoring of ill-structured problems and processes of finding solutions for them are critically influenced by their epistemic assumptions.

If, for example, individuals believe that there is an objective reality which is absolutely knowable and known by someone, they will be unable to distinguish between the types of solution necessary for puzzles and ill-structured problems. ... they will assume that their task with respect to both types of problems is to apply *the* correct procedure ... to insure a valid and true solution.

... By contrast, an individual may understand that problems do not always have an absolutely correct solution, only better or worse ones, that in some cases knowing is influenced by one's frame of reference, and that reason and data are fallible. Individuals holding such assumptions can allow for the existence of both puzzles and ill-structured problems and differentiate between the kinds of solutions available for each.

(226)

As long as individuals assume that there may be several potentially valid perspectives on a problem, they can recognise that different solutions may be constructed (226).

Strohm Kitchener cites research which claims that epistemic cognitive processes play a critical role in the reasoning of older adolescents and adults. While "the epistemic framework of early

adolescents assumes knowledge is absolute and truth is effectively computable" (229), a developmental shift occurs in the late adolescent years which allows knowledge to be understood in relationship to the system or context in which it is embedded. A second shift occurs when adults begin to understand knowledge as encompassing different perspectives, while allowing for the process of knowledge through integration and synthesis (229).

From students' work in a pre-sessional course on the production of knowledge in the Arts and Social Sciences, Craig (1991) developed the concept of "a commonsense theory of knowledge" which disadvantaged students tended to have. She established a list of basic tenets of such a theory which include some of the following: (1) There is an objective reality which is absolutely knowable and known by someone; and there is "a 'right' and 'true' and 'proper' because God (and the Bible or some other unquestionable authority) made it so" (137). (2) There is only one direct access to this 'truth' and that is through personal, immediate, first person accounts of experience. (3) When confronted with a set of ideas, students tend to force them into a linear story line.

These tenets are consistent with the epistemic framework of early adolescence outlined above. It seems that Craig's students and, indeed, many disadvantaged students, come to university, without having shifted their epistemic assumptions. They have not yet formulated assumptions about "the limits of knowledge, the certainty of knowledge and the criteria for knowing (Strohm Kitchener 1983:230), or have formulated assumptions which are at odds with the epistemologies of which university disciplines are part (Craig 1991:138). Here again one has to guard against stereotyping students. For example, some students can debate topical issues in a sophisticated way, but revert to a commonsense view of knowledge when they apply themselves to academic tasks.

Learners who are unable to solve ill-structured problems will not be able to succeed in Arts and Social Sciences courses, as they are such a fundamental part of learning and knowing in these faculties. Most students from disadvantaged backgrounds have to learn through being thrown in the deep-end, and some of them do. However, I would argue that it is the work of foundation courses and mainstream departments to facilitate the development of epistemic cognition of learners in order for them to succeed with university studies.

This is the challenge that foundation courses are faced with — to create contexts in which students can be provided with mediation to mobilise and develop the functional mental capacities needed in university contexts; to equip students to cope with the kinds of tasks required in university disciplines; to show them how the rules "for the construction of ... new academic knowledge" differ from "the rules they used to construct their 'common knowledge'" (Bougey 1997:7) and to assist students to develop the language and discourses to engage in critical analysis. In the next section, I discuss Vygotsky's ideas on learning and development, particularly his concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD).

4. Some Vygotskian theories about cognitive and conceptual development.

If one takes a social constructivist approach to learning, it is important to look at the contribution of Vygotsky to developing a sociocultural approach to mind. Vygotsky's work has had an influence on the field of education and has indirectly influenced approaches to academic development. Although Vygotsky mainly researched children, one should not view him as primarily a student of child development. John-Steiner and Soubberman write that "he emphasized the study of (child) development because he believed it to be the primary theoretical and methodological means necessary to unravel complex human processes" (Vygotsky 1978:128).

There are a number of aspects of Vygotsky's theories which I will discuss in this chapter. Firstly, I will briefly introduce what is meant by a sociocultural theory of cognitive development and the concept of mediation as used by Vygotsky and I will go on to discuss the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky is also important for his understanding of the relationship between language and thought and this will be discussed in a later section.

According to a sociocultural theory of mind, development does not proceed as the unfolding of inborn capacities, but as the transformation of innate capacities as they interact with socioculturally constructed mediational means (Lantolf & Pavlenko 1995:109). Vygotsky emphasised two types of mediated activity — the use of tools and signs, such as algebraic symbols, mnemonic tools and above all language. While the use of *tools* is externally oriented

and aimed at influencing the object of activity, the use of *signs* is a means of internal activity, aimed at mastering oneself. Vygotsky argued that mediated activity fundamentally changes all psychological operations. During the process of a child's development, she moves from an initial reliance on external signs to a stage where the operation of mediated activity takes place as an internal process. This transition process is referred to as internalisation (Vygotsky 1978:55-56).

4.1 The zone of proximal development (ZPD)

Moll argues that from a Vygotskian perspective, a major role of schooling is to create contexts for mastery of and conscious awareness in the use of the cultural tools and signs referred to above (Moll 1990:12). Schools should provide zones of proximal development which facilitate the development of higher order thinking. Rather than facilitating the growth of systematic conceptual reasoning, apartheid education has actively hampered this kind of development (Forrest and Winberg 1993; Moll and Slonimsky 1989). However, Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development provides hope and direction for educators trying to facilitate development in adults as it sees the process of learning as being ongoing, and stresses the possibility of new abilities being acquired through mediated learning.

Vygotsky defines the zone of proximal development as:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.
(Vygotsky 1978:86)

The child's actual developmental level relates to functions that have already matured. The ZPD defines those functions which have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, currently in an embryonic state. "These functions could be termed the 'buds' or 'flowers' of development rather than the 'fruits' of development" (1978:86).

Vygotsky argues that learning which is oriented toward developmental levels that have already been reached is ineffective from the viewpoint of a child's overall development. Thus, the

only 'good learning' is that which is in advance of development, where learning

creates the zone of proximal development; that is learning awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement (89).

Thus children internalise and *transform* the assistance they receive from others and eventually use these same means of guidance to direct their subsequent problem-solving behaviours (Moll 1990:11). An example of this internalization is language which is used initially as a means of communication between the child and the people in her environment. Subsequently, the child begins to use language for internal speech, and it is used to organise the child's thoughts and becomes an internal mental function.

Vygotsky argues that learning is not equivalent to development; however, properly organised learning results in development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning. "Thus, learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organised, specifically human, psychological functions" (90). He also argues that at the moment a child assimilates the meaning of a word, or masters a new operation, her developmental processes have only just begun, as the learning will have awakened a variety of highly complex internal processes in the child's thinking.

Learning to solve problems independently would rely on developing a consciousness about *how* to go about solving the problem. Through solving a problem (with mediation), the learner learns

not only the solution to the problem but also how his/her actions should be regulated when dealing with problems of this kind. In other words, ... not only the solution to the problem but the set of regulations or operations that are necessary to solve problems of this kind (Miller 1989:156).

Vygotsky argued that "awareness and deliberate control appear only during a very advanced stage in the development of a mental function, after it has been used and practised unconsciously and spontaneously" (Vygotsky 1986:168). This suggests that prior to the

development of self-directed, conscious control, action is a more direct or less mediated response to the world. Bruner argues that it is through the ZPD that the mind "grapples itself to 'higher ground'" (Bruner 1986:73). It is through mediation in the ZPD that this consciousness develops.

Bruner asks how 'good learning' can be achieved in advance of development. "How can the competent learner lend consciousness to a child who does not 'have' it on his own?" (74). He developed the term *scaffolding* in the sense of "scaffolding erected for the learner by the tutor" which helps to answer his question. This term has become a common name for forms of assistance in the learner's ZPD. "Because scaffolds are literally temporary, adjustable frameworks for construction in progress, their metaphorical sense retains the important Vygotskian meaning of an ever-shifting ZPD" (Cazden 1994:174).

Roehler and Duffy (1986) analysed the way fifth-grade teachers taught reading skills. They identified four characteristics of the verbal mediation or scaffolding provided by effective teachers. Firstly, teachers provided students with the information needed to use the skill. Secondly, they explained how a particular skill was useful as part of a strategy for when meaning broke down. Thirdly, they helped students to assume responsibility for the control and use of skills. They did this "by directing students, by gradually reducing assistance as students assume responsibility for using the skill, and by allowing students to verbalize and clarify the thinking required" (282). Fourthly, they helped students transfer the skill to other contexts. I think that these steps, subject to variation, characterise the type of features that scaffolding is made up of.

I need to clarify my use of the term 'mediation' or 'mediated activity' as at times I use it in a similar sense to scaffolding. Vygotsky uses the term 'mediate' in a broad sense, which seems to mean to affect or change, for instance in the case of the use of tools or psychological signs affecting activity. Activity is mediated because it is shaped by the use of tools or signs (Vygotsky 1978:54-55).

Language is one of the most widely used and significant psychological signs. According to Vygotsky, social interaction is characterised as an 'interpsychological process' that signs and

language in particular mediate. Vygotsky describes higher mental functions as originating when 'interpsychological processes' are internalised, creating 'intrapsychological processes' (Rodby 1992:62). Thus, social interaction is also an agent for mediating cognitive development, and a teacher or a particular learning situation can mediate learning. Thus I have attempted to trace the use of the word 'mediate' from what I see as a more general meaning to its use in an educational context. I see scaffolding as related to mediation in this sense, but with a more specific meaning, which I have explained and will discuss more.

An acceptance of the ZPD and its role in learning poses a number of challenges for course development. A clear implication is that one should provide material that is challenging to the learner. Thus, in the case of disadvantaged students, there is no point in seeing them as slow or stupid and providing them with tasks which they are easily capable of doing. Tasks need to stretch the learner, but they also need to be designed in such a way that scaffolding is provided, either built into the task, through pair-/group-work, or through assistance from the tutor.

In practice, aiming to locate tasks within the student's ZPD poses a number of difficulties. Naturally, the students are at different levels of development and one cannot aim a task at precisely the right level for each student. I think that in a context like an EAP course, one has to aim at a middle level of students' abilities and build in further challenges for more advanced students and supports for less advanced ones. The use of group work in class, if carefully planned, can address this problem to some extent, as more capable students play the role of mediator for their peers, and all participants can learn from this experience. Writing tasks can be tiered at different levels, so that more advanced students can take the task further than those who are struggling at a more basic level (Boughey and Van Rensburg 1994:160). Even though there are these difficulties, for me the most important implications of the ZPD are firstly, the need to strive to make tasks challenging for students, but to provide scaffolding to enable them to engage with the task. Secondly, it accords with the basic principle of always aiming to take students from where they are to a higher level of understanding. This seems like an obvious, commonsense principle in education, but I think it is often ignored in teaching and curriculum development. Perhaps the problem is more that educators do not know how to do this and Vygotsky's theory of the ZPD draws attention to

the need to focus more on how this process can be engaged in in teaching and research.

4.2 Scientific and everyday concepts

Another aspect of mediation that Vygotsky stressed was the development of conscious awareness and voluntary control of knowledge, which he explained using "scientific" and "everyday" concepts. Scientific concepts are part of a system of knowledge and are learned through formal instruction, whereas everyday concepts are acquired unconsciously through experience, are "saturated with experience" (Vygotsky 1986:193). According to Vygotsky (1986;1987) the strength of scientific concepts is in the child's capacity (developed through instruction) to use these concepts voluntarily. In contrast the weakness of everyday concepts is the child's incapacity to manipulate them in a voluntary manner (Moll 1990:9).

Vygotsky also emphasized that everyday and scientific concepts are closely connected and interdependent. It is through the use of everyday concepts that children make sense of the definitions and explanations of scientific concepts. That is, everyday concepts *mediate* the acquisition of scientific concepts. However, everyday concepts also become dependent on, and are mediated and transformed by scientific concepts; "they become the 'gate' through which conscious awareness and control enter the domain of the everyday concepts" (Moll 1990:10). Thus scientific concepts grow down into the everyday, into the domain of personal experience, acquiring meaning and significance. Scientific concepts, in turn, supply structures for the upward development of the child's everyday concepts towards consciousness and deliberate use (Vygotsky 1986:194).

I am including this aspect of Vygotsky's theories, not in relation to conceptual development of children, but with a question as to whether it has relevance for the conceptual development of young adults concerning the relationship between everyday, commonsense knowledge and academic knowledge. One could argue that for meaningful learning to take place, there needs to be a dialectical relationship between the learner's life experience and the academic concepts which she is learning. The learner could use the academic ideas which she is learning to reflect on and relate to her life experience. At the same time her life experience would be used to test whether the academic knowledge is valid and to add depth and substance to it.

Both academic and everyday knowledge would undergo change because of this dialectic process.

5. The relationship between language and learning

The understanding of language and learning underlying this research is that language plays a critical role in mediating learning. I explore the nature of this relationship in this section by discussing the views of Vygotsky (briefly) and Cummins, who addresses bilingualism in education. The shaping of thought through concepts and schemas will also be discussed. Lastly, I look briefly at the relationship between conceptual understanding and grammatical control in students' writing.

Views on the relationship between language and thought have been divided between followers of Whorf (1956) and Vygotsky (1962) and at the other extreme, Piaget (1926) (cited in Nightingale:1988:66). Whorf and Vygotsky believed that language has a determining effect on cognitive processes, so that "on the one hand, possessing language makes it possible to order experience into learning, but on the other hand, the nature of the language resources possessed determines the style of learning and even shapes perceptions and understandings" (Nightingale 1988:73). Piaget emphasized the dominant role of cognition, arguing that as increasingly sophisticated learning takes place, language develops to express concepts.

Vygotsky viewed thought and language not as "inner and outer manifestations of the same mental phenomenon" (Fredericks 1974:283 in Schinke-Llano 1993:122) but as two distinct cognitive operations which develop along separate lines in young children but grow together at a certain stage in childhood (Vygotsky 1986:93-94). He argued that inner speech develops with the child differentiating the social and egocentric functions of speech and that "the speech structures mastered by the child become the basic structures of his thinking" (Vygotsky 1986:94). He believed that "the child's intellectual growth is contingent on his mastering the social means of thought, that is, language" (*ibid.*). Once thought and language have grown together, they develop in an intertwining pattern, each reinforcing and changing the other as development proceeds (Schinke-Llano 1993:122).

What relationship between language and thought would develop in bilingual or multilingual children?⁶ Cummins (1980a, 1981a) developed the *common underlying proficiency model* of bilingualism. According to this, although two languages are outwardly different, they operate through the same central processing system (cited in Baker 1993:134). The model sees bilingualism in the following ways. Irrespective of the language in which a person is operating, their thinking comes "from the same central engine" (Baker 1993:135) and there is one integrated source of thought. Information processing skills and educational attainment may be developed through two well developed language channels or through one monolingual channel equally successfully as both channels feed the same central processor. However, the language the child uses in the classroom needs to be sufficiently well developed to be able to meet the cognitive needs of the classroom. If children are made to operate in a poorly developed second language in the classroom, the quality and quantity of what they learn and produce may be relatively weak and impoverished. This seems to have been the case in most DET schools, and is perpetuated at university, when students have to study through English without having adequate competence in it.

Linked to the theory of common underlying proficiency, Cummins (1978) formulated his *developmental interdependence theory*. He argued that there is a threshold level of competence in the first language which a child must attain before learning a second language in order to gain the potential benefits of bilingualism. He added that if instruction in the child's first language was effective in promoting cognitive/academic proficiency, there would be transfer of this proficiency to a second language, provided there was exposure to the second language (in Harlech-Jones 1991:106).

As has been mentioned above, the effects of the sudden transition to education through the medium of English in Standard 3 in DET schools indicated that students were unlikely to have developed a cognitive academic proficiency in their first language sufficiently before they proceeded to studying through the medium of English. This is likely to have negatively affected their development of proficiency in English and their academic development

⁶ I will limit my discussion to bilingualism, assuming that one can extrapolate these theories to deal with multilingualism.

generally.

Cummins (1984a) distinguished between two components of language competence. These are basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), which are those aspects of linguistic skills that are necessary for functioning in everyday contexts and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), the ability "to use language effectively as an instrument of thought and represent cognitive operations by means of language" (Hoffmann 1991:127). The distinction between BICS and CALP explains the failure of bilingual children in mainstream education, who appear to have sufficient language competence (BICS) to cope, but fail because their CALP is not developed enough to cope with the demands of the curriculum. What Cummins (1984a) regarded as essential was that the 'common underlying proficiency' was well developed. That is, he argued that a child's language-cognitive abilities need to be sufficiently well developed to cope with the curriculum processes of the classroom. This underlying ability could be developed in the first or second language, or in both languages simultaneously (in Baker 1993:138).

What are the implications of research on bilingualism and education for an EAP course? The idea of a common underlying proficiency supports an approach which is not just language based, but which strives to develop the cognitive, academic abilities linked to language, which students need at university. The point that students cannot study through the medium of a second language without having adequate competence in it suggests that one needs to work at developing students' competence in the second language as well as developing a common underlying proficiency. Practically at a university level, with students from a range of multilingual backgrounds, it is difficult to address the problem of students not having gained a sufficient level of competence in their first language. However, one can try to promote additive bilingualism by valuing students' first languages and introducing support in African languages at a level that is practically possible. For example, Kapp (1996:460) made a proposal that a co-teaching tutorial system be introduced for first-year classes at the UCT, where post-graduate students who are speakers of African languages would co-teach with tenured academic staff.

In a further development of the theory of BICS and CALP, Cummins (1986) outlined a

framework of range of contextual support and level of cognitive demand of communicative activities. This proposes that 'language proficiency' can be conceptualised along two continua. First is a horizontal continuum relating to the range of contextual support available for expressing or receiving meaning. The extremes of this continuum are described in terms of 'context-embedded' versus 'context-reduced' communication. They are distinguished by the fact that:

in context-embedded communication the participants can actively negotiate meaning ... and the language is supported by a wide range of meaningful paralinguistic and situational cues; context reduced communication, on the other hand, relies primarily ... on linguistic cues to meaning and may in some cases involve suspending knowledge of the 'real' world in order to interpret (or manipulate) the logic of the communication appropriately.
(Cummins 1986:152-3)

The vertical continuum is related to how cognitively demanding the task or activity is.

At university, students are required to understand and work with language that is both context-reduced and cognitively demanding. Cummins refers mainly to spoken language as being context-embedded and written text as context-disembedded. However, one can also see a continuum of contextual support operating in written texts, where narrative text provides far more contextual support, than expository text which is highly decontextualised.

This model of language proficiency helps us to understand why students who are fluent in English at an interactive, communicative level, struggle with certain academic tasks. It supports the idea that linguistic competence cannot be separated from the cognitive demands of a task. It also has implications for curriculum development that activities should be scaffolded; there should be a development from those with more contextual support, which are less cognitively demanding to those which are context-reduced and more cognitively demanding. In this way, it complements the ideas of Vygotsky.

In the following section I explore an approach to how concepts are developed through language. Entwistle (1987:36) argues that images of past events and *concepts* are stored in long-term memory, concepts providing a way of condensing meaning. He defines a concept as a "class of objects, (like a 'building'), or a general notion, (like 'freedom') which can be

defined formally in terms of its main attributes" (36). In everyday life, our understanding of a concept is built up by seeing what fits or does not fit that particular label. Besides images of past events, we seem to have *semantic* long-term memory made up of the concepts we have developed.

Bloom (1981) explores the linguistic shaping of thought through the concept of schemas. His starting point is that humans impose meaningful organisation on their experience of the world "by means of a highly complex and extensive repertory of discrete cognitive schemas" (61). I outline his argument at some length because I feel that it gives substance to what is often understood intuitively. He argues that at around eighteen months, according to both Vygotsky and Piaget, a child's capacity for symbolization develops and with it the capacity to link a set of lexical schemas to cognitive ones. This opens the door to linguistic communication (64).

To learn the language of his adult culture, the child has to "reformulate and extend his cognitive map of the world in the directions to which his language points, so that he can come to mean and understand by his use of these linguistic labels what the adults of his culture do by theirs" (Bloom 1981:65).

Bloom argues that the point of instruction, aimed at developing thinking structures rather than instilling facts, is to use linguistic labels to encourage the development of cognitive structures that can operate in the absence of the labels through which they have been taught. For example, teaching the word "perspective" should lead an art student to look at paintings in a new way, without the word "perspective" necessarily coming into his mind (74).

He argues that although linguistic labels do not act as the medium in which we think, or act to exclusively determine the way in which we think, they do lead us "to extend our cognitive repertories in language-specific ways, to develop many schemas through which we come to cognize the world, store information about it and plan our reactions to it that we would be unlikely to develop without their aid" (74). We formulate many of the thoughts we intend to communicate within the unlabelled portions of our schematic repertories. However, "to communicate those thoughts through language we must first 'put them into words'" (75).

He argues that we use language not only to give direction to the behaviour and thoughts of others, but also to give direction to our own behaviour and thoughts. We pose questions to ourselves in words in order to direct our thoughts to a specific topic and we try to formulate our ideas in words in order to represent it "as a discrete, stable cognitive unit which we can thereafter call upon when we want to direct our mental attention to the specific perspective on the world it represents" (77). Inglis and Grayson (1992) mention two byproducts of students verbalising ideas. "Once these ideas have been put into words, that is made concrete by the student they can be transferred to another context more easily" (Perkins and Salomon:1989 in Inglis and Grayson 1992:193), and the student is in a stronger position to be able to monitor his or her learning.

The most significant effects of language on thought are "the cognitive effects of linguistic labels that lead us to build those highly complex, abstractly derived perspectives on reality that we [are] unlikely to construct without their aid" (83). Successful performance in these tasks depends on the use of information that can neither be represented in perceptual terms nor easily disengaged and maintained in one's mind without the aid of associated linguistic labels.

Although speakers of different languages may differ in how they label aspects of reality and what labels they use, they still come to hold many cognitive schemas in common. Thus they can communicate to each other, through translation, much of what they mean. With specialised concepts which do not exist in the other language, what is required is not simply translation, but a complex, cognitive accomplishment, that may be aided by referring to categories the speaker already has and to exemplar situations that he has experienced. Furthermore, it must involve mastering, under the direction of linguistic labels, a new mode of thought. "Here, in highly abstract realms of thought, translation depends on, and provides the direction for, cognitive growth" (86).

This is particularly relevant in the case of disadvantaged, black students coming into a university situation where the medium of instruction is English. Like all students, they are required to learn new terminology and concepts, but those terms may be more unfamiliar to them, than to first language speakers. Furthermore, it is likely that in the case of many

academic terms and concepts, there is no equivalent in their first language. ESL students may be bombarded with unfamiliar terms initially at university. However, in a foundation course, it is necessary to consider to what extent new and unfamiliar terms and concepts are being used in the selection of materials and to provide careful scaffolding to assist students to develop an understanding of them.

Entwistle (1987) sees meaningful learning as taking place "when we try to make sense of new information or new concepts by creating links with our existing set of concepts and factual knowledge or with previous learning" (36). Furthermore, education involves the use of increasingly abstract concepts, many of which may be defined formally. Such definitions can be learnt by rote, but then they are, in effect, separated in the memory from other potentially relevant concepts and experiences. "Understanding depends on being able to develop a web of interconnections which relate previous knowledge and experience to the new information or ideas being presented" (37).

In many cases, academic disciplines use everyday words with specialised meanings, which may be specific to that discipline. Often students' prior understandings of those words, which are commonsense understandings do not assist students in mastering the more academic meanings of the terms and may in fact interfere with their developing understanding. In these cases, I would argue that one should engage with students' prior understandings of the terms, and make students aware of how the academic meaning differs from the commonsense one, not just impose the academic meaning as another layer on top.

Researchers studying the writing of English first language students have observed inconsistencies in control of grammatical structures. For example, Taylor, West and Nightingale (1987) found that "... students are quite able to use [various parts of speech or sentence constructions] adequately in many contexts of meaning," but they struggle to do this in less familiar contexts (quoted in Nightingale 1988:70). Ballard and Clanchy argue that often at first year level "precision in grammar and syntax gives way under the pressure of conceptual sophistication or density" (1988:17). This also applies to ESL students, who may be more fluent writing in a narrative form in English, for example, than in an argumentative essay.

Cummins' framework of range of contextual support and level of cognitive demand of communicative activities can help to explain inconsistency in students' control of language. Different tasks at the same level of students' development may differ in terms of firstly, how context-embedded or disembedded the writing is required to be and, secondly, how cognitively demanding the task is. A student may have more control over language in a more context-embedded task related to a task which is context-disembedded, and less control as the tasks become more cognitively demanding. The framework may also explain Taylor's observation of students' ability to handle grammar deteriorating "under the more rigorous, perhaps more subtle, and certainly more abstract demands of 'higher' studies in the same discipline" (Taylor 1988:59).

Nightingale (1988:81) echoes Vygotsky's image of language and thought developing in an intertwining pattern, when she conceptualises

the relation of language and knowledge as interlocking spirals up which a learner moves unevenly; at points where the language and the cognition intersect the learner is capable of articulation of the knowledge. Sometimes learners have the vocabulary but lack understanding of the concepts; but sometimes the concept is grasped intuitively while the vocabulary is inadequate to express it.

This draws attention to how carefully language development and cognitive/conceptual development need to be interwoven in the curriculum, in any course, but particularly in an EAP course.

6. Academic literacy

The issue of language and learning at university is closely linked to the notion of academic literacy, which is thoroughly explored in *Literacy by Degrees*.⁷ Ballard and Clanchy (1988:8), two of the authors of this book, describe academic literacy as a set of cultural

⁷ Taylor, G., Ballard, B., Beasley, V., Bock, H. K., Clanchy, J. and Nightingale, P. (1988). *Literacy by Degrees*. Milton Keynes: SRHE and Open University Press.

understandings which most academics would broadly agree on. These understandings, also referred to as 'rules and conventions', "effectively define what can be construed as knowledge since they relate not merely to textual conventions but to ways in which what counts as knowledge is explored and constructed within the university as a whole and within specific disciplines in particular" (Bouhey 1994:24). These cultural understandings also define the ways in which a student's cognitive and linguistic competences may legitimately be brought to bear on a task - and the ways in which they may not (Ballard and Clanchy 1988:8).

Ballard and Clanchy argue that in learning to 'read' the university culture, the student is also acquiring a set of values, learning to respect the rules and conventions which define how language and thinking may proceed:

Thus arguments should cohere, must be internally consistent; they should not contain propositions which contradict other propositions in the same text - or, at least, should not leave such contradictions unresolved. Assertions may not lurk, go unexamined. They must be led out into the clear light of reasoning, made explicit, even challenged. And so it goes on.

(11-12)

Students are not only required to learn the general rules of academic discourse and argumentation, but also the *literacies* of different disciplines. This includes the distinctive methods of investigation and modes of analysis of a discipline and the "appropriate disciplinary or *sub-cultural* rules which govern how thinking and ... language may function" in specific disciplines (14).

These 'rules and conventions' are rarely addressed directly in communication between academics and students, who are required to learn them 'by osmosis'. Moreover academics are often so immersed in their own disciplines that they take for granted the groundrules of those disciplines and find it hard to see the need to - or in fact to — make them explicit to students. Taylor *et al*, in various essays, develop a strong argument that they need to be made explicit to students and consciously integrated into curricula.

The idea of 'rules and conventions' of academic literacy and of particular disciplines can be linked to Strohm Kitchener's concept of *epistemic cognition*. As I have mentioned, Strohm

Kitchener defines epistemic cognition as the activity of consciously interpreting the nature of a problem and defining the limits of any strategy for solving it. It involves the nature and limits of knowing and knowledge. Epistemic cognition "includes conscious awareness of and an attempt to pay heed to what may count as a claim to knowledge in a particular discipline, course or topic" (Craig 1989:169). It includes what may count as evidence for the claim(s) advanced; the certainty of knowing and knowledge as well as limits of knowing and knowledge; and the criteria by which knowledge or claims to knowledge can be evaluated.

It seems that academics working within the field of academic literacy, when discussing knowledge of 'rules and conventions' are referring to a similar concept to that of epistemic cognition, although their focus may be more on the implications for language.

It is part of the task of an EAP course to teach students general academic literacy, and to make them more aware of how knowledge is constructed in the university. It may also be appropriate to show students that there are different ways of constructing knowledge in different disciplines, although I think it is largely the responsibility of academics within the disciplines to make explicit the epistemological guidelines which their disciplines are based on. I am not saying that these epistemologies are fixed or static, nor that they should be taught through a transmission mode, but that students' attention could be brought to them in a creative way, and with more mature students, even tensions within a discipline could be exposed and discussed.

7. The role of voice in conceptual development

Whilst analysing my data, I read an article by Wertsch (1991a) outlining ideas of Bakhtin. Reading this deepened my understanding of the notion of voice, which I had come across before and Bakhtin's ideas resonated with the voices of the students that I had been reading in my data.

Wertsch sees *semiotic mediation* as a central theme in the work of both Vygotsky and Bakhtin as it serves to link the sociocultural setting with individual mental functioning. It does this

by, on the one hand, particular semiotic practices (e.g., using language in literacy activities) reflecting and helping to constitute sociocultural settings; on the other hand, it shapes the development of individual mental functioning (through the interpsychological plane) (Wertsch 1991a:93).

Bakhtin focused his analysis on the *utterance* or "the *real unit* of speech communication" (Bakhtin 1986:71 in Wertsch 1991a:93). Thus he focused on actual language in use, rather than on analytical abstraction of language. He argued for an alternative approach, which Wertsch interpreted as *translinguistics*, which would incorporate a concern with how utterances and the voices producing them are organised in sociocultural context.

The concept of utterance is inherently linked with that of voice or the "speaking personality, the speaking consciousness" (Holquist and Emerson 1981:434 in Wertsch 1991a:94). An utterance can only exist by being produced by a voice and it is always expressed from a point of view. The notion of voice applies to written as well as spoken communication and it is concerned with "the broader issues of a speaking subject's perspective, conceptual horizon, intention and world view" (Wertsch 1991b:51).

Bakhtin stressed the idea that voices always exist in a social milieu, and in interrelationships with other voices. For example, in addition to the voice producing an utterance, the point of view or speaking consciousness being addressed was also fundamental. He viewed meaning as an active process rather than a static entity. He believed that meaning can come into existence "only when two or more voices come into contact: when the voice of a listener responds to the voice of a speaker" (Wertsch 1991b:52).

Bakhtin saw an utterance as "a link in the chain of speech communication" (Bakhtin 1986:84 in Wertsch 1991b:52) and saw utterances as being connected to each other — "they are aware of and mutually reflect one another" (Bakhtin 1986:91). The addressee's voice is also involved in the chain of speech communication as the speaking voice may show an awareness of it and reflect it in the production of utterances. Bakhtin saw every utterance as being a *response* to preceding utterances. The responses he had in mind could include the following forms: they could involve the speaker quoting another voice, processes of abbreviation, such

as those that take place with inner speech, or the formulation of an argument in order to circumvent counterarguments anticipated from other voices (Wertsch 1991b:53).

Furthermore, Bakhtin did not limit the notion of addressee to only those speakers in the immediate speech situation. The voice or voices to which an utterance is addressed could be temporally, spatially and socially distant. It could be a particular type or group of people being addressed or it could be "an indefinite, unconcretized *other*" (Bakhtin 1986:95).

Thus Bakhtin's constructs of utterance and voice presuppose an understanding of dialogicality. For Bakhtin, the notion of dialogue extended beyond face-to-face communication or a dialogic orientation of one speaker's utterances to "others' utterances inside a *single* language" (Bakhtin 1981:275 in Wertsch 1991a:95). One of his concerns was with forms of dialogicality that emerge in connection with "social languages".

A social language is a way of speaking that is characteristic of a particular group in a particular sociocultural setting. He was concerned with the social languages of professions (e.g., lawyers or doctors), the social languages of different genders or generations and so on, as they appear in concrete cultural and historical settings (Wertsch 1991a:95). This seems to correspond to the concept of 'Discourse' used by Gee (1990). An analysis of social languages moves away from an exclusive focus on unique utterances to types or categories of utterances.

According to Bakhtin, speakers always use social languages in producing unique utterances, and these social languages shape what their individual voices can say. The process of producing unique utterances by speaking in social languages involves a specific kind of dialogicality or multivoicedness that Bakhtin termed *ventriloquation* (Bakhtin 1981 in Wertsch 1991a:95), which refers to the process whereby one voice speaks *through* another voice or voice type as found in a social language. According to Bakhtin,

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word ... Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's concrete context, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make

it one's own.

(Bakhtin 1981:293-294 in Wertsch 1991a:96)

Bakhtin also saw words as being "overpopulated with the intentions of others" so that "expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process" (Bakhtin 1981:294 in Cazden 1992:202) especially when those "others" occupy a more powerful place in a stratified society. Cazden (1992:202) uses this to clarify how even though a student may understand the concepts that she is engaging with, it may take time for her to feel comfortable with and take ownership of certain subject-specific words.

As I conclude this chapter, I reflect on a process that I've been through from initially intending to make conceptual and cognitive development my main focus. As the research took shape, the focus broadened. The theoretical base gained a centre in the framework of constructivism, but other theoretical approaches emerged, which seemed to pull the research in other directions, yet needed to be included. Some of the theory in this chapter is not actively drawn on in the discussion, but acts as a background conceptualisation to the analysis. The following two chapters contain the analysis and discussion of data.

4. Students' conceptual development in relation to culture

Before examining the conceptual development of students in the course, I will discuss how the course was designed to mediate conceptual development. I will then outline the concepts of culture which were held by students at the beginning of the Culture course as revealed in the data. I identify trends in the development of students' understanding of culture generally, and focus in more depth on the development of one student, Abdul, as revealed in his writing and interviews. When looking at the development of students, I will be concerned with their conceptual development in terms of culture, and their development of academic literacy. I will also discuss the voices coming through in students' utterances⁸, particularly in Abdul's writing. On the whole this chapter contains *descriptions* of students' conceptions of culture and indications of change or development, as indicated in their writing or interviews. Chapter 5 contains more *analysis* of students' learning in relation to the theory surveyed in Chapter 3.

