THE INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning

The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning is a peer-reviewed journal, which focuses on making a difference to educators at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. It publishes original contributions of interest to researchers and practitioners in the field of education.

The following types of contribution will be considered for publication:
- research-based empirical, reflective or synoptic articles that would be of interest to the educational practitioner
- review articles that critically examine research carried out in a specific field
- discussion or advocacy papers suitable for publication in the section entitled 'Practitioners' Corner'
- book reviews that comprise a clear and concise evaluation of recently published books.

Disclaimer
The publisher and the editor cannot be held responsible for any consequences arising from the use of information contained in this journal. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher or the editor.

Contents

Volume 3   *2008*

Notes on contributors

Chrissie Boughey worked in Britain, Spain and the Middle East before coming to South Africa in 1989. In South Africa, she worked at the University of the Western Cape and the University of Zululand before taking up a post at Rhodes University in 1999. She is now Dean, Teaching and Learning at Rhodes and also heads the Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning. She supervises extensively at doctoral level and has a particular interest in the development of students' writing.

Roddy Fox is Professor in the Geography Department at Rhodes University, South Africa and Guest Professor in Economic Geography at University West, Sweden. Since receiving a Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education in 2004 he has been publishing on innovations in Geography teaching. **Per Assmo** is a Senior Lecturer at University West, Sweden. He obtained a PhD in Human Geography in 1999, and has for a number of years had a research focus on internationalisation and pedagogical development in higher education. Dr Assmo is currently heading a three year multidisciplinary international programme for Politics and Economics (IPPE) at University West in Sweden. **Hanna Kjellgren** is senior lecturer in political science at University West. She has a PhD in political science from Göteborg University. Her doctoral thesis was an analysis of how information policies should be viewed from a liberal democratic philosophical perspective. Her current research interests are civic education in the Swedish school system, and the public relations activities of state authorities and its implications for democracy.

Liz Harrison is a senior lecturer at the Durban University of Technology where she works in the area of academic development. As Head of Department of Learning and Teaching, she works with curriculum development at programme and classroom level and has overseen a variety of staff development initiatives. Her active union involvement informs her views about the working environment of academics. She is currently researching the development of doctoral identity for her own PhD studies.

Tamlyn Hosking, Dr. Bhelekazi Mhlauli and **Tesfagabir Berhe** are tutors in the Access programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College), specifically working in Academic Literacy. Tamlyn Hosking has completed her Masters in English, and has done development work in Access and Communications. Dr Mhlauli has specialised in second language teaching and learning, with her focus being on English, and she has been the Access co-ordinator at the University for several years, where she has worked closely with the students in the programme. Tesfagabir BerheTesfu, a foreign student from Eritrea, has been working in Academic Literacy for several years, and has focused his studies on Culture, Communication and Media Studies. Both Tamlyn and Tesfagabir are currently based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in the Access department, while Bhelekazi is now working with the students of Mangosuthu Technikon.

Gitanjali (Gita) Mistri is currently working at the Durban University of Technology as a Teaching and Learning Development Practitioner. She has a Masters Degree in Higher Education from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her research interests are Online Learning and the impact of HIV/AIDS on Higher Education.

Naretha Pretorius is the Campus Co-Navigator: Operations (Vice Principal) at Vega the Brand Communications School (Durban Campus) where she lectures Honours students in Creative Development. Naretha is the National Field Navigator for the subject Creative Development. She is studying for a Masters in Fine Art at the Durban University of Technology in which she investigates the relationship between Memory, Identity and Creative Development.

Editorial

Dolina Dowling

Fourteen years into South Africa's new democracy, higher education is still to meet the transformational imperatives of the new dispensation, namely, to meet the learning needs of its citizenry as well as the reconstruction and development needs of the economy and society at large. While much progress has been made towards achieving this goal, a number of challenges remain; for example, continuing to widen access to higher education and to increase the quality and number of graduate outputs.

There are a number of factors that need to be considered here. First, given the legacy of South Africa's fragmented and inequitable schooling system, the majority of students entering higher education are under-prepared for study at this level. Higher education institutions have attempted to address this through a number of initiatives, for instance by establishing foundation or access programmes and teaching and learning centres.

Secondly, large numbers of students entering higher education are not English or Afrikaans mother tongue language speakers and hence have the additional struggle of having to learn new concepts in a language other than their own. This poses particular challenges for such students and few innovations have been forthcoming on how to address this issue.

Thirdly, one outcome of the drive towards the massification of higher education has been an exponential growth in the staff/student ratio at public higher education institutions. Not only do lecturers have to teach high numbers of students but they have to support under-prepared and at-risk students. Further, lecturers are still recruited on the same criteria as before, namely academic qualifications and evidence of scholarship. Few, if any, requirements are made regarding pedagogical competence. We need to consider what should be done to equip lecturers to teach large numbers of under-prepared students and provide support for at-risk students.

In this third edition of _The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning_ consideration is given on how under-prepared students can be supported and so increase their success and thereby institutions' throughput rates. In the first article, the authors investigate the effectiveness of Academic Literacy, a module in an Access programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in transferring the practices and knowledge that students learn from this module to degree modules. While it was found that transfer does occur to some extent, their findings suggest that for optimum benefit Academic Literacy should be taught as a discipline specific module.

The second author grapples with the problem of the poor quality of writing submitted by students at South African higher education institutions and the large amount of time that academics spend on responding to written work. She provides an innovative understanding, based on contemporary linguistic and social theory, of the reasons for poor writing. She concludes by suggesting a new approach for lecturers in providing feedback that will improve students' writing ability.

Enhancing the quality of teaching is a concern of all higher education institutions. In the third paper, the author considers Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) as a means of assessing quality of teaching. She shows that there is a range of complicating factors around this practice. She concludes that SET needs to be developed by educators in conjunction with students.

The authors in the fourth paper demonstrate the effectiveness of role playing as a learning tool. Two groups of students played the African Development Game; one group was from South Africa and the other from Sweden. The authors show that by having students active rather than passive participants in a course, learning, albeit in different ways, does occur.

In the fifth paper the author investigates the notion of the 'written self' within different types of writing. She examines how telling stories contribute to an understanding of 'the self'; which in turn leads to the further development of creative and academic writing ability.

Lastly, the article in Practitioners' Corner is concerned with one of the major issues facing South Africa today; i.e., the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The author investigates the viability of offering an entry level HIV/AIDS related online counselling service for students, one of the most at risk groups in South Africa.

Does instruction in Academic Literacy result in transfer?[1][2]

Tamlyn Hosking, Bhelekazi Mhlauli and Tesfagabir Berhe
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College, South Africa

ABSTRACT

The University of KwaZulu-Natal offers year long, Faculty-based Access programmes to students who did not initially meet the Faculties' entrance requirements. One of the Access modules offered in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences (HDSS) is Academic Literacy (hereafter referred to as AL) which teaches reading and writing in the first semester. It is hoped that Access students will transfer the practices and knowledge they have learned from this module to degree modules. However, studies on transfer indicate that decontextualised practices are not transferable (Perkins & Salomon, 1988). The authors, therefore, conducted a study which investigated the HDSS Access students to discover if transfer of practices does take place, and if so to what extent this occurs. Data collection consisted of analysing a sample of students' essays at various stages: pre-intervention, intervention and post-intervention. Findings indicate that transfer did happen to a certain extent, especially in the modules that use similar writing practices to those taught in AL. This suggests that AL should be taught as a discipline specific module.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) (Howard College) offers a one year Access programme in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences (Humanities Access). This programme admits students who come from disadvantaged educational backgrounds and who initially did not meet the faculty entrance requirements. The majority of these are African students. The aim of this programme is to develop the students' academic and psycho-social practices that are needed for the first and the subsequent years of the degree of their choice. The admission policy of this programme is in line with the mission statement and goals of UKZN, which state that UKZN promises to be 'demographically representative, redressing the disadvantages, inequities and imbalances of the past' (www.ukzn.ac.za). Its first goal is to 'promote access to learning that will expand educational and employment opportunities for the historically disadvantaged, and support social transformation and success' (www.ukzn.ac.za).

In addition, the Humanities Access programme adopts an adjunct model in that the access year is a separate first year, after which students register for degrees of their choice. This type of an Access programme has been criticized for a number of reasons. For example, Warren (1998: 80-81), in discussing different educational interventions, mentions among other things that 'learning is a cumulative

process and as such the practices and knowledge gained at the foundation level need to be secured and developed in subsequent years.' Moreover, according to him, 'Academic Development experience also suggests that appropriate learning is achieved not by reducing complexity but by providing students with the mediation, mental tools and constant practice needed to confront complexity and foster transfer.' This has not yet been the case in the Humanities Access Programmes as Access students do not yet receive educational intervention in their degree studies. Therefore, while UKZN seeks to transform from being partly a historically white institution, there are still some shortcomings in the model that is adopted in the Humanities Access. The model raises questions as to whether the decontextualised practices and knowledge the students gain in the Access year can carry them through the subsequent three or four years.

UKZN ACCESS STUDENTS' ACADEMIC BACKGROUND AND THE NEED FOR ACADEMIC LITERACY (AL)

Students who are admitted to the Humanities Access Programme are mostly African students who are products of the former Department of Education and Training.[3] As a result of their poor preparation for university, they are not familiar with what is expected of them in terms of academic reading and writing (Kapp, 2004; Boughey, 2002). Niven (2005) suggests that in the disadvantaged educational environments there is limited access to reading material, other than the Bible. Leibowitz (2004:40-41) suggests that a 'lack of print literacy' and limited 'opportunities to engage in communicative events with adults' have an impact on students' home literacy. Because of these factors, children are often not taught to evaluate critically or question what they read. UKZN Access students are also not accustomed to reading for themselves, and they therefore struggle with the large quantities of extra reading required within HDSS.

Additionally, there are several problems with disadvantaged schools such as untrained teachers, promotion of rote learning, little emphasis placed on leisure reading and there is little responsibility taken for learning to read and write at home (Nyamapfene & Letseka, 1995; Kapp, 2004). Kapp (2004) has noted that this results in basic communicative practices, but not the critical thinking practices necessary for active engagement in a university classroom. Niven (2005) suggests that this also has an impact on the students' academic performance, which is intricately linked with the ability to read and write academically. We have found this to be true with our students as well.

