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Australian Aboriginal students in higher education

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FRAMING STUDENT LITERACY:
*Cross-cultural aspects of communication skills
in Australian university settings*

**AUSTRALIAN
ABORIGINAL STUDENTS
IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Ian Malcolm

Judith Rochecouste

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
CENTRE FOR APPLIED LANGUAGE RESEARCH

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FRAMING STUDENT LITERACY: A PROJECT OVERVIEW

What is the problem?

In recent years almost everyone has been expressing concern about the literacy standards of Australian university students — except, it may seem, the students themselves. By the time they graduate, the number who think that their skills in written communication have *not* been improved by their degree studies is only one in seven. Those figures come from a national Course Experience Questionnaire survey, based on responses from nearly 70,000 graduates across all programs (Ainsley & Long 1995:6). But that is hardly enough to dispel concern. Some improvement during the long period of study is the least that can be expected, and perceptions of improvement tell us nothing about whether the literacy achieved is adequate. Perhaps students tend to be too easily satisfied. Perhaps their tertiary education has failed to acquaint them with proper norms of advanced literacy in the wider community. Perhaps the entry level for tertiary institutions these days is often so low that students are bound to remain below par when they leave.

Actually most of those who teach in universities express general dissatisfaction with the written language skills of most of those they teach. This was the finding of a world-wide survey of 20,000 academics not long ago (Aubert 1992). Australian employers seem even more concerned than academics with the communicative competencies of graduates. A report by the Higher Education Council (1992), drawing on a survey by the Business Higher Education Round Table, shows that employers attach the highest importance to written and oral communication, yet academics rank this only fifth among desirable skills.

What employers ask universities to provide above all else is better attention to students' literacy skills. And Australian business leaders and professional organisations are clear and consistent about their priorities. To quote just a small sample of public statements culled from newspapers in the last couple of years, the CEO of one industrial organisation says that 'business wants university graduates with literacy skills and liberal minds'; the national recruitment manager for the Institute of Chartered Accountants says 'employers don't want number-crunchers ... they want people with all-round skills ... able to communicate well' (cf. ICAA 1994); the public affairs director for the Institution of Engineers lists 'communication skills' among the general abilities expected from an engineering education; and the Association of Graduate Employers, having surveyed 150 of the largest public and private employers, has found that the most commonly perceived deficiency in the quality of graduates is in the area of written English (Illing 1994).

But when these and other groups refer to communication skills, it is seldom clear precisely what they mean. 'Tertiary literacy', as it is now often called (Golebiowski 1997), is not a single problem. Rather, it is a knotty tangle of several large problems, and the different strands that get caught up together need at least to be separately identified here so that we know what variety of things we are talking about.

Cultural and disciplinary perspectives

The issues need to be placed in the context of larger transformations in our university system (Reid 1996). Higher education in Australia has become mass education. This produces a situation in which large numbers of students appear to be struggling, and in many cases part of their struggle may stem from the difficult study conditions within which their literacy skills need to be developed. As enrolments increase while government funding declines, students often face a lack of reading space in libraries, a lack of reading material on the shelves, or a lack of direct access to that material in the case of those studying at a distance. Writing, too, is affected: with larger classes for each staff member to teach, there are reduced opportunities for individual feedback on written assignments. Further, students are often trying to cope with a lack of sustained time to read and write, since for economic reasons many of them must now study part-time. Changes in teaching methods, while perhaps beneficial in some respects, may also lead to difficulties: for instance as continuous assessment becomes the norm, it tends to produce short-term reading patterns and simplified writing tasks (Gibbs 1992).

Those are just a few of the obvious influences on literacy practices in our universities today. The researchers who came together to work on the project described in this set of reports were aware of several other circumstantial complications as well. One such complicating factor is that fields of academic study have become more diverse in recent years. New specialised degree programs proliferate, and as a seemingly inevitable consequence it is more difficult than ever before for universities to ensure that consistent expectations about generic skills such as written communication are maintained across the widening range of disciplines.

A further complication is that Australia's tertiary student population is also becoming more diverse year by year — in particular, increasingly multicultural (Kalantzis 1993, Trent 1993). On the whole, the sociolinguistic consequences of this heterogeneity are not adequately recognised either in university policies or in classroom practices. In some states, one student in every four does not use English as a first language. Many such students come from overseas, largely from the Asian region. Most of them have considerable bilingual or multilingual skills and bring to their studies a rich potential for contributing to intercultural communication. But not only do our universities generally fail to draw in a creative way on those resources to enhance the scope for cultural exchanges across the whole learning community, they also often fail to provide adequate support inside or outside the classroom for students whose first-language literacy practices differ significantly from those considered normative in Australian academic settings. Indigenous Australians often face comparable difficulties. It seems that the assumptions held by many teaching staff about communication skills for academic purposes tend to be at odds with the language behaviour and cultural attitudes of students from non-traditional (particularly non-English-speaking) backgrounds.

Against that background, questions about literacy practices in contemporary Australian universities need to be pursued with two variables particularly in mind:

the requirements of different disciplinary areas, and the influence of cross-cultural factors. The project described in this present set of reports is the first to investigate on a large scale the intersection of those two variables.

Previous published work on either aspect of the topic has been limited. Some discipline-specific preferences for different styles and genres of communication are indicated by Becher (1989) in his book *Academic Tribes and Territories*, but his evidence is confined to the practices of academic professionals: for example, experimental physicists apparently rely more than chemists on non-written sources of information, such as talking among themselves, and give relatively little attention to reading the relevant journals. While differences of that kind may be broadly relevant also to discipline-specific patterns of student literacy, no such links have been established by research. Similarly, despite the fact that the variable relationship between communicative acts and their cultural contexts is well understood at a theoretical level, it remains true nevertheless that much research in discourse interpretation 'operates within a specific cultural frame' (Candlin 1978:171). And while 'cross-cultural variation in spoken interaction has become a well-established area of discourse study, very little has been published in the case of written genres' (Bhatia 1993:37). Until now, despite recognition of the general importance of this issue (e.g. Freebody & Luke 1990), cross-cultural aspects of English communication skills in Australian university settings have never been investigated on a large enough scale to reveal the broader patterns clearly, let alone analyse the underlying causes or indicate solutions.

With regard to both of the variables mentioned above, questions about what university teachers expect are particularly pertinent. How common is the expectation that students should somehow just 'pick up' the specific reading and writing practices conventionally regarded as appropriate in a particular discipline? Or that students whose first language is not English should, by their own efforts, just 'keep up' with native-speaking students in meeting the communication requirements of their course? How widespread, and how effective, is the practice of establishing dialogue between staff and students to delineate explicitly their respective responsibilities regarding literacy issues?

The present project

Four semi-autonomous teams participated in this project, each being responsible for a separate area of investigation. But the work of all four teams has been governed by this pair of broad questions: what literate behaviour is currently required of university students, and how is that behaviour affected by disciplinary and other cultural differences?

The Curtin University team concentrated on reading skills across various programs. The team based at the University of Western Australia concentrated on writing skills. The Edith Cowan University team investigated issues that relate to Aboriginal students, particularly regarding the relationship between oral and written language modes. The main focus of the Macquarie University work was on

the study of the cultures of academic literacy, especially in two disciplinary domains, viz. Psychology and Computing.

Each team has conducted its part of the collective inquiry in a way appropriate to its own particular focus, described in detail within the respective report sections. Yet the conception of the whole four-part project rests on the following simple shared premises:

- 1 Literacy is 'situation-specific' and should not be regarded as a single capacity or level of skill.
- 2 Theories of framing are useful in making sense of our findings.
- 3 Academic literacy is linked with cultural and disciplinary differences.

Situated literacy

If 'being literate' meant no more than being able to cross the threshold of access to basic reading and writing, serious questions about literacy in tertiary education would hardly arise. All students who enter university can surely be presumed to know how to read and write in at least a minimal sense. They can crack the general code that links a set of alphabetical conventions to the spoken word and to culturally regulated meanings. In many cases their spelling or their grasp of grammar may be shaky, the sense of some words may defeat them, but you could hardly describe university students as utterly illiterate at the functional level. However, literacy should be seen in broader terms:

A prime task for any university teacher must still be to assist the development of competent human beings who will be motivated to continue using and refining throughout their lives the potential skills they acquire. It is vital that they come to regard 'literacy' as an ability to use resourcefully, in specific situations, the written language system through which knowledge is most fully accessible in our own society. To be effectively literate is not only to have gained a certain competency in reading and writing, but also to go on exercising the habits, attitudes, know-how and values that equip a person to act on the language rather than just be acted on by it.

(Reid 1996:71)

Frame analysis

We have drawn on the research method known as 'frame analysis' for a common set of terms and a conceptual point of reference. This method was established primarily by Goffman (1974), but versions of it are now being used across several disciplines (MacLachlan & Reid 1994). The metaphor of framing is already familiar in general usage, of course. For instance no special technical knowledge is required to make sense of the observation that much current public discussion of 'student literacy' is *framed* in various ways. *Campus Literacy Divides Academics*, proclaims a newspaper headline, while some government functionaries continue to allege that literacy standards have declined at every level of our education system. But it is easy to discern that such pronouncements may depend on dubious assumptions about what constitutes literacy. These assumptions are seldom made explicit.

Within universities, too, staff often fail to articulate clearly what they expect from students in this regard. No doubt everyone agrees with the general principle that communication skills are of great importance — but students are frequently left uncertain about the requirements of a given course as far as their own reading and writing are concerned. Criteria of adequacy, let alone excellence, tend to be assumed rather than articulated by many teachers. The pedagogical frame generally remains invisible, and this is a major difficulty for students who are trying to discover what they must do in a particular academic setting.

Distinctive literacy practices (ways of reading, ways of writing, and ways of linking both to other language behaviour) can do much to establish or reinforce the features of an academic discipline. This is not to say that the disciplinary frame is immutable, or that it corresponds in a simple way to the labelling of a broad field of study. For instance 'computing' ranges from technical programming to business systems and information management, and the discursive events associated with each area of computing studies will vary correspondingly. Nevertheless disciplinary conventions are enforced in general by the communicative style that students are taught to regard as authoritative. Learning about an academic subject means 'learning to work *within* a received frame ... It means accepting a given selection, organisation, pacing and timing of knowledge realised in the pedagogical frame' (Bernstein 1971:214).

But frames, by definition, not only include; they can exclude at the same time. Some ways of communicating knowledge are not readily accepted as appropriate in our academic communities. Evidence of this, drawn mainly from classroom observations and student interviews, is given in some sections of the following reports. It is especially noteworthy in the case of Aboriginal students.

The basic premise of frame analysis is that appropriate interpretation presupposes an ability to recognise the framing devices (mainly linguistic) which convey metamesages — that is, messages about the messages. Differences of social or educational background can result in a failure to recognise such cues, or in a mismatch of frames. The framing expectations that students themselves bring to the texts they read or write in academic settings may be an impediment in some cases. Since it often happens that 'framing, by its very nature, is signalled indirectly' (Tannen 1992:65), what a teacher takes to be poor literacy performance by a student may indicate in many cases not a difficulty at the functional level but a difficulty in recognising the metacommunicative frames in a particular situation, perhaps because they have not been articulated explicitly enough by teachers.

Different cultures

The project subtitle refers to 'cross-cultural aspects of communication skills in Australian university settings', but 'cross-cultural' needs to be broadly interpreted. Where literacy issues are concerned, ethnic, national or linguistic backgrounds may not always be the most important differentiating factors. Indeed some common suppositions about differences in literacy practices between 'native speakers' of

English (NS) and 'non-native-speaker' (NNS) groups are not supported by what we have discovered. In parts of the following research reports the emphasis falls rather on comparisons between academic disciplinary 'cultures'. Different academic disciplines foster different attitudes with regard to literacy, tacitly or openly encouraging their students to approach communication tasks in one way rather than another. Universities need better information, then, not only about literacy issues arising from the changing cultural composition of the student body but also about the current range of pedagogic practices in various fields of study.

Scope for change

Accordingly we hope that academics and administrators will see practical value in the findings of this project. Of course, research findings in themselves can hardly guarantee that tertiary literacy practices will become more enlightened. Around any teaching/learning situation there is always a framework (often unseen) formed by the presence or absence of particular institutional policies and attitudes. For instance, if specific support for principles of cross-cultural education is not formally developed (Parker 1997), there can be little prospect of real progress in improving communication skills across the diversity of the student population. The details of such a policy will be specific to the institution's particular mission, to the ethnic composition of its student and staff population, and to the community that it serves. But certain principles should be fundamental, and one is that all students, irrespective of their cultural background, have a right to equitable treatment. It follows that staff are obliged to ascertain and value the various linguistic resources of their students, and to adapt their teaching practices accordingly. It also follows that adequate support needs to be provided to non-native speakers of English so that they can attain the proficiency needed to succeed in their studies.

To recognise that acts of communication are always framed in those ways is also to accept that 'tertiary literacy' is not just a student problem but also an institutional problem. If our universities are to devise better curricula, better study materials and better learning strategies, there will need to be first an understanding of the various and complex responsibilities that must be carried jointly by teachers, students and administrators. The present set of project reports is offered as a contribution to that end.

Ian Reid

Chief Investigator

1.0 AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

1.1 Introduction

One of the striking features of Australian higher education over the last ten years has been the marked increase in participation by Indigenous Australians. In a National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, carried out in 1994, it was noted that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students had more than doubled between 1988 and 1993 (National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 1994:28-29). Indigenous Australians constitute 1.6 per cent of the population of Australia and in 1993 some 5,578 indigenous people were attending Australian public universities, which is 1.3% of all Australian students in percentage terms. Edith Cowan University, in 1995, had an overall student population of 18,058 and an Aboriginal student population of 359 (2% of the total).

In some ways, however, these encouraging figures are deceptive. A majority of the Aboriginal students enrolled in the university (64%) are engaged in bridging courses which were set up to prepare them for entry to university degrees. Like the degree students, some of these are on campus, some in regional centres and some are enrolled as external students, coming to the university twice a semester for a week's intensive tuition. The population of Indigenous Australians in higher education also differs from the non-Indigenous population in that they are more likely to have gained entry through special provisions: they are older when commencing university and they are under-represented in many areas of study, particularly science, technology and the more prestigious professional areas such as medicine, law and engineering.

At Edith Cowan University, which is one of the leading national providers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, a preponderance of students enrolled, then, are taking bridging courses rather than degrees, and their overall success and completion rates are lower than those of other student groups. Despite undoubted progress in the extension of higher education access to Indigenous students, there is still evidence that, in many respects, the system treats them as 'invisible' (a term used by Shoemaker, 1989, to describe their presence, until recently, in accounts of Australian history) and that they feel, as one external student put it, like 'hicks from the bush' in the university scene. Many experience significant levels of communication apprehension (Daly, 1991) and it is likely that this is a factor leading to unacceptably high attrition rates.

The proposal for the present project (developed jointly with Professor Ian Reid of Curtin University, Professor Christopher N. Candlin of Macquarie University and Dr Susan Kaldor and Dr Michael Herriman of the University of Western Australia) offered an appropriate opportunity to investigate this situation within the context

of a comprehensive description of the literacy expectations of four universities and the ways in which students meet them or fail to meet them. Edith Cowan University undertook, as a part of this project, to investigate the ways in which Aboriginal students participate in the literacy events of the university. This investigation has been conducted at two campuses of Edith Cowan University where it has involved consenting Aboriginal students and the staff who work with them.

1.2 Theoretical approaches

This research draws on a number of theoretical considerations and concepts. Firstly Framing theory, as introduced by Reid et al. in the first report of this series, has been used and will be reviewed briefly here. Secondly, additional concepts which have proved invaluable in the description of the data will be defined. These include the concepts the *grapholect* of the *literacy event*.

1.2.1 Framing theory

The work of MacLachlan and Reid (1994) on frame theory has been drawn on to provide a common theoretical basis for the studies contributed by all four universities to the collaborative project. In the case of the Edith Cowan University team, an attempt has been made to apply frame theory to a wide range of literacy events, whereas in the other universities the focus has been predominantly on student reading or writing. MacLachlan and Reid's work was carried out within the framework of earlier studies, for example, by Goffman (1974), Gumperz (1982) and Tannen (1993) which postulated that messages are typically accompanied by internal or contextual cues which guide the receiver into adopting the appropriate frame within which they may be meaningfully interpreted, and they have, in particular, identified four kinds of framing which readers need to employ: extratextual, intratextual, circumtextual and intertextual (MacLachlan and Reid, 1994:2-5).

Frame theory has been found particularly appropriate in accounting for communication incompatibilities which occur across cultures. For example, Tannen (1993) reports on Watanabe's finding that the Japanese, when providing reasons, do so in the frame of storytelling, whereas the Americans tend to do so in the frame of reporting. Likewise, Tannen in her own research, showed how, in responding to the same film, Greek viewers operated from a 'film-interpreter' frame but Americans from a 'film-viewer' frame. Similarly, frame theory has provided a useful basis for examining communication incompatibilities which occur in institutional settings between professionals and clients. Tannen and Wallat (in Tannen 1993:57-76) demonstrated how, in a medical interview, frame shifts on the part of the paediatrician were accomplished by register shifts. They also showed how the frames of the professional and of the client may make conflicting demands. Ribeiro (1996) describing the interaction between a psychiatrist and her patient in a discharge interview, showed what she described as a 'struggle' between the professional framing, which the psychiatrist wished to maintain, and the personal

framing which the patient wished to introduce, in anticipation of moving into a non-professional setting. Research by Emmott (1994) applying frame theory to the analysis of narrative discourse has given evidence that frames may change in two ways: either by frame shift (where the author brings about a complete scene change) or by frame modification (where the reader has to adjust to one element within the frame changing, as in the case where one character is no longer there).

1.2.2 The concept of the grapholect

If we are to study the nature of the language which prevails in the discourse communities which influence the practice of (and, to some extent, constitute) universities, we need to make use of linguistic concepts which have developed for the study of intra-lingual variation. English, of course, manifests itself in many varieties, commonly distinguished under the headings dialects and registers, or functional varieties. University education clearly operates in the dialect we call standard English and employs a range of registers which vary according to the fields of specialisation. There is, however, a dimension which escapes the dialect/register dichotomy and which may be seen to be fundamental to the linguistic practice of universities: that is, the dimension of writing-oriented as opposed to speaking-oriented language.

The sociolinguist Einar Haugen (1972:164), in the context of a discussion of linguistics and language planning, observed that, if the speech of an individual were committed to writing, it would no longer be that individual's speech: it would have gone through a process of inevitable editing, analysis, delay and stabilisation. It would have been transformed into another medium, which Haugen called the grapholect. When we commit the speech of a whole community to writing, so that many different individual ways of talking may be represented by it, we have a *grapholect* which needs to be even further removed from the actuality of any one individual's speaking. It requires a double learning effort, first because it involves written encoding and second because it cannot represent the actuality of any individual's speech.

Developing on Haugen's concept, Walter Ong, in his influential book *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* (1982), put forward the thesis that, on the basis of the kind of language which has evolved within them, we may distinguish two kinds of cultures: primary oral cultures and literate cultures. A true primary oral culture is one which has no contact at all with the written word. There are very few such cultures remaining in the world today. There is, however, a long and complex historical process which needs to take place for the progressive transformation of the language of a primary oral culture into the language of a literate culture. In the case of English, we can observe stages where the language, in its more widespread use, was much closer to that of a primary oral culture than it was later to become.

There is a widespread view of literacy which sees it as a tool or a technology (cf. Ong 1982) which is equally applicable to the needs of all people and which needs to be imparted to as many people as possible to provide them with more equal access

to the benefits of the modern world. Recent studies on cross-cultural literacy, particularly reported by Street (1993, 1995), have thrown into question the idea of a single or 'autonomous' model of literacy. Rather, it has been argued, there are multiple literacies, even within a single society, and the assumption that only one model should be recognised through the education systems is ideologically inspired and privileges the literacy conventions of one class-based group over others.