1. The Culture course

I frame the analysis of students' conceptual development in the course with reference to Shalem's discussion of Felman's course on 'Literature and Testimony'. Felman refers to her course as a journey which the class experienced. The starting point was two taken-for-granted conceptions that she wanted to falsify. The first was "the view that 'testimony' conveys a representation of events which have already occurred [while] the full meaning of these events is independent of the act of testimony itself ..." (Shalem 1997:18). The second taken-for-granted conception that she critiques is "the view that learning develops as a movement from darkness to light, from confusion to clarity" (18). Against the taken-for-granted meaning of testimony, Felman wanted her learners to attune to its complexity. In the process of discovery which she designed, students were estranged from their past knowledge. They were moved

⁸ I use 'utterance' in the sense of a unit of spoken or written communication (Bakhtin 1986 in Wertsch 1991b:50-51).

beyond their old understandings to experiencing a sense of how much they didn't really know ... "In this pedagogical path the students had to acquire a framework of meaning through which they were moved to the encounter with its partial loss ... and finally to a constructed point of 'resolution' and re-connection ('finding it again')" (19).

There is a parallel between what Felman wanted to achieve through her course and the aims of the Culture course. The Culture course aimed to challenge students' commonsense concepts of culture and facilitate the development of more complex and critical understandings. It may be that in order to go through this process students needed to become estranged from their past knowledge and experience the sense of uncertainty, loss of meaning and suspension that Felman described (19) before hopefully reaching a new understanding.

Shalem (1997) analyses the journey of Felman's course in order to:

illustrate the vital role of the *pedagogical authority* used by the teacher when conducting epistemological labour of selecting a segment of a tradition (the taken-for-granted meaning of 'testimony') and staging a process of deconstruction of this tradition, in a class which its explicit educational goal (*sic*) was to transcend the limitations of this tradition through criticism and pedagogical invention.

(18)

She seems to use the term *epistemological labour* to mean the act of planning and conducting a programme for the learner to engage in, which aims to advance significant pedagogical ends. The term *pedagogical authority* is used to describe the epistemological labour conducted by the teacher. Shalem argues that pedagogical authority is essential for sustaining a vibrant and engaged process of learning.

I do not feel comfortable with Shalem's terminology (with reference to Bakhtin, I have not expropriated it). However, the argument which comes across clearly in her paper, is the importance of teaching and learning processes being driven by clear pedagogical aims, which are translated into the planning and conducting of programmes, which are directed at furthering these aims. To analyse this more closely, one needs to explore how learning is mediated in a course in order to do this.

In the following section I describe the Culture course, looking at how it engaged with the understandings of culture which students brought to the course, how it strove to challenge students' commonsense understandings and provided scaffolding for the constructing of new understandings. The central form of mediation of conceptual development in the course was through texts — a series of articles on culture. The first one is by Robert Thornton, an anthropologist, entitled *Culture: A Contemporary Definition*. I wrote an adapted version of this article, to try to make it more accessible to students (Appendix A4). The other articles are by Steve Biko, Chinua Achebe and Mamphela Ramphele. They all reflect different understandings of culture, though in some cases (Achebe and Ramphele) these understandings are slightly hidden within the autobiographical genre. I will discuss them further below.

At the start of the course the students were asked to write their own definitions of culture, and then to construct joint definitions in groups. Students' individual definitions were written in their journals so that they could return to them later. They were then given a worksheet with different definitions of culture which they had to work with (Appendix A3). One of the aims of the worksheet was to show that a concept like culture can be defined in very different ways. One of the questions asked the students to consider which definition/s they found most useful and to explain why. Thus they had to start positioning themselves in relation to the various perspectives. During this class, tutors found that students wanted them to point out which were the "correct" definitions and when they did not do this, some of the students appeared confused and uneasy (Meeting 29/4/97). This marks one of the points where students experienced the sense of uncertainty and loss of meaning which Felman referred to (Shalem 1997:19). In this case it was not only because their taken-for-granted understandings of a concept were being questioned, but also because their epistemic assumption that there is one correct understanding of a concept was being shaken (See Chapter 3, Section 3). For many of them this may have been the first time that they had been explicitly challenged about this.

The students then read the article adapted from Thornton (See Appendix A4), which was most overtly conceptually challenging and which was intended to provide a framework from which to approach the topic of culture (See Chapter 1, Section 2). They worked through a worksheet on the article in groups and the worksheet was then discussed in class, with the

tutor giving feedback and clarifying problem areas (Appendix A5). (There was also a lecture on Thornton's article by Dr Robin Palmer from the Anthropology Department at Rhodes scheduled for the following week, but due to unforeseen circumstances it had to be postponed by a week.) In the following week students read the Biko, Achebe and Ramphela articles and answered worksheets on them (Appendices A6-A11). Biko's article, written in 1971, contrasts the features of African culture with those of western culture and warns against the dangers of assimilation. Achebe's article, published in 1975, is an autobiographical essay. In it he discusses his childhood experiences of growing up in Nigeria with different cultural influences. He presents this through the symbol of being at the crossroads of these different influences. The article by Ramphela, published in 1995, presented the students with a dynamic view of culture and stressed the importance of "transgressing boundaries" in order for processes of transformation to take place in South Africa.

The worksheets assisted the students to understand the texts, by asking guiding questions about the content. They also aimed to create "an awareness that definitions of concepts are often time and context-bound and that knowledge is not fixed nor unchanging" (Alfers, Dison and Theophilus 1997:5). They required students to identify what view of culture was held by each writer and to compare the different writers' views of culture. The readings were also mediated by two writing tasks leading up to an essay (See Appendix A12; See Chapter 5, Section 1). A workshop was run on Multiculturalism and Rhodes Culture in the fifth week, which stimulated discussion about students' experience of Rhodes culture and gave them ideas which they could develop in their essays. The first three weeks, described above, forms the core part of the course which I will be researching.

The rest of the course included a lecture on Gender and Culture and tutorials on reading and writing skills such as cohesion and coherence, summarising etc. which were linked to this topic. During this period students were still engaged in the process of writing their assignment tasks and the essay, so while the core of the course which I'm focusing on took place in three weeks, the process that students underwent was in the time-frame of about five weeks to eight weeks if one includes their exam essays, which I also used (See Appendix A1). At the end of the second week, students were again asked to define culture in their journals and to reflect on whether their understanding had changed in relation to their original definition of culture.

This was aimed at developing students' metacognitive ability, their ability to monitor their own learning (Craig 1989:169; Strohm Kitchener 1983:222). We intended to set them a similar task further on in the course but later realised that the students would experience this as "overkill".

2. Students' initial understandings of culture

As has been mentioned, the first tutorial in the course required students to write their own definitions of culture, addressing the question, "What do I understand by Culture? What role does it play in my life?" They were then asked to share their definitions in groups and to construct joint definitions of culture (See Appendix A2). The purpose for this was two-fold. Firstly, we felt that it was a good educational principle to start with students' own knowledge and understandings (Entwistle 1987:36-37), to bring them to the surface (Carrell and Eisterhold 1988:76-81), to encourage them to work with their own understandings and develop them further. Secondly, their written definitions generated valuable research data. One of these classes was video-taped.

I had certain expectations of the types of definitions which students would generate, for instance I expected many of them to have commonsense definitions of culture as being traditions and customs of a particular group. Many of them did see it in this way, but there was a diversity and richness amongst the definitions. Also, some of the students had encountered the concept of culture in courses like Sociology and Anthropology, so their definitions were influenced by this.

I have extracted the main themes from a sample of the students' individual and group definitions of culture, and the content of their definitions will be described under these themes. Of course, there were contrasting views among the students, which will be discussed below. Some ideas which did not come across so strongly in the definitions which I collected, but which seemed to be an important theme in the video-taped group discussion and which emerged later in the students' writing, will also be discussed.

A central idea in many of the definitions was that cultures belong to particular societies. For example, "Culture is all about beliefs and customs of different races which originate from our ancestors". Culture was seen as "the way in which people from different societies identify themselves where we have for example Xhosa's being different from Zulus when it comes to culture". One group wrote culture "is different from one clan to another".

Linked to this is the idea of culture being something that is *shared*. Culture is "shared group behaviour with similar values, morals, thinking patterns and beliefs". Members of a society "share ideas and interact according to the expectation of their society". Culture is also seen as "ideas and habits formed together by a society". The discourse of some of these definitions as well as the content appear to be influenced by a subject like Sociology, and there were students in that particular class that did Sociology.

Another strong theme that emerged was that of roots and identity. "Culture is what one is, one's roots and origins". "... it guides me, it gives me the direction to follow in life and lastly it enables me to identify myself". "Culture is a provider of true identity to its people ... (it) works hand in hand with our living conscience in keeping on reminding us of who we really are". Lastly one group definition stated that "Culture makes you feel confident and a sense of belonging (*sic*)".

From watching the video of the one group particularly (21 April), it was clear that culture was seen as relating to people's traditional background and included customs, rituals and practices related to that. It was not linked to normal everyday life. Nomfundo expressed this point most clearly in her interview:

... the way I thought of it — I thought to myself — I'm not a cultural person because our traditions, our customs are some things that I don't do anymore, my family doesn't practise anymore, so that means not to be a cultural person. So, I didn't see it as part of my daily life. I saw it as something that I do once in a while, or a certain practice that I practise once in a while, the kind of attire that I wear once in a while. Since I was no longer dressing like that, practising those things, I just thought I was no longer a cultural person, or culture is not part of my life.

(NM 22/5)

There were two areas of disagreement which emerged. One was the issue of culture being

prescriptive and needing to be obeyed and the second was the issue of whether culture changes. The theme of culture prescribing to people how they should behave was reflected strongly in the video-taped group discussion and emerged later in the students' writing. Culture is "about the do's and don'ts, ... about principles". "It help people to behave in a right manner in their society".

In the one group discussion which was video-taped (21 April)⁹, the students use the word "obey" in relation to culture and customs alternated with "follow". The word "obey" fits into a discourse of command, where people are obligated to behave in a certain way. Whilst this could be an issue of ESL students not having the precise English word to use, this theme of culture needing to be obeyed is echoed elsewhere in the video and in some students' writing later on in the course. It will be further explored in Section 3.6.

Nomfundo expresses a contrasting view to this in the videoed group discussion:

To me, ...(inaudible)..., culture — it does play a role, but it doesn't play a major role, because, um, I do obey some of the customs, I do ... norms, some of them, but not all of them. And on the other hand, you find that if you try and obey all the customs, you can and if you look at it, you find that this thing is not actually significant and the thing that this thing was said by someone, was created by someone, it is there because as you see we are all human beings, you see, and you might agree and you might disagree with the person, so like its hard to say I follow my culture, I follow all the customs, I do everything that my ancestors did, I do everything that they pass on.

(NM Video 21/4)

Nomfundo expresses a particular view that one doesn't need to obey all the prescriptions of one's culture but that one is free to choose whether something is meaningful to one personally. Part of the joint definition that she was involved in formulating sees culture as voluntary and subjective. Abdul and Thembinkosi, later in the course, express the view that one has to obey the requirements of one's culture, which I will return to. Thus one can identify two contrasting views, one that one has to obey one's culture and a view that culture is voluntary and subject to choice. Both see culture as outside of everyday life.

⁹ The sound quality of the first video was extremely poor. I have quoted Nomfundo mainly as she spoke a lot in her group and was audible.

One of the issues about culture that appeared to be most controversial in the class discussions was whether culture changes or remains static (ELAP Meeting 29/4). One of the group definitions stated that culture "changes from one generation to another generation". Another view of culture changing was that it "changes as we become more civilised". "... As you get civilised, people ___ (inaudible) their cultures and adopt other groups' cultures" (NM Video 21/4). An alternate view to this was that culture doesn't change, but people change, for example, "A person is changed by the environment and leave his/her culture-but the culture itself remains the same and others who are interested in keeping it do so" (AN Task 23/4). This will be discussed further in Section 3.4.

One last aspect of culture, which was brought up by Nomfundo was the idea that one is not born with culture, but that it is "instilled in a person".

3. Tracing students' development

In this section, I analyse the development of students' understandings of culture, drawing on various writing tasks, journal entries and interviews. Most of the students said that their understanding of culture had developed rather than changed and the ways in which students' understandings showed evidence of changing or developing will be examined under a number of themes.

I will also look at how students linked concepts to their own experience, and made knowledge their own. In the second week of the course, Helen expressed a dissatisfaction with Thornton's article as she felt that it was written at too abstract a level with insufficient concrete examples worked into it. She said:

... my feeling was that students didn't really understand and they asked the odd word, but they weren't asking broader questions ... so I read through sections with them ... so I could make sure that they either understood or I could help them understand. But I found it extremely difficult to explain a lot of the concepts, and I feel that *there should have been much more concrete examples* built in (*my emphasis*).

(ELAP 29/4)

In a further meeting, she said:

... we have to provide our own concrete examples and students should be taught how to do that as well. That is why I think this whole culture course is so good. It's forcing them to do things that good students do, that you are always relating new information to old, and your experience of life ... and reassessing ...

(ELAP 5/5)

It seems that through the process of working through the worksheet and discussions in class, many students did grasp the concepts in the article to varying degrees. I found it particularly interesting how students provided their own examples to concretise their understandings of the concepts and examples of some of these explorations of concepts will be provided in the discussion below.

3.1 Change from "different cultures" to "culture"

The first point that Thornton made in his article was to challenge a view of seeing culture as different "cultures" belonging to different ethnic groups (Thornton 1988:17), which I have introduced in Chapter 1. Instead he argued that culture is best thought of as a resource, which "cannot belong exclusively to any particular individual or group of individuals" (Thornton 1988:24) This was an essential point for students to understand although most of them found it difficult to understand the difference between "cultures" and "culture" and some of them disagreed strongly with this argument. Many of the students did agree with this argument towards the end of the course, although in some cases, they still seemed to be struggling with it.

In an interview, Enoch spoke about how he had shifted away from an understanding of culture as cultures belonging to different ethnic groups (See Appendix D2):

I used to think that culture is something by which people differentiate themselves against one another. I used to think of culture as something which has some connection with race, just like me being a Xhosa and being able to see that this one is a Zulu. I used to take culture on those grounds and now I've discovered that culture is just a way of living together — it has nothing to do with races."

(EH 21/5)

Enoch explores this idea further, by using the image of two armies.

... there are differences between people but as one of the writers says, it's like every society coheres to those differences, but there are common things between each and every one. So, what I'm saying is it's those common things that we need to recognise them, so that we create harmony among ourselves. It's not like — it should not be something like two armies standing on one side and the other one standing on the other side, where you just look at differences, so that we know who's on my side when we are at the battle. It should be something that is harmonious, it should be something where we unite and know this is different — I mean what Abel is doing is different from what I'm doing, then you try and put respect on that. Then what is common to us, you celebrate that.

(EH 21/5)

The idea of two armies facing each other is likely to come from Dr Robin Palmer's lecture on Thornton's article. In this lecture, Palmer talked about the confrontation between the British and the Zulu in South African history. These two groups could only see differences between them and could not see commonalities (my notes from Palmer's lecture). This idea comes from the original article by Thornton but had been cut out of my adapted one. It seems to have captured the imagination of Enoch, who used the image in his interview, his essay and his exam essay.

3.2 Culture being part of life

Many of the students appeared to see culture as something rarefied and static, part of their traditional heritage and not part of everyday life. A few students expressed how their understanding of culture had shifted to seeing culture as part of everyday life.

Nomfundo, in her interview talked about how her understanding of culture had changed: (Part of the following quotation has been used above).

... the way I thought of it — I thought to myself — I'm not a cultural person because our traditions, our customs are some things that I don't do anymore, my family doesn't practise anymore, so that means not to be a cultural person. So, I didn't see it as part of my daily life. I saw it as something that I do once in a while, or a certain practice that I practise once in a while, the kind of attire that I wear once in a while. Since I was no longer dressing like that, practising those things, I just thought I was no longer a cultural person, or culture is not part of my life.

... I didn't know that like culture is part of my daily life, what I do, what I say, what I wear, the way I behave — I had no idea about all that and I didn't really understand the term culture.

... I didn't take it to the lengths of communication, the lengths of reasoning, um then ___ (*inaudible*) to associate it with music, associate it with food, associate it with language, I didn't. It was just so limited. The scope of it was just so limited.

(NM 22/5)

In a similar vein, Zandile said, "Now I am beginning to understand, like (culture) it's in a institution, it's at home, it's where you live, it's where you work, it's everywhere" (NA 21/5). Abdul said that he hadn't previously associated culture with things like food and sport, which I saw as being more part of everyday life (AXM 22/5). Yekani, who is a minister, said that he hadn't previously seen religion as being part of culture, but that doing the course had made him realise that it was (YV 20/5).

The above comments illustrate a broadening and deepening of students' understandings of culture from the commonsense view of culture as meaning purely traditional practices and rituals to a more academic, contemporary anthropological view of culture as being part of everyday life. The comments to varying degrees also seem to indicate more than just an academic, abstract realisation that culture is part of everyday life. Some students seem to have reflected on their own daily life experiences and been able to see how culture was bound up in everyday life.

3.3 Culture as a resource

As I have mentioned, a central concept in Thornton's article is that culture should be seen as a resource. On the one hand, this informs and strengthens an understanding of culture being part of everyday life. On the other hand, it was also used by students to argue against a static view of culture, by claiming that people draw on the resources offered by various cultures, and don't stick narrowly to one culture.

Thornton argues that:

... culture is best thought of as a resource. Like other resources, such as energy, sunlight, air and food, it cannot belong exclusively to any particular individual or group of individuals. All groups and individuals must have access to at least some of these resources to survive. Similarly, culture is the *information* which humans are *not* born with but which they need in order to interact with each other in social life.

(Thornton 1988:24)

When Helen's students were first exposed to this definition, she felt that they found it meaningful and useful. She said in relation to the worksheet on the Thornton article:

I checked the understanding of the others and I mean they weren't wonderful, but they were definitely trying to grapple with it, and I really feel its working, you know. The bright students are definitely flying with that Thornton definition. They love it. Nomfundo is bringing it in at every possible opportunity. And its great, because she's really — that's what understanding is, you know, she's using examples from her experience and then saying, well, I agree with Thornton ...

(ELAP 29/4).

From the class in which the students were exposed to different definitions, Abel found Thornton's definition of culture as a resource useful. In his task on definitions, he discussed how he understood this concept and this was also developed in Task 1 (See Appendix C2):

The definition I agree with and find it most useful is the one by Thornton, R (1988) where s/he says culture is a resource. I further agree with him/her when s/he says culture is the information which humans are not born with. We all know that when a child is born he knows nothing about what is happening and where he is. But as years goes on, he tend to copy or do what his fellow-family members do. I mean, if the fellow-family member pray before s/he eat food, the child will do the same.

(AN Definition Task 23/4)

Here, Abel is making the concept of culture being a resource his own by explaining it in terms of his life experience.

In Task 1, he develops this point once more, but does so at a more abstract, decontextualised level than in the previous task:

Thornton define culture as the information which humans are not born with but which they need in order to interact with each other in social life. I agree with him because culture is something we learn or copy from our fellow family members, what they do and don't. As years goes on you find yourself accustomed to those customs and the social life of your family. Those customs and the social life then becomes your culture.

(AN Task 1)

Reflecting back on the course, it seems that developing a fuller understanding of the idea that "culture is the information which humans are not born with but which they need in order to interact with each other in social life" (Thornton 1988:24) was an important conceptual step

in the course. Deconstructing commonsense notions of culture was insufficient without providing an alternative conceptualisation of "what culture is" or how it could be understood. It seems that most students focused on the development of culture being a resource in terms of people being able to draw on the resources of "other cultural groups". This is an aspect of Thornton's argument which challenges a very static view of culture. However, I think that the idea of culture being the information which humans need ... may have been slightly neglected by the tutors, due to a lack of substance to our understandings of the concept. Thornton did not discuss this aspect in much detail and the tutors seemed to lack the background knowledge in Anthropology or Sociology which would help to elaborate on this.

Yekani seemed to enjoy using the concept of culture being a resource in relation to the idea of drawing on resources of other cultures. In his interview, he said:

... when Thornton speaks of culture as a resource, I think that is where then if there is a difference I can draw something which I think it's good and it's applicable to my own culture. And then I draw that as a resource and put it into my culture and into my context and maybe change it a little bit here and there.

... one would think of a resource as like water, something that you go with and you take from and you come and sit down and when it's finished here, you go again and withdraw again, so for me it should be something that if once I have taken something out of that culture, I should live with that thing that I have taken. It should be part of me and the next person should see it and take that and live with it and becomes the culture of that person.
(YV 20/5)

The idea of culture as a resource ties in closely with the image that is central to Achebe's essay, in which he writes about living "at the crossroads of cultures" (Achebe 1975:67). The one arm of the cross represented the influence of Christianity and Western culture, the other arm represented indigenous African practices. Although it is not explicitly stated, the ELAP tutors' interpretation of this article was that one can be influenced by different cultures, and that they can be reconcilable within one person, that a person is made up of multiple identities, and doesn't have one cohesive identity. Nevertheless, it implies a more fluid view of culture and identity than most of the students started the course with.

In his interview, when I asked Yekani to give an example of culture being a resource, he

talked about the practice of *ukuhlolwa*, which he described as virginity school, in which Zulu adolescent girls were taught how to conduct love affairs without losing their virginity. He said that when the missionaries came, they saw this practice as a disgrace and forbade Christians from engaging in it. He said "that is why today we find many children which are thrown in dustbins, the single parents, I think, emanates from that area" (YV 20/5).

Yekani concluded that he found this practice very important and that:

... if the western missionaries thought of that and saw that as something they can withdraw (*draw on*) if at all, there was anything that was vital, which could be applicable to their culture. They could have withdrew (*drawn on*) and applied to them. And if they were not positive about it, they should have said 'Oh what and say let's just observe it and let it be the culture which they practise' without destroying it.

(YV 20/5).

According to Yekani, a logical outcome of seeing culture as a resource is being able to draw on the cultural resources of different groups, or at least to see their value and respect them.

3.4 Does culture change or is it just people who change?

In this section I will trace the development of Abel, as seen in his writing, particularly in relation to the question of whether culture changes (See Appendix C1). During the Culture course, Abel seems to be grappling with Thornton's argument that culture is controlled by the environment and with a dilemma about whether culture changes. At first he is adamant that culture doesn't change, but he seems to shift this view towards the end of the course.

In his Definition task, following on directly from his explanation of culture as a resource, Abel wrote:

Thornton further says culture can be controlled by the environment, which is true and false. We are born without culture, so whatever the environment is we tend to change or adjust ourselves to that environment. In other ways I disagree with him on his opinion. A person is changed by the environment and leave his/her culture *but the culture itself remains the same and others who are interested in keeping it do so.* (my emphasis).

(AN Definition Task 23/4)

His writing conveys a sense of thinking carefully about Thornton's concepts, considering

whether he agrees with them and explaining thoroughly why he holds the view that he does.

In his journal and in Task 1, Abel expresses a similar view that culture does not change. He writes, "I think culture remains and will remain the same even in future. A person changes from culture and leave it as it is" (AN Task 1). However, in Abel's essay, there is a shift in his view and it is expressed in relation to Biko's paper.

Lastly, Biko's experience made him to believe that culture changes. He made an example of his culture (African culture) which was endeavoured (*devoured*) by colonialist culture and drastically changed. In other words I think he meant that any change in the environment of a group will results in the change of their culture.

Through my experience, Biko's experience has a true meaning in my life ...
(AN Essay)

This seems to indicate that he has come to agree that culture changes. A shift seems to have occurred from a static view of culture to one that is more fluid. However, when I questioned Abel about this in October, he claimed that there had been no change in his understanding of culture. He still believed that a person changes but a culture remains the same. He explained that he adapted to Rhodes culture when he was at Rhodes, but when he went home he practised what his family did at home. Thus, he saw himself moving between two cultures but he didn't see culture changing. He did, however, express some confusion about it and remembered a comment that Helen had made that culture exists because of people who practise it. It cannot live on its own. This had made an impact on him. He said that when he set up his own home, he would try to take what he liked and leave what he didn't like from his home culture. However, he continued to argue that a person changes, but a culture remains as it is.

I found this hard to reconcile with the development which I saw in Abel's writing. There seemed to be a clear development from the view that "*a person* is changed by the environment and leave his/her culture *but the culture remains the same...*" (AN Definition task) (*my emphasis*) to arguing that "any change in the environment of a *group* will results in the change of their culture" (AN Essay) (*my emphasis*). Perhaps Abel wrote the latter comment, without believing it fully or without having internalised it. Perhaps he did make

this shift but returned to his previous understanding in the time that had passed since he did the course. It may be that Abel moved into the state of uncertainty described by Felman (Shalem 1997:19) and developed a tenuous grasp of a new understanding. However once the Culture course ended and he was no longer exposed to the arguments which he encountered in it, he returned to his old understanding of culture.

3.5 Transgressing boundaries

A concept which was important in the course was Ramphele's idea of transgressing boundaries. Ramphele does not explain clearly in her chapter (Ramphele 1995) what she means by boundaries. This has to be inferred from her examples. However, the idea of boundaries is clearly outlined by Thornton (1988:26), where he states that culture creates "boundaries of class, ethnicity (identification with a larger historical group), race, gender, neighbourhood, generation, and territory within which we all live". Ramphele's focus, when she talks of boundaries, seems to be on race, class and gender (Ramphele 1995:207). Understanding this concept, with its different implications was difficult for us as tutors as well as for the students. As part of a wrap-up session to the class at the end of the course, I said:

Sometimes when she talks about crossing boundaries she means reaching across from one's own social group to a different social group. Sometimes she uses the term in a more flexible way to mean breaking through old ways of doing things, or breaking out of the barriers which restrict how one acts or how one thinks. (She uses Mandela conducting talks with the Nationalist Government, whilst still in prison, as an example of this).

Because Ramphele's chapter is written in an autobiographical genre, the students initially found it difficult to extract what her understanding of culture was from it. "They couldn't see how it related to culture" (HA, Meeting 12/5), "they said, 'this is so boring — this article', initially" (FT, Meeting 12/5). However, tutors discussed how they worked through the article thoroughly in class and Fleur said that "by the end of the double period they were enthralled and they were actually relating to it much more than in the beginning" (FT, Meeting 12/5). In Task 2 where the students had to identify and discuss the writers' understandings of culture, some students seemed to stick quite closely to the text in discussing Ramphele's idea

of crossing boundaries as if they felt too insecure to explore it further. However, during the course, the phrase "transgressing boundaries" or "crossing boundaries" became thoroughly integrated into students' vocabulary and many of the students interviewed used it often and freely. I think that some of the understandings of students of transgressing boundaries may be fairly superficial and this will be discussed further below.

A common interpretation of transgressing boundaries was that of reaching out to other groups and being open to other cultures. I include two quotations from students' interviews which illustrate this:

... and a problem is — once you become boxed in your culture, you don't want to go and explore other cultures. So that must be changed. People must actually go — as Ramphele says, they must stretch across the boundaries of culture and explore other cultures. Maybe they can find out that OK, if you go and explore other cultures then they're going to find out that OK — it's very good and you can learn a lot from other cultures too. There are actually advantageous things upon — from other cultures that you can take and use with your culture. But it does not mean that you must do away with your culture, first You must know your culture and you must understand it and you must love it.

(MM 27/5)

... one should open up, one should give up himself or herself and open to other cultures and allow those cultures to flow through his or her mind and to think about them as if he or she is thinking of his or her own culture and to put them at the same path and, once one develops a negative attitude, then it becomes dangerous.

(YV 20/5)

I include an extract from an essay by Enoch, showing how he used the concept of transgressing boundaries, relating it to his experience at Rhodes and the transformation process at Rhodes. He introduces Ramphele's idea of transgression of social boundaries being an important part of any transformation process. He goes on to write:

These boundaries include issues like social life boundaries where people talk about social inequality, racism, gender, handicap etc.

First of all I would like to mention classism as one of the boundaries which made sense in the past but still existing among the students of Rhodes University. The fact that a number of Rhodes students grew up in the apartheid era still affects their feelings towards this multiculturalism. Some student view this issue as if two armies are standing there preparing for a battle and in this case none of the two is thinking about negotiations. The only thing in their minds is war and as a result they do not recognise things that are

common between them instead they only consider differences.

Alexander (1994:237-263) approaches this issue by showing how people from different cultural backgrounds combine and form one or under one cultural umbrella (*sic*). In his article he shows how vital it is for people coming from different cultures to share their common social values while respecting the differences ...

(EH Essay)

Here Enoch is giving substance to the idea of transgressing boundaries by discussing how students are affected by boundaries which have been created by apartheid, and how they have a strong separate identity. He integrates this with the argument of Alexander (1994) that we have to develop a common South African culture.

His exam essay followed a similar line, but he inserted an example under the image of the two armies:

... it is also my Rhodes experience. I remember one day we were playing as a team for our residence. During half time we automatically seperated (*sic*) into two camps where blacks were on their side and whites on the other one.

(EH Exam)

In these two similar pieces of writing, Enoch shows evidence of developing some important academic literacy skills. The first of these is developing an idea from a text further and making it one's own, which he does with the image of the two armies, which illustrates the concept of boundaries. Secondly, he links ideas together from different texts, in this case linking Alexander's idea of developing a common South African culture with the idea of transgressing boundaries. Thirdly, in his exam essay, he relates academic concepts to his own experience, which was a requirement of the essay topic.

I mentioned that some students tended to develop a superficial understanding of transgressing boundaries. Some students saw crossing boundaries as assimilating into a Western cultural environment.

In his interview, Abdul said:

... in some cases I find that to adopt some situations, not to be stereotyped and think about my environment (*home environment*) and go according to my environment, whereas I'm

here in Rhodes. I have to change. I think I learn that. According to Ramphele — something like that — to cross boundaries. Just like when I arrive here I didn't, I never wear jean-trouser, but when I'm here, I suppose because I see that the — most of the — I can say 99% wear jeans.

(AXM 22/5)

This idea is echoed in Abdul's essay. He writes:

According to my experience of transition to the Rhodes environment, I am coming from another environment which is far different from Rhodes environment. This does not mean that I have to be stereotyped, I have to stick to my environment's expectations and ignore the situation of Rhodes. As I already mentioned, I have to learn Rhodes culture and try by all means to adapt it (*sic*) in order for me to interact with others.

(AXM Essay)

Certainly when Ramphele talked of transgressing boundaries, she did not mean assimilating into western culture. This may be individual students' interpretation of the concept. However, as a tutor, one of the issues that I needed to stress with my students was that they could develop their own interpretations of concepts, but they had to have a clear understanding of what the writer's view was, and if their view differed from the writer, they needed to make this explicit.

3.6 Conflict between old ways of seeing culture and new

I mentioned earlier a tendency for students to see culture as being prescriptive and rule-bound. In Abdul's writing, this view manifests itself strongly. During the course of his writing tasks, his perspective seemed to shift, but there was evidence of conflict between his views of culture being prescriptive and new ideas that he was exposed to in the course. (See Appendix C2). One can also interpret the voices that come across in Abdul's writing in terms of Bakhtin's theory of social languages, which I have discussed in Chapter 3.

Before I enter into a discussion of Abdul's conceptual 'journey', I will qualify my interpretations in the light of Abdul's lack of fluency in English. When reading extracts from his writing and interview, one can appreciate how carefully he has to think about the language that he uses, which must exacerbate his struggle with concepts. What impressed me about Abdul was the effort that he put into engaging with the concepts of the course, in spite of his

difficulties with English.

In Task 2, Abdul wrote that Ramphele's view that one can cross boundaries "puts people in risk because we know that there are norms and values that restrict people and if you break those norms and values you will be punished" (AXM Task 1). This links to an idea expressed by Thembinkosi in his interview that "if you don't stay within the boundaries of respecting your ancestors, you go abroad the boundaries, many things could go wrong in your life" (TK 27/5). Abel also expressed the idea that "some people seem to have bad luck of this behaviour (changing or forsaking their culture)" (AN Journal 21/4).

On the one hand the above students are expressing a particular view which arises from traditional African belief systems. On the other hand, they are also adopting a particular discourse, or speaking in a particular social language — a discourse of strict guidance or control linked to traditional African cultural practices.

In Task 2, Abdul seems to shift his view and support Ramphele's idea that one should cross boundaries, but in terms of the assimilationist view that I have described above. In his essay he writes that "every individual must not be ethnocentric that is, to stick to his or her culture only and neglect other cultures" (AXM Essay). What he goes on to say reflects a shift away from an assimilationist view, as he stresses that one should continue to appreciate one's own culture.

We know that there are norms and values for each culture, the fact that you have to show interest to other cultures does not mean that you must ignore your culture. Therefore we can cross the boundaries which are abstract in our minds in the sense that you keep on appreciating your culture.

(AXM Essay)

(Here the use of the transitional phrase, "in the sense ...," seems to be inappropriate, and it would make more sense if he wrote, "*but* you need to keep on appreciating your culture".)

In his interview (Appendix D3) Abdul reflects on the shift in his views, saying:

I used to agree with Biko's perception, but as the day goes on, I just change my mind because I find that we can cross the boundaries. Biko's view is that we cannot cross the

boundaries. He sees culture as a fixed ____ (*inaudible*). So, that is what I don't like is that a person can be stereotyped, following his culture only, not being interested in other people's culture. You have to cross the boundaries, ja.

(AXM 22/5)

In the quotation from Abdul's essay, he describes boundaries as being "abstract in our minds". The fact that he felt it was necessary to specify this, reveals a process of him developing an understanding of the concept of boundaries, and realising that it is an abstract concept. This is a development that the tutors tended to take for granted, but it's a significant realisation that each of the students had to make. Thus, it is a significant part of the process of developing abstract forms of thinking, which appears to be neglected in school education.

