UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

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ACCESSING ACADEMIC LITERACY:

PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING IN ENGLISH 101 AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

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Abstract

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the apparent mismatch between the expectations of first year students in the English department at the University of the Western Cape, and those who teach them. By exploring the perceptions of some of the students, lecturers and tutors in the department, I investigate how meaning within the discipline of English studies is negotiated and to what extent the learning experiences in the department contribute to the facilitation of "epistemological access" (Morrow, 1993). An important aspect of meaning negotiation is the redefining and rethinking of concepts such as "academic literacy" and "critical literacy".

The exploration is done through the collection of qualitative data; by means of questionnaires and interviews. The overall findings are analysed and interpreted in terms of current research around tertiary learning, especially that which discusses academic development issues and the 'new' literacy studies.

The study concludes that further consideration and exploration of issues of epistemological access and academic literacy is particularly relevant and necessary at this point, not only for an institution like UWC, but all South African universities. It would be shortsighted to allow students into the university without giving careful consideration to the processes of mediating access to ways of knowledge-making in the academic context. These ways of making meaning need to be made explicit.

It is hoped that this research will provide a better understanding of how students and lecturers perceive the learning process at UWC, and will encourage tertiary educationists so as to continue the process of rethinking and redefining factors which influence the learning process in this discipline.

CHAPTER ONE:
ENTERING THE DEBATE

"If I say I don't understand they will ask 'what don't you understand?',
then I can't answer. How can I say I don't know what I don't
understand? I can't say 'everything', so, like everyone there, I just say
'yes', and then we move on."

"When I write the exam I think I did it right, but then I failed and I
don't know why. Essays the same, I try and write the corrections, but I
don't improve much."

Introduction

These are quotes from an interview with two students in which they describe their perceptions
of their first year of study in the English Department at the University of the Western Cape
(UWC). Comments such as these convey the bewilderment often experienced by so many
students when faced by the daunting demands of doing university studies in English. By their
account, they diligently attend lectures and take copious notes, they painstakingly try to work
through the texts, they attempt the essays, and yet they still don't succeed - and they don't
really understand why.

On the other hand, there are also comments from frustrated lecturers in the Department:

"... students are unable to understand lectures, prepare for tutorials or
write a coherent sentence, let alone an analytical essay."

They also ask:

"What is going on? Why can't our students, even at this stage, carry out the simplest operation of textual analysis, and why have they not mastered even the most basic elements of the language? ... I do think we have some sort of crisis on our hands here - "

This research project is an attempt to reach a better understanding of the learning process in the English department at UWC. By exploring the perceptions of students, lecturers and tutors, I investigate how meaning within the discipline of English studies is negotiated and to what extent epistomological access [1] (Morrow, 1993) in a tertiary context is facilitated.

My interest in investigating these issues comes from my involvement in teaching on the English 101 course in the English Department at UWC, both as a tutor and a lecturer. The high failure rate in English 101 (53% in 1995), the obvious difficulty that students in my classes had in understanding what was expected of them, as well the frustrations of those teaching the course, led me to investigate learning and teaching in this context in a more rigorous way than merely relying on untested intuitions of what my students were experiencing.

I maintain that the exploration of issues of epistemological access and academic literacy is particularly relevant at this point, not only for an institution like UWC, but all South African universities whose student populations have been quite radically transformed in recent years.

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[1] Wally Morrow, argues that access to education has two dimensions: access to the institution, formal access, and access within the institution to the goods (knowledge) it distributes, which he calls "epistemological access". He argues further that, although formal (institutional) access is necessary for epistomological access to take place, it is far from being a sufficient condition.

Thousands of students who had been previously barred from higher education are clamouring at the doors of learning, and are being let in. UWC, especially, has led the way in this regard. It has for some time adopted an 'open admissions' policy as a conscious effort to enable previously-barred students to have access to university studies. As Morrow (1993) argues, institutional access is absolutely meaningless if not accompanied by epistemological access. At UWC the latter has been sadly lagging behind the former, but the issue needs to be addressed very urgently if tertiary education is to be at all meaningful in South Africa.

Some of the broad questions I explore are:
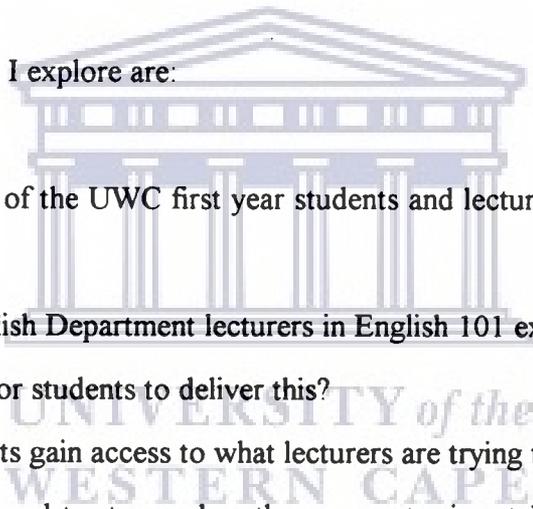
♦ What are the perceptions of the UWC first year students and lecturers about what happens in university learning?

♦ What is it that UWC English Department lecturers in English 101 expect from the students, and why is it so difficult for students to deliver this?

♦ How can first year students gain access to what lecturers are trying to deliver?

♦   How do we explain, and try to resolve, the apparent mismatch between what (some) students bring to the learning situation, and what the university in general, and the UWC English   Department in particular, demand?

During the course of my investigation I became interested in trying to define the nature of academic discourses and the process of accessing these, rather than just exploring and recording student and lecturer perceptions of learning. In addition, the context in which learning takes place is a crucial factor. Thus learning within the specific context of English studies means understanding of what it means to construct meaning within this context, and this understanding has to be negotiated by all those involved. Debates about learning need to

transcend the curricular level to the metacurricular level. In particular, those who teach need to discuss more **how** to learn than **what** is learnt.

In the first chapter of this study I raise and explore the main issues explored in this study and situate these within the context of theoretical debates in the field of literacy studies and academic development studies. I also describe the setting of UWC. In the second chapter I outline the arguments of some of the main theorists who have guided this research study. In the third chapter I describe and motivate my choice of a methodological approach which I feel best serves my purpose. To some extent, I also recount a narrative of the actual research process. In the fourth chapter I diverge somewhat from the traditional structure: I conflate the research findings with the analysis and interpretation, which I find a more comfortable way of 'making sense of it all' (the title of the chapter). In the conclusion I attempt to explain my findings, and to demonstrate the relevance and generalisability of my findings. I also outline a methodological approach which I suggest might assist in the mediation of the specific literacy practices of English studies at UWC.

This study, like the issues it explores, represents the start of a process rather than a definitive interpretation. Hopefully, my discussion here will encourage others to enter the debate, to start rethinking and redefining the process of learning within English studies in particular, and the university context in general. In addition I hope that lecturers will be encouraged to redefine their relationship with those whom they teach. While it can be argued that the

relationship between students and lecturers can never be one of complete equality [2], the needs, desires and perceptions of the learner should be regarded as an essential factor in the discussion and planning of learning processes.

Background and Context

The problem of adjusting to the university experience is referred to by many educationists working within the field of university learning. Michael Chapman (1990) refers to the first year of university study as a crisis year, as educationists are faced with a student group who are not "adequately prepared to think critically, to connect literature to crucial social understandings, and to articulate any argument with any precision" (21). He voices this concern about students generally, many who, according to him, seemingly lack any exposure to serious academic texts before being faced with the course reading list.

Angelil-Carter and Paxton (1993), working in the Academic Support programme at the University of Cape Town, describe how they have come to the realisation that educational competence in the context of the university "means something different" (1993:8) than what is expected at school. This very specialised discourse presents a problem to all new (and old) students.

Further afield than South Africa, many educationists have discussed the problems that their students experience when doing university studies in English. They describe how highly

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[2] It has to be acknowledged that an unequal situation exists between student and lecturer with regard to knowledge and experience of the specific discipline. Lecturers have the responsibility of allowing students to gain access to that knowledge and experience they have made their own, and to approach this process in a way which is enabling, empowering and self-confirming for their students.

motivated students are to learn English, given the universal status English enjoys as a means to empowerment and success. This is especially true in countries where English is spoken as a second language. Zughoul (1986), teaching in the Middle East, describes the problems students have in adjusting to English studies and argues that this discipline has to be radically restructured in order to accommodate the needs and interests of English second language students. In Taylor et al (1988), Australian educationists propose a quite radical anthropological approach to looking at university learning. They argue that gaining access to the new environment of the academy is like moving into a new culture, with new rules and conventions. Although working mainly in English first language context, the arguments presented in Taylor et al raise issues quite appropriate in a South African setting.

What they all seem to be discussing, though, as Gee (1990) argues in an American context, are "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles". Gee argues that new students, especially those coming from an English second language background, find it difficult to learn these at first, and are often then branded as "inadequate" students. Learning the rules and conventions of academic discourse, a new way of using language, is not a simple matter, as what is expected from new students bear very little resemblance or relationship to the non-academic literacies they may have encountered previously.

To understand the social nature of language, and especially, the way it works in an academic context, it is useful to briefly outline the thoughts of some key discourse theorists.

The term 'discourse' can have a number of meanings. When used by some linguists, the term refers to the organisation of language, both spoken and written, which extends beyond just a sentence into longer stretches of communication like conversations, letters and so on

(Baynham: 1995). Other language theorists extend the concept of discourse into the social and political terrain. Fairclough (1989) defines discourse as "the whole process of [social] interaction" including the production and interpretation of texts (ibid:4). Kress (1989) offers a definition of 'discourse' which is located in a network of social and political relations:

> Discourses are systematically-organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution. Beyond that they define, describe and delimit what is possible to say and not possible to say ..., with respect to the area of concern of that institution, whether marginally or centrally." (1989:7)

These "statements" define *what* can and cannot be said, as well as *how* things should be said and are always located in a social and political context.

Thus when talking of academic discourse we are referring to ways of expressing meanings and values validated by academic institutions. We are referring to certain rules and conventions which form the context in which reading and writing is embedded. Academic literacy can be said to be the awareness of these discourses, as well as the confidence and ability to appropriate them.

I find the notion of academic literacy and academic discourse as outlined above a useful one when investigating the differences between students' and lecturers' perceptions of learning, as well as the vast gulf between previous educational experiences and the demands of university studies. It enables us to start defining what the "something different" (Angelil-Carter and Paxton:1993) could be which is demanded in a tertiary learning context. It serves as an entry point into a discussion of the immense distance in social and cultural terms many students have to cover in order to be judged as 'competent' university students.

Simplistically defined, academic literacy can mean the ability to read and write effectively within the university context in order to pass from one level to another. However, I contend that acquiring academic literacy is a much more complex process: it involves learning to read, write and speak with conifdence and independence, which in turn involves a reshaping of the students' self-image and sense of identity as they adjust to new perceptions of what the learning process involves. This is never an easy process. both for those who are learning, and those who are teaching.

At a recent planning meeting in the English Department (1995), there was general consensus that the main focus of the English 101 course should be on **critical literacy** skills. If academic literacy can be seen to refer to a particular level of linguistic proficiency regarding the literacy practices of the university generally, then critical literacy refers to the more specific practices of English studies: the close reading of literary texts, and providing some evidence of this reading in the form of analytical writing. Higgins (1992) argues a position which regards the study of English as practice, as techniques, not content. He sees English studies as a discipline in which students are taught the particular skills of reading and analysis:

> ... Critical literacy is the development of the analytical skills which
> enable one to take a critical distance from what is written, from what
> there is to read, from the representations of the world which forms of
> discourse make available to us, and seek to place us in. (1992:198)

He distinguishes between 'primary literacy', which he sees as the acquisition of the basic instrumental skills of a language and the ability to read, understand and paraphrase a text, and 'critical literacy', which is seen as the ability to see how that text wishes to be understood, how it seeks to position us as its readers.

Clearly, critical literacy as defined above demands quite a high level of linguistic proficiency. The development of this "second order operation", given the reality that students might not be proficient in "the first order operation" of language is unlikely to be a simple process.

I hope that investigating what the different perceptions are of the learning situation will give those involved in tertiary education a chance to hear what the others are saying about their experiences. Comments from teaching staff and students have made it clear that the present situation in the English Department is a problematic one. In order to understand fully what the challenge is for the English Department, we need to understand the learning processes as they are experienced from the perspective of the learner. If we focus only on the syllabus and teaching methodology we focus only on what the teaching staff perceive the learning process to involve, and what they believe the intended outcome for the students to be. I believe this could be a very limited view.

This study draws on two quite different paradigms, that of the new literacy studies, as well as the deficit model approach to discussing educational issues in South Africa. To a large extent, I do focus on the problems which students experience. This is unavoidable. It is impossible to escape the fact of the past apartheid education experiences of our students, experiences of an education system which deliberately sought to oppress the majority of this country's citizens. This is the reality that teachers in South African tertiary institutions all live and work with. What might be problematic, though, is if we locate all discussions around educational development in South Africa in a deficit paradigm, without looking at the issues from other perspectives.

The alternative approach which I offer is one which sees the academic context of UWC as a strange, alienating context for most of its students. It is a context whose literacy practices are very different to the ones practised by the students previously. However, a university like

UWC is unavoidably part of socially-determined conditions, and these conditions have to be faced head-on. The usual deficit model is one which attempts to bring a underprepared, disadvantaged group of students to an ideal level which is seen to be that of the rest of the academic community (including students). My approach argues that the majority of those which the university hopes to acculturate into the academic community have been disempowered by a series of obstacles deliberately designed to inhibit academic progress: apartheid, Nationalist education policy, the Group Areas, the quota and permit system. These students are now knocking at our doors, no longer as a negligible entity, but as a powerful pressure group challenging the previously unassailable power base of the institution. We have to face up to this, and deal with it.

Setting of the study:

The University of the Western Cape was established in the late Sixties to provide a limited form of tertiary education for Coloured students. Established under the apartheid regime, it was set up as part of the apartheid policy of "separate development". At this time Coloured students were not allowed to study at the University of Cape Town (UCT), which was seen as an institution for whites only. UCT only allowed in Coloured and African students under very special circumstances. UWC was staffed mainly by Afrikaner supporters of the apartheid regime. During the Seventies, however, the university developed into an institution of apartheid resistance, as increasing numbers of Coloured intellectuals, influenced by the rising Black Consciousness movement, began voicing their opposition to the racial policies which influenced education at the university. Many of these students came back to the university after graduation to teach and challenge the notion of the university as a "Bush college". Gradually the university defied its label as a "Coloured" university and began opening its doors to African students. This led to a more "open" admissions policy under which students would not be prevented from further education because of the restrictive effects of apartheid

education (Horrell, 1970, and van der Ross, 1980, cited in Da Costa, Julie and Meerkotter, 1994). This meant that students with poor results, who would ordinarily not qualify for entrance to universities such as UCT, could apply to come to UWC.

Unfortunately academic development measures which would address some of the consequences of the "open admissions" policy were fairly slow to develop. Consequently one had the situation where academic staff, trained in conventional academic practices, often found it very difficult to cope with the changing student population, and many were, and still are, frustrated at the seeming inability of students to cope with conventional academic demands.

The English Department:

The setting of this study is the English 101 course at the University of the Western Cape. It is described as a "language and literary studies course" (Departmental Handbook 1995. See Appendix C and D). In addition to four literature modules, there is a year-long Language module. Although the handbook explains the purpose of the language component of the course as "developing the skills of reading and writing English in an academic context" (12), the course in fact does not set out to provide basic language support for students. It teaches critical language awareness: how language is used in different contexts, dealing with issues of register, dialects and varieties of English, and language and the media. The theoretical approach proves to be difficult for students. It demands a high level of linguistic proficiency to be able to recognise how language is manipulated in various texts; a proficiency which many student lack.

The English 101 course consists of five modules: South African prose fiction, South African poetry and drama, Literature of the Modern World, Renaissance literature and Language studies.

Students attend four lectures a week, one of which is a double lecture; one tutorial a week and one period is allocated as a workshop period. Attendance of workshops is optional. At the time of the study, the workshops were mostly used for revision and preparation for examinations. In addition, for the last two years, students have participated in a Computer Supported Education (CSE) programme, which allows student to work on computer programmes. These have been designed by Academic Development Centre Staff in conjunction with the English department, and focus on essay-writing, editing and language skills. Students work on these programmes at the computer centre in their own time. As an incentive, the students are scored on a series of tests, which contributes to their overall mark in English.

Participants in my study:

(See Appendix B for additional details).

Participants in the study are students, lecturers and tutors in the English 101 course. There are twenty-one permanent and nine contract lecturers in the department. The majority are white. They all have at least a Masters degree. The average age is under forty. Some of the lecturers have been in the department for many years, experiencing the transformation of the institution referred to above. Only three of the lecturers, contract staff members, attained their degrees at UWC. The others studied at other South African universities or at institutions abroad.