Associated with this 'literacy as technology vs. literacy as ideology' debate is a controversy related to the supposed advantages which literacy (understood in the sense of the autonomous model) holds over orality. It was argued by Ong that literate cultures have access to a qualitatively different language (the grapholect), and, through it, to a different way of thinking, *text-formed thought*, which makes possible different modes of expression and different linguistic practices, such as studying. Ong saw oral codes as 'restricted' and the grapholect, by contrast, as bearing 'the marks of millions of minds which have used it to share their consciousnesses with others' (p. 107). Through the grapholect it was possible to free language from the context of the existential present, from particularities of dialect, from dependence on situational, intonational discursual supports to memory and from 'fixed, formulaic thought patterns' (p. 24).

In some ways, as Sledd (1988), Street (1995), Finnegan (1988) and others have shown, Ong overstated his case. The generalisations he made were too broad; the assumption of the cultural and ideological neutrality of the grapholect could easily be refuted; the relationship he claimed between linguistic expression and thinking was seen to be implausible. Street (1993, 1995), in particular, accused him of proposing a 'great divide' between orality and literacy which did not exist. By generalising without sufficient knowledge of cultures other than that of the western middle class, he had failed to appreciate the different ways in which orality and literacy might be constructed in differing societies.

However, while recognising that Ong's case was overstated (perhaps because it was illustrated by reference to the extreme case of a primary oral culture by contrast with the equally extreme case of a unified global English culture based on the grapholect) we should not overstate the case against him. The grapholect does exist and its domination in the education system cannot be accounted for in ideological terms alone. It carries out functions which cannot be carried out by oral-based varieties. Similarly, although we may not readily find a primary oral culture in the present day, we will find many cultures which have come into contact with print much more recently than others and in which the alternatives to the use of the grapholect are not so much what Street (1995) calls 'social literacies' as oral speech practices. Such a culture, or group of cultures, we would argue, is exemplified in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society.

1.2.3 The concept of the literacy event

Another concept which we have used in this analysis is that of the *literacy event*. This may be seen to be an extension of Hymes's concept of the *speech event*, which

he defined loosely as 'Activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech' (1972:56). Anderson, Teale and Estrada, whose conceptualisation has been utilised by both Heath (1983:386) and Baynham (1993), have defined literacy events as 'any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role' (1980:59). Heath extends the concept beyond that of Anderson, Teale and Estrada, who divided literacy events into two types (reading events and writing events) by stressing the relevance of oral language, which 'reinforces, denies, extends, or sets aside the written material' (p. 386). Heath argued that the ways in which written language is talked about are carefully regulated in literacy events and she implied that the literacy event could be considered a subset of the speech event.

Literacy events typically occur in schools, although they may also have their reflection in practices which take place in the home and community (Heath 1983; Breen et al. 1995). In higher education the use of language related to existing or intended writing is so fundamental as to be virtually inseparable from most of the communicative events which go on. Thus we are of the view that the production and comprehension of print are so pervasive in higher education as to enter, directly or indirectly, into all events associated with learning, including independent study, receiving lectures, participating in tutorials and small group discussions and engaging in one-on-one discussions with tutors.

When students read before the lecture, when they have reading material expounded in lectures, when they discuss readings or questions which have been presented to them on handouts, when they write assignments and get feedback on how they have written them, and when they sit for examinations, students are engaging in literacy events, events which normally are dominated by the grapholect.

It is an assumption of the Edith Cowan University team that the types of literacy events used in higher education constitute a process of *reception*, *integration*, *expression* and *review* of communication based on the written word. Essentially this is a study cycle around which the life of the university student revolves. (See Table 1). On an individual basis, the *reception* of the written word typically takes place as the student is involved in reading, computer searching or taking notes in lectures and seminars. It takes place in a group context where students listen to lectures, seminar presentations or media presentations (though these may, of course, also be received individually). Brainstorming, in student groups, although apparently totally oral, may often also involve mediation of the written word.

The heart of the study cycle occurs when the student is involved in a process of *integration* of that new learning which has been accessed through such reception processes into his or her existing knowledge. This involves such individual activities as notetaking, summarising, preparing assignments, preparing for tests and revising one's lecture notes. It also takes place in such group activities as tutorials, small group interactions, collaborative project work and making oral response to material which has been presented by other students.

	<i>RECEPTION</i>	<i>INTEGRATION</i>	<i>EXPRESSION</i>	<i>REVIEW</i>
INDIVIDUAL ACTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: • before lectures • during lectures • after lectures • computer searching • taking notes in lectures and seminars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study: • reading • notetaking • summarising • preparing assignments • preparing for tests and exams • revising lecture notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • producing assignments • sitting for exams • carrying out individual research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading and responding to marked work
GROUP ACTIVITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engaging in brainstorming groups • listening to lecturer presentations • listening to media presentations • listening to student presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participating in tutorials • participating in small group work • carrying out collaborative projects • responding to other students' presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presenting seminar papers • carrying out collaborative research • reporting on research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • receiving and responding to lecturer oral evaluations

Table 1 The Tertiary Study Cycle: Embedding of the written word in literacy events

The third stage in the cycle is that which involves the *expression* of what has been learned. Individually, students may carry this out by producing assignments, sitting for examinations and carrying out individual research. On a group basis, they may present seminar papers, report on research or collaborate in research. All of these expressions of learning are typically subject to evaluation by lecturers and often by fellow students.

Finally, there is the *review* stage, where the student considers the evaluation which has been given of what he or she has expressed. This involves, for example, reading and interpreting what has been written on essays, or receiving and responding to feedback given orally by the lecturer. Table 1 summarises the processes which underlie literacy events at university. All these activities, based as they are on the written word, may be characterised as literacy events and as such they may be analysed within a common sociolinguistic framework.

Literacy events, like speech events (Hymes 1972:56), constitute a part of the complex of behaviours on which the communicative competence of a member of a speech community is judged. They are learned behaviours, which are culture-specific and even sub-culture specific. It follows from this that the *framing* of literacy events may not be unproblematic. Different participants may impose differing frames on the same event on the basis of the assumptions which they may bring to it from prior experience in different socio-cultural contexts or on the basis of the different values they may place on the contextualisation cues available in the course of the event to guide its interpretation.

1.3 Methodology

The research team, consisting of an applied linguist, a half time graduate research assistant and consultants with an Aboriginal community base was guided by a steering committee composed of Aboriginal staff members of Edith Cowan University and the University of Western Australia. Data collection was carried out over a period of eighteen months on two separate campuses of Edith Cowan University.

1.3.1 Oral data

Oral data were gathered ethnographically. Observations were made in two kinds of classes: first, classes in the Aboriginal University Orientation Course (AUOC), which involves students who are not yet involved in degree-level studies, and secondly, block release classes with Aboriginal Education Workers, who are studying externally for a degree in education but come onto campus on occasions for intensive periods of instruction and support.

The research assistant, when consent was given, attended classes and the literacy events which took place. It was decided that no tape recording be carried out as this would have been too intrusive in the context and might have inhibited the students. The research assistant frequently became more of a participant than a

non-participant observer as students engaged her in conversation about the content of classes or the research. The data gathered were in the form of detailed field notes, retrospective notes, supplemented by informal interviews with both staff and students and questionnaire responses.

A large number of class and one-to-one interactions were observed and, where appropriate, discussed informally with the participants. In addition, staff of the centre (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) were informally interviewed.

1.3.2 Written data

Students were also invited to submit samples of their written work for analysis of discourse features. Written data were analysed in terms of the circumtextual, extratextual, intertextual and intratextual influences on the student writer. The impact of these frames was measured using Chafe's (1982, 1985) classification of oral and written discourse features.

1.3.3 Interview data

Students on one campus of Edith Cowan University were invited to take part in an interview where issues related to coming to terms with the literacy requirements of university were discussed. Fifteen students were interviewed. On these occasions tape-recordings were made with the written permission of participants.

1.4 Scope of the study

Given the particular problems of this student population in relation to course completion, the research team was especially interested in the cross-cultural implications of literacy events in the higher education setting and their impact on the communication between academic staff and Indigenous students.

1.4.1 Cultural dimension of literacy events

The apparent naturalness of literacy events to those who are familiar with them is deceptive. These events are embedded in a cultural context and are, in Hymes' words 'directly governed by rules for the use of speech' (1972:56). The present research was preceded at Edith Cowan University by a study in which students were observed in their participation in literacy events at different year levels (Malcolm and Deng 1995). In this study it was observed that students in their first semester at the university participated in group discussions differently from students at graduate level. The first year students, by contrast with the graduate students, were concerned to display what they knew rather than to draw out from their fellows what they knew or were thinking. Similarly, a difference was observed between Australian and overseas students working in discussion groups. The

Australian students discussed the matter which had been assigned, reached finality, and switched to another speech event. The overseas students, however, observed the total time available as needing to be occupied with the assigned work. Observations such as these demonstrate that even what appear to be completely open and unstructured literacy events are in fact part of a learned culture.

If literacy events are culturally embedded, so too is literacy itself. It follows from our earlier discussion about the grapholect that some societies, or sub-cultures, have been intensively exposed to the grapholect for millennia, whereas others are still more comfortable in settings where the grapholect plays only a minor part. According to Ong (1982:2) the earliest script dates from 6000 years ago. The cultural focus on literacy is, then, more longstanding in some cultures than in English-speaking culture. The Chinese, whose writing form predates that of Western Europe, retain a close association of artistic and cultural formation with the mastery of calligraphy, something which is more peripheral to most English native speakers. Likewise, the imperative to see their children formally educated is something which, for many Chinese parents, justifies significant financial and other sacrifices, perhaps to a greater extent than for most Australian parents.

Harmer and McConnochie (1985:76) have argued that the adoption of literacy by societies has been associated with the development of a new epistemological base — a new way of looking at the world. They see literacy as associated with an ability to separate the past more effectively from the present, to develop the kind of scepticism which is required by science and to develop an awareness of alternatives to established beliefs.

The same authors observe that literacy has still not been effectively embedded into Aboriginal culture in Australia:

Literacy has not yet been well-established amongst many Aboriginal communities, and for those groups which bore the brunt of white expansion in the nineteenth century, cultural disintegration occurred well before there were any serious attempts to develop literacy. Indeed, it was not until the 1950s that the levels of literacy became significant amongst Aboriginal people, by which time traditional cultures in many places had been changed beyond recognition.

(Harmer & McConnochie 1985:74)

Aboriginal Australia is, then, much closer to a primary oral culture than is most of the rest of Australia. It has a rich and longstanding oral tradition which has been retained during a period when there has been much less access to literacy even in the twentieth century than for most Australians. In some places, it still is a 'predominantly oral culture' (Eggington 1992:95). In view of this, it would not be unreasonable to assume that there is a certain foreignness about the grapholect for many Aboriginal people, and that Aboriginal students coming into higher education might carry with them, in many cases, a resistance to adopting communicative practices which are based on it. Perhaps this shows in the fact that the participation of Aboriginal school leavers in higher education is comparatively low (Ward and Pincus 1992). It may also show in the ways in which Aboriginal students respond to the literacy events of higher education. To some extent, the research reported on here represents an attempt to find out whether or not this is so.

1.4.2 Culturally based differences in higher education

Universities in the present day have been subject to increasing pressure to reduce dependency for funding on governments, to guarantee to their stakeholders that they are quality providers, to relate their offerings to the needs of the global marketplace, to follow the example of industry in the way in which they manage their affairs, and to welcome competition from all comers. This changing university culture is not limited to one country: parallel changes are taking place all over the world, and the changes are forcing universities to look beyond the boundaries of their immediate communities for partnerships, for solutions to their problems and for markets. The move towards an international student market is now well advanced in Australia, although the policy of admitting overseas students on a full paying basis to Australian universities is only a little over ten years old.

The wide-scale entry of international students into Australian universities has brought a new dimension into the higher educational experience. The incoming students, whose homes are for the most part in Asia, are bringing new traditions of study, new concepts of knowledge and new forms of discourse into their host institutions. Concepts of education which for many years had been normalised within Australian universities have come into question. With education becoming increasingly client-driven, institutions have had, for their own survival, to consider whether or not they need to learn new discourses appropriate to their increasingly new clientele.

In 1994 at Edith Cowan University a research project was carried out under funding from the university's Student Equity Committee to discover whether or not students of non-English speaking background were being treated with equity in their experiences in the university. Ethnographic techniques were employed to gather data from lecture and tutorial rooms and to inquire into the views of students of all backgrounds and of their lecturers. This project resulted in the publication of a report entitled 'Worlds Apart', in which it was shown that there were vast differences separating local and overseas students in their conceptions of crucial communicative events taking place in the university, and vast differences also separating the official self-perception of the university from the actual perceptions of the students who were enrolled in it (Malcolm and McGregor 1995). The report resulted in the commissioning of a staff development programme to be made available through the computer network to alert staff to some of the things they need to be aware of with respect to cultural differences affecting the expectations of overseas students in university settings (Rochecouste 1996). It is, then, recognised within the university that not all students approach their learning experiences in the same way, or in the same way as their lecturers and that cultural inflexibility on the part of university lecturers may sometimes exacerbate student problems.

An Australia-wide study of student outcomes (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1995), compared the progress of students on a number of

criteria. One of the findings of this report was that student progress differed significantly according to cultural and linguistic difference. It was found that the progress rate was 87% for students who spoke English at home, 82% for students from non-English speaking backgrounds and 67% for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. These findings suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may well be the group most disadvantaged by the cultural inflexibility of the higher education system.

Table 2 provides statistical information on the total number of completions, deferments and withdrawals/terminations by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in each Faculty at Edith Cowan University from 1988 to 1995.

Table 2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments at Edith Cowan University 1988-1995

<i>FACULTY</i>	<i>STILL ENROLLED N (%)</i>	<i>COMPLETED N (%)</i>	<i>DEFERRED N (%)</i>	<i>WITHDRAWN/ TERMINATED N (%)</i>
ARTS	134 (14.6)	121 (13.2)	50 (5.5)	612 (66.7)
BUSINESS	3 (17.6)	2 (11.8)	5 (29.4)	7 (41.2)
EDUCATION	30 (14.3)	26 (12.4)	22 (10.5)	132 (62.9)
HEALTH & HUMAN SCIENCES	17 (17.5)	9 (9.3)	18 (18.6)	53 (54.6)
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ENGINEERING	6 (19.4)	7 (22.6)	2 (6.5)	16 (51.6)
WA ACADEMY	4 (10.3)	19 (48.7)	1 (2.6)	15 (38.5)
ALL FACULTIES	194 (14.8)	184 (14.0)	99 (7.5)	836 (63.7)

Source: Institutional Research & Statistics Branch, Edith Cowan University.

1.5 Discourse conventions in Aboriginal society

One major disadvantage which confronts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on entering university is the marked difference between Aboriginal discursual features and those of higher education. A number of features can be identified in Indigenous discourse which suggest that it is diametrically opposed to that of academia.

1.5.1 Contextualisation

Traditionally, Aboriginal people relate their communication to the physical and personal context in many ways. It is an important principle that communication takes place in the open, usually with the participants sitting on the ground. For a person to withdraw from the open and public communicative setting might cause them to come under suspicion. There are constraints on whom one may face, with whom one may sit, on what level one may communicate (that is, one cannot

communicate to somebody sitting without sitting oneself). Contextual factors also have a bearing on what may be talked about, employing what varieties and what genres (see further Malcolm 1980-82:63-68). Context and communication are inseparable.

The strong orientation to context is something which Aboriginal society shares with many traditional rural-based societies and which, perhaps, helps to distinguish them from Western societies. According to Denny (1991:66), it is a distinctive property of Western thought that it operates in a decontextualized way, disconnecting what is talked about from other things that may be backgrounded. This he relates to our inheritance from classical Greek times and from literacy. A number of authors have specifically related the use of contextualised or 'concrete' language to Australian Aborigines (Bain 1992, Gray 1990, Eggington 1992) and related it to problems of communication and of schooling in contexts where white norms of communication prevail. There is evidence that the use of decontextualized language by white people is a source of discomfort to Aborigines and its use by fellow Aborigines in Aboriginal contexts may be seen as 'betraying traditional aboriginal values' (Eggington 1992:93). The problems of the encounter of people from an oral-based culture with the decontextualized language of the education system have been referred to recently by Davidson (1996:154) in describing experience in teaching academic literacy to black Africans at Rhodes University:

The need to reinforce the difference between context-specific or spoken communication and context-independent or written communication was considered fundamental to the writing process in which respondents engaged with students... restricting the process of writer-learning to written codes may seriously disadvantage black African learners whose cultural identity is more comfortably matched to an oral, consultative approach to learning

The attention of Aboriginal learners to context may be misinterpreted by non-Aboriginal teachers and fellow classmates as inattention to the matter in hand. Such misinterpretation could lead to prejudgment which, in turn, could lead to alienation of Aboriginal students from learning contexts, perhaps contributing to the over-high attrition rate.

1.5.2 Participation

A second feature of the Aboriginal oral culture is participation. It was noted by Sansom (1980) in his study of patterns of interaction within a Darwin fringe community that communications of significance were seen by members of that community to be a commonly held possession of the group and could only be accessed through a member of the group who was authorised to pass them on. Inquirers who asked an unauthorised person for information would normally be told 'I dunno' or 'I caan say' and referred on to the right person, even though the person originally asked might have known the requested information. In talk among children of school age we observed that information tended to be given accompanied by confirmation-seeking devices on the part of the speaker and

confirmation-giving devices on the part of other members of the group. Indeed, Aboriginal English has a repertoire of tag forms such as *ana*, *inti*, *init*, etc., which serve the purpose of seeking confirmation. The giving of confirmation may be by utterances such as 'Yeah', or by repeating what the speaker has said or saying it with the speaker (see further Malcolm 1994b).

Walsh (1966) has summed up one of the key features of Aboriginal communication by describing it as communal or group oriented rather than dyadic as is common in western society. That is, Aboriginal people, at least in traditional settings, are more comfortable being spoken to in the group context rather than being addressed on an individual basis.

The principle of participation may also be observed in such practices as joint narration of stories, cooperative singing of songs, whereby one singer takes over from another as the voice gets tired and audience involvement, by way of interjected comments and questions (see further Malcolm 1980-82).

In the acceptance of storytelling as a participative performance event, Aboriginal communities may be compared with orally-oriented communities in many cultures, including pockets within western cultures, as described, for example by Bauman (1986).

1.5.3 Personalisation

The oral culture is, of necessity, personalised. Speakers are interacting face to face and typically are well known to one another. It is characteristic of members of Aboriginal communities to seek to locate newcomers with respect to kin connections so that there is a personalised basis on which ongoing communication may proceed. This need may be so strong that, in traditional contexts, non-Aboriginal visitors may be assigned a classificatory kin relationship if their stay is extended.

While oral-based societies are of necessity personalised in their communicative behaviours, they still possess the capacity to avoid personal identification with what is said when necessary. Finnegan (1988:66) has shown that one way in which distancing is achieved in African narrations is to 'clothe their characters in animal form rather than speaking directly about, say, the quirks or the virtues of everyday people.' A similar practice may be found in Aboriginal society.

Personalisation may also be observed in the way in which Aboriginal storytellers or information-givers defer to the rights of the owner of the story or the authorised holder of the information. It is, as Sansom puts it, 'an Aboriginal cultural verity [that] the given word is to be treated both as created object and as a property held in possession' (1980:24). Not only is the ownership of the material being communicated personalised, but also the content. We have observed among Aboriginal children an insistence on getting the identity of the participants right. This is apparent in the following extract:

... then me and Patrick was playing round for- bird,
then we was sittin' down,
and after, and me, Michael an' Christopher, we 'ent up Tank Hill;
then Christopher see us walking along,
last, no, first Michael, me, no Christopher then me,
we 'ent along,
then Christopher fell down
so 'e hurt 'is knee ...

(Malcolm, 1994a)

1.5.4 Shame Avoidance

We have argued elsewhere (Malcolm 1994b) that it is possible to relate discourse strategies which characterise Aboriginal communication to two pervasive principles: shame avoidance and conflict avoidance. These behaviours in some ways are comparable to what has been called in the pragmatic literature positive politeness and negative politeness.