Another problem faced by the majority of our students is that they frequently are not proficient in the university's language of instruction. Henning, Mamiane and Pheme (2001: 121) pick up on this complication: 'Clearly the students have problems with the vehicle of the discourse, the English language. This in itself is already a contested terrain, because it means that their own language does not allow them access into the academy'.

Therefore, some students come into the university at a linguistic disadvantage and this has an impact on their ability to read and write, especially according to university standards. Because of these setbacks, it becomes the responsibility of the university to acquaint new students with the practices of academia in order to place these students on an equal academic footing with their peers. Accordingly, AL aims to allow students access to academic discourses.

---

3   While these students entered school after the end of apartheid, the schools are still influenced by the problems experienced during apartheid (Kapp, 2004: 246).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature examines the requirements of academia in order to shed light on what students need to learn to become integrated into the institution. Therefore, the issue of transfer is also examined to determine whether the students take what they have learned in AL and apply it in other modules.

Acquiring academic discourse

'The educational environment is not neutral. It has the objective of imbuing particular values, practices and ways of knowing into its learners' (McKenna, 2004: 275-6). These knowledge systems or conventions are intrinsic to academia, and as such learners need to become aware of these customs, which are composite features of academic discourses (Leibowitz, 2004). These customs pertain to reading and writing encountered in the institution. As such, most people involved with the institution find it necessary to be familiar with their relevant academic discourse as this allows them to use discourse appropriate reading and writing practices. This is an important part of learning to succeed within tertiary education as students, from first year to the postgraduate years, are expected to utilise these conventions (Boughey, 2000). This also allows these students to become further integrated into the academic environment. Some students, depending on their previous education, find it easier to assimilate these customs, and consequently find it easier to integrate themselves into the university. McKenna (2004: 276) writes: '… some learners bring with them cultural capital of specific literacy practices and values recognised and valued by the higher education system. For these learners the transition phase during which they fathom and adopt the target [academic] identity is easier'.

Pretorius (2002: 186), in her study of tertiary students' reading ability, notes that: 'the better a student's reading ability (specifically inferencing ability during reading), the better his/her academic achievement'. Therefore, students who are proficient readers are able to achieve greater understanding of texts, allowing them to 'construct new knowledge from their texts' (*ibid*) and allowing them to construct academically appropriate texts. However, students who are not capable readers do not have the ability to comprehend fully the intricacies of the texts presented to them, which 'results in the construction of inaccurate, fragmented and oversimplified representations of complex content matter' (*ibid*). These findings imply that the ability to read with comprehension and the ability to make deductions from texts results in improved writing capability and therefore greater academic success. Conversely, students who lack this ability will struggle with academic writing and therefore are less likely to attain academic success. As previously suggested, it is predominantly students who come from disadvantaged schools who struggle with the reading of academic texts. It is these students who need to have academic customs made overt as this will allow them to understand the need to read and write effectively in the ways expected in the university.

Writing practices required for mainstream academia

Academic success is dictated by the ability of a student to perform according to the requirements of a degree. In relation to the Humanities and Social Sciences, many of these requirements involve the ability to read successfully and write academic texts. Goodier & Parkinson (2005: 67) note that 'the discourse features of a language in specialised disciplines, both at a macro and a micro level, differ significantly from the discourse features of everyday language'. The main requirement in the Humanities is for students to acquire 'the ability to express information, ideas [in expository writing] clearly, relevantly and logically' (Van Wyk, 2002: 226). Van Wyk (2002: 227) outlines three important factors in academic writing: the first is that of 'sentence control' and to ensure that both structure and grammar do not 'interfere with communication'. Secondly, students need to be aware of who their audience will be, as students need to understand that it 'is not whether the writing is clear to themselves, but whether it will be clear to another reader' (*ibid*). Finally, students need to express themselves clearly and present both a relevant and organised essay. Curry (2004) notes that the predominant form of writing within the Humanities is

'essayist literacy' and this is distinguished by specific characteristics, in particular: 'a linear style in which the author advocates a particular point of view, analysis, or course of action and supports it with accepted types of evidence'. Furthermore, Curry argues that students must also be able to take an objective position in academic writing, avoiding using a more personal voice to which most students are accustomed. It is these practices which students will need to use if they are to accomplish academic success within the university.

Transfer

Success in Humanities can be seen as dependent, to some degree, on acquiring and utilising the conventions of academic reading and writing. The teaching of this is a central concern of AL. Therefore, once students move forward into a degree, they should theoretically transfer these conventions to new texts. In other words, they should take the practices taught to them in AL and utilise them in reading and writing for their degree courses.

In current literature, transfer reportedly does not occur if it is not contextualised, or if students are not made aware of it. Also, for transfer to be effective it needs to be deliberate (see, for example, Ennis, 1989; Dison, 1993; Starfield, 1994; Dison & Rosenberg, 1995; Warren, 1998; Perkins & Salomon, 1998; Gaylam & Le Grange, 2005). Perkins and Salomon point out that transfer does not '[take] care of itself' (1998: 23). This is supported by studies in Academic Literacy: Jacobs (2005: 476) suggests a need for contextualized, discipline-specific AL courses, while Boughey advocates the necessity of making 'the "rules and conventions" of academic disciplines as overt as possible' (2000: 289). Therefore, and according to the studies, for transfer to be effective students need to be actively aware of the necessity of transferring practices and students must actively participate in this transfer. This understanding of transfer can be extended to include different degrees of transfer. Perkins and Salomon (1988) outline two basic degrees of transfer: near and far transfer. Near transfer is when skills are transferred from one context to another (which is more commonplace), while far transfer is when knowledge is transferred from one context to another (which is considered to be more difficult to achieve). Therefore, for students to improve their academic practices, they not only need to achieve near transfer, but far transfer as well.

It is from this research that we decided to conduct the study on the ability of a module such as AL to facilitate transfer of essay writing practices and knowledge.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. The purpose of this study was to find out whether instruction in AL develops students' ability to write essays.

2. This objective was extended to discover if transfer of this ability was evident within Access modules (thereby showing near transfer), and if it was evident in degree modules (thereby showing far transfer).

3. The final objective was to determine whether this transfer was deliberate on the part of the student.

METHOD

The Sample and Data Collection

The sample consisted of 15 students randomly selected from 120 Humanities Access students in 2006. Several essays were selected for this analysis, namely: pre-intervention essays, the end of the first semester's examination essays, degree module essays and reflection papers.

The pre-intervention essay, which discussed the differences between spoken and written language, is one that students wrote before they were taught essay reading and writing in AL. It therefore depicts the students' writing before any practices have been taught in AL, and determines what knowledge the students bring to the university. The end of the semester's examination essay, discussing the influence of mass media in South Africa, is an essay written as an open book examination after students are taught academic reading and writing practices, through the use of several draft essays and extensive feedback. These essays demonstrate the students' practices after intervention has taken place, but within the same set of practices developed in the module, and therefore it represents near transfer.

The degree module essay is any essay that students wrote in a degree module in the second semester and it represents far transfer, in that it considered whether transfer was taking place in new knowledge contexts. Students are also required to use the degree module essays to reflect on essay writing. This resulted in reflection papers which discussed the students' perceptions of their acquisition of academic reading and writing practices, thereby examining how aware students were of transfer. That is, we wanted to understand whether students applied to their degree modules essay writing practices taught to them in AL, and whether this transfer was deliberate.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Pre-intervention

This analysis will discuss the main problems encountered by the students before instruction in Academic Literacy and examines the main areas in which students are assessed. For reading, students are assessed on their ability to understand the content of a text and on their ability to use that text to write an essay. Writing practices are assessed on two levels: surface level – spelling, grammar, punctuation, expression – is briefly assessed to enable students to express themselves; deep level – constructing meaning in an academic discourse through content, structure and referencing – is assessed in far more detail, as AL is predominantly concerned with these factors.

First, grammar and expression were serious problems, but these are not readily dealt with in AL. While students are corrected on their grammar, it is not explicitly taught to them in this course. One of the main concerns was sentence construction. Students struggled to formulate concise sentences to express a single idea and in several cases whole paragraphs consisted of one sentence. This difficulty also leads to problems of repetition and confusing expression. However, these problems are not dependent on poor sentence structure. Many of the students struggled to express their ideas clearly and repeated words, phrases and ideas throughout their essays. Another difficulty that students faced was spelling. There were numerous spelling errors in most of the essays and occasionally these distorted the intended meaning. For example, students often confused the words 'their', 'there', 'they', and 'they're'. While the context often allows the reader to understand meaning, the continual poor spelling creates a poor impression.

The central cause for concern was that of content. Students need to be able to analyse the topic of an essay and respond appropriately if they are to achieve academic success. However, there were numerous problems with content. To begin with, students did not always include the most relevant information and often went off the topic. For instance, in the essay about the differences between written and spoken English, one student gave a brief outline of the SeSotho language. While the essay was grammatically and structurally sound, the essay did not include the necessary information. Other students included information about language, but did not adequately discuss the differences between the two modes of language; they also included examples that did not support their statements. There are two implications

here. First, students have not clearly understood either the topic or the text. Second, students have not understood how to construct knowledge within an academic discourse.[4]

In many academic discourses, essays follow a prescribed structure, namely: an introduction that presents the topic, a body that develops the main points, and a summative conclusion. While students were aware of the structure that essays should follow they were uncertain about what each of these parts entailed. For the most part, the introductions did not cover all of the necessary information. The paragraphs, although they did exist, did not always discuss a main idea. Alternatively, they discussed one idea in a paragraph, but repeated it at a later stage, resulting in a confused argument. For the most part, students did not know how to conclude their essays and as such, most of the essays did not have conclusions. If conclusions were included, they seldom summarised the main points, or restated the main argument. It seems that conclusions were mainly used to state opinions or offer irrelevant insights about the subject.

The following examples from student essays illustrate this point clearly:

> How boring would it would have been if spoken language was formal it is a very good thing the above differences are present.