At the time of this study, there were thirteen tutors, specially employed to take tutorials in the department. These tutors, except for four, were white Masters students from the University of Cape Town. They would have attended whites only, English first language high schools. Their educational backgrounds, therefore, matched those of the lecturers. Furthermore, they had come from a vastly different tutoring experience at the University of the Cape Town. At the

time of the study there was not a single tutor, or full-time permanent lecturer, whose educational background matched those of the majority of the students at UWC.

Students are those who were registered for English 101 in 1995. The majority of the students come from Department of Education and Training (DET) schools. They have graduated from an education system which for years neither sought nor claimed to prepare students for university study. Often English was claimed to be the medium of instruction, but as I will show in this study, for too many students the classroom was probably the only place where any level of English was heard, and even this was not always the case.

At the beginning of the year (1995) 1126 students registered for English 101. At the end of the year 1040 students wrote the exam. 53% of these students passed. The majority of those who passed achieved a 'D' symbol, and the majority of the failed students were in the 'F' and 'G' levels.

The sample of students involved in the study are drawn from three tutorial groups:

Tutorial group 21:

Xhosa L1 speakers - 11

Sesotho L1 - 1

English L1 - 4

Afrikaans L1 - 2.

Total - 18

Tutorial Group 24:

Xhosa L1 speakers - 10

English L1 - 4

Afrikaans L1 - 3.

Total - 17

Tutorial Group 31:

Xhosa L1 speakers - 10

English L1 - 3

Afrikaans L1 - 3

Shangaan L1 - 1

Tswana L1 - 2.

Total - 19

The number of students surveyed - 54.

This is 5,1% of the total number of students who wrote the examination at the end of 1995.

All of these students wrote the examination at the end of the year. Of the 54 students, only 8 were in their second year of study.

The students above were not specially elected for the study, but were placed in these tutorial groups by the administrative staff of the Department, according to the timetables of the students, as well as the availability of tutors and venues. The composition of these groups is usually fairly representative of the English 101 student population. See Appendix A for more detailed information about student enrolment and language distribution figures.

CHAPTER TWO
OUTLINING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I want to start this chapter with an extract from one of the interviews I conducted with a first year student in the English Department:

> *But my idea of the story was not met in the lectures at all. I would*
>
> *have read about 'apples', and then in the lecture they would be talking*
>
> *about 'pears', with no mention of the 'apples' at all.*
>
> *Whatever they regarded as fundamental differed from my idea. I had*
>
> *a problem linking what they say to my idea and to the story.*
>
> *The same with my essays. I was never sure of what they wanted from*
>
> *me, especially in the essays. I would look at the topic - what did they*
>
> *want me to do? [my emphasis] (student interview, 1995)*

This student's articulate description of his bewilderment reveals that, after almost a full year, he has not mastered what "the creation of meaning and the expression of understanding" (Taylor et al, 1988:2) demands within the context of university English studies. Ballard and Clanchy, in their essay "Literacy in the University: An Anthropological Approach" (Taylor et al, 1988) present a perspective on academic literacy which claims that academic literacy can only have meaning within the particular cultures of the university. In order to understand some of the problems faced by new students it is necessary to examine the culture of the particular discipline:

> "the task required of the students, then, is to learn not only the general
>
> rules of discourse and argumentation which sustain the culture but also
>
> the appropriate disciplinary or sub-cultural rules which govern how

thinking and ... language may function in specific contexts of knowledge..." (1988:14)

According to Clanchy, a necessary step in learning these disciplinary or sub-cultural rules is to make these explicit to students. Doing this is difficult, though, as academics are often unable to objectify their own academic cultures in order to make explicit the assumptions which they have internalised through the development of their own literacy and expertise. Yet it is only by attempting to do this seriously that they can be said to be "acculturating" or "socialising" students into the discourse.

In a presentation of actual case studies, Bock (1988) argues that language development does not precede conceptual development, so it is no use just focusing on surface language errors made by new students to overcome what she identifies as a more serious problem: a fundamental understanding of the academic endeavour expected and the nature of the task. Taylor supports Bock's argument that what seems to be poor writing may reflect semantic and epistemic problems. Students need to learn the metalanguage of academic enquiry.

The image of the struggling student sketched in these essays is a familiar one to those teaching within a South African context. Taylor argues that a source of tension and difficulty for students is the balancing of their position as new learners with the academic demands to become critical experts. They are required to make academic judgements, but feel inadequate. Hence the fall-back to the familiar "text as reality" assumption and the overuse of the personal voice in student writing. Overcome by the conceptual difficulties of a task such as critical analysis in English literary studies, for example, a student responds to a text as if it is a story of a real experience. She might often respond with a personal account of her own instead of using the more detached, critical academic discourse.

Ballard and Clanchy (1988) in many ways concur with Taylor in their attempt to put together a more encompassing definition of what academic literacy is. What seems on the surface to be inadequate linguistic competence is often a deeper problem related to structure and understanding. It is the difficulty of dealing with the demands of the discipline which contribute significantly to the failure in producing what is regarded as correct language. The conceptual framework of knowledge in that discipline, the ways of knowing and ways of representing knowledge is closely related to the language used. If tertiary educationists and researchers are to improve academic literacy we need to understand this relationship. Students are generally regarded as literate in a particular discipline when they can use the appropriate mode of analysis competently, and this means both cognitive and linguistic competence. Ballard and Clanchy have identified two dimensions to the linguistic competence required. The first is what they call the "generalised literacy of context" (17), which includes such things as "correctness, coherence, appropriateness of style and voice" (17). The second they call "control of the disciplinary dialect" (17), which are those meanings and forms of language peculiar to the discipline.

The role of language in academic settings and how this relates to the facilitation and mediation of academic and critical literacy, should be of special concern to those involved in tertiary education. In order to investigate these and other related issues, however, one needs a framework which defines the nature and scope of these issues, and which offers an approach on how they can be described and investigated.

The context for exploring notions of academic and critical literacy here is a problem that many tertiary educationists face in universities today: the problem of redressing some of the educational impoverishment and disadvantage experienced by many students in the context of apartheid education. There is a need to identify and respond to the academic and

communicative needs of many students with a view to increasing their confidence and competence to interact and communicate fully and effectively within the university environment. If we are to do this we need to reflect on those academic processes and skills that we consider necessary for success at university. This requires a rethinking of what the process of acquiring academic literacy involves.

Gee (1990) problematises the notion of literacy. His theory of literacy encompasses a wider theory of language and society. He argues that literacy surely means nothing unless we talk about reading or writing something. Furthermore, how we read these things is not an instinctive process but is socially-determined. Socially-determined conditions influence how one learns to interpret texts of a certain type, and in turn, write texts of a certain type. So when we consider issues of literacy we have to do so by taking into account all aspects of the social institutions where the practice of literacy takes place. These include the appropriate ways of talking, interacting, thinking, behaving and believing which are encouraged by these institutions. A Discourse is a socially accepted way of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signify (that one is playing) a socially meaningful role. (1990:143)

According to Gee, it is only within the context of the notion of Discourse that a viable definition of literacy can be achieved. Everyone is primarily a member of one Discourse, which signals membership within a particular community, 'people like us'. This he refers to as the person's 'primary Discourse' (1990:151). The primary Discourse serves as a base or framework for the acquisition and learning of other Discourses. It also shapes the form this acquisition and learning will take. Furthermore, other Discourses acquired can influence the person's primary Discourse, reshaping it in various ways. Other Discourses crucially involve social

institutions, and are referred to as 'secondary Discourses'. Thus any socially useful definition of literacy must be seen in the context of primary and secondary Discourse. Literacy can be defined as 'mastery of, or fluent control over, a secondary Discourse' (1990:153). And because there are many Discourses, therefore, literacy is itself always a plural concept.

What are the practical consequences of Gee's argument? He bases his theories on a study of American society, making a distinction between middle-class children and underprivileged, often mostly black, children. He argues that middle-class children acquire school-based literacies through experiences in the home before and during school (story-telling, access to books, preschool learning and so on) as well as by the opportunities the school gives them to practise what they are acquiring. Many children who come from non-middle-class backgrounds do not get these opportunities. When they come to school, they cannot practise what they haven't got. School-based Discourses, too, often conflict with non-mainstream children's primary Discourses. He bases his arguments on comparative studies of the school performances of the children from white middle-class, white working-class and black lower-working class communities in the United States, as well as looking at the work of several ethnographers and sociolinguists.

Because society underwrites these school-based Discourses, they are relevant to moving towards the next stage of education, and for eventual entry into the academic Discourse of a tertiary environment. If the primary Discourses of students entering higher education are in conflict with the secondary Discourses of the university, students will have difficulty in adapting. How to overcome this mismatch? Gee sounds a note of warning against special 'writing classes' or 'English Second Language' courses, or other "sheltered programs" (1990:173). Often these serve merely as gates to see that only the right students move to the next level. Other who are deemed 'unsuitable' would remain behind. Using the analogy of

learning to play drums, or to be a carpenter, he argues that the only way to learn these skills properly is to actually do it, in the setting where these things are done, together with other drummers and carpenters. Those who teach mainstream courses should take these factors into account when planning the content and in this way

> justify the content of our language and literacy classes, justify the Discourse ...[we] are apprenticing them to. This justification would be that we had picked a Discourse that was substantive, important and rich in its own right, or we had picked one that these particular students (whom we are faced with here and now) need for their futures.. (173)

The process of 'apprenticing' students to academic discourses is explored by Swales (1990) as well. In his book <u>Genre Analysis</u> he offers an approach to the understanding of spoken and written discourse within tertiary institutions. Central to his argument are the concepts of discourse community, genre and language-learning tasks. Discourse communities, such as academic groupings of various kinds, are recognised by the specific genres that they employ in their specific disciplines, which include both speech events and written texts. The work that members of discourse communities are involved in have to do with the processing of tasks which reflect specific linguistic and discursive skills.

Swales attempts to give an account of a discourse community by addressing a definition proposed by Bizzell (cited in Swales:1990):

> ... a discourse community is a group of people who share certain language-using practices. These practices can be seen as

conventionalized in two ways. Stylistic conventions regulate social interaction both within the group and in its dealings with outsiders: ... Also, canonical knowledge regulates the world-views of group members, how they interpret experience; ... (29)

Swales differs from this definition in a few quite crucial aspects: Firstly, he questions the premise that participation necessarily entails assimilation. Secondly, he argues that people often belong to different discourse communities simultaneously, and they vary in the number of discourse communities they belong to and the genres they command, thus they will vary, also, in the degree in which a particular world-view is imposed. Just as Gee (1990) argues that individuals have different literacies, different primary Discourses, and they are exposed to a range of secondary Discourses, so Swales argues that university students, for example, taking a range of courses in a range of disciplines, could possibly participate in a range of discourse communities with some detachment.

Swales concedes that any account of a discourse community remains an abstract, idealistic concept. In reality, in actual university classrooms and departments, research fields and disciplines are characterised by continual tensions, conflicts and contradictions, making a definitive account impossible. He is unable to clearly define the boundaries, the composition and discursive practices of a discourse community. However, as limited as Swales' description of discourse communities is, what is useful is his emphasis of the seriousness of the challenge which is imposed on teachers in academic institutions to understand the forces which shape the language of the academy so as to pass on this understanding to those who wish to gain access to academic discourse. What I find useful, too, is Swales' discussion on the concept of task, especially as these tasks relate to an English academic context (73). He presents the arguments of many other educationists to support his point that carefully designed language-learning

tasks are essential for university learning. These tasks would involve students in the practice of manipulating the discourse of the discipline in an explicit way. I return to the concept of task in the conclusion of this study.

The significance of the contributions made by the arguments outlined above is, first of all, the insight they give into problems which seem surprisingly similar to those we experience at an institution like UWC. The essays present a convincing argument that teaching needs to acknowledge the relationships between language and learning if students are to be expected to meet the lecturers' expectations.

In this study I describe a situation which shows just how necessary it is to take cognisance of some of the issues raised by these arguments. It can be argued that these issues are by no means new to those working within South African tertiary institutions. We are all are aware of the educational backgrounds of the majority of our students, and how these have impacted on their university studies. The problem, though, that many of us grapple with is: how does one go about mediating access to the literacy practices of the university, in general, and those of the discipline in particular, and whose responsibility is it to do this? Faced with the unwillingness, or inability, to seriously address these questions, English Studies departments have been quite adept at passing the buck of literacy development to Academic Support and Academic Development structures, while allowing them to continue with 'business as usual'.

Many tertiary educationists in South Africa, working either in English departments, or in Academic Development programmes of various kinds, have suggested that instead of labelling our students as 'underprepared', it is our teachers who are underprepared to deal with the situation. I would like to contend that one of the reasons for this underpreparedness might be that teachers often do not understand the experience of learners in the academic context.

In order to explore these learning experiences, I needed to work out the guidelines for a process of systematic enquiry. It is this process which I outline and describe in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Undertaking any research project means embarking on a process of systematic inquiry, a process which is characterised by certain principles and procedural guidelines. These principles and guidelines are determined by what the purpose of the inquiry is. My purpose, outlined in Chapter One, is the investigation and interpretation of the differing perceptions of the learning processes in English 101, and the social and cultural processes which affect these perceptions. A key feature of this project is to investigate how teachers and learners make sense of and interpret the world of university learning and teaching.

In a previous chapter I point out the nature of the challenge posed to the English Department at UWC. Recently the Department has made several curriculum and methodology changes. Some of these changes relate to the scrapping of certain texts from the reading list. As well-intentioned as this revision is, changing the reading-list without focusing on methodology is inadequate. When focusing on the syllabus in this way one only looks at the situation from the perspective of the lecturer, at what the lecturer believes the learning problem to be. In order to more fully understand this challenge, I wanted to understand the learning process as experienced from the point of view of both students and lecturers. First and foremost, then, I see the input from participants as the first principle guiding this study.

In addition, I focus on those students whose cultural and educational background have left them most disempowered, and who are in the majority at UWC. It is their voices which I want heard. The concept of 'voice' is a central one to many educational researchers working in the field of English Second Language teaching and learning. Giroux and McLaren states "[t]he category of voice, then, refers to the means at our disposal - the discourse available to us - to

make ourselves understood and listened to, and to define ourselves as active participants in the world (cited in Pennycook, 1994:199).

Choosing an appropriate research methodology to achieve this was not a simple and straightforward task. The history of educational research seems to be a history of shifting definitions and alternative approaches, of changing narratives of how knowledge is created and studied. Underlying the process of any research are assumptions of what the world is like, how society is structured and how it functions (Popkewitz, 1984).

Cameron et al (1992) identify two main areas of concern when discussing the issue of social research. The first is the status of academic knowledge itself, and the second is the crucial issue of the relation between the researcher conducting the study and those who are being studied, the researched.

I needed, therefore, to consider seriously the repertoire of research methodologies that seemed appropriate for my particular research project.

Different ways of looking at the world: the status of knowledge

I have mentioned that the history of research has been a history of changing narratives of how academic knowledge is created and presented. These narratives have been based on certain assumptions about how the world should be looked at. In order to justify my own way of looking at the world, and my own research choices, distinctions must be made between the choices which present themselves. I am interested in the perceptions and attitudes of people, in what they have to say about their experiences in a particular situation. This draws me to an ethnographic path of enquiry, rather than a positivistic one.

Positivism - "Telling like it is"

Positivistic research entails a commitment to studying certain observable phenomena and then describing these in general law-like terms, moving from the specific to making predictions of the general. Only what can be observed is of value for research, other forces such as political dynamics, people's perceptions, beliefs and values, are not considered valid. Positivist research methodology emphasises the observation of the factual. Because of positivism's commitment "to the obviousness and unproblematic status of what we can observe" (Cameron et al, 1992: 6), methods of research such as measurements, statistics and deductions, in other words, methods which quantify, are used. Cherryholmes describes the goal of positivism to be "to tell it like it is, not as one wishes it to be" (1988:22). It does not take sides, and the methods chosen should ensure that the research findings should reflect this ideological neutrality.

It cannot be denied that positivist methods of enquiry can be very useful for various kinds of educational research. In fact, I have found it useful to help sketch the background of the students surveyed, as in the tables outlining the language backgrounds of the students (see Appendix A). However, one aspect of a positivistic approach to research which I find problematic for my own purpose, though, is the way the role of the researcher is viewed. Emphasis is given to what is called the "observer's paradox" (1992:7). In the pursuit of completely value-free, unbiased research, efforts are made to erase the researcher as an integral factor from the context of the study.

I am investigating the context of 101 and making certain assumptions about the situation, therefore my position is quite crucial, I cannot be neutral. I am part of the narrative I am weaving, inevitably I bring my own story into it, my own subjectivity, my own self. This is a crucial element in the human interactions I am describing. Who I am determines the questions I ask, what aspects I am looking at, and the way I am trying to find answers. I am an actor in

the play I am critically reviewing - a strange position to be in, but there nonetheless. As Cameron et al point out, "the question of 'what's going on here' cannot be answered without reference to the agent's own understanding of what she is doing." (1992:11)

The relationship between researcher and the researched is an essential issue to discuss in my own context. No matter how sincere my intentions and purpose, I am trying to interpret social interaction, a range of subjectivities and discourses - and these are interpreted by me, the researcher, and in the language of social research. I am situated within the context I am exploring, but perforce distanced because of the role I am playing as researcher. The role of 'participant-observer' is a risky one: despite my intention that this research be 'empowering', research "on, for and with" (Cameron et al, 1992:22), there is still the danger of objectifying the researched as a consequence.