Shame refers to the experience of the individual being set apart in some way from the group, either because one has fallen short of group expectations by, for example, having spoken or acted out of turn, or because one has been thrust into prominence by being focused upon, even if it is for some worthy achievement. To avoid shame, it is safest to say too little rather than too much and to use indirect rather than direct communication strategies.

1.5.5 Conflict Avoidance

Conflict avoidance is shown in communicative strategies which will favour harmony over what might be seen as referential efficiency. For example, Aboriginal speakers have been observed to avoid expressing disagreement, although disagreement may be inferred from the fact that they express a different opinion from that which the other speaker has expressed. In cross-cultural communication, they may express agreement without intending it to be assumed that they endorse what has been said. The agreement may be social rather than referential in nature. Aboriginal people also, at least in some traditional contexts, afford the receiver of a question the right to decide whether or not to respond to it. Avoiding conflict in communication may subordinate the instrumental function of the communication to the social function (see further Malcolm 1994b).

It is sometimes the experience of teachers to find that their Aboriginal students approach their school learning experiences on the basis of conflict avoidance. A group of Aboriginal teachers, reflecting on their school experience, 'realised that the main purpose of their reading lessons was to please the teacher' (reported by Theresa Ward 1982:45).

In another, but comparable context, in South Africa, Davidson (1996:156) observed that there is a problem among African students in the context of higher education that they may *imitate* the discourse they find accepted there but by doing so 'mask genuine understanding'.

1.6 Discourse conventions of higher education

The discourse features of Aboriginal society described above can be seen to contrast sharply with those of higher education.

1.6.1 Pervasive use of the grapholect

As we have observed, the grapholect is fundamental to communication in higher education literacy events (see above). The written word is, as it were, the password without which nobody can even enter the networks of higher learning. Access to knowledge as it is institutionalised in universities is by way of access to recognised discourse communities and these discourse communities, as Swales (1990) has pointed out, define themselves through conventions for the use of the written word. Students must first learn the codes, so that they can access the learning, and then they must learn to use the codes so that they may receive the imprimatur of the university as potential members of these communities after graduation. For this reason, even the oral discourse of lecturers and tutors is heavily metalinguistic and focused on the proper use of the language appropriate to the disciplines with which they are concerned.

This characteristic discourse of higher education differs from the discourse of the world of orality not only in the extent but also in the nature of its vocabulary. As Olson and Astington (1990) have pointed out, it prefers a more remote, Latin-based vocabulary to the more familiar Germanic vocabulary of English, and makes extremely complex discriminations in certain speech act and mental state verbs which are relevant to the expression of views about texts and their interpretations. The grapholect which the student must master, as Ong puts it, contrasts with the language of the oral based culture in that it 'makes "words" appear similar to things' (1982:11).

To the student whose primary identification is with an oral-based variety, the grapholect may represent not only an instrument to access learning but an arbitrary barrier to learning and a symbol of the alienness of the social class to which that variety may be seen to belong.

1.6.2 Synchronisation of participation

A second aspect of the discourse which prevails in higher education is its synchronisation. Typically, at least at the undergraduate level, students are expected to progress through their courses at the same rate. They read the same textbook chapters or references at the same point, as directed by the lecturer, and they receive lectures in a set sequence. Such a pattern of communication contrasts with that which is described by Walsh (1996) as typical of traditional Aboriginal

groups, where learning is not pieced up into fixed and sequenced segments but is rather continuous.

In terms of the discourse of the university classroom, there is an expectation that turn taking conventions will be followed and that people will speak independently of one another. There is little or no place for the oral-culture oriented conventions of joint or simultaneous responding or of being silent in response to a question, nor is there normally an opportunity for the seeking and offering of confirmation in the way it occurs in Aboriginal contexts.

University pedagogical discourse, at least as observed in Australian contexts, is also characterised by unidirectionality on the part of the lecturer, who may resist attempts from students to interrupt to pursue matters they may wish to have expansion on. In the following example from an Aboriginal class we see the lecturer's sequencing being held to despite the desire of the student to interrupt it:

Lecturer: (introduces the idea of the World Wide Web)

Student: Why are you calling it a web?

Lecturer: I'll come to that.

Student: Is that like the internet?

Lecturer: Yes, I'll be talking about that too.

(AUOC Computing 11.6.96)

1.6.3 Decontextualisation

Compared with the discourse of the oral-based culture, the discourse of the higher education setting is decontextualized. The link between person and information which is so important in Aboriginal contexts is broken, and information is taught about typically in the passive. Students are expected in a similar way to disconnect their own experience from the material they are discussing or writing about and be dispassionate and objective. It is normally dysfunctional for them to be affected by the immediate context, in the physical sense, in that this constitutes distraction. The context is, however, relevant in that it provides what Street (1995:114) has called 'space labelling', that is, it is symbolically and physically cut off from the outside world where, for the person oriented to orality, one would 'tend to use concepts in situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract in the sense that they remain close to the living human lifeworld' (Ong 1982:49). Here, the grapholect prevails and one's idiosyncratic or community oriented experience is kept in parentheses.

1.6.4 Assessment

A fourth distinguishing feature of the literacy events of higher education is that they fit into a structure of assessment. The context is potentially highly shame-inducing, in that one may be isolated from the group and expected to interact in a dyadic way with the lecturer, who may well assess one's contributions. Whether

the assessment is positive or negative, shame may be occasioned. There is also the need to be prepared for assessment in the written form and, although the student may be able to imitate the grapholect orally, the demands of assignment and examination paper writing may take longer to acquire.

2.0 ABORIGINAL PARTICIPATION IN THE DISCOURSE COMMUNITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The term *discourse community* has been helpfully used by John Swales (1990) to refer to special interest groups whose members communicate with one another by means of a number of mainly written mechanisms and which possess one or more established genres and some specific lexis which they hold in common. For Swales, a discourse community may be distinguished from a *speech community* in that the former is a socio-rhetorical grouping while the latter is a sociolinguistic one. In a sense then, higher education institutions form specific discourse communities into which new students must be initiated. When the discourse conventions of Aboriginal society are matched with those of higher education, students will create their own discourse communities. This has been made possible by the introduction of Aboriginal Student Centres.

The concept of *discourse community* may be seen to relate to universities in both its broader and its narrower interpretation. First, universities are important repositories of the products of discourse communities and incorporate many of their members. Second, they help to maintain discourse communities by contributing to the professional formation of successive cohorts of new members who can understand and employ the appropriate discourse. Third, they sustain constantly renewing temporary groupings of communicating members whose unifying discourses are the literacy events of the undergraduate environment.

In the 'Worlds Apart' report Malcolm and McGregor (1995) suggested that students who were native speakers of English could be distinguished from students who were non-native speakers of English with respect to the communicative strategies they employed in classrooms and in service encounters. In some cases, the same literacy event was viewed as functionally different by students from these two groups. These findings were not entirely unexpected, however an unexpected finding was that neither group of students showed a close identification with the university's official view of itself as a community of learning. The groups of students studied revealed themselves as sub-communities within the wider university community in which they viewed their membership as less than complete.

2.1 The experience of the 'novice'

There is, at present, no Aboriginal university in Australia and so Aboriginal students experience university life as members of a small and culturally divergent minority. For many such students entering university life is associated with stress and fear. Louise Kearing (1977), described in a conference paper her experience in entering higher education in 1976 as a mature aged student in the following terms:

One of the most frightening things that I faced in coming to college was mixing with white people. I hadn't much mixed with them before coming here because in Pinjarra, the whites and the Aboriginals don't mix very much...So coming here meant the opening up of a whole new world.

(Kearing 1977:65)

She observed that her main support in the adjustment to higher education came from meeting and sharing experiences with other Aboriginal students, especially since they knew that, among Aborigines outside of the institution, they might suffer being labelled 'bigheads' (p. 66).

Experiences like that of Louise Kearing were matched by those of many other Aboriginal students as they began to find places in higher education in the early 70s. Understandably, many such students expressed the desire to have some place on campus where they could be surrounded only by Aboriginal people and could relax and be themselves rather than, as students in one survey put it, having to 'act like students' (Sherwood, et al. 1980:117).

2.2 Aboriginal student centres

It was in response to such requests that the idea of the *Aboriginal Student Enclave* (now generally referred to as Aboriginal Student Centres) arose. An Australian Government report described enclaves in the following terms:

Enclaves are support programs which provide Aboriginal people enrolled in standard courses in tertiary institutions with additional support to enable them to cope with the often alien atmosphere of a tertiary institution. The essential elements of an enclave program are:

a) provision of staff whose role is to assist students in dealing with their course work and developing the necessary skills to proceed through the course to graduation. This involves both counselling support and providing ... for special tutorials i.e. personal and academic support.

b) provision of a separate area for students' use.

(House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education, 1985:152)

The student centre, then, is a clearly marked sub-community within the University, with its own area and with certain designated staff. Within the centre, students may interact with one another on their own terms and receive help in as diverse areas as study needs, accommodation, child care and finances.

The first such centre was established in the South Australian Institute of Technology, Adelaide, around 1973, but by the mid 80s they had become standard provisions in higher education institutions in response to the fact that the existence of a centre became the deciding factor, as far as many Aboriginal students were concerned, as to whether or not they would enrol (House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education 1985:152-153). The popularity and success of Aboriginal Student Centres is well documented (e.g. Sherwood, et al. 1980; House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education 1985). They have come to be commonly provided not only for on-campus but for off-campus Aboriginal students through regional centres in rural and remote areas (Hubble 1982). For the non-traditional Aboriginal student they have been one of the significant factors in improving Aboriginal participation in higher education (Sherwood, in House of Representatives Select Committee on Aboriginal Education 1985:153).

Aboriginal student centres provide a kind of 'half-way-house' for Aboriginal students in higher education and as such they are associated with distinctive discourse patterns. These are shown in a range of particular literacy events which take place in the centres, including one-to-one tutoring and counselling, special intensive tuition for students from rural areas spending 'block release' weeks on campus, and other kinds of lectures and classes which operate distinctively because of the 100% Aboriginal composition of the class. There is also the student common room in which students are free to drop the 'student act' and allow Aboriginal discourse conventions to prevail.

Students will use the centre in between lectures and to pass their lunch break. They are able to read daily newspapers and browse through magazines in the common room and conversation frequently includes sporting events, the night life of the city and family events. The students often have characteristic ways of referring to one another by nicknames relating to their social or work life. The core values of the centre included, predominantly, enjoyment of the group life, sharing and a lack of pretension.

2.3 Student centre discourse

As a discourse community, the core of the student centre could be briefly characterised as follows:

SENDERS/RECEIVERS:	Aboriginal members
MESSAGE FORMS:	Phatic exchanges, joking, teasing, name-calling.
	Reading as a group-oriented activity (i.e. quoting to the group from magazine articles in the course of reading)
CHANNELS:	Face-to-face spoken communication, supported by extensive non-verbal communication, including constant laughter and frequent physical contact
CODES:	Standard English, casual style
TOPICS:	Personal behaviour and attributes of group members, social activities, family life, shared experience (not including the subject matter of course work)
SETTINGS:	Aboriginal student common room, lecture rooms between lectures.
FUNCTIONS:	Solidarity; reinforcement of group values, setting the higher education experience within an agreed group perspective.

The discourse conventions of the student centre are not always typical of informal student interaction on the campus at large. The essence of the distinctiveness of the behaviour might be best expressed by the observation that the students interact like a

big family, with constant good-humoured teasing and ready displays of mutual trust and affection.

We observed earlier on that the existence of an Aboriginal Student Centre is one of the most important factors to many Aborigines in determining whether or not they will enter higher education. The ways in which communication functions in such centres show that it fills a need which in some students is particularly marked to switch out of the wider academic community and its heavily monitored communication styles and back to the secure environment of one's own people. This environment excludes things academic and is ruled by good humour and lack of pretension.

When the students emerge from the Aboriginal student common room and attend lectures in homogeneous classes with lecturers who are attached to the centre, it is not uncommon for them to carry over some of these communicative behaviours. This may involve use of Aboriginal English vocabulary and the interpolation into the discourse of jocular comments and group references. The student centre therefore provides a bridge for the Aboriginal student towards the discourse of the university.

3.0 FRAMING LITERACY EVENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

It has been argued by Reid (1993:15) that the literate and the oral traditions are in conflict to the point where the operation of the curriculum based on the practice of literacy results in the 'undermining' of the oral tradition. He sees, however, that it is possible to have 'a friendly, proto-literate culture which stresses narrative and contextualisation, de-emphasises strict evaluation, and allows learning to be "on demand" rather than rigidly sequential' (p. 20).

At the school level, Reid sees this as a subversive idea which might be implemented in locations where students come from low socio-economic groups and retain features of oral cultures. By this means, he suggests, students might be gradually introduced to literate modes of learning without experiencing alienation.

On the other hand, Rampton (1995) has observed that, at the secondary level in multicultural schools of the U.K., students may 'themselves undermine taken-for-granted realities and try to establish new conventions and assumptions where old ones no longer seem tenable' (p. 18). He sees one way of this happening as by their use of *heretical discourse* (p. 18) which symbolically asserts their alternative collective view to that which is embodied in institutionalised discourse.

3.1 Fixed and flexible framing

For the purposes of this research, the term 'framing' has been used to refer to the activity whereby participants in a communicative event reciprocally exhibit and interpret anticipated norms for the conduct of that event. Framing is typically provisional throughout the course of the communicative event as participants adjust or change frames. It has not been found possible or useful to identify and describe a set of frames, although it is assumed that, at any given point in time, for each participant, a frame exists, in the sense of an idealised working pattern or schema for a communicative event, or part thereof, which serves as a guide for one's participation in that event. What has been demonstrated here is a process of framing, or, perhaps more accurately in Ribeiro's terms, the 'struggle' between competing frames.

In contexts such as have been observed in this project, the framing of the literacy event is often problematic, in that the Aboriginal students and the lecturers are actively (though not necessarily consciously) engaged in maintaining their own respective frames which are, at least to some degree, mutually incompatible. The lecturers are employing frames which relate back to the higher education experience, and the students are employing frames which relate back to the experience of their community life. These contrasting frames entail the employment of different linguistic varieties, speech use features and content, which serve as *frame markers*.

Discourse (even written discourse) is, of course, essentially interactional and governed by sequencing rules which anticipate consistency with respect to the use of a particular register or variety, the observance of certain speech or writing conventions and the maintenance of topic. Generally, this is not a problem. One participant initiates communication in accordance with a given frame and the other participant (or participants) recognises the frame markers being employed, identifies the frame and follows suit, maintaining compatibility of variety, pragmatic features and topic.

However, when discourse has been initiated in accordance with a frame which is not shared, or not completely shared, by those who are expected to maintain it, problems arise. Will the receivers of the communication abandon their pre-existing frame for the one which has been summoned up by the frame markers employed by the first speaker, will they, by employing contrasting frame markers in their discourse, contest the choice of frame which the first speaker has made? And if they do this, how will the first speaker respond?

These questions have been found to be highly relevant to the interpretation of the discourse which characterises literacy events involving Aboriginal students in higher education. In order to account for the phenomena which we have observed, we have found it necessary to identify two approaches which may be taken to the framing of such events. *Fixed framing* is the framing activity which displays resistance to frame change or modification on the basis of evidence of contrasting frames being held by other participants; *flexible framing* is the framing activity which displays openness to frame change or modification on the basis of evidence of contrasting frames being held by other participants. Where communication takes place between parties not sharing the same frame, one side or the other will need to employ flexible framing if communication is to proceed harmoniously.

In fact, what we have observed is that, in some events, frames appear to converge and, in other events, fixed framing on the part of one side (e.g., the lecturer) occasions some degree of frame shift on the part of the other (e.g., the student). Often in the latter case, it seems that the frame shift reflects a desire on the Aboriginal students' part to take over the decontextualized language of the higher education system and *recontextualise* it, that is, give it content or discursal features which tie it to a particular, known context.

It is possible, along the lines just described, to provide an account of the data showing the framing of literacy events by both lecturers and students, with respect to both oral and written events/texts. In order to demonstrate the ways in which fixed and flexible framing operate within the discourse we need to show the options separately for lecturer and for student (these being essentially a mirror image of one another) and also separately for oral and written texts. This has been attempted in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

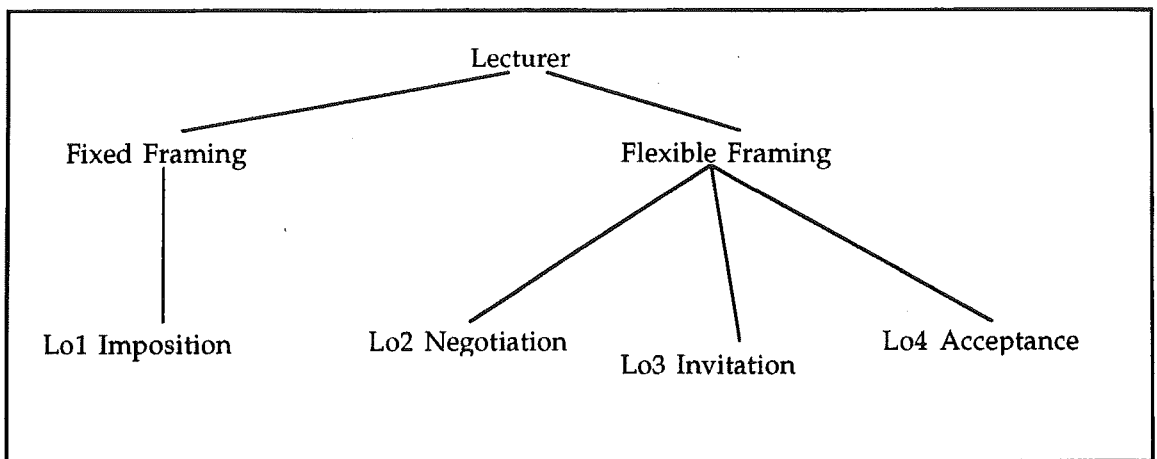


Figure 1 Oral texts: lecturer options

Figure 1 represents the lecturer's options in an oral-based literacy event, which could be, for example, a lecture, a tutorial, an interaction with a small group or a one-on-one counselling encounter. The diagram represents the options open to the lecturer at a given point in such an event, since we are concerned not with *frames* but with *framing*, which takes place on an ongoing basis and is constantly being monitored with respect to the feedback received. If the lecturer is employing fixed framing, there is no option open to the student but to conform to the frame that is imposed or else opt out of the event (for example by leaving the room). Fixed framing occurs where the lecturer takes no account of the fact that the student may be framing the event differently but simply presumes upon the compliance of the student within the frame which has been set up (see Example 1). If the lecturer employs flexible framing, he or she shows openness to frame modification or shift on the basis of student feedback. This may be shown by *negotiation* (see Example 2), where there is a readiness to discuss and possibly modify framing determinations, *invitation* (see Example 3), where the lecturer offers the option of determining the frame to the students, or *acceptance* (see Example 4), where the lecturer accedes to an initiative on the part of a student, or students, to modify or shift the frame.

Example 1: Lecturer Fixed Framing (oral event): **Lo1 Imposition**

Lecturer: What I want you to do now is move into pairs and talk about the first one and what can you learn from each other. You might not think it's significant but these first ideas are going to direct your research ... so just 5 minutes ... and some noise, I want to hear some ideas.

(AUOC '96)

(Here the lecturer's imposition of a frame is explicit in the initial directive: 'What I want you to do ...')

Example 2: Lecturer Flexible Framing (oral event): Lo₂ Negotiation

Lecturer: (referring to assignment preparation) So you know all about this.

Student: It's just putting it in those English words.

Lecturer: Just write as though you were talking to me, or writing a letter. 'Dear XX., I want to tell you about ...'

(Block Release '95)

(In this case, the lecturer is prepared to negotiate a modification of the frame).

Example 3: Lecturer Flexible Framing (oral event): Lo₃ Invitation

Lecturer: Okay, so see what you come up with and if you want to take yourself off to a corner of the room you can.

(AUOC '95)

(Here the lecturer takes the initiative in offering the students the opportunity to vary from the default frame).