> Therefore written and spoken language is very important to human life weather they are Black, White, Indian or Coloured.
> (Student Essays, 2006)

Such use of the conclusion implies that students are unaware of how this component of the essay functions in academic writing and are perhaps including it only out of necessity. Again, this suggests that students have perhaps not acquired an understanding of academic conventions which would enable them to construct discourse appropriate texts.

The final area of assessment is concerned with the students' ability to understand and utilise the texts provided. There are numerous instances in the essays where students have misinterpreted or misunderstood the readings. This has an impact on the content of the essay itself. However, students also seemed to struggle to write their essays when using the readings. Most students seemed unaware of plagiarism. Students frequently borrowed both phrases and ideas from the text, and did not show an awareness of paraphrasing. Additionally students were clearly unaware of referencing; for example, only one reference was used in the sample essays. This reference however, was not of the text, but rather a reference used within the text. While this does show an acknowledgement of the need to reference on the student's behalf, it also indicates that the student is not able to reference for him/herself.

This pre-intervention analysis suggests two things. First, students lack knowledge of some of the conventions of academic reading and writing; and second, students do not arrive at the university equipped to integrate themselves into the socio-cultural environment. The intervention analysis can help us establish if it is possible for these students to gain some of these practices through the AL module.

Intervention

Students are taught the differences between the spoken and the written language through a transcription exercise. They then compare the oral and the written stories and discuss the differences between the two

---

4   This could possibly be attributed to the classroom practices with which these students are familiar, such as rote-learning, which inhibits students from engaging deeply with the material and/or the topic (see Kapp, 2004; Boughey, 2000).

versions of the story and the causes thereof. This is done in order to expose the students to the differences between the two genres of spoken and written narratives.

Understanding the similarities and differences between the oral and the written modes of language forms a background to genre awareness and is followed by paragraph construction, reading a number of academic texts, and summary writing. This is followed by the process of teaching of research essay writing in which students write an essay on a given topic based on the readings they were taught. Essay writing includes the structure of an essay, as well as formulating one's thoughts and expression. Students are asked to submit several drafts to the lecturers, who then give students feedback until lecturers are satisfied with the quality of the students' essay writing. The final draft is marked and taken into the examination where students write an open book examination on the same topic on which they wrote several drafts. Students are required to submit the final draft together with the examination booklet. This way, the lecturers are able to see whether or not the students made the recommended changes in the final draft.

Feedback, and consequently the changes the students have to make, focuses on several points. Some feedback is given for grammar and expression but, again, this is not the focus of AL, so more consideration is given to deep level errors. Structure is frequently commented on, with remarks such as 'link up these points' or 'join paragraphs' being used to guide the students. Feedback on content includes asking students to check if their claims are relevant, or require clearer (or more) elaboration. One student was asked to add more information while another was asked to make his/her information more explicit. In terms of referencing, students were asked to reference and quote where necessary, or they had to correct the reference list. This feedback is aimed at enabling students to take an active role in correcting their own work.

Post-intervention

Post-intervention comprises the end of the semester examination essay, the students' reflection papers and the degree modules' essay. The following is an analysis of these three post-intervention types.

*The end of the semester examina*tion

As already mentioned, the final essay is the product of several drafts. As can be expected, students still encounter problems with the use of readings, referencing, expression and grammar, but they do show some improvement. Students generally seem to find it difficult to synthesise information from various readings. It is rare to find a paragraph that is made up of ideas from two or more authors as the students prefer using one author's ideas to write each paragraph. The following paragraphs demonstrate this tendency:

> During the mid period of apartheid In South Africa, the government had managed to use mass media In the production of popular culture by Influencing the laws that govern the media. . . . The managers that worked in the radio station were part of the boerbond therefore they were supporters of the oppressing government. People who worked at the Radio Bantu stations as DJ's were forced by the managers to focuss "on the Importance and the value of cultural tradition and living in your own cultural homeland" (D. viney 82:83) . . .

> There were also people who were not influenced by the two soapy operation in a positive way. These people who criticized the soapy operas because they found some things not appealing to the youth. Soul City's reservation about solutions to the moral dileas were considered "perhaps too pat or too soapy" (Kruger 1999:119). . . . Although the two soapy operas were successful in influencing the youth. The were people at the same time which the soapy operas were not successful in influencing them. . . .
> (Student Essays, 2006)

The above two paragraphs were written by the same student. In each paragraph, there is no synthesis of ideas. This indicates that the student still struggled to structure his/her essay appropriately. This can be linked to his/her understanding of the texts and a tendency to view each text as separate rather than seeing all the texts as contributing to an overall topic.

In the above paragraphs, it is also worth noticing the different referencing styles used in one essay: in one paragraph the author's initial is written whereas it is not written in the other paragraph. This is not an isolated problem. In another student's essay, sources of information have not been acknowledged and there is no bibliography at the end of the essay. However, in addition to the feedback given by the lecturer, the student was given a mark sheet and therefore knew that marks were going to be deducted for lack of in-text referencing and bibliography. Sometimes the author's ideas or words are not acknowledged, either by citing the author or by putting the borrowed words in quotation marks. Another major problem is that students often fail to include the correct information. For example, the following reference list does not include a number of details:

- "Soap Opera Series with a soul" - By Rita Colorito.
- Viney D (2005) Zulu and Xhosa radio during Apartheid: resistance of popular cluture (Student Essays, 2006)

At this stage in the process, other problems include both surface and deep level errors. For the most part, these were surface level errors. For example, writing in an informal style, using grammatically incorrect English, spelling and punctuation mistakes and the use of capital letters in the middle of sentences, as seen in previous examples. The main deep level error was the inability of students to convey meaning effectively.

Degree Modules' essays

Out of 120 students, 15 essays were taken from degree modules and from one Access module in which students were awarded high marks. In one degree module essay, the student did not have an introduction and conclusion. The paragraphs did develop one idea each but there was no topic sentence.[5] Only one reference was used. In another degree module, Sociology, a student wrote a very good introduction with a thesis statement and plan of development. The ideas were logical and the referencing was good. In the other two modules, Legal Studies and Linguistics, the students were limited by the essay requirements to write short paragraphs each with a sub-topic, something that we do not teach in AL. However, apart from the grammatical mistakes, the sub-topics were well supported. In one of the Access modules, students have acknowledged that they are constantly reminded to apply the practices they are taught in AL. However, the tasks do not always require the students to apply these practices.

Reflection Papers

Almost all the students reported to have transferred essay writing practices taught in AL but most said that this transfer was not deliberate. In particular, they mentioned practice transfer in terms of essay structure, especially the introduction with its thesis statement, how to write a coherent paragraph, including a topic sentence and how to support this topic. Students indicated that their essay writing practices in general had improved, which is partially evidenced in the degree module essays. They also claimed that they were able to apply these practices in the degree modules, as the following highlights:

---

5   While we acknowledge that it is not necessary to include a topic sentence in a paragraph, we do encourage students to use topic sentences to help them structure and focus their essays.

I have decided to reflect on the piece of academic work I have written in Africa in the world that was an essay where I was requested to write down our reviews and thoughts about African Diaspora. The reason for such a choice is because it tends to reflect my writing practices that I have acquired through attendance of academic literacy.

In the introduction I explain meanings of the main idea that underneath paragraphs are going to be revolving around. . . . There must be presence of a thesis statement.

Every paragraph I have written has a topic sentence that is going to make the evaluator aware of the idea I will be discussing throughout the paragraph. The sentences that follow that are elaborating and explaining the idea I had introduced. . . .
(Student Essays, 2006)

While students do claim to have transferred practices, there is only some evidence to support this. For example, the above paper shows clear structure in the paragraphs, but the grammar in the first sentence suggests that students' claims are not always accurate.

Discussion of the Findings
In the discussion of our findings, we will focus on the objectives of the study.

The first point looked at is whether AL develops a students' essay writing ability. This can be partially established by comparing the above discussions on pre- and post-intervention. In the pre-intervention a case has been made that grammar and expression were serious problems. They are not taught explicitly in AL but they are taught in a sister module: English Language Development (ELD). It is hoped that some application of this knowledge will occur in students' writing in AL. This did not seem to be the case as even in post-intervention, grammar and expression are still problematic.[6] Therefore, it is argued that AL did not improve students' grammar.

The content was also mentioned as a problem in the pre-intervention essay. This was not evident in the post-intervention since the end of the first semester essay was a final draft and students submitted their best degree essay. Students are reported to be ignorant about the structure of an essay in the pre-intervention. However, in the post-intervention, there is evidence that students know what each of these entail, as shown in all of the three post-intervention types. It can therefore be postulated that AL did develop this part of the writing practices. Misunderstanding of the readings, plagiarism and referencing seem to be problems even in the post-intervention. This can possibly be attributed to the students' disadvantaged educational background and the lack of critical reading practices taught in these contexts. This could also be the result of AL being a generic course, which is not discipline specific so it does not address discipline specific practices.

As to the point of whether AL facilitated students' essay writing practices within Access, one could argue that it did in some parts and not in others. As discussed, at the end of the semester in which they were taught essay writing, students did know what the structure of an essay entailed. However, they still encountered problems with language and expression, plagiarism and referencing. In other words, some form of near transfer did happen.

---

6   This of course, depended on the students' level of proficiency in English since some of our students function in English as their language and some, as a foreign language. This can also be attributed to the age of the onset of the instruction in English and the type of school from which a student comes.

In terms of the ability of AL to facilitate essay writing practices in other modules, one can argue that it did in the modules that demand essay writing practices that are similar to those taught in AL and not in those which do not. This implies that some far transfer has taken place. The same conclusion was reached by Mhlauli (1997) who conducted a similar study on the English for Academic Purposes course at the University of Transkei. It is interesting to note that students think (as written in the reflection papers) that obtaining a good mark is a result of essay writing practices taught in AL even though the structure of an essay is different from the one they were taught in AL. Perhaps one should investigate their understanding of essay writing practices.

The last point questions whether transfer was deliberate or not. The only reliable source of information in this question is what students have reported in the reflection papers. All of them claim that transfer was not deliberate, in that they did not actively and consciously apply what they had learned in AL.