I'm not sure how valuable exam essays are as an indicator of conceptual development, as they are written under stress. Abdul's exam essay is interesting as one can see from the way he writes that he is under stress and he seems to be thrown back into the conflicts that he has about culture. One response to stress may be losing access to the conscious, reflexive knowledge that is still precarious and being forced to draw on one's tacit, commonsense knowledge. Abdul compares boundaries to norms of a society, giving an example of a person being afraid to commit a crime because of the rules of his or her society. The implication is that breaking boundaries is something illegal. I don't think his example is a good one, but it reveals something interesting about his views of crossing boundaries.

Abdul defines transgressing as "[to] violate norm or a certain rule, in other words is to make a sin. But in this case it doesn't mean so. To transgress is where by a member of a particular culture comes to accept another culture" (AXM Exam). This reflects a process whereby Abdul has probably looked up the meaning of "transgress" in the dictionary and identified the unmarked meaning of it, but recognised that in this context it has a slightly different meaning. However, the idea of violating a norm or a rule does tie in with his earlier view expressed about crossing boundaries, and it ties in with the discourse of culture being prescriptive, consisting of norms and values which have to be obeyed. ("... Ramphele' understanding I think it puts people in risk by crossing boundaries because we know that there are norms and values that restrict people and if you break those norms and values you will be punished", AXM Task 2.)

According to Bakhtin, speakers always use social languages in producing unique utterances and these social languages shape what their individual voice can say (Bakhtin 1981 in Wertsch 1991a:95). It is as if Abdul speaks through different voices in his various pieces of writing during the course. Initially one hears the voice of a social language which constructs culture as strictly prescriptive. Abdul then seems to try on a voice which he has been exposed to in the course, a voice that advocates transgressing boundaries and one can sense him grappling with what the implications of this are. Is it an assimilationist process or can one still continue to appreciate one's own culture? In his exam, the discourse of culture being prescriptive reemerges.

As I have mentioned in Chapter 3, Bakhtin viewed meaning as an active process, which came into existence "only when two or more voices come into contact: when the voice of a listener responds to the voice of a speaker" (Wertsch 1991b:52). One can interpret Abdul's utterances as responses to the social language which he has been immersed in of culture being prescriptive, and then to the voices which he has been exposed to in the course (Thornton, Ramphela). At the same time he is writing for an audience, for the tutor, and this addressivity affects the nature of the utterance. (It may be that Abdul is writing what he thinks she wants to hear.) There is also evidence of a dialogue taking place within Abdul, when he moves from an assimilationist perspective to arguing that you should not "ignore your own culture" or where he defines transgressing as "[to] violate norm or a certain rule ... But in this case it doesn't mean so".

Chris Weedon writes about subjectivity as being "precarious, contradictory and in process" because several often conflicting forms of subjectivity coexist in individuals (1987:33 in Thesen 1994:40). Whilst this applies to everybody, it is particularly pertinent in an educational context, where learners are undergoing processes of change. Lather refers to learning (in this case a process of feminist consciousness-raising) as "not a linear process: it moves back and forth ... throughout one's life often being in contradictory locations simultaneously" (Lather 1991:127). The sense of being "in process" is likely to be even more pronounced in ELAP students as they are in the process of moving between different worlds. Students tend to speak in different voices and reflect different social languages as a result of the shifting influences exerted on them by the different worlds or cultures which they move

between. There was evidence in a number of cases in the course of students using concepts that they had learned in the course to reflect on and understand this process of transition.

In my location as an African I do know I have to attend our traditional works, but the most thing I'm interested in is to go to parties, braai, watching sport and reading kick-off magazines. In this way, I have cross boundaries because I'm not allowed to do some of these things, but I see a light in future in them.

(AXM Exam)

In the above extract, Abdul sets up a polarity between the narrow constraints of a prescriptive, traditional culture and the attractions of a permissive, urban popular culture. There has been much discussion and disagreement as to how this quotation should be interpreted.¹⁰ In the context of Abdul's exam essay, it seems that on the one hand, he identifies his culture according to a narrow definition of culture as "traditional works" the customs, rituals and practices of his traditional background. On the other hand, he has come to include aspects of popular culture as also being culture. Although, in the extract, he positions himself with the obligations of a traditional culture, he is reaching out towards the aspects of popular culture, which he has identified. He is "most ... interested" in them. He sees "a light in future in them". The quotation reflects a shift that is beginning to happen. At another level, it implies that what Abdul sees as his culture is still narrow, but it is in the process of broadening.

In this chapter, I have discussed students' initial understandings of culture and I have explored changes or developments in their understandings of culture, which occurred during the course. I hope that I have been able to communicate something of the openness, enthusiasm and creativity with which students engaged with the course, both in their writing and in their interviews. However, the discussion of aspects of the development of two students, Abdul and Abel, shows the real struggle for some students in working through previous understandings and grappling with new ones.

¹⁰ The quotation has been used in a conference paper written by the ELAP tutors, and was discussed at a presentation to the Department of Linguistics and English Language at Rhodes.

In the following chapter, I will shift the focus from *what* students' learnt in the course to *how* they learnt, looking at facilitation of students' learning and students' perceptions of their learning in the course. I will also discuss what the ELAP tutors learnt from their involvement in the course.

5. Students' learning and staff development

In this chapter student learning is examined from three different angles. Section 1 examines specific aspects and instances of mediation of learning which took place in the Culture module. In Section 2, students' views of the type of learning which was developed in the Culture module are discussed. In the third section, I reflect on outcomes of the course — the results of a course evaluation, the effect of the course on students and the growth of the tutors that resulted from their involvement in the course.

1. Facilitation of students' learning

In Chapter 3 I discussed the concept of mediated learning, where students are provided with scaffolding to assist them to do problem-solving tasks which they wouldn't be able to do on their own (Bruner 1986; Vygotsky 1986, 1978). In Chapter 4 I discussed broadly how the Culture course was designed to mediate students' conceptual development. In this section, I focus on *how* scaffolding is provided in ELAP and the Culture course in order to mediate students' learning. I will also discuss how scaffolding was provided in the way that the essay task was broken up for the students. I will then look at two examples of tutors mediating the learning of students in the classroom environment.

Most of the teaching in ELAP takes place in small tutorial groups. (This year groups ranged from 12 to 22 students.) In this way the tutor can give students more attention and is able to provide scaffolding for the learning activities taking place. Tasks are designed to facilitate student learning and pair and group work are built in to the lessons. In the Culture course students were exposed to articles which were conceptually difficult, in particular Thornton's article, and provided with worksheets designed to help them to understand the main ideas of the articles (See Appendices A5, A7, A9 and A11). The students were given time to work on these in small groups in class, which provided another form of scaffolding and tutors were also available for assistance. Tutors also explained aspects of the articles to students which they felt they were struggling with. Once students had had a chance to complete the

worksheets for homework tutors went over the questions with them in-class.

The assignment was broken up into three stages: Task 1 related to the Thornton article and demanded that students engage with the content of the article by asking them what they agreed with, disagreed with and didn't understand in the article. Task 2 was based on the Biko, Achebe and Ramphela articles and required students to identify how each of the writers understood culture and to position themselves in relation to the different concepts of culture, by explaining which concept they found most useful (Appendix A12). These tasks provided scaffolding for the essay which required students to draw on at least two of the above sources and to apply what they'd read to their own experience at Rhodes University (Appendix A13). The writing tasks were responded to by the tutors, using an approach to feedback which enters into a constructive dialogue with the writer, rather than providing criticism in a judging way. Direct, specific questions in the body of the essay are preferred to broad comments on structure or argument (See Boughey and Goodman 1994; Boughey and Van Rensburg 1994; Coetzee and Boughey 1995). It has been found that this type of feedback can help to facilitate students' conceptual development (Van der Riet, Dison and Quinn 1996) as it can guide students' emerging understandings and help them to clarify the ideas which they express in their writing.

An important aim of providing feedback in this way is for students to use the comments which they receive on their earlier pieces of writing to help them to formulate their ideas, in particular for when they write their essay. In order to use this feedback effectively the students need to have metacognitive understanding of this process. Although the tutors made it clear to students that Tasks 1 and 2 were aimed at assisting them with the essay, this understanding was not internalised by all students. This is demonstrated by comments like the one made by a student on the evaluation questionnaire, "I don't understand why should we have too much work before the final version i.e. task 1, task 2".

I will now show how one of the tutors, Fleur Theophilus, helped to facilitate students' understanding of Thornton's concept of culture as a resource. In a tutor's meeting, Fleur talked about a discussion which her class had had about this (See Appendix E1). She said they had started off with an idea which a student had brought up in his journal — "the fact

that the idea of culture being a resource is actually a metaphor". She said she helped them understand what a metaphor is because "a lot of them were battling with that because they saw a resource as only something concrete like water or metal or whatever".

They discussed:

... what ideas a resource brings to you, how does that carry over to the metaphor of it as a resource and that worked very well as well because people would say everyone has access to resources, and then we discussed, well, actually, is this in actual fact the case? For instance water — everyone is supposed to have access to it, but it doesn't really work that way. There're a lot of poor people who do *not* have access to water as they should, and in the same way culture can work that way because everybody for instance should have access to university education as a culture, in actual fact this doesn't really happen as yet.

... Another idea that the metaphor brought forth was one cannot live without water or _____ (inaudible) resources in the same way that one cannot live without culture, and there were wonderful ideas that sprung forth because of that, and it was like a bridge to understanding that concept.

(Meeting 5/5)

Fleur's reflection on her teaching reveals how she assisted students to understand an abstract concept by providing links between concrete and abstract ideas. By explaining what a metaphor was and that seeing culture as a resource was constructing a metaphor, she provided the students with the cognitive tools to help them to understand the abstract concept. This is an example of a tutor lending consciousness to students to help them to master an abstract concept (Bruner 1986:73-74; Vygotsky 1986:170-171; 1962:91-92). Fleur helps to deepen the students' understanding of the concept by discussing access to the resource, looking at it at a concrete level, in terms of access to water, and then taking it back to a more abstract level, with university education. It is also noteworthy that Fleur got the idea of culture as a resource being a metaphor from one of her students' journal entries. This is an example of students contributing to the learning process which will be discussed below.

When Fleur describes the metacognitive awareness of a metaphor as being like a *bridge* to understanding a concept, she is providing another metaphor which is similar yet different to the concept of scaffolding. However, scaffolding has an association with building up an understanding of a concept which is fluid, which does not refer to a fixed "ontological

reality" (Glaserfeld 1989:182 in Ernest 1992:2). The metaphor of a bridge implies that the concept which the students are learning about has a fixed meaning which the bridge is leading them to. In the lesson which Fleur referred to she was trying to assist students to understand the concepts of culture which Thornton discusses in his article. Although as tutors we felt that some understandings were more convincing than others, we could not be confident that any understanding was *the* "correct" answer, including our own understandings. In response to my analysis of the "bridge" metaphor, Fleur wrote:

... what I think I was trying to do was not pass on purely 'my' view of what Thornton meant (I'm still not sure what he means!!), but for the students to create their *own* understanding of what he meant which is made easier by using a *metaphor*, as a metaphor has personal associations which are different for each individual so helps to access or create their *own* understanding as opposed to *my* interpretation ... (*Her own emphasis*)
(FT 6/12)

This demonstrates how the tutors' involvement in the course and the research enabled them to explore their own understandings of the construction of knowledge, which also developed in the process (See Section 3.3 below).

The above class discussion took place when the students were working through the worksheet for the Thornton article. I will discuss mediation of students' understanding, through analysing an extract from a groupwork session in Helen Alfes' class, which was video-taped. The class was also working on the worksheet for the Thornton article.

The students had to discuss the following questions:

- 7a. *According to Thornton and Said, do people have a clear cultural identity? Explain.*
- b. *Think about your own identity, by listing the labels which name what you are. eg. male/female, language group, urban/rural, working—class/middle—class, student etc. ... Do you agree with the views of Thornton and Said in relation to how you see your own identity?*

(See Appendix A5).

From the video, it was evident that the students struggled to begin to answer these questions. In particular, they were confused about what was meant by a "clear cultural identity", which was essential to understanding the question. Helen was called on to assist. She first tried to

explain the idea that people don't have a clear cultural identity, but she seemed to realise that she needed to address the question from another angle.

She then moved to the second part of the question, asking the students individually to describe what labels fitted them. She extracted information from them such as their gender, language group, religion, urban/rural background and whether they were a daughter, a sister, an uncle and so on. Then she looked for an easy example to work with. She asked the female students if they acted differently as a sister and as a daughter, and they agreed that they did. Helen responded, "OK, so that means that in those two different roles that you fill, you feel and you act differently. Now that means that you don't see yourself only — you are not only a daughter, or only a sister. Now let's think further, broaden it, you are Xhosas all of you. Are there times when you don't feel like a Xhosa?" (HA Video 25/4). Thus she moved the discussion onto a level of more conceptual difficulty.

Thus Helen first engaged students' involvement at a concrete level, by discussing family relationships which were easy to identify with. It was easy to understand how one can be different as a daughter and a sister, and yet be the same person. She then moved the discussion on to a level of greater complexity, discussing ethnic identity. This was linked to the previous discussion addressing the question of whether as a Xhosa, you always feel like a Xhosa, or whether there are other aspects to your identity. Helen succeeded in drawing in all the students in the group into the discussion, by consciously addressing them by name and asking for their contribution. This was likely to have the effect of making all the students active partners in facilitating the understanding of the group, and thus active partners in constructing knowledge.

2. Students' reflections about learning and knowledge in the course

In this section, I will discuss how students perceived the processes of learning which they experienced in the course, and how they saw knowledge more broadly. In the interviews, I wanted to find out how the students perceived the type of learning process required in the Culture course and I did this by asking what type of learning was encouraged at school and

how this compared to the type of learning required in the Culture course.

2.1 Experiences of learning at school

Students' comments about learning at school were predictable. (All of the students were at Department of Education and Training (DET) Schools, except for Carmenita, who was at a Department of Education and Culture convent school.) Students commented on the rote-learning that took place, the lack of emphasis on understanding and the discouraging of questioning. Carmenita said that at school " ... you learn a subject to be able to answer the questions for an exam. So, its a parrot style of learning. There is no perspective in it, there's no how you interpret it, there's no discussion level at all" (CD 21/5). Abdul said "the way I used to study at school — its like most of the time I'm memorising. I'm not reading to understand most of the time ..." (AXM 22/5).

He added that:

... sometimes you memorise something. You don't know whether you understand it or what, but you just read it, OK, you memorise, you memorise ... it's in your mind, then it becomes you write a test, the question raise that point — you just write it, and then you pass."

(AXM 22/5)

According to Enoch, at his school, students were discouraged from making connections between related topics in different subjects. He mentions an example of his questioning a contradiction between the advocating of pesticides in agriculture and what he had learnt in Nature Conservation from the same teacher. The teacher's response was that the students shouldn't link the two subjects (EH 21/5). (See Appendix D2.)

The comments suggest that a transmission mode of learning took place at school, where knowledge consisted of fixed facts that were learnt by rote and reproduced for assessment. Students contrasted this with their experiences of learning at university, particularly in the Culture module.

2.2 Experiences of learning in the Culture course

In ELAP we are allowed to use our own initiative, apply it in a group and to be able to speak to it, and I must say this group work learned me a lot because I'm sitting there with one perspective and the minute somebody else will talk, then I will like either write it down or I will listen to that particular person, and that gives me a different perspective again. At the end of the day when we have a formal discussion or we have class discussion, I finally realise that there is no right and wrong in culture specifically. I thought there was a wrong and a right. Only it opened up my mind for other possibilities. There's not one particular answer for a question.

(CD 21/5)

Carmenita clearly describes how group discussion emphasises the existence of different perspectives, and the implication is that one has to construct one's own understanding of a concept, or one's own view, through considering various perspectives. Her realisation that "there is no right and wrong in culture" and "there's no particular answer for a question" is an important development in epistemic knowledge, which should help to equip her to solve "ill-structured" problems (Strohm Kitchener 1983, Craig 1989). This is particularly relevant for disciplines in Arts and Social Sciences at an undergraduate level.

This realisation is echoed in the point made by Abel in Task 2:

Thornton argues that it is difficult to define culture, because culture is so complex. From Thornton's argument, one can deduce that (no)one is incorrect in defining culture the way s/he understands it.

(AN Task 2)

Nomfundo goes into more detail about the type of process that she was going through in the culture module:

The ELAP course — it's more based on the discussion, whereas if you have a topic, you have a module on culture, you get to talk about it as the whole tut group. You get to hear different views from different people. Thereafter, you go home and you read so you get another perspective of people who have studied and have tried to look at culture broadly, and then you combine your views with the views that you heard in class, you combine and you compare with the views that you read from all the authors and then thereafter you have a chance to make a decision that OK, this is how I see culture, this is what I see culture as related to, this is what I can associate culture with. But at school, we were only given a topic, say, for instance, Discuss multilingualism — you were never really told to go and search for information, you only wrote down what you thought of multilingualism and never really had a chance to discuss about anything. You never really were given a time to go about searching for information, so that you can have substantial facts for an essay.

(NM 26/5)

Nomfundo focuses on the need to synthesize information from different sources and to deal with different perspectives on a topic, which she was not required to do at school. These are important aspects of developing academic literacy, and the ability to evaluate different perspectives and synthesize them in some way is a crucial part of learning how to solve ill-structured problems (See Chapter 3, Section 3).

During the course, one of the tutors commented on a problem with the students' ability to deal with different perspectives. "Once something is learnt, its right and everything that is read must then be adapted around that idea ... without being able to shift one's perspective" (Meeting 29/4). This tendency is a product of the approach to knowledge underlying (the former) DET education and is part of an approach to learning that the Culture course was trying to counteract.

Nomfundo also discusses the need to apply knowledge at university, to test if it is valid:

... if you see that you can apply it, then you can say that OK this is true, or if you take — somebody gave you something, you take it and apply it and it doesn't come out the way its supposed to come out, then you can come to a decision and say, no, this is not true, this is not effective, so I don't agree with the person.

NM 26/5

This need to test knowledge links to the radical constructivist idea that a person "generates cognitive schemas to guide actions and represent its [her] experiences. These are tested according to how well they 'fit' the world of [her] experience. The best 'fitting' of the schemas are tentatively adopted and retained as guides to action" (Ernest 1992:2).

Zandile stresses her own involvement in the learning process:

... my experience of how I've learnt at school, it differs a lot from now. Now I can get involved, like I can get personally involved, and that at least gives me motivation to be more — , to try to be at your best 'cos the information as I can understand — it all lies in me, but I don't know what block it from coming out.

(NA 21/5)

She says its as if she's known these things all along, but wasn't aware that they were there, and that the learning experience has helped her to become more aware of herself. I interpret this as saying that she's known these things all along, but the course has helped her to clarify

her understanding and to articulate it. It ties to a point that Fleur made that it's very important to bring out into the open "what's subconsciously going on in your mind in order to be able to work with it" (ELAP 5/5).

In a presentation of some of these research findings, some members of the audience interpreted the tutors' view of constructivism as privileging the students' own processes of construction of knowledge and denying the reality that there are canons of knowledge to be learned. On the one hand these criticisms come from a more traditional approach to knowledge and learning. On the other hand they raise an important question about the constructivism which has emerged as a central force in this project. Shalem (1997) tackles this question when she criticises constructivist approaches which privilege the learners' processes and situate teachers as mere facilitators of the learning process (517). She describes learner-centred pedagogy "seen as free growth process which is instinctively driven by the inner organic powers of the learners" (27-28) as a false and misleading conception of pedagogy because it denies the leading constructing pedagogical power of the teacher (28).

The constructivist approach which I see emerging in this project is not one which affirms *any* process of knowledge construction by students. Instead it has a particular pedagogical project, which is to develop students' epistemic knowledge (See Chapter 3, Section 3) and to assist students to develop the abilities which we believe are necessary for Arts and Social Sciences courses — abilities such as synthesizing information from different sources, understanding writers' perspectives and accommodating different perspectives and developing their own understandings. These underlying goals informed the course design in a clear, thorough way. The students were assessed according to how well they developed these abilities.

As a last point of this discussion I will discuss issues raised by a journal entry of Yekani's. The students had been required to write down their understanding of culture in their first journal entry of the course, and then they were asked to reflect on their first definition and revise it.

Yekani wrote:

I agree with what I wrote on culture but I can add since I have gained some insight from the definitions (*sic*) and Thornton's article.

... my ideas of culture *did not change really*. *I understood culture to be a communal binding factor irrespective of our differences such as race, colour or creed. ...*
(YV Journal 2/5)

Yekani goes on to discuss how his understanding of culture relates to the concept of ubuntu. He explains that he has had these ideas from before he did the course, but it seems that doing the course has helped him to refine them, extend them and possibly articulate them better.

2.3 Awareness of the relativism of knowledge

An interesting aspect of Thornton's article is that in exploring concepts of culture, he also raises issues about knowledge. He stresses that ideas are strongly influenced by their historical contexts and are also culturally relative ("we must include our own ideas about culture as part of the resources that culture provides", Thornton 1988:24).

Enoch picks up on this idea of cultural relativism (Appendix D2), saying that he likes the idea that:

... you can't just explain what culture is unless you are part of that culture. In order to be able to say, no, this culture is like this, you need to be part and parcel of it. You can't for example just stand up and say, no, the Zulus are doing it like this and that, although I'm not a part of them, so it's one and the same with them — they cannot say I'm doing this and that until they join me and say no, we have experienced this, and now we say this is wrong with your culture.

... I'm just saying to define culture, you must be part of it. You can't just say this culture is like this, while you are not there. The observer himself or herself must be there.
(EH 21/5)

This links to Brown *et al's* point (1989:33) (mentioned in Chapter 3) that "the activities of many communities are unfathomable unless they are viewed from within a culture".

In Task 1, Enoch explains Thornton's idea of one's ideas about culture being part of the resources that culture provides. He does this in a very articulate way:

Defining culture is a problem and is also a difficult issue simply because trying to define and understand culture is also part of culture. Defining culture is not like trying to explain how a certain disease (*sic*) is spread or how a certain chemical solution (*sic*) is prepared, to discuss culture is to be part of it and it is also to have an effect on and lastly changing it. As Thornton says that we must include our own idea about culture as part of the resources that culture provides.

(EH Task 1)

By using medical and scientific examples, he is differentiating scientific knowledge, which he sees as having an objective existence, with knowledge in the Social Sciences. (In the interview he makes a similar comment but uses the example of water being made of Hydrogen and Oxygen.) I interpret his statement as saying that knowledge (in the Social Sciences) cannot be seen objectively, independently of the observer, because the observer herself plays a part in constructing knowledge. Although leading natural and physical scientists have in recent years been questioning notions of objectivity in science and have been moving away from a positivistic framework (Janse van Rensburg 1994:5), Enoch's point is a very insightful and useful one for a first year student to be making.

In the group discussion, this stimulated discussion about the importance of the influence of a person's background on his/her understanding. Abel said:

... Thornton says that we have to add our own understanding when defining culture. In other words, in my interpretation, I can say, no one is incorrect when he's explaining culture, and Dr Palmer was talking about when a person can explain culture, in his own way, you must simply understand which background he is coming from...

(AN 21/5)

The influence of environment and time that one is living in was also discussed. Enoch said:

Ja, the environment and the — well partly the time when you grew up, like me I grew up in Cape Town in Crossroads, just one of the poor villages of Cape Town and staying in that place, being blacks only and being oppressed or depressed by the way, and with me — when I'm talking about culture, I take culture on those grounds of apartheid — blacks are only blacks and whites are only white — there's nothing that is common between black and white. But now that I'm in a new environment where I am between people from different backgrounds, people of the western and people of the south, its changing now because I'm experiencing a new knowledge now. Its new because its not what I've been growing with, its something new.

(EH 21/5)

Enoch clearly articulated an awareness of the relativism of knowledge in relation to one's context — both cultural and socio-political as well as the time that one is working in. The development of this type of awareness shown by Enoch and other students was one of the aims of the Culture course. The points made by Enoch reflect a sophisticated epistemic assumption, an awareness that knowledge is not absolute and that thinking cannot take place independently of a particular context. (See Strohm Kitchener 1983:225-226). Although one cannot claim with certainty that Enoch developed this awareness through doing the course, one can infer that the course has at least assisted him to articulate these ideas clearly, provided him with a discourse to do this and enabled him to gain more confidence in expressing them.

3. Some outcomes of the course

In this section I briefly discuss feedback from an ELAP course evaluation done by students at the end of the term. I then look at how students were affected by doing the course and the tutors' development arising out of their involvement in the course. The section on students looks at their development in relation to their essays, journal entries and tutors' perceptions. The section on staff development is also concerned with students' development. They are very closely linked because the tutors' learning came about through their reflection on the students' learning processes and their role in this.

3.1 Feedback from the course evaluation

The ELAP students were asked to fill in questionnaires at the end of the second term (See Appendix F). The students were asked to rate the usefulness of the content of the modules and of the assignments of each module. A total of 90% of students rated the content of the Culture course as useful. (51% rated it as very useful while 39% rated it as quite useful). 89% of students rated the assignments in the Culture course as useful. (53% rated them as very useful while 36% rated them as quite useful). The ratings for the preceding module on Language Issues were slightly higher, so overall there was a positive response to these aspects of the ELAP course.

The students were asked to rate their level of interest or enjoyment of the two modules. A total of 84% of students rated their level of interest/enjoyment of the Culture module as high. (34% of students rated their level of interest/enjoyment as very high, 50% rated it as high). The total was slightly higher than the total rating for Language Issues, which was 80%. They were also asked to rate the amount of work required in each module and 48% of students indicated that the Culture module required too much work, compared to 33% in relation to Language Issues. Many of the students who complained about too much work made comments to the effect that ELAP was not their only course and that the tutors tended to forget this. Some of them complained about having too many articles to read and that they were difficult to understand. Certainly, some of the articles were difficult either conceptually or in terms of language use and they may have taken students a long time to read through on their own. Part of the problem was because there was a lack of time, the students were asked to read three articles — Biko, Ramphela and Achebe — over a short period of time. One student complained about having to do Tasks 1 and 2 before the final version of the essay. It seems that this student didn't understand that Tasks 1 and 2 were actually building up to the final essay and just saw them as extra work (See Section 1 above).

I will include two positive comments made by students:

"The Culture issues has been very useful to me. I have been challenged by this issue in terms of my attitude towards other cultures. I have gained incredible insight."

"Culture is directly a part of (our lives), so it was interesting".

Two negative comments:

"Personally culture issue is too much complicated and abstract and it was difficult to understand".

"Term 2 (the Culture module) was not useful to me because I didn't understand the articles, they were confusing me."

These two sets of comments reflect the positive and negative poles of students' attitudes towards the Culture module. From the figures cited above, it seems that most students had a positive attitude towards the course and found it useful in some way.

3.2 Students' development

On the whole, the students actively engaged with the course, and showed a positive development. This was the case, particularly with the "brighter" students, but there was the potential for all students to get something out of the course and to develop at a level relative to their ability. However the tutors did express disappointment in the students' essays. The fact that the strong students did not fulfil their potential in their essays could have been due to a number of factors. It may be that tutors sometimes underestimate the difficulties for students writing in a second language, and forget how much harder writing is than speaking. Furthermore, at that stage in their first year, students are still inexperienced in writing essays. While they may have coped well with the more limited, directed tasks preceding the essay, making the shift to coping with a longer, more complex piece of writing may have been difficult for them. One needs to bear in mind that for most people learning to write well in a complex genre such as that of the academic essay is a lengthy process, which would be likely to take longer than one semester. The students were also not given the opportunity to write a rough draft of the essay and get feedback on this before writing their final draft. This is usually done in ELAP, but because we divided the essay into two different tasks and a final draft, there was no time for a rough draft. Another possible reason for students' essays being weaker than expected, could have been because of the time of the year which was close to exams when students were under a lot of pressure. Thus they may not have had the time or energy to apply themselves sufficiently to their essays.

The essays also seemed to be greatly influenced by the discussion from the workshop on multiculturalism and Rhodes culture which was held on 19 May. By running this workshop, we had intended to apply the concept of culture to a real-life scenario, which affected the lives of all the students. We also wanted to give them ideas for their essays, but we hoped that they would apply the theoretical concepts that they'd been learning in their discussion of their transition to Rhodes culture. Some students did this, but many largely left the theoretical concepts behind or dealt with them superficially and focused mainly on aspects of Rhodes culture, which were easier to write about. This made their essays thin and superficial.

However, I don't want to draw attention away from the many positive developments, which students went through, if one looks at the whole process of the course. Many of these are evident in excerpts from students' writing and interviews which I have discussed above and

also emerge in tutors' comments below.

There was an indication of the effect that the course had had on certain students when their journal entries in the third term referred to the course or showed the influence of their having done the course. S'khona wrote about his experience during his holiday at his Grandmother's home in a rural area. He had been reprimanded for making himself something to eat in the kitchen, as it wasn't appropriate for a male to do this. He commented that "That made me realise Thornton's views of Culture, that it is controlled by the environment. The environment in which my Grandmother lives allows them to divide the jobs according to Genders" (SN Journal 4/8).

In the third term one of the topics covered was female circumcision and a number of students discussed it within the context of culture, for example, Beverley said, "But surely there are some girls who wants it to happen to them. It's their culture. It is here that culture comes up and you cant say your culture is more civilised. But when you think of it ..." (BT Journal August). This comment reflects one of Thornton's important arguments that one culture is not more evolved than another, which challenged a fundamental belief of many of the students.

In retrospect the tutors commented that virtually all of the students had been influenced in their thinking by the course at some level, not only the strong students (Meeting 27/8). One of the effects of the course which I thought was most profound, was when May, a coloured student wrote in her journal that she didn't use to think that she had a culture, but since doing the course she realised that everybody had culture. One of the problems of seeing culture in terms of cultures belonging to different African ethnic groups in South Africa, is that of cultural identity for people who do not fit into those ethnic groups, whether they are coloured or white. Recognising that everyone has culture is likely to have the effect of building self-esteem and self-knowledge for those people.

However, there were students whose understanding of culture remained the same in spite of doing the course. This is illustrated by the following extract from a journal entry where Chippa was reflecting on female circumcision. "Culture in my own view it is the thing that

you have to respect. If it was in my culture I will go with it and I will support circumcision of the women" (MCK Journal August). He goes on to say that if you don't practise your culture or try to change it, your ancestors will get angry with you and you'll get bad luck in your life. He concludes by saying, "I know that times are changing but there are things that will never change if you are an African, you have to do it although you are crossing the boundary" (MCK Journal August). There seems to be a contradiction between "crossing the boundary" and the idea that you have to continue practising a culture that doesn't change. Why does Chippa bring in "crossing the boundary" and what does he understand by it? He may see crossing boundaries as going into situations where there is a culture, other than your own, which is dominant. However, he doesn't use it in Ramphele's sense of crossing boundaries socially and psychologically (See Chapter 4, Section 2.4). Thus, he has appropriated Ramphele's term, but is using it with a different meaning, in an argument that is based on a very static notion of culture.

How does one respond to a perspective like this, which is likely to be representative of the views of a number of the students? A relativist approach would be that this fixed concept of culture is valid, and would question why a fluid understanding of culture should be any better. This is a point of view that has to be carefully considered. Although one cannot evaluate a student's development, based on one journal entry, I think that if a student had really engaged with the Culture course, she/he would at least show more evidence of an awareness of the criticisms of a static notion of culture, even if they still understood culture in that way. I don't think she/he would have made a statement like this in such a confident, unproblematic way. Chippa's reference to "although you are crossing the boundary" is the only indication that he has done the course, and even this is stated quite unproblematically.

3.3 Staff development

Staff development is implicitly a central aim of educational action research. The main aims of action research according to Carr and Kemmis (1986:165) are to improve practice, to develop practitioner's knowledge and to involve those who are involved in the situation being researched. The aims which I stated (in Chapter 2) were to contribute to the process of curriculum development in ELAP, as well as to develop a deeper understanding of the

conceptual development of students within the course. In my first draft, I stated that the project would be collaborative to a certain extent, as I was unable to anticipate to what extent the tutors on the course would choose to get involved.

The tutors exceeded my expectations and became very involved in the course and excited by it, and they have indicated that they learnt a lot from being involved in the process. They reflected on their teaching in journals and shared their experiences at length in weekly staff meetings, which I recorded. I refer to the tutors in the third person, excluding myself, as I am wanting to focus on the other tutors' experiences.

An important factor in the tutors' development was that they were grappling with the subject matter of the course, slightly ahead of the students. This is often the experience of EAP tutors who use diverse subject matter to teach English and academic skills. However, in this case it was more pronounced for two reasons; firstly, the course deals with the concept of culture which is an important concept with implications for our understandings of other things, and, secondly, the thrust of the course was so challenging to all of our commonsense understandings. At one point Helen comments that she was going through a *profound* experience, reflecting on her thoughts and beliefs. She talks about "writing all this confusion to the students" in their journals, "showing them that I'm confused" (Meeting 5/5).

This raises questions about whether this uncertainty of the tutor provides a threat to her pedagogical authority or that of the course. Here one has to distinguish between pedagogical authority in a constructivist context and the teacher's authority in a context underpinned by a "unitary and singular conception of knowledge" (Shalem 1997:5). In the Culture course, the tutors' lack of certainty in some areas actually worked to further the pedagogical aims of the course. For example, Helen commented that "it's perhaps also important for them to realise that we don't know everything, we don't know the answers to all these questions". Fleur added that that in itself was an important learning experience for the students that the module was also teaching (Meeting 5/5). Showing the students that the tutors do not know all the answers challenges the commonsense epistemic assumption that there is a right and true answer (Craig 1991:137) and that this is known to the teacher (See Chapter 3, Section 3).