An ethnographic approach - "It's all about culture"

An approach which seems to accommodate my concerns is an ethnographically oriented research methodology. Johnson (1992) describes the purpose of ethnographic research as one which describes and interprets the cultural values, attitudes and behaviour, including communicative behaviour, of a group. She proposes that one of the most important uses of this approach for L2 learning can be to help inform us about the ways students' cultural experiences before coming to university compare with their experience of the culture of the university.

As I understand it, ethnographic inquiry has its roots in anthropological studies, and refers to the description and interpretation of the cultural behaviour and the everyday lives of particular groups of people. If one defines the context of the university as a particular culture with specific ways of behaviour, and which has particular groups of people with specific attitudes

and values, one can argue that an ethnographic inquiry is appropriate when describing and interpreting this context. In a report on her work on the teaching of writing at American universities, Spack (1988) talks of the need for students to "master the language and culture of the university; the role of the university writing teacher is to initiate students into the discourse community." (30)(my emphasis).

Ethnographic inquiry, too, emphasises the role of the researcher, and the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Because this approach relies so much on the individual testimonies of informants, the role of the informant is a crucial one, and the researcher-informant relationship therefore an essential characteristic of this kind of inquiry (Burgess, 1985:79).

Empowerment as a research goal: empowerment for whom?

Cameron et al's working definition of empowering research is, as stated before, research on, for and with those who are researched. Empowering research insists that "persons are not objects and should not be treated as objects" (1992:23). Cherryholmes (1988) explains that "[s]ubjects gain power because they are valued for themselves, when what they say and do is accorded status, when their voice is acknowledged, ..." (110). Unlike Cameron et al, who see ethnographic research as being potentially rather than necessarily empowering, Cherryholmes links ethnography and empowerment more directly: "ethnographic research grants power ... to subjects who formerly were silent as objects." (110)

He explains:

> ... the power to enunciate, select categories, make arguments, choose metaphors, and propose explanations shifts a bit from researchers to subjects, from the research literature to understandings of people in the

world, from academic specialties (such as measurement and statistical analysis) to tacit understandings. ... The locus of power that makes "truth" possible shifts from researchers as subjects to respondents as subjects. (110)

This is a quite a burden of responsibility for the researcher, and one not easily achieved, or borne. I echo Cameron et al's problematisation of the notion of 'empowerment'. Do I cast myself in the role of empowerer of the disempowered because I give the previously silenced a voice in my study? Surely we are not dealing with the absolutes of power and powerlessness, but with a far more complex position? Historically, the situation of the researcher (White) studying the researched (the Other) has been institutionalised in academic disciplines, especially when it comes to the origins of ethnographic research. The discipline of anthropology has long been the study by white academics steeped in Western ethnocentric epistemological thought on marginalised and Other ethnic groupings; studies based on a position of inequality - the colonialist studying the colonised. We need to guard against this condescending approach to the situations of those we research. However, there are still problems of power even when the researcher and researched are closer in cultural experience. Having been through a similar educational experience to many of the students forming part of my research does not eradicate the basic inequalities in our relationship. In the context of ethnographic inquiry, my role as 'participant-observer' has been determined by my role as lecturer in the English Department, not student. And, as researcher, I have set the agenda, albeit out of concern for the problems experienced by those I have taught: I have decided what to research, how I would conduct it, and which questions were to be asked. Furthermore, there was little of an exchange or sharing in the course of this research project. The students and some of the teachers who act as informants are unlikely to benefit directly from the results of my research: the students involved would have passed on to further studies, and some of

the teachers have left the university. The notion of empowering research is thus a risky and slippery thing.

Defining the study

The first step, after deciding what exactly I was going to look at, was deciding who my informants were to be, a process Johnson (1992) calls "defining the population". By this she means the group or groups of people to whom the findings of your study are meant to apply. In this instance, the group, or population, was not just one particular group, but rather two, those involved in learning, and those involved in lecturing or tutoring in English 101 at UWC.

In 1995 there were 1 126 English 101 students. So clearly it was not feasible to survey the attitudes and experiences of everyone. This leads us to the issue of sampling. My study employs a sample of convenience (Johnson,1992), so called because of the groups' accessibility. I was the tutor of three tutorial groups, and so had easy access to them. The composition of each group, too, is fairly representative of the whole population. Interviews were done on a volunteer basis. Other samples came from those lecturing or tutoring in English 101.

The research process:

The one thing that was crucial to me about the research process was that I involve those researched in a meaningful way. Their knowledge and perceptions are the core of my research, and I wanted them to speak to me honestly and freely. Dialogic and interactive research methods, rather than those which are distancing and alienating, seemed the goal to aim for. I wanted the active co-operation of the researched, which meant that I was as open as possible about my intentions, goals and procedures. Cameron et al (1992) suggest that research which intends to be empowering in some way should try and make the knowledge gained accessible

to those researched. The researcher is not the sole custodian of the information gained. This is the process suggested by them to ensure that the research is ultimately empowering, rather than objectifying (1992:22). I tried to follow this as far as possible, but as I discuss above, the problem of empowerment is an issue not easily resolved.

Preparing for the research - getting to grips with the issues

I discussed my research proposal with some of the staff members in the Department. Their enthusiastic support for my plans gave me the confidence to start raising issues in staff meetings and workshops. Although I have been long aware of the need to start looking critically at teaching and learning in the Department, the formlessness and incoherence of my thoughts prevented me from taking these issues up in a confident way. I began to discuss these issues with those interested. What helped was the fact that the English Department was itself discussing ways to face challenges and resolve the problems they were identifying. I was able to contribute to this process by presenting discussion documents to the rest of the staff, and experimenting with new approaches to tutor training. I think that this showed too that I was serious about what I was doing, and this helped in gaining their co-operation when it came to collecting my data.

Research methods:

To fully understand what is happening in the learning context, the researcher has to be completely familiar with all aspects of the context in which the research is conducted. One of the most common techniques for gathering information when doing ethnographic and quantitative research is participant-observation. Becker et al (quoted in Burgess, 1985) describes the activity of the participant-observer: "The participant observer follows those he (sic) studies through their daily round of life, seeing what they do ... under what circumstances, and querying them about the meaning of their actions." (25). As lecturer and

tutor in English 101 I was able to do this quite easily. I was able to observe the regular activities of both the groups researched.

Another method of collecting data used was interviewing. Semi-structured interviews were held with groups of students, as well as individual students, when they were willing to talk to me alone. I also had informal discussions with several of the teaching staff. The interviews were not tape recorded, as I felt that this might intimidate and silence students. Instead I took brief notes, and wrote them out in more detail as soon as possible afterwards. The most extensive data collecting tool I used was the questionnaire. There were separate ones for students and lecturers. Drawing up the questionnaire was quite a complicated procedure, especially the one designed for students. First of all I had to consider the purpose of the questions I was asking. I had to ensure that the language used was not too difficult, so that English second language speakers would understand them easily. Secondly, the intention of the questions had to be clear, so that respondents would not find it too difficult to come up with a response. An important consideration was the fact that despite careful consideration, some would find it difficult to answer a particular question, so I felt that the questionnaire had to cover this by asking similar questions a bit differently each time. All the questions were open-ended, with spaces left for respondents to fill in their responses in their own words. I chose this option rather than closed questions which required respondents to select one from among a limited number of responses supplied by me. This method is quite useful for the gathering of quantitative information, but what I was looking for was responses in the respondents' own words, which I felt would give me more variety in responses, and a more accurate picture of respondents' experiences. Open-ended questions also allowed me to compare the responses with those gathered in the interviews.

The initial questionnaire was piloted with a representative of the group under study, and I found that a number of changes had to be made. Firstly, some of the questions did not take into account students' level of literacy and were either too technical, or used academic jargon which led to incomprehensibility - so a few of the questions had to be rephrased or omitted.

The questionnaire was given to students towards the end of the year, and this was preceded by a mid-year session which was less formal, in which I asked the students in first year tutorial groups to write down their experiences in English 101 thus far. Later on I compared their responses to those in the questionnaire and interviews.

Problematising responses:

An issue which needs to be discussed here is that of "non-response", which Johnson (1992) refers to in her chapter on survey research. She warns that "it is important in survey research to assess the degree to which nonrespondents introduce bias into the sample data" (1992:117). By this she means that when involved in the process of research, and hoping to substantiate a particular hypothesis through research, the researcher might find her data somewhat affected by nonresponse. This often has something to do with the phrasing of the questions in a questionnaire or an interview. I have to admit that my questions, although planned to tease out and develop on responses to earlier questions, were not always successful. Nor were they more successful, in some instances, in interview situations. Often then, in interviews, I asked more open-ended questions and let them talk. Again, this was not always as successful as I would have liked. I refer to this problem when analysing the data in Chapter 4.

In the case of my own research the issue of non-response is a factor to take into some consideration, for two reasons:

Firstly, as mentioned above, I regard the composition of the tutorial groups as fairly representative of the English 101 student population as a whole. This includes a number of students who do not really experience major problems with learning in English 101, because they have come to the University of the Western Cape from educational backgrounds which had to some extent prepared them for a less painful adaptation to academic discourse than the majority of students. They therefore did not respond to the questions asked in the questionnaire in the same way as the majority of students did. In many instances they indicated that they had far fewer problems with learning, and where they did have difficulty, these students were often able to give far more articulate responses than could other students. Secondly, and more interestingly, I was faced with the realisation that I needed to be careful about regarding students' perceptions of their learning situation as "truth". Because I was interested in exploring attitudes, perceptions and beliefs regarding the teaching and learning situation, I was quite concerned about the validity of what people were saying. Thus I did not just rely on responses to one questionnaire, but also gathered data from less formal and structured group and individual interviews. This was especially necessary as I noticed that once respondents moved from straightforward factual questions such as " Where did you attend school?" and "Which texts did you enjoy most/least?" they experienced more difficulty when responding to questions regarding their attitudes and perceptions of what they were experiencing. In my interpretation, therefore, I attempt to explore why respondents said what they did, why they were unable to respond to some questions, and what contradictions were revealed in their responses.

Some reflections on the research process

Despite my efforts to make the interviews and questionnaire sessions as clear as possible for the purpose of my study, I was aware that students were constructing their own versions of their experience. I also had to evaluate my own role as interviewer in this regard. In

qualitative research methods a central issue is the validity of what people say in interview situations: are they really saying what they mean, or are they saying what they think I want to hear? In my attempt to analyse why students say what they do, and what it means, I tried to squeeze contesting perceptions of their learning situations by asking them the same questions in different ways. For example, when I asked if they were experiencing problems with learning in tutorials, and they were not at all critical, I followed up with a question on doing tutorial assignments. The responses to these questions often reveal that various problems were, in fact, experienced. When I analyse my data, I find, for example, that students were quite uncritical of their tutorial experiences. Yet it is in tutorials that most of the written work of the course is done, and the majority of students readily discussed the difficulty they had with writing assignments.

I followed up the questionnaire with both individual and group "follow-on" interviews. I hoped that the less formal situation would elicit "truer" responses. During the course of the year I had become quite friendly with some of the students, some of them would drop in for a chat in between lectures. I hoped that chat sessions over a cigarette and a coke would be more comfortable. However, responses did not change substantially.

Morag Paxton, in a paper reflecting on her own experience in interviewing students at the University of Cape Town (1994), suggests that a reason for some students saying what they do in interviews has to do with their struggle to be accepted as full participants in the discourse of the university; they are reluctant to be critically assertive as this is seen as setting them apart as not being able to fit in. However this response does not reflect the very real struggle they have in coping with the demands of university study. She suggests further that

"to some extent the ability to be critical is hindered by the power
relations inherent in their position as students, as well as the interview
situation. As students progress further, though, they may well develop
this critical ability, as well as the confidence to give voice to them.
(1994). "

My findings in this study seem to confirm this.

Outline of data framework:

My research findings are based on three main sets of data:

1. data obtained from the students

- a set of two questions asked of English 101 students at the start of the second semester,
focusing on their experiences in tutorials in the first semester;

- a long questionnaire in the fourth term;

- follow-up group and individual interviews.

2. data obtained from the English 101 teaching staff

- a questionnaire covering teaching experience and perceptions of teaching and learning in
English 101;

- selected interviews.

3. data obtained from English Department staff discussions, in workshops and staff meetings,
as well as from informal memos circulated for discussion by concerned staff members.

Although I used the questionnaires holistically to generalise some of the findings (see
Appendix F), I only select the issues which I think are relevant to make certain important
inferences. As far as students' perceptions are concerned, these issues relate to:

- doing critical analysis

- the experience of writing essays

- previous English learning experience

- the reason for doing English studies

- their experience of lectures

- their experience of tutorials.

When it comes to lectures, the relevant issues I discuss are:

- the concept of academic literacy

- the concept of critical literacy

- how these concepts related to teaching practice in English 101 at UWC

- lecturers' perceptions of students' learning experiences

- how lecturers have attempted to 'acculturate' students.

Rudduck (1993), whose research interest is the study of school profiles, notes the difficulty that teachers often have in getting an analytical grip on the familiar context in which they work day after day. Teachers are so much part of the context they work in, that being analytical and self-reflexive about their teaching is not that easy to do. The same, of course, applies to students. I found it quite difficult to get back some of the lecturer questionnaires. Although they agreed to fill in the questionnaires, they found the questions quite demanding. One remarked: "I almost didn't do it. The questions really made me think about what I was doing." Which, of course, was what I wanted them to do. Another colleague said that she hoped that I would not quote her as she felt that her responses to the questions were too sketchy. A few questionnaires just did not get back to me, despite reminders. I had designed the questionnaire so that extensive responses could be given without the need for follow-up interviews, as I

knew that most of my colleagues were over-burdened. Three of them , however, preferred to talk to the questions, so I wrote these up as interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDING AND ANALYSIS

Attempting to make sense of it all

In a previous chapter (Chapter Two) I explore some arguments put forward by a growing number of educational theorists who try to analyse what happens in tertiary learning and teaching. In particular, I focus on the work of the "new literacy studies" educationists, as they have been characterised (Gee, Ballard and Clanchy et al), who argue the view that the tertiary institution can be read as a specific culture, which functions on the basis of certain culturally specific "ways of thinking, knowing, behaving" (Gee, 1992). It is these ways of knowing which students need to acquire if they are to gain "epistemological access" (Morrow, 1993) to these institutions.

However, as I argue further, negotiating access is not an unproblematic process. It is a complex and uneasy process, wrought with bewilderment, frustration and misperceptions on the part of all those involved. It is this process that I am interested in investigating.

Asking the initial questions:

My first foray into the data collection process was when I asked the students in my tutorials to respond to two questions designed to survey what they had picked up thus far of what learning in English 101 involved. This was done in the first week of the second semester (July 1995). At this point the students had been through a semester of tutorials and lectures, and they had also written two or three essays and had been through a full-scale university exam. The purpose of the questions was two-fold: I was interested as a lecturer and tutor to receive feedback on how the teaching and learning had been experienced and received thus far, with the view of improving my own teaching. Secondly, I saw this as a suitable starting point to

start surveying students' perceptions of my project. I asked two questions and students gave me written responses.

The responses to the first question **"What is the purpose of doing an analytical essay in English 101?"** can be summarised into four main categories:

1. to know more about the passage or text

Most of the students referred to the need to understand the text in its entirety. They seemed to regard critical analysis as a quest to find out the "message" of the text, and this is done by finding the "meaning behind the words", and "hidden information". To do this you needed to go "deeper" into the text. The implication here is that students felt that what was expected from them was to unlock meaning which was not immediately obvious from the surface meaning or the "words".

2. to give your own words, own opinions and give reasons

Several students referred to the need to be able to give their own opinions, their own "views", "perspectives" or "ideas" on what the text was all about, and to phrase these in words which were not just plagiarised from the passage. Many students referred to the need to substantiate their opinions, to "give reasons" and "support their views with statements from the theme they are analysing".

3. to test, to check, to assess, to show

These responses revealed the understanding that writing essays, or doing critical analysis, in English was mainly for evaluating and assessing progress, and testing their knowledge. The responses show an awareness of the intimidating presence of the marker in the writing task. Critical analysis was a test of their understanding of the text. This awareness of being 'tested'

should be understood, too, in the context of previous educational experience with the emphasis on learning for examinations.

4. understanding the context

Several students picked on the concept of context, although they did not go into much detail: "to understand the context", and "to explain the context". Students were familiar with the term "context", clearly a concept picked up in tutorials and lectures. To be able to "contextualise" a text is a common requirement in assignments and examinations. There was no evidence, though, that they were able explain what exactly was meant by the term.