CONCLUSION

From the above points we can conclude that transfer, both near and far, has taken place to some extent, but it was not deliberate. The question then, is how can we increase the knowledge that students take with them to their mainstream courses? We suggest that transfer needs to be more actively employed. According to the literature, for more successful transfer to occur students need to participate actively in the process of transfer. This would allow them better access to academic discourses, which should theoretically have two results. First, it would allow them to interact on the same academic level as other students, increasing their ability to integrate themselves into the academic community. Secondly, it would allow for greater academic success, as students would be able to cope with the course requirements. While this may be happening to some extent, greater and more deliberate transfer would increase the degree to which these students cope within an academic society.

Therefore, we make several recommendations concerning transfer. First, practices are more easily acquired when the experiences or practices with which students are familiar (from home, school or church, for example) are used as building blocks or resources, through which AL practitioners can construct new knowledge (Leibowitz, 2004; Kapp, 2004). In addition to this, AL should make explicit the 'rules and conventions of academic ways of thinking, valuing, acting, acting, speaking, reading and writing' (Boughey, 2002: 306). Moreover, AL needs to become more entrenched in discipline specific approaches. This is strengthened by Jacobs' (2005: 477) assertion that 'AL is best acquired by students when it is embedded within the contexts of particular academic disciplines'. Consequently, AL should try to adopt a scaffolded approach to transfer. More dialogue within the Access modules and between Access and mainstream courses is essential as a starting point, as is continued support throughout the students' degrees.

REFERENCES

Boughey, C. (2000) 'Multiple Metaphors in an Understanding of Academic Literacy' *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 6(3) pp.279-290.

Boughey, C. (2002) '"Naming" Students' Problems: an analysis of language-related discourses at a South African university' *Teaching in Higher Education 7*(3) pp.296-307.

Curry, M. (2004) 'UCLA Community College Review: Academic Literacy for English Language Learners' *Community College Review* 32(2) pp.51-68.

Dison, A. (1993) 'Conducting needs analysis for developing a course in Academic Literacy in English-work-in-progress at Fort Hare' *South African Association for Academic Development Conference Proceedings* pp.273-281.

Dison, A. and Rosenberg, L (1995) 'Creating an environment to facilitate students development of Academic Literacy' *Discourse* 7(1) pp.25-31.

Ennis, R.H. (1989) 'Critical thinking and subject specificity: Clarification and needs research' *Educational Researcher* 18(3) pp.4-10.

Gaylam, N. and Le Grange, L. (2005) 'Improving thinking practices in science of learners with (dis) abilities' *South African Journal of Education* 25(4) pp.239-246.

Goodier, C. and Parkinson, J. (2005) 'Discipline-based Academic Literacy in two contexts' *Journal for Language Teaching* 39(1) pp.66-79.

Henning, E., Mamiane, M. and Pheme, M. (2001) 'Entering the Academy as "the other" – about writing competence and the bridge to the discourse community' *South African Journal of Higher Education* 15(1) pp.109-128.

Jacobs, C. (2005) 'On being an insider on the outside: new spaces for integrating academic literacies' *Teaching in Higher Education* 10(4) pp.475-487.

Kapp, R. (2004) '"Reading on the Line": An Analysis of Literacy Practices in ESL Classes in a South African Township School' *Language and Education* 18(3) pp.246-263.

Leibowitz, B (2004) 'Becoming Academically Literate in South Africa: Lessons from Student Accounts for Policymakers and Educators' *Language and Education* 18(1) pp.35-52.

McKenna, S. (2004) 'The intersection between academic literacies and student identities' *South African Journal of Higher Education* 18(3) pp.269-280 and *Language and Education* 18(1) pp.35-52.

Mhlauli, B. (1997) *An investigation of the extent to which English for Academic Purposes at a South African University develops and facilitates transfer of essay writing practices* Unpublished M.Ed dissertation. University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg).

Niven, P. (2005) 'Exploring first year students' and their lecturers' constructions of what it means to read in a humanities discipline: A conflict of frames?' *South African Journal of Higher Education* 19(4) pp.777-789.

Nyamapfene, K. and Letseka, M. (1995) 'Problems of learning among first year students in South African universities' *South African Journal of Higher Education* 9(1) pp.159-166.

Perkins, D.N. and Salomon, G.A. (1988) 'Teaching for Transfer' *Educational Leadership* 46(1) pp.22-32.

Perkins, D.N. and Salomon, G.A. (1998) 'Are cognitive practices context bound?' *Educational Researcher* 18(1) pp.16-25.

Pretorius, E.J. (2002) *Reading ability and academic performance in South Africa: Are we fiddling while Rome is burning?* Department of Linguistics, University of South Africa: Pretoria pp.169-196.

Starfield, S. (1994) 'Multicultural classrooms in Higher Education' *English Quarterly* July pp.30-37.

Van Wyk, A. (2002) 'A university bridging course focusing on academic reading and writing practices' *Journal for Language Teaching* 36 pp.3-4.

Warren, D. (1998) 'Educational intervention in higher education: from academic support to "academic development"' *South African Journal of Higher Education* 12(3).

15

Responding to students' writing:
An alternative understanding

Chrissie Boughey - Rhodes University, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Many academics spend an inordinate amount of time responding to written work submitted by students. Rewards accruing from this work are often meagre in terms of the overall development of students' ability to write. This article argues that much of the work related to writing is based on 'commonsense' understandings of what it means to write. It then goes on to provide an alternative understanding of the reasons for poor writing based on contemporary linguistic and social theory. The article concludes with an approach to responding to written work based on this understanding.

INTRODUCTION

The poor quality of writing submitted by students at South African institutions of higher education is an issue of great concern to many members of the academic staff and often results in inordinate amounts of time being spent in providing feedback in an attempt to improve written work. The most common form of feedback consists of comments written alongside the mark at the end of the assignment, although many staff members also provide (often cryptic) comments in the margins of the text. Often these comments focus on what might be termed the 'surface features' of the language such as spelling, grammar and punctuation. This article offers an understanding of 'what's wrong' with students' writing that is derived from theoretical positions in applied linguistics and the field which has become known as 'New Literacy Studies', before going on to suggest more efficient means of providing feedback intended to improve writing ability.

AN ALTERNATIVE UNDERSTANDING

Dominant understandings of 'what's wrong' with students' writing tend to centre on students' lack of command of the language itself – perceptions which are generally bolstered by the fact that the majority of students in South African institutions of higher education are speakers of English as an additional language (Boughey, 2002; McKenna, 2004). Assumptions underpinning this view are that meanings exist prior to language. Successful language use then involves encoding those meanings into a form which can be decoded by others – that is, into standard spelling, grammar and punctuation. Australian educator Frances Christie (1985) terms this a view of language as 'an instrument of communication', which she then contrasts with another view – that of language as a 'resource' which allows us to *make sense of* and *order* our experiences of the world around us. Increasingly, positions in the field of applied linguistics (see, for example, the work of linguist Michael Halliday (1973, 1978, 1989, 1994) and others who work in the area known as 'Systemic Functional Linguistics' or 'Systemics') support a view of language as a dynamic

resource which allows us to make meanings rather than as a mere tool for encoding and communicating pre-made understandings.

All human beings without any physical or mental impediment learn to use spoken language to make meanings from birth. Speech is therefore a primary language function. The way we use spoken language is also dependent on the context in which we learn to use it. One obvious example of this point is that we learn to speak different languages from birth – a phenomenon which is very evident in a multilingual country such as South Africa. We also learn to speak individual languages in different ways. Most people are aware of differences in accent, but there are also differences in the kinds of vocabulary used by different social groups, the kinds of topics spoken about and so on. In contrast to speaking, writing is not acquired naturally but has to be taught and we are all familiar with the techniques used to do this. Young children first learn to hold a pencil and then go on to make different kinds of strokes on a page before beginning to learn the correspondence between sounds and the letters of the alphabet which will eventually allow them to spell out words. What many children are not taught, however, are the rules for making meanings in writing which differ from those used to make meanings in the kinds of speech from which they are accustomed.

When children learn to speak, they do so in contexts involving face-to-face communication about everyday topics. Learning to speak in other kinds of contexts might come later, depending on the kinds of social experiences learners can access. Face-to-face communication about everyday topics has very different rules for meaning-making than those used for academic writing. In face-to-face communication, for example, the context and the relationships between speakers in that context will determine, to a large extent, the kinds of topics which can be spoken about. If, for example, I am stopped by a person in the street, my expectation would be that the person would want to ask me for directions or the time. If the person were holding a clip-board, I might expect the conversation to involve some sort of consumer or other survey. In similar fashion, if I went to a coffee shop to meet a friend, the kinds of topics we would speak about would be determined by our relationship (whether, for example, we are close friends or casual friends) and what has been happening in our lives recently. What is important, therefore, is that a context for spoken language already exists and that context shapes the kinds of meanings which can be made, the meanings themselves and the language which is used to make them. When we begin speaking, we assume the context is there and pick up on it as we begin to speak. I might thus begin a conversation with a friend by saying 'What did he say?' The context for this question is such that i) we both know who 'he' refers to, ii) I am aware that my friend has recently had a conversation with the person in question about something of importance to her/him, and iii) it is socially permissible for me to ask about what occurred. In the face-to-face conversation, this shared context means that background for the question does not have to be stated. I do not have to say 'I know you had a meeting with x recently and I know you were going to say y to him so therefore I want to know what he said in response.'

Written language is very different from spoken language in assumptions which can be made about shared context. Written language printed on a piece of paper can be transported to an entirely different context to that in which it was written, and an electronic document has even greater potential to travel across contexts. One of the 'rules' for making meaning in written language, therefore, involves the need to create a context for the text. The creation of a context for a written text is achieved in all sorts of ways. Sometimes, typographical and other conventions create that context. An office memo, for example, contains information about its author, the date on which it was written and its topic in a stylised format. The very fact that it is a memo, moreover, limits the kinds of meanings which will be communicated. In other forms of written text, and in academic writing in particular, the context needs to be created in less stylised ways - although the very construct of an 'introduction' is itself a stylised device.