Helen added:

[the students were] also being treated as having an equal share in the construction of knowledge — that we're doing it together. So I feel that in lots of cases, not in all cases by any means, but I feel as though in my response to their journals, in my response to the Thornton article things, my response all the time is that I'm trying to show, you know, when they make fresh ideas or — I say that's great, I hadn't thought of that, you know, they're being treated as equals. So I think it's been a really very important experience as a learning experience apart from, you know, anything else.

(Meeting 12/5; Appendix E2)

There is evidence of this where Enoch wrote an explanation of Thornton's point that our ideas about culture are part of the resources that culture provides (I have discussed this extract in Chapter 4, Section 7). Helen had previously conveyed that she wasn't sure what was meant by that. She made the comment on Enoch's task, "Brilliant. I found this concept difficult and you made it much clearer for me" (EH Task 1).

There is a development from discussion that took place in a meeting in the second week of the course to one in the third week. In the second week, Helen observed that after having read Thornton's article and done the worksheet on it, many of the students seemed to still have a superficial understanding of the concepts. "They are saying things like 'Its a resource' and 'culture can change'. But when they actually write a bit more, they're saying quite the opposite. Its this — I'm sure it's just part of the process — it's them developing their understanding ..." (Meeting 5/5).

During the third week of the term, students appeared to be engaging more fully with the concepts. Talking about a discussion of Biko's article, Helen said "students have really started thinking — I could see that they were really thinking about culture and what it meant for them in their lives and making meaning out of it" (Meeting 12/5).

Further on in the discussion she said:

I can feel that there's a shift in gear, that people are changing patterns of thinking and of doing things, you know suddenly the lecturer isn't sure of the answers — that I'm showing as much confusion as they are. You know, they're being confronted by fuzzy, grey, uncharted territory where *their* knowledge and understanding of culture is being constructed from *their* understanding and experience and what they're reading and there're

no clear rights and wrongs and they're learning all that in a very authentic way because I'm not able to give rights and wrongs ...

... it's not like we're saying that students must be critical in a vague kind of way. We're actually showing them that this is how to be critical and this is how to um — when they read — these are the kinds of things that they must be thinking, they must always be um reflecting on their experience and their understandings and how that reading is — relates to it.

(Meeting 12/5; Appendix E2)

Possibly the most important aim of the course was to take students through a process in which they were required to construct knowledge in a way that we believe is required in certain aspects of university education. The course also challenged some of their commonsense understandings of knowledge, such as notions that there is one correct answer, or one correct definition of a concept. They were required to reflect on their own beliefs and experiences and relate new knowledge to their previously held knowledge. One cannot teach students about constructing knowledge. This can only be done in context of a course with authentic content where students are taken through a process of constructing knowledge themselves. It seems that to varying degrees, the course was successful in realising this aim. Thus, this research provides support for the case for using challenging subject matter in an EAP course. However, the material needs to be accessible to students, relevant and engaging, and the learning process needs to be carefully scaffolded.

Whilst the issues related to the construction of knowledge were implicit in my planning of the course, they had not been clearly expressed as such. Thus, they were not foregrounded for the other tutors, and emerged for them during their teaching of the course. Because of the dedicated, enthusiastic and self-reflective way in which they engaged with the teaching of the course, it became a very valuable learning experience for them.

This research project was planned as one cycle of action research and thus far there have not been formal plans to continue into further cycles. However, as I have described, the implementation of the Culture course has had a significant impact on the tutors and thus it is likely to affect the ongoing development of the course. I will point to possible areas for research and development which have generated from this project.

The Culture course is definitely going to be run again next year, but will need to be improved, based on reflection on the course this year. One of the problems this year has been a lack of time and a need to rush through difficult articles with students. There has been a suggestion to shift it to later in the year, because it is more conceptually difficult than other modules which come after it and more time could be given to it. This curriculum intervention could then be researched.

One of the aims of the research was, through intensively researching a small section of the course, to gain insights into the curriculum development of the course more broadly. This issue was raised by Fleur when she said that there was a challenge to maintain the ways of teaching that the tutors had used in the Culture module and to use a similar approach in other parts of the ELAP course (Meeting 27/8). The tutors then jointly defined what she meant by "the ways of teaching" as drawing on students' knowledge and challenging it, facilitating conceptual development, having a strong link between content and skills and teaching academic thinking (Meeting 27/8). A further project could be to develop other modules or sections of the course, aiming to meet similar objectives to those described above and to research them.

Thus the first cycle draws to a close. The last chapter will contain a critical reflection on the research project and discuss some issues arising from the research.

6. Conclusion

This research project grew out of my experience of teaching on and developing the ELAP course at Rhodes University. It has enabled me to explore in more depth the idea that content should be more than just a vehicle for teaching language and academic skills; that one of the tasks of an EAP course is to assist students to develop their ways of learning and ways of thinking and that an EAP course should also aim to facilitate conceptual development of students, which necessitates content being included as an integral part of the learning process.

Talking about these ideas in the abstract leaves them vague and undeveloped, both in one's own mind, and when one tries to communicate these ideas to other tutors. Developing, implementing and researching a course which had these aims and involving the ELAP tutors in the process allowed me to explore these ideas in practice, and also exposed the other tutors to them in a concrete and meaningful way.

1. Participatory action research — the involvement of the tutors

What I have discussed above shows the potential power of participatory action research methods to involve practitioners in research and to enhance their understandings of aspects of their practice. The success of action research relies on the willingness and commitment of practitioners to be involved in the research. I was very fortunate in this project to work with colleagues who were so open to the ideas which I was introducing to the course and who engaged so enthusiastically with teaching and reflection once the course began to unfold.

The approach to EAP which I was exploring in the Culture course was different to the approach of the other tutors, but its aims were not so far removed from their beliefs and understandings about teaching, so as to alienate them. I quote at length from a conference paper written by the tutors, to convey a sense of what their approaches to teaching were and how they were affected by being involved in the teaching of the course and the research:

Although we as teachers have always located ourselves within a broadly constructivist

framework, we all felt that we had been significantly altered by the experience of teaching this module. We now believe that our understanding of what it means to construct knowledge existed at a theoretical level but that during the course of this module we were confronted by very concrete examples of how students, who come from rote-learning educational backgrounds, can have their learning patterns changed. Scaffolding of tasks, exposure to different perspectives and reflection on learning were not new to us as methods for building up new knowledge but the way in which students and tutors became partners in the learning process was not something we had experienced before. As teachers we could see how these strategies (scaffolding, reflection and partnership) helped students construct an understanding of culture which linked their common-sense, everyday understandings with abstract and conceptually more sophisticated understandings.

Alfers, Dison and Theophilus (1997:11)

Fullan (1991) discusses the difficulties of implementing educational change, particularly in relation to changes in belief as they are related to core values held by individuals regarding the purposes of education. "Moreover, beliefs are often not explicit, discussed or understood but rather are buried at the level of unstated assumptions" (42). Doing participatory action research is a way of bringing those beliefs and understandings to the surface, allowing practitioners to reflect on their own approaches and creating a space for colleagues to engage with each others' understandings in a constructive way.

2. Development of the students

Some trends can be identified in terms of how students responded to the Culture course. All of the students involved in the research actively engaged with the ideas in the course in their own way, though there were students in ELAP who did not really engage. There were some students, like Yekani, who had thought through some of the ideas in the course before, but who seemed to be equipped in the course with conceptual tools and language to help him engage with these concepts more clearly and more articulately. McCormick (1996:49) writes "if students are to learn how to read the world critically, they must be given access to discourses that can allow them to analyse that world ...". Students like Yekani have clearly already been exposed to discourses which have enabled them to analyse the world. Similarly with Enoch, who was able to engage fluently with the concepts in the course, even concepts that tutors were struggling with, and apply them to his own life experience. In the case of these students, the course is likely to have stretched them even further and helped them to

channel their thinking into academic forms of argument and writing.

I chose to focus most closely on the development of Abdul and, to a lesser extent, Abel, two students who seemed to work hard at understanding the concepts in the course and who struggled with the challenges of new ways of conceptualising culture and the strong pull of their previous understandings. Why did I chose to focus on these students? I think it was largely because of a process that was evident in their writing; a process that was for Abdul difficult, recursive and sometimes contradictory. In Abel's case, I identified that there was a significant change in his understanding, which he denied. I also chose to focus on them because I don't believe that it's honest or useful to design challenging courses and just investigate how the high achievers respond to them. What I learnt from the work of these students is that having your beliefs and understandings challenged, in relation to a concept that is well known to you in an everyday life context, is a painful process. Working towards developing new understandings is a process of struggle, with movement between new and old understandings.

In terms of approaches to learning, the students who were interviewed seemed to value the approach to learning which was being developed in ELAP and particularly in the Culture course. The opportunity to reflect on this (in the interview) was probably useful for them, and there possibly should have been a more explicit emphasis on development of metacognitive awareness in the course.

When writing up research, the students whose utterances one is using can feel very removed. When I met one of the students to clarify something, his response reminded me of how enthusiastic and involved students had been in their interviews, in terms of how they responded to the topic of culture and to the course.

3. Challenges for EAP courses

At another presentation on the research project to a largely Academic Development Centre audience at Rhodes, a question was asked as to whether it is appropriate to teach students critical ways of constructing knowledge, when most of the lecturers that they encounter have

traditional approaches to knowledge and learning, and teach their courses accordingly. This question reaches to the heart of the research project and raises what is an ongoing issue for EAP and foundation courses. A tentative response to this is that one can conceptualise approaches to learning as being on a continuum with reproductive modes of learning (Entwistle and Entwistle 1991:205) at one end and constructivist approaches at the other. Most lecturers in Arts and Social Sciences disciplines at a university like Rhodes would not have social constructivist approaches to learning and many would be opposed to the ontology inherent in this approach. However they would probably be closer on the continuum to constructivist approaches to learning than to a reproductive approach in that they require students to synthesise information from different sources, develop arguments based on evidence and critically evaluate arguments, particularly at later stages of their degrees. This is an area which needs to be researched further.

I have chosen to focus on the needs of students in the Arts and Social Sciences faculties for this research. However ELAP is a general course, which has students from various faculties. The majority of students in ELAP, including a number of the students who volunteered to be involved in this project, are Commerce Foundation students. From the second year of their degree they do Management and Economics in which they are required to write essays. However, the extent to which they are required to develop their own critical understandings of concepts at an undergraduate level, is questionable. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the ELAP tutors believe that there is an intrinsic usefulness in teaching a critical approach to learning, that even if it is not immediately useful to students, it has the potential to enhance students' capacity for life-long learning. The Commerce students that I interviewed felt that the approach to learning which was encouraged in ELAP would be useful to them in their degrees. Even though they did not know exactly what to expect from their future courses, the ELAP course had credibility for them. (Of course this does not apply to all students.) Again, this is an area which needs to be further researched.

4. Implications for curriculum development

In Chapter 3, I discussed the concept of academic literacies and the need for academics in mainstream disciplines to make the groundrules of those disciplines explicit to students and

to consciously integrate them into curricula. In EAP courses there is the space to experiment with integrating content and academic literacy development in a meaningful way, as has been done in the Culture course. Although there are obvious differences between EAP and mainstream courses, I believe that lecturers involved in curriculum development in the mainstream could learn from the findings of research such as this. The Culture course and the research could provide useful stimulus for discussion about curriculum development, as I have suggested in Chapter 2. Furthermore, there are elements of the course development which could be transferred to mainstream courses.

5. Tensions, limitations and gaps in the research

One area of tension in the research was language issues. There was an ongoing danger of focusing mainly on conceptual development and issues of learning and neglecting the reality that the students who were the focus of the research were speakers of English as an additional language. I have to also recognise my limitations as a researcher in that I am not fluent in any African languages. This would have been a requirement for reaching really meaningful insights about students' conceptual development, taking their various language competencies and processes into account. However, this focus would provide a whole research project in itself.

A possible flaw in this thesis is a lack of integration of some of the theory in the Literature chapter into the discussion chapters. I believe that the inclusion of all the theory which I did was necessary for me as part of the process of developing a theoretical framework. Some of it needs to be seen as background to the research, which I have drawn on.

At the outset of the research I intended to study students' interactions in group discussions, and how this provided mediation of learning. However, as I selected material from a large bank of data, this aspect was excluded. I see this exclusion as a gap in the research and I hope to still explore this area in further research.

There have been many metaphors which have surfaced in this thesis, metaphors with layers of meaning or ways of seeing the world and learning attached to them. There are organic

metaphors of growth and terms linked to building and construction - scaffolding, tools, framework, bridge. There are metaphors linked to technology such as engine and computing such as processing system. There are the three central metaphors from the readings on culture, culture as a resource, standing at the crossroads, and transgressing boundaries.

I will end with a metaphor. As I have been sitting at my computer day after day, I keep thinking the words "chipping away". I am tapping away at the computer, I feel as if I am chipping away very small shavings from a huge sculpture. There are times when I work fast and productively, the sculpture unfolds before my eyes. But mostly I am just chipping away. Often I meet with the resistance of hard wood - the rigidity of my own thinking and I long for a fluid and lyrical shape to emerge. I wonder if my students experience this.

There are parallels when it comes to our work with students. People outside of Academic Development — Deans, administrators, people who sit on committees, expect us to work miracles, expect us to equip students from villages and ghettos to fly into mainstream courses, and to do it in a year. I have come to think that when we research the work that we do, one has to look for small, subtle changes, developments of the type that I have described, and *see them as being part of a longer term process*. Of course, there are students that undergo transformations, or who shine from the start, but these are not in the majority. I think it is important to value the small developments as well as the large ones, to see them as significant. Lastly, this research has provided affirmation for the idea that one needs to provide students with courses that are challenging, that treat them as learners with potential to grow, and to provide careful scaffolding for them in that process.

Bibliography

Achebe, C. (1975). Named for Victoria, Queen of England. In *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. London: Heinemann.

Agar, D., Hofmeyr, J. and Moulder, J. (1991). *Bridging Education in the 1990s: Learning from Experience*. Durban: Edusource.

Alexander, N. (1995). Core Culture and Core Curriculum in South Africa. In Jackson, S. and Solis, J. (Eds.) *Beyond Comfort Zone in Multiculturalism*. Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey.

Angelil-Carter, S. (1997). Second Language Acquisition of Spoken and Written English: Acquiring the Skeptron. *TESOL Quarterly*. 31(2), 263-287.

Alfers, H., Dison, A. & Theophilus, F. (1997). Breaking Boundaries: Facilitating conceptual development in an EAP course. Proceedings of the 12th Annual Conference of the South African Association for Academic Development, Broederstroom.

Baker, C. (1993). *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Ballard, B. and Clanchy, J. (1988). Literacy in the University: An 'Anthropological' Approach. In Taylor, G., Ballard, B., Beasley, V., Bock, H.K., Clanchy, J. and Nightingale, P. *Literacy by Degrees* (pp. 7-23). Milton Keynes: SRHE and Open University Press.

Biko, S. (1986). African Cultural Concepts. In *I Write What I Like*. Cape Town: Heinemann.

Bloom, A. (1981). *The Linguistic Shaping of Thought*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Boughey, C. (1994). New meanings for old words: Defining and developing academic literacy at South African universities. In Proceedings of the 9th Annual Conference of the South African Association for Academic Development. Volume 2 (pp. 22-29). University of Natal Durban.

Boughey, C. (1995). The rise and fall (?) of the study 'skill' myth. *Discourse*. 6(2), 7-14.

Boughey, C. (1997). Multiple metaphors in an understanding of the acquisition of academic literacy. In Proceedings of the 12th Annual Conference of the South African Association for Academic Development, Broederstroom.

Boughey, C. and Van Rensburg, V. (1994). Writing to Learn in Occupational Therapy. In *AD Dialogues*, 2, 155-176.

- Brown, J.S., Collins, A. & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning. *Educational Researcher*. January-February 1989.
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. Chapter 5.
- Burr, V. (1995). *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Cameron, D., Frazer, E., Harvey, P., Rampton, B. & Richardson, K. (1993). Ethics, Advocacy and Empowerment: Issues of Method in Researching Language. *Language and Communication*. 13(2), 81-94.
- Carr, W. & Kemmis, S. (1986). *Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Carrell, P.L. & Eisterhold, J.C. (1988). Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. In P.L. Carrell, J. Devine & D.E. Eskey (Eds.), *Interactive Approaches to Second Language Reading*, (pp. 73-92). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cazden, C.B. (1992). Vygotsky, Hymes and Bakhtin. From Word to Utterance and Voice. In *Whole Language Plus. Essays on Literacy in the United States and New Zealand* (pp. 190-207). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cazden, C.B. (1994). Vygotsky and ESL Literacy Teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*. 28(1), 172-176.
- Craig, A. (1989). The conflict between the familiar and the unfamiliar. *South African Journal of Higher Education*. 3(1), 166-172.
- Craig, A. (1991). Adult cognition and tertiary studies. *South African Journal of Higher Education*. 5(2), 137-144.
- Craig, A. (1996). Education for all. *South African Journal of Higher Education*. 10(2), 47-55.
- Craig, A.P. & Kernoff, R.J. (1995). Development of textual interpretation by underprepared students. *South African Journal of Higher Education*. 9(1), 23-30.
- Cummins, J. (1986). Language proficiency and academic achievement. In J. Cummins & M. Swain (Eds.) *Bilingualism in Education* (pp. 138-162). London: Longman.
- Department of Education (1997). *Curriculum 2005: Lifelong learning for the 21st century*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- Dison, A. and Law-Viljoen, B. (1995) Work in Progress: English Language for Academic

Purposes at Rhodes. In Proceedings of the 10th Annual Conference of the South African Association for Academic Development (pp. 497-507). Technikon Free State, Bloemfontein.

Ellsworth, E. (1989). Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*. 29(3), 297-324.

Ely, M. with Anzul, M., Friedman, T., Garner, D. & McCormack Steinmetz, A. (1991). *Doing Qualitative Research: Circles Within Circles*. London: The Falmer Press.

Entwistle, N. (1987). *Understanding classroom learning*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Entwistle, N & Entwistle, A. (1991). Contrasting forms of understanding for degree examinations: the student experience and its implications. *Higher Education*. 22, 205-227.

Entwistle, N. and Ramsden, A. (1983). *Understanding Student Learning*. London: Croom Helm.

Ernest, P. (1992). Putting the Social Back into Constructivism. Political Dimensions of Maths Education (PDME) Conference Proceedings. Broederstroom.

Forrest, F. & Winberg, C. (1993). Fixing the past not the patient: Developing a language and cognition course in the English Department at UWC. In Proceedings of the 8th Annual Conference of the South African Association for Academic Development (pp. 259-271). University of the Western Cape, Cape Town.

Fullan, M. (1991). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. London: Cassell Educational.

Gee, J. (1990). *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. London: Falmer Press.

Giddens, A. (1989). *Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Guba, E.G. (1990). The Alternative Paradigm Dialog. In E.G. Guba (Ed.), *The Paradigm Dialog* (pp.17-27). CA: Sage.

Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1989). *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Harlech-Jones, B. (1990). 'You taught me language'. *The implementation of English as a medium of instruction in Namibia*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Hoffmann, C. (1991). *An Introduction to Bilingualism*. London: Longman. Chapter 6.

Inglis, M. (1992). The interrelationship of proficiency in a second language and understanding of scientific concepts. *SPIL Plus*, (21), 375-388.

Inglis, M. & Grayson, D. (1992). An Approach to the development of communication skills

for Science students: Some ideas from the Science Foundation Programme. In Proceedings of the 7th Annual Conference of the South African Association for Academic Development (pp. 192-200). Port Elizabeth Technikon.

Janse Van Rensburg, E. (1994). Lecture Notes. M.Ed. Course in Research Methodology. Unpublished lecture notes. Rhodes Education Department.

Jennings, L.E. & Graham, A.P. (1996). Exposing Discourses Through Action Research. In O, Zuber-Skerritt (Ed.), *New Directions in Action Research* (pp. 165-181). London: Falmer Press.

Kalantzis, M. and Cope, W. (1993). Histories of Pedagogy, Cultures of Schooling. In W, Cope & M, Kalantzis (Eds.). *The Powers of Literacy: A Genre Approach to Teaching Writing* (pp. 38-62). London: Falmer Press.

Kapp, R. (1996). Language, Culture and the Politics of the Tutorial: The Case for Multilingualism in the Tertiary Context. In Proceedings of the 11th National Conference of the South African Association for Academic Development (pp. 453-463). Academic Development Centre, University of Fort Hare, Alice.

Kemmis, S. (1996). Emancipatory Aspirations in a Postmodern Era. In O, Zuber-Skerritt (Ed.), *New Directions in Action Research* (pp. 199-241). London: Falmer Press.

Lantolf, J.P. & Pavlenko, A. (1995). Sociocultural theory and second language acquisition. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 15, 108-124.

Lather, P. (1991). *Getting Smart. Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern*. New York:Routledge.

Lather, P. (1996). Research as Praxis. *Harvard Educational Review*. 56(3).257-277.

Lave, J. (1991). Situating Learning in Communities of Practice. In L.B. Resnick, J.M. Levine & S. D. Teaseley (Eds.) *Perspectives on Socially Shared Cognition* (pp. 63-82). Washington:American Psychological Association.

Lincoln, Y. and Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Luckett, K. (1995a). The Reflective Practitioner: A Guiding Concept for Staff Development? In Proceedings of the 10th Annual Conference of the South African Association for Academic Development (pp. 718-730). Technikon Free State, Bloemfontein.

Luckett, K. (1995b). Towards a model of curriculum development for the University of Natal's Curriculum Reform Programme. *Academic Development*. 1(2), 125-139.

McCormick, K. (1996). *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- Miller, R. (1989). Conceptual issues in theorising about cognition. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 3(1), 154-166.
- Moll, I. & Slonimsky, L. (1989). Towards an understanding of cognition and learning in the academic support context. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 3(1), 160-166.
- Moll, L.C. (Ed.) (1990). *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology*, (pp. 1-27) . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moore, B. (1994). Multicultural Education in South Africa: Some Theoretical and Political Issues. *Perspectives in Education*, 15(2), 237-263.
- Murray, S. (1990). Accomodating change in primary education. *Language Projects Review*, 5(3), 26-28.
- Murray, S. (1992). Current approaches to the teaching of English for Academic Purposes: A critical appraisal. Proceedings of the 12th Annual Conference of the South African Applied Linguistics Association (pp. 119-124). University of Port Elizabeth.
- Nightingale, P. (1988). Language and Learning: A Bibliographical Essay. In Taylor, G., Ballard, B., Beasley, V., Bock, H.K., Clanchy, J. and Nightingale, P. *Literacy by Degrees*, (pp. 65-81). Milton Keynes: SRHE and Open University Press.
- Pennycook, A. (1994). *The Cultural Politics of English as International Language*. London: Longman.
- Phillips, D.C. (1990). Subjectivity and Objectivity: An Objective Inquiry. In J.E.W. Eisner & A. Peshkin (Eds.). *Qualitative Inquiry in Education. The Continuing Debate* (pp. 19-37). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ramphele, M. (1995). Stretching across Boundaries. In *A Life*. Cape Town: David Phillip.
- Rodby, J. (1992). *Appropriating Literacy. Writing and Reading in English as a Second Language*. Portsmouth, N.H.:Heinemann.
- Roehler, L.R. & Duffy, G.G. (1986). What Makes one Teacher a Better Explainer than Another. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 12(3), 273-283.
- Rosenberg, S. (1994). Where does EAP stand? Relationships and EAP. Paper presented to Rhodes University Faculty of Arts Sub-committee: English Language for Academic Purposes. 7 November 1994.
- Schinke-Llano, L. (1993). On the Value of a Vygotskian Framework for SLA Theory and Research. *Language Learning*. 43(1), 121-129.
- Shalem, Y. (1997). Epistemological Labour: The way to significant pedagogical authority. Unpublished paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Kenton Education Association,

Hermanus.

Smaling, A. (1989). Munchhausen-Objectivity: A Bootstrap-Conception of Objectivity as a Methodological Norm. In Baker, W., Hyland, M., Van Hezewijk, R. & Terwee, S. (Eds.) *Recent Trends in Theoretical Psychology Volume 2* (pp. 156-165). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Smaling, A. (1992). The Pragmatic Dimension: Paradigmatic and pragmatic aspects of choosing a qualitative or quantitative method. In *Course Material for the Qualitative Methodology Summer School* (pp. 29-44). Centre for Research Methodology, Human Sciences Research Council, 1993.

Smaling, A. (1993). *Course Material for the Qualitative Methodology Summer School*. Centre for Research Methodology, Human Sciences Research Council.

Strohm Kitchener, K. (1983). Cognition, Metacognition and Epistemic Cognition. A Three-level model of cognitive processing. *Human Development*, *26*, 222-232.

Taylor, G., Ballard, B., Beasley, V., Bock, H.K., Clanchy, J. and Nightingale, P. (1988). *Literacy by Degrees*. Milton Keynes: SRHE and Open University Press.

Thesen, L. (1994). *Voices in Discourse: Re-thinking Shared Meaning in Academic Writing*. Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Cape Town.

Thornton, R. (1988). Culture: A contemporary definition. In Boonzaier, E. and Sharp, J (Eds.) *South African Keywords. The Uses and Abuses of Political Concepts* (pp. 17-28). Cape Town: David Phillip.

Van der Riet, M., Dison, A. & Quinn, L. (1996). Conceptual Development through Process-Writing: A Case Study of a Psychology 2 Course. In Proceedings of the 11th National Conference of the South African Association for Academic Development (pp. 367-379). Academic Development Centre, University of Fort Hare, Alice.

Volbrecht, T. (1996). What can narrative enquiry and literacy studies tell us about meaningful access and accommodating diversity? An investigation into the acquisition of literacies in an academic literacy course. In Proceedings of the 11th National Conference of the South African Association for Academic Development (pp. 474-485). University of Fort Hare, Alice.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in Society*, edited by M. Cole and S. Scribner. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1986). *Thought and Language*, revised and edited A. Kozulin. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press.

Wertsch, J.V. (1991a). A Sociocultural Approach to Socially Shared Cognition. In L.B. Resnick, J.M. Levine, and S.D. Teaseley (Eds.) *Perspectives on Socially Shared Cognition*

(pp. 85-99). Washington: American Psychological Association.

Wertsch, J.V. (1991b). *Voices of the Mind. A Sociocultural Approach to Mediated Action*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Winter, R. (1989). *Learning from Experience. Principles and Practice in Action Research*. London: The Falmer Press.

Appendices

- A. Core materials from Culture course.
- B. Letters to students.
- C. Writing of three students.
- D. Transcripts of selected interviews.
- E. Extracts from two tutors' meetings.
- F. Extract of ELAP Course evaluation.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSESCOURSE OUTLINE: TERM 2 1997THEME: CULTURE AND IDENTITY

MON	WED	THURS	FRI
WEEK 1: 21-25 April Group Seminar: Defining culture	Group seminar: Definitions	Group seminar: Previewing readings. Thornton article	Group seminar: Thornton article
WEEK 2: 28 Apr - 2 May <i>PUBLIC HOLIDAY</i>	Group seminar: Thornton article	<i>PUBLIC HOLIDAY</i>	Group seminar: Return Essay 1 Give out Task 1 Grammar <u>*Hand in journal</u>
WEEK 3: 5-9 May Lecture: Culture Dr Robin Palmer Group seminar: Autobiographies	Library practical <u>*Hand in Task 1</u>	Group seminar: Autobiographies	Group seminar: Cohesion & coherence Grammar Give out Task 2
WEEK 4: 12-16 May Workshop: Multicultural education & Rhodes culture	Group seminar: Argument <u>*Hand in Task 2</u> Hand back Task 1	Group seminar: Argument cont.	Group seminar: Grammar <u>*Hand in journal</u>
WEEK 5: 19-23 May Lecture: Gender & Culture Mary van der Riet Give back Task 2	Group seminar: Revising & editing	Group seminar: Intros & concs	Group seminar: Prepare for debate Grammar <u>*Hand in final version</u>
WEEK 6: 26-30 May Debate Wrap-up of module	Group seminar: Summary practice	Group seminar: Exam skills	Group seminar: Return final version Grammar

ELAP:Term 2
Week 1 (21 - 25 April)

Monday 21 April

Tapping students' understandings of culture.

First period:

Introduction:

10 minutes

Hand out course outline for term.

Explain aims of term:

Content: Working with concept of culture, starting from students' understandings of culture, working towards more academic understandings.

- generate debate about culture
- look at Rhodes culture
- look at gender and culture

At a metacognitive level: (explain this concept)

-learn more about how knowledge is constructed at university.

Academic & language skills:

- more about essay writing, library skills, cohesion and coherence, argument, more about revising and editing.

Individual activity:

10 m

Students write on:

What do I understand by culture? What role does it play in my life?

Groupwork:

25 m

Students read their writing to each other and then discuss:

Do we have similar understandings of what culture is? Are there differences in the way we see culture? If so, explain what these differences are.

Develop a joint definition of culture. (Work out how you're going to deal with different understandings, if there are differences.)

If this takes longer, give them more time.

10 m break.

2nd period:

Reportback:

20 m

Groups read out their definitions. Any discussion coming out of this.

Students hand in individual writing and group definitions.

Start with "Definitions of Culture" worksheet. **25 m**

ELAP: Definitions of Culture

A. *Discuss the following questions in class:*

1. On Monday we asked you to develop your own definitions of culture. How did you find the process of writing definitions? Was it easy or difficult? Why?
2. Why do we define concepts? Think about why lecturers define concepts, why writers of books and articles do it and why students do it? Of course there are common reasons, but they may differ slightly.

B. *Read the definitions and discuss the following questions in pairs:*

3. Definitions often explain what a concept refers to, and then give an example to illustrate this meaning in concrete terms. Find an example in the definitions you have been given and explain how it illustrates an abstract idea.
4. Look at the dictionary definition of culture (Definition 3). How useful do you think it is for developing our understanding of culture for this course? Explain your answer. How would you use a dictionary to help you to understand a complex concept like culture?
5. There are two references in the definitions to university disciplines. Find these references. Do you think that the same term could be defined differently in different disciplines? Explain.
6. You may have noticed that the definitions show different perspectives on culture. Can you find some examples in the definitions of ideas that contradict each other? Explain why you think this?
7. Which of the definitions do you agree with the most or do you find most useful? Are there some that you disagree with? Explain your answers.

Source: A. Giddens (1989). Sociology. Cambridge: Polity Press.

DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS

① The concept of culture

In this chapter we shall look at the unity and diversity of human life and culture. The concept of **culture**, together with that of **society**, is one of the most widely used notions in sociology. Culture consists of the **values** the members of a given group hold, the **norms** they follow, and the *material goods* they create. Values are abstract ideals, while norms are definite principles or rules which people are expected to observe. Norms represent the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of social life. Thus monogamy – being faithful to a single marriage partner – is a prominent value in most Western societies. In many other cultures, a person is permitted to have several wives or husbands simultaneously. Norms of behaviour in marriage include, for example, how husbands and wives are supposed to behave towards their in-laws. In some societies, a husband or wife is expected to develop a close relationship with parents-in-law; in others they are expected to keep a clear distance from one another.

When we use the term in ordinary daily conversation, we often think of 'culture' as equivalent to the 'higher things of the mind' – art, literature, music and painting. As sociologists use it, the concept includes such activities, but also far more. Culture refers to the whole way of life of the members of a society. It includes how they dress, their marriage customs and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits. It covers also the goods they create and which become meaningful for them – bows and arrows, ploughs, factories and machines, computers, books, dwellings.

'Culture' can be conceptually distinguished from 'society', but there are very close connections between these notions. 'Culture' concerns the *way of life* of the members of a given society – their habits and customs, together with the material goods they produce. 'Society' refers to the *system of interrelationships* which connects together the individuals who share a common culture. No culture could exist without a society. But, equally, no society could exist without culture. Without culture, we would not be 'human' at all, in the sense in which we usually understand that term. We would have no language in which to express ourselves, no sense of self-consciousness, and our ability to think or reason would be severely limited – as we shall show in this chapter and in chapter 3 ('Socialization and the Life-Cycle').

Source: Thornton, R (1988)

② Culture is a resource

Today, culture is best thought of as a resource. Like other resources, such as energy, sunlight, air and food, it cannot belong exclusively to any particular individual or group of individuals. All groups and individuals must have access to at least some of these resources to survive. Similarly, culture is the *information* which humans are *not* born with but which they need in order to interact with each other in social life. It must be learned during the long process of education, socialisation, maturing and growing old. Like other kinds of resources, culture can be – and is – controlled by the environment, which places limits on what can and cannot be done. But the physical environment can never determine the content of culture. Unlike other physical resources, however, culture is never 'used up', but can only grow, change or even disappear in use. It is people who create cultural resources and control access to them.

③

cul-ture /'kʌltʃə(r)/ n 1 [U] (a) refined understanding and appreciation of art, literature, etc: a society without much culture ○ She is a woman of considerable culture. ○ Universities should be centres of culture. (b) (often derog) art, literature, etc collectively: tourists coming to Venice in search of culture. 2 [U] state of intellectual development of a society: twentieth-century mass culture ○ a period of high/low culture. 3 [U, C] particular form of intellectual expression, eg in art and literature: We owe much to Greek culture. ○ She has studied the cultures of Oriental countries. 4 [U, C] customs, arts, social institutions, etc of a particular group or people: the culture of the Eskimos ○ working-class culture. 5 [U] development through training, exercise, treatment, etc: physical culture, ie developing one's muscles and fitness by doing exercises ○ The culture of the mind is vital. 6 [U] growing of plants or rearing of certain types of animal (eg bees, silkworms, etc) to obtain a crop or improve the species: bulb culture, ie the growing of flowers from bulbs. 7 [C] (biology) group of bacteria grown for medical or scientific study: a culture of cholera germs.