Example 4: Lecturer Flexible Framing (oral event): Lo₄ Acceptance

Student: It's about how to collect stuff.

Lecturer: What sort of stuff do you collect.

(AUOC '95)

(Here the lecturer has picked up the alternative frame marker used by the student, 'stuff', and incorporated it into her own discourse, showing flexibility with respect to framing).

Figure 2 represents the options students commonly take in an oral-based literacy event. The anticipated option is for the student to engage in flexible framing and to conform to the pattern for the event which has been set up by the lecturer, if necessary by frame shift. The data we have gathered show that, at least in a passive way, most of the Aboriginal students do this (though discourse turns tend to be minimally filled). This framing activity we call acceptance (Example 5). On the other hand, the student may engage in fixed framing and oppose an alternative frame to that which may have been adopted by the lecturer. This may be done in an overt way, by some kind of metacommunicative exchange, in which case we call it contestation, or it may be done implicitly by performing acts which are appropriate to another frame, in which case we call it counter-framing. In each case, the acceptance or non-acceptance of the lecturer's frame is actualised in linguistic or pragmatic frame markers which are either supportive or unsupportive of decontextualized communication. Contestation of the lecturer's frame may take the form of *querying* its requirements (Example 6), or of *rejection* of them (Examples 7, 8, 9). Counter-framing may be expressed by acts which *modify* (Examples 10, 11), suspend *i.e.*, *disengagement*, (Examples 12, 13, 14), or completely bypass the framing expectations set up by the lecturer (*i.e.*, *substitution*, Examples 15, 16).

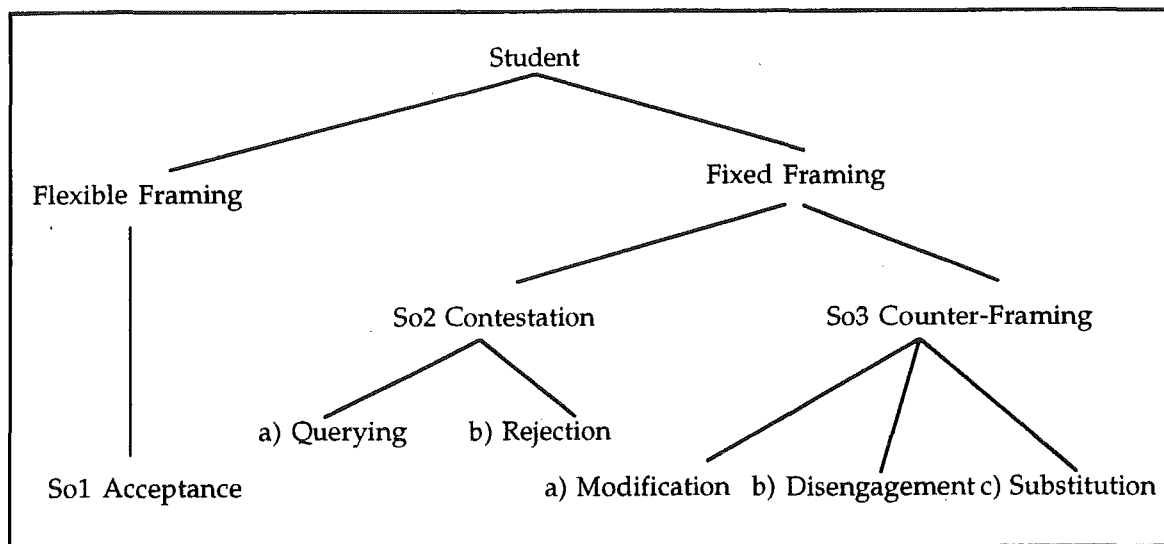


Figure 2 Oral texts: student options

Example 5: Student Flexible Framing (oral texts): So1 Acceptance

Lecturer: What you need to do is focus on the question ... What you have to get out of the Castles article is the laws about immigration in Australia, N.

Student: I understand what a summary is but I don't understand what I have to do. I don't understand in text and end text referencing.

Lecturer: Don't worry for now, we'll talk more about that later ...

(AUOC '95)

(Here the student's acceptance of the lecturer's framing is shown in her seeking of clarification of the requirements).

Example 6: Student Fixed Framing (oral texts): So2 Contestation (a) Querying

Lecturer: The answers are in the back.

Student: *(gasp)*

Student: *So why do we do it?*

Lecturer: No, the question is, 'Why has the lecturer put the answers in the back?'

Student: *So we can find the answers?*

Lecturer: No, so you can check your understanding.

(AUOC '95)

(The student reservations about the way in which the event is being framed are here made explicit, both by questioning what is being required, and by responding facetiously to the lecturer's question).

Example 7: Student Fixed Framing (oral texts): So2 Contestation (b) Rejection

Lecturer: (reads a paragraph)

Student: *Now you're going quick again.*

Lecturer: What? Sorry (rereads).

(AUOC '96)

(The lecturer responds here to a request for frame shift by slowing down his delivery).

Example 8: (second example of So2b)

Lecturer: It says pedagogical. Do you know that word?

Student: I don't like that word. I don't use it.

(Block Release '96)

(The frame marker, in the form of a lexical selection belonging to the grapholect, is overtly rejected by the student).

Example 9: (third example of So2b)

Lecturer: (Refers to an assignment which required students to obtain library information)

Student: I didn't do that. I couldn't find it.

Lecturer: You couldn't find it? Why didn't you ask?

Student: Nup. It's too shame.

(AUOC '96)

(The student here shows resistance to an information-seeking strategy which is inherent to the lecturer's framing of student behaviour. In this case, the behaviour is 'shame inducing' for the Aboriginal student)

Example 10: Student Fixed Framing (oral texts): So3 Counter-Framing (a) Modification

Lecturer: What words would you be looking for N?

Student: *(no response)*

Lecturer: What words would you be looking for?

Student: *(no response)*

Lecturer: We went through this last week.

Student: *(no response)*

(AUOC '96)

(Here the student achieves a modification of the discourse pattern by not taking the offered turns).

Example 11: (second example of So3a)

Student: (discussing assimilation policies)...they were concerned with the children learning European ways so the children were taken from their parents. I don't know how you would feel about having your children taken away.

Lecturer: Yes, there was an obsession about colour, breeding out colour.
(Block Release '95)

(The student here has changed the frame by contextualising the subject matter in a way which makes it personal to the lecturer).

Example 12: Student Fixed Framing (oral texts): **So3 Counter-Framing (b) Disengagement**

Lecturer: (asks for a response from a student whom the other students have been joking about for her frequent responding)

Student: I'll probably balls it all up now ...
(AUOC '96)

(The student, embarrassed by the fact that her frequent responding could be interpreted by her Aboriginal colleagues as shame inducing, emphasises her solidarity with them by a marked frame shift into the vernacular).

Example 13: (second example of So3b)

Lecturer: There's no board in here.

Students: Over there.

Lecturer: Oh, I'm left handed. A white board is terrible to use.

Student 1: *We all have our problems.*

Student 2: *That's bad organisation. Check your chalk and duster every day.*
(Block Release '95)

(Here the students shift the frame by responding to the lecturer, jocularly, on the basis of sharing a common role with him).

Example 14: (third example of So3b)

Student: For us it's a long time between courses. Like, I did Science first in 1991 and now I'm doing Science again years later. It's a long time between drinks (laughs).
(Block Release '95)

(The student has, with her final quip, shifted from the academic to the social frame).

Example 15: Student Fixed Framing (oral texts): So3 Counter-Framing (c) Substitution

Lecturer: What do we mean by gender inclusive curriculum?

Student: It's sort of having them involved like, you know, all of them are involved.

(Block Release '95)

(The student has substituted her own variety for the grapholect in making the meaning of this expression plain).

Example 16: (second example of So3c)

Lecturer: I thought you were going to stay over there?

Student: *I thought I'll join this mob.*

(Block Release '96)

(The Aboriginal English expression 'mob' is the marker of a frame shift here).

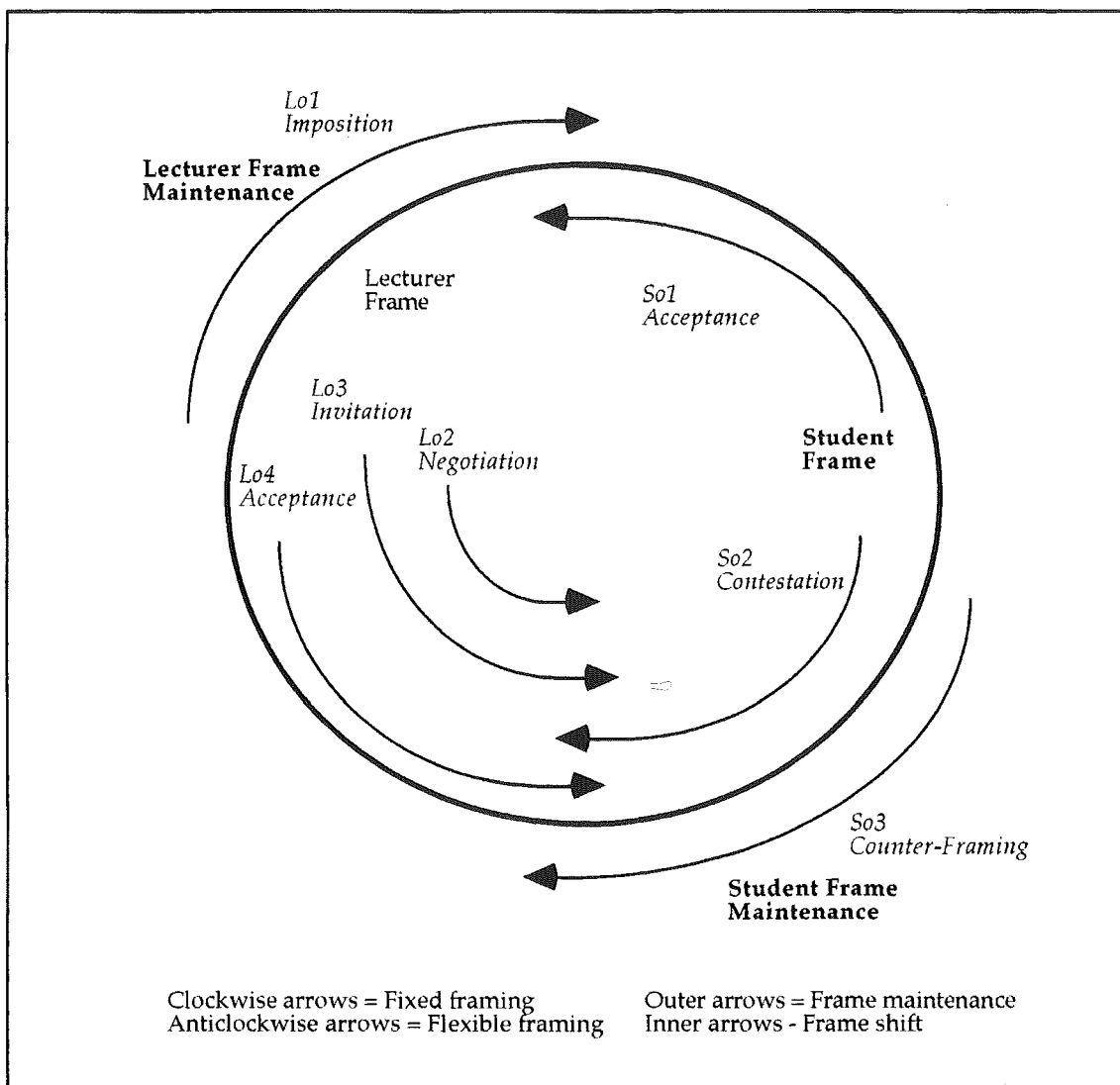


Figure 3 Fixed and flexible framing patterns of reciprocation

Communication cannot proceed if both parties continue to employ only fixed framing. A symmetry is maintained as fixed and flexible framing options are taken up on alternate sides. Figure 3 attempts to convey this.

In written literacy events, the same principles appear to apply, although the data analysed are less extensive than in the case of oral literacy events. The options taken in the data analysed are summarised in Figure 4.

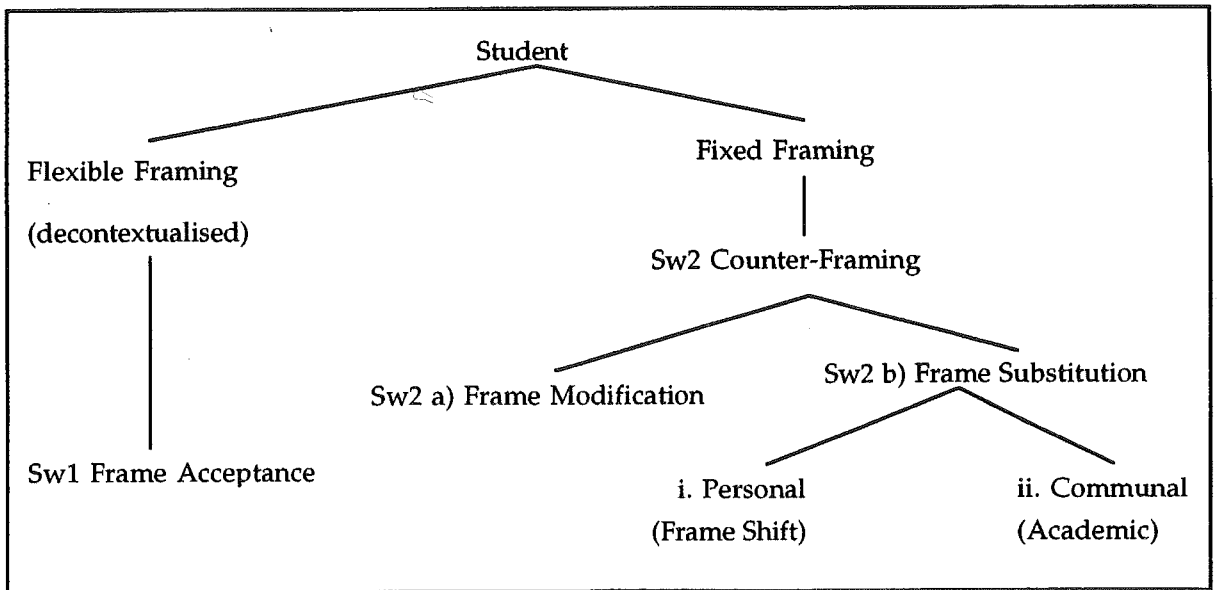


Figure 4 Written texts

The student, when writing, will either employ fixed framing, in which case he or she will carry over principles from contextualised communication domains into the domain of higher education, or else he or she will employ flexible framing and shift frames to follow the conventions of higher education. In the case where flexible framing is employed, the resultant text will demonstrate *acceptance* (see Examples 17, 18). Where fixed framing is employed the writing will demonstrate *counter-framing* and will either modify the higher education frame applying to the text concerned (i.e., *modification*, Example 19), or will substitute an indigenous frame for it (i.e., *substitution*, Example 20). We have observed two different cases of substitution, one employing a personal and one a communal frame.

Example 17: Student Flexible Framing (written texts): **Sw1 Frame Acceptance**
(Extract from an essay)

The need to carry out European work and stay alive dispersed groups and left little time for Aboriginal culture and tradition which was later to decline. The rituals of ceremonies which played a major part in earlier years became infrequent and the singing and dancing skills gradually declined, although they were not entirely lost. Young people were accused of losing interest in their heritage.

(AUOC student)

Example 18: (second example of Sw1 with non-Aboriginal topic)

The Oral Language Development Curriculum has been designed to assist children to effectively use the 'language of school'. To be successful, children must be able to control the specialised 'language of school'. School language is no better or worse than other means of communication, its only difference is that children do not encounter this language in everyday interaction. For example 'All eyes to the front' or 'Are we all sitting up straight and holding our pencils correctly'.

(3rd year student)

Example 19: Student Fixed Framing (written texts): Sw2 Counter-Framing (a) Frame Modification (Academic)

(In the last sentence of this paragraph there is a frame shift bringing about personalisation and contextualisation)

In Nyungar culture its important to allow brothers and sisters (extended family) be involved with the child, responsibility is given to other children to take care of babies from an early age. The strong relationships formed can help the baby to develop at a faster rate because the baby can imitate and learn from the other children. I think one of the reasons that Aboriginal babies walk sooner is because they are encouraged by older children to whom they have regular contact with (daily).

(1st year student)

Example 20: Student Fixed Framing (written texts): Sw2 Counter-Framing (b) Frame Substitution

(The frame substitution in this essay fragment begins in the last sentence of the extract)

After all the studying of the word culture, I still can't define the word culture. The dictionary says 'developed understanding of literature, art, music, etc; type of civilization; I'm still not sure of my own culture so I will just have to talk about my life so far. Let's see, I was born on the 12th of March 1977, in the small wheatbelt town of K..

(AUOC student)

Example 21: (second example of Sw2b, this time in the form of a Kura, or yarn)

We took off for home. Opportunity had come our way again. Charged up boys, meant easy pickins for us kids, we were always able to skab some dosh which would be pooled to buy fish, chips, scollops and Coke next day.

(2nd year student)

Example 22: (third example of Sw2b)

After the telling, there are calls of 'bullshit' from all quarters until someone said 'Stuff this let's go to the [placename] for a charge.' Agreement was instantaneous and unanimous.

(2nd year student)

Example 22 illustrates how the student may switch between frames for aesthetic effect in the course of a piece of creative writing.

3.2 Inclusion and exclusion

In Section 3.1 above it has been demonstrated that both the student and the academic lecturer or tutor in the higher educational setting have the capacity to manipulate the discourse of the particular literacy event. Examples show that the lecturer can alternate between imposing, negotiating, accepting or inviting strategies. In this section we view the discourses of higher education and of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in terms of how the lecturer might deliberately include and acknowledge the discourse characteristics of these students.

There is now a good deal of evidence that many classrooms, in western and non-western settings are places where Indigenous perspectives are excluded. Such exclusion may occur both at the institutional level and at the level of the individual teacher. In extensive observation in Western Australian school classrooms (Malcolm 1979) it has been noted that exclusion may be realised in discourse, when teachers, perhaps unconsciously, adopt patterns of classroom interaction which contravene discourse conventions of Indigenous communities, such as those which depend heavily on the use of display questions, or where they act as 'gatekeepers' of student responses, only adopting those which fit their own train of thought, or where they select content according to perspectives which treat Indigenous people as if they didn't exist (for example, by implying that Australia's *only* discoverers and pioneers were European). As has been mentioned in section 1.2.2, Brian Street (1995), on the basis of evidence from a number of cultural backgrounds, has observed that the widespread acceptance of what he calls an *autonomous* model of literacy (that is, the view that there is only one literacy and that is what the school dispenses) has the effect of silencing the Indigenous voice. He says this may occur by:

...the distancing of language from subjects- the ways in which language is treated as though it were a thing, distanced from both teacher and learner and imposing on them external rules and requirements as though they were but passive recipients; 'metalinguistic' usages- the ways in which the social processes of reading and writing are referred to and lexicalized within a pedagogic voice as though they were independent and neutral competencies rather than laden with significance for power relations and ideology; 'privileging' - the ways in which reading and writing are given status vis-a-vis oral discourse as though the medium were intrinsically superior and, therefore, those who acquired it would also become superior.

(Street 1995:114)

Street also sees the exclusion of indigenous perspectives in 'space labelling' (p. 114), whereby, by separating institutional space from everyday space, educators exclude from it wider social and ideological constructions. He also sees teacher behaviours as contributing to this exclusion when they avoid discussion of alternative interpretations of texts, or use tests to create a distance between learners and their own perception of their knowledge (p. 116).

If educational institutions in general are prone to exclude indigenous perspectives, we might expect universities to be particularly likely to do so. Universities, as we have observed (p. 18), are specific discourse communities or socio-rhetorical groups which utilise their own set of written genres and range of specific vocabularies

(Swales 1990). Initiation into these discourse communities is selective, and the universities, in association with the professional bodies they represent, are the gatekeepers.