Despite displaying a seemingly sophisticated knowledge of what critical analysis entails, phrased in academic terms probably absorbed from the language of lecturers and tutors, students revealed confusion when they described the problems they experienced when applying this concept when writing essays, or, in other words, doing critical analysis. Three students - a definite minority - reported that they had no difficulty with doing critical analysis, as they had done it at their previous school.

The responses to the second question, **"What has been your experience of writing essays in English 101?"**, can be grouped into three main categories:

a) Expressing themselves

The majority of students said they found it difficult to express their thoughts in writing, and to express themselves clearly and unambiguously. Several responses referred to the difficulty of "putting one's thoughts down on paper" or "into writing" and "making myself clear", revealing a marked lack of confidence in the academic writing process. Responses such as "I find it difficult to start" or "I don't know how to introduce my thoughts" can also be categorised as a

similar writing block. The demands of the academic writing task seem to have a dampening, a silencing effect on the student.

b) I don't know what is expected

This response was the most common one. Comments ranged from "I can't understand the question" to "I put in a real effort only to find I missed what was really wanted". The tone of the responses revealed a sense of bewilderment and disempowerment. Some students indicated that they often felt that they had something to say, an opinion they wanted to share, but did not really know exactly how to frame these in academic discourse, and they felt that they were not being shown how to do this.

c) Many students had difficulty in unlocking "the deeper meaning". Students said they found the task laborious and time-consuming, and sometimes they felt that they did not know enough about the text to be able to look further. Although they often grasped the surface meaning of the text, the 'deeper meaning' eluded them. Because they understood that it was this deeper meaning the tutor/lecturer wanted from them, they felt they were unable to present a good enough or acceptable argument to sustain an essay. One student said although she sometimes understood critical analysis when the tutor discussed it in the tutorial, she found it difficult to do critical analysis on her own, without the tutor there to guide her. She felt unsure about her own interpretation for two reasons: firstly, she needed the tutor to point her in the 'right' direction, and secondly, she needed the tutor to confirm and validate her responses. This reveals the lack of confidence students have regarding the task of constructing an essay based on their opinions and arguments. This is a direct result of some students' previous school experience, where passive learning was the norm, and in which the teacher was the guide and ultimate authority.

The above responses indicate what a slow and halting process the acquisition of academic literacy is at university. Second language speakers of English have not been exclusively selected for this survey. All the students in the tutorials responded. What I found was that English first language speakers described their learning experience at first year level as problematic in many ways, although they were more articulate in their descriptions. It seems, therefore, that learning through a second language, although quite difficult for some students, should not be seen as the only determining factor when looking at student experiences in the English 101 course (Leibowitz, 1994). However, previous schooling does have an effect on the extent to which students are able to gain access to the discourse of the university, as we will discuss further below.

I found the exercise very useful to get students to start thinking about their learning experience in English 101. I also used this opportunity to introduce them to my research project and to the idea of using their perceptions and opinions as the basis for my research. The students were quite enthusiastic. This initial survey also gave me, as researcher, some basis against which to measure the findings of the longer questionnaire given to the students at the end of the year.

The Questionnaire:

The first question asks them to describe their English learning experience at school. These are the most common responses:

- my teacher was approachable and used the simplest language to teach us.

- he explained everything very clearly, and gave us notes which explained everything.

- our teacher had patience with us, he repeated everything.

- our teacher explained us all the unfamiliar words.

- when we did plays, he got the students to act the parts.

- we had extra classes on Saturdays and in the holidays to prepare us

for the exams, and we got lots of notes.

- I enjoyed it when we read magazines and we would tell the teacher

about the story we read.

One student reported that she did not enjoy learning English. She found it difficult to understand, and had even at school, but luckily the English teacher translated everything he said into Northern Sotho: "even if we were doing literature, he was reading in English but explained it in N. Sotho". However, despite her previous experience and present difficulties, she wanted to learn English as this would help her get a good job. She thought that doing English would help in achieving this objective.

Most students referred to the teachers explaining everything clearly, the repetition, the simple language used. One of the students said:

"I thought doing English will help me be more fluent. The way we are

being taught in lectures - I thought it would be the same way my

teacher taught me. Clearly telling me what the book is about - the aims

of the book, the author's background, the themes. Also we read the

book in class and he gave us summaries of the book, chapter by

chapter, with the themes." (student interview, 1995)

Students' perceptions of their high school English class as comfortable and nurturing sketch a rather skewed picture of the previous educational experiences of most of the students. A closer look at the English 101 students' descriptions of their school experience reveals that their experiences have not been specifically useful in preparing them for university. In particular, the accounts of the English teacher translating everything into Northern Sotho, or plays being taught through the medium of student performance and simple thematic summaries to be memorised, indicate this.

Walters and England (1990) in a paper researching the teaching of English literature in black South African high schools, observe that the passive learning environment involving listening, memorising and the recalling of notes given by the teacher, does little to encourage critical reflection. English literature, specifically, presents a further problem at high school level for most students. The implicit historical/cultural knowledge, the foreign scenarios and environments cause great difficulties for the student. These difficulties encourage the students' passivity and reinforce the role of the teacher as the only one in the class who knows anything. English literature demands individual interaction with the text. A teacher-dominated educational environment would prevent this interaction from being developed.

When interviewed in this study, students were not able to relate their school experience to the problems they were experiencing at university level. As first year students, they had not grasped what was expected of them regarding academic learning styles, to be able to do so. . Some studies conducted at UWC (Leibowitz, 1995; Mabizela, 1994) deal specifically with the way prior schooling has an influence on the skills students bring with them to the university context. One of these studies was conducted with postgraduate students at UWC, and focused on their reflections on their development of academic literacy at university. As postgraduate students, they had the advantage of being able to reflect on their experiences in a more

sophisticated way than the students in my study were able to do. The students in the Leibowitz study were able to reflect on their initial experiences with hindsight, and with the ability to do so from a theoretical perspective, as many of the students were also involved as tutors in the Writing Centre, and were involved in workshops and seminars around academic literacy issues.

Unlike the students in the Leibowitz study who describe their school learning as "very poor" (1995:5) and as occurring under "appalling conditions" (5), the English 101 students of my study did not make these assertions, but rather emphasised their perceived bewilderment at the sudden transition from what was perceived as a nurturing environment to an alienating one.

The next question was: How did you end up doing English 101? These are the most common responses:

- I wanted to learn how to teach English at high school.

- it is a requirement for a law degree.

- I wanted to learn more about English.

- I needed an extra teaching subject for my degree.

- I chose it because I love English.

- I found it interesting at school.

- I wanted to know how to analyse and use sentences correctly.

- I got high marks for English at school so I thought I could do it easily.

- I would get new knowledge about English and my vocabulary would increase.

- I was concerned about English as a medium of instruction so I wanted to learn more about it.

All the students answered this question. This was quite interesting, because I do not think it was that easy a question to answer. Vague responses such as "I found it interesting", "I wanted to learn more about it" and "I would get more knowledge about it" reflected the difficulty in articulating a response. Given that the majority of students listed literature as the activity they had enjoyed most at school, and given that the English department handbook states quite clearly that the course does not teach grammar skills, most students are aware that in English 101 the focus would be literary studies. Only two students surveyed said they wanted to learn English language skills. This seems to contradict many English 101 lecturers' assumption that one of the reasons why many students did so badly in English 101 was that they are under the misconception that they would be taught language skills such as grammar. Assumptions such as "they want to be taught how to use English practically' (English Department planning meeting, 1995) and "[they] expect to learn grammar, ..." (English Department planning retreat, 1994) are not borne out by my findings. From their comments in interviews and the questionnaires, it is clear that students consider English as the language of power, status and upward mobility, and of course, students greatly desire to improve their English competence and to learn skills which would enable this, but they seem to accept that doing English literary studies would be one of the ways in which this is achieved. They are, in my opinion, keen to learn the skills related to the practice of reading and writing in an academic context, and so do well in their university studies generally.

Clearly, students are well aware of the role played by English as a gatekeeper to positions of prestige in society. It has become one of the most powerful means of inclusion into, and exclusion from further education, employment and social position (Pennycook, 1994).

A related question focuses on the perceived differences between the way they were taught at university and at school. The most common responses are that:

- teachers tried to understand the difficulty of the students, the lecturers are too harsh.

- the teachers at school tell us everything in simple terms but at university they don't tell you everything you should know, you must find out on your own.

- English is made more difficult here at the university.

- the teacher told us everything about the book.

- the lecturers has (sic) a way of teaching you to solve a problem without showing you how, unlike the teachers.

- my English teacher used to take it step by step, the lecturers do not go into detail.

- lecturers don't give us notes.

- lecturers don't know our problems because of the big classes.

- the teacher was reading the whole book with us in class and the lecturer is just mentioning the important aspects and is not explaining page by page.

- the lecturers are impersonal, not easy to talk to, they don't know us.

These responses highlight the disconcerting effect of a transition from what is perceived to be a comforting learning zone to one which is cold, impersonal and alienating. Ballard and Clanchy describe these difficulties of adjustment as "an unsteady transition between cultures" (1988:13) rather than merely inadequate preparation on the part of the school system. If the primary discourses of the students are quite different from the discourse of the university, the problems of adjusting to the new culture of the university could serve as barriers to accessing that discourse. Ballard and Clanchy (1988), and Chiseri-Strater (1991), argue that the way to remove these barriers is to make explicit the relationship between literacy and the academic

culture, an act very difficult for those so steeped in the culture itself. From the responses above we see that students perceive their problems in the light of the lecturers' inability to provide a comfortable learning environment for them, similar to the one experienced in high school, and not in the light of different learning expectations.

Other questions require students to focus in more detail on the learning experience itself, specifically lectures and tutorials. They also describe the problems they experience with understanding the work, what is expected from them as English 101 students, and writing essays and examinations. Their responses paint a bleak picture of their learning experiences:

The most common student responses were that:

- the lecturer is moving too fast and I am left behind.

- sometimes I feel that they are not talking to us, just to themselves.

- they don't talk in the way we can take notes.

- there are too many lecturers teaching us, we can't really get to know them.

- the way he uses words is difficult.

- they talk on monotonously without being specific.

- they want you to solve the problem without showing you how.

- they don't give proper notes.

- I don't understand what they say.

Almost without exception English 101 students focus on the pace of lectures as a serious problem: they describe the lecturers as "going too fast", as "rushing", as "not waiting to see if we are with them". The next biggest problem seems to be the impersonality of the lecture situation - the rapid changeover of lecturers from module to module, which meant that they

were just getting used to one lecturer when another took her place, as well as the feeling that some lecturers are not addressing them, but seem to be talking to themselves. The feeling of alienation and impersonality spills over into their experience of the educative role that the lecturers played - again students feel that they do not take into account students' problems in keeping up with the pace or not understanding them.

This is an extract from one of the student interviews:

> "The way we are being taught in lectures, they just say "turn to page 103" then blah, blah, blah, then turn to page ... then blah, blah, blah again and then look at page so and so and then again -you see here Lawrence is saying this, and he means this" , I can't keep up, I get lost. They should come to class and tell us clearly about the story according to their views so we can get insight into what the story is about." (student interview, 1995)

With regard to their understanding of what is expected from them in English 101, the most common responses were that:
- most of the time I don't know exactly what they want
- actually, the issue is not what I expected from the course, it is what is expected from **me, and I don't know**
- they must tell us what they know and what we are supposed to do

The most common refrain was "I don't understand." Students refer to their inability to be clear about what they are doing wrong in their assignments and examinations, their inability to

improve on the little feedback they receive, as well as their inability to articulate the problems

they are experiencing. A student describes her difficulty:

"because firstly I need to consult a lecturer but I can't because I did not

understand what he/she taught me in class. In that way I find it

problematic because I can't ask a question but I do have something that

I do not know" (student interview, 1995).

Another student expressed his frustration in the following way:

"I remember a lecturer said that to analyse means to break it into little

pieces and restructure it, and I am not clear what this means. Also when

we analyse we must not just focus on the structure but look at the story

as a whole, then in my essays it is said that I must not retell the story, so

I am confused." (student interview, 1995).

In contrast to their descriptions of the lecture experience, the English 101 students surveyed

describe their tutorial experience very positively. The overall impression of the role of the

tutor was that their tutor is there to help and guide them, and the majority of the students felt

that this is happening. Students referred to the willingness of tutors to listen to their problems,

to explain the work clearly, and to spend time in individual consultations. Students focus on

the nurturing role played by the tutors, which resemble the descriptions of the role of their

high school teacher.

When focusing on the work done in the tutorials, though, a sense of confusion still prevails. It

is in the tutorials where the English 101 assignments are discussed, worked on and marked.

Many students describe their tutors' remarks and comments on their essays as obscure and vague, and even after reading them, feel they are often unable to improve their writing. Again, they feel that they do not understand what was expected of them. One student describes how she often understands what is required when her tutor is in class explaining the work to her, but as soon as she is expected to do the work on her own, she feels lost.

The overall perceptions of the English 101 tutorial experience as positive underline the mismatch between students' and lecturers' perceptions of English 101 learning and teaching. As we will see below, several lecturers identified tutor training as one of the urgent areas needing attention in English 101, despite the students describing their tutorial experience positively.

The English 101 lecturer questionnaire

The same questionnaire was given to both lecturers and tutors. The questions relate to:
- concepts underpinning teaching practice
- perceptions of teaching practice
- expectations of teaching practice
- perceptions of main problems experienced by students
- what the most urgent issues in English 101 are.

The first important question I asked lecturers relates to their perception of **academic literacy**. I was interested in how teachers define this concept, and relate this concept to their work. The question is: "How do you understand the concept of academic literacy?"

These are the most common responses, grouped under two categories:
1. Academic literacy includes:

- the ability to acquire information from lectures and readings.

- having note-taking and essay-writing skills.

- the ability to control academic discourse.

- having the level of literacy appropriate in an academic context.

- the ability to grasp forms of academic writing.

I separated these responses from those below because they are very general and vague - clearly demonstrating the difficulty of the respondents to define this concept. Ballard and Clanchy (1988) argue that one way of overcoming the barrier between previous literacies and the one students are trying to gain access to, that is, academic literacy, is for teachers to try and make the processes and meaning of the academic literacy and culture (academic discourse) explicit to students. These responses to the question of 'what is academic literacy?' befuddle the definition even further: how does one acquire the information? what is academic discourse and how does one control it? what level of literacy is appropriate? what is academic writing?

The responses below indicate a more detailed engagement with the concept:

2. Academic literacy includes:

- knowing the conventions of presenting information in academic form.

- having the confidence to present your own ideas both orally and in a written form.

- the ability to read, write and speak in academic discourse.

- the ability to comprehend complex texts.

- the ability to isolate key concepts and use them in other contexts.

- the ability to write well-structured and comprehensible arguments.

- the ability to make sense of abstract and specialist language.

- the ability to read and interpret secondary meanings.

- showing evidence that the student can use own knowledge and experience to approach and interpret texts.

Only two of the above responses pick up on the idea of culturally specific knowledge as outlined by Taylor et al (1988). The first one : "knowing the conventions of presenting information in academic form" shows an awareness of academic conventions governing how information is presented and the second "ability to read, write and speak in academic discourse" points to the kind of discourse specific to academic learning.

The other responses, although attempting to clarify the concept of academic literacy, present it as natural and unproblematic, as context-free. For example the response "the ability to comprehend complex texts" is problematic, in that it does not make the link between texts and discourse, where the texts under study within the university environment cannot be separated from the discourse governing the interpretation of that text. Furthermore, defining academic literacy as "the ability to write well-structured and comprehensible arguments" fails to explain that what is judged to be "well-structured" or "comprehensible" would be such in terms of the governing discourse.

A further problematic definition of the term is the final response in the list above " showing evidence that the student can use own knowledge and experience to approach and interpret a text". This response fails to take into account the mismatch between many students' previous knowledge and experience and the kind of knowledge and experience lecturers assume will be brought to bear when interpreting university texts.

English 101 lecturers see the concept of academic literacy as relating to their work in the following ways:

- students need to become critical readers of texts and write about these texts in a form of academic discourse.

- students need to follow an academic style of writing and understand the terminology used.

- students need to learn to analyse literary texts and write essays.

- students need to read critically.

- they need to be able to use resources for academic processes.

- academic skills are the basis of every lecture and tutorial.

- they need to be able to read, making sense of figurative and referential language.

- they need to engage with specific literary forms and genres, and be able to construct a clear argument and organise their ideas.

What is interesting about the responses above is that in relating the concept of academic literacy to their work lecturers make many more direct references to academic discourse and the way it is applied in the practice of literary studies.

The next question is: "how do you understand the concept of critical literacy?"

In many staff discussions on teaching and learning in the department, or on future planning, consensus was reached that it is the teaching of critical literacy which underpins the English 101 approach to literary studies. What is not at all clear, though, is exactly what critical literacy is. In a staff discussion on what the aims of teaching in the English department actually are, David Bunn, head of the department in 1995, defines critical literacy as "being self-conscious about the enframing effects of texts, an awareness of discursive contexts, discursive

production; the defamiliarisation of the naturality of language, and regarding language as practice rather than real." (English department planning meeting, August, 1995)

This is a view of critical literacy which the department felt most accurately captured what its approach is.