Source: Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.

One can take two very different and basic views of culture.

The first takes its cue from cultural anthropology which took off in the early twentieth century. Here we had people studying the beliefs, practices, life styles and organisation of small scale and usually relatively isolated and self-contained societies. They called these patterns of living and thinking the culture of the society. From here it has been applied to other societies but with the same set of basic ideas; as a set of beliefs and practices pertaining to a demarcated group of people within a larger society, [which] beliefs and practices are oriented to the past in that they are associated with tradition.. This 'culture' is essentially something that can be described and is believed to be a crucial constituent of the 'identity' of individuals within the cultural group. ... 'Culture' here is a given within which people's lives take shape.

(4)

The second view sees culture as a construct used to organise and interpret human behaviour. As such it is contested. It can be used to block progress and development.. to legitimate oppression. Or it can be used to help people achieve their ... aspirations ... 'Culture' here is a value concept ... it is a political concept which has to be understood in the context and the purposes for which it is being used.

...I must admit, though, that the first view of culture is the dominant and popular view. It is so dominant that even people who adopt the second view often fall back into using 'culture' in the first sense.¹⁰

Source: B. Koda
Quoted in Moore, B (1994).

(5)

It is around a core of shared cultural meanings that any society or nation coheres. Within any healthy society there are differences. But underneath those differences there are shared values which unite the different groups. When difference is seen as different forms of expression of the core values, then difference is not divisive. It gives life and energy to the unity.

In South Africa we have to attack the Euro-centric notion of culture which sees language, culture and nation as co-terminus. It is this notion which was used by apartheid to drive people into separate cultural corners and construct these corners as separate nations. If we are going to create a new South Africa we have to bring people out of those cultural ghettos to see what each has in common with the others and celebrate that ...

We do not have to start from scratch. Already most black communities are multilingual which breaks the language-culture nexus and helps us see the cultural between people. And, despite the success of apartheid in manufacturing in some people a sense of belonging to a Zulu nation or a Xhosa nation, the overwhelming majority of black people do think of themselves as South Africans. Each believes that their heritage has a contribution to make to a common South Africa. That is what I understand by culture. It is not ethnic or linguistic difference. It is a set of core values and meanings which enables a collection of diverse individuals and groups cohere as a single society or nation. In that core culture everyone participates.¹³

Source: N. Alexander
Quoted in Moore, B (1994) 'Multicultural Education in South Africa in Perspectives in Education, 15, 2, pp 237-263.

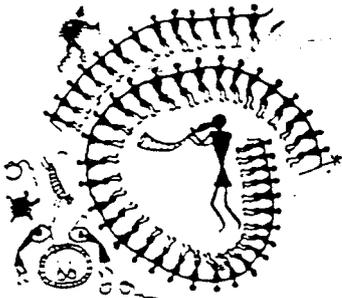
6

4

A WORKING DEFINITION OF CULTURE

First, culture is all around us; we live our lives by means of culture, just as a fish always swims in the sea. As a fish takes the sea for granted, so we tend to take culture for granted. When we do think about culture, we very often forget that it is an organic part of our life, and we talk about it as something external and removed from us. Consequently, we tend to think about culture as a set of objects - like musical instruments, or a set of traditional values - like religion. This means we usually think about culture as something handed down to us, finished and complete, something decided upon by others in the past. This way of looking at culture can be misleading; musical instruments and religion are part of our culture, it is true. But what makes them 'cultural'? They are part of culture because they are all ways of making sense of the world we live in. We must never forget that 'making sense' is something we do all the time. Swimming in the sea of culture must not hide from us the fact that culture is about swimming. Or to put it another way; culture is the storehouse of ways in which we create a meaningful world. We have to use those meanings all the time, too. Culture is about what we do today not just about what our forefathers did yesterday. If their ways still work for us today too, that is lucky for us. If they don't, then we need to make new ways if we don't want to live our lives like a fish out of water.

Source: Muller, J (1989) in Tomaselli, K. (Ed.)
Rethinking Culture.



CONCEPTUALISING CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA.

Adapted from an article by Robert Thornton.

Culture or cultures

When we hear about culture in South Africa, we usually hear how South Africa is composed of many cultures, and that these cultures are the products and properties of different peoples or *volke*. Robert Thornton, an anthropologist, believes that these common concepts of culture distort our understandings of culture. 1

The following extracts from Anthropology textbooks illustrate the idea of different cultures being owned by different peoples. "*Soveel volke wat daar is, soveel kulture bestaan daar*" (There are as many cultures as there are peoples)(Coertze, 1973, 1973:61). *An Introduction to Anthropology* by DP Stoffberg, says that culture is "the expression of an ethnic group's speech, thought processes, actions and aspirations. An ethnic group and its culture develop organically and simultaneously to become an indivisible, homogeneous group" (Stoffberg, 1982:1). 2

BV Levitas claims that the members of a group "i.e. a people, possess a common way of life and share a common culture" and goes on to say: "All South Africans are classified into races ..(and South Africa) ... consists of many peoples, the Xhosa, Zulu and Tswana etc. each with a distinct language and culture" (Levitas n.d.:19). 3

Thornton argues that the idea of cultural differences being closely linked to different 'peoples' or *volke* is contradicted daily. "In the marketplace and workplace, listening to music or watching television, at homes and in churches, people in fact experience the same desires, profess the same religions, follow the same leaders, and eat the same cornflakes, notwithstanding their "multicultural" condition!" (Thornton, 1988:18). 4

Neville Alexander explores this idea further: 5

In South Africa we have to attack the Euro-centric notion of culture which sees language, culture and nation as co-terminus. It is this notion which was used by apartheid to drive people into separate cultural corners as separate nations. If we are going to create a new South Africa we have to bring people out of those cultural ghettos to see what each has in common with the others and celebrate that ...

We do not have to start from scratch. Already most black communities are multilingual which breaks the language- culture nexus And despite the success of apartheid in manufacturing in some people a sense of belonging to a Zulu nation or a Xhosa nation, the overwhelming majority of black people do think of themselves as South Africans. Each believes that their heritage has a contribution to make to a common South Africa. 6

(Quoted in Moore, 1994:247).

Was ethnicity invented?

The idea that a culture is associated with one nation and language was developed in the nineteenth century in Europe. 7

Debi Pattanayak argues that:

the concept of a nation state is built around unitary symbols, one language, one culture, one religion and so on. This is how the nation state is conceived of in the European plan. Their one language is the national language. This is an entirely inadequate concept. It is inappropriate both to European countries, as they have discovered to their great cost, and even more so to developing countries. National monolingualism is a complete myth.

(Cited in Alexander, 1995:212).

Similarly, many Southern African historians have shown how ethnicity was created in Southern Africa by missionaries, colonial administrators and entrepreneurs in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Leroy Vail (1991) demonstrates how the economic needs of colonial modernisation, especially the demands of deep-level mining and plantation-style farming, brought about the system of forced migrant labour by means of which African males of the surrounding territories were recruited according to which ethnic group they belonged to. In the mines, different ethnic groups were kept separate, and this caused them to develop strong ethnic identities. 8

In South Africa, it was particularly the missionaries and their mainly male converts who determined the content of these ethnic identities, by, for example, developing a written form of each of the African languages and by recording the heroic epic, myths and customs of the "tribe". Vail's conclusion was that ethnicity is not a natural cultural phenomenon but a "consciously crafted ideological creation" (Vail, 1991:7 quoted in Alexander 1995:212). 9

Michael Cross argues that during the first two centuries of colonial history in South Africa the concept of 'civilisation' influenced the relations between the colonisers and the indigenous population. As bearers of 'civilisation' the colonisers saw themselves as having a 'civilising mission' which legitimated the patterns of domination and subordination established in government and social relations. In the early twentieth century, Afrikaner intellectuals took the concept of 'culture' from cultural anthropology i.e. the concept of each ethnic group having its own culture. They applied this concept to the population groups in South Africa and 'discovered' 'Bantu culture' and indeed 'Bantu cultures' (Moore 1994:242-3). 10

But although Cross believes that different cultures were created artificially during our history, he argues that we still need to recognise cultural diversity as a real issue. He says, "One cannot just ignore it and say we are concerned with national unity. Of course unity is a common goal. But it has to be a national unity which is built on the existing reality ... of ethnic diversity" (quoted in Moore 1994:245). 11

Culture is a resource

Thornton (1988:24) argues that culture is best thought of as a resource. Like other resources, such as energy, sunlight, air and food, it cannot belong exclusively to any particular individual or group of individuals. All groups and individuals must have access to at least some of these resources to survive. Similarly, culture is the *information* which humans are *not* born with but which they need in order to interact with each other in social life. It must be learned during the long process of education, socialisation, maturing and growing old. Like other kinds of resources, culture can be - and is - controlled by the environment, which places limits on what can and cannot be done. But the physical environment can never determine the content of culture. Unlike other physical resources, however, culture is never 'used up', but can only grow, change or even disappear in use. It is people who create cultural resources and control access to them. 12

Although culture is an essential resource, this does not mean that all people have equal access to all of culture, or even access to all of the cultural resources that they might need or desire. For the most part, earlier theories about culture assumed that everyone had more or less the same degree of access to the cultural resources that their particular social environment provided. Today, we see that this is not true - and believe that it was probably never true, even of the so-called 'egalitarian' or 'tribal societies' which were once thought to be completely homogeneous. 13

If we think of culture as a resource, however, then we must include our own ideas *about* culture as part of the resources that culture provides. This is particularly true in South Africa since the concepts of 'different cultures' and 'own culture' have become central to the political thought of most South Africans. For the most part, these political uses of the word 'culture' are not about culture at all, as we use the term here, but rather about *cultures*. In this case, it is the final 's' that makes all the difference. This has been an effect of the apartheid system, which had a strong influence on how people understood society. It has caused people to see others as belonging to different cultures, which are separate from each other. Furthermore, people's understanding of society, including how they see culture, become part of the cultural resources, which they use to deal with the world. 14

Thornton argues that while there are differences in the way people behave and think and live, this reflects their differing access to cultural resources (the information which humans need to interact with each other) as well as their use of these resources to make statements to each other and about themselves. 15

One such statement, perhaps the most significant for our understanding of the concept, is the statement about identity and group membership. Wearing a safari-suit or a tee-shirt and beads, participation in a rugby team or a dance band, represent choices made from a selection of cultural resources that comprise a statement about identity. Culture, however, is more than this. It includes clothes that we wear, events and practices that we participate in, languages that we speak. Moreover, it also includes all of the ways of using and expressing these and many other material and conceptual resources which our human environments present to us. 16

Muller (1989) writes that we tend to think of culture as a set of objects - like musical instruments, or a set of traditional values - like religion. These are part of our culture, but what makes them 'cultural'? They are part of our culture because they are all ways of making sense of the world we live in. Or to put it another way; "culture is the storehouse of ways 17

in which we create a meaningful world" (51).

An understanding of culture, then, is not simply a knowledge of differences, but rather an understanding of how and why differences in language, thought, use of materials and behaviour have come about. There are certainly cultural differences, just as there are differences in climate or personality or the various batches of the same colour of paint - but those differences have meanings, functions and histories. Contemporary cultural studies, look at these meanings, functions and histories in order to understand the differences; they do not use the apparent 'fact' of differences to explain history, politics and beliefs. 18

Culture changes

Since cultural changes are controlled and limited in many different ways by social and environmental factors, culture changes. Over the *very long term* we can talk about the evolution of culture. Evidently, the resources that humans have used to cope with each other and with their environments have undergone a dramatic evolution from simple stone and wooden implements, primitive drawings, and simpler languages to the complex forms we see everywhere today. It is clear that no single region or regional population is more or less responsible than others for the most important changes in the evolution of culture. It is also clear that the evolution of culture and the evolution of the human physical form and racial characteristics are completely unrelated. In fact physical anthropologists agree that the human body ceased to evolve once humans became fully *human*, that is, when they no longer interacted directly with the environment with their bodies and sensations, but indirectly through the use of tools and concepts. From the dawn of our species, *Homo sapiens*, it has been culture which has evolved in order to provide the knowledge, tools, habits and beliefs that permitted humans to adapt to changing environments rather than live directly in the natural environment. These changes have proceeded at more or less the same pace, *over the long term*, everywhere. 19

In the shorter term, however, it makes little sense to talk about more-evolved or less-evolved cultures, since all but a very few humans possess at least the minimum necessary cultural skills to permit their survival and the full expression of human social and emotional life. The exceptions, where they exist, have nothing to do with 'evolution', but rather with specific social relationships of political power, economic exchange and control of cultural resources that have led to cultural deprivation, poverty and powerlessness of some people relative to others. It may seem attractive to some people to explain these differences in terms of the ideas of biological evolution of species, but Thornton argues strongly that culture is not comparable to the genes and organic substance of an organism. Thus, the metaphor of evolution drawn from biology is not helpful in understanding culture. 20

What culture does

Thornton (1988:26) argues that it is difficult to define culture, because it is so complex. Although there is not much point in trying to say what culture *is*, it is useful to look at what culture *does* and how it does it. 21

"One thing that culture does is to create the boundaries of class, ethnicity ... race, gender, neighbourhood, generation and territory within which we all live" (27). Boundaries are created and maintained when people observe, learn and finally internalise the rituals and habits of speech, body language and dress and ways of thinking to the extent that they become entirely automatic and unconscious. These boundaries come to seem uniquely real and permanent.. Their creation through cultural means is only obvious when we step outside of our normal day-to-day interactions. 22

Thornton uses the example of borders of state to illustrate how boundaries are created. In crossing an 'international boundary' we involve ourselves in a complex political ritual which includes signposts, people wearing uniforms, gates and narrow corridors. There is always an element of risk, of interference with personal freedom, even death if the formalities of this particularly powerful ritual are not acknowledged and complied with. The boundaries between countries, in fact, exist only in the imagination. They are created through international agreements and laws constructed by humans. They are identified through complex geographical calculations. 23

Boundaries between classes and races are similarly maintained by habits of language, positions of subordination and domination, dress, differential access to cultural and economic resources, and patterns of residence. These cultural boundaries, while automatic and in many cases unconscious, are learned within communities. They can be brought to the level of consciousness through education, discussion, art or drama and thus un-learned. They can be changed. In fact, individuals in South Africa do change their class position, their racial classification, their ethnicity and nationality, even their gender. Although time decrees that we cannot change our age, there are different cultural expectations of what people can or cannot do at different ages, thus this can be changeable as well. 24

The existence of boundaries and the fact that they are created by means of culture present us with a kind of paradox. Boundaries divide individuals and groups of people, but they can only do so if the groups so divided share a common belief about what criteria and what rituals constitute a boundary. People must believe that it is important to 'be a South African', to 'be an elder', to 'be a man'. It seems that being human guarantees that some set of identities will always be important in this way. These identities overlap and often conflict with each other. They almost never correspond with other identities, however, in a way that would justify the belief that each 'people' has a uniquely different culture. 25

Edward Said explores this idea further: 26

No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting points which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or black, or Western, or Oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as

if that was all human life was about. Survival in fact is about the connections between things.

Said (1994) quoted in Alexander (1996:9)

Alexander (1996:10) argues that under certain conditions such as political stability, people experience their "culture" as a definite "thing", a kind of envelope that determines to a large extent how they perceive and react to their normal surroundings. Under other conditions such as periods of rapid social change) they experience their "culture" as a process, as something that is itself changing and unstable. He argues that in a multilingual, "multicultural" society, a more dynamic view of culture seems to be appropriate. 27

Thornton (1988:28) argues that cultural categories such as 'a nation, 'a community', and 'a society' are political entities only when they act together in some way (for example, when a nation goes to war, or the Lions club makes a street collection). Otherwise, they are merely categories based on some criterion or set of criteria (for example 'the coloured people', 'the residents of Hillbrow'). Such categories are created by humans. They provide a means of classifying and coping with the complexity of life. They are not cultural *groups* in any sense, unless they believe themselves to be so, and act together as a consequence of these beliefs. 28

This paper has criticised the common understanding of culture as different cultures belonging to different ethnic groups. The idea that each *volk* or people 'belongs to' or possesses a different culture is itself a part of the cultural processes of establishing political and personal identities. When seen in historical perspective, these ideas emerge clearly as products of their times (*our* times), which will themselves change. Societies, political groups, nations, and so on have boundaries. Their edges are often very easy to perceive and to define. This is because culture creates these boundaries and makes them seem important to us. However, what we have been arguing in this paper is that when we study culture it is not what is defined by those boundaries, that we are concerned with. Rather, we may be asking how and why those boundaries have been created, whether they may be shifting, and whether people are constrained by those boundaries or are crossing them. 29

References

The article which the above paper has been adapted from is:

Thornton, R. (1988). Culture: A Contemporary Definition. In Boonzaier, E & Sharp, J (Eds.). South African Keywords: The Uses and Abuses of Political Concepts. Cape Town: David Philip.

The following other articles have been used:

Alexander, N (1996). Mainstreaming by Confluence: The Multilingual Context of Literature in South Africa. World Literature Today. 70(1), 9-11.

Alexander, N (1995). Core Culture and Core Curriculum in South Africa. In Jackson, S. and Solis, J. (Eds.) Beyond Comfort Zones in Multiculturalism. Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey.

Moore, B (1994). Multicultural Education in South Africa: Some Theoretical and Political Issues. Perspectives in Education. 15(2), 237-263.

Muller, J (1989). Culture, Society and Education in South Africa. In Tomaselli, K. (Ed.). Rethinking Culture. Bellville: Anthropos Publishers.

Worksheet for "Conceptualising culture in contemporary South Africa".

Please use the article (by Thornton) to answer the following questions. Answer in your own words.

Conceptual questions

- 1a. What is the difference between "culture" and "cultures" as used in the first sub-heading?
 - b. Why does Thornton have a problem with the idea of "different cultures belonging to different ethnic groups"?
 - c. Do you agree with Thornton's statement in paragraph 4 that "people in fact experience the same desires, profess the same religions, follow the same leaders, and eat the same cornflakes" ?
2. Alexander (in paragraph 5) and Pattanayak (in paragraph 7) criticise the European notion of culture which sees one nation having one culture and one language etc. Why do they think this idea is inadequate, and why especially for South Africa?
3. What does Vail mean (in par.8) when he says "ethnicity is not a natural cultural phenomenon but a consciously crafted ideological creation". Why does he believe this?
- 4a. Thornton argues that culture is best thought of as a resource (par. 12). Explain the meaning of resource in this context.
 - b. Does this seem to you to be a useful way of conceptualising culture? Why/ Why not?
 - c. Thornton (in paragraph 14) argues that "we must include our own ideas *about* culture as part of the resources that culture provides". What do you think he means by this?
5. According to Thornton's argument in paragraphs 19 and 20, would it make sense to talk about "more civilised" or "less civilised" cultures? Explain your answer.
- 22
- 6a. What does Thornton mean (in par. 20) by boundaries which are created and maintained by culture?
 - b. Why does he use the metaphor of borders of states to illustrate how boundaries are created?

- 7a. According to Thornton and Said, do people have a clear cultural identity? Explain.
- b. Think about your own identity, by listing the labels which name what you are. eg. male/female, language group, urban/rural, working-class/middle-class, student Do you agree with the views of Thornton and Said in relation to how you see your own identity?
8. Thornton says that the idea of cultures belonging to different peoples is a product of its time (par. 29).
- a. How is an idea a product of a particular time? and
- b. Why has the idea of cultures belonging to different peoples been so popular in South Africa?

Language questions

9. What does the verb 'conceptualise' mean (used in the title of the paper)?
10. In paragraphs 1,2 and 4, the word 'peoples' is used. The word people is not usually used with an 's' as it is already in the plural form. Why is it in this case?
11. In the article, a number of words are written in quotation marks, eg. 'peoples' (par.4), 'civilisation', 'civilising mission', 'discovered', 'Bantu culture', 'Bantu cultures" (par. 10).

Why do you think the writer has used these quotation marks?

12. In paragraph 10, it says that "Afrikaner intellectuals ... *'discovered'* 'Bantu culture' and indeed 'Bantu cultures'. What does 'discovered' mean in this context? Do you think someone can 'discover' another person's culture?
12. What are the meanings of the following words and phrases?

organically (par.2)
 homogenous (par.2)
 entrepreneurs (par.8)
 ideological (par.9)

egalitarian (par.13)
 evolution (par.19)
 ethnicity (par.22)
 paradox (par.25)

Biko, S. (1986). I write when I think.
Cape town: Heinemann.

8 Some African Cultural Concepts

This is a paper given by Steve at a conference called by IDAMASA (Interdenominational Association of African Ministers of Religion) and ASSECA (Association for the Educational and Cultural Development of the African People) at the Ecumenical Lay Training Centre, Edendale, Natal, in 1971. The conference drew together a number of black organizations who might be interested in a closer association. Several papers were given including one by Chief Gatsha Buthelezi. This conference proved to be a staging post on the way to the formation of the Black People's Convention in Johannesburg in December of that year.

Some African Cultural Concepts

One of the most difficult things to do these days is to talk with authority on anything to do with African culture. Somehow Africans are not expected to have any deep understanding of their own culture or even of themselves. Other people have become authorities on all aspects of the African life or to be more accurate on BANTU life. Thus we have the thickest of volumes on some of the strangest subjects – even 'The Feeding Habits of the Urban Africans', a publication by a fairly 'liberal' group, Institute of Race Relations.

In my opinion it is not necessary to talk with Africans about African culture. However, in the light of the above statements one realizes that there is so much confusion sown, not only amongst casual non-African readers, but even amongst Africans themselves, that perhaps a sincere

attempt should be made at emphasizing the authentic cultural aspects of the African people by Africans themselves.

Since that unfortunate date – 1652 – we have been experiencing a process of acculturation. It is perhaps presumptuous to call it 'acculturation' because this term implies a fusion of different cultures. In our case this fusion has been extremely one-sided. The two major cultures that met and 'fused' were the African culture and the Anglo-Boer culture. Whereas the African culture was unsophisticated and simple, the Anglo-Boer culture had all the trappings of a colonialist culture and therefore was heavily equipped for conquest. Where they could, they conquered by persuasion, using a highly exclusive religion that denounced all other Gods and demanded a strict code of behaviour with respect to clothing, education, ritual and custom. Where it was impossible to convert, firearms were readily available and used to advantage. Hence the Anglo-Boer culture was the more powerful culture in almost all facets. This is where the African began to lose a grip on himself and his surroundings.

Thus in taking a look at cultural aspects of the African people one inevitably finds himself having to compare. This is primarily because of the contempt that the 'superior' culture shows towards the indigenous culture. To justify its exploitative basis the Anglo-Boer culture has at all times been directed at bestowing an inferior status to all cultural aspects of the indigenous people.

I am against the belief that African culture is time-bound, the notion that with the conquest of the African all his culture was obliterated. I am also against the belief that when one talks of African culture one is necessarily talking of the pre-Van Riebeeck culture. Obviously the African culture has had to sustain severe blows and may have been battered nearly out of shape by the belligerent cultures it collided with, yet in essence even today one can easily find the fundamental aspects of the pure African culture in the present-day African. Hence in taking a look at African culture I am going to refer as well to what I have termed the modern African culture.

One of the most fundamental aspects of our culture is the importance we attach to man. Ours has always been a man-centred society. Westerners have on many occasions been surprised at the capacity we have for talking to each other – not for the sake of arriving at a particular conclusion but merely to enjoy the communication for its own sake. Intimacy is a term not exclusive for particular friends but applying to a

whole group of people who find themselves together either through work or through residential requirements.

In fact in the traditional African culture, there is no such thing as two friends. Conversation groups were more or less naturally determined by age and division of labour. Thus one would find all boys whose job was to look after cattle periodically meeting at popular spots to engage in conversation about their cattle, girlfriends, parents, heroes, etc. All commonly shared their secrets, joys and woes. No one felt unnecessarily an intruder into someone else's business. The curiosity manifested was welcome. It came out of a desire to share. This pattern one would find in all age groups. House visiting was always a feature of the elderly folk's way of life. No reason was needed as a basis for visits. It was all part of our deep concern for each other. 7

These are things never done in the Westerner's culture. A visitor to someone's house, with the exception of friends, is always met with the question 'what can I do for you?'. This attitude to see people not as themselves but as agents for some particular function either to one's disadvantage or advantage is foreign to us. We are not a suspicious race. We believe in the inherent goodness of man. We enjoy man for himself. We regard our living together not as an unfortunate mishap warranting endless competition among us but as a deliberate act of God to make us a community of brothers and sisters jointly involved in the quest for a composite answer to the varied problems of life. Hence in all we do we always place man first and hence all our action is usually joint community-oriented action rather than the individualism which is the hallmark of the capitalist approach. We always refrain from using people as stepping-stones. Instead we are prepared to have a much slower progress in an effort to make sure that all of us are marching to the same tune. 8

Nothing dramatizes the eagerness of the African to communicate with each other more than their love for song and rhythm. Music in the African culture features in all emotional states. When we go to work, we share the burdens and pleasures of the work we are doing through music. This particular facet strangely enough has filtered through to the present day. Tourists always watch with amazement the synchrony of music and action as Africans working at a roadside use their picks and shovels with well-timed precision to the accompaniment of a background song. Battle songs were a feature of the long march to war in the olden days. Girls and boys never played any game without using music and rhythm as its 9

basis. In other words with Africans, music and rhythm were not luxuries but part and parcel of our way of communication. Any suffering we experienced was made much more real by song and rhythm. There is no doubt that the so-called 'Negro spirituals' sung by black slaves in the States as they toiled under oppression were indicative of their African heritage.

The major thing to note about our songs is that they never were songs for individuals. All African songs are group songs. Though many have words, this is not the most important thing about them. Tunes were adapted to suit the occasion and had the wonderful effect of making everybody read the same things from the common experience. In war the songs reassured those who were scared, highlighted the determination of the regiment to win a particular encounter and made much more urgent the need to settle the score; in suffering, as in the case of the black slaves, they derived sustenance out of a feeling of togetherness; at work the binding rhythm makes everybody brush off the burden and hence Africans can continue for hours on end because of this added energy. 10

Attitudes of Africans to property again show just how unindividualistic the African is. As everybody here knows, African society had the village community as its basis. Africans always believed in having many villages with a controllable number of people in each, rather than the reverse. This obviously was a requirement to suit the needs of a community-based and man-centred society. Hence most things were jointly owned by the group; for instance there was no such thing as individual land ownership. The land belonged to the people and was merely under the control of the local chief on behalf of the people. When cattle went to graze it was on an open veld and not on anybody's specific farm. 11

Farming and agriculture, though on individual family basis, had many characteristics of joint efforts. Each person could, by a simple request and holding of a special ceremony, invite neighbours to come and work on his plots. This service was returned in kind and no remuneration was ever given. 12

Poverty was a foreign concept. This could only be really brought about to the entire community by an adverse climate during a particular season. It never was considered repugnant to ask one's neighbours for help if one was struggling. In almost all instances there was help between individuals, tribe and tribe, chief and chief, etc. even in spite of war. 13

Another important aspect of the African culture is our mental attitude 14

to problems presented by life in general. Whereas the Westerner is geared to use a problem-solving approach following very trenchant analyses, our approach is that of situation-experiencing. I will quote from Dr Kaunda to illustrate this point:

The Westerner has an aggressive mentality. When he sees a problem he will not rest until he has formulated some solution to it. He cannot live with contradictory ideas in his mind; he must settle for one or the other or else evolve a third idea in his mind which harmonizes or reconciles the other two. And he is vigorously scientific in rejecting solutions for which there is no basis in logic. He draws a sharp line between the natural and the supernatural, the rational and non-rational, and more often than not, he dismisses the supernatural and non-rational as superstition . . . 15

Africans being a pre-scientific people do not recognize any conceptual cleavage between the natural and supernatural. They experience a situation rather than face a problem. By this I mean they allow both the rational and non-rational elements to make an impact upon them, and any action they may take could be described more as a response of the total personality to the situation than the result of some mental exercise. 16

This I find a most apt analysis of the essential difference in the approach to life of these two groups. We as a community are prepared to accept that nature will have its enigmas which are beyond our powers to solve. Many people have interpreted this attitude as lack of initiative and drive yet in spite of my belief in the strong need for scientific experimentation I cannot help feeling that more time also should be spent in teaching man and man to live together and that perhaps the African personality with its attitude of laying less stress on power and more stress on man is well on the way to solving our confrontation problems. 17

All people are agreed that Africans are a deeply religious race. In the various forms of worship that one found throughout the southern part of our continent there was at least a common basis. We all accepted without any doubt the existence of a God. We had our own community of saints. We believed – and this was consistent with our views of life – that all people who died had a special place next to God. We felt that a 18

communication with God could only be through these people. We never knew anything about hell – we do not believe that God can create people only to punish them eternally after a short period on earth.

Another aspect of religious practices was the occasion of worship. Again we did not believe that religion could be featured as a separate part of our existence on earth. It was manifest in our daily lives. We thanked God through our ancestors before we drank beer, married, worked, etc. We would obviously find it artificial to create special occasions for worship. Neither did we see it logical to have a particular building in which all worship would be conducted. We believed that God was always in communication with us and therefore merited attention everywhere and anywhere. 19

It was the missionaries who confused our people with their new religion. By some strange logic, they argued that theirs was a scientific religion and ours was mere superstition in spite of the biological discrepancies so obvious in the basis of their religion. They further went on to preach a theology of the existence of hell, scaring our fathers and mothers with stories about burning in eternal flames and gnashing of teeth and grinding of bone. This cold cruel religion was strange to us but our forefathers were sufficiently scared of the unknown impending anger to believe that it was worth a try. Down went our cultural values! 20

Yet it is difficult to kill the African heritage. There remains, in spite of the superficial cultural similarities between the detribalized and the Westerner, a number of cultural characteristics that mark out the detribalized as an African. I am not here making a case for separation on the basis of cultural differences. I am sufficiently proud to believe that under a normal situation, Africans can comfortably stay with people of other cultures and be able to contribute to the joint cultures of the communities they have joined. However, what I want to illustrate here is that even in a pluralistic society like ours, there are still some cultural traits that we can boast of which have been able to withstand the process of deliberate bastardization. These are aspects of the modern African culture – a culture that has used concepts from the white world to expand on inherent cultural characteristics. 21

Thus we see that in the area of music, the African still expresses himself with conviction. The craze about jazz arises out of a conversion by the African artists of mere notes to meaningful music, expressive of real feelings. The Monkey Jive, soul, etc. are all aspects of a modern type 22

evidence

of African culture that expresses the same original feelings. Solos like those of Pat Boone and Elvis Presley could never really find expression within the African culture because it is not in us to listen passively to pure musical notes. Yet when soul struck with its all-engulfing rhythm it immediately caught on and set hundreds of millions of black bodies in gyration throughout the world. These were people reading in soul the real meaning – the defiant message 'say it loud! I'm black and I'm proud.' This is fast becoming our modern culture. A culture of defiance, self-assertion and group pride and solidarity. This is a culture that emanates from a situation of common experience of oppression. Just as it now finds expression in our music and our dress, it will spread to other aspects. This is the new and modern black culture to which we have given a major contribution. This is the modern black culture that is responsible for the restoration of our faith in ourselves and therefore offers a hope in the direction we are taking from here.

Thus in its entirety the African culture spells us out as people particularly close to nature. As Kaunda puts it, our people may be unlettered and their physical horizons may be limited yet 'they inhabit a larger world than the sophisticated Westerner who has magnified his physical senses through inverted gadgets at the price all too often of cutting out the dimension of the spiritual'. This close proximity to nature enables the emotional component in us to be so much richer in that it makes it possible for us, without any apparent difficulty, to feel for people and to easily identify with them in any emotional situation arising out of suffering.

The advent of the Western culture has changed our outlook almost drastically. No more could we run our own affairs. We were required to fit in as people tolerated with great restraint in a Western type society. We were tolerated simply because our cheap labour is needed. Hence we are judged in terms of standards we are not responsible for. Whenever colonization sets in with its dominant culture it devours the native culture and leaves behind a bastardized culture that can only thrive at the rate and pace allowed it by the dominant culture. This is what has happened to the African culture. It is called a subculture purely because the African people in the urban complexes are mimicking the white man rather unashamedly.

In rejecting Western values, therefore, we are rejecting those things that are not only foreign to us but that seek to destroy the most

cherished of our beliefs – that the corner-stone of society is man himself – not just his welfare, not his material well-being but just man himself with all his ramifications. We reject the power-based society of the Westerner that seems to be ever concerned with perfecting their technological know-how while losing out on their spiritual dimension. We believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationship. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face.

23

24

25

Worksheet on Biko's 'Some African Cultural Concepts'

Read the article carefully and answer the following:

1. Preview and Overview

What does the title indicate? When was the article written? Who was it written for? How can you tell? What can you say about its style?

2. What are the characteristics of what Biko describes as 'African culture'?

3. How does it differ from what he calls 'Western culture'?

4. Read paragraph 22. What effect does Biko claim that 'Western culture' has had on 'African culture'. What evidence has he provided in the article which enables him to reach this conclusion? What do you think of the evidence he has provided?

5. What is the solution posed by Biko in his conclusion?

6. Write a description of Biko's view of culture.

7. How does Biko's view of culture compare with Achebe's?

8. What do you think of Biko's perspective on culture?

Achebe, C (1975) Morning Yet on Creation Day. London: Heinemann.

I Named for Victoria, Queen of England

I WAS born in Ogidi in Eastern Nigeria of devout Christian parents. The line between Christian and non-Christian was much more definite in my village forty years ago than it is today. When I was growing up I remember we tended to look down on the others. We were called in our language 'the people of the church' or 'the association of God'. The others we called, with the conceit appropriate to followers of the true religion, the heathen or even 'the people of nothing'.