The acquisition of academic discourse means that a student must come to terms with the literacy requirements of university. All courses of study at university require the submission of numerous pieces of written work, the preparation of which requires finding books in libraries, reading, extracting information, paraphrasing, and writing essays, reports, etc. Ong (1982) maintains that it is these skills, which are embodied in the notion of 'study', that separate literate societies from oral societies. In today's universities, however, student populations reflect a continuum of familiarity with literacy in this sense. Some students do indeed come to university with experience in study through secondary education, others may come as mature age students from an environment where work skills do not require high levels of literacy. Yet other students may have come from a situation where secondary schooling was not completed. While it would be incorrect to call some of these students illiterate, they could be considered *aliterate*, a term proposed by Reid (1996:3), to describe the reduced exercise of reading and writing skills evident with the current prevalence of TV, telephone and personal mobility.

Ironically, learning at university requires highly developed oral skills as well as literacy skills. As pointed out by Street (1995:157) 'Literacy practices are always embedded in oral uses, and the variations between cultures are generally variations in the *mix* of oral/literate channels'. Hence university students are required to listen, to memorise and to repeat information just as learners in an oral environment. However, oral communication in Australian Aboriginal society differs from that of non-Aboriginal society, being communal or group oriented and continuous, whereas non-Aboriginal communication is dyadic (based on one to one focus, even in group situations) and contained, that is, it occurs within a fixed period of time (Walsh 1996). A typical example of non-Aboriginal communication is the oral instruction of a class where a lecturer is speaking to students, engaging in eye contact in a dyadic way, and having *x* amount of time to cover *x* amount of content. Structured learning such as that contained within lesson plans, course structures and school curricula to be studied and completed within a given time, is illustrative of a culture with dyadic and contained communication and contrasts markedly with the narrative, experiential and socially assessed way of learning in a culture with communal or continuous styles of communication.

Inherent in the western academic tradition are also particular ways of talking and writing *about* knowledge. The discourse of the university community, as we have observed, typically involves the decontextualisation of knowledge. Students find that it is no longer acceptable at university level to interpret experiences from their own point of view. Even first year students are encouraged to set themselves apart from their experience, i.e., to be objective. Decontextualisation involves the use of a range of linguistic devices (passivisation, nominalisation) and therefore the mastery of particular syntactic skills. Writing and talking about knowledge at university also requires specialised vocabulary, quite apart from the terminologies of specific disciplines. To this end, the English language has developed two sets of vocabulary

to accommodate the development of its literary tradition (Olson & Astington 1990:712). One is of Germanic origin and typical of informal oral communication, including words such as *say, tell, think, and know*; the other is of Latin origin with words such as *assume, claim, contradict, imply, predict, prove*, etc. and is frequently used in the transmission of academic knowledge. It is this advanced linguistic syntactic and lexical repertoire that is rewarded within the university system.

A further feature of the university discourse community is the abstraction of information. At university, a student is confronted with the study of ideas, theories and theoretical perspectives. A student is confronted with concepts such as Structuralism, Post Modernism, Marxism, Chaos Theory, Functionalism, Interactionist Theory, Conflict Theory, Behaviourism, Rationalism, Empiricism and many more. These ideas are associated with particular 'schools of thought', expressed as 'differing perspectives', or 'hidden agenda'. A large proportion of students find this aspect of university learning difficult. Many try to avoid the more theoretical components of a course or postpone enrolling in these units. Bertola & Murphy (1994:32) consider that most first year students 'will not have been exposed to material at the high level of abstraction and complexity that is found in much academic writing. They may not understand what you mean by an argument and almost certainly will have difficulty with the term 'perspective' let alone the idea of a 'theoretical perspective'.

Elements included in the mastery of academic skills can be demonstrated with the following model:

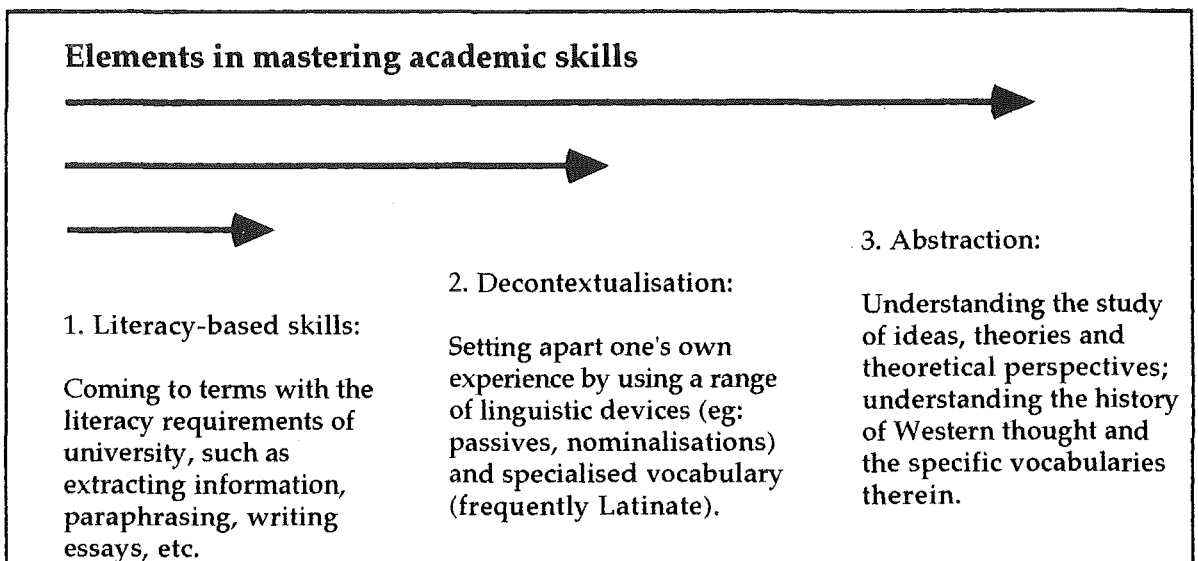


Figure 5 The process of acquiring academic skills

University environments therefore support specific literacy practices. Street (1995:162) defines literacy practices as the 'behaviour and conceptualisations related to the use of reading and/or writing'. These practices involve oral and literacy skills and have in common the objective interpretation of other texts,

whether verbal, visual or written. Written texts will frequently require an understanding of the development of Western thought and contain classification and reclassification of human experience in terms of numerous abstract theories leaving little scope for the expression of participants' own experiences.

From what we have said above, it is clear that it would not be difficult to adduce information to support a claim that Edith Cowan University, like all Australian universities, functions to exclude Indigenous perspectives. It *does* support the autonomous model of literacy; it *does* seek to initiate its students into wider discourse communities of selective membership; it *does* employ tests to select students, progress them through their courses and qualify them for graduation; it *does* have curricula which, for the most part, have not been scrutinised by Indigenous academics to ensure that they reflect Indigenous perspectives.

There is, however, another side to the picture. Edith Cowan University prides itself on being an 'equity' university and has a well established support programme for Aboriginal students, including by far the largest bridging course programme for Aboriginal students in Western Australia, accessible both on campus and externally or in widely scattered regional centres. It also provides extensive student support, which deals with Street's problem of 'space labelling' by providing them with space which they control (Student Centres) and which enables them to receive specialised instruction on campus in small groups as well as individualised tutoring off-campus.

The following examples demonstrate some of the strategies used by teaching staff at Edith Cowan University to include the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous students. As such these examples also reflect the pedagogical underpinning of the units offered. The examples have been classified into three broad categories. The first includes explicit instruction designed to provide *familiarisation* with the ways of universities. Here the lecturer may offer the students some strategies to operate within the system, provide forewarnings of difficulty, model particular behaviours or paraphrase particular concepts or vocabulary. The second type of example involves *recontextualisation* (Mertz 1996) whereby the situation, topic or word is equated to the students' own personal experiences. The third set demonstrate *legitimation*. We use this term to describe instances where the students' own contextual experience is accepted as legitimate academic discourse.

3.2.1 Familiarisation

A requirement of university discourse is to provide supporting evidence for statements. In the following examples the lecturer makes this explicit.

Example 1:

Student: I reckon it's all stupid

Lecturer: Why is it stupid, you've got to say why if you say it's stupid. What's stupid, the exercise or the article?

(AUOC '95)

Example 2:

Lecturer: Yes, he says the government is changing immigration policy without the people's views being considered

Student 1: Immigrants feel more closer to Australia than Australians

Lecturer: Where does he say that? ... I'd like you to back that up.

(AUOC '95)

Coming to terms with talking to university staff is frequently a problem for Aboriginal students. Example 3 demonstrates the Aboriginal perspective in relation to having to ask for help. The lecturer responded by instructing on the need to learn to talk to lecturers.

Example 3:

Lecturer: ... You can still come and see me, talk to me about it. It's about talking, that's one skill you have to develop as you go through university, talking to lecturers, it is one key university learning skill, talking to your lecturers.

(AUOC '96)

Students are frequently warned of the level of difficulty of the reading.

Example 4:

Lecturer: Sociologists are not very good at making things simple ...
and later

Lecturer: ... A lot of sociological theory has come from the French and the French have a much more intellectual approach to communicating.

(Block Release '96)

Students might be offered some strategies to link the oral and written components of a task.

Example 5:

Student: But I can say it but I can't write it

Lecturer: Say it on a tape recording, say it as you write it, introduce some strategies.

(Block Release '95)

Reading academic texts presents a particular problem for these students and lecturers might provide specific strategies to enable the student to understand the text, such as reading in order to answer a question.

Example 6:

Lecturer: What you need to do is focus on the question. Now the question is..., so what you have to get out of the Castle article is the laws about immigration in Australia.

(AUOC '95)

Lecturers frequently feel required to paraphrase or define the vocabulary of their specific disciplines.

Example 7:

Lecturer: Post Modernism says you can't accept the surface but you have to look beyond, many influences are in language, what is written and said, in the discourse. Discourse is what is written and said, do you know that word 'Discourse'?

Student: Yeah.

Student: Yeah, I heard it.

(Block Release '96)

Example 8:

Lecturer: ... today I guess the thing to do is to give a view of the world from the sociological perspective, the ways of looking at the world ... You know last year when you looked at Psychology, you know there's different schools of thought in Psychology, there's behaviourism... well it's the same in Sociology, there's four main areas: the Functionalist perspective, the Conflict perspective, the Interactionist perspective, and the Post Modernist perspective. A perspective is just a way of looking at things.

Student: A way of looking at things.

(Block Release '96)

Example 9:

Lecturer: ... It's the legitimisation of conformity (L uses example of legitimacy of Birth Royalty, ruled by Divine right, by God's choice ...) From the teacher's point of view he has to establish legitimacy, you have to get the kids to believe that you have the authority ...

(Block Release '96)

The strategy exemplified in 8 and 9 did not appear to be readily accessed by the students. It is possible that the paraphrasing was marred by the extent of other abstract (and unexplained) vocabulary.

Finally, instruction may be in the form of modelling academic behaviour, in this case, in relation to the set texts. MacLachlan and Reid (1994) have used the term circumtextual to refer to features associated with the way in which a written text is presented. These include such things as whether or not there is an index, what the quality of the binding is, etc. These things are cues to the reader which enable him/her to approach the text in the right way.

Example 10:

During a Block Release session, a lecturer was observed to be helping students to pick up circumtextual cues in relation to the books they were studying. He did this by continually handling the set books for the course, folding back the covers, comparing the chapters for similar topics, referring to the contents and headings

across the texts, describing the different types of font for different types of information, e.g. *Sans serif*, called 'without serif — without the little ends on the letters' for readings as opposed to chapters.

(Block Release '96)

3.2.2 Recontextualisation

In these examples the lecturer recontextualises the situation to equate the students' own experiences.

Example 11:

One lecturer uses the chatline (computer-based 'virtual conversation') to help students make the link between oral communication and written communication. According to the lecturer:

Lecturer: '[The chatline] is tremendous for Aboriginal students because it forces them to communicate by using written words, you can't speak, no-one can hear you, it's the only way to communicate so you are forced to write what you want to say'.

In instructing students in how to communicate using the chatline, the lecturer contextualizes the experience by relating the activity to what the students are used to in everyday communication:

Lecturer: What happens when you walk into a room with people in it?
What do they do?
They say 'hello'?
What should you do?
Say 'hello' back ...
When you leave a room, it's nice to say 'goodbye', so people know you're not there any more.

(AUOC '96)

Recontextualising can occur by drawing analogies with situations familiar to the students.

Example 12:

Lecturer: Then there's Post Modernism, they say you can't define Post Modernism because that defeats the purpose of Post Modernism, Post Modernism says there's no answers or not just one answer

Student: Not even right and wrong?

Lecturer: Post Modernism can't make rules because individual situations differ (uses the example of Derby being different from Bunbury). When you look at the way the world operates Post Modernism makes sense, but it doesn't recognise consistency or regularities and we know there are

consistencies and regularities (uses the example of a teacher from Derby being able to teach in Bunbury). So when we teach we have to decide on the perspective we take ...

(Block Release '96)

A discipline specific term may be referenced to the student's own contextual use.

Example 13:

Lecturer: Mean and range don't tell us much about the data so we have to look further at the Standard Deviation. What do you understand by Standard Deviation? Do you say that in everyday language? Deviate? Deviate? Deviant?

Student: Side-tracked

Lecturer: Side-tracked, deviate away from the central track. So the Standard Deviation tells us... (AUOC '95)

Example 14:

Lecturer: Bias, remove bias. Is it a word you use in everyday talk?

Student: You use it in football, like the umpire's biased.

Lecturer: One-sided.

Lecturer: One-sided or lopsided. It has to be fair...

(AUOC '95)

Assessment at university generally requires meeting assignment deadlines and sitting for exams. These are recognised components in the structured learning of university. Examination strategies, in particular, are frequently taught by Academic Support Units. The data from the bridging course show evidence of a lecturer contextualising the concept of examinations.

Example 15:

Lecturer: So I want you to get out your plan and we'll talk about what would be reasonable exam questions. So have you got that and any more which have objectives ...

Lecturer: So if you think of a question write it out and give it to me. Perhaps we could put 'This is (N's) questions and this is (N's) question'

Student: At least we'd get one right

Lecturer: (Laughs) At least you'd get one right, perhaps I'll do that next year ...

(AUOC '95)

Example 16:

Lecturer: Why do you think we give you exams?

Student: To test what we know

- Lecturer: Yes, but I can do that in other ways
- Student: To stress us out
- Lecturer: Yes they are very stressful ... We also give you exams because you will have to do them in mainstream study and it helps to get used to them, to get over being nervous.
- (AUOC '95)

Recontextualising may involve equating the activity to one with which the students will be familiar, i.e. a game.

Example 17:

- Student: But the references?
- Lecturer: That's a game, you can say you have something to contribute, you can at this level, then you go to the experts and see what they say.
- (Block Release '96)

An academic paper may be compared with a popular magazine known to the student, what MacLachlan & Reid (1994) refer to as the intertextual dimension.

Example 18:

- Lecturer: ... where are you up to?
- Student: I've been reading the articles but I haven't started writing yet.
- Lecturer: Where are you up to?
- Student: Yeah, I find it a bit hard to read.
- Lecturer: I think everybody does, because they're written.. they're not written for the New Idea, they're written to give a particular idea. The Castle one is long but straightforward.
- (AUOC '95)

3.2.3 Legitimation

Some students appear to employ the recontextualisation of academic input as a learning strategy. In the following example the student introduces personal experience in response to the lecturer input and the lecturer responds by treating this as legitimate academic discourse.

Example 19:

- Lecturer: ... this one relates to American research.
- Student: (relates her own experience of primary school) ... and when I'm getting high marks they'd say 'Who is she sitting next to?' (relates later experience at High School).. I was put into the lower stream at high school because the teacher's didn't expect much
- Lecturer: So what was the expectation of the teacher?

Student: That I'd be getting them marks, but I kept on getting good marks until later on when the other kids would say I was pretending to be white.

Lecturer: That's a good point.

Student: And then I would downgrade my marks...

(Block Release '96)

Lecturers will often waive the requirement for decontextualisation of information, treating the student's own discourse style as legitimate academic discourse.

Example 20:

Lecturer: No just write as though you were talking to me, or writing me a letter, Dear xxx, I want to tell you about the xx Course. Imagine you're telling a parent what the xx Course is all about.

(Block Release '95)

A student's own experience may be acknowledged as legitimate or even superior academic evidence.

Example 21:

Lecturer: That's good what you said, that's worthy of going into textbooks, there is nothing about peer pressure in these books. That is what you should put in your essay, you have to have the confidence that you know all about this, you'll know more about Aboriginality than I ever will... So write it all in, write with passion, don't worry about the grammar, just write it down.

(Block Release '96)

This was particularly evident in the following example where the student's experience contradicted the information in the text book.

Example 22:

Lecturer: ... that's what this tells you (holds up the text). Who wrote this?

Student: You did, that's why I don't want to criticise it (explains disagreement with the text and reluctance to oppose it).

Lecturer: No, go for it, you know more about Aboriginal kids than I ever will.

(Block Release '96)

In the following example a student employs what we have called a context-switch, where, perhaps triggered by a reference to traditional Aboriginal knowledge, she switches into an imaginative evocation of personal experience in that context. The lecturer is prepared to recognise this as coherent in terms of the academic content being discussed.

Example 23:

Lecturer: It's a very general question. You could talk about kinship, Aboriginal law, language, a really wide question, you could talk about knowledge of the country, how and the ways.

- Student: I can't wait 'til the holidays, staying with Mum, we go wandering through the bush collecting bush tucker, teaching living off the land.
- Lecturer: Does she tell stories?
- Student: Yes.
- Lecturer: It's the importance of being taken to the country.
- Student: Sort of need to immerse them in it.
- Lecturer: Yes that word of yours 'immerse' is a good one ...

(Block Release '95)

In the following example the lecturer not only incorporates the student's contextualised narrative but privileges it over the language of the textbook with respect to the subject which is Aboriginal Cultural Studies.

Example 24:

- Lecturer: You might find some of the language old-fashioned or offensive, like 'natives' and things you wouldn't dream of using now ... some of the expressions are old-fashioned and I am sometimes shocked that they used words like 'blacks' and talk about 'natives' and certainly use 'tribe'.
- Student: It was really funny, there's a new teacher at our school from Victoria and we went to visit a friend of hers from Victoria, an old lady, and she asked 'What tribe are you from?' — I just looked (makes a surprised face), the teacher who I'm friends with, said I should have just made something up, a name, she wouldn't know the difference.
- Lecturer: What do you say?
- Student: We use family.

(Block Release '95)

Sometimes a lecturer may explicitly invite students to provide contextualised experience.

Example 25:

- Lecturer: Let's focus on your own experiences. Over the last twenty years, how have Aborigines articulated their preferences and how have whites resisted? What was the focus before Mabo?
- Student: What land rights?
- Lecturer: What was the main focus before Mabo? How did history shape the policies?
- Student: What do you mean? Like how they just invaded the country and the land was just taken?

(Block Release '95)

In this case, even though the students have been given the opportunity to tell their own experiences, their responses do not reflect understanding. In spite of his good intentions, the lecturer's vocabulary has served to exclude these students. Expressions such as 'focus on your own experiences' 'articulated preferences' and 'shape policies' have mystified the original invitation.

The examples discussed above have, hopefully, shown that Indigenous students may bring to their university education distinctive perspectives which may make it difficult for them to adjust to some of the literacy practices which obtain there. This immediately raises questions of exclusion.

Universities are, in many ways, institutions which maintain mechanisms of exclusion. To some extent the requirement placed on universities to achieve equity goals threatens their achievement of other goals related to initiating their clients into privileged professional groups within society and in times of increased competitiveness and scarcer Government resources equity goals may suffer.

It might be hoped that, in the long view, universities, by favouring academic freedom and independent social inquiry, might contribute to the formation of a more enlightened citizenry on which the development of more inclusive social institutions will ultimately depend.

In the meantime, however, working within the system as it is, it is possible to address problems of exclusion by addressing literacy practices at the level of the classroom or lecture room. In so far as such practices are encoded in discourse, they can be changed by changing discursual practices.