It is not difficult to apply these sorts of understandings of the different 'rules' for meaning-making to an analysis of students' writing. Students will often begin a piece of writing with a phrase such as 'This theory says . . .' The natural response of the reader who is familiar with the rules for meaning-making in writing is 'Which theory?' Even though the academic reading the student's text may well know which theory is being referred to, the rules for meaning-making in writing require a context to be created *on the page* and when this expectation is contravened then 'discomfort' results. The 'problem' with students' writing in cases such as these, therefore, is not that students have not mastered the language being used for communication purposes, but rather that they have not mastered the particular *rules* for meaning-making in writing. Getting students to think about their relationship with their reader, what the reader will and will not know and, therefore, what sort of information they will need to provide for the communication to be successful, is critical. Teaching this sort of information about writing is very different from teaching students to master the grammar or punctuation system.

Writing differs from many kinds of spoken language in other significant ways. In face-to-face communication, for example, the making of meaning is a *shared* process. One of the reasons why meaning-making is shared in face-to-face situations is that participants in the communication receive immediate feedback on the extent to which their meaning-making makes sense to the other person. In a conversation, for example, I might begin to say something and the person to whom I am speaking will interrupt me to ask for clarification. Even in more formal speech situations where interruption is not possible, it is possible to get feedback on the success of the communication via body language and facial expression. Feedback indicating that meaning-making is not successful will then cause me to adjust what I say in an attempt to make my meanings more clear. Meaning-making is also a shared activity in much spoken language because participants in speech situations each contribute to the process by, for example, extending or exemplifying what has already been stated, or openly disagreeing with propositions and providing reasons for that disagreement. In contrast to speaking, meaning-making in writing is a more individual process and experienced writers compensate for this by having imaginary conversations with their prospective readers in order to anticipate objections and the need for clarification. This conversation might take the form of considering a statement and then noting 'If I say this, s/he'll say that, so I'll say it like this …' The imaginary conversation with the reader of a written text then results in continuous redrafting of propositions as the text is written.

Students, who are accustomed to making meanings in speech rather than in writing, may not appreciate the need to monitor the extent to which they are being successful in making meanings in writing, because their experience is one of having immediate feedback on the success of the communication supplied by participants in the speech situation. Their approach to producing written text, therefore, involves pressing on with the meaning-making process even though they are not being successful in making meaning. The result is texts which do not make sense, which are incoherent or which are 'unexpanded' in terms of possible meanings which could be made. This response is understandable not only because of students' experience primarily of meaning-making in speech, but also because of dominant forms of writing tuition which, as indicated earlier in this article, focuses on encoding. It is also understandable in the context of previous classroom-based experiences of 'academic' meaning-making. Consider the following example of writing (taken from Boughey, 2000) which attempts to outline the weaknesses of the Marxist system of justice. The writing was submitted by a student in a first year political philosophy class at a South African university:

> People do not work hard. People are tired of working hard and at the end they get a medal instead of money. So the economy of the country will drop.

Although this writing contains no mistakes in grammar, punctuation or spelling, it is not successful in conveying meaning because of its cryptic nature and because of the way it jumps from one idea to

another. The writing also lacks context – typically an academic reader would expect the piece to begin with some sort of definition or description of the Marxist system of justice. But it is not difficult to imagine how this same piece of language use might have occurred and been treated in the classroom. The following imaginary dialogue serves to illustrate the point:

Teacher: All right. Who can tell me about one of the weaknesses of the Marxist system of justice? Zanele, tell me one weakness.

Zanele: People don't work hard. People are tired of working hard and at the end they get a medal instead of money. So the economy of the country will drop.

Teacher: That's right! People don't get extra money for working hard because everyone is rewarded according to his needs. People who work hard are rewarded with medals so people don't work and then the economy suffers.

In this imaginary dialogue, the teacher picks up on Zanele's statement that one weakness of the Marxist system is that it does not provide incentives to work hard and expands upon it with more information and explanation. The more comprehensive process of meaning-making occurs through joint contributions (Zanele's and the teacher's) and Zanele herself is spared the effort of having to construct a more 'complete' meaning on her own. Given students' previous experiences of meaning-making of this sort and their lack of experience of making the kinds of extended meanings in writing required of university study at most schools (Leibowitz, 2004), it is not surprising that Zanele is not familiar with the need to extend thought for herself.

The same lack of experience will often lead students to make propositions in their writing which are open to objection from a reader. The result is then that their writing is open to the criticism of not demonstrating adequate understanding.

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

Thus far, this article has offered an alternative understanding of writing submitted by students. This understanding locates the 'problem' not in students' lack of command of the English language and, more particularly, in written *forms* of the language, but rather in their lack of familiarity with the *rules and strategies* for meaning-making in writing. These rules and strategies include i) the need to provide a context for one's writing and ii) the need to produce 'extended' meanings which are not open to criticism, or requests for more information by monitoring meanings as they are made. From this perspective, it is possible to argue that much of the poor writing submitted at South African universities is poor because it is 'speech written down' rather than writing itself.

Given students' familiarity with making meanings in face-to-face situations, it makes sense to draw on the experience of conversational language use in order to develop writing. Many universities do this through work in Writing Centres. Writing Centres generally offer one-on-one consultations about pieces of writing 'in progress' involving the writer and a more experienced 'consultant' (often a senior student). While Writing Centres would claim a record of success in developing writing ability, they are not available on all campuses and opportunities to use them are not taken up by all students. An alternative perspective, moreover, would hold that they allow students to remain in the realm of spoken language even though consultation has, as its focus, a piece of writing. What is arguably necessary, therefore, is a form of writing development which forces students into the world of written text but which leads them to an understanding of the rules and strategies for meaning-making in writing which is derived from their primary experiences

of making meaning in face-to-face situations. Given the primary role of academic staff in teaching and learning and the fact that they already spend a large amount of their time responding to students' writing when they mark it, it makes sense to try to maximise the benefit of a task which is already required. The remainder of this article will therefore focus on a strategy aimed at making the practice of commenting on written work more effective within the theoretical position outlined above.

A CONVERSATION IN WRITING

Much of the argument presented thus far in this article has focused on students' familiarity with spoken language and, more specifically, on the role of immediate feedback in face-to-face communication in processes of meaning-making. The use of strategies borrowed from oral communication therefore offers the potential of teaching students ways of meaning-making in writing. This claim then gives rise to the idea of developing student's writing ability through the use of a 'conversation in writing'.

Key to this form of responding to students' writing is the idea of providing comments in the body, rather than at the end, of their texts. The comments need to interrupt the flow of written language much as a participant in a face-to-face conversation would interrupt a flow of spoken language. The following extract from a piece of writing produced in response to the rubric 'What are the strengths of a liberal system of justice?' and written by a student in a first year philosophy class at a South African university serves as an exemplar:

The good about Liberal is that a person

(i)   owns his own job and his properties.
(ii)   People are granted equal qualifications.

Although there are problems at a linguistic level with this text, the purpose of the response is not to correct grammar, punctuation or spelling, but rather to convey to the writer the reader's lack of satisfaction at the level of meaning. Appropriate responses therefore might include:

i)   *The good about <u>Liberal</u> is that a person* – the word 'Liberal' is underlined to direct the student to the place in the text where meaning is being queried and the comment 'Do you mean "liberal" or "liberalism"?' is written in the margin.
ii)   *<u>owns his job and his properties</u>* – the phrase 'owns his job' is underlined to direct the student to the place in the text where meaning is being queried and the comment 'What exactly do you mean by "owns' his job"?' is written in the margin.
iii)   *<u>People are granted equal qualifications</u>* – the phrase 'People are granted equal qualifications' is underlined to direct the student to the place in the text where meaning is being queried and the comment 'Are people "granted equal qualifications" or are they granted equal opportunities to gain qualifications?' is written in the margin.

Through these responses, the staff member seeks to help the student to

i)   See the need to explain and clarify terms and statements (What exactly do you mean by 'owns his job'?)
ii)   Think more deeply about what s/he is saying or the implications of what s/he is saying (Are people granted equal qualifications or equal opportunities to gain qualifications?)
iii)   Be exact in the use of terminology (Do you mean 'liberal' or 'liberalism'?)

Key in making comments of this nature is the idea that no answers are provided. The comments, in this example all phrased in the form of questions, are simply indicators that the writer is not being successful in making meaning.

The next excerpt from a piece of student writing serves to explicate further the idea of a 'conversation in writing'. This piece was written by a student on a BEd honours course which required engagement with a text written by the American philosopher and educational reformer, John Dewey. It is clear from her writing that the student has not engaged with Dewey's text in any way and is basing her response to the assessment rubric on her own commonsense understandings:

Dewey in this case he appreciates the role of the state that it forces education to each and everyone to fight literacy. He says every child has a right to a free education. To endorse this he is making sure that no child under the age of 6 years should not go to school. He even introduces some bursaries whereby people are allowed to follow their call.

An appropriate response to this piece of writing might be:

a. everyone to fight <u>literacy</u> – the word 'literacy' is underlined and the comment 'Do you mean <u>illiteracy</u>?' written in the margin of the text.
b. No child <u>under</u> the age of 6 years should not go to school – the word 'under' is underlined and the comment 'Do you mean no child <u>over</u> the age of six years should not go to school?'
c. An overall comment of 'Did Dewey really say these things or are these your beliefs about education?' written at the end of the paragraph.

One of the issues in providing a response at this level is the temptation to over-comment on poor texts. Judgement is therefore needed about which aspects of the writing are most in need of attention so that comment can be focused on key areas. Clearly assessment criteria can be useful here in guiding responses, along with the idea that problems in meaning-making are more significant than problems with the 'surface' of the language such as grammar, punctuation and spelling. In order to work in this way, it may well be necessary to suspend the idea that surface level issues impede meaning since the ability to 'look through' language errors can often allow meaning to be perceived. This is not to say that surface level errors are not important in a piece of academic writing, but rather that problems at the level of meaning are of more critical concern. This article now moves on to locate the 'conversation in writing' in a more comprehensive 'process' approach to the development of writing which allows language related concerns to be addressed appropriately.