Thinking about it today I am not so sure that it isn't they who should have been looking down on us for our apostasy. And perhaps they did. But the bounties of the Christian God were not to be taken lightly—education, paid jobs and many other advantages that nobody in his right senses could underrate. And in fairness we should add that there was more than naked opportunism in the defection of many to the new religion. For in some ways and in certain circumstances it stood firmly on the side of humane behaviour. It said, for instance, that twins were not evil and must no longer be abandoned in the forest to die. Think what that would have done for that unhappy woman whose heart torn to shreds at every birth could now hold on precariously to a new hope.

There was still considerable evangelical fervour in my early days. Once a month in place of the afternoon church service we went into the village with the gospel. We would sing all the way to the selected communal meeting place. Then the pastor or catechist or one of the elders having waited for enough heathen people to assemble would address them on the evil futility of their ways. I do not recall that we made even one conversion. On the contrary I have a distinct memory of the preacher getting into serious trouble with a villager who was apparently notorious for turning up at every occasion with a different awkward question. As you would expect this was no common villager but a fallen Christian, technically known as a *backslider*. Like Satan a spell in heaven had armed him with unfair insights.

My father had joined the new faith as a young man and risen rapidly in its ranks to become an evangelist and church teacher. His maternal

grandfather who had brought him up (his own parents having died early) was a man of note in the village. He had taken the highest but one title that a man of wealth and honour might aspire to, and the feast he gave the town on his initiation became a byword for open-handedness bordering on prodigality. The grateful and approving community called him henceforth Udo Osinyi—Udo who cooks more than the whole people can eat.

From which you might deduce that my ancestors approved of ostentation. And you would be right. But they would probably have argued if the charge was made by their modern counterparts that in their day wealth could only be acquired honestly, by the sweat of a man's brow. They would probably never have given what I believe was the real but carefully concealed reason, namely that given their extreme republican and egalitarian world-view it made good sense for the community to encourage a man acquiring more wealth than his neighbours to squander it and thus convert a threat of material power into harmless honorific distinction, while his accumulated riches flowed back into the commonwealth.

Apparently the first missionaries who came to my village went to Udo Osinyi to pay their respects and seek support for their work. For a short while my great-grandfather allowed them to operate from his compound. He probably thought it was some kind of circus whose strange presence added lustre to his household. But after a few days he sent them packing again. Not, as you might think, on account of the crazy theology they had begun to propound but on the much more serious grounds of musical aesthetics. Said the old man: 'Your singing it too sad to come from a man's house. My neighbours might think it was my funeral dirge.'

So they parted—without rancour. When my father joined the missionaries the old man did not seem to have raised any serious objections. Perhaps like Ezeulu he thought he needed a representative in their camp. Or perhaps he thought it was a modern diversion which a young man might indulge in without coming to too much harm. He must have had second thoughts when my father began to have ideas about converting him. But it never came to an open rift; apparently not even a quarrel. They remained very close to the end. I don't know it for certain but I think the old man was the very embodiment of tolerance insisting only that whatever a man decided to do he should do it with style. I am told he was very pleased when my father, a teacher now, had a wedding to which white missionaries (now no longer figures of fun) came in their fineries, their men and their women, bearing gifts. He must have been impressed too by the wedding feast which might not have approached his own legendary performance but was by all accounts pretty lavish.

About ten years ago, before my father died, he told me of a recent dream in which his grandfather, long long dead, arrived at our house like a traveller from a distant land come in for a brief stop and rest and was full of admiration for the zinc house my father had built. There was something between those two that I find deep, moving and perplexing. And of those two generations—defectors and loyalists alike—there was something I have not been able to fathom. That was why the middle story in the Okorokwo trilogy as I originally projected it never got written. I had suddenly become aware that in my gallery of ancestral heroes there is an empty place from which an unknown personage seems to have departed.

I was baptised Albert Chinualumogu. I dropped the tribute to Victorian England when I went to the university although you might find some early acquaintances still calling me by it. The earliest of them all—my mother—certainly stuck to it to the bitter end. So if anyone asks you what Her Britannic Majesty Queen Victoria had in common with Chinua Achebe, the answer is: they both lost their Albert! As for the second name, which in the manner of my people is a full-length philosophical statement, I simply cut it in two, making it more businesslike without, I hope, losing the general drift of its meaning.

I have always been fond of stories and intrigued by language—first Igbo, spoken with such eloquence by the old men of the village, and later English which I began to learn at about the age of eight. I don't know for certain but I have probably spoken more words in Igbo than English but I have definitely written more words in English than Igbo. Which I think makes me perfectly bilingual. Some people have suggested that I should be better off writing in Igbo. Sometimes they seek to drive the point home by asking me in which language I dream. When I reply that I dream in both languages they seem not to believe it. More recently I have heard an even more potent and metaphysical version of the question: in what language do you have an orgasm? That should settle the matter if I knew.

We lived at the crossroads of cultures. We still do today; but when I was a boy one could see and sense the peculiar quality and atmosphere of it more clearly. I am not talking about all that rubbish we hear of the spiritual void and mental stresses that Africans are supposed to have, or the evil forces and irrational passions prowling through Africa's heart of darkness. We know the racist mystique behind a lot of that stuff and should merely point out that those who prefer to see Africa in those lurid terms have not themselves demonstrated any clear superiority in sanity or more competence in coping with life.

But still the crossroads does have a certain dangerous potency; dangerous because a man might perish there wrestling with multiple-headed

spirits, but also he might be lucky and return to his people with the boon of prophetic vision.

On one arm of the cross we sang hymns and read the Bible night and day. On the other my father's brother and his family, blinded by heathenism, offered food to idols. That was how it was supposed to be anyhow. But I knew without knowing why that it was too simple a way to describe what was going on. Those idols and that food had a strange pull on me in spite of my being such a thorough little Christian that often at Sunday services at the height of the grandeur of *Te Deum Laudamus* I would have dreams of a mantle of gold falling on me as the choir of angels drowned our mortal song and the voice of God Himself thundering: This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Yes, despite those delusions of divine destiny I was not past taking my little sister to our neighbour's house when our parents were not looking and partaking of heathen festival meals. I never found their rice and stew to have the flavour of idolatry. I was about ten then. If anyone likes to believe that I was torn by spiritual agonies or stretched on the rack of my ambivalence, he certainly may suit himself. I do not remember any undue distress. What I do remember was a fascination for the ritual and the life on the other arm of the crossroads. And I believe two things were in my favour—that curiosity, and the little distance imposed between me and it by the accident of my birth. The distance becomes not a separation but a bringing together like the necessary backward step which a judicious viewer may take in order to see a canvas steadily and fully.

I was lucky in having a few old books around the house when I was learning to read. As the fifth in a family of six children and with parents so passionate for their children's education I inherited many discarded primers and readers. I remember *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in an advanced stage of falling apart. I think it must have been a prose adaptation, simplified and illustrated. I don't remember whether I made anything of it. Except the title. I couldn't get over the strange beauty of it. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was a magic phrase—an incantation that conjured up scenes and landscapes of an alien, happy and unattainable land.

I remember also my mother's *Ije Onye Kraist* which must have been an Igbo adaptation of *Pilgrim's Progress*. It could not have been the whole book; it was too thin. But it had some frightening pictures. I recall in particular a most vivid impression of the valley of the shadow of death. I thought a lot about death in those days. There was another little book which frightened and fascinated me. It had drawings of different parts of the human body. But I was primarily interested in what my elder sister told me was the human heart. Since there is a slight confusion in Igbo

between heart and soul I took it that that strange thing looking almost like my mother's iron cooking pot turned upside down was the very thing that flew out when a man died and perched on the head of the coffin on the way to the cemetery.

I found some use for most of the books in our house but by no means all. There was one arithmetic book I smuggled out and sold for half-a-penny which I needed to buy the tasty *mai-mai* some temptress of a woman sold in the little market outside the school. I was found out and my mother who had never had cause till then to doubt my honesty—laziness, yes, but not theft—received a huge shock. Of course she redeemed the book. I was so ashamed when she brought it home that I don't think I ever looked at it again which was probably why I never had much use for mathematics.

My parents' reverence for books was almost superstitious; so my action must have seemed like a form of juvenile simony. My father was much worse than my mother. He never destroyed any paper. When he died we had to make a bonfire of all the hoardings of his long life. I am the very opposite of him in this. I can't stand paper around me. Whenever I see a lot of it I am seized by a mild attack of pyromania. When I die my children will not have a bonfire.

The kind of taste I acquired from the chaotic literature in my father's house can well be imagined. For instance I became very fond of those aspects of ecclesiastical history as could be garnered from *The West African Churchman's Pamphlet*—a little terror of a booklet prescribing interminable Bible readings morning and night. It had the date of consecration for practically every Anglican bishop who ever served in West Africa; and even more intriguing, the dates of their death. Many of them didn't last very long. I remember one pathetic case (I forget his name) who arrived in Lagos straight from his consecration at St Paul's Cathedral and was dead within days, and his wife a week or two after him. Those were the days when West Africa was truly the white man's grave, when those great lines were written of which I was at that time unaware:

Bight of Benin! Bight of Benin!
Where few come out though many go in!

But the most fascinating information I got from *Pamphlet*, as we called it, was this cryptic entry:

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, died 430.

It had that elusive and eternal quality, a tantalising unfamiliarity which I always found moving.

I did not know that I was going to be a writer because I did not really know of the existence of such creatures until fairly late. The folk-stories

Worksheet on Achebe's 'Named for Victoria, Queen of England'

Read the article carefully before answering the following questions. Remember to quote evidence from the passage for your answers.

1. Preview and Overview questions:

What is the context of Achebe's article? When was it written? Who was it written for? What can you say about the style of writing from the introduction and conclusion?

2. Paragraphs 1-13.

Describe Achebe's attitude towards Christianity as a young child.

How did he feel about traditional beliefs and customs?

3. Paragraphs 14 - 22:

What influence did books and university have on his life?

4. Paragraphs 11 - 12:

What does the writer mean when he says 'we live at the crossroads of cultures'? and 'the crossroads ... have a dangerous potency... prophetic vision'?

What do these statements reveal about Achebe's view of culture, i.e how would he define culture? What do you think he is saying about his own identity?

What do you think about Achebe's perspective on culture?

Ramphela, M. (1995). A Life. Cap. Town: David Philip. 8

Stretching Across Boundaries

An important part of any process of transformation has to be transgression of social boundaries which made sense in the past but which stand in the way of creative responses to a changing environment. South Africa has many transgressives who have brought the country to its current historical position: all those who have died in the struggle for liberation, those who have more recently been involved in negotiations at various levels, whether constitutional or socio-economic, and the many unsung heroes and heroines who continue to lead lives which stabilise society. But it is fair to say that Nelson Mandela is by far the most important transgressive at this moment in our history. Without his willingness to talk to his gaolers at a time when doing so was tantamount to mixing the profane with the sacred, our history would have been very different.

I am fortunate to have got to know this remarkable man. I first visited him at his invitation when he was still in prison. This was too crucial an appointment to miss, so I took no chances. I set the clock for 6 a.m. to make sure that I would be on time for my 7.30 appointment. As I drove along the highway towards Pollsmoor on Sunday morning, 31 July 1988, I could hardly contain the excitement. Many questions raced through my mind. How was I to respond to this living legend? What kind of person was he in real life? Why was he interested in meeting me at this stage? I had to wait to find out.

I was at the gate by seven o'clock. I was shown into a living-room by a friendly looking warder, who sat down at a makeshift desk at the entrance of the room. Soon Mr Mandela's tall, trim, well-built frame, oozing authority and grace, appeared. His face had a softness and gentleness enhanced by his beaming smile. He was wearing an immaculately clean prison outfit – a long-sleeved khaki shirt, gabardine pants and spotless boots.

His sensitivity to others shines through in every encounter he has

with people. The mark of greatness in people often manifests itself in the respect with which they treat others irrespective of social status. Mr Mandela's respect for his captors as human beings was also obvious in the manner in which he acknowledged the warder at the door and requested him to warn him in case we overstepped our time limit. This respect was in turn rewarded in most cases by the deference which they showed him, and which became more obvious to me during my visits to him between 1988 and 1990.

On my first visit, Mr Mandela's major focus was on establishing a relationship of trust between us as one human being to another. He chose to greet me in Sesotho, my mother tongue, *Dumela Kgaetsedi yaka* (Hallo, my sister), to signify his wish to engage the human being in me. His great social skills were in evidence at every turn – he put me at ease without patronising me. He could see that I was in awe of him.

Our conversation centred on trivia but was peppered with penetrating questions which indicated his curiosity about the real Mamphela. He enquired about my career aspirations, my hobbies, the books I was interested in, and the well-being of my children. I was amazed at how well informed he was about events in the country, people in different walks of life in our society, international politics, and the world of arts and music. There was hardly a book published over the last few years that he had not read or heard about. I was in the presence of a giant.

Just before we parted he urged me to ensure that the history of the Black Consciousness Movement was properly documented, and that the place of Steve Biko was properly delineated. He said earnestly: 'Steve Biko must take his rightful place in the history of the liberation movement in South Africa. He has made an enormous contribution. We must not allow that to be forgotten.' I made a promise to him which I kept. The publication in 1991 of *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* is testimony to that.

Writing the book was itself part of the process of healing which I have had to go through. I had to record that part of my history as objectively as I could. The participation of former fellow activists in the project, particularly Barney Pityana and Malusi Mpumlwana, made it more meaningful as a collective process of healing. But like all collaborative projects, it took time and energy to keep it on course. Barney's methodical approach helped a great deal in facilitating the completion of the book.

There was also pain involved in the project. AZAPO, which see themselves as the custodians of Steve Biko's legacy, publicly opposed this project. They asserted that we, who were not members of AZAPO, had no right to record and reflect on that history. They put pressure on people such as Harry Nengwekhulu, who had agreed to contribute a paper and attend a seminar in Harare where draft chapters were discussed, to withdraw. It was to me a sad reflection of a failure to grow beyond parochial boundaries. Steve was larger than any one organisation – his life was dedicated to the struggle for liberation of the whole person, which includes the freedom from being constrained by ideological or organisational strait-jackets. It could in fact be argued that AZAPO's parochialism has done a disservice to Steve's vision of society and his memory as an important player in the liberation struggle. By claiming sole ownership of this man, they have made it difficult for others to acknowledge his contribution to the struggle. Those of us who were determined to let Steve take his rightful place in history refused to be deterred.

Subsequent visits to Mr Mandela between 1989 and 1990 were made under very different circumstances. His accommodation at Victor Verster Prison, in Paarl, near Cape Town, was luxurious by any prison standard. Major Gregory, his personal warder, was gracious and made sure I felt at home during the visits. Gone was the prison garb. Mr Mandela wore smart casual clothes with soft slippers to ease his swollen ankles – the aftermath of many years of hard labour in the cold Robben Island climate. He sat in an easy chair with his feet elevated on a stool. I got to know a little bit more about the person behind Mandela the symbol.

On one visit in December 1989, my two sons, Hlumelo and Malusi, accompanied me at his insistence. He took time to engage them around their own interests – tennis in the case of Hlumelo, and starting school and favourite TV programmes in the case of Malusi. It was the closest my sons have ever been to relating to a grandfather. They liked him enormously and valued his interest in them as persons. Their respect for him has grown over the years as he continues to take an interest in their development.

With each subsequent visit, our discussions moved from the initial polite trivia to important issues confronting our society. We found great areas of agreement, but also agreed to disagree about a few questions of strategy. One question related to the role of tradi-

tional leaders in a democratic society. The first time I broached the subject I could see that he was deeply troubled. I asked him how the ANC reconciled its espousal of democracy and its commitment to non-sexism with the resuscitation of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa). Traditional leadership by its very nature is hereditary and leaves little scope for the democratic election of leaders. Male dominance is an ethos deeply embedded within African traditional authority structures. Mr Mandela's face darkened. He sat up in a regal posture, and said: 'The issue you have raised is too complex to be dealt with cold in the short space of time we have available during this visit. We have to defer it for discussion during the next visit.' I could see that he was troubled.

Two weeks later when I arrived, he went straight to the heart of the matter. He acknowledged that he had been upset by my raising the difficult issue of traditional leadership, but also that he had not until then reflected on the contradictions I had pointed out in my question to him. He took his time to explain the complexities of mass political mobilisation in a country where traditional leadership is part of the political and social landscape. Mobilising people entails taking them from where they are, and that may be an uncomfortable place for one's sensibilities, to where one would like them to be. The ANC also had to face the challenge posed by the National Party government's continued use of traditional leaders for the perpetuation of apartheid. The resuscitation of Contralesa was part of the ANC's strategy to bring traditional leaders into the fold of liberation politics. I could fully understand the logic of his approach but pointed out the long-term costs of such a strategy.

I have over the years noticed the extent to which Mr Mandela has taken gender equity seriously. It was one of the issues he highlighted in his inaugural address in May 1994 as the first democratically elected President of South Africa. He acknowledged the difficulties of changing the male-dominated culture of South Africa, but insisted that everyone has to learn to live up to the commitment to gender equity – 'starting with the President'. Listening to that made me glow all over with pride and admiration. I feel incredibly privileged to have been able to share more than just a casual acquaintance with this remarkable man. Our friendship continues to grow.

Mr Mandela's presence makes the task much easier of lowering boundaries in our divided society. This involves both stretching across well-established boundaries and transgressing them, because

no known in
outlook as
scope.

some parties that have retreated behind barriers are too far to be reached by merely stretching to them from the safety of one's comfort zone. But transgression also brings with it the danger of incurring the disapproval or rejection of people – one's own camp – who may be harmed by the breaking of pollution taboos. It is a risky enterprise, but one which is driven by such compelling historical imperatives that one feels privileged to be part of the process.

My transgressive activities have been focused on one central goal: transforming the major institutions of our society. Unlike many post-colonial societies in Africa, South Africa has a viable and extensive infrastructure: transport and communications, finance and banking, tertiary education, science and technology, and so forth. The major problem area is the development of human resources, which have been sacrificed on the altar of racial bigotry. The major task ahead of us in South Africa is making human development the centre of a process of reconstruction which will create a better fit between the infrastructure and the people whom it is intended to serve. Such a better fit will also enhance the infrastructural base and make for its more effective and efficient use.

My areas of engagement are those shaped by my competencies: higher education, social policy, and uprooting poverty. My training as a doctor and anthropologist enables me to stretch across the boundaries between natural or medical science and social science in interesting ways.

The danger of medical doctors being treated as, and behaving like, demigods has been the subject of many analyses, particularly by medical anthropologists. But the mystique lives on, because it serves an important psycho-social function related to the ultimate vulnerability of human beings – the fear of our own mortality. However, it is also fair to acknowledge the enormous psychological advantages which a doctor derives from being a member of a powerful, respected profession. It gives one enormous self-confidence, over-confidence in many cases. It is the ultimate proof of how the expectations others have of one influence and shape one's own expectations of oneself.

My membership of this powerful club has stood me in good stead throughout my life, beyond the naïve expectations which lay behind my initial decision to become a doctor in my quest for independence. I had no idea how right my childish instincts were in choosing a medical career. Security police in both King Williamstown and

Tzaneen, conservative farmers and traders in Tzaneen, strangers everywhere, all change their response to me because of my profession. They could easily dismiss me as a black person, a woman, but not as a medical doctor. This was strategically important, and remains so in my current engagements.

My anthropological training has given me insights into my own behaviour as member of a complex society, and tools for ongoing exploration. I can stand back as a participant observer in the many complex settings I find myself in, and try to learn from the social dynamics I see around me. The capacity to switch roles, and become a visiting anthropologist, is essential for my survival in some of the conflict-ridden settings in which I often find myself: there are often people with such differences in outlook that it does not pay to try to argue with them. Listening with empathy becomes a valuable step before taking decisions about the need for, and nature of, further interaction.

I stopped practising medicine in 1988 when I went to the Bunting Institute at Radcliffe College. I tried to go back to my part-time work at Guguletu Hospital towards the end of 1989, but after a few sessions it became clear to me that it was time to move on from the clinical practice of medicine. I found the endless problems of diseases of poverty exhausting. But even more distressing was the regular appearance of sexually abused children. I could not cope with my impotence in the face of such symptoms of social disintegration. I felt that I could, perhaps make a better contribution by involving myself more actively in shaping creative social policies which would provide a safer environment for children. It was the right decision to make at the time. I do not miss medical practice at all.

It is difficult for me to imagine a better place to be at in the higher-education sector in South Africa than the University of Cape Town. Its physical setting makes it tower above its surroundings – an interesting symbolic statement which even Cecil John Rhodes, who bequeathed the land, could not have fully comprehended. It also has a solid infrastructure which puts it in a good position to make a significant contribution to higher education not only in South Africa but in the entire continent. It fulfils the criterion I have alluded to, being one of the major institutions in our society which I believe need to be harnessed for the better service of humanity. Without a vibrant higher-education system capable of producing the best in

high-level human resources, the development of South Africa in the context of the competitive, technologically based global economy will be at risk.

Even in my wildest dreams I did not, however, ever imagine myself as an executive officer at UCT. Not because I did not think that I had the ability to play such a role, but because after settling into my new-found position as a social science researcher, I was content. I enjoyed the space to read, reflect, write and interact with colleagues across disciplines, both nationally and internationally. What more did I need? The little I had seen and heard about the lifestyle of UCT executives and the demands on them was enough to make me believe that one would have to be self-sacrificial to accept such a job.

In the second half of 1990 I was riding on the crest of a wave after coming out of the depression I have already referred to. It is to the credit of the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Stuart Saunders, that I eventually succumbed and agreed to serve. But I was not ready to give up my research base, so I negotiated a 50 per cent engagement. Anyone with experience of executive jobs would have known better. There is just no way one can do an executive job part-time, for it is more than a full-time commitment. One's whole lifestyle is shaped by it, however hard one tries to prevent this happening. I had to learn this lesson the hard way too. The part-time arrangement lasted only a few months. They felt like years. Doing a full-time executive job whilst still attempting to pursue my research was a recipe for burn-out. I reluctantly came to terms with the fact that my research work had to be put on hold.

The naïve side of my nature had led me to believe that I could pick and choose aspects of my new job which suited me and leave out the rest. It is perhaps true that unlike many of my colleagues, past and present, I have had greater flexibility to shape my own job. As the first woman ever to occupy an executive position at UCT, there was clearly scope for flexibility. Similarly, as the first black person in this position, one could take certain liberties.

My task as the executive officer in charge of the Equal Opportunity Portfolio presented me with both space for creativity and major challenges. UCT had until 1990 responded to its environment and its heritage, as part of apartheid South Africa, by changing aspects of its operation to become more open and accessible to blacks and women in South Africa. But it had not systematically set out to

alter course radically. The emphasis of the leadership policies was on blacks gaining access to the UCT they had come to love and respect. Black advancement was the primary focus – a problematic approach, which implied that blacks were to be advanced by whites to where the latter already were.

The shape my portfolio took reflected my philosophical orientation, forged over the years, as well as my social analysis of the inter-relationships between the various markers of power in society and my understanding of what was possible within the institutional framework of UCT. I thus placed emphasis on equity as the goal which should shape the vision of a transformed UCT. But equity could not only be seen in terms of blacks and whites, but had to include gender and class as important determinants of inequity in our society. It was also vital to ensure that whatever process of change my portfolio promoted should take cognisance of the realities which make UCT what it is and motivate those within it. People function at their best when they feel that their own interests are not being compromised and, if they are, that such compromises should be seen to hold long-term benefits for them.

My approach to equity is informed by the research carried out with my research colleague, Carla Sutherland, through the Equal Opportunity Research Project, which I established as part of my portfolio. The creation of greater equity in higher education, and indeed in all areas of our inequitable society, has to involve three thrusts: greater access, opportunities for personal development, and a change in institutional culture. Firstly, increasing access to UCT for blacks and women means more than just simply welcoming them. It has to do with reaching out to them wherever they are, addressing their perceptions of UCT, which often lead to self-exclusion, and then facilitating their application to come, which may involve putting extra resources at their disposal. Access also involves assessing individual potential to succeed, which is a difficult issue, given the paucity of reliable measures and methods of measurement.

Once people are on board, their ability to succeed depends not only on their own efforts and skill but on how much support is provided for their development, and how much value the institution places on the time and energy expended in developing human resources. An essential part of the nurturing which helps people succeed is the setting of developmental goals early on. People need to know what is expected of them, and to negotiate goals which they

feel are achievable. Nothing succeeds like success. This open goal-setting process is particularly crucial when one is dealing with people who are 'outsiders' in terms of traditional positions of power in society, namely women and blacks.

Another important goal of this exercise is to ensure that the student takes responsibility for his or her own personal development and success. The institution has a responsibility to create a nurturing environment with opportunities for growth, but the individual is the one who holds the ultimate key to success or failure. The encouragement of human agency is crucial to breaking the victim image blacks and women often adopt.

Thirdly, however well one selects people and tries to encourage their development, if the institutional culture remains unaltered, the chances of long-term success are low. Institutional cultures reflect the collective and cumulative customs, rituals, symbols and preferences of the people flowing through them over time. It is not surprising that most institutions in South Africa, including UCT, have a dominant white male culture. It would be surprising if that were not the case. The problem is not the existence of the culture but the need to acknowledge it, examine it and change aspects of it that prevent its members from realising their full potential.

Therein lies the rub. A lot of what constitutes institutional culture is not often articulated and acknowledged. It could be argued that the power and mystique of institutional cultures lie in the very fact of their being interred in habit and beyond normal discourse. Discourse may, and does, strip it of the veil of mysticism, which makes it intangible and beyond the reach of any potential pollutants or detractors. The attraction people often feel to belonging to exclusive clubs is precisely the sense of being privy to something no-one else can fully explain - one has to belong to be able to know.

But people who are 'outsiders' in the broader society are not well placed to negotiate the mystique of institutions in which they find themselves. Nor are they necessarily inclined to do so. Young white males may have some romantic notions of such exclusive clubs which their own fathers belonged to, but blacks and women may find some aspects of the very cultures offensive. Failure to address this problem openly lies at the heart of many failed programmes of affirmative action and black advancement.

Affirmative action as it has been pursued in the United States and in many other parts of the world assumes that 'outsiders' have to be

brought into the mainstream to ensure their participation, without there being any fundamental questioning of that mainstream as a desirable social framework. When blacks or women fail, it simply proves to conservatives that 'they do not have what it takes to make it'. At the same time failure raises uncomfortable feelings in liberals, who are troubled even to admit the reality of the failure, lest it play into racist hands. But they too have not questioned the assumption that one has to succeed according to the terms of white male institutional culture.

I must hasten to add that there are certain basic fundamentals about knowledge, science, work patterns and behavioural approaches which are common across cultures. It would be difficult to function in the increasingly unified global village if such assumptions were not possible. One has to trust that certain fundamentals are in place in all similar institutions, whatever the country: trains must be on time, planes must be flown by competent pilots, phones must work, and time must mean the same to all people.

But I am referring to the frills that serve to exclude others or depict them as subordinate or invisible: manner of dress, accents, the etiquette of eating, names of celebrated heroes and so on. It is amazing to observe the ease with which people who can't speak English, or speak it with a non-standard accent are often dismissed as unintelligent by white South African English-speakers, who more often than not have made no attempt themselves to master an African language. The fact that they live in Africa has not had any impact on them. But even more damaging than these frills, as I call them, are invisible practices that create circles of privilege and access to information crucial for promotion within the hierarchical system.

Needless to say, an agenda such as the one I have set out to pursue at UCT is bound to generate a lot of conflict and to please very few people. In anticipation of the difficulties ahead, I decided to conduct visits to individual faculties and departments throughout the entire University to engage people in the process of transformation. The aim of the visits was to get individual deans and heads of departments to set their own goals based on what they perceived to be achievable within the constraints of their particular circumstances. Such goal-setting is essential if key players are to take ownership of the process of change. The role of my portfolio is a facilitatory one. I have been amazed at how willing many people are to change if they see that their own best interests are served in this way,

if not in the short term, then in the long term.

It is too early to judge how successful the transformation of UCT is likely to be. But it is noteworthy that the people who stand to benefit from greater equity at UCT are often still sceptical of the motives behind the University's equal opportunity policies. Their past experiences have conditioned them not to expect much from liberal institutions. The danger of the self-fulfilling prophecy looms large. Success in transforming this institution depends on the involvement of all to move it in new directions.

There are also fears, on the part of blacks particularly, that their hard-earned achievements will be devalued if they are lumped together in the University's affirmative action basket. The attacks levelled at affirmative action by conservatives have clearly had their desired impact. My approach to such attacks is to point out that most, if not all, white people in South Africa have been recipients of affirmative action at many levels, and it does not seem to have hurt them. White males in particular are the greatest beneficiaries of that excellent affirmative action programme, the old boy network. It would be folly for black people, and women, to reject well-targeted affirmative action programmes simply because they fear being labelled by people who ought to know better. Carefully designed and applied affirmative action programmes are essential to the establishment of greater equity.

The criticism directed at me earlier on in my career for joining UCT had died down by 1990 as more black South Africans realised the importance of academic work as real work, and its contribution to social policy and the general development of society. But some people thought that my joining the UCT executive in 1991 was going too far. Was I not allowing myself to be used by white liberals, who had no intention of changing, but needed to protect themselves by having a token, high-profile black woman? 'They are using you,' said someone whom I respect, and who really cares for me. I was troubled by this perception, but remained convinced that my decision was the correct one for me.

I have no other way of knowing the real motive behind Dr Stuart Saunders's invitation to join his executive team, but feel quite comfortable taking his stated motives at face value. But if he was indeed intending to use me, as some people say, then he has a major problem on his hands. UCT can never be the same after the process it has been through over the last few years. It would have had to change

anyway, with or without me. But I would like to believe that the strategies for which my portfolio staff and I have sought acceptance at UCT, and which I have had the pleasure of seeing put into operation, will have far-reaching consequences beyond UCT, and indeed will help shape the way in which South Africans tackle equity issues generally. The Equal Opportunity Research Project, through its outreach programme, has played an important role in helping other institutions of higher learning, the private sector as well as non-governmental organisations, to develop policies and programmes around issues of race and gender equity.

Not all aspects of my job are enjoyable, however. Nor is it possible to change all the things I find irritating and uncomfortable. There is no escape from interminable committee meetings, appointments, and dealings with bureaucrats. These are all part and parcel of working with people anywhere in the world. But the only time I really felt uncomfortable and ill at ease, if not downright embarrassed, was the first occasion I had to wear the robes of office at an inaugural lecture. I had naïvely thought that I could elect to be part of the audience. It dawned on me later that in the same way that I enjoy the pomp and ceremony of High Mass at St George's Cathedral, I too had to make academic rituals come alive for those participating in the life of the University.

I have learnt to relax and see the funny side of donning robes designed for the cold weather of the Northern Hemisphere, and wearing hats which could only have been designed with men in mind. One does become willy-nilly an honorary man in these situations. The awkwardness of a woman in my position shows up more starkly in public ceremonies. At the first graduation ceremony I presided over in December 1993, the Dean who was to present candidates to me for graduation had to establish how he was to address me. When he said he did not want to use a sexist form of address, I asked him how he would have addressed my male colleagues. 'Mr Acting Vice-Chancellor,' he stated confidently. 'Well,' I said, 'I am Madame Acting Vice-Chancellor!' One has to learn to laugh at oneself in order to remain sane.

Another important institution in the transformation of South Africa is the Independent Development Trust. I was invited to sit on the board of the IDT in 1990 as one of its founding trustees and was appointed its third chairperson at the end of 1994. The IDT was

Worksheet on Mamphela Ramphele's "Stretching across Boundaries"

Read the article carefully before answering the following questions. Remember to provide evidence (by quoting or paraphrasing) from the text for your answer.

1. What is Ramphele's definition of culture? Begin your discussion by describing the image she uses to describe culture. Look at the title and 1st paragraph particularly.

2. How do individuals contribute to society and to change. Think, for instance, of Ramphele's description of Nelson Mandela as "Mandela the symbol" (p. 202).

3. What is Ramphele's perception of traditional African structures of authority?

4. How does she define UCT? Examine the concept of an "institutional culture" (p. 207).

5. She talks about her role in UCT. How does this compare with your experience?

6. How does Ramphele's view of culture compare with the views of Achebe and Biko? (Use the reverse side for your answer.)

ELAP

Essay topic:

Identify and discuss what concepts of culture you find most useful for understanding your experience of transition to the Rhodes environment.

3 stages:

Task 1: Hand in 7 May. Get back 9 May.

What aspects of Thornton's ideas about culture did you agree with? What aspects did you not agree with? Was there anything that you found confusing? Explain all your answers.

Task 2: Hand in 14 May. Get back 19 May.

Identify and discuss how the three writers Biko, Achebe and Ramphele understand culture. Which of these concepts of culture do you find useful and why?

Task 3: Final essay.
 Hand in 23 May. Get back 30 May.

Identify and discuss what concepts of culture you find most useful for understanding your experience of transition to the Rhodes environment.

ELAP

Essay topic:

Identify the concepts of culture which you find most useful for understanding your experience of transition to the Rhodes environment. First define these concepts of culture fully and in each case discuss why they are relevant to your experience of your life and particularly your adaptation (transition) to Rhodes. Draw on the readings and class discussions of the different perspectives of the concept of culture.

Final version due: 23 May 1997

Your essay should:

- * reflect an understanding of the different definitions of culture which you discuss
- * deal with all parts of the essay topic, i.e. **identify** and **define** the concepts fully, **discuss** how they relate to your own experience;
- * reflect an understanding of the readings;
- * have an effective introduction and conclusion;
- * be coherent, i.e. have well-structured paragraphs and clear links between paragraphs;
- * have transitional phrases which both link ideas and create cohesive paragraphs;
- * have accurate referencing within the essay and a reference list at the end of the essay.

Please attach Task 1 and Task 2 to your final essay.

Length: approximately 2-3 pages long (600 - 900 words)

Readings

Achebe, C. (1975). Named for Victoria, Queen of England. In Morning Yet on Creation Day. London: Heinemann.