What we have called in this project familiarisation, recontextualisation and legitimisation represent three strategies which can be and are being used by lecturers to contribute to this end. We would not claim this to be more than a small beginning, but we consider that it should be acknowledged and built on.

4.0 FRAMING ABORIGINAL STUDENT WRITING

We have pointed out above that the grapholect is all-pervasive in the higher education setting and that students must come to terms with this in the course of their university studies. This section focuses on the how students, in adapting to the requirements of university, develop strategies associated with uses of the grapholect. As evidence of this adaptation we have carried out a small but detailed investigation of discoursal features in Aboriginal student writing.

4.1 Analytical framework

Reid et al. in their report in this series present a range of contextual frames (after MacLachlan & Reid 1994) which they demonstrate influence a tertiary student reader's interpretation of the academic texts prescribed as reading in a number of university courses. In this chapter we investigate how these same contextual frames can influence the student as a writer. In accordance with the focus taken by Edith Cowan University, the writers are students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin and the samples of writing were submitted for assessment in tertiary or pre-tertiary (Bridging) courses, the latter referred to in this text as AUOC (Aboriginal University Orientation Course). A large proportion of these texts were written by mature-age students and, as a result, our data reflects a range of experience with writing. The following tables demonstrate the experience and year level of the authors of these written texts and the range of writing *genres* collected:

Table 3 Experience and year level of students submitting texts

YEAR	AUOC	1 st yr	2 nd yr	3 rd yr	4 th yr	TOTAL
High School Leaver	8					8
Mature age	23	4	10	4	1	42
Total	31	4	10	4	1	50

Table 4 Range of written genres in corpus of data

YEAR	AUOC	1 st yr	2 nd yr	3 rd yr	4 th yr	TOTAL
Expository	14	4	8	4	1	31
Personal	11					11
Creative	4		2			6
TOTAL	31	4	10	4	1	50

In this analysis of written discourse we demonstrate that the four contextual frames proposed by MacLachlan and Reid (1994): *Circumtextuality*, *Extratextuality*,

Intertextuality and *Intratextuality*, are reflected in the choice of a particular range of discourse features. These discourse features have been identified using Chafe's (1982, 1985) analysis of the differences between spoken discourse and written discourse.

Chafe (1982) claims that the different structures used in spoken and written discourse can be attributed to the processes involved. For example, speech is a fleeting exercise ; the information is not preserved and must be comprehended at a much faster rate than writing. Speech therefore cannot contain a complex of 'idea units' (segments of speech or writing adding a notion to the sentence). In speech ideas are 'fragmented' or set apart with the frequent use of conjunctions, particularly 'and' (Chafe 1982:39). Writing, on the other hand, is a slow and editable process which enables the concentration of many more 'idea units' per sentence:

Writing is in fact free of the constraints imposed by the limited temporal and informational capacity of focal consciousness; we have time to let our attention roam over a large amount of information and devote itself to a more deliberate organization of linguistic resources.

(Chafe 1985:107)

As a result, time is available for the selection and inclusion of certain linguistic devices which raise the number of idea units in the sentence.

A further way in which Chafe claims writing differs from speaking is in the use of detachment strategies. In speech linguistic structures serve to involve the speaker and hearer (e.g. 1st and 2nd person pronouns) whereas in writing, and in particular academic writing, linguistic devices such as abstract subjects and passive construction serve to separate the writer from the content of the text. In Chafe's analysis the following dichotomy results whereby speech is identified by the *fragmentation* of ideas and the *involvement* of speakers and hearers and writing is identified by the *integration* of ideas and the *detachment* of the writer and reader.

The distinction between spoken and written discourse measured by Chafe can also be viewed as a continuum of acquisition of the academic writing process. At one end of this continuum is spoken language and at the other end is academic expository writing. In between such genres as creative or diary writing might be placed. Thus students, and more particularly students from oral traditions, will move along this continuum in the course of their study in higher education institutions.

Our particular interest in using Chafe's analysis arose from its use by McDonald (1993) to measure the development of one Aboriginal student's writing over a two year period. We have used Chafe's methodology to measure the discourse of different genres. Personal histories and creative writing, we would expect, contain more features of spoken language whereas expository writing would contain more features of written language. We would expect the inexperienced expository writer to incorporate more features of spoken discourse in his/her expository texts and less features of academic writing.

In combining Chafe's analysis with framing theory we claim that the particular requirements of a set written task constitute a circumtextual frame which influences the internal structure of the text and this is manifest in the choice of particular linguistic features. Equally, on the extratextual level, a student's own experiences can be reflected in a piece of writing. In our data this is demonstrated by the use of linguistic structures more applicable to an oral language tradition than those representative of written texts. Frequently written discourse includes reference to other texts. In framing theory, this is referred to as intertextuality. This too can be demonstrated using Chafe's classification of discourse features and can be shown to vary according to the circumtextual requirements of the task. Finally, at the intratextual level, in satisfying the circumtextual requirements of a set task, a writer must control the presentation of information by employing a number of linguistic strategies which raise or lower the density of information per sentence. Chafe's analysis provides a number of strategies which writers employ to raise the concentration of information in a text. Figure 6 illustrates the relationship between framing theory and Chafe's analysis.

The follow tables specify the number of essays analysed by student level and experience (Table 5) and by student level and genre (Table 6) in a pilot analysis using Chafe's methodology:

Table 5 Number of analysed essays by student level and experience

	<i>AUOC</i>	<i>2nd yr</i>	<i>3rd yr</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
High School Leaver	1	0	0	1
Mature age	8	6	1	15
TOTAL	9	6	1	16

Table 6 Number of analysed essays by student level and genre

	<i>AUOC</i>	<i>2nd yr</i>	<i>3rd yr</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
Expository	7	4	1	12
Personal	2	0	0	2
Creative	0	2	0	2
TOTAL	9	6	1	16

The relevant linguistic strategies were counted and expressed as a percentage of the total word count for the essay. The text of quotes was excluded from this word count as it did not represent the writers' own words. An average was then calculated for AUOC group of students and combined second and third year group and genre types. Differences in average percentage scores between AUOC and 2nd/3rd year expository writing will reflect the students' development of academic

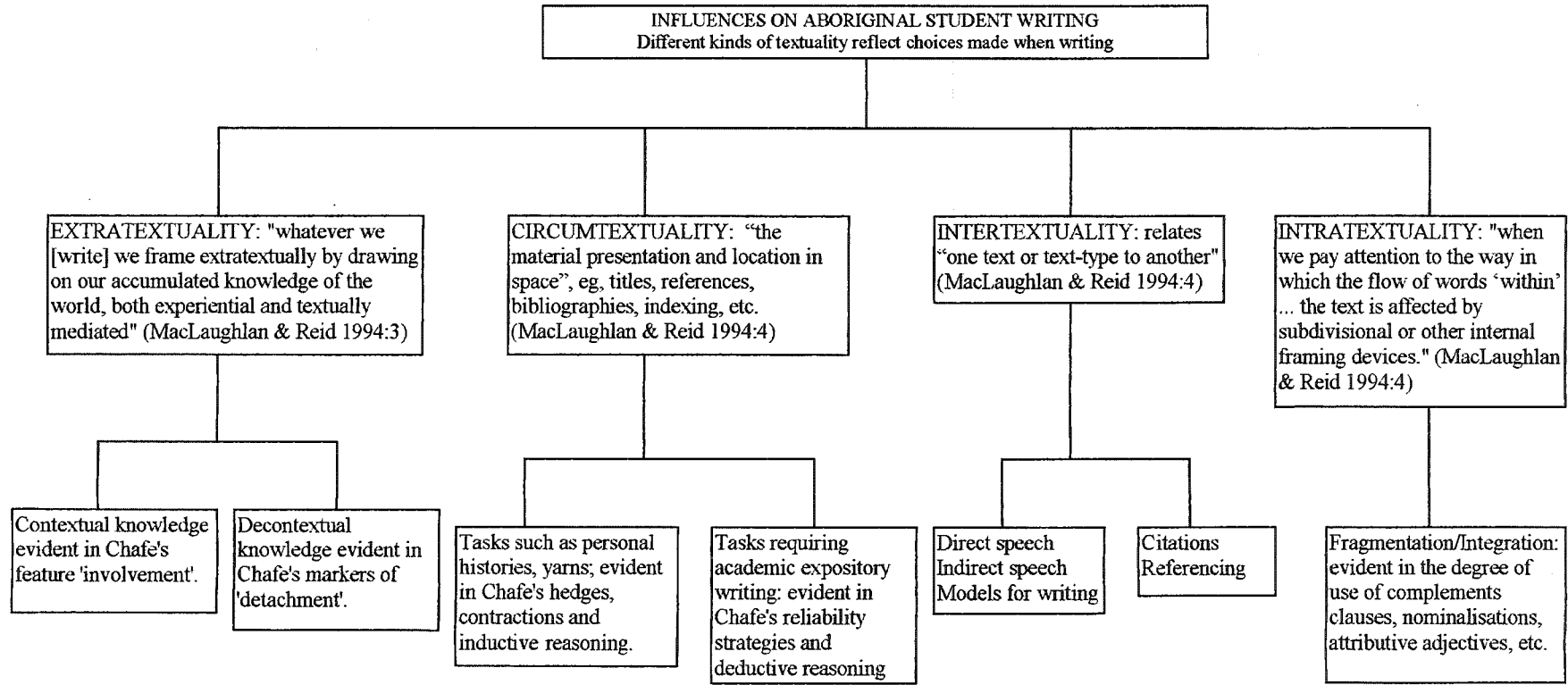


Figure 6 Influences on Aboriginal student writing

writing skills. On the other hand differences between average percentage uses of a particular linguistic feature in personal histories and creative writing (called 'free writing' in this analysis) as compared with expository writing will mark an accommodation of the requirements of one genre over another.

4.2 Circumtextual framing of student writing

Our corpus of written data has provided us with a range of different writing tasks. Frequently in classes consisting of only Indigenous students (for example, in a University Learning Skills class for bridging students) or when tasks allow for free expression (such as an Aboriginal Writing Course) writing tasks will be directed to accommodate these students' own life experiences. Other university courses will require expository writing relating discipline specific content. These differing requirements constitute circumtextual influences on a text. MacLachlan and Reid define *circumtextuality* as 'the material presentation and location in space [of a text], e.g. the title, references, bibliography, indexing, etc.' (1994:4).

Hence the location, title, etc. of the task as specified by the course instructions creates a circumtextual frame for the writing task. It is these circumtextual frames which differentiate academic writing, such as essays and reports, from other types of written expression, for example, personal histories, stories and yarns. Of course, it is only by recognising or learning the intertextual frames of the different genres that students are able to fulfil the requirements of such circumtextual frames.

4.2.1 Evidentiality — reliability of knowledge

In satisfying these circumtextual frames the writer chooses, or learns to choose in the course of his/her study, the linguistic strategies appropriate to each frame. For instance, tasks requiring academic expository writing have specific requirements for the justification of evidence and for reasoning on the basis of the content:

Writers show a concern for certain links of reasoning that speakers are not so much concerned with. Furthermore, the permanence of written language means that writers need to worry about possible future criticism of their output in ways that a speaker does not.

(Chafe 1985:118)

Chafe calls this *evidentiality*. One type of evidentiality is the reliability of knowledge. In speech such concerns are manifest with words like *maybe* or *perhaps*:

... children who would have otherwise been neglected and maybe placed into foster care, to be raised away from their own cultural setting.

(2nd yr, expository, mature age writer)

But Chafe (1985) points out that there is a considerable range of words that can be used to mark reliability in writing, for example, *possibly*, *undoubtedly*, *surely*. Furthermore, where speakers tend to be concerned simply with the truth or falsehood of an idea, writers will consider the 'statistical reliability' of their information with words like *basically*, *essentially*, *generally*, *in some sense*, *invariably*, *normally*, *primarily* and *virtually* (p. 119):

On this day families gather together for a big Christmas dinner which is generally cooked by our elderly aunt and nan.

(AUOC, expository, mature age writer)

... which, it is suggested could cause major emotional problems...

(2nd yr, expository, mature age writer)

Average percentage uses of reliability strategies were 0.18% for AUOC expository writing and 0.05% in the free writing examples, and 0.4%¹ for second and third year expository essays and 0.28% for free writing. This reflects greater accommodation of the academic writing strategy 'evidentiality' by both groups of writers. When compared in terms of writing experience the 2nd/3rd year groups exhibited greater use of strategies for expressing the reliability of knowledge.

4.2.2 Evidentiality — manifestation of reasoning

Another marker of evidentiality is the manifestation of reasoning. In spoken language reasoning is inductive, for example:

Also you must be at least 6.0ft to do one.

(AUOC, expository, mature age)

Whereas in written texts reasoning is more deductive and thus consequences are predicted and hypotheses formed. Deductive reasoning is demonstrated by use of modals (could, should, would, might).

Differences between the use of inductive reasoning by AUOC and experienced students were minimal (average percentage occurrences in AUOC expository writing 0.05%, and in second and third year expository writing 0.02%). As would be expected, in the genre of creative writing, second and third students used more inductive reasoning (average percentage occurrences 0.09%). The AUOC free writing examples in this analysis had no examples of inductive reasoning.

Strategies for deductive reasoning were greater in the texts of more experienced writers:

This could only have been accomplished by a person who was...

(2nd yr, expository, mature age writer)

This pressure upon her and her family could have resulted in all sorts of emotional problems and could have led to a very insecure life ...

(2nd yr, expository, mature age writer)

AUOC expository writing demonstrated average percentage use of 0.27% while second and third year students demonstrated an average score of 0.53%. Interestingly, deductive reasoning was used less in the second and third year creative writing (0.37%) and did not occur in analysed samples of personal histories by AUOC students (0.0%).

¹Average percentage occurrences only are given here, rather than means and standard deviations, since the sample number was small.

4.3 Extratextual framing of student writing

Extratextual influences are drawn from 'our accumulated knowledge of the world' (MacLachlan & Reid 1994) and are evident in texts as social or contextual knowledge compared with academic or decontextualised knowledge. In Chafe's analysis this contrast is reflected in the use of features which mark involvement or detachment.

4.3.1 Involvement strategies

Three types of involvement are defined: speaker involvement (or ego involvement), hearer involvement and subject involvement.

Ego involvement

Ego involvement which is evident in the use of first person pronouns and references to the speaker/writer's own mental processes was frequently included in the expository texts of more inexperienced writers (average percentage uses for AUOC students 2.52%; average percentage uses for 2nd and 3rd year students 0.55%):

In my opinion this could be the one event which would destroy her ...
(2nd yr, expository, mature age writer)

... I felt that deep down there were still feelings of fear in her life...
(2nd yr, expository, mature age writer)

When writing expository texts about one's own culture, as in a number of these texts, it would be expected that ego involvement be greater:

As an Aboriginal person myself I will no doubt have an Aboriginal perspective on some of the problems discussed
(2nd yr, expository, mature age)

Naturally ego involvement was widespread in AUOC personal histories (10.98%):

As it was my first experience and looking back now I say that everyone will learn by their mistakes and make up for it in years to come.
(AUOC, personal, mature age)

Second/third year creative writing texts, on the other hand, contained 0.37% of ego involvement markers. Ego involvement then is a strong indicator of extratextuality in student writing. McDonald (1993:9) observed her informant to deliberately employ ego involvement strategies to identify herself as Aboriginal and thereby advertise her particular expertise. This, the student claimed, obviated the need for the required referencing.

Hearer involvement

Hearer involvement is found in posing questions or requesting confirmation such as *Right?*, *Okay?* or *You know*. Such features in a written text would be classified as reader involvement and were demonstrated in some examples of writing:

Well that's all I can think of to say about the NBA at the moment I will tell you more next time.

(AUOC, expository, mature age)

Who have made the majority of claims? You guessed it, the ... mob.

(2nd yr, creative, mature age)

Hearer involvement featured in AUOC expository writing (average percentage uses 0.21%) but not in that of 2nd and 3rd year students (average percentage uses 0%). In the creative writing of the 2nd and 3rd year students, however, hearer involvement was used (average percentage uses 0.2%). We might expect that hearer involvement is a strategy used frequently in creative writing and in particular the 'yarns' which constituted the creative writing on our corpus of data. No hearer involvement strategies were present in the AUOC personal histories.

Subject involvement

With subject involvement, devices are used to 'express a speaker's lively interest in the subject matter' (1985:117). Emphatic particles marking subject involvement were occasionally present in the expository writing of these students:

... emotionally she was really mature ...

(2nd yr, expository, mature age)

There are certain players that I like watching in the NBA and they are; Michael Jordan; Charles Barkley; Scottie Pippen; and also Shawn Kemp and plenty of other players as well.

(AUOC, expository, mature age)

Subject involvement featured in the expository writing of AUOC students (average percentage uses 0.34%) but not in that of 2nd and 3rd year students (0%). The 2nd/3rd year group used subject involvement strategies in their free writing (0.2%) but no such strategies were observed in the sample of AUOC free writing.

4.3.2 Detachment strategies

Involvement strategies are considered less desirable in written language and in particular in academic writing which is notably detached:

A writer is typically less concerned with ego expression, less concerned with any direct interaction with the audience, and less immediately involved with the subject matter.

(Chafe 1985:117)

Strategies for detachment are passivisation:

... she has been blessed with good health.

(2nd yr, expository, mature age)

... this ruling was always reinforced by the Native Protector who was also the local Police.

(2nd yr, expository, mature age)

Displays of the birth of Christ are put on every year at Christmas time
(AUOC, expository, mature age)

and abstract or inanimate subjects:

... these roles included wife and mother which took up most of her time.
(2nd yr, expository, mature age)

Other events to happen during her late adult life-span included such occurrences as...
(2nd yr, expository, mature age)

... these tasks demanded committment...
(2nd yr, expository, mature age)

Passive constructions were more prevalent in 2nd and third year expository writing (average percentage uses 1.61) than in AUOC expository writing (0.78%). Creative writing examples contained fewer passivisations (0.66%) as did AUOC personal histories (0.35%). Abstract subjects occurred more in expository writing (AUOC 1.89%, 2nd & 3rd year 1.76%) than in personal histories by bridging students (0.7%) and 2nd and 3rd year creative writing (0.76%)

4.4 Intertextual framing of student writing

Intertextuality relates one text to another. In academic writing these relationships are made by citations and referencing. In non-academic writing intertextuality takes the form of direct and indirect speech.

Intertextuality in non-academic texts, like that of speech, is frequently sensory (it *sounds like ...*) or hearsay (*I hear that ...*) or can be actual direct speech as demonstrated in some of the personal experiences related by the students in this study:

'Time to go back to school,' yelled mum.

'Come on daughter', mum said, 'you've only just begun'.

Occurrences of direct speech were, naturally, infrequent in expository writing (AUOC 0%; 2nd and 3rd year 0.07%) but occurred in creative writing (0.1%) and personal histories (0.61%). The same distribution was reflected in the use of indirect speech in expository writing (average percentage uses in AUOC expository writing 0.07% and 2nd and 3rd year expository writing 0%) as compared with creative writing (average percentage uses 0.1%) and personal histories (0.25%) respectively.

In writing and particularly in academic prose 'information derived from another source is of course provided by citations of relevant literature' (1985:120):

As stated by X 'A Nyoongar usually contracts a marriage informally at a young age and legal marriage is not important.' ...

... and as Berndt (1977. p90) states, ...

'Almost everything that is, including the 'Law', it is believed stems from the Dreaming and the actions of mythical-beings ...'

Our data showed that the more experienced 2nd and 3rd year writers used more citations than the bridging students in their expository writing (2nd & 3rd year 0.44%; AUOC 0.039%). Citations were of course absent from personal histories and creative writing examples.

Student expository writing samples showed frequent examples of this type of Intertextuality. Indeed strategies for referencing were explicitly taught in bridging courses.

Another more implicit type of Intertextuality is that provided by textual models which the student uses. Aboriginal writing courses have models in other texts written by Aboriginal authors and in the oral traditions of the culture. Models of academic writing come from prescribed readings.