LOCATING THE CONVERSATION

Engaging in a 'conversation in writing' with students without allowing students to rework their writing in the context of that conversation clearly will not capitalise on its potential to develop writing ability overall. The 'conversation in writing' therefore needs to be located within a more comprehensive approach to writing development which incorporates the following elements:

1. Discussion with students of the assessment task and the criteria against which writing will be assessed as the task is introduced. This allows students to understand more fully what is expected of them.
2. Scheduling time for the submission of a first draft of the assignment in the assignment writing process.
3. Marking a final draft of the assignment.

Each of these elements of the approach will now be discussed separately.

Discussion of the writing task

Discussion of the assessment task is crucial in helping students to understand what is expected of them, even if clear written instructions are provided. The discussion needs be focused on the criteria which will be used to assess performance and students need to be allowed to ask questions in order to negotiate their own understandings of what is required (McKenna, 2007).

Submission of a draft of the assignment

Time spent on responding to students' writing is wasted if they are not able to use the comments and questions to improve the written task. This is especially the case given the theoretical reasoning underpinning the approach advocated in this article. It has been argued that much of the poor writing submitted at South African universities is, in effect, 'speech written down' and results from a failure to monitor meaning-making given students' predominant experience of having meaning monitored by other participants in face-to-face conversations. The purpose of the 'conversation in writing' advocated in this article is to teach the need for self-monitoring. Clearly this will not be achieved unless students i) are required to respond to the comments and questions by rephrasing meaning and ii) become accustomed to the need to anticipate questions and comments and, thus, 'silence' their readers. This latter aim will only be achieved through the practice of using comments and questions to redraft writing.

The overall approach promoted in this article, therefore, requires the submission of a draft of the assignment which then receives comment from the academic staff member teaching the class. When the draft of the assignment is handed back to students, it will be necessary to demonstrate how the commenting works. This is most easily accomplished by typing an anonymous extract from an assignment and making an overhead slide of the text. Comments can be hand-written on the slide. The lecturer can then verbally demonstrate and explain the comments to the class and ask for suggestions regarding the way the text could be rewritten to eliminate further comment. It is often useful to explain that the writer's purpose is to 'silence' the lecturer so that s/he cannot interrupt the piece of writing with comments and questions.

When the overall purpose of the comments and questions has been explained and demonstrated, students can be instructed to use the comments and questions asked of *their* texts to rewrite them. A further period of time should be allowed for this to take place. If the class meets during this period, it is useful to remind students that they need to be sure that i) they are indeed meeting the assessment criteria as they rewrite their assignments and ii) that they are 'silencing' the lecturer as they do so.

Marking the final draft of the assignment

The approach promoted in this assignment requires effort to be expended *formatively* in that it is directed at bringing about improvement of students' texts as they are being written. The final draft of students' writing should therefore only receive a summative response of a grade or mark and should not elicit further comment since this cannot be used to improve the text further. The marking of the final draft of the assignment should thus require less time than if a response were being provided.

CONCLUSION

Although many lecturers will undoubtedly argue that it is the role of academic development personnel rather than their role to develop students' writing, a considerable body of research now exists which shows that generic writing instruction is flawed at theoretical and practical levels. In a South African context, for example, Reynolds (2007) shows how writing is discipline specific and how she, as an academic development practitioner with a background in linguistics, has had to work to identify the conventions required by individual disciplines. Her work along with the work of others, such as Lea & Street (1998), shows how academic writing is discipline specific and, thus, how support for writing needs to be provided

by those who are expert at writing in the disciplines rather than from generalists with a background in linguistics or language studies.

The approach described in this article draws on a particular theoretical position to advocate the idea of a 'conversation in writing' between a novice writer and an expert not only to develop an understanding of what is involved in making meaning in writing but also for what it means to write in particular disciplinary contexts. Given the amount of time most academic staff spend on responding to student writing from a commonsense perspective in any case, a shift in approach so that a more theoretically reasoned strategy is used makes sense when the potential benefits are considered. At the very least, it is hoped that this article will have provided an argument which will persuade academic staff to think about what they need to do in relation to working with students' writing somewhat differently even if the entire approach is not adopted.

REFERENCES

Boughey, C. (2000) 'Multiple metaphors in an understanding of academic literacy' *Teachers and Teaching* 6(3) pp.279-290.

Boughey, C. (2002) 'Naming students' "problems": An analysis of language related discourses at a South African university' *Teaching in Higher Education 7*(3) pp.295-307.

Christie, F. (1985) *Language Education.* Victoria: Deakin University Press.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1973) *Explorations in the Functions of Language.* London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1978) *Language as social semiotic.* London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1989) *Spoken and Written Language.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1994) *Introduction to Functional Grammar.* London: Edward Arnold.

Lea, M.R. & Street, B.V. (1998) 'Student writing in higher education: an academic literacies approach' *Studies in Higher Education* 23(2) pp.157-172.

Leibowitz, B. (2004) 'Becoming academically literate in South Africa: Lessons from student accounts for policymakers and educators' *Language and Education* 18(1) pp.35-52.

McKenna, S. (2004) 'Lecturers discourses about the interplay between language and learning' *South African Journal of Higher Education* 18(2) pp.278-288.

McKenna, S. (2007) 'Assessment rubrics as a means of making expectations explicit' *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning* 2 pp.22-30.

Reynolds, J. 2007. 'Writing in the discipline of anthropology: Theoretical, thematic and geographical spaces' Paper presented at the Foundation Event, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, 1-2 October 2007.

Who decides what counts as effective teaching?

Liz Harrison - Durban University of Technology, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Student evaluation of teaching is the most widely used mechanism internationally for assessing quality of teaching. The results of student evaluations contribute to performance evaluations and thus academic career prospects as part of a managerial 360° performance appraisal. Moreover, in the context of the global Quality Assurance drive in Higher Education, the practice is carrying increasing weight. Yet the apparent simplicity of asking students to evaluate educators belies the raft of complications around the practice. This literature review questions the fairness of Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET), when educators have no say in the items used to rate their teaching performance. It further challenges the value of students' opinions of an educator's performance, when students have had no opportunity to identify the features of teaching practice that they hold as making valuable contributions to their learning. The argument suggests that the only legally fair and valid form of SET must be derived through the intersection of teacher-selected performances with those identified by students as valuable.

INTRODUCTION

The most widely used mechanism for assessing the quality of teaching internationally is student evaluation of educator's performance (Tight, 2004; Marchese, 1997). Student Evaluations of Teaching (SET) have been researched for over 50 years, have been the subject of over two thousand journal articles and have been found to provide valid and useful information for both educators and administrators (Tight, 2004; McKeachie & Kaplan, 1996). Reviews of the literature around SET show that they are multidimensional, reliable and stable, appraise the teacher rather than the course, are valid against indicators of effective teaching, and are relatively unaffected by assumed sources of bias 'when proper attention is paid to measurement and theoretical issues' (Marsh 2001: 184).

Increasingly, the use of SET is featuring in discussions related to Quality Assurance internationally and in the South African context in the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) documentation (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2005) and calls for performance management systems for academics. The lack of agreement on what constitutes effective teaching is problematic (Shevlin, Banyard, Davies & Griffiths, 2000). It is interesting that in most of the literature the term *performance*, is used rather than the terms *competence* or *effectiveness* (Dunkin, 1997: 39). *Educator performance*, evaluated by learners as experts in being taught (Cox, 1994: 109), refers to the way that an educator behaves in the process of teaching. While learners are typically considered the providers of the raw data, they are rarely considered when SET instruments are devised. Few survey instruments constructed actually ask students what teacher behaviours

they consider important in encouraging their learning. This raises the question as to the authenticity of 'learner feedback' when it does not represent the teaching behaviours that learners value.

It makes sense that students cannot appraise *Educator competence*, such as the ability to use a variety of methodologies, e.g., the ability to facilitate a group discussion, without a background in Education. Similarly *Educator effectiveness*, or the extent to which an educator achieves educational goals, cannot be evaluated by the average learner, who is usually not in a position to comment on the aims of a given course within departmental and programme contexts.

A recent study of pharmaceutical students found 'that students are careful discerners of teaching quality' and that, '[o]verall, students appear to be appropriate, albeit imperfect, evaluators of good teaching, and are better judges of some aspects (e.g. creating an environment conducive to learning) than others (e.g. expertise of the faculty member)' (Surratt & Desselle, 2007).

THE PURPOSES OF SET

SET is the recorded judgements of a group of learners about the quality of teaching they experience. The gathering of learner opinion always aims at the improvement of teaching quality but has two distinct purposes, formative and summative, which approach the issue of quality from two different directions (Marsh, 1984).[1]

Formative SET is any evaluation including informal discussions that an educator seeks from learners for his or her own self-improvement (Moses, 1986). This may take the form of, for example, gathering learner opinion about the way a certain part of a course was taught, to find out if it was effective and so represents the educator's personal commitment to quality.

Summative SET is an assessment by learners, required by institutional policy, to inform a decision about an educator's merit (Moses, 1988), in relation to peers (in the case of promotion decisions), or in relation to an institutional quality standard (in the case of appointment decisions). It represents an institution's intention to maintain or even surpass a quality standard.

THE STAKEHOLDERS: EDUCATORS

In order to facilitate comparisons, a summative SET instrument must be relevant to all teaching and learning fields and contexts and must be free of in-built biases against certain groups in the population of academics (Seldin, 1980). Because a negative performance assessment could lead to an educator's dismissal or a failure to advance in his or her career, the content of SET should be the elements of the teaching and learning process that are under his or her direct control. For instance, it would be legally unfair to penalise an educator for not using a variety of audiovisual techniques when the audiovisual equipment does not exist.

While it is unlikely that one unfair item on a evaluation instrument, surveying one group in a '360° performance evaluation' would be grounds for dismissal, it is important that each item in the instrument is individually substantively and procedurally fair to prevent an accumulation of bias. As key stakeholders in the SET process, educators have to be consulted on what aspects of teaching performance are within their control.

---

1   Deakin University's Institute of Teaching and Learning provides an excellent summary of the range of instruments collectively known as SET: http://www.deakin.edu.au/itl/pd/tl-modules/scholarly/setuceq/setu-ceq-06.php

Summative SET must 'reliably and validly sort those candidates who are adequately prepared for responsible, independent practice from those who are not' (Dunkin, 1997: 9). This is in clear contrast to the informality of formative SET, which can be shaped around educators' specific interests and concerns, providing the autonomy of practice required for academic freedom (Haskell, 1997).