These are the English 101 lecturers' responses to the question on critical literacy. The most common responses suggest that critical literacy means:

- to be critical when analysing texts, be critical of what is dished out, on TV, or in lectures and tutorials.

- to understand how meaning is made in texts, and understand the concept of context.

- to develop their 'own' position, have a scepticism towards texts.

- to be a critical reader and writer.

- to understand how language is used in texts, and be able to argue about how language is used and theorise about it.

- thinking and analysing in a way which emphasises the contextual nature of meaning.

- to reject right or wrong answers and positions.

- to think critically.

- to analyse arguments for their hidden assumptions and contradictions, demystify myths about language and texts.

- to make meaningful connections between an essay question and own opinions.

Lecturers describe quite clearly what 'ways of knowing' mean within the context of English literary studies. Most of the responses reveal a genuine attempt at self-reflectivity as to what

lecturers are teaching their students. Sometimes, though, the term 'critical' is used in a meaningless way: what does it mean to be a 'critical reader and writer', or to think 'critically'?

What I find interesting too, is how the responses define critical literacy as a 'reading skill'. Only one of the responses refers to writing. Yet academic writing, or the academic essay, is the primary mode of developing and evidencing meaning in the university context. The written essay serves as concrete proof of whether the student has or has not mastered critical literacy.

This is an extract from an interview with one of the lecturers:
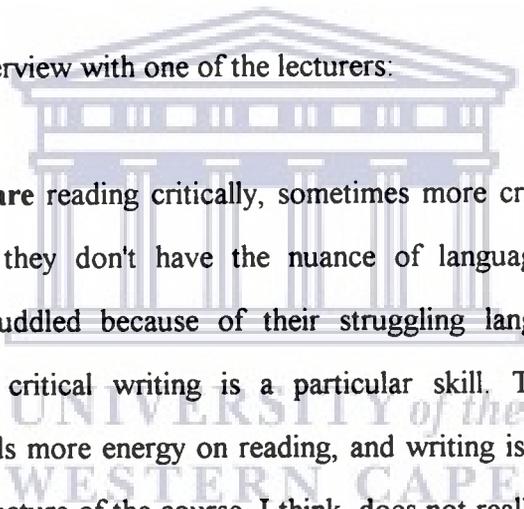
> I think students **are** reading critically, sometimes more critically than we realise. But they don't have the nuance of language so their criticalness is muddled because of their struggling language. The problem is that critical writing is a particular skill. The English department spends more energy on reading, and writing is left for the tutorials. The structure of the course, I think, does not really marry the two aspects. Another problem is the way we present meaning, or knowledge. We do it one way, but what we can't control is how people will respond. Will they read it in the intended way? So what happens is some negotiation of meaning or knowledge." (interview, 1995)

These comments touch on a crucial problem, which is the way the practice of critical analysis is restricted and constrained by preconceived ideas of what that process of analysis entails. A stereotypical approach to critical analysis throws the question " what does this mean?" at the student. This question ostensibly encourages the student to bring her own scepticism and critical faculties to bear on the text. Often the subtext of what the lecturer is asking is: **"I know**

what it means, do you know what I'm thinking here?" No wonder that students report feelings of confusion, and the desperate need to know what it is that the lecturer wants from them.

Lecturers feel that the concept of critical literacy is directly related to their work in English 101 in the following ways:

- it is definitely taught and practised in preparation for assignments.

- English 101 is text-based, thus we show how recurring images, ideas and metaphors contextualise in a particular analysis. We show how ideas are projected, tapping into the writer's conscious and unconscious intentions.

- the analysis of literary texts is what I teach - this typically focuses on the relationship between language and power structures - the appreciation of multiple meanings.

- the aim of the course is geared towards teaching students to become critical readers who can deconstruct texts and write about this academically.

The way lecturers relate critical literacy to their work again bears out the comments from the interview (above). Note the repetition of "we show" (not "we explain") and, again, the emphasis on the teaching of reading which is at odds with the response which sees the teaching as practice for the writing of assignments. None of the responses refer to the teaching of writing critically.

Another question I explore is:

"What are English 101 lecturers' perceptions of students' problems?" Some lecturers' responses were that:

- students think that they need to regurgitate what they think the 'right' answer is.

- they search the text for truth-values, rather than seeing the text as a construction.

- they do not understand English well enough.

- students insist on content, something in writing, something they can learn.

- they do not read or come to the lectures prepared to analyse them critically.

- they grapple with non-realist narratives.

- what is taught and expected is not applied in essays.

- they do not understand critical analysis or why we do it.

- students lack the nuances of language, so even when they are being critical, the criticalness is muddled because of their struggle with language.

- they do not know what it means to critically engage with a text.

- students do not understand what is required from the essay topic, they do not express themselves clearly.

- there is frequent disinterest in the assigned texts - they don't read them.

These responses recall the students' descriptions of their previous English learning experience. It is clear that many of them have not been exposed to the kind of discourse practices which characterise tertiary learning. In most instances, school teachers explain clearly what the interpretation of a literary text is, and give them simple notes to be studied. It is

understandable, then, that a teaching practice which expects anything else would be bewildering. Students are seen to struggle with a "no right answers" approach to learning which characterises literary studies at university level. An approach which expects students to see a text as a construction, rather than just a "story" to be learnt and appreciated, is something outside many English 101 students' previous experience. Gee argues that the factor of previous educational experiences or "literacies" have to be taken into account when discussing the acquisition of what he calls "essay-text literacy" (1990:67). He argues that the teacher of English is, in fact, not teaching English literature, or language or even grammar. What she is doing, rather, is teaching a set of discourse practices, and the acquisition of these practices is a form of socialisation. The component skills which make up the whole of essay-text literacy, or as I have referred to it, critical literacy, has to be practised. One cannot practise a skill one has not been exposed to, and one cannot engage in a practice which one has not been socialised into.

Having identified some problems they experience with first year students in English 101, how have lecturers tried to overcome these? In other words, how have they tried to socialise students into the discourse practices of English studies?

These are the most common responses:

- I explain to students what you they going to do in the lesson. recap the previous lesson. break students into smaller groups to workshop part of the lecture material.

- I encourage peer feedback on each other's work (in tutorials).

- I ask questions and ask for questions to be posed.

- I use visual materials, overheads, pictures. Question and answer format, with careful attention to the phrasing of questions.

- I use mindmaps, task analysis.

- I try to speak slowly and clearly, and use a variety of registers. I stay

behind for a while after the lecture so that students can come and ask

questions.

Clearly, these responses show an attempt to break down the practice of critical literacy into its

component skills: asking questions, task analysis, feedback and explanations.

Finally, English 101 lecturers identified the following as the most urgent areas they feel needed

to be addressed in the English department:

- rethinking how students are placed in English 101.

- the students' lack of skills, including language skills.

- the high failure rate.

- the need for more intensive tutor training.

- the integration of tutorials and lectures.

- reworking the syllabus so that it is more focused.

- thinking about what is achieved in course, is it accommodating

students' needs and desires?

These responses can be seen to fall into three broad categories: the tutorial, the students, and

the course syllabus:

a) The tutorial

Several lecturers identified tutor training as one of the areas which needed urgent attention.

They feel that tutors should be supporting and reinforcing what is happening in the lectures

more strongly, by practically applying the more theoretical slant of the lectures, and that they

should be trained to do this. Training is also needed in the areas of the teaching of writing and close reading skills.

On the other hand, most students, as reported above, regard their tutorials in a very positive light. What strikes me is the similarity in tone between the student descriptions of the tutor and the high school English teacher - both are seen as having been very supportive. The tutorial encounter is seen as a cosy, non-threatening experience, the tutor plays a parent-like role. Clearly, the tutorial is also seen as a haven from the alienating experience outside it.

b) The students:

These responses focus on the students as the problem. Students lack the necessary language skills, they are inadequately prepared at school, they are unable to cope with the workload and therefore fail. The inference is that learning in an academic context is very dependent on prior learning experiences. If this is not the case, there is not much the university could/should do about it.

c) The English 101 course

Several lecturers refer to the urgent need for course structure to be adapted to the changing student population. However, when asked in which ways this could be done, it is clear that change is often seen in terms of changes to the curriculum and text list, and not necessarily pedagogical practice, and methodological adaptations. No-one raised these issues.

Staff discussion papers, planning meetings:

The difficulty lecturers had with responding to the questionnaire which I describe above reflects the difficult self-reflexive process the department as a whole is going through presently. And not only this department, but English departments nationally and internationally

seem to be experiencing a severe identity crisis. Over and over again questions relating to the aims and purpose of English studies, the need for us to define what exactly it is that we do, and to defend this confidently, are brought up in staff discussions.

Discussions in these sessions reveal a strong feeling of frustration and concern about the inability of many students to grasp what lecturers were attempting to teach them. There is also a feeling that what is happening in the course does little to empower students, or prepare them for the even more stringent demands of further English studies.

A central question asked by everyone and coming up over and over in staff discussions was - what are the basic things we are trying to teach in English 101? As a staff member stated: "We need to clarify why English was being done - the purpose, the end result needs to be clarified; common expectations need to be developed..." and another "we need to identify the aim of the 101 syllabus, the underlying principles..." (Departmental planning meeting, August, 1995). Everyone agreed that it was absolutely necessary for teaching staff to define this for themselves if they were to plan for the future and resolve the problems already identified.

In going through the reports of these meetings, I was struck by a question asked by one of the staff members, a question which was not answered or discussed, and was in fact completely lost in the discussion. When I saw it amongst the morass, it jumped out at me. Even though I was present at the time, I in fact do not even recall it being asked: "What do the students want, how do they perceive their learning and how do they interpret what we have to offer?" The response was : "they want to be taught how to use English practically" which was followed by the quick retort: "Are we to become a department of communication in English?" The discussion then went off into a theoretical discussion of the need to redefine the concept of 'literary studies'.

This particular exchange I find particularly interesting. Firstly, I think a crucial question was asked here, yet went unanswered, even unnoticed. Instead the discussion latched onto the last part of the question "what we have to offer" instead of the first part. The response to the question seems to imply what I regard as an unspoken fear underlying discussions on the future direction and the nature of English studies at the University of the Western Cape. I recall another meeting where the need to discuss the aim and nature of English studies was seen as an urgent one, because as someone said, "if we don't do it, it will be decided for us" (1995) And if this was done, it was feared that the decision might well be on the lines of a department of communications model. In other words, staff members in the English Department would be forced to compromise on long-held notions of "the discipline of English studies" and instead transform the course into an English language service course.

Finally, the exchange also illustrated a certain unwillingness to consider the students themselves as a source of inspiration for the future shaping of English studies. If lecturers see the need to adapt to the changing needs of changing student populations, it seems rather short-sighted not to regard student perceptions of learning in English 101 as being able to contribute meaningfully to this discussion; although, as I have warned above, first year students' perceptions should not be absolutely decisive in this regard.

What is useful, though, is to regard these responses as an articulation of how they represent themselves as learners within the context of the English department, and in turn, how we, as teachers, are constructed as representatives of the institution. Hopefully, reflecting on these issues could be the start of a process of identifying and understanding different ways of seeing what is happening within the Department.

In this discussion of the differing perceptions of learning in the English department at UWC, I have tried to move away from a exclusively deficit view of educationally disadvantaged students, to a focus on the need for teaching staff to be critical of their own discourse practices within the university context.

Furthermore, teaching staff might want to look at the possible resources which students do bring with them to the learning process. In this way we can explore what kinds of knowledge and literacy experiences students have been exposed to prior to coming to university, so that we may begin to understand how these affect students' access to academic discourses. I draw on the 'literacy studies' paradigm as a way of offering an alternative way of approaching learning in English studies, so as to possibly replace traditionally uncritical notions of literacy with an approach which stresses the social practices in which reading and writing are embedded, and out of which they develop, rather than just focusing on individual cognitive 'skills' or 'abilities' or lack thereof.

Rather than bemoaning their lot with masses of educationally underprepared students, lecturers might, too, want to ask themselves:

1. Might the deficit model not also apply to the curriculum and pedagogical practices of teachers?

2. How can I turn the experiences/ literacies students bring with them into a resource?

3. In which ways can my teaching facilitate a true sharing of meaning with students rather than just imposing my meaning on them?

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

> *"Another problem is the way we present meaning, or knowledge. We*
> *do it one way, but what we can't control is how people will respond.*
> *Will they read it in the intended way? So what happens is some*
> *negotiation of meaning or knowledge."*
>
> (interview with lecturer, 1995)

This study was originally conceived as an investigation into students' perceptions of learning so as to compare them with what I suspected to be very different perceptions from the side of lecturers. In the process, however, my interests have shifted somewhat. My initial concern with the affective aspect of learning, such as their bewilderment and confusion, developed into concerns about the nature of academic discourses, and the complex process of gaining access to them.

What my investigation reveals is that for the majority of students in the English department at UWC, the process of acquiring academic discourses seems mysterious, mystifying and bewildering, an ultimately unattainable goal, no matter how hard they try. For the majority of lecturers, on the other hand, trying to get students to acquire literacy practices which are deemed appropriate to the discipline of English studies seems just as frustrating.

In the conclusion to her unpublished master's thesis titled "Voices in Discourse", Thesen (1994) defines discourse as "a process of meaning exchange via language in a given context. Individuals have differing access to these patterns of exchange in different social contexts" (1994: 77).

Interestingly, the quote from one of the lecturers interviewed which introduces this chapter seems to echo Thesen's point. The quote touches on what I have come to see as a crucial aspect of learning in English 101; learning as a process of meaning exchange. The notion of 'exchange', too, implies a process of sharing meaning, a two-way process. I suggest that my findings show that this is not what is presently happening in English 101.

The context in which the negotiation of meaning takes place is a crucial factor. The context of English studies at UWC has as its basis a specific conceptual framework, defined by lecturers as "critical literacy". For students for whom this new learning (social) context is totally unlike their previous experiences, it is essential that ways of knowing and doing in this context be made explicit. This is true for the majority of students at UWC. The lecturers and tutors are the ones best placed to do this. It is they who are familiar with these ways of knowing and doing, so, logically, they are the ones who can act as mediators of access, as negotiators in the process of sharing meaning.

This process demands a rethinking and redefining of what learning means in a tertiary context, and more specifically, what it means in the context of English studies. This means taking the debate about learning in English 101 beyond the level of the curriculum to the level of metacurriculum. Instead of being concerned about **what** should be learnt, we should be concerned about **how** to learn. Instead of saying : we want students to be able to read and write about the following ten texts, for instance, we need to discuss how we can facilitate the process of being able to write and read about those texts; how to make explicit to our students the conceptual framework, the conventions of the discursive terrain which govern how we are able to read and write about those texts in this discipline. We need to discuss questions of pedagogic theory, teaching practice and methodology: how we mediate ways of knowing (contextual knowledge) and ways of doing (reading and writing). At the heart of a discipline

like English Studies is extensive and demanding reading. What does this mean in practice? It is common enough to say that students need to critically respond to the texts they read. By this we mean that they need to respond actively. How do we then teach this way of reading to students whose previous experiences have only been as passive readers? A situation where this is most unlikely to happen is one where the brilliant teacher explicates a poem or other text before a class of intimidated students, and they are then expected to follow this example. Students cannot do this merely by imitating. What lecturers need to do is to give students the tools to provide their own readings of a text. The lecturer needs to share with students her way of analysing or synthesising texts, how to 'do' this activity called literary criticism, making explicit the "tacit traditions of her field" (Chiseri-Strater, 1991:68). Although some lecturers do attempt to break down the processes of critical analysis, what often happens is that they then get back from students their own reproduced formulas. There is no evidence that the students have a clear understanding of these processes in a meaningful way.

One way to facilitate the reading of a text is to make use of the students' own resources as an aid to making meaning. This can be done by carefully designing pre-reading activities and discussions, which might incorporate predictions and deductions, for example. Students could first note their responses to a text, share these and then evaluate them against the text itself. Personal responses could be the start of discussions about the text, students linking their own experience and intuitions to the text, moving progressively, through a process of reflection and connection, to increasingly incisive textual analysis. In this way students could start becoming aware of what it means to read texts closely in English Studies.

Another approach is getting students to ask a series of questions which they work out for themselves. Reading always involves asking questions of the text and comprehension ensues to the extent that the questions are answered. New students need practice and the confidence to

ask questions of the text, and to start understanding what kinds of questions to ask. As these different kinds of questions are asked, attention will necessarily be drawn to details of the text, which could then stimulate more questions, fresh directions for enquiry. In Appendix H, I have outlined a suggested list of questions which Montgomery et al (1992) suggest could be explored. These questions could be seen as initial ways of getting into the text.

Starting off with students asking their own questions can form the basis of a series of tasks which takes the students progressively deeper into discussions on various aspects of the text. Even if a student is unable to answer these questions positively, their responses reveal gaps in a student's background knowledge which lead to new enquiries. In addition, the responses are likely to reveal informal kinds of reasons or explanation, based on intuitions the student has about the text, or how it relates to other texts she might be familiar with. These responses can be developed into miniature critical arguments, which can be written down and linked together into larger interpretative or critical responses.