The following graphs (Figures 7 to 10) illustrate the average percentage uses of evidentiality strategies (reliability, inductive and deductive reasoning), involvement (ego, hearer and subject), detachment (passivisation and abstract/inanimate subjects) and intertextuality in the two genres and by the two student groups.

The most marked difference between AUOC expository and free writing (Figure 7) is the use of ego involvement. The high score for ego involvement in free writing results from the personal histories which were used for this sample. These particular results therefore might be considered an artefact of the data collection. The relatively high score for ego involvement in AUOC expository writing may well reflect less experienced writers. Expository writing also showed more use of abstract/inanimate subjects. Other discourse strategies did not differ greatly between the two genres for this group of writers.

Second and third year students (Figure 8) demonstrate more detachment strategies (passivisation and abstract/inanimate subjects). Similarly scores for ego involvement were greater in expository writing samples than in free writing. A number of these essays related to Aboriginal issues and this may explain the greater use of involvement strategies. 2nd and 3rd year students used more citations in their expository writing which reflects with the requirements of academic writing.

Evidentiality, Involvement, Detachment & Intertextuality in AUOC writing

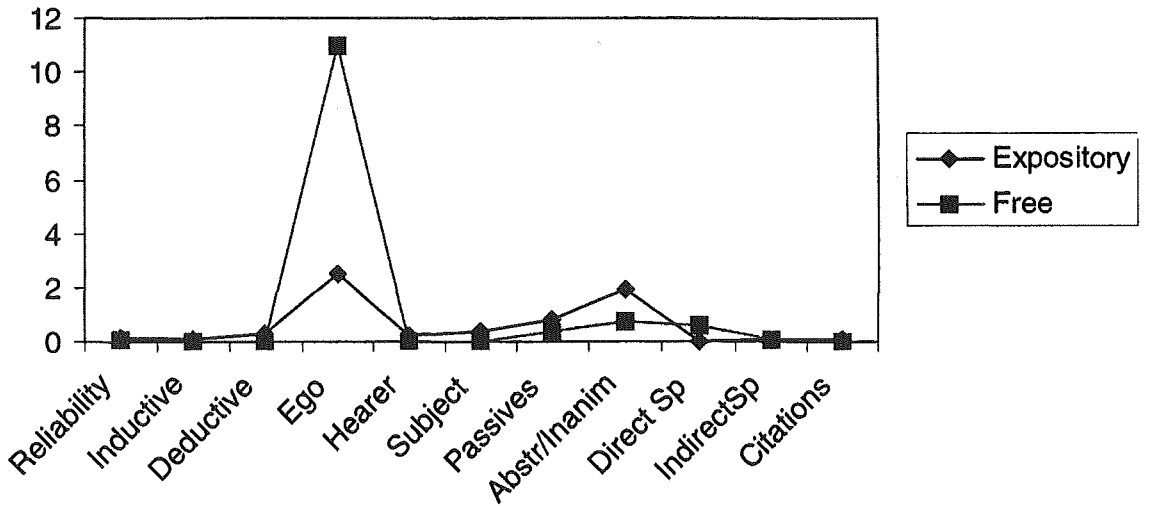


Figure 7 Strategies in AUOC writing

Evidentiality, Involvement, Detachment & Intertextuality in 2nd/3rd yr writing

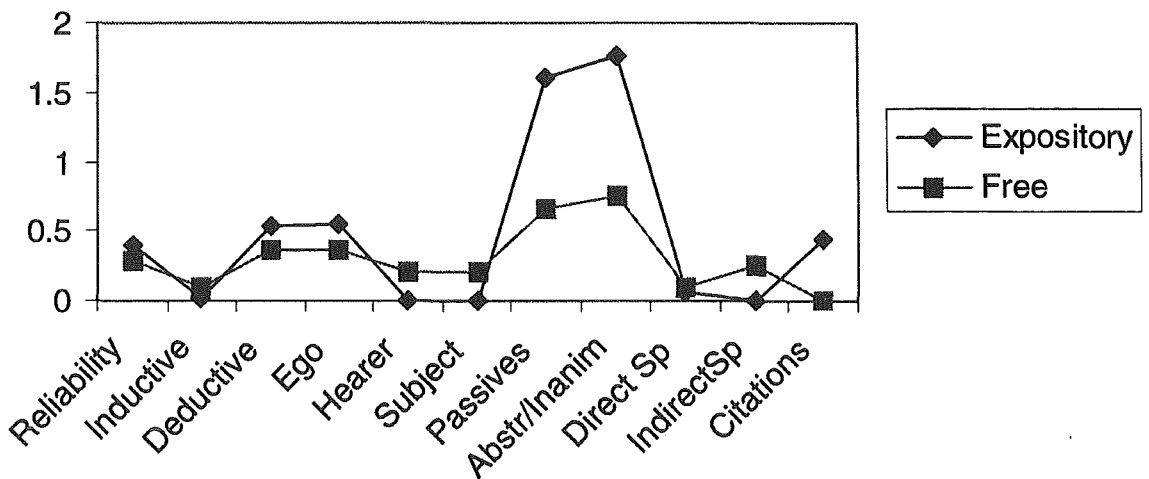


Figure 8 Strategies in 2nd/3rd year writing

Evidentiality, Involvement, Detachment & Intertextuality in expository writing

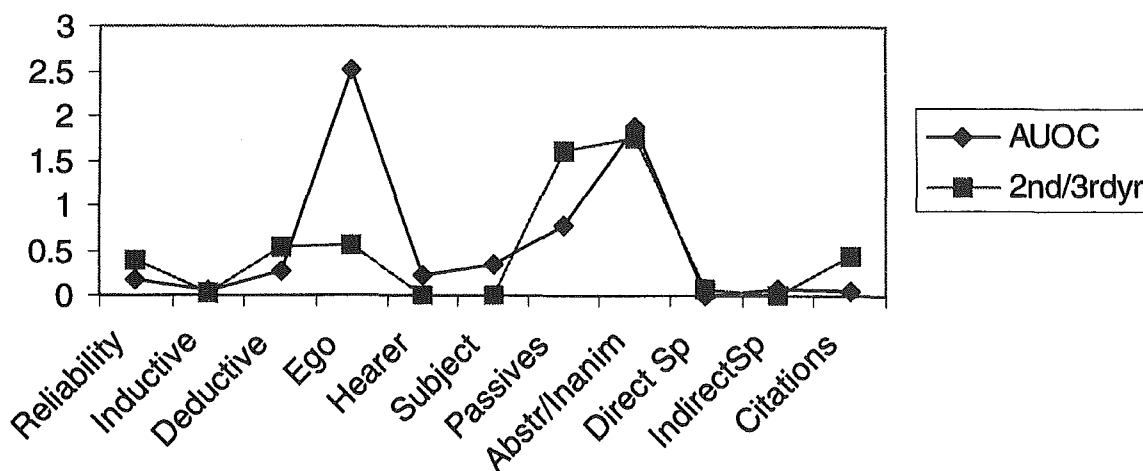


Figure 9 Strategies in expository writing

Two major differences occur between the two groups of writers. AUOC students use more ego involvement and less passivisation in their expository texts than did 2nd and 3rd year students (Figure 9). This may be indicative of their shorter experience with academic writing. Also reflected in this graph is the greater use of citations by the more experienced 2nd and 3rd year writers.

The most marked differences between AUOC and 2nd/3rd year students' free writing (Figure 10) is the use of ego involvement. As pointed out above, this may be an artefact of the data collection: the only examples of free writing submitted by AUOC students were personal histories and no examples of this particular genre were submitted by 2nd/3rd year students. Otherwise the two student groups were similar in their use of reliability, involvement and detachment strategies in their free writing samples.

4.5 Intratextual framing of student writing

With *Intratextuality* 'we pay attention to the way in which the flow of words within the text is affected by subdivisional or other internal framing devices' (MacLachlan & Reid 1994).

Chafe claims that written texts differ from spoken texts in the way ideas are presented. In spoken texts ideas tend to be strung together with or without conjunctions while in written texts there is more information packed into a sentence unit 'than the rapid pace of spoken language would normally allow'

(Chafe 1982:39). As such, spoken texts, and for our purposes, texts which reflect oral traditions, would involve the fragmentation of ideas while written texts and particularly academic texts would involve the integration of ideas. Chafe identifies a number of specific linguistic strategies for integration all of which were demonstrated in the corpus of student writing.

Evidentiality, Involvement, Detachment & Intertextuality in free writing

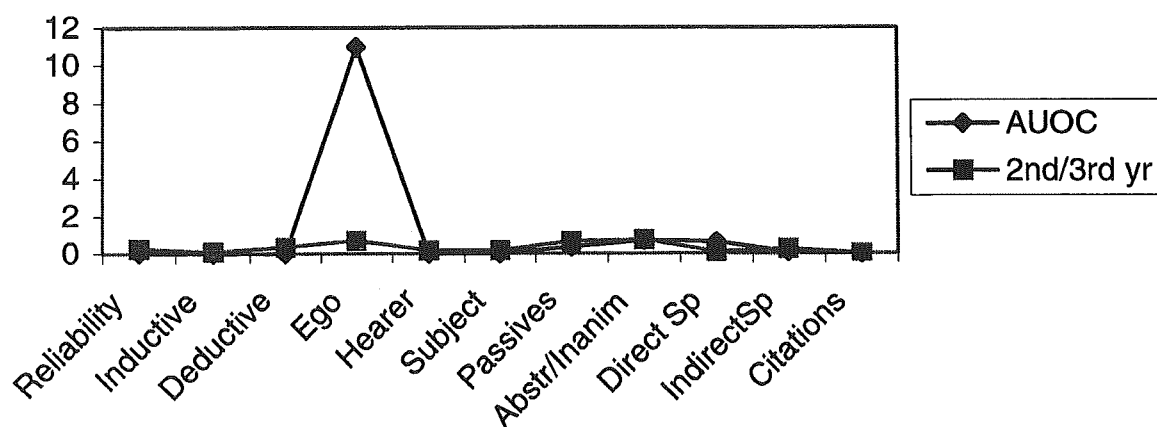


Figure 10 Strategies in free writing

4.5.1 Integration strategies

Nominalisation

Nominalisations enable a verbal notion to be inserted into the text as a noun:

This lack of education is still affecting her and her family today...

She is someone who has dedicated much of her life to ensuring the happiness of those less fortunate ...

More nominalisations occurred in 2nd and 3rd year expository writing (0.49%) than in AUOC expository writing (0.13%). 2nd and 3rd year creative writing contained fewer nominalisations (0.29%) and AUOC personal histories even less (0.15%).

Attributive adjectives

Attributive adjectives turn predicates into modifiers:

At this time no Aboriginal child was allowed to attend school ...

...in my view the religious significance of Christmas is no longer adhered to.

Attributive adjectives were used more by 2nd and 3rd year students in their expository writing (5.49%) than in their creative writing or yarns (3.94%). AUOC expository writing contained fewer attributive adjectives (3.84%) and personal histories even less (2.59%).

Attributive Participles

Participles, either past or present, can be used as attributive adjectives:

The accepted normal behaviour in Nyoongar was for girls to marry at a very early age ...

Otherwise the ageing process for this lady will be one of living life to the fullest ...

No marked differences were observed between the AUOC and 2nd and 3rd year students in this category (expository writing: AUOC 0.19%; 2/3yr 0.29%). 2nd and 3rd year creative writing showed an average of 0.18% uses and there were no occurrences of participles used attributively in AUOC personal histories.

Postposed participles

Postposed present and past participles can also introduce further information:

Fostering is not the only role keeping this lady active ...

...where she worked as a tea lady taking trays around to the patients.

These past happenings will be viewed against policies used by the Federal and State Governments to control Aboriginal people ...

Postposed participles occurred in more 2nd and 3rd year expository and creative writing (0.55% and 0.4% respectively) than in AUOC expository writing (0.16%) or personal histories (0%).

Prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases can be used sequentially to integrate a string of ideas:

... the move to X was not one of choice, but was a place of convenience for the family to stay.

... have already died at the hands of these clever men.

Sequential prepositional phrases were used more by the 2nd and 3rd year students (expository: 0.44%; creative: 0.75%) than by the AUOC students (expository 0.25% and personal histories 0%).

Series of Constituents

Constituents can be juxtaposed to form a series:

All other ageing defects, such as loss of hearing, slowing down or locomotion, memory loss and wrinkles ...

... which would have required many hours of tender loving care.

... she had to be a responsible mature young woman at fourteen years of age ...

Series of constituents occurred marginally more in the 2nd and 3rd year writing (expository 0.84%; creative 0.49%) than in the AUOC writing (expository 0.47%; personal histories 0.68%).

Conjoined phrases

Constituents can be conjoined into pairs. These may include noun phrases:

In Italy most homes and churches have a PRESPIS (nativity scene) ...

... but strong family support and love for each other, helped them to maintain their dignity and self worth.

verb phrases:

... where they were able to settle and remain unto this day.

She continued to work there until she met and married her husband.

adjectival phrases and predicates:

Although it was a move to a safer and socially better place to live these children still left people they loved behind...

... it is the most enjoyable and busiest time of the year.

adverbial phrases:

... and taking away their right of freedom to move when and wherever they chose.

Conjoined phrases were used more in expository writing (AUOC 2.2%; 2/3yr 2.58%) than in 2/3rd year creative writing (1.48%) or AUOC personal histories (1.64%).

Complement clauses

Complement clauses can be embedded in sentences to integrate further information:

... policies used by the Federal and State Government to control Aboriginal people.

... it was a necessary part of life to be constantly moving in order to prevent the Native Welfare from removing the children.

Complement clause use did not show any marked differences between the two groups in expository texts (AUOC 1.52%, 2/3yr 1.4%) and creative writing (1.3%). Personal histories written by AUOC students showed fewer complement clauses (0.77%).

Relative Clauses

Restrictive relative clauses are a further strategy for integration:

Throughout the tutorial we were informed on many events which took place in the X family's life.

it has become obvious throughout this case-study that life events faced by X are not those which would normally be encountered by other women.

Although many circumstances were beyond the control of X and her family, the life she finally acquired for herself has shown...

Relative clauses also did not show themselves to be a strategy representative of either writing experience (AUOC 0.97%; 2/3yr 1.04%) or of genres (personal histories 1.05%; creative writing 1.05%).

Adverbial Phrases

Adverbial phrases add to a verbal notion:

Throughout her tutorial, reference was made to where the family lived and...

Adverbial phrases were more widespread in personal histories (1.06%) and creative writing (1.05%) than in expository writing (AUOC 0.32%; 2/3yr 0.82%).

The following graphs (Figures 11 to 14) demonstrate the use of integration features in the two genres and by the two student groups.

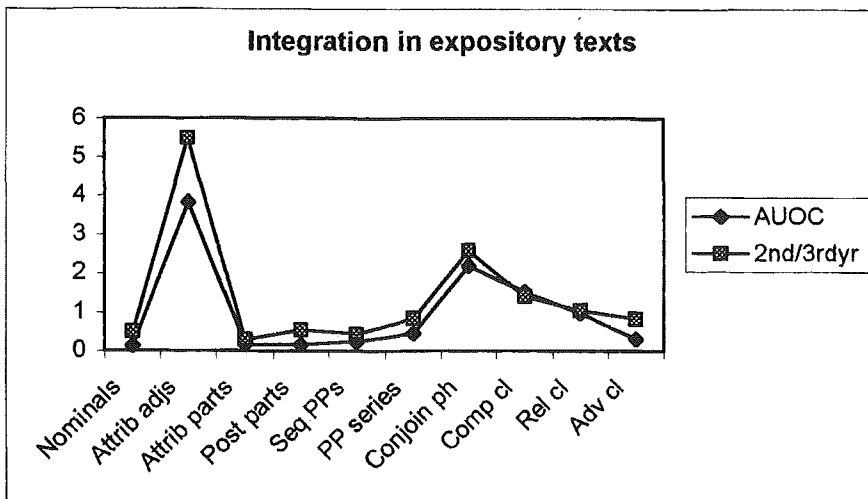


Figure 11 Integration in expository writing

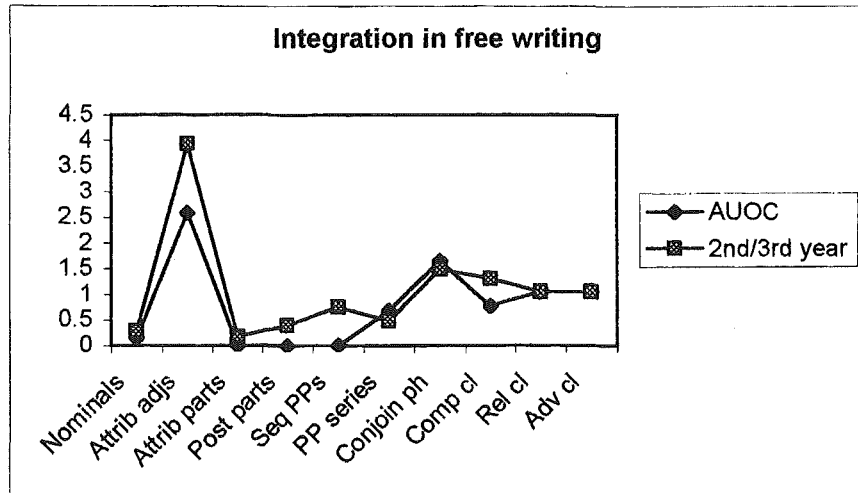


Figure 12 Integration in free writing

Figure 11 shows the 2nd/3rd year writer to use generally more integration features overall than the AUOC writers in expository texts.

Figure 12 shows 2nd/3rd year writers to use more attributive adjectives, postposed participles, sequential prepositional phrases and complement clauses in the free writing examples than AUOC students. These particular linguistic features may be typical of more advanced writing skills but only further research can tell us.

Figure 13 shows AUOC students to use more integration features in expository writing than in their personal histories with the exception of series of prepositional phrases and adverbial phrases.

The 2nd/3rd year group (Figure 14) varied in the degree of integration in their expository and creative writing. There was very little difference in the use of nominalisation, attributive participles, postposed participles, complement clauses and relative clauses. More marked differences occurred in the use of attributive adjectives and conjoined phrases.

Results from this pilot study show empirical evidence of a developmental process for academic writing. Use of strategies for the reliability of knowledge, deductive reasoning, detachment and intertextuality in the form of citations was greater for the more experienced writers than for the Bridging course students. The data also illustrate the development of genre control with the use of strategies such as involvement occurring less frequently in expository writing than in creative or personal writing. Conversely more detachment strategies were found in expository writing than in the free writing samples.