THE STAKEHOLDERS: LEARNERS' INVOLVEMENT IN CONSTRUCTING SET

Supposedly, learners are able to say what lecturer behaviours encourage them to learn (Freilich, 1983). For this reason rating scales and observational schedules of in-class activity are the instruments used for assessing educator performance (Dunkin, 1997). It is therefore fair to ask learners to define the criteria for the instrument, which will produce data representing their opinion.

SET rating instruments are constructed in two ways: A literary approach, in which literature is reviewed and appropriate items are selected and reviewed by a panel of teaching experts (Marsh & Roche, 1992a), or a committee of staff developers and educators (identified by peers as effective), generate the items (Saunders & Saunders, 1993). Neither approach uses learners as the originators of items for educator evaluation. These methods are used in order to ensure construct validity, or that the summative SET instrument will generate data that will enable the future teaching performance of an educator to be predicted - a desirable outcome for administrators (Marsh & Roche, 1992a). However, both practices compromise the criterion validity of the instrument as a way of recording the students' voice in democratic education. These standard approaches assume that learners are incapable of identifying the characteristics of a consistently good educator as opposed to one who is merely entertaining (Browne, Hoag, Myers & Hiers, 1997). Neither the literary nor the committee approach consults students on what educator behaviours they find valuable.

CRITERION VALIDITY

Criterion validity is the extent to which scores on an instrument are related to an independent, external, criterion variable believed to measure directly the underlying attribute or behaviour. The degree to which items on a questionnaire indicate quality of teaching, has been the bone of contention in SET research almost since its origin in the 60s, following the rise of the student power movement and the demand that institutions be more publicly accountable.

Most SET instruments have claimed criterion validity through correlating learner ratings of educators with measures of learner achievement, such as examination results, with mixed success (Cohen, 1981, Benton, 1982). One reason may be that these studies confused educator performance, on which learners can clearly comment, with teacher effectiveness, which relates to a short-term measure of learning as demonstrated in examination performance. As every learner knows, examination performance does not necessarily mean that there has been long-term retention of information. True learning is represented by learners' ability to go on building on their knowledge without the presence of the educator. In other words the outcome of an effective learning process is more than the sum of the teaching objectives achieved during a formal academic year. Further, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, Collins, Filer, Wiedmaier & Moore (2007: 118) point out that it is not unlikely that learners will give credit to their lecturers for their success – this 'positive manifold' effect makes it difficult to establish criterion-validity through purely quantitative methods.

Moreover, in their attempts to remain objective and achieve the credibility of empirical results, SET researchers have ignored the truth that any evaluation is an opinion, regardless of how statistics are manipulated. An educational administrator seeks students' opinions on the effectiveness of teaching performance, from their unique position as learners experiencing continuous classroom interaction with

the educator. From the reasons outlined above, it follows that to be valid an instrument should contain items that learners feel contribute to effective learning.

The danger of both the literary (reference to research literature) and the committee (the opinions of expert educators) approaches is that instrument constructors do not take their own implicit theories of learning into account. Those deemed experts, whether researchers or educators, achieve this status within a specific discourse (Webb, 1996; Marchese, 1997). To consult only their opinions may result in a skewed instrument that ensures that the dominant educational culture prevails. For example, where experts value good oration techniques favouring the lecture as a teaching methodology, the needs of the second language English speaker may be overlooked.

In instances where learners have been consulted, the consultation often occurs 'after the fact'. A Croatian study highlights the dangers of not consulting learners in the first stages of constructing a SET instrument. The starting point for the study was a list of 15 educator behaviours selected by identified teaching experts from the literature (Lediç & Horç-Böliç, 1998). Staff and learners agreed that 10 factors constituted 'ideal' teaching, but they disagreed radically on the extent to which educators at the university practised these behaviours. It would appear that staff and learners differed in their understanding of the items. A SET instrument can only produce a fair summation of learner opinion of educator performance, if it asks the learners the questions they want to answer and if staff to be assessed and learners have a similar understanding of the criteria.

CONTENT VALIDITY OF SET

Content validity refers to the degree to which a SET instrument actually measures teaching quality (Kerlinger, 1986). When both other measurements and other evaluators agree with a SET instrument, the case for content validity is strengthened. Other evaluators could be the educators themselves, their peers, administrators, or trained external evaluators. Including these other evaluators, as an alternative to SET, is appealing because many educators fear that learners are inadequately qualified to make effective judgements (Browne, *et al.,* 1997). The fear is that students will negatively evaluate educators who are strict and demanding (Haskell, 1997).

The 'grading leniency effect' refers to the belief that educators who give good grades are evaluated more favourably than those who do not. It is often called a biasing factor in the literature on SET and is often identified when a strong correlation is found between SET ratings and learner scores on courses.

In 1972, Rodin and Rodin showed that learners apparently learned the least from highly rated educators, because students working with highly rated educators achieved the lowest marks on the course assessments. This study is discounted because the evaluation of teaching that was gathered was of a group of teaching assistants who provided supplementary instruction to learners in need of help and not the educator doing the bulk of the teaching. The measure of achievement used was a series of examinations that learners could repeat up to six times. Students were asked to answer one question about the teaching assistant's performance, 'What grade would you assign to his total teaching performance?' (Benton, 1982: 12). The grade expressed as a letter from A to F was translated into a score (A=6 to F=0). The problems of assigning ratio values to categorical data are well documented (Kerlinger, 1986), as is the futility of reducing teaching to a single dimension. It is very likely that learners resented teaching assistants who forced them to repeat the examination and therefore rated the teaching assistants poorly.

The irony is that an instrument that truly assesses the educator's contribution to effective learning should *always* show the so-called 'grading leniency' effect. Good educators should show teaching effectiveness

through their learners achieving good results as well as good ratings on teaching performance. Researchers have solved the problem of whether grading leniency was a bias, by comparing learners' ratings of the same educators in a controlled study. One group of learners received their end of course marks prior to evaluating each educator in the study and another did not. The study found that educators achieved similar ratings of their teaching from both groups of learners and so showed that the 'bias' did not actually exist (Marsh, 1984: 740).

A second bias is called the 'Dr Fox effect' after a study that apparently demonstrates that enthusiastic and entertaining presenters will receive high ratings of their teaching, even though the content is worthless. In the study, an enthusiastic professional actor lectured on content specifically designed to have little educational value and was given favourable evaluations of his teaching performance. Again the research methodology is flawed. The study had no control group, the audience was not familiar with the subject, the fifteen-minute lecture could not be assumed comparable with a full course and 'a poor rating instrument' was used (Marsh, 1984: 743).

The prevalence of the belief that enthusiasm confounds the value of student evaluations was investigated by the journal *Change* in 1997 which dedicated the entire September issue to a study that apparently shows that when the educator became more enthusiastic, the ratings of the course textbook increased even though the text was the same as had been used in previous courses (Williams & Ceci, 1997). The study has similar flaws to those of the Dr Fox research. In both cases there was no control group and the rating instrument was not validated. In neither case, was the audience qualified to comment on the content of the lecture and the instrument did not measure what it claimed to measure. The question 'How would you rate the textbook?' asked for a response on a 1- to 5- point scale. Predictably an average response was received. Granted it was a higher average (2,98 as compared to 2,06) than it had been before the educator showed more enthusiasm, but it is not relevant to a rating of the educator's performance in encouraging effective learning. The halo effect on the rating of the textbook (resulting from the educator's enthusiasm) is more likely to affect learners' ratings if the questions are not meaningful enough for them to have an opinion on them (Ramsden, 1998). This strengthens the argument that content validity of SET will be enhanced if students comment on educator performances that they value. Rather than showing bias, both the Dr Fox and the Williams and Ceci study show that drama and enthusiasm are effective educational tools (Seldin, 1980), particularly where learners appreciate these behaviours.

THE INTERSECTION

To strengthen the case for SET, evaluations of a given educator by learners have been shown to correlate significantly with comparable ratings by alumni (Seldin, 1980), colleagues (Wagenaar, 1995) and trained classroom observers (Murray, 1997). Research comparing learner evaluations and educator self-evaluation, shows a range of weak to strong correlations, dependent on the size of the study (Marsh, 1984).

The gap between learner evaluation and educator self-evaluation on the same instrument, where educators rated themselves more highly than did the learners, was shown to be a powerful motivator to enhance teaching effectiveness (Marsh & Roche, 1992b). This study stresses the importance of shared meanings in student evaluations, showing that educators, using the same instrument as learners, take the ratings seriously enough to change their teaching behaviour. It demonstrates that where learners and other assessors agree on criteria for effective teaching, SET is likely to be valid. 'There are many possible indicators of effective teaching… the component that is most valid will depend on the criteria being considered' (Marsh, 1984: 710).

Beliefs about effective learning are likely to be a product of learners' previous experiences of what has worked for them as learners and how they have been socialised to perceive educational success, i.e., whether they have self-generated or intrinsic definitions of success or whether their perception of success depends on an external 'mark' provided by an authority figure. The author would expect to find that both learners and educators would favour Transmission style criteria for effectiveness, because of South Africa's history of educator-centred education (Deacon & Parker, 1996), coupled with a cultural respect for elders. This is not to suggest that one is more correct than another, but that it is important to achieve 'goodness-of-fit' between a performance evaluation system and the expectations of stakeholders (Koopman, 1991). This suggests too that the 'fitness of purpose' and 'fitness for purpose' of SET instruments, however constructed, will change over time.

CONCLUSION

In reviewing some of the vast literature around SET this article argues for the legal right of educators to select the behaviours on which they will be evaluated for summative purposes, but more importantly it argues that in order for SET to reflect valid students' opinions as stakeholders in a 360° performance appraisal system, students ought to have the right to identify the teacher performances that they value. Some researchers suggest that learners are incapable of making a fair evaluation of teaching because they value educator characteristics such as rapport and flexibility which have little to do with educational effectiveness (Browne, *et al.,* 1997). The argument for educator control in the selection of items for a summative SET instrument is answered by the fact that learners' experience of learning is what is at issue. 'The wrong kind of assessment - as perceived by staff and students - results in an attitude of compliance and this path leads quickly to dissatisfaction and mediocre performance' (Ramsden, 1998: 195). The right kind of assessment should be arrived at through involving both learners and educators in identifying effective teaching behaviour that is appropriate to both in the context, recognising that valued behaviours will probably change as education policy evolves and impacts on classrooms over time.