Discussing the answers to questions students have asked themselves will show that the student may already have a wide range of intuitions about the text, based on their previous reading experiences. The literacy practices and experiences they bring with them can thus be a positive resource to explore ways of reading in a different context. Furthermore, not having specific answers to the questions becomes less of a problem when the reasons for being interested in the particular question have been identified.

Getting students to ask their own questions about a text is also a way to initiate discussion of what we 'do' when we read - how we construct characters, situations, and a world out of the words of a text. Scholes (1985) suggests that students should be encouraged to produce their own texts that are "within the world they have constructed by their reading." (28) Students

should retell the story, summarise it, even expand it, and try to rewrite the story from another character's point of view.

We need to encourage students to move from merely saying, for example, 'this story is about a man who abuses his wife' to start saying 'it's about betrayal, or patriarchy or power relations'. We need to get students to move from the "things named in the story - character-things, situation-things, event-things - to the level of generalised themes and values." (1985:31), in other words, from the said to the unsaid, the implied or even repressed.

Bock (1988) describes how new students fundamentally misunderstand what the academic task requires and how this impacts on their approach to reading, writing and hence the lecturer's assessment of their intellect and on the quality of their writing. This is an observation which has been confirmed by lecturers who participated in this study (see Chapter Four). One common misunderstanding is when a student responds to a text as if it were a personal and real experience, and not a construction of the writer. I suggest that a way of overcoming this is to encourage students to produce their own texts based on the texts they read. Constructing their own versions of a particular story, for example, in the ways suggested above, will enable them to think of texts as a writer's construction, as someone's version of an experience or event, and might indeed seem very different when looked at from another perspective. By making reading a conscious process through the production and discussion of texts about the text, we open the way for students to be aware of what it means to read and write within the discipline.

In Taylor et al (1988), Bock draws on actual case studies and argues that learning processes are crucially influenced by advice on learning offered by the lecturers. "Students cannot do without knowing," she states, "yet they cannot know before they start doing because doing

means asking the kinds of questions which lead to knowing." (26) The careful planning of tasks is crucial to this process.

Moore (1996) concurs with Bock's focus on the task as central to considerations of ways of opening up pedagogical possibilities within the South African tertiary context:

> from the conception of the task in the mind of the lecturer, its articulation in printed text, its mediation to students, students' written responses, to the marking and subsequent feedback by the marker, opportunities present themselves for either opening up, or the narrowing, of empowering possibilities. (80)

What lecturers need to do, he argues, is to facilitate exposure to authentic academic tasks, mediated and embedded in the specific discipline. In order to allow the student to adapt to these tasks lecturers need to make explicit the cognitive operations and epistemological underpinnings of these tasks; not only for these to be more easily transmitted, but also so that these might be laid open for critical scrutiny.

My findings have shown that this process needs to happen in English 101. If students understand the task differently from the lecturer or tutor who has designed it, and who will most probably mark it, there will be a major problem in establishing common understanding. Common understanding of the processes, purpose and goals of the literacy practice within English studies is essential for learning to take place.

Perhaps this study has over-emphasised the bewilderment that the underpreparedness of students have given rise to, compared with the seeming inability of lecturers, caught up in their

own discursive practices, to make explicit the demands of their discipline. In order to compensate for this imbalance, therefore, I want to move away from centralising the debate in this study in a lecturer-versus-student polemic. The difficulty lecturers had in defining and explaining these 'demands' I describe in an earlier chapter suggests that these demands are not always as explicit or one-dimensional as we would wish.

I would like to demonstrate what I see as the relevance of the debates raised here for tertiary learning, especially within the context of English 101. Having described the student and teaching population in the English department, I suggest that an approach which emphasises metacurricular issues can have a positive effect on all involved in learning; an approach which could create the conditions for successful learning. The work of linguists such as Durant and Fabb (1990), Montgomery et al (1992), as well as Brumfit and Carter (1986), has been quite influential in shaping my approach to teaching in English studies. They approach the teaching of literature from an essentially linguistic perspective. They ask questions about the language of literature, the nature of literary texts, and the nature of literary discourse. The study of literary texts is approached as a use of language in a particular context, a context in which the discussion of the content of the text leads naturally to a discussion and an examination of the language (Brumfit and Carter, 1986), in other words, "[w]hat is said is bound up very closely with how it is said..." (1986:15).

My research has shown that there is little real negotiation of meaning in many learning situations in English 101. Furthermore, my analysis of student and lecturer perceptions of the learning process shows that although most lecturers are well-intentioned as far as facilitating student learning is concerned, there is a chronic mismatch between what lecturers think is happening, and what students are experiencing. To be effective mediators of academic literacy practices, lecturers need to think of approaching learning in new ways.

If we regard disciplines as specific cultural contexts which represent more than just fields of knowledge or content areas, we need to find ways for students to acquire the language for understanding and interacting, to know the ways of 'being' in this context. We could explore ways in which students' prior experiences and background knowledge can assist in making meaning. Thesen (1994) argues that:

> since we give weight to the idea of educational disadvantage, it is part of our responsibility to see what other areas of experience have been meaningful, and to understand how they affect students' entry into, or avoidance of, the academic conversation. (79)

Postscript:

I have mentioned that the English department has long been discussing the issues explored in this study, and recently, have attempted to address some of them. In 1996, the English 101 course structure has undergone some changes:

All English 101 lecturers now take first year tutorials. Tutorials had been almost exclusively run by postgraduate teaching assistants before. In addition, instead of the course modules running parallel to each other in each semester, students now complete a module before moving onto the next. The only exception is the year-long Language module, which has been retained. However, this module now has a strong stylistics slant, and is much more focused on supporting and reinforcing the literary texts taught in lectures. Recently, too, the department has been intensively discussing the need to reflect on methodological and pedagogical issues, in relation to possible future Foundation Year courses, and has been working more closely with those teaching English 105, which is a course in academic literacy.

My research has encouraged me to start working out practical ways of resolving the issues discussed above. I am in the process of developing a course in textual analysis, which is aimed at assisting students to exploring the conceptual framework of literary studies. Although aimed primarily at English students, it is open to all Arts students who are interested in the reading of, and writing about, texts. The course focuses on strategies used to interact with a text, to start understanding what kind of questions should be asked. This course has been developed with the assistance and support of English 101 lecturers, and is to be piloted in 1997.

However, it needs to be pointed out, though, that attempts to resolve the issues have not received enthusiastic support from everyone. Some lecturers are reluctant to change their pedagogical practice, and are unwilling to discuss new methodological approaches. It is hoped that this study, tentative though its conclusions are, will encourage lecturers to explore new ways of mediating the acquisition of specific discursive practices. The more conscious students are of ways of reading, writing, talking and thinking that characterise the discipline, the more confident and articulate they will become, not only about **what** they are learning, but **how** they are learning as well.

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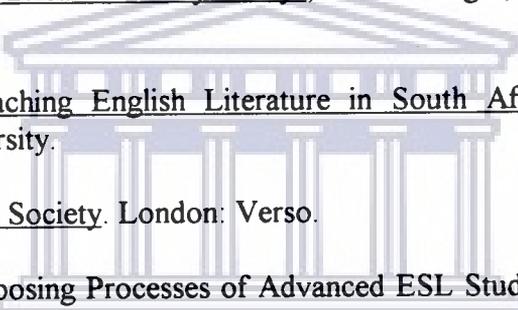
APPENDIX A:
Enrolment and Language Statistics

TABLE 1

STUDENT ENROLMENT AT UWC 1960 - 1995

YEAR	ENROLMENT
1960	166
1965	415
1970	936
1975	2 073
1980	4 153
1985	7 701
1990	12 405
1995	14 653

Source: UWC Statistics, 1995, Vol 2, p. 1

TABLE 2

LANGUAGE DISTRIBUTION OF UWC STUDENTS, 1980-95

YEAR	TOTAL	AFRIKNS.	ENGLISH	AFR/ENG.	AFRICAN LANGS.
1980	4 153	72%	20%	7%	1%
1985	7 701	63%	21%	12%	4%
1990	12 405	44%	19%	9%	28%
1995	14 653	21%	20%	9%	50%

Source: UWC Statistics, 1995, Vol 2, p. 10

TABLE 3

HOME LANGUAGES OF UWC STUDENTS, 1995-6

HOME LANGUAGE	TOTALS 1995	TOTALS 1996
Xhosa	5 322	5 524
Afrikaans	2 902	2 518
English	1 399	2 654
English & Afrikaans	652	647
South Sotho	974	467
Tswana	497	464
Zulu	451	400
North Sotho	64	91
Tsonga	41	53
Venda	55	56
Swati	49	66
Ndebele	4	10
Other	295	247
	14 905	13 783

Source: UWC Statistics, 1996

APPENDIX B:

Participants in the study:

The English 101 students:

The students I focus on in this study were from three English 101 tutorial groups. These groups met once weekly throughout the year, with the same tutor (in most cases: sometimes tutors left the programme and had to be replaced). 54 students were surveyed.

The majority of students were first year students at UWC.

Some are doing English 101 as a language requirement for a law degree. All the others are registered in the Arts Faculty: Anthropology/Sociology, Linguistics and History seem to be the most popular first year courses, with Xhosa and Psychology close seconds.

Many of the students are from outside the Western Province. They have come here to the University of the Western Cape despite the fact that there are tertiary institutions closer home. This is because of what is commonly known as our "open admissions" policy, which means that often students who cannot gain access to other institutions find a home here at UWC. This policy also applies to students from Cape Town, who did not manage to gain access to an institution like the University of Cape Town, for example, because the marks they received for matric were not good enough in terms of UCT's points system. Although many lecturers regard the "open admissions" policy as one of the reasons why our student find it difficult to cope with academic studies, it is not my purpose in this study to focus on this. I approach the situation from the perspective of one who accepts the situation for what it is. UWC is an institution which has opened its doors to all students; we accept this, we live with it, and try and do something about it. In the recent words of our new rector, "our students are disadvantaged, and I see UWC as a place where we try and turn disadvantage into advantage"

(address to UWC staff, May, 1996). I see this study as a contribution to an attempt to do just that.

The teaching staff:

The group I characterise as teaching staff consists of two subgroups: lecturers and tutors. Although differing in some ways, I categorise them together because of their teaching roles, and because in the English department most lecturers have tutoring duties as well (though not first year tutorials at the time of this study).

The English 101 lecturers:

Most of the lecturers involved in this study have many years of university teaching experience. All of them except one are white, and have qualifications at least at Master's level. Three of those surveyed have doctorates. All those surveyed were involved in first year teaching, but not exclusively so. Most were also involved in postgraduate teaching. Only one of the lecturers surveyed was teaching for the first time. Most of the teaching staff in the department consider themselves overworked, and attribute this to the large numbers of students in the department, as well as the extra effort they have to put into their work because of the poor performance of the students. Most of the lecturers categorise teaching English 101 as the biggest, and worst, workload. Because of the large number of English 101 students, there is lots of marking. Some English 101 lecturers complain that they often have very little time to do their own research because of teaching responsibilities. They find time to do this, however, because the English department has a particularly good research reputation on campus.

The job of co-ordinating the first year course is considered a particularly onerous duty.

The English 101 Tutors:

Tutors, in contrast to the lecturers, have contact with students on an ongoing basis. English 101 tutorials consist of about fifteen students each. Tutors met their groups weekly throughout the year. Most of the tutors have a total of three to five tutorial groups each. English 101 assignments are dealt with in the tutorials and are marked by tutors. It is in tutorials that students have the opportunity to raise problems and issues related to their work in the supportive environment of the small group.

The first year tutorials are run mainly by post-graduate students who are completing their Masters or Honours degrees. They tend, therefore, to be younger than the lecturers. Close in age to the students they teach, their relationship with the students is quite different to the one between students and their lecturers. Working in small groups on an ongoing basis, tutors get to know their students quite well, and get to know individual students' strengths and weaknesses. They know their students' names! They are therefore generally more accessible to students, because of their relative youth, their status as students and the closer working relationship. In 1995, tutors met once a month with a tutorial co-ordinator: these sessions were training sessions, discussion fora and also served as a support system for tutors who were new to the programme.

APPENDIX C:

The UWC English 101 course

In 1995 the course consisted of five modules: two ran concurrently in each semester, together with a year-long module on language. The students are divided into five lecture groups. They attend a total of three lectures and one tutorial period per week. One of the three lectures is a double period. Modules are taught in blocks. For example, each lecture group would have eighteen lectures on Module 1.

Teaching in English 101:

Of the 18 periods, six periods would be spent on the novel, say - three double periods. So Lecturer A would, for example, teach eighteen periods (three different lecture groups), Lecturer B would teach twelve (two different lecture groups) and another only 6 (one lecture group). As is evident, therefore, Lecturer A and B would complete their English 101 teaching allocation in the first three weeks of the term, and this might be their only English 101 allocation, or they might come back for another short time later on in the year to teach a block of lectures on another text. In most cases, therefore, contact with English 101 students would be limited to these short blocks of lectures. Each lecturer sets aside several periods a week for individual student consultation. However, as my data will show (see below) very few students made use of this opportunity to consult their lecturer. At the time of the study most English 101 lecturers took no first year tutorials at all. The only full-time English 101 lecturer who took a tutorial was the course co-ordinator. She had one English 1 tutorial. As a committed lecturer, she felt that the job of co-ordinator could only be done competently if she had some idea of what students were doing and thinking. The best way to do this, she felt, was to take a tutorial herself. She reported that this experience was invaluable for her to have an idea of what was happening in the course.

11. ENGLISH I (101) SYLLABUS

Students who register for English 101 should be fluent in English and able to read a variety of texts. To benefit from this course, students should have at least a C for English for the Senior Certificate, Second Language, higher Grade examination.

There are two lectures and one tutorial per week. Consult this handbook for lecture venues and the notice board for information about tutorials

English 101 consists of language and literary studies. The purpose of the language component of the course is to assist students with developing the skills for reading different kinds of texts, including popular and visual texts.

The literature course is divided into four "modules". In the first semester, you will have lectures on modules 1 (South African Fiction) and 2 (South African Poetry and Drama). The second semester's lectures will cover modules 3 (Literature and the Renaissance) and 4 (Literature and the Modern World).

11.1. ENGLISH I: PRESCRIBED AND RECOMMENDED READING

LANGUAGE COURSE

FIRST AND SECOND SEMESTERS
* Orlek, Janet *Languages in South Africa* Wits UP.
* Rule, Peter *Language and the News* Wits UP.
* Granville, S. *Language, Advertising and Power* Wits UP.

LITERATURE COURSE

FIRST SEMESTER
Module 1. South African Literature in Context:Fiction
* Gordimer, Nadine *July's People* Penguin
* Malan, Robin (ed) *Being Here* David Philip

Module 2 South African Literature in Context: Poetry and Drama
* Fugard, Athol *Statements* OUP
* Mhlope, G et al *Have You Seen Zandile* Skotaville
* Malan, Robin (ed.) *Poetry Works* David Philip

SECOND SEMESTER
Module 2: Literature and the Renaissance
* Shakespeare, W *Romeo and Juliet* Penguin
* Shakespeare, W *Macbeth* Maskew Miller
Poetry compilation available in the Department

Module 3: Literature and the Modern World
* Lawrence, D.H *Sons and Lovers* Penguin
* Edgell, Zee *Beka Lamb* Heinemann
Reader available in Campus Bookshop

Recommended Additional Books:
(Not compulsory or examinable, but these will be helpful, especially if you plan to 'major' in English):
* Roget's *Thesaurus*
* Concise Oxford Dictionary
* M H Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*
* Alex Potter, *The Context of Literature Written in English*

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17. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

17.1. CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

There is no mystery about critical analysis, and there are no fixed techniques or formulas for going about it. In fact, you often practise it whenever you make a reasoned attempt to understand a subject that interests you; whatever it may be, you have been analysing critically. Your interest has led you to find your own approach, and you have selected critical tools as the need has arisen.
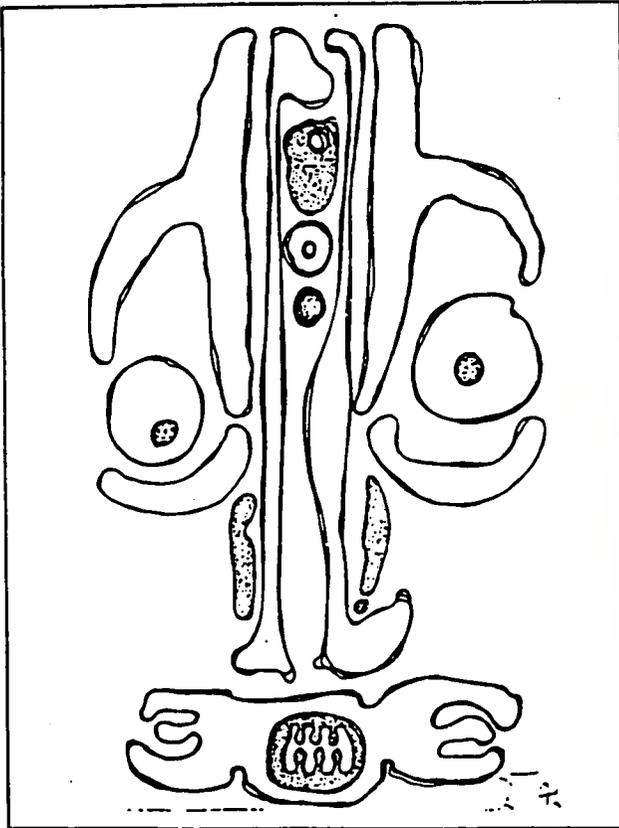
This applies to literature as much as to any other subject. You may be interested in a poem's aesthetic qualities, or its implied moral and philosophical meanings, or its relation to the society which produced it. But, whatever your interest, you will have to find your own way of exploring it. In fact, the only tool basic to all kinds of critical literary enquiry is a detailed or "close" reading of the text.