Biko, S. (1986). African Cultural Concepts. In I Write What I Like. Cape Town: Heinemann.

Thornton, R. (1997). Conceptualising culture in contemporary South Africa. Adapted from Thornton, R. (1988). Culture: A Contemporary Definition. In South African Keywords. Cape Town: David Phillips.

Ramphela, M. (1995). Stretching across Boundaries. In A Life. Cape Town: David Phillips.



RHODES UNIVERSITY

Grahamstown • 6140 • South Africa

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT CENTRE • Tel: (0461) 31 8171/3 • Fax: (0461) 2 5049 • e-mail: aszg@giraffe.ru.ac.za

22 April 1997

Dear

I am very pleased that you have volunteered to be involved in my research project. I am writing to you to make sure you know what being involved in this research will entail and to check that you agree to the involvement that I'm asking of you.

I am doing my research on parts of the course on Culture in ELAP. I am interested in researching how students' understandings of culture develop during the course and how they respond to the course.

What I want from you

I would like to study the writing that you do on culture. So I want to use your journal entries on culture and your joint definitions of culture that you did. You are going to be writing an essay, which will be divided into three stages. I would like to look at these three pieces of writing as well. If you still agree to this, I will arrange to get these from your tutors and make photocopies.

I have arranged for some of the group work sessions in Helen's class to be videoed. One of the workshops with the whole class will also be videoed.

Later in the term, I would like to arrange interviews with you. I have still not decided whether to do individual interviews or group interviews. I may not interview everyone who has volunteered. This should involve about half an hour of your time.

Confidentiality

When I write up the research, I will not use your real names to identify you, unless you have told me that you would prefer that.

Communication

If I need to contact you, I will get hold of you through ELAP classes or through your tutor. If you have any queries or would like to discuss something to do with the research project with me, you can come and see me at the Academic Development Centre (ADC) Room 506 or phone me at 318171.

If you are still prepared to give me permission to involve you in the research, could you please sign the attached form and return it to your tutor? If you change your mind at a later stage you could withdraw your permission.

Thanks very much for your interest in the research.

Yours sincerely

Arona Dison

Agreement to involvement in research project

I give my permission for Arona to involve me in her research in the way that she outlined in the letter which accompanied this form.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Do you know how to use e-mail? Yes/No.

Do you have an e-mail address that I could use to contact you if I need to?

Do you have anything that you'd like to say to me at this stage about the research process?



RHODES UNIVERSITY

Grahamstown • 6140 • South Africa

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT CENTRE • Tel: (0461) 31 8171/3 • Fax: (0461) 2 5049 • e-mail: aszg@giraffe.ru.ac.za

15 September 1997

Dear

I have written drafts of two chapters for my thesis, which draw on data from the students who were involved in the research.

I am giving you a copy of these two chapters for a number of reasons. I want you to know what I'm doing with the data which I got from students' writing and interviews. I also want you to let me know if you disagree with how I've interpreted or represented any of the data. I'd also appreciate any feedback you'd like to give me.

I have used most of your real names, as you requested. Please let me know if you would prefer me to use other names.

I would appreciate it, if you have any feedback for me, if you could give it to me by about 29 September.

I am on academic leave, but you can leave written feedback for me with the secretary at ADC. If you need to contact me, you can phone me at home - 311179 or at work - 318171/3 or you can e-mail me at asad@giraffe.ru.ac.za

Thanks very much for your involvement in the project. The data that I've got has been extremely useful.

Regards

Abel Ntumeni

WHAT DO I UNDERSTAND OF CULTURE

21-APRIL-1997

Culture is the whole way of life. I mean everything in life that a person do e.g. the food we eat, the clothes we dress, the language we speak, etc is culture. Truly speaking every family or person's race has its own culture that their lives is based on.

I too have culture that my life is based on and it plays an important role as it shows me the way to live with different people and races.

WHAT DO I UNDERSTAND OF CULTURE

21-APRIL-1997

Culture is the whole way of life.

I mean everything in life that a person do e.g. the food we eat, the clothes we dress, the language we speak, etc is culture.

Truly speaking every family or person or race has its own culture that their lives are based on.

I too have culture that my life is based on and it plays an important role as it shows me the way to live with different people and races.

Culture is really a resource because without it the world we live in and our lives would be meaningless.

I would ^{like} to disagree with the opinion saying culture changes. People change from their culture and leave ~~it~~ ^{culture} as it is.

I haven't changed my ideas as they seem to be almost the same as the article by Robert Thornton.

In conclusion, I would like to discourage the tendency of people to change or forsake their culture because some people seem to have bad luck because of this behaviour.

I think it's better to develop your culture instead of forsaking it.

4/5

Abel

I disagree with you. I don't think your views of culture are like Thornton's definition. You are still seeing culture as one thing which you have. i.e. you are Xhosa therefore you dress like a Xhosa (no) you speak like a Xhosa (yes) you eat like a Xhosa (sometimes).

~~There~~ I pick this up from the way you have described culture as something your life is based on.

Abel: Definition task

NTIMENI ABEL

23-APRIL-1997

The definition I agree with and find it most useful is the one by Thornton, R (1938) where s/he says culture is a resource. I further agree with him/her when s/he says culture is the information which humans are not born with. We all know that when a child is -born he knows nothing about what is happening and where he is. But a years goes on, he tends to copy or do what his fellow-family members do. I mean, if the fellow-family member pray before s/he eats food, the child will do the same. Thornton further says culture can be controlled by the environment, which is true^{and false}. We are born without culture, so whatever the environment is we tend to change or adjust ^{ourselves} to that environment. In other ways I disagree with ~~him~~ ^{on} his opinion. A person is change^d by the environment and leaves his/her culture^{but} ~~the~~ the culture ^{itself} remains the same and ps others who are interested in keeping it do so.

) As far as other definitions are concerned, I have no comment but ^{they} are a bit difficult to understand especial the one by B. Koda (1994) and the one by N. Alexand (1994)

Interesting. - I like the way you have tried to make sense of the concepts

THORNTON'S IDEAS ABOUT CULTURE

Robert Thornton has different ideas and opinions on the concept of culture in his article quoted from the book South African keywords: The uses and abuses of political concepts. In the first section, I will discuss the ideas I agree with and I will then deal with the ideas I disagree with.

Thornton defines culture as the information which humans are not born with but which they need in order to interact with each other in social life. I agree with him because culture is something we learn or copy from our fellow family members, what they do and don't. As years go on you find yourself accustomed to those customs and the social life of your family. The customs and the social life then becomes your culture.

I further support him when he says we must include our own ideas about culture. Culture is complex and it seems as if no one has a true or clear definition of what it is. Furthermore Thornton says culture is not only the clothes we wear, events and practices that we participate in, language that we speak but culture includes all the ways of using and expressing these many other materials which our human environment presents to us, which is a fact that suggests that we need to include our own ideas about culture.

think this is very important reason

I agree with him when he says cultural diversity still needs to be recognised as a real issue. South Africa is a country which is composed of different cultures where the different cultures need to be maintained so that it might attract tourists. What is disgusting is that people seem to forsake their cultures and follow other people's culture. I think it is wise for people to develop their cultures instead of forsaking it as I see culture as a source of meaningful life.

I think this is why different cultures need to be recognised & affirmed

Furthermore, he says it makes little sense to talk about more civilised and less civilised culture, and I agree with him. On my side I see culture as culture and has nothing to do with civilisation.

and link

Having discussed the ideas of Thornthorn I agree with, let us now look at some ideas I disagree with. Thornthorn says people ^{experience} the same desires, whereby I totally disagree with him. On my point of view, it seems as if desires are controlled by the environment. For example, a person who lives in rural areas can desire the same things as a person who lives in urban areas. It doesn't mean that everyone is the same. It means that people from different ^{ethnic} backgrounds follow the same leaders etc.

mean that people are different in some ways etc

I disagree with him when he says culture changes. I think culture remains and will remain the same even in future. A person changes from culture and leave it as it is

Can culture exist independently of people?

Thornton argues strongly that culture is not comparable to the genes and organic substances of an organism. I find this argument confusing as it seems as if different races have got different cultures. I mean the African cultures seems not to be the same as European cultures.

out to be a genetic who is a learned thing.

To summarise, I will say let us keep and maintain our different cultures so that the forthcoming generation may see what we were and are doing in order to make the world and our lives meaningful.

TASK II

Thornton (1988:26) argues that it is difficult to define culture, because culture is so complex. From Thornton's argument, one can deduce that no one has a clear definition of what culture is and "one is incorrect in defining culture the way s/he understands it."

There are three writers namely, Biko, Achebe and Ramphela whom each understand culture ^{according to} his own background or experience. ~~whereby~~ I would like to discuss their understanding. Firstly, I will identify and discuss Biko's understanding secondly, Achebe's and lastly Ramphela's understanding of the concept of culture.

Thornton argues that it makes little sense to talk about more civilised or less civilised culture whereas Biko was against this opinion. He (Biko) saw culture has something to do with civilisation. In his autobiography he wrote that African culture was unsophisticated and simple whereas the Anglo Boer culture or colonialist culture was heavily equipped and powerful in almost all the facets. He further spoke of superior culture and indigenous culture which is still supporting the fact that he saw culture has something to do with civilisation.

I don't think he ever said that western culture was superior or that one culture was 'better' than another.

Biko saw culture as the way of life of the members of the society. In other words he saw culture as something that create humanity (ubuntu) in the society. He made an example that conversation in his culture is determined by age and division of labour and no one is unnecessarily an intruder in someone's business and secrets, joy is shared.

Biko saw culture as something that unites the society. For example, he says songs are never for individuals in his culture but they are for a group and Africans can comfortably stay with people of other cultures and be able to contribute to the joint cultures of the communities.

Secondly, coming to Achebe's understanding, I think he would define culture the same way as Thornton when he (Thornton) says culture is the information which humans are not born with but which they need in order to interact with each other in social life. Supporting my opinion, he made an example of his father who gave up his born culture and learnt the western culture.

Quoting his words "Thinking about it today I am not sure that it isn't they who should have been looking down on us for our apostasy" I concluded that he sees culture unchanging. I think by these words he means that people give up their culture and leave it as it is. I think he means we are made up of different cultural influences.

He says we live at the crossroads of cultures. I think he means that we are living between two cultures, i.e. the culture of westerners and ^{our} the culture, of which is true as I think we all don't seem to be keeping our cultures comprehensively. He made an example ^{about} his experience ⁱⁿ from the family he came from that on one hand they sang hymns and read the bible day and night and on the other hand his father's brother offered food for idols.

I don't think so. I think he was saying that people have different cultural influences. I think it has to do with the idea of a resource.

Lastly, Ramphela defines culture in a modern way where she says culture is the transgression of cultural boundaries in order to be transformed. She made an example that Mr Nelson Mandela (the president of South Africa) transgressed the apartheid culture in South Africa by being against it and declared equal rights to all South Africans. She further made an example that the University of Cape Town has to change its institutional culture in order that changes of long-term success may be high.

She sees culture as something which moulds the behaviour of a human being. She says her anthropological training (the scientific study of human race, including its different types, its beliefs and social habits) which I see it as culture gave her insights into her own behaviour as a member of a complex society.

I find all the concepts of culture useful, mostly the Biko and Ramphela's definition as they touch the concept of culture in different aspects. Biko discusses culture concentrating on the beliefs, customs and social habits whereas Ramphela discusses culture in a modern way where she discusses about current issues that are happening in our country and our lives.

Good try. You've made some good points.

NAME : ABEL NTIMENI

SUBJECT : ENGLISH LANGUAGE IAP

GROUP : FOUR (4)

TUTOR'S NAME : MRS H. ALFERS

DATE : 27 - MAY - 1997

TITLE : IDENTIFY THE CONCEPTS OF CULTURE WHICH YOU FIND MOST USEFUL FOR UNDESTANDING YOUR EXPERIENCE OF TRANSITION TO THE RHODES ENVIRONMENT.

Rhodes is one of the institutions of higher education in South Africa that ^{class} have opened its doors to all racial groups nationally, and internationally. When one ^c hears of different racial groups at Rhodes, one could think of how Rhodes is composed of ^{art} a diversity of cultures which belong to different people. The way things are done at Rhodes, one could conclude that the institution values only one culture i.e. Western culture and devalues the other cultures.

This is a stage where one may experience transition from one's culture to other people's culture for the sake of keeping one's life up to standard. Transition is a difficult period one experiences in life where one needs to develop or change completely one's family-background to the environment presented to oneself. Digenaar stresses that: one way of not falling prey to pessimism is to become involved in understanding the process of transition, and through understanding to prepare ourselves for responsible action in whatever situation we may find ourselves. (Quoted from Cosaw 1995:45)

you surely don't have to change completely, it's more like assimilation

good quote + very relevant.

I would like to share my experience of transition from the background I come to the Rhodes environment. My sharing will be based on the concept of culture which I will first identify different writer's views namely, Thornton Achebe and Biko on the concept of culture which I find most useful in understanding my transition and I will then discuss the relevance of these concepts to my transition. ✓

Good try at an introduction.

Firstly, Robert Thornton (1988:24) defines culture as "the information which humans are not born with but which they need in order to interact with each other in social life". In other words he meant that people can receive certain qualities of body or ability hereditarily, but culture is not ~~in that way~~ ^{one of these qualities}, instead it is something which one learns through life and it is something which is essential in order to participate in the cultural life of the family or society.

Comparing to my transition, I will begin by saying at home I play soccer as my favourite sport but coming to Rhode the environment compelled me to play some odd sports like rugby, cricket, hockey etc of which I am not used to.

I mean if I was born with soccer it would be difficult for me to ~~turn~~ ^{turn} ~~in~~ to rugby, cricket, hockey etc, but because culture is learned I find myself playing these odd sports in my life.

Secondly, Achebe understands culture as a resource. We know that resources like energy, air, sunlight etc do not belong to a certain group of people but it is for everyone. He saw culture as something for everybody whether it is Western culture or African culture. In his life neither Western culture nor African culture was better than the other to his life as he enjoyed both cultures the same. In his autobiography he managed to show that "we live at the crossroads of cultures" (Achebe 1975:6). He made an example about his experience that "on ^{one} ~~the~~ of the cross we sang hymns and read the Bible day and night. On the other my father's brother and his family offered food for idols" (Achebe 1975:68) ✓ Introduced referencing

You are not born playing any sport. What you mean is that you have not grown up playing anything but soccer.

he doesn't - Thom does - although I'm sure Achebe would agree

In other words he meant that people are in-between ~~of~~ different cultures where they seem to follow other people's culture and their culture with enjoyment like when enjoying ^{different} resources.

The relevance of Achebe's experience for understanding my transition to the Rhodes environment is that I find myself living between two cultures i.e. Western culture and my culture (African culture). Most of the things like activities and food are western at Rhodes. As I have mentioned that the sports you can find is rugby, cricket, hockey, tennis etc and the food is prepared in western style. Another example is that I use my home language and most often English unlike at home where I only use my home language. I simply told myself that I will keep on enjoying ^{it} as myself culture is a resource.

so you don't see it as a multi-headed monster which can threaten you

Lastly, Biko's experience made him to ~~not~~ believe that culture changes. He made an example of his culture (African culture) which was devoured enderoured by colonialist culture and drastically changed. In other words I think he meant that any change in the environment of a group will results in the change of their culture. - ^{negative thing as he found it to be for African culture}

Through my experience, Biko's experience has a true meaning in my life. Our culture as Africans stress that a child must be an early-bird in order that s/he may do housework, and this is what I was accustomed to at home. One day I woke up early in the morning only to find that all my fellow-resident were fast asleep. I was ashamed and ~~so~~ went to bed again.

This is a wonderful clear example of how you have held to the dominant culture

I remember another day during my orientation week, having in mind to clean the common room as it was dirty but I had been noticed that there are maidservants who are responsible for that. I saw my culture changing from being a hardworker to become a lazybones.

Having discussed the three writer's views on the concept of culture I have concluded that culture is the information we are not born with but which we need to survive as it is a resource, and that any change in the environment will result in the change of culture.

I have attempted to demonstrate my transition from the background I come to the Rhodes environment. I discussed that human beings do not receive culture hereditarily but it is something which they learn to interact with each other in social life. I further discussed that culture is a resource and we need it in order to survive, and that culture changes when the environment changes. In each of these sub-topics I'm an example of how they relate to me ⁱⁿ on my transition to the Rhodes environment. Lastly, I would like to say let us accept the diversity of culture so that we may see what each other has in common ^{with} the other and celebrate that.

Good conclusion. You've summed up very well

I really like this essay. You've given very clear, concrete examples of your transition at Rhodes + you've linked them well to your readings.

REFERENCES

1. Achebe, C. (1975). Named for Victoria, Queen of England. In Morning Yet on Creation Day. London: Heinemann
2. Biko, S. (1986). African Cultural Concepts. In I Write What I Like. Cape Town: Heinemann
3. Cosaw. (eds) (1995) Art and Culture in a Changing South Africa. In Bringing Cinderella to the Ball. Johannesburg: Cosaw.
4. Thornton, R. (1988). Culture: A Contemporary Definition. In Boonzaier, E and Sharp, J (eds). South African Keyw
The Abuses and Uses of Political Concepts. Cape Town: David Phillips. ✓

Good

Culture

21-04-1997

Culture is whereby the members of the society are strongly integrated, that is, they share ideas and interact according to the expectation of their culture. Culture is historically derived. It also help people to behave in a right manner in their society.

Culture

02-05-1997

I have still the same definition whereby culture is the way of life of its members, that is the society is strongly integrated for instances, collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation.

I think there is no alternative in order to change my definition of Culture. In a discussion in the class we agreed that the best definitions of culture from ELap: definitions of culture are definitions one and four which are the most relative definitions from mine.

Also the article by Thornton makes my mind more clear about definition of culture in paragraph 12, when he see culture as a resource. It is said that this culture cannot belong to any person, also it is the information which everyone is not born with but they should learn it in order to interact in the social life. The views of Thornton are relative to my views in paragraph one, so in other words the article by Thornton also play a big role in my constant definition of culture.

Culture Definition

7. Definition number one.

Yes: Firstly, definition number one gives us a clear picture of what culture is, it explains this concept deeply or it looks in generally. Secondly and finally definition number two and four they are not clear in their definition, in number two it is said that, culture cannot belong exclusively to any particular person or group of individuals and in number 4 it is said that, culture is a set of beliefs and practices pertaining to a demarcated group of individuals. Both these definitions are not satisfying and they do not make a reader familiar with the concept of culture, they just brief us about culture.

Do you think definitions 2 and 4 are not clear because they contradict each other? One of the aims of this worksheet is to show that there are different perspectives on culture, not just one definition of culture.

TASK 1

The article by Thornton is the best one which explains the concept of culture very well, ^{why although?} although it is the best one, there are aspects which I tend to agree with him. To be honest I agree with him in all of his aspects about culture and I will explain few of them below. Also the Thornton article argues that that idea was not appropriate for Europe either.

I am of the opinion of Thornton when he quoted Neville Alexander saying that, "In South Africa we have to attack the Euro-centric notion of culture which sees language, culture and nation as co-terminus." I support Neville Alexander because this Euro-centric notion was used by apartheid to drive people into different cultural lands as different nations. As we know that in Europe they use their language as national language, here in South African we have to avoid this Euro-centric notion especially we know that education policy provides multilingualism in South Africa. ^{It is relevant to talk about multilingualism here, but think more carefully about why multilingualism contradicts the idea of one language, culture & nation.}

I also tend to agree with Thornton when he argue that, "culture is best thought of as a resource." As he made examples about resources that do not belong to anyone or any group of individuals such as resources called sunlight, air and food. Therefore he associate culture as one of these resources because there is nobody who owns culture, everybody is not born with culture but there is a need for everyone to learn culture of his or her society in order to interact with other people in the social life. As we know that according to Thornton's example, sunlight as a resource does not belong to any individual or group of individuals but everyone need the sunlight for his or her health in order to survive. Similarly to culture, a person who does not learn his or her culture or the incident of the baboon boy who grew up with baboons from his infancy to middle childhood, these can lead person to a feeling -

of isolation or neglect. A person feel in this way because he or she lack almost the whole information which he or she needs in order to interact with each other. ✓ A good example

The whole article by Thornton is clear and sensitive. As I already mentioned in my first paragraph that to be honest I agree with the whole article & did not get any confusing aspects. Thornton put his ideas under subheadings in order a reader to be clear of what he or she is going to read.

I liked the way you discussed culture as a resource. If you use that concept in your essay, you will need to apply it to your own experience.

Your first point about nation, culture and language is fairly clear, but I'd like you to develop more thoroughly an argument of why this ^{idea} is inappropriate in S.A. I think it is too specific to mention the education policy here. Talk to me about this if you like.

Well done.

Abdul: Task 2

don't think its relevant to include so much (1) versus about the characteristics of Western culture and African culture, as the question asked you about Biko's understanding of culture generally. You could summarise all the characteristics into one main point. But I think the main point is related to your first point about 2.

According to Biko's understanding of culture, he see culture as two separate groups that is African and the Western culture. In between these groups he mentioned that there are boundaries which are not to be crossed. He identify African culture as a man centred society whereby communication and relationship in social activity is a great issue. In other words he means that co-operation between people is of high concentration; that is people interact ^{with} to each other in the sense that they help each other. He also mentioned that music and rhythm is shared by Africans that is, it is not for individuals. He also comes up with a fact that, when Africans are facing a problem they are likely to experience the situation more than facing the problem. He often also noticed that, Africans when they have a visitor they will rather organise for visitor something to eat, no reason was needed as a basis for visit separate groups. Also it seems to be a static view of culture - it doesn't change - The core of African culture remains the same.

Biko noticed that Westerners take people for granted, when the visitor comes in they will ask the visitor if what can I do for you. He mentioned the fact that when Westerners facing a problem, they have to look out for solution, that is they cannot live with or endure the conflict of ideas in their minds, they have an aggressive mentality. Think about what will be useful for your final essay. Do you think these characteristics of African culture and Western culture will be useful?

According to Achebe's understanding, Achebe himself did not clarify directly his understanding of culture. He mentioned that he lived at the crossroads of culture. His understanding of culture was influenced by Christianity and African culture traditions. He father and grand father were christians, therefore he clarify this point in paragraph thirtien, he said that they sang hymns and read Bible right and day and his father's brother and his family, blinded by -

Do you think Achebe believes that one has to choose ⁽²⁾ either Christianity / Western culture or traditional heathenism, offered food to idols?

Ramphela also has her understanding of culture which is different from Biko and Achebe's understanding. She agreed that there are social boundaries between different cultural groups but she sees these boundaries as something that can be crossed because they are not fixed. She often also sees male dominance as the rules of certain people's lives deeply embedded within African traditional authority structures. Can you develop this point further?

I find Biko's understanding of culture useful. He is very clear, his explanations are clear. He differentiated between African and Western culture by coming up with actual facts. Unlike Achebe and Ramphela Achebe is been influenced by two culture and he did not know which one to follow and Ramphela's understanding. I think it puts people at risk by crossing boundaries because we know that there are norms and values that restrict people and if you break those norms and values you will be punished. Who will punish you? In what way?

This sentence structure is difficult to follow. It makes it difficult to understand what you are saying.

clear and
Do you think there are such definite boundaries between African and Western culture as Biko says? Wasn't Biko himself a person who took risks and crossed boundaries, otherwise he would not have spoken out against the apartheid state?

Abdul: Essay

* Do you mean cultures don't belong to particular ethnic groups? Society can be used in a very general way and there is definitely a link between culture & society.

t Writers had argue about the concept of culture. Although it is not easy for them to explain the concept of culture but they tried by all means to input how they understand this concept of culture. As we know that for every individual it is impossible to agree with all writers's understanding of culture. At least you must find the most useful one and it might happen that you agree with some certain points of other writers and you

prop can include them ^{with} to the ones you find useful to form a concrete understanding in your minds. Therefore the concepts of culture which I find most useful are the ones which are discussed by Thornton and Pansphela.

is not sure what you mean by "culture does not link to society" and how that relates to the second point in the sentence. See above *

According to Thornton, culture does not link to society, in other words everyone is born without culture and everyone needs to learn it in order to interact in the social life. Therefore we can associate culture with sun as a resource, because every individual need sun in order to survive. So culture is a resource which everyone needs to survive, it is the information which humans are not born with but which they need in order to interact with each other in social life. (Thornton, 1988)

Therefore culture does not belong to anyone. All people have an access to cultural resources but there are some people who are deprived from cultural resources because of some reasons such as poverty, economic reasons etc. Culture is a strategic resource in the sense that it forms part of a plan or an aim to achieve a specific purpose or to gain an advantage. Where does this idea come from? Reference

Also if you include this idea, you need to develop it more, Culture can be seen as a strategic resource Not everyone

I agree that culture need to be learned even other people's culture. If you do not learn culture you will behave in a unique manner. For example, there was a baboon boy who did not bear any resemblance as other human beings do. This baboon boy grew up with baboons from his childhood to middle childhood, he did not learn his culture he learnt the culture of baboons. Therefore this leads a person to feel isolated or neglected in the society because he or she lack almost the whole information needed by the society in order to interact with it. ✓

According to my experience of transition to the Rhodes environment, I am coming from another environment which is far different from Rhodes environment. This does not mean that I have to be stereotyped I have to stick to my environment's expectation and ignore the situation of Rhodes. As I already mentioned, I have to learn Rhodes culture and try by all means to adapt ^{to} it in order for me to interact with others.

According to Ramphela, we know that different ethnic groups have different cultures. Every individual must not be ethnocentric that is, to stick to his or her culture only and neglect other cultures. We know that there are norms and values for each culture, the fact that you have to show interest ⁱⁿ to other cultures does not mean that you must ignore your culture. Therefore we can cross the boundaries which are abstract in our minds in the sense that you keep on appreciating your culture PTO *

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ramphele, M. (1995). Stretching across boundaries or A life. Cape Town: David Phillips
- Thornton, K (1997). Conceptualising culture in contemporary South Africa. Adapted from Thornton, K (1988). Culture: A Contemporary Definition. In South African Keywords. Cape Town: David Phillips

* I like the way you say "we can cross the boundaries which are abstract in our minds" but I'm not sure how that ties with continuing to appreciate your culture. Do you mean we should cross boundaries to learn about other people's culture, but we should still continue to appreciate our "culture"?

Xiao

I think you show an understanding of Thornton's idea of culture as a resource and something that needs to be learned in society. But you have not applied this concept to your own experience. Your reference to Ramphele is a bit superficial. You seem to have an understanding of the concepts you use, even if they are sometimes superficial, and in some places unclear

53%

AD

52%

3. Mamphele Ramphele writes about transgressing boundaries in the sense that she was trying to ^{show} us that culture is not fixed. If we can take the example of borders of state we will see what ~~does~~ she means if you travel from one country to another, you must deal ^{with} the authorities far ~~to~~ away in your journey, where you have to show the permission ^{you have for} of going to another country such as ^a passport. This point of showing your permission is what we call borders of state. ^{No you cannot} You ~~can~~ cross these boundaries without permission. But in these case of Ramphele in culture we can cross the boundaries, no one is an obstacle in front of you.

but with it we can cross boundaries according to Ramphele

In trying to go further, I will explain ^{What} ~~how~~ does she mean by transgressing boundaries according to culture. I will also generally explain my experience and later my experience at Rhodes University. but these are obstacles.

As we know ~~that~~ culture ^C consist of norms which are the rules that guide members of a society ^{so that they br} for who they should do or not do in a given situation. These norms are like the boundaries Ramphele has ^{t written} write about.

Therefore boundaries are those rules which are abstract in our minds: for example, a person might be ^{SP} affraid of ^{commit} doing crime because there is this conflict in his or her mind, that he or she will going to prison if he or she does a crime. Therefore a person has a conscience because he or she knows that crime is unacceptable. In other word a person cannot cross that ^{SP between} boundaries ^{in the} of being innocent to be guilty. But, Ramphele in this case of culture ^C agrees that culture is not something that ^C holds a person tightly.
 ^{don't think she means this. I think she} would agree that culture is something that holds you tightly - it thus shows how difficult it is to transgress boundaries like Mandela has done so often.

Therefore you explore other cultures. In other words you a

transgress boundaries. To transgress means violate norm or a certain rule, in other words is to make a sin. But in ~~as~~ this case it doesn't mean so. To transgress is where by a member of a particular culture comes to accept another culture. By doing so a person has transgressed a boundary.

In my location as an African I do know I have to attend our traditional works, but the most things I'm interested in is to go ~~to~~ parties, break, watching sport and reading kick-off magazines. In this way I have crossed boundaries because I'm not allowed to do some of these things, but I see a light in future in them. in your culture

Here in Rhodes University I play with whites soccer and volleyball of which I feel I cross a boundary. The reason for this is that I ~~am~~ no longer living according to the expectation of my society. I'm living according to Rhodes's expectation. I also eat the same food which is also a part of ^{another} culture, I attend the same lectures with them and also I attend cheese and wine parties. participating in another culture.

Interesting: the experience you don't feel doubted by it. - you enjoy

By crossing boundary it does not mean that you did a crime. We must not be ethnocentric. We must show interest in other cultures

Pity you didn't finish. - you had some good points. However there are some points that are misinterpretations of Ramphela i.e. there are obstacles to crossing boundaries + culture does have a strong binding effect. - She is not saying that it's easy to cross over, (like Achebe may say) but that we have to

Questions for interview about ELAP Culture module.

1. Has your understanding of culture changed while you have been doing the course (Culture module)?
or developed
^
If so, explain how it has changed. If not, explain.
- 2a. Think about how you learnt at school. Compare it to your learning process in the Culture module. In what ways does it differ?
- 2b. How does the way you've been learning in the Culture module compare with the type of learning required in your other subjects at university?
- 3a. What did you like about the course?
- b. What didn't you like about the course?

Interview with Enoch, Abel, S'khona and Carmenita 21 May 1997

A: Has your understanding of culture changed or developed while you've been doing the module on culture in ELAP?

EH: My understanding of culture has a bit changed up to so far because at first or before coming to Rhodes and reading those modules on culture I used to think that culture is something by which people differentiate themselves against one another. I used to think of culture as something which has some connection with race just like me being a Xhosa and being able to see that this one is a Zulu.

I used to take culture on those grounds and now I've discovered that culture is just a way of living together - it has nothing to do with races. So, I also experienced that culture is just a way of survival - no matter you are from different backgrounds but you can come together and form one culture as we do here at Rhodes, where we have people from different backgrounds but forming one student culture.

AN: And me too, my understanding of culture has developed - I can say it has developed because there is more information about which I never knew before. 'Cos I was taking culture as Enoch has said that a Zulu has got his own culture, and a Xhosa has got his own culture, but as far as the module is concerned, it made my knowledge of culture more broadly, to know more about culture, than being stereotyped.

SN: To me its as - well I don't think I had an idea about culture before, but now since I read the articles that we have, so now I came to realise that what I was doing - I was crossing boundaries before now and I was controlled by the environment in which I was staying. I changed from a Xhosa to a Tswana, to speak Tswana and do everything that Tswanas do, but I didn't take it as its part of culture. Since I came here and read these articles, now I came to realise that what I've been doing was crossing boundaries and its part of culture.

CD: I never used to understand the concept of culture. According to me, I'm coming from a mixed family and I thought, right, what they taught me and the way we are interacting in the environment as well as with each other - that's unique, and like, when you interact with other people, you have to understand that you are a mixed group and that you - there's no possibility that you can mix or like where you say crossing the boundaries. But this module has opened up a lot for me, and now I understand why it was like that, because I felt that that put that with us (?). You can talk to Xhosa people, you can talk to other African groups, but you must remember that you are mixed - you understand, you are not part of them, and you'll never be. That is how I understand it. I found out, like, by interacting, tends to bring out differences together, makes us to be more closer. This is how I understand it now. I didn't see culture as a resource. I didn't think that it had norms and values and things like that. I didn't know those things. I only found it through the modules that we are doing that I found that out. I thought that because I'm mixed - I'm unique and I

belong to those mixed groups, that's how I thought, not in this deep perspective *.

A: When you talk about mixed d'you mean in terms of coming from a coloured background?

CD: Ja, from two groups.

A: I just want to ask Enoch and Abel, you both said something about that you saw culture in terms of culture belonging to different groups, something like that, and I'm not sure how you put it but d'you see it in a different - ?

EH: Its like what actually is happening is, yes, there are differences between people but as one of the writers says it its like every society coheres to those differences but there are common things between each and every one. So, what I'm saying is its those common things that we need to recognise them, so that we create harmony among ourselves. Its not like - it should not be something like two armies standing on one side and the other one standing on the other side, where you just look at differences, so that we know who's on my side when we are at the battle. It should be something that is harmonious, it should be something where we unite and know this is different - I mean, what Abel is doing is different from what I'm doing, then you try and put respect on that. Then what is common to us, you celebrate that.

A: D'you want to add anything to that?

AN: Well * I can just quote what Carmenita has said, when she was talking of something that culture is a resource. So, on my side, I just developed my understanding, because I never knew that culture is a resource, culture changes, culture is the information that we are not born with, so I've just developed that information, or I've developed my understanding on those concepts, I mean on the Culture module.

A: Does anybody else want to say anything else about this question? Feel free to just talk now, hey? If you think about something later that you'd like to say about it ...

EH: But there's one thing that confuses me around this concept of culture, when it comes to rituals and norms. Is it - culture linked with rituals, or are rituals linked with culture? Which one is following the other? Because its like - I'm a Xhosa and in my society, we do things in our own particular way, to mention one thing which is common in our society - we undergo the initiation school and that's part and parcel of our lives. So, when we are talking about our cultures, we say no, we are different because we do this, and they do not do that, so is it OK to take culture on those grounds?