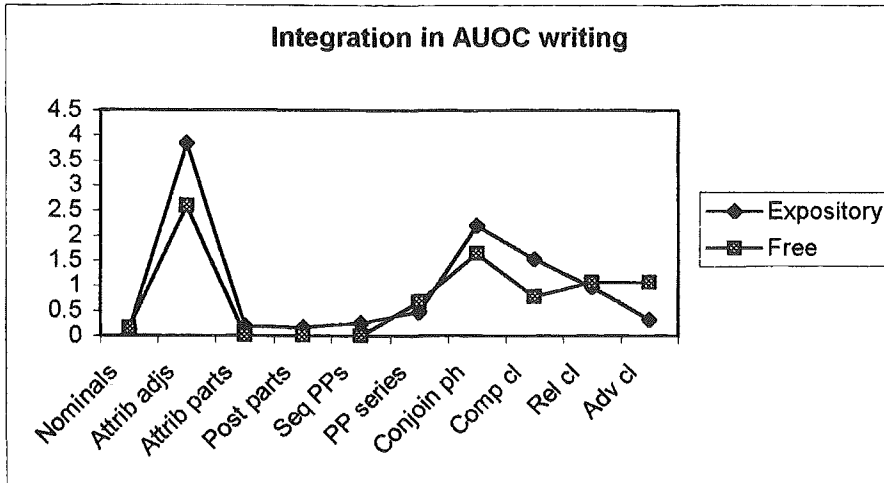


Figure 13 Integration in AUOC writing

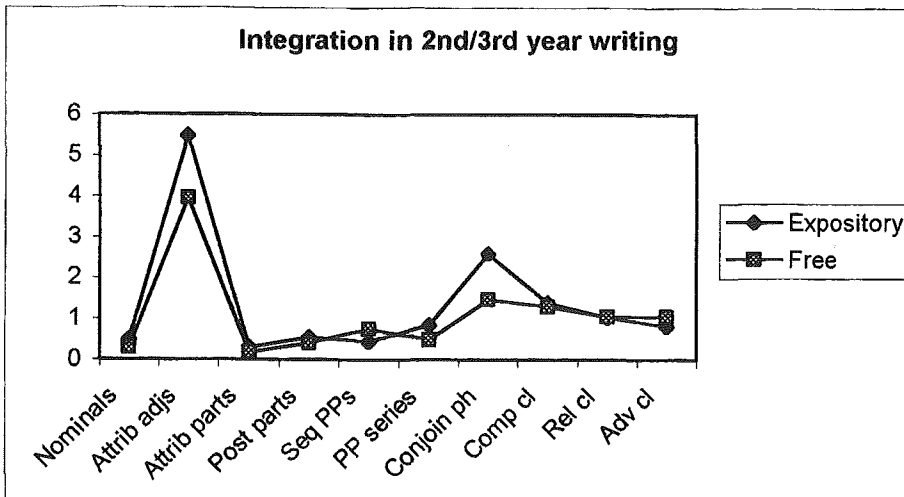


Figure 14 Integration in 2nd/3rd year writing

However, it is possible that the continued use of involvement strategies in expository writing by 2nd and 3rd year students might also be suggestive of manipulation of the text to claim:

Membership of two groups, the university community and the Aboriginal community, thereby constructing an identity that is both Aboriginal and Western-educated or expanding the construction of what it is to be Aboriginal.

(McDonald 1993:11)

This would be especially so if the topic related to Aboriginal issues which was in fact often the case here.

The quantification of integration strategies shows marginally more integration in expository writing for both groups of student writers. This reflects a degree of experience among these student writers, even those in the bridging course, which

might also be enhanced by the specific instruction in academic writing which the bridging course provides.

However, given the small sample size, care must be taken with any interpretation drawn from this analysis. Some degree of bias has already been pointed out with respect to the different genres classified as 'free writing'. Further bias is possible in that the shorter 2nd/3rd year essays were chosen for analysis. As such some of the more sophisticated texts have not been analysed.

5.0 INTERVIEWS

In previous chapters of this report we have demonstrated, by way of data collected through class observation, that Aboriginal students, on entering university, are confronted with a different set of linguistic and paralinguistic norms. In 3.1 above we have shown that sometimes covert tensions can exist between academic staff and Aboriginal students which stem from competing linguistic agendas or the fixed *versus* flexible framing of interactions. In such cases one party, either the academic staff member or the students, must conform in some way to the linguistic agenda or frame set or enforced by the other. In Chapter 3.2 we have demonstrated how staff explicitly instruct on and even model particular academic discourse and behaviours for their students to be able to come to terms with the requirements of academic study. In Chapter 4 our analysis of the features of academic writing, evident in the written assignments of a small sample of bridging course and second and third year students shows that the requirements of academic writing are acquired over a period of time. For example in the course of their study, students will use the markers of oral discourse less and the features of academic writing more.

In the course of this research a number of Aboriginal students at one campus of Edith Cowan University were interviewed about their experiences within the education system from primary through to tertiary (See Appendix for the interview schedule). In this chapter we present extracts from a number of these interviews. Evidence from these interviews lends support to our earlier claim that entry into tertiary institutions requires surmounting a considerable barrier in terms of the specific literacy requirements.

As pointed out in Chapter 4, Indigenous students come to tertiary institutions from a wide range of life experiences. Some have completed primary and secondary education and have had positive experiences in the course of their earlier education:

1. *Parents always made me go to school, you know, it was, like they made it essential that we went to school. The whole family was the same way, you know, even my uncles and that, 'cos you know there's not a great difference in age between my youngest uncles and me, sort of thing, just a few years. And uh, like they were always at school.*
2. *We had a very good upbringing, you know with Mum and Dad, and they made sure that we um, you know, had everything, you know, like schoolwise and that. Books and all that stuff.*
3. *Well, ... I went to Year 10 in school, ... in Place A. It was pretty good. I was one of the good students there. I got a prize ... me an' another Aboriginal, ... a girl, got a first prize for one of the best students. I left at the age of 14, an ... ah I got straight into work.*

Others, however, have had little support in their early school years and related a range of negative experiences. These included a lack of support at home or at school:

4. *So you were a Nyungar kid you sat at the back at school, you kept your mouth shut. At home because there was a whole heap of us, a whole heap of kids, we weren't encouraged to study.*
5. *Yer, the school was sort of um, how do I put it, if you didn't fully understand, you sort of sat behind and missed out. You were afraid to ask, you know, if you asked the teacher you were dumb.*
6. *Those were really hard days, doing year 11 and 12. If I'd had a lot more support like Aboriginal teachers or even guidance officers at the high school it would have been easier.*
7. *The teachers just sort of stuck us in the corner and said you do this. So basically I went through school knowing nothing right up to third year high school.*
8. *No one took the time for me. I was in (Place B). Me and my sisters, we were the only Aboriginal kids in that school at that time.*
9. *I pulled out of school early. I s'pose the teachers in the class didn't spend much time with Nyungar kids. I don't know whether that 'cause the Nyungar kids never asked... or they not got Nyungar kids putting their hands up in a classroom full of white kids... So I never learned much. I left school with about a year to go and just tried to find work.*

Such experiences show that many of these students would be quite unfamiliar with the literacy-centred or grapholect-dominant environment of higher education. In fact their experiences of education have caused them to avoid association with this environment as soon as possible:

10. *Well, I went to um, the first half of year 10 and then I dropped out of school. I think it was high school peer pressure and not being able to understand, the requirements of us at that age.*
11. *I went as far as year 9. Fair bit of problems at school, with the work and that. I was more interested in going out with me mates and that instead of going to school... Yeah, I liked what was going on at school, but interestin things were goin on h'at that time. I preferred to be with me brothers an that than going to school.*

Indeed, some students' early educational experiences are so horrific it is surprising that they are willing to repeat the experience of education at all:

12. *... and I went to a state high school there. I found that really hard there. I was the only black kid in the whole school. A lot of racism. I spent most of my days*

crying on the desk, just sitting in the back, the back of the room crying. The teacher never even noticed I was there.

It is not surprising then that the idea of communicating within a tertiary institution can fill some Aboriginal students with a degree of trepidation:

13. *But ... lot of kids, they frighten' to ask the tutor ... or the teacher ... for them ... you know, ... 'specially h'Aboriginal people ... They frightened. They might feel shame.*

As a result many Aboriginal students come to higher education having been convinced of their inability to succeed (p.c. Aboriginal Student Counsellor). They have low expectations and a low estimate of their own skills:

14. *... and so I was talking to a few lecturers and they said that really I should be looking at uni and I just laughed, I thought well you know, uni's not a place where I'd be, it's just, they're really smart people and I didn't fail my TEE but I didn't get as high as I should have.*

For many Aboriginal students, their earlier studies had little relevance:

15. *I liked history but I had a lot of conflict with the teacher because we were learning European history and nothing that related to me as an Aboriginal person. I grew up not knowing anything about Aboriginal history and I didn't realise I was Aboriginal until I went to high school.*
16. *Um, but yea, apart from the arts and the human bio and oh biology I liked as well, but nothing else related to me at all.*
17. *A lot of things we missed out on in school ... the Aboriginal History ... we never done it in school. Mainly just, ... just, ahhh ... do things about Convicts and those ... those that come over. It's really important for young kids now to start off ... learn about the Aboriginal History.*

Coming to higher educational institutions then might be seen as a way to redress the inadequacies of earlier education. Data from class observations (AUOC ULS) reflects the eagerness to learn more about Aboriginal culture as one reason for returning to education:

18. *Lecturer: And why did you decide to do the course?*
Student: I didn't know about Aboriginal culture.

Other benefits perceived by these students include the chance to improve communication skills:

19. *I wanted to get better qualifications. Better speaker see ... so you (Nyungars) can be speakers. Be easier to cope with then ... or least I know what everyone else talks about then when they are talkin. When you talkin to 'em, see they [Wadjelas] talk different. They tell you to do somethin h'and you think... what was that? you know ... what they said ... what's it mean?*

to have better job opportunities:

20. *I 'm lookin for gettin a job ... you know ... make my age less of a thing by bein h'educated ... an able to do some of the things that needs to be done.*
21. *The main aim, ... is to know more writin ... more maths ... to be of good benefit for your employment ... you know ... if you wanna getta good job ...*

to be able to assist one's own children:

22. *... it will help your children too, you know ... When they get the work ... like homework and they wanna ask you questions 'bout how you do this and that ... It'll be good for them ... Good for yourself too. Cos you know you know you can help 'em an that will benefit 'em when they get older.*

or expand one's interests and raise one's level of confidence:

23. *It's given me confidence anyway, in my own abilities, for a start. Um, it's got me interested in a lot of things that I would never have been interested in before. Um orientated my thoughts into community sort of things, where before I was, you know, doing just the one thing for self and family and now it's think of community first and sort of self second, not second, but you know, like you look, you know is this going to be good for me and community, you know what I mean, that sort of thing.*

However upon entry to university, the demands of assignment deadlines, attendance at lectures combined with family and community commitments will naturally take their toll on students causing the high withdrawal rates demonstrated in Table 1 above. A number of students expressed difficulty with new regimes which constitute the Tertiary Study Cycle (see Figure 1):

24. *... it took me a fair while to come to grips with all the talk and all that sort of stuff. The things that are um, you know, necessary things like essays have to be on time and stuff like that you know. But when you get used to, you know, getting your essays and assignments on time and you know, makes it a lot easier...*
25. *Oh, now you are tertiary, it is completely different isn't it? You are constantly taking notes, you know, you miss a class you make sure you catch up with your notes, previous notes and that there. Just flat out mate.*
26. *I think that was a big thing for a lot of Nyungars students at that time, you know meeting deadlines for assignments, things that they hadn't really been done before.*

The questionnaire focused particularly on the literacy requirements of university and responses demonstrate that students recognise that they must learn a totally new system of communicating. They are aware a whole new language manifest in the speech of academic staff:

27. *Different like, describin things. Like you describe somethin different h'in a different language that we would.*
28. *It is a totally different language from what you use outside, the campus, to what you use inside. Um you can't, you have to learn to live two different languages, one when you go outside and when you are at home and one when you are here. Um, its a necessity to use it at the campus and then you try and use that on people at home and it just doesn't work.*
29. *I would say to get it all organised in my head and all that sort of stuff, the routine, how to write, structure an essay and the language to use because you know, each discipline's got its own language you have to use, you know, which is a real strain and stress when you step out into nowhere into a tertiary situation and then not only do you have to learn, you have to learn two different types of language, because you have got your minor as well, which has got all this other terminology coming in and you don't know what it means until half way through your minor*
30. *Not much Nyungars talk like lecturers an that, they talk straight out to you. Lecturers ... they use other words ... those big words ... an you lose track what they are talkin about then. Trying to work out what the words mean.*

An important preoccupation of many Aboriginal students in the early stages of higher education, then is 'trying to work out what the words mean.' In order to do this, they develop strategies, some of them designed to change or avoid the unfamiliar language (employing what we have called *fixed framing*), and some of them designed to come to terms with it (employing what we have called *flexible framing*).

31. *When the lecturers were talking, doing lectures and that. I just had to pick up on what I did know ... you are constantly trying to clarify what the lecturers are saying. It's what your aim and what you are hearing if it's the same thing.*

This 'new language' is all pervasive in the new educational environment and is particularly problematic in prescribed reading. Students are frequently required to read texts of a level never previously attempted:

32. *Yea, um, no, well I've come across some of the words, some words and I think they are just ridiculous words. You know, just too long winded to, to describe something that you know, I suppose just Aboriginal people can't perceive it or just can't grasp it, because we are just simple, we'll say something straight out, whereas when you look at some of the readings I read and some of the works, like it's just too scientific or too bullshit, hypherfalluted or whatever.*
33. *Some of the books when you got a word, like a fifteen letter word, you don't know what it means you can't even pronounce it it's just sort of, well me I just read up to that, skip that word read on you know. And if you can't pronounce it why read it you know.*

34. *I didn't really realise there would be such an incredible amount of reading that would have to be done, per assignment.*

But the most difficult skill perceived by these students is that of writing. Interview responses suggest that some Aboriginal students seem to find the processes of decontextualisation and abstraction, so prevalent in academic writing, to be extremely tedious:

35. *Yes, I don't like writing a lot. When I say I don't like writing, I don't like writing the Wadjela writing. It's too long and it gets boring. And there's too many whys, and whom and where and whens all in there. You start to lose what yer on about because you have to do, you know, you have to ... When you are asked to do a 2,000 word assignment, well that to me was for the sake of just filling up words and words and words. Making sentences and sentences.*
36. *I even like ... write the whole thing what they talk about in one little sentence ... if you wanted to you know, but they want a full page of h'it. They say talk about same things ... but they want more words. Yaa can just put one word h'an it'll describe the whole thing that you talkin 'bout.*
37. *And mainly the English way of speaking, like Nyungars have their own way of putting something in their own Nyungar prose and it was explained that once we were in tertiary that they wouldn't accept that sort of Nyungar prose in the assignments or even in the tut's.*
38. *Well I'm sort of getting there yea. It's easier to talk about it but to write that's the hardest part to put it on paper. I can understand reading and that. It's just a little bit hard.*

It is not surprising therefore that a number of students rely heavily on their tutors to provide support, encouragement and cultural empathy:

39. *Well I find it a lot easier because we are one on one with the tutor he's just letting us do our own thing, he's not rushing us we are just going along at our own pace. If we need help then we just ask him.*
40. *I find it a lot easier, with a tutor with us ... an also he's a Nyungar too, you know ... an we can sorta relate to 'im and he can relate to us ... We're not sort of frightened to ask 'im questions.*

For many students, tertiary study, not only presents challenges in terms of literacy, but new experiences by way of greater contact and interaction with non-Aboriginal staff and students. For some, it is a new cross-cultural experience: moving into higher education is moving very much into a non-Aboriginal world:

41. *Yer, I have actually started doing that in my classes, um teaching Wadjela students um, in the situation where the hospital situation of an Aboriginal person, that um they are close to death or whatever, that they all have heaps and heaps of people going in to see the person and they seem to want to know more about it because they find it a bit rude that they sort of know most other*

cultures than the Aboriginal culture itself. I mean I'll use the word Nyungar and Wadjela in class and they'll say what does that mean and then I will explain to them. So they are interested in Aboriginal language.

42. *Our lecturers are really good, they're the same. I don't have any trouble. If anything, they will ask me if there's any similarity between Aboriginals and Wadjelas.*
43. *I don't mind talking to Wadjelas. It's just the other sort that you get that um just look at you kind of stupid and think you don't know nothing ... Confidence with talkin to people, Wadjelas, you know ... it all depends on who I'm talking to ... If I'm talking to a teacher or somethin I feel confident.*

This data clearly illustrates the difficulties that Indigenous students face when they become involved in the literacy events which abound in academic establishments. Students regret being unable to express themselves using their 'own Nyungar prose' whereas the accommodation of Aboriginal knowledge, seen in Chapter 4 as *legitimation*, is greatly appreciated. Interview responses show they feel positive when invited to describe Aboriginal culture to fellow non-Aboriginal students and to lecturers. Those students returning to the education system with a view to learning more about their own culture may well be thoroughly disillusioned to find the general exclusion of their world view in the culture of universities. Such strategies for the recognition of indigenous knowledge should therefore be encouraged further in the university.

Harrison (1991) in his survey of Aboriginal student and lecturer perceptions at Northern Territory University (NTU) also recognises that learning at tertiary level 'is learning another culture and language' (p. 1). He argues (after Brown 1991:5) against the view that all students should be treated the same:

...that attempts to treat [all university] students at NTU as a homogenous cultural and speech community disempower[s] Aboriginal students and make[s] it harder for them to succeed because they soon recognise, on admission, that their ways do not have a place in the learning process. Consequently, many students are confronted with what is apparently no choice: either withdraw their enrolment or adopt the racelessness persona to achieve.

(Harrison 1991:40)

Evidence points, therefore, to the possibility that the exclusion of Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge within the university culture is a major factor contributing to the low completion rates of these students and that to address the problem of withdrawal attention must be given to greater inclusivity.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

It has been argued in this report that the way in which literacy is constructed in higher education is culturally constrained. Higher education proceeds by way of literacy events, that is, events, both spoken and written, which entail a commitment to the value of and a competency in the use of a form of English which is heavily influenced by a longstanding culture of literacy. Aboriginal students entering higher education are in many cases moving from a sphere where they have been heavily influenced by the residual presence of a primary oral culture and as such do not share the unquestioning acceptance of the value of the grapholect which the higher education system assumes. Given these circumstances, the use of the grapholect can be expected to be problematic for Aboriginal students in the various literacy events they encounter in higher education, especially if they are newcomers, or only occasional visitors, to university campuses.

On the basis of material extracted from naturalistic data sources obtained over a period of extended observation, it has been suggested that, in all literacy events considered: reading, receiving lecturer presentations, group work, assignments and examination papers, Aboriginal students do show evidence of unfamiliarity with and limited confidence in employing the grapholect. This may well be related to the fact that Aboriginal students are not, in many cases, attracted to higher education until they reach mature age: a situation which may itself result from the appalling experiences which they have had in primary and secondary education.

If higher education is to become more inclusive with respect to Aboriginal students, it needs to recognise the culturally contingent nature of the literacy events by means of which it seeks to promote learning. This involves recognising:

a) the evidence of the transfer from an oral-based culture in Aboriginal students:

- approaching of reading and lecturer-student interactions as group rather than individual tasks;
- non-observance of anticipated turn taking rules in academic exchanges;
- non-response to the grapholect when unfamiliar terms are used in lecturer speech;
- use of oral-influenced forms rather than the grapholect in responding;
- resistance to certain unfamiliar conventions (e.g. those associated with examinations);

b) the following problem areas where Aboriginal students may require special support or where practices should be modified:

- extensive reading;
- processing skills for talking about reading (e.g. paraphrasing, precise referencing, acknowledgement);
- reading aloud before the group;
- handling discipline-specific registers;
- comprehending lectures at the first hearing;
- achieving written competence to the same level as oral competence;
- mastering skills in manipulation of the grapholect (e.g. written summarising);
- interpreting assignment questions;
- having written submissions correctly interpreted;
- maintaining consistency of style in written assignments and examination papers;
- writing in a sufficiently decontextualized and explicit way.

Cultural inclusiveness in higher education does not mean in any sense a lowering of standards. It means achieving a greater level of self-awareness on the part of the educators and a greater level of sophistication in applying principles of learner centredness to the educational process. The preliminary findings of this research offer some directions to educators who recognise that change and adaptation should not be wholly seen as the burden of the Aboriginal student.

The number of Aboriginal students in higher education in Australia is rapidly increasing (Ward and Pincus 1992) and there will be a growing need in future to come to terms with the communication problems which universities pose for them. For this to happen, further research will be needed to account for the distinctive way in which they frame literacy events and to explore ways in which universities may accommodate to them. Such research would potentially have application in many cross-cultural higher education settings.

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APPENDIX

Interview schedule

- 1) We are going to be talking about early education and tertiary education. Could you tell us about high school? How far did you go there and what did you do?

- 2) Did you have a sort of homework set up at home, take any school work home, over the weekend or anything like that on a regular basis? Did your parents encourage you to do homework at home?

- 3) How long were you away from formal education before you went back to university?

- 4) How did you find going with the AUOC? Did you find any problems? I'm particularly interested in the language that you came across, the definition of terms and how you had to structure your essays or your work?

- 5) Did you have tutors in the AUOC and afterwards in tertiary [i.e. mainstream] ?

- 6) Where would you see yourself going from here in terms of literacy and language? What sort of bonus did you get out of the tertiary course? Where do you want to go now?