At this point it should be clear that we cannot speak of "right" answers in literary criticism. Some answers are obviously wrong, of course: *Macbeth* is not set in South Africa. But most answers are relatively good or bad rather than right or wrong, and they are good insofar as they explore the significance of the text in a convincing and clear way. The following guidelines are designed to help you develop your reading skills. (These guidelines are based on Robert Scholes' Textual Power: *Literary Theory and the Teaching of English*, 1985: Yale University Press.)

A: PRIMARY READING
◊ This is spadework, but we need to follow the basic sense of a work before we go any further.
◊ First make sure that you understand all the "codes", words and allusions. Dictionaries and companions to literature may help here.
◊ Although reading is often an unconscious activity, we can read a story or a poem only if we are familiar with enough other poems or stories to understand their basic rules or codes. The more we read, the easier it becomes for us to understand a text's basic meanings and to read quickly and easily.

B: INTERPRETATION
Literary criticism is interpretive, and literary texts are not statements, so we cannot simply paraphrase them or "tell the story". Rather, we need to ask questions such as:
◊ What is the focus of the text and what does it explore?
◊ How is the focus or theme explored?

Once you have come to some conclusions about these issues, you will be ready to give a general account of the work. Such an introductory account is of fundamental importance to your critical essay, because, unless you commit yourself to an interpretation early on, you will not have anything to test, qualify, and expand on in the rest of the essay. Once you have identified the focus or central meanings of a text, the rest of your interpretation should show in detail how these meanings are explored. This can best be done by selecting extracts from the work and showing in detail what they contribute to the overall effect.

You may need to remind yourself that:
◊ Words have connotations as well as denotations, and that the connotations are usually emotional, moral, or sensory.
◊ The rhythms and sound patterns, particularly of poetry, but also of prose, affect the way we respond to the work.

◊ Tone (which has a similar meaning to "attitude") lets us know how the writer views us, and so how we are expected to respond to events, characters, and so on. Tone can sometimes be used to mislead the reader, to play a joke on us, or to persuade us of the value of something without being explicit about it.

◊ Irony, other forms of wit, images and figurative language like similes and metaphors often convey meanings in an especially forceful and/or economical way. In writing about them we should always be concerned with what purpose they serve and what their overall effects are. It is not adequate or useful simply to identify them, a practise which is often encouraged at school.

◊ There are different genres or conventional types of writing, and we are expected to recognise the genre of what we are reading to help us to interpret a text.

◊ Form and style affect meaning as much as content. We should therefore think about how writers use features like sentence structures or patterns, repetitions, and rhyme schemes, and how these features affect our response to certain texts.

A useful book to acquire is MH Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, which explains, illustrates and suggests further reading on a range of terms used in literary theory and criticism.

Developing a descriptive vocabulary
Students' difficulties with analysis often arise from the inadequacy of their vocabulary. You should consider building up a list of words describing tone, attitude, emotion, and style, adding to the list every time you encounter a potentially useful one in your reading or in the course of lectures and discussions. Reading critical studies of your prescribed texts will also help you to develop your own vocabulary and to improve your writing.

Understanding lectures and feeling that you "know enough" about your prescribed texts should not make you complacent about reading further. Remember that writing about what you know requires practise, analytical skills and a vocabulary that is learnt gradually.

Use the library's facilities, especially the reference works, for developing your technical vocabulary, analytical skills and general knowledge.

C: CRITICISM
Basically, criticism concerns our assessment of a text. It involves asking questions such as
◊ How well does a text explore its central concerns
◊ Does the exploration satisfy you? Why?
◊ Does the text adequately answer the questions it
◊ raises?

In lectures, tutorial discussion and essay-writing, you are encouraged to assess texts from the perspective of your personal, cultural and ideological beliefs. Considering why you respond to a particular text in a particular way, and how your views differ from those of the author is crucial to your development as a student. You should, however, always bear the following in mind.
◊ always support your views; avoid making assessments without explaining them.
◊ make sure that you have read the text and interpreted it thoroughly before making assessments; you cannot criticise a text or writer unless you show that you understand what the writer is trying to say first.

> COMMENT: Remember that the activities of primary reading, interpretation and criticism are interconnected and that they overlap. Avoid using formulae or rigid headings in your essays. In the course of your writing, discussions and lectures, you will become more familiar with how these activities intersect.

17.2. CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND SPECIFIC ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS

Practice: During the course of the year, you will need to develop your interpretive and critical skills. Practice by writing an essay on any of the poems you have studied, and then examine your work with the aid of the following questions:

Check-list of questions to ask about your analysis
• Have I described the work in my essay, explaining not only what it is about but also how its meaning evolves?
• Have I given a general account of the main points and explored their implications? Have I used detailed analysis of extracts to back up the discussion and give
• it depth?
• Have I paid attention to what the tone contributes to the overall effect? Have I noted the voice we are hearing and the point of view being presented? Have I distinguished between voice and point of view where necessary?
• Have I spent too much time on unnecessary paraphrase or story-telling instead of analysis?
• Have I taken subtleties in the text into account in assessing the author's purposes, values, or interests?
• Have I at any stage either patronised the author or undervalued the quality of the work through not attending to what is being said?
• Have I assessed the text convincingly and supported my criticism of its meanings?

APPENDIX E:

Extracts from student interviews:

1. Group interview

Thembeka (Transkei), Wendy (Eastern Cape), Kholeka (Cape Town)

Researcher: Tell me about what you experience in lectures?

Student/s: The lecturers go too fast, we find it difficult to follow what he is saying all the time. Sometimes we can't follow what is being said because we have a difficulty understanding English.

R: Are the words he uses too difficult?
S: Yes, sometimes we try by all means to write down what is said, but I don't understand what he means.

R: Like what?
S: Iambic pentameter, symbolism - he uses the words like we must know.

R: Do you listen or do you just write down?
S: Sometimes I just write, and sometimes when I get lost because he is going too fast I just try and listen.

R: What do you write down? everything?
S: Not everything, just what I think is important.

R: How do you know what is important? Does the lecturer tell you 'write this down, or listen carefully, this is important"?
S: Sometimes, but not always, what I mean by important , sometimes I will write down what I think, maybe, I have read the book, so I write down a point which seems to explain something I didn't understand, like why the character says this, or does this and maybe how it is connected with other parts of the book, whatever I think is important.

R: Does the lecturer ever ask you questions? (nods) What kind?
S: Sometimes they stop and ask - are you with me? is it clear?

R: And is it?
S: Sometimes, and sometimes no.
R: What do you do then, do you ask him to explain?
S: No.
R: Why not?

S: I am afraid he will ask me what I don't understand, you know you don't know what you don't understand, so you keep quiet.

They do ask "do you understand?" but even if sometimes when someone says no, they don't go back to the question. Most of the time we say yes, but we don't understand. They also say "Do you remember when we talked about..." but I don't remember, because I didn't understand it the last time. If you miss the discussion, you don't know what to do, and then you are lost when it comes to the writing of the exam or the essay.

R: Do you then go and ask the lecturer afterwards during consultation, or your tutor?

S: No.

R: Why not?

S: I don't know to explain how I don't understand. Maybe they think I am not working hard, or ...

R: Well, do you think you are working hard?

S: Yes, I think I am putting effort in this, but not enough maybe for passing.

The student, and the others, said they often went over their lecture notes in the evenings. One also mentioned that she was part of a study group which met once a week sometimes, but especially when there was an essay to work on, and for tests.

R: What other problems have you experienced?

S: I find the work too much, there are too much books. We don't get enough time to read the books, because they are too many and some are big yet the time is short.

I am also not sure yet what we must do when we analyse because we didn't do it before in school.

R: How about the tuts?

S: I like the tuts because I don't feel shy to ask a question because we are a small group. Also the tutor explains clearly what the work is about. Like when we must do an essay the tutor explains clearly the passage and how we must do the essay.

There should be more tuts.

2. Student interview

Vuyani (East London)

R: Tell me, how has it been so far in English 101? Are they going the way you expected?

S: I must say I have been struggling with the load, yah. It's been tough. The way we are being taught in lectures - I thought it would be the same way my teacher taught me. Clearly telling me what the book is about - the aims of the book, the author's background, the themes of the book. Also we read the book in the class and he gave us summaries of the book, chapter by chapter, with the themes. I didn't realise the books would all be done one after the other, with very little time to read them.

Also I find the lecturers talk too fast, I find it difficult to understand their accents, because I have experience of a black accent.

R: Do you manage to take notes in lectures, even if the lecturer's talking so fast?
S: I don't take notes in lectures - at school I was taught not to write when the teacher is speaking, so I try and listen to what he is saying in lectures. Listen comes first, then I copy a friend's notes.

R: Does the lecturers ever ask you questions? (nods) what kind of questions?
S: The questions the lecturers ask are: are we all together here? Any questions? Can you hear me? What is the meaning of...?
Then we all respond yes immediately, we want him to proceed.
Sometimes I want to ask a question, but then I feel too shy in front of the big lecture, that's why I like small groups in tuts, because we get support and information from each other.

R: What are the main issues you think should be addressed by the department?
S: The way we are being taught in lectures. They just say "turn to page 103" then blah, blah, blah, then turn to page ... then blah. blah, blah again and then look at page so and so and then again - you see here Lawrence is saying this, and he means this, I can't keep up, I get lost. They should come to class and tell us clearly about the story according to his views so we can get insight into what the story is about. Our teacher at school used to tell us about a relevant chapter. We should also have more tuts, because tuts explain things clearly.

3. Student interview

Lulamile (Eastern Cape)
I thought we were going to do grammar and learning to speak the language. But it was a different thing, only literature and the way of analysing the books are very different to what I am used to. The lecturers speak too fast and I feel very shy to tell them and ask them questions. Sometimes I will go and ask after the lecturer, but they are always in a hurry and they tell me to come and speak to them in their office, but then I have class, and I can't go. They should go into deep details and explain the story further, so it is clear to me what the story is all about. They should ask us more questions, after the session to check understanding before they go on to other things.

I take notes sometimes when I can understand what the lecturer is saying and then I go over it afterwards, but often it is not clear.

The lecturer does give tips sometimes, like I remember one lecturer said that when we analyse we "must break it into pieces and restructure it" I am not clear what this means. They also say that when we analyse we mustn't only focus on the extract but on the story as a whole, but then in my essay it is said that I must not retell the story.

Another difficulty is the number of texts, there are too many, and I found the poetry module the most difficult, because I have a problem analysing poems. Even when I understand what the poem is about when I consult my lecturer, I have the same problem when looking at other poems. I would like the lecturer to give more detailed notes, their notes in lectures are too brief to understand clearly.

4. Student interview
H. (Namibia)

I decided to do English because it was a requirement for doing law. I didn't really have an idea of what English 101 was going to be - I thought it was just going to be a lot of books to read, I didn't realise it was going to be so much work.
I found that I couldn't really relate to what is being discussed. They are too fast, too rushed.

I didn't always read all the books, but I knew some of the stories. But my idea of the story was not met in the lectures. I would have read about 'apples', and then in the lecture they would be talking about 'pears, with no mention of the 'apples' at all. Whatever they regarded as fundamental differed from my idea. I had a problem linking what they say to my idea and to the story.

I was never sure of what they wanted from me, especially in the essays. I would look at the topic - what did they want me to do?

What about taking notes?
Whatever evidence which went with what I had read I would write down - whatever I didn't understand I wouldn't write down.

My problem I think has a lot to do with gutter education - we were spoonfed. We didn't have a chance to think critically. Then you come to UWC - and everyone tells you - think critically. And then they also ask in one question - analyse, discuss, give your opinion - I didn't know how to apply these terms. The application of these terms is a problem. I know what analyse means - I must break it apart, go for the deeper meaning, open it up. And I know that critical analysis means linking the opinion which exists in the passage and your own opinion, focusing on the differences between these, so when you open it up certain things are revealed. To me 'critical' means that you comment from another viewpoint, maybe from the perspective of how I see things, from my own values, and so on.

But I can't do it - I can't just react the way they want me to. I suppose the limited approach from school is inside me. I'm still trying to overcome it in me.

APPENDIX F:

Questionnaire

<u>To: English 101 lecturers</u>   <u>From: Kay Jaffer</u>

I am presently completing my research thesis for my M.Phil in Applied Linguistics. I am interested in exploring the tension between academic literacy and critical literacy as these pertain to teaching and learning in English 101. I would be grateful, therefore, if you would assist me by filling in this questionnaire.

1. Name:

2. How long have you been teaching in English 101?

A: General

1. What do you understand by academic literacy?

2. What do you understand by critical literacy?

3. How are these concepts related to the experiences of students in English 101?

4. Which English 101 module do you teach? If you teach more than one, list the one you are most involved in.

5. What are the prescribed texts for the module?

6. Why were those particular texts chosen?

7. What are the main problems experienced by students in the module?

8. What kind of previous learning experience (skills and background knowledge) should students already have in order to learn effectively in the module?

9. What kind of learning level (skills and background knowledge) should students have reached at the end of English 101 in order to progress successfully to the next year of study in the department?

B: Teaching practice

1. What teaching processes seem to work in lectures? Give an example and explain why.

2. What kind of teaching process never seems to work? Give an example and explain why not.

3. What would you like to change about your own teaching practices?

Why?

How?

4. What changes, if any, should be made to the structure of lectures?

5. What advice would you give students as to what they could do to improve learning for themselves?

6. What would you say are the three most urgent issues which need to be addressed in English 101?

Thank you for your co-operation.
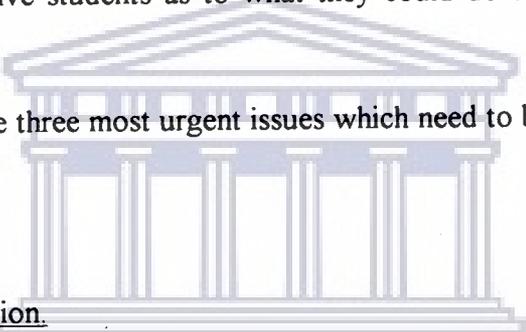
Questionnaire

To: Students **From: Kay Jaffer**

I am doing research into learning in the English 101 course for a masters degree. The purpose of this study is to try and understand some of the problems experienced by first year students doing English 101. Hopefully, this will enable us to work out possible solutions to the problems experienced.

I ask you to complete this questionnaire so that I may know more about the attitudes of students doing English 101. Think about the questions carefully, and please be as honest as you wish. Be assured that your responses will be held in the strictest confidence and will not in any way affect your assessment at the end of the year, but will be of invaluable assistance to all of us teaching in the department. Hopefully, your contribution will go a long way towards making learning in the department a more empowering experience.

A: Your Background

1. Name (optional)

2. Where is the last school you attended?

3. List the subjects you wrote in matric and symbols received.

4. What languages do you speak, write, read and understand?

List in order of fluency.

6. What language was used as the medium of instruction at your school?

Officially?

Unofficially?

7. What language was used for interaction:

between students?

between teacher and students?

B: Learning English

At school:

1. Did you enjoy doing English at school?

Why/why not?

2. Which aspects of English did you enjoy:

the most?

the least?

3. When and where did you learn most of your English?

At university:

1. How did you end up doing the English 101 course?

2. What were your expectations of the course?

3. In which way/s were those expectations met or not met? Please be specific.

5. What are the differences in the way your lecturers teach compared to how your English teacher used to teach at school?

6. So far, have you experienced any problems with the following?

a) reading the texts - if yes, which?

b) listening in lectures - explain.

c) speaking in lectures - explain.

d) listening in tutorials - explain.

e) speaking in tutorials - explain

f) writing your assignments - explain.

g) feedback on your assignments - explain.

h) consultation with your lecturers - explain.

i) consultation with your tutor - explain.

j) examinations - explain.

7. Do your lecturers give you any tips and advice for preparing to read a particular text?

If yes, what kinds of tips and advice do they give?

8. Do your lecturers give you any tips or advice for writing assignments on a particular text? If yes, what kind of tips and advice do they give?

9. Do you get a chance to thoroughly discuss the content, style, tone, and so on of a text:

in lectures? If yes, with whom?

in tutorials? If yes, with whom?