A: Um I'm not quite sure what you're saying, but the way, I would see it is that - that maybe in all traditional societies of going into adulthood, and that its interesting to look at that and maybe compare how its dealt with in different cultures, you know even in Western culture, you'll find rituals, but of a different kind. So, you know, maybe one can look at it from that perspective. But I also find it a bit difficult. I mean I think you know that the ELAP tutors are also struggling with these concepts

as well. So, you know, its easy to understand culture in a more traditional way, where you see it as being the culture of a group, and the group has its rituals and beliefs, values and norms and so on. And then when you start looking at it in a different way, its a bit difficult to see how those rituals fit in to a different approach. Is that what your question was saying?

EH: Ja, ja - that's what I was just asking, because there's a lot of things happening around us, like I mean, we differentiate from each other through traditions, especially in African societies. Its like, for example, I have a cut finger so its those things that differentiate us, ja. Some make scratches on their face. I'm just asking -its like - we used to say, no, you don't belong to this society because you don't have this. Then you have this, therefore you are not a member of this society. With those things in mind, we say no, out of our culture. So, going through these modules now changed that because they say no culture is just a resource, its just a way of communicating. Its not only the way of differentiating, but there is something underneath differentiating each other, something involving our humanity and cons - I mean uniformity between people.

A: I think maybe its also linked to you know that idea that Thornton says that ideas come from a particular time and I think that this way of looking at culture is more appropriate for our time where you have a lot of change and you have a lot of mixing of people from different groups. And its not useful anymore to look at our separate cultures, and see them as being very separate.

EH: And there is also one idea which I like that you can't just explain what culture is unless you are part of that culture. In order to be able to say, no, this culture is like this, you need to be part and parcel of it. You can't for example just stand up and say no the Zulus are doing it like this and that, although I'm not a part of them, so its one and the same with them - they cannot say I'm doing this and that until they join me and say no, we have experienced this, and now we say this is wrong with your culture.

A: Are you referring to that idea of calling another culture primitive?

EH: Yes, where people are talking about less civilized cultures and more civilised cultures, so I'm saying its not a statement that one can just say. Its like to define culture, you must be part of it. Ja, ja, its not like something which we read from the books, where even this guy can take it and say no, this thing is made like this and this, and I can take it too and say, no, water is made of hydrogen and oxygen, and he can say water is made of hydrogen and oxygen. When it comes to culture, we need to be part of it, we must know everything about it and then you say no, this one is - well the idea of having less evolved and more evolved cultures - I don't support it. I don't think its relevant. I'm just saying to define culture, you must be part of it. You can't just say this culture is like this, while you are not there. The observer himself or herself must be there.

AN: Adding on what Enoch was saying, Thornton says that we have to add our own understanding when defining culture. In other words, in my interpretation, I can say,

no one is incorrect when he's explaining culture, and Dr Palmer was talking about when a person can explain culture, in his own way, you must simply understand which background he is coming from, so I'm just supporting what Enoch was saying.

A: So the importance of one's own background and the way that one sees culture - that each person's understanding of culture is influenced by their own background?

EH: Ja, the environment and the - well partly the time when you grew up, like me I grew up in Cape Town in Crossroads, just one of the poor villages of Cape Town and staying in that place, being blacks only and being oppressed/depressed by the way, and with me - when I'm talking about culture, I take culture on those grounds of apartheid - blacks are only blacks and whites are only white - there's nothing that is common between black and white. But now that I'm in a new environment where I am between people from different backgrounds, people of the western and people of the south, its changing now because I'm experiencing a new knowledge now. Its new because its not what I've been growing with, its something new.

A: OK, maybe we should move onto the next question. I'm just trying to get you to think about the way you approached learning at school and how that's different from the way you approach learning at university, or how we are expecting you to learn in this course - to think about the processes that you need to go through in order to learn and how they were different at school from what you are doing in this module.

CD: I can say like at school - I was at a boarding school for girls, a convent. And there we had 6 subjects and 4 of those 6 subjects were learning subjects. So, my understanding of where I was coming from, you learn a subject to be able to answer the questions for an exam. So, its a parrot style of learning. There is no perspective in it, there's no how you interpret it, there's no discussion level at all. That was way back between '81 and '85. I finished my matric in '85. And now, I only now in my ELAP, 'cos I did Psychology, I did Linguistics and its only now in ELAP that I realise that you don't learn things according to a parrot way because my Catering - I also learnt for exams, not for understanding, for use for tomorrow or when I'm not in ELAP itself or for when I'm interacting with other people. What you learn, you must be able to use the next time, or you must be able to understand - this is how I see ELAP now. In my school and my Catering that I did at the College, it was more parrot style, for exam purposes.

AN: Ja, I understand what Carmenita says. What I've seen in ELAP is the group discussion. I've seen the good thing that equip me and help me to understand the subject - a certain subject, because at school, we were simply just - they were just teaching us, we were not having any discussion for the certain subject so it makes it difficult if you use your own mind, but if you are a group and someone share his idea, really you become to realise or you become to understand that topic that you are talking about, so it helps you to have more understanding on that certain topic you are talking about. So I've seen this group discussion is a good thing.

SN: I think like what we did like what Carmenita has said to use like when we had to start even like going to more details like want to know what does that mean - we just only

read just to have the answers for the exams, not like taking into account that no, I have to understand this thing - what does it mean? You just take every word which is in the textbook and put it in your book (?). But when I came here now it is different because I have to know first what does that mean. I have to discuss it first and know it, so even like when I'm reading, must try and put - have my own understanding about the thing - then like create my ideas about the subject, which I'm reading.

EH: Ja, its just like saying, just repeating the same thing, but to add more, I'll just say at school I think there was a bit of uh - we didn't feel the importance of education. We just learnt to survive or to pass the exams, we didn't see how important education is. Now, I mean you feel that I'm doing this for tomorrow. I'm learning so that I can be able to stand (?) the coming future. So, what was happening at school is just you pass Standard 8 and go to Standard 9. Now, even if you fail, but you fail with something on your mind. Like, for example, this question of culture, which have been one of the burning issues of South Africa, because its not only the issue which has been discussed at school but its a problem for South Africa as a whole, so I think that's the way of trying to approach the future, which was not done at school. That is the reason why I'm saying at school I think there was a little bit of lack of seriousness - I don't know if its seriousness or consciousness, but there was something lacking at school, as compared to now.

CD: Like in my case, we had school from 8 till half past two, and then from 3 to 5 there was study time - that's how the boarding school worked. And we were taught like - especially when it comes to exams, we can work in groups, and we had a particular teacher that used to give the subject, to be around, just observing us, to see that we are doing work. And like there was people in my class that was very much - how can I say - they wanted to know more. They were very much curious of the particular thing and I think there were very much political orientated as well. And one answer that this lady in particular gave us that we are learning under a restricted code and I haven't learned till this year what she meant by a restricted code. We are only compiled (?) to learn that and not developing a different perspective of a particular subject. But this was in particular History and there was questions asked and that you answered only according to what she told you, but there were other ones in the class that seemed to be very much curious of what, who, why did he do it? and then that was her answer to us. We are taught in a restricted code and I've never known what she said until now.

(I asked her how she found out what it meant and she explained that she came across the concept in Linguistics 1, but I think she has misunderstood Bernstein's concept of restricted code.)

EH: Ja, what Carmenita is saying is just remind me of something that happened to me some few years ago. I think I was just doing Standard 7 or 6. But I remember one time we had the class and my Agricultural Science teacher was telling us about stinks (?) to control pests in agricultural food, and the same person who just the day before was telling us about nature conservation, all those things - how to care for animals,

like birds, whatsoever. Then this day, he said to us, "So you must apply pesticides to your food so that things like birds cannot take it." I stood up and asked him, "But yesterday you told us 'No, you should not kill things like birds, whatsoever', so now its like we are now going back because we are killing them when we apply pesticides we are killing the same birds which you told us not to kill. What's going on ?" And he said "No, no ..." you see - I'm just trying to show how they restricted us at school. They just want you to focus on this. He was not giving me the chance to know why we apply pesticides, and how do we - considering the nature. He was just saying "You must concentrate now on nature and then, now you, must concentrate on your food - that's all." You don't have to link the two. (Laughter)

So that proves that at school, it was just something narrower as compared what is happening here, so now we are going to very, very broad, deep down. We look the consequences of what we are doing.

CD: In ELAP we are allowed to use our own initiative, apply it in a group and to be able to speak to it, and I must say this group work learned me a lot because I'm sitting there with one perspective and the minute somebody else will talk then I will like either write it down or I will listen to that particular person, and that gives me a different perspective again. At the end of the day when we have a formal discussion or we have closed (?) discussion, I finally realise that there is no right and wrong in culture specifically. I thought there was a wrong and a right. Only it opened up my mind for other possibilities. There's not one particular answer for a question.

A: Do you think that learning those, you know, going through these processes will- is preparing you for other aspects of your life, or will help you with the courses that you're going to do?

CD: I think mostly for other courses in this particular context where we are and like for us that are coming to Rhodes and then go back home, it learns you something, like at home, when everytime you go back, things are changing, you know, so for us its like going from Rhodes University into a changed environment. It learns you to, what is the word, be able to cope with those changes there, so here we are made aware of how changes are happening, how we *, like when I went home last year, I found * in my street, my street is very much Indian restricted, there's a white couple, there's three black couples now staying opposite us. So, things have changed because we now fall und - I am able to adapt to that situation, not put myself in a little corner and have to stay in that side.

A: OK, S'khona, you were going to say something?

SN: I was going to say almost the same thing, now when I have to go home, I can now see the change, like I have to go back to, get out of the Rhodes environment and I can feel that I have to switch, like here at Rhodes, most of the time, we're using English. Now when I go home, I have to change from English to using Tswana now. So, it makes me now see the differences, like now from now (?) I've been crossing boundaries. I was in another environment. Now I'm coming to another another environment and I have to change to try to cope with it.

EH: Ja, well to add more, I think what is happening here is preparing us for the future.
(Tape turned over)

I was just about to say that what is happening here is preparing us for the future because its like with me - I'm doing commercial courses and we're from the environment where we have stereotyped people who concentrate on Xhosas only and think that the only existing people are Xhosas, so I think that what is happening here has changed that idea of concentrating on Xhosas only and I think its preparing me for the coming future because I'll be able to withstand the pressures of being within different people because at first I was just used to being within my society and know what is happening within that society, not experiencing or considering what other societies were doing. I think that was going to put a pressure somewhere somehow because I was just going to grow up with that and maybe it will end up effecting my personality, views (?) of other societies, so I think now there is a change.

A: OK, Can we just go on to question 3 - What did you like about the course, and what didn't you like about the course?

(Students answered the question about the ELAP course as a whole rather than in relation to the culture module).

CD felt she learnt a lot from the culture and language module, and was able to apply what she learned "in our daily lives at Rhodes University, where we have a mixed culture as well as mixed languages".

AN liked the topics Multilingualism and culture, the way they are in a South African context, so they give you more broad knowledge of what is happening in South Africa, really benefited, liked the topics very much.

-Won't say anything that he disliked in the course.

SN: I liked the course, because its developing us, its showing us the way of communication and how to live together, to unite. So far, there's nothing I don't like about the course.

EH: Well, with me, I'll just say, ja the course is OK and well the reason why I'm saying this is " 'cos the course is more practical and is arranged in a South African way - its like we're doing what we know and we are mainly talking about our experiences. It threatens me when we talk about something which is irrelevant to what we are doing or something which is very very irrelevant. I used to ask a lot of questions at school when they teach us about Italian history, European history, all those things. I used to ask my teacher, "Why are you teaching us all these things? Why are you telling us about Italian histories? Why are you not giving us the South African history, so we can stay aware of what is happening in our country?" But up to now that question was not yet answered. With ELAP, I think its OK because we've been given a chance to say how do we feel about South Africa, and we learn things that are happening around us.

So with the question of the dislikes ...(nothing he dislikes about the course, but he

says that for everything there is an advantage as well as a disadvantage.)

A asks if they're all just being polite and not saying what they don't like. EH denies this.

AN says now its going OK -there's no problem at the moment.

ZA came in here and said she likes the course because it "is an idea to get students from disadvantaged backgrounds to fit in, not to fail dismally on their first year. I think this course is equipping us a lot so we don't get too much lost when we get to the * I mean to the university". Says she used to dislike the fact that there were only black students in the course, but has realised that most of the white students at Rhodes are first language speakers of English.

Some discussion about this between her and EH, SN also chips in.

EH says that they have to realise that they are disadvantaged "...We are disadvantaged and we need to be developed ** so that we can reach the standard of the university."

EH: Just like Mamphela is saying, People should not be just accepted or admitted. They should be supported. The universities should try and reach out to them, so she goes on and says the success does not only depend on their efforts but also depends on the support, so I think this is part and parcel of the support.

(They come in thinking that they should be accepted and taken into the mainstream, but they realise that they need to be developed before they go into the mainstream.)

Appendix D3

Interview with Abdul

22 May 1997

A: Has your understanding of culture changed or developed while you've been doing the culture module?

AXM: I think it has changed, I mean not changed but developed.

A: OK, Can you explain in which ways?

AXM: Ja, in the sense that ...when I think about culture there are few things that I thought about that I can associate with culture. I didn't know about just like to compare food as a part of culture and compare sport as a part of culture. I mean when we are talking about culture, I thought initially that we're talking about something like norms, my thoughts about culture were something like that. I associate with norms, not to associate with like food, sport and other minor things that I discovered in discussions.

A: OK, I know that you're doing Sociology and Psychology. Have you dealt with the topic of culture in Sociology? Has there been a correspondence between what you've done on culture in Sociology and in ELAP and how have they related to each other - the two subjects, in terms of culture?

AXM: No, I think they are related, but in this course of ELAP, we are going deep in details when we are talking about culture, then in Sociology they are concerned with norms and values ... frequently.

A: Ja, so you didn't go into it in a lot of detail?

AXM: Ja, we didn't go into it in a lot of details.

A: And when you say the things that you think about being part of culture have changed, like you've realised that food and sport and those kind of things are part of culture, how did that happen? What made you think that?

AXM: Can you clarify it?

A: Was it through class discussions or ... um ..that you started to develop a different idea of culture or what aspects of the course caused you to develop a different idea?

AXM: I think the articles, 'specially this one - Thornton. It mentions that we eat the same kind of food - cornflakes etc. but he mentions that its a part of culture, which is common to us.

A: Are there any other ways in which your understanding of culture's developed?

AXM: I think I have a picture in my mind, but I can't express it in words.

A: You can take your time if you want to think about it.

(Long pause)

A: Even if its easier to express it in Xhosa, you could say it in Xhosa and then try and translate it (laughs in a shy way).

AXM: Try and translate it?

A: Or you can say it in Xhosa, 'cos I've got a Xhosa person to help me with the tapes.

(Long pause)

AXM: Ai, I can't translate it into Xhosa. ... I think the problem is that I have a picture in my mind about culture but I can't even express it in Xhosa. Its just I see this concept, how does it develop ...

A: I'm interested in this - this picture that you've got. (laughs) You can't tell me anything more about it?

AXM: You ask how does it develop my understanding - culture?

A: Ja.

AXM: You see in some cases I find that to adopt some situations, not to be stereotyped and think about my environment and go according to my environment, whereas I'm here in Rhodes. I have to change. I think I learn that. According to Ramphele - something like that - to cross boundaries. Just like when I arrive here I didn't, I never wear jean -trouser, but when I'm here, I suppose because I see that the most of the - I can say 99% wear jeans.

A: So, do you agree with Ramphele that ... //one should cross boundaries?

AXM: //Ja, I agree with her - we must cross boundaries.

A: Why d'you think it's necessary? D'you think its necessary to fit into the environment or ...?

AXM: It is necessary because you cannot fit in a certain environment where you are going to follow your environment's expectation. // You will feel isolated?

A: //You mean if you're going to follow your home environment's //expectations?

AXM: //Ja, then you'll feel isolated. You won't feel allright.

A: OK. Thanks. Um. Can we go onto the next question, which is the question about

how you learnt at school, and if you can try and think about the process of learning that you went through at school, or you were expected to go through and how that compares to the process of learning that you're meant to go through in this course on culture?

AXM: You mean about culture at school?

A: No, I just mean learning generally, like, how did -? - are there differences-? You can think about school and university generally? What kind of differences are there in the way that you had to learn at school and the way that you learn at university?

AXM: When I was at school, I didn't learn just like what I'm doing here, but I was a hard worker at school, but now I'm not even in that form that I was at school. But the way that I used to study at school - its like most of the time I'm memorising. I'm not reading to understand most of the things. Here, in university I discovered that you cannot just proceed with the work that you don't understand. You must try and find it in a dictionary, or even to go lecturers and ask for certain chapter, how does it go, if you don't understand. But at school, I just read and just memorising if I don't understand, and I find that they - I don't know what to say- the staff - they encourage that. Whereas they encourage also at school that we take this for granted.

A: You take what for granted? - the material that you're learning?

AXM: Ja, we take it for granted.

A: So, do you believe that these are the facts that you're given and you have to learn them. //This is the knowledge that you have to learn. Am I right in saying this? Is that what you mean when you say you take it for granted?

AXM: //Ja. ...Ja, I'm not saying ... if you have a problem in a certain section at school. You don't mind whether you know it or don't know it. You just read it and memorise it. Sometimes you memorise something. You don't know whether you understand it or what, but you just read it - Ok, you memorise, you memorise but you don't know what's happened about ...(?) but you memorise it's in your mind then it becomes you write a test, the question raise that point -you just write it, and then you pass. That's what I meant by take it for granted (?).

A: Ja, OK. And um you talked about at university, you need to understand things. Um, do you think that ELAP is helping you to develop those skills that you need at university, and particularly the Culture module? D'you think its helping you to understand what's required at university, how you need to learn at university? Maybe its difficult for you to answer that but I'm interested if you have any thoughts about that.

AXM: I think most of the time *** when you learn something you don't see the use of that thing at that moment, you start to see it after - just like next term, I start to see, Oh that section about something -its - I don't know how to express it.

A: that its relevant, or that it links to something else?

AXM: Ja.

A: Is that what you mean?

AXM: Ja, even the course as a whole, I don't see where I am going but I know that - I have the belief that its somehow going somewhere. (Laughs)

A: Are you talking about ELAP now, or school?

AXM: I just made an example. Just like when I'm doing this course, I don't know where I'm going, but I understand that - but I believe that I'm going somewhere.

A: So, are you saying that you've got faith in your teachers that they're teaching you something (smiling)?

AXM: Ja. But I hope that I will see where I'm going.

A: Ja. (Asks whether in the culture module, he has been able to know where he's going, what it's leading him towards, if he feels there's some development taking place - a reason for doing the work.)

AXM: Ja. I feel that there's a development with this. Ja.

A: Can you explain more what you mean by this?

AXM: (Long pause) What do I mean there's a development? The concept of culture - I know what is culture. And then just a little information that I have about culture. And then when you gave us these worksheet, I add some information - I don't know how to exactly answer this question.

(A asks him to compare the type of learning in ELAP to the type of learning required in his other courses

- AXM struggles to answer this question

_ A asks him to brainstorm what skills are required for learning at university).

AXM: It seems ... to read many readings at libraries.
(Phone rang and it seemed I decided not to continue with this question).

A: What d'you like about the course and what don't you like about it?

AXM: So, it's interesting about culture. And what do I not like is some perception of other writers about this concept - culture. It's like Biko said, ja, but I used to agree with Biko's perception, but as the day goes on, I just change my mind, because I find that we can cross the boundaries. Biko's view is that we cannot cross the

boundaries. He sees culture as a fixed -. So, that is what-I don't like is that a person can be stereotyped, following his culture only, not being interested in other people's culture. You have to cross the boundaries, ja.

(A questions him on his comment that he found the course interesting, as he had told her a few weeks ago that he was finding it boring. He said he thought that was a response to there being too much work.

She asks if it is relevant to his life and he says yes.)

AXM: I can't motivate my answers.

A: Is there anything else that you want to say?

AXM: No, I don't think so.

A: OK.

Appendix E1

ELAP Meeting 5 May: Notes from tape (Extract)

I started off making notes and ended up transcribing.

Side one

Discussion on Wednesday's class: Reportback on Thornton article worksheet

Fleur

Wednesday - Fleur had a very successful class. It worked well doing Question 7a and b first., and also allocating each small group a question to do in detail, after they'd done the whole thing for homework. Worked out mainly in pairs. Had to come to front of class and present it, which was useful 'cos it made them do the question properly. Up to them whether one person present or all - really made them participate. Mentions how they always address themselves to tutor, she turned around and faced the class, so they had to address the class. "And that works well because then all of a sudden they've got to turn around and articulate themselves so that the class can actually understand what's going on." Had so much participation. "After they'd presented their questions, I then focused them on what was wrong, but in a tactful way and opened class discussion on the point after each one." Before they went over worksheet, she went over the point of culture being a resource, because that's the basic concept that they had to grasp. Started off with an idea that a student brought up in his journal - "the fact that the idea of culture being a resource is actually a metaphor, and help them understand what a metaphor is because I think a lot of them were battling with that because they saw a resource as only something concrete like water or metal or whatever", and just by asking them what is a metaphor, give me an example of a metaphor and suddenly they seemed to understand better what he meant. Then discussed "what ideas a resource brings to you, how does that carry over to the metaphor of it as a resource and that worked very well as well because people would say everyone has access to resources, and then we discussed well actually is this in actual fact the case, for instance water - everyone is supposed to have access to it, but it doesn't really work that way, there're a lot of poor people who do not have access to water as they should, and in the same way culture can work that way because everybody for instance should have access to university education as a culture, in actual fact this doesn't really happen as yet ... Another idea that the metaphor brought forth was one cannot live without water or * resources in the same way that one cannot live without culture, and there were wonderful ideas that sprung forth because of that and it was like a bridge to understanding that concept."

Asked them to leave question about "culture" vs. "cultures" in their presentations and F did it with them beforehand, just after discussion about metaphor. Actually drew little boxes on board and wrote different ethnic groups cultures in boxes and said this is the idea of different cultures. "This is how most people generally view culture at the moment as separate entities, but in actual fact there's so much overlap, and I drew little crosses between the boxes and that actually worked very well as well. And I said, this is what actually happens, and this is what Thornton means by "culture" as in the general concept vs. "cultures" in the separate little boxes.

Arona's worksheet was great. "I had a definite feeling at the end of this lecture most of them had grasped the concept much better and were relating to it."

H: which is what should be happening - they should be constructing their own idea based on their experience. Ja, I just found - the methodology worked well, but I found that their understandings were very superficial. And I'm finding it reading their journals and ...marking their written answers on the Thornton article. They are saying things like "Its a resource" and "culture can change". But when they actually write a bit more, they're saying quite the opposite. Its this - I'm sure it's just part of the process - it's them developing their understanding ...

F: They've listened to you and they've picked it up, but they haven't really understood it.

H: No, not in a real way and not in a way that I think a constructivist approach to this sort of thing would advocate, you know that somehow we've missed a stage in the scaffolding. I have anyway. I feel as though they haven't really grasped it, and I just wonder if there isn't a bit of a problem with that article. I know I've said before that I think it's perhaps a bit too abstract - that there aren't enough concrete examples, but in a way, we have to provide our own concrete examples and students should be taught how to do that as well. This is why I think this whole culture module is so good. It's forcing them to do things that good students do, that you are always relating new information to old and your experience of life -

F: and reassessing //your ideas

H: //and reassessing and I've gone through this reassessing in a major way this weekend, just reading journals and marking these questions, and thinking to myself well I - somehow I agree with the students when they say "My culture is different, I feel different, I do act differently". and I don't see it in terms of drawing along ethnic lines or tribal lines but I do feel that there's a very substantial and essential difference between my culture and an African culture.

Talks about experience in Mmabatho, being only white in an African environment, being aware of cultural differences. Differences were there and came out at times, eg. her reaction and her black colleagues reaction to corruption and mismanagement in the College.

F: ... Thornton is not negating cultures at all. He is saying though, to me, that cultures exist and they should be promoted, but that there're not just strict boundaries. I keep telling the students that he's not saying there's just one universal culture and that everyone's the same. He's also, to me, celebrating cultures and their differences, but saying also that there're no strict, little box- like boundaries, but the fact that there are different cultures is not a question, in my opinion.

H: I agree with you. I think that's probably a very sophisticated interpretation of what he's saying, but he's not saying that clearly enough. The students are not picking it up, and I'm finding difficulty ...// This mismatch for me is very stark.

F: I spent a good couple of minutes - maybe 5, 6, 7 minutes stressing that in that lecture ...stressing that aspect, which possibly also helped in their understanding.

H: You see, I think, Thornton- the base he's coming off is that we mustn't see ourselves

as these isolated little groups, so he's emphasizing almost to the opposite extreme. And there needs to be a sort-of balancing of that. But its difficult, because on the one hand I saw the difference between an African culture and English culture, but I don't see a difference between Xhosa and Zulu and you know - I don't think those are real differences. I mean when you ask people what is your difference ...

F: Thornton's example of eating the same cornflakes is quite a good one because people should still be proud of their culture, and I'm proud of my Netherlands culture, OK, but I tried to explain to them and lots of them agreed that they do eat the same cornflakes, some people said "no, I don't eat cornflakes and I said "That's fine but other people do, OK, and I as a Netherlands western woman in Africa love umnqusho, which is samp and beans, and I eat that which means that my cultural boundaries have become fuzzy, but that doesn't mean to say I have to negate my culture - its just that the reality is that we have our cultures, but we also borrow in a positive way from other cultures.

H: But you see, I think that that's a fairly - I agreed with you last week, but I feel that those are superficial things. You know this borrowing from cultures and wearing beadwork, dressing in an Af- all those things I did in Mmabatho and - but now that I'm here, I don't do those things because that essential difference is much, much deeper than that.

(Continues)

Appendix E2

ELAP Meeting 12 May

(Extract begins while meeting is in progress)

- H: ... finish the Biko article. It felt it was one of the best ... lessons in this culture theme that we've had actually. Students have really started thinking - I could see that they were really thinking about culture and what it meant for them in their lives and making meaning out of it. We had a very good debate about Biko's ideas on culture how they're a product of his time and necessary in affirming black people's identity then, however you know now, that wouldn't be emphasised, I mean if Mandela gave a speech like that he'd be howled down and people would be up in arms //and what was really nice...
- F: //But then also ensuring that he was very advanced for his time, if you think it was ** - at that time.
- H: It was the start, he was the start of the whole black power movement, but it was really nice 'cause one of the students in my class is as old as me, and he went to one of Biko's speeches in P.E.
- F: //Speeches, oh, really
- H: So he was able to tell everybody about that. And it was such a nice lesson, you know, everybody - even the students who weren't contributing, even the slow students were listening and they were attentive. There wasn't one face that was asleep - I looked round, you know 10 minutes before the lesson - usually when everyone's been snoring especially after lunch and everyone was interested, you know it was great, it was very nice. I could just suddenly feel that you know things are coming together, I can feel that there's a shift in gear, that people are changing patterns of thinking and of doing things, you know suddenly the lecturer isn't sure of the answers - that I'm showing as much confusion as they are. You know they're being confronted by fuzzy grey uncharted territory where their knowledge and understanding of culture is being constructed from their understanding and experience and what they're reading and there're no clear rights and wrongs and they're learning all that in a very authentic way //because I'm not able to give rights and wrongs
- F: and there's more acceptance of it
- H: and there's acceptance.
- F: from the beginning
- H: it's not like we're saying that students must be critical in a vague kind of way. We're actually showing them that this is how to be critical and this is how to ehm -when they read - these are the kinds of things that they must be thinking, they must always be ehm reflecting on their experience and their understandings and how that reading is - relates

to it.

F: //Relates to it, and builds on it or takes away from it or....

H: And they're also being treated as having an equal share in the construction of knowledge - that we're doing it together. So I feel that in lots of cases, not in all cases by any means, but I feel as though in my response to their journals, in my response to the Thornton article things, my response all the time is that I'm trying to show you know when they make fresh ideas or - I say that's great, I hadn't thought of that, you know, they're being treated as equals. So I think it's been a really very important experience as a learning experience apart from you know anything else. Then Friday the Ramphela article - I was great - I really - what I did is that on Thursday night I said "You look up, you read it, you look up all the words and on Friday I'm going to check - I want to see a page - an A4 page of words and their meanings" and I did it and they'd all done it. Some of them hadn't, some of them had three or four - hadn't really burdened themselves but I mean one guy had two columns, he had 62 words and he looked up each and every one (small laugh). So it was just forcing them do that bit, you know that they must do that before I was going to read it through with him and it worked, it worked very well. I just felt like there are all sorts of things in the Ramphela article. They said -I said what did you think of the article at the beginning, did you understand, what did you think her main message was and they couldn't see how it related to culture.

F: No, and another thing - mine...I don't know if it was just a couple of them, but they said this is so boring this article initially, until I went through it with them and step by step like you say, keep drawing on those .. parameters all the time of her as a medical doctor and anthropologist, there's that thing. There's examples of that right the way through where she extends into different territories and has different perspectives and can see things from different perspectives ...

H: Ja, and I think it's such a beautifully written article too

F: And * by the end of the double period they were enthralled and they were actually relating to it much more than in the beginning.

(Continues)

ELAP COURSE EVALUATION: 1ST SEMESTER 1997
EXTENSIVE ANALYSIS

Total questionnaires completed;

Group 1 (AD):	10
Group 2 (FT):	18
Group 3 (HA):	<u>21</u>
Total:	49

a. What were your feelings about ELAP before you started the course?

<u>very positive</u>	<u>positive</u>	<u>negative</u>	<u>very negative</u>
8/46 = 17%	25/46 = 54%	10/46 = 22%	3/46 = 7%
Total positive = 71%		Total negative = 29%	

b. What are your feelings about ELAP now, after 2 terms?

<u>very positive</u>	<u>positive</u>	<u>negative</u>	<u>very negative</u>
16/46 = 35%	25/46 = 54%	5/46 = 11%	0/46 = 0%
Total positive = 89%		Total negative = 11%	
(increase of 11%)		(decrease of 18%)	

c. Contents of the course;

	<u>very useful</u>	<u>quite useful</u>	<u>not useful</u>	<u>not useful at all</u>
Term 1: Language Issues	25/49 = 51%	22/49 = 45%	2/49 = 4%	0/49 = 0%
	Total = 96%		Total = 4%	
Term 2: Culture	25/49 = 51%	19/49 = 39%	5/49 = 10%	0/49 = 0%
	Total = 90%		Total = 10%	
COMMENTS:	<u>positive</u>	<u>neutral</u>	<u>negative</u>	
	21/36 = 58%	5/36 = 14%	10/36 = 28%	

d. Assignments;

	<u>very useful</u>	<u>quite useful</u>	<u>not useful</u>	<u>not useful at all</u>
Term 1: Language Issues	21/48 = 44%	24/48 = 50%	3/48 = 6%	0/48 = 0%
	Total = 94%		Total = 6%	
Term 2: Culture	25/47 = 53%	17/47 = 36%	5/47 = 11%	0/48 = 0%
	Total = 89%		Total = 11%	
COMMENTS:	<u>positive</u>	<u>neutral</u>	<u>negative</u>	
	16/33 = 49%	7/33 = 21%	10/33 = 30%	

e. Amount of work required

	<u>too much</u>	<u>about right</u>	<u>too little</u>
Term 1: Language Issues	16/48 = 33%	30/48 = 63%	2/48 = 4%
Term 2: Culture	23/48 = 48% (quite high)	24/48 = 50%	1/48 = 2%

COMMENTS:

right*	neutral	too high	too little
10/32 = 32%	3/32 = 9%	16/32 = 50%	3/32 = 9%

(* Note that many of the students who ticked the "about right" box, made no comments.)

f. Your level of interest or enjoyment

	<u>very high</u>	<u>high</u>	<u>low</u>	<u>very low</u>
Term 1: Language Issues	13/49 = 27%	26/49 = 53%	9/49 = 18%	1/49 = 2%
	Total = 80%		Total = 20%	
Term 2: Culture	17/49 = 34%	24/49 = 50%	6/49 = 12%	2/49 = 4%
	Total = 84%		Total = 16%	

COMMENTS:

positive	neutral	negative
13/25 = 52%	5/25 = 20%	7/25 = 28%
Total = 84%		Total = 16%

g. Your tutor's teaching

<u>outstanding</u>	<u>very good</u>	<u>satisfactory</u>	<u>poor</u>
18/46 = 39%	25/46 = 54%	3/46 = 7%	0/46 = 0%
Total = 93%		Total = 7%	

COMMENTS:

positive	neutral	negative
26/32 = 81%	5/32 = 16%	1/32 = 3%

h. Journal writing

<u>very worthwhile</u>	<u>worthwhile</u>	<u>not worthwhile</u>	<u>not worthwhile at all</u>
22/47 = 47%	22/47 = 47%	2/47 = 4%	1/47 = 2%
Total = 94%		Total = 6%	

COMMENTS:

positive	neutral	negative
21/22 = 95%	1/22 = 5%	0/22 = 0%

i. Library Orientation Course

<u>very helpful</u>	<u>helpful</u>	<u>not helpful</u>	<u>not helpful at all</u>
17/47 = 36%	28/47 = 60%	2/47 = 4%	0/47 = 0%
Total = 96%		Total = 4%	

COMMENTS:

positive	neutral	negative
16/27 = 59%	5/27 = 19%	6/27 = 22%

Themes that emerged in the data

Initial understandings of culture

- Culture = traditional, static thing (customs, rituals) Tr
- Cultural practice enforced F

Development of understanding

- Culture part of everyday life L
- Culture as a resource Re
- Need to cross boundaries B
- Resistance — clinging to traditional ideas Resis
- Relate to own ideas O

Development of academic literacy/ conceptual development

- Knowledge fixed, need for right answers KF
- Construction of knowledge CK
- Concept development Con
- Mediation/scaffolding M/S
- Academic literacy AL