10. Do you feel you need extra help with the demands of the English 101 course? If yes, what kind of help would you like from:

lecturers?

tutors?

other students?

11. Do you think your tutorial group is functioning optimally (at its best)?

What do you think the tutorial group could do to improve the way the group functions?

What do you think the tutor could do to improve the way the group functions?

12. What do you think the lecturer could do to improve the lectures?

13. What do you think the English department could do to improve the conditions for learning in English 101?

Thank you for your co-operation.

APPENDIX G:

Description of new course "academic literacy for literary studies" 1997

Proposed Academic Literacy for Literature Studies Course

Background

This proposal grew out of the recent English department discussions on a Foundation Year programme, which would be a part of a proposed four-year arts degree. However, this is unlikely to happen soon. Discussions have revolved around curriculum design and restructuring, with the first-year level a particular priority. According to EH's recent report, however, there's not much that can be set in place for 1997.

Eng105 has suggested one of its lecture groups be accommodated in its timetable, to pilot a programme which, while run along existing Eng105 lines, would focus on preparing students for literature studies in Eng101. This suggestion has now been accepted. The course would be aimed at those students who wish to continue with English studies, and who would find an introductory course useful in this regard.

Rationale

In joint discussions between Eng105 and the rest of the English department, it has been made clear that many aspects of the present Eng105 course are able to provide students with a range of experiences which could prepare them for academic studies. Eng105 has as its focus the development of language and academic literacy. The course tries to develop the confidence of new students to acquire academic discourse, and at the same time, developing the student's ability to find her own voice in this discourse. The development of reading, writing, speaking

and listening skills is an essential aspect. The course could be adjusted to focus on a programme which would prepare students for entry into the present Eng101 course.

In this way, too, a closer relationship could develop between Eng105 and the rest of the English department. It is proposed that Eng105 offer their facilities, which would include the timetable spot, the venues, the tutors and the lecturer. This cannot be done, though, without the full co-operation of the Eng101 teaching staff, not only at the stage of conceptualisation, but also at later stages of ongoing planning and assessment.

Students:

A student selection system needs to be agreed upon quite soon. The idea was raised that we identify students for this programme on the basis of their symbol for matric English, and that they be recommended to take the proposed Eng105 course if they wanted to continue in the department. If they intend to major in English, taking this programme means that they will take four years to complete. It has to be noted that as this is a pilot project, with an assessment after the first year, findings would be necessarily skewed if an homogenous group was selected to take this course. It is recommended that the student group be a fairly mixed group as far as language ability goes.

Structure and content

The course is intended for those who would like an introductory grounding in the ways of making meaning in the discipline of literary studies. The foundation of the course is an intensive materials-based programme of reading and writing. Methodological approaches tried and tested in the Eng105 programme form the basis of the course, but focused on the making of meaning in the context of literary studies. The course would identify the elements of the discourse which is at the centre of literary studies; introducing the specialised language and the

objects of study (texts) of literary criticism, close reading, critical reading, genre awareness; and writing in the discipline; discussion, showing evidence, referencing, arguing. The course would include, too, theories of language and language use, modes of analysis, and critical and visual literacy.

As the focus of the course would be skills, not content, a short reading list of accessible, interesting texts would be included: short stories, poetry, a short drama (or extract).
A small selection of non-literary texts is to be included as well.

The Eng105 course is consist of five sections which are designed to parallel the development of the student in her first year of university study. The first section deals with a student's identity and deals with groupwork processes, introduction to self-reflective practices, freewriting, autobiographical writing. The next section focuses on 'becoming a student'. The student is introduced to process writing, listening and note-taking in lectures, drafting, self-editing, pre-reading skills. In the third section the work focuses mainly on the academy: reading and writing in the academic context: the following of arguments, responding to arguments, constructing your own argument, close reading skills, critical reading, discourse analysis, integrated research. The other sections deal with skills related to other forms of writing, such as letters of application, report-writing, CV writing.

Each section is introduced by the following:

Defining the task/s.

Describing the aim and purpose in terms of student learning outcome.

Constructing a series of tasks of increasing complexity, each building on the previous one.

Ideas for follow-up assignment options.

Optional: answer/explanation section.

Questions prompting students to assess their own learning outcome.

Eng105 for Literary Studies will generally use the main reader, but this will be accompanied by a selection of literary texts: short stories, a short selection of poetry, a drama extract.

Eng105 presently has the format of one double-period lecture, one double-period tutorial, and one self-access learning period per week. The lecture group ordinarily consist of 150 students, with twenty-five the maximum number for tutorials. Students are allocated to tutorial groups according to the lecture group they fall into, as there is a close link between the lectures and the tutorials.

Staffing:

One of the existing Eng105 lecturers will teach the course. According to existing tutorial structures, this will mean that the group will divide into six tutorial groups. Tutors would have to be found to take these tutorials, and they should preferably have a literary studies background.

APPENDIX H

How to get started in ways of reading

(adapted from Montgomery et al (1992))

These suggested ways of exploring the meanings of a text are not separate from each other: they form a network of overlapping viewpoints from which the search for meaning can be seen. Listing the main directions of analysis can be useful, if only to make students aware that there is more than one meaning or approach. Hopefully, these questions will suggest ways to get going on a text, and will encourage students to explore ways of resisting the ways of reading they may have been used to. Each of these questions could lead into a range of speculations that could be assessed on the basis of insights and judgements they make possible about the text which is being read.

Textual questions

- is the text you are looking at the whole of the text?

- has the text been edited in any way?

- has the text been annotated? Who provided the annotations, and do these direct you towards looking at the text in a particular way?

Contextual questions

- was the originator of the text male or female? Native speaker of English or not?

- who was the text originally aimed at? Are you part of that expected readership or audience?

- when, where and in what circumstances was the text produced?

Questions of voice

- who is supposed to be speaking the words of the text?

- from whose point of view is the text being told?

- who is the text being spoken to?

Referential questions

- does the text contain quotations?

- does the text refer to particular social attitudes, facts or assumptions about the world, or to particular interests or geographical knowledge?

- does the text contain specific references to other literary, media, historical, mythological, religious texts, figures or events? If so, do you know what these references refer to?

- would it be helpful to understand the precise meanings of the references, or merely their general origin and flavour?

Language questions

- is the text in its original language, or a translation?

- is it likely that all the words in the text mean what you think they mean?

- what sort of vocabulary do the words of the text generally come from; elevated or colloquial, technical or non-technical?

- were all the words and sentence structures current at the time the text was written, or is it possible that some are archaisms?

- are the sentences generally of the same length or complexity? If not, is the inequality patterned in any way that might be significant?

- Is very 'literary' language used?

Symbolic questions

- do names used in the text refer to unique, particular individuals, or are they representative, standing for general characters or character types?

- is it appropriate to look for symbolic meanings of places, weather or events in the text?

- is the text concerned to relate a specific set of events, or does it represent one set of concerns in the form of a story about another (allegory)?

- is the text's title a key to its meaning?

Questions of convention

- should the way you regard a text be guided by conventions about the sort of text it is - eg satire, tragedy?

- how realistic do you expect the text to be? Is it appropriate to ask such a question of the text you are reading?

Questions of representation

- is the text typical of how it represents selected themes, or is different from other treatments of similar concerns?

- does the text create images of race, women, class and other socially central themes? If so, are these images problematic, and if so, why?
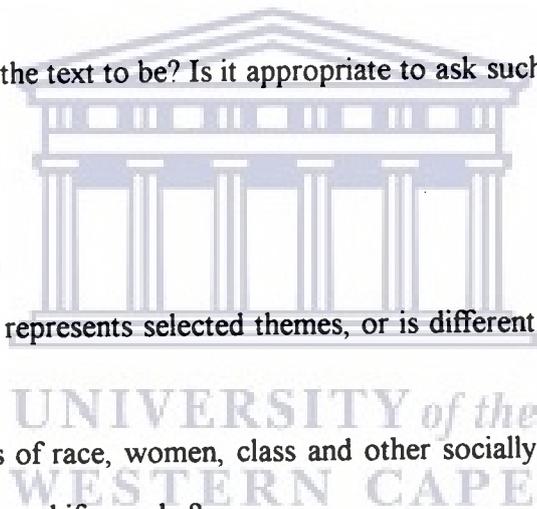
APPENDIX I

An outline of a possible approach to a literary text

(Adapted from Montgomery et al (1992))

1. Read the following poem. Make a list of questions you feel it would be useful to ask bout it. Also list the specific pieces of information you feel it would be helpful to know in order to discuss the text or comment on it.

2. Arrange the questions and kinds of information in your lists under the different headings presented above (Appendix H). Don't worry about the answers to the questions, or even about where the answers would be found. Focus instead on what kinds of questions would be worth exploring.

3. When you have completed your lists, consult the information about the poem given below.

How far have these pieces of information answered the questions you have listed?

What difference does it make to the reading of the poem whether you have access to such information?

Do all texts rely to some extent on background information in the same way as this poem appears to?

4. Now examine some of those questions which are unanswered by the information received.

How many of your questions are 'why' questions?

Is there a difference between 'why' questions and other kinds of question? If so, what is the difference?

Tranquerah Road

1

Poor relative, yet well-connected,
same line, same age as Heeren Street
(more or less, who knows?)
the long road comes and goes -
dream, nightmare, retrospect -
through my former house,
self-conscious, nondescript.

2

There was a remnant of a Portuguese settlement,
Kampong Serani, near the market,
where Max Gomes lived, my classmate.

At the end of the road, near *Limbongan*,
the Tranquerah English School,
our *alma mater*, heart of oak.

By a backlane the Methodist Girls' School,
where my sister studied
*See me, mother,*
can you see me?
The Lord's prayer, Psalm 23.

The Japanese came,
and we sang the *Kimigayo*,
learnt some *Nihon Seishin*.

Till their *Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere*
collapsed, and we had to change,
out tune again - God Save the King.
Meliora hic sequamur.

The King died when I was in school,
and then, of course, God save the Queen.

While *Merdeka* inspired -
for who are so free
as the sons of the brave? -
and so *Negara-ku*
at mammoth rallies
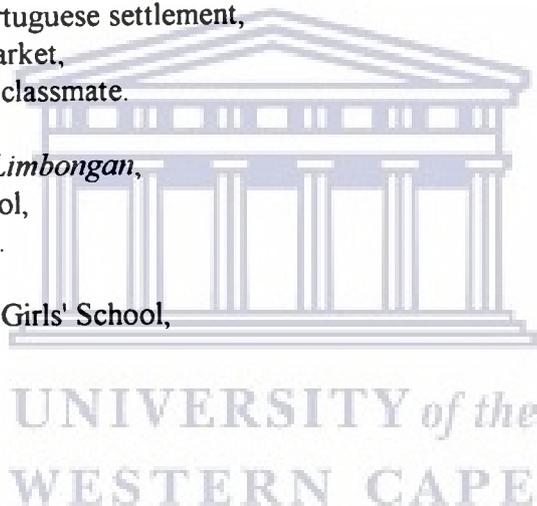
I salute them all
who made it possible.
for better, for worse.

3
A sudden trill,
mosquito whine
like enemy aeroplane
in a blanket stillness,
the heave and fall of snoring sea,
swish and rustle of coconut,
kapok, tamarind, fern-potted.
where *pontianak* perch
by the midnight road.

Wind lifts its haunches off the sea,
shakes dripping mane,
then gallops muffle-hoofed,
a flash of whiteness in sparse bamboo
in a Malay cemetery.

Yet I shall fear no evil
for Thou art with me
through the wind is a horse
is a jinn raving free
Thy rod and Thy staff
they comfort me
and fear is only in the mind
as Mother said
why want to be afraid
just say *Omitohood Omitohood Omitohood*
Amen.
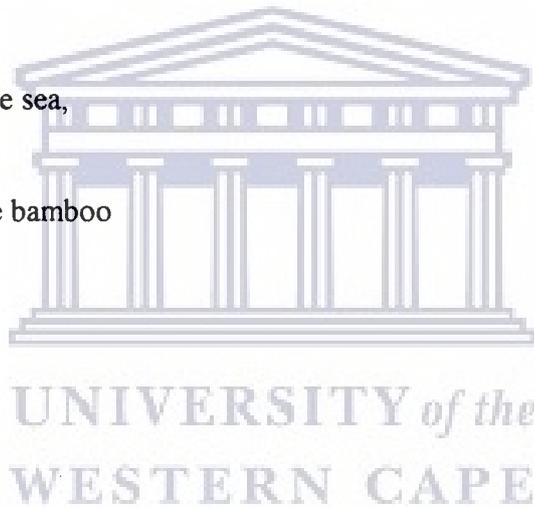
Notes on Tanquerah Road

The author, Ee Tiang Hing, is a Malaysian writer, who was born in Malacca in 1933 and educated at Tranquerah English School and High School, Malacca. He now lives in Australia.

Tranquerah Road: the road is an extension off Heeren Street, Malacca.

Kampong Serani: 'Portuguese Village', in the suburb of Ujon Pasir.

Limbongan: a suburb adjacent to Tranquerah. The Dutch used to moor their vessels off the coast there.

Kimigayo: the Japanese national anthem.

Nihon Seishin: 'Japanese Soul'.

Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity sphere: the Japanese scheme to unify Asia, during the Second World War.

Meliora hic sequamur: the motto of the Malacca High School ('Here let us do better things.')

Merdeka: 'Independence.'

Negara-ku: 'My Country, the Malayan, and then Malaysian, national anthem.

pontianak: succubus (female demon supposed to have sexual intercourse with sleeping men).

jinn: genie, evil spirit.

Omitohood: a Buddhist benediction (Om Mane Pudmi Hum), in the Hokkien Chinese dialect.
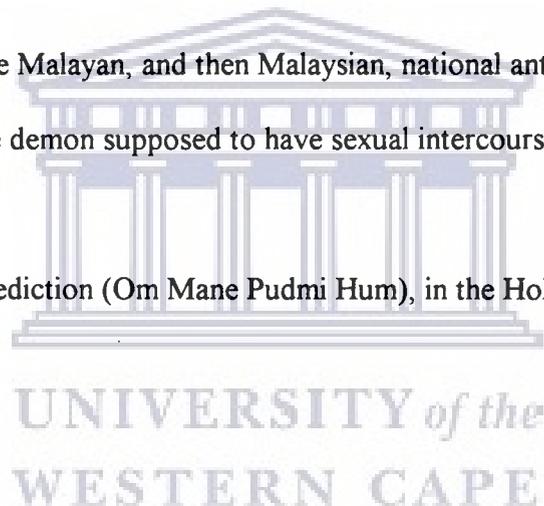
Ways of reading a short story:

(adapted from Scholes (1985)

In the second chapter of his argument for <u>Textual Power</u>, Scholes suggests a detailed approach to discussing English literary texts. He uses an extremely short text from Hemingway's <u>In Our Time</u> as a way of introducing notions of reading and interpretation.

> While the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh jesus christ get me out of here. Dear jesus please get me out. Christ please please please christ. If you'll only keep me from getting killed I'll do anything you say. I believe in you and I'll tell everyone in the world that you are the only one that matters. Please please dear jesus. The shelling moved further up the line. We went to work on the trench and in the morning the sun came up and the day was hot and muggy and cheerful and quiet. the next night back at Mestre he did not tell the girl he went upstairs with at the Villa Rosa about Jesus. And he never told anybody.

Scholes suggest beginning by asking students about their understanding of what a story is. How can this text be considered as a story? Is there characterisation? Changes of scene, shifts in time? Is a story being told? From these kinds of questions the students could begin to develop an explicit notion of fictional coding, of genre, which is a major guide to reading literary texts.

Scholes suggests, further, that a discussion of cultural codes is a necessary part of processing texts. students should be encouraged to make explicit how they are able to construct a scene from the words of the page.

Setting: How are words like 'bombardment', 'shelling' and 'trench' related? How do they know? What background knowledge is evoked by these words? Are other words in the text as important in evoking a background?

What does it mean to 'go upstairs' with a girl at the Villa Rosa? How do you know? How important is it?

What ideas of religion are brought into play by the repetition of 'dear Jesus'? What do we have to know about religion to understand the story? What beliefs are implied by this story?

Scholes proposes that teachers should not shy away from group study. Many interpretive obstacles can be resolved by group discussion, he argues, or by group research. Like Montgomery et al, Scholes argues that introductory questions like these lead the way to discussing more complex notions of interpretation and criticism. progressively more and more complex issues can be discussed, moving from the level of specific events narrated in the text, to a more general level of social values, to the theme of the story as it is commonly known. How does one get the student from the level of 'it's about a soldier in a trench' to 'it's about fear' - or shame, or betrayal or whatever?

One way is to go back and reconsider the readings of the story, getting the students to give summaries and responses. What are the repetitions and oppositions set up in the story? Then moving the discussion from the singular oppositions set up in the story to generalised oppositions that structure societal and cultural values. It is not so much a matter of generating meanings, as it is making connections between a specific text and a larger cultural text, Scholes suggests. In order to teach the interpretation of a literary text, we must be prepared to teach the larger cultural text as well.