REFERENCES

Benton, S.E. (1982) 'Rating College Teaching: Criterion validity studies of student evaluation of instruction instrument' A.H.E. - *Eric/Higher Education Research Report No. 1.*

Browne, M.N., Hoag, J.H., Myers, M.L., & Hiers, W.J. (1997) 'Student Evaluation of Teaching as if Critical Thinking Really Mattered' *The Journal of General Education* 46:3 pp.192-206.

Council on Higher Education (2005) *Improving Teaching and Learning Resource.* CHE: Pretoria.

Cohen, P.A. (1981) 'Student ratings of instruction and student achievement: A metaanalysis of multisection validity studies' *Review of Educational Research* 51 pp.281-309.

Cox, B. (1994) *Practical Pointers for University Teachers.* London. Kogan Page.

Deacon, R. & Parker, B. (1996) 'The Ordering of Educational Discourse in South Africa' *South African Journal of Education* 16(3) pp.164-169.

Dunkin, M.J. (1997) 'Assessing Teachers' effectiveness' *Issues in Educational Research* 7(1) pp.37-51 http://cleo.Murdoch.Edu.Au/gen/iier/iier7/dunkin.Htm (Revised 10 September 1998).

Freilich, M.B. (1983) 'A Student Evaluation of Teaching Techniques' *Journal of Chemical Education* 60(3) pp.218-221.

Haskell, R.E. (1997) 'Academic Freedom, Tenure and Student Evaluation of Faculty: Galloping Polls in the 21st Century' *Educational Policy Analysis Archives* 5(18) August 25.
http://olam.Ed.Asu.Edu/epaa/v5n6.html

Kerlinger, F.N. (1986) *Foundations of Behavioural Research* (3rd Edition). Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

Koopman, A. (1991) *Transcultural Management: How to unlock Global Resources.* Cambridge, MA. Basil Blackwell Inc.

Lediç, J., & Hörç-Böliç, N. (1998) 'The Differences between Teachers' and Students' Assessment of Higher Education Teaching Quality: A Case from Croatia' *E.C.E.R.* Ljubljana. 7 October. June 1999
http://ultibase.rmit.edu.au/Articles/ledic2.html

Marchese, T. (1997) 'Student Evaluations of Teaching' *Change.* Editorial September/October 4.

Marsh, H. (1984) 'Student Evaluations of University Teaching: Dimensionality, Reliability, Validity, Potential Biases, and Utility' *Journal of Education Psychology* 76(5) pp.707-754.

Marsh, H.W., & Roche, L.A. (1992a) 'The Use of Student Evaluations of University Teaching in Different Settings: the Applicability Paradigm' Conference of the Australian Association of Research in Education October 1992. http://www.Swin.Edu.Au/aare/conf92/MARSH92.449 (Accessed June 1999).

Marsh, H.W., & Roche, L. (1992b) 'The Use of Students' Evaluations and an Individually Structured Intervention to Enhance University Teaching Effectiveness' 1992 Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education. October 3. http://www.Swin.Edu.Au/aare/conf92/MARSH92.449 (Accessed June 1999).

Marsh, H.W. (2001) 'Distinguishing Between Good (Useful) and Bad Workloads on Students' Evaluations of Teaching' *American Educational Research Journal* 38(1) pp.183-212.

McKeachie, B., & Kaplan, M. (1996) 'Evaluating Teaching: Solutions Old and New' *Bulletin of the American Association for Higher Education* 48(6) pp.5-8.

Moses, I. (1986) 'Student Evaluation of Teaching in an Australian University: Staff Perceptions and Reactions' *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 11(2) pp.117-129.

Moses, I. (1988) *Academic Staff Evaluation and Development: A University Case Study.* St Lucia, Australia: University of Queensland Press.

Murray, H.G. (1997) 'Does Evaluation of Teaching lead to Improvement of Teaching?' *International Journal for Academic Development* 2(1) pp.8-23 May.

Onwuegbuzie, A J., Witcher, A. E., Collins, K.M. T., Filer, J.D., Wiedmaier, C. D. & Moore, C.W. (2007) 'Students' Perceptions of Characteristics of Effective College Teachers: A Validity Study of a Teaching Evaluation Form Using a Mixed-Methods Analysis' *American Educational Research Journal* 44(1) pp.113-160 March.

Ramsden, P. (1998) *Learning to Lead in Higher Education*. London: Routledge.

Saunders, C., & Saunders, E. (1993) 'Expert Teachers' Perceptions of University Teaching: the Identification of Teaching Skills' *Quality Assurance for University Teaching* R. Ellis (Ed). Buckinghamshire. Open University Press and The Society for Research into Higher Education.

Seldin, P. (1980) *Successful Faculty Evaluation Programs: a Practical Guide to Improve Faculty Performance and Promotion/Tenure Decisions.* Crugers. New York: Coventry Press.

Shevlin, M., Banyard, P., Davies, M. & Griffiths, M. (2000) 'The Validity of Student Evaluation of Teaching in Higher Education: love me, love my lectures?' *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 25(4) pp.397-405.

Surratt, C.K. & Desselle, S.P. (2007) 'Pharmacy Students' Perceptions of a Teaching Evaluation Process' *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3833/is_200701/ai_n18705733 (Accessed 19 January 2008).

Tight, M. (2004) The Routledge Falmer Reader in Higher Education. London: Routledge Falmer.

Wagenaar, T.C. (1995) 'Student Evaluation of Teaching: Some Cautions and Suggestions' *Journal of American Sociological Association* 23(1) pp.62-68 January.

Webb, G. (1996) *Understanding Staff Development.* Buckinghamshire, UK: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Williams, W.M., & Ceci, S.J. (1997) 'How'm I doing? Problems With Student Ratings Of Instructors And Courses' *Change* pp.13-23 September/October.

Role playing African development: an international comparison[1]

Professor R.C. Fox, Rhodes University, South Africa
Dr. P. Assmo, Högskolan Väst, Trollhättan, Sweden and
Dr. H, Kjellgren, Högskolan Väst, Trollhättan, Sweden

ABSTRACT

The African Development Game is a simulation developed from the World Trade Game. It introduces first year undergraduates to the Millennium Development Goals through role playing. Learners are allocated different resources, debt levels and human capacity depending on which of six African countries they represent. They have to produce artifacts such as houses, clothes and food whilst interacting with each other and the World Bank. The World Bank represents the world's economic system, provides resources and administers debt repayments. The game has been played in two different countries, South Africa and Sweden. Student reflections and participant observation have revealed that the game highlights the problems of African countries attempting to meet the Millennium Development Goals. The two groups of students revealed differences in their types of learning and the ways in which they played the game. They all commented, however, on the effectiveness of the role play as a learning tool.

ROLE PLAYING AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT: AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

The Geography curriculum at Rhodes University in South Africa critically examines the world's political and economic system so that learners develop a knowledge-based understanding and an ethical awareness of the problems facing African countries. The International Programme in Politics and Economics at Högskolan Väst, Sweden, has similar intended course outcomes. Role-playing simulations are used in both institutions in order for attitudinal, or affective, learning to take place alongside knowledge-based, or cognitive, learning. Our experience of playing these games is in accordance with sociologist Richard Dukes' (1997) summary of the benefits of using simulations and games:

1. They increase motivation and promote individual learning based on the learner's own viewpoint.
2. They can achieve both cognitive and affective learning outcomes.
3. They promote interpersonal activities, discussions and relationships.
4. They can help learners develop a more holistic view both of the world and the constructs which we use to interpret it.

As will be shown in this paper, students in South Africa and Sweden who have played the African Development Game (ADG), report on all of these benefits.

FROM WORLD TRADE GAME TO AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT GAME

The African Development Game was produced by modifying the World Trade Game (Sloman, 2002; World Council of Churches, 2006). This section examines the new game rules and simulator rules (Crookall, Oxford and Saunders, 1987) that we have introduced.

The World Trade Game was initially developed in the 1990s by Action Aid, the global anti-poverty development organization (World Council of Churches, 2006). Its strength is its simplicity. Six groups of players represent two rich, two middle-income and two poor countries and each group has different resources and technological potential. National resources are represented as paper whilst technology becomes scissors, pens, rulers, etc. They manufacture shapes from paper, trade the shapes for money through a commodity trader and may also trade amongst themselves in raw materials (paper), technology (scissors, ruler, etc), skills and labour. The game usually shows that the world trading system enables the gap between rich and poor to remain intact. Debriefing the participants allows many economic, political and geographical concepts to be discussed, for example, the formation of trading organizations and cartels (Sloman, 2002).

We wanted to integrate the Millennium Development Goals into the simulation whilst also making resource use more realistic (McGuire, 2003) and modelling debt levels. Accordingly we tested new elements and rules with learners in South Africa and Sweden in March and May 2005. Feedback from the learners, together with participant observation, led to the production of the current version that we decided to call the African Development Game. This was then played again in South Africa with a group of first year undergraduates in 2005 and then in Finland and Sweden in June and September 2006. The analysis that comes later in the paper compares the experiences of the South African and Swedish groups as they were the most directly comparable.

The new rules and parameters that we developed were as follows. Firstly, domestic resources were introduced in the game (as coloured paper) to enable participants to try to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through making houses, food, transport, etc. These complemented the export resources which we represented as paper printed with oil barrels, gold bars or textile 't' shirts and used for international trade. So each of the six countries had domestic resources as well as export resources to work with, or trade, so as to try and meet its MDGs whilst paying off its debt burden.

The six African countries that we selected represent sharply different geographical, resource and infra-structural potential. These replaced the World Trade Game's USA, Japan, India, Brazil, Mozambique and Tanzania.

1. Libya and Mauritius were chosen to represent export-based economies with relatively small populations and high Human Development Indices. They had limited domestic resources to meet the Millennium Development Goals.
2. South Africa and Ghana were selected since they are also exporters but with relatively large populations and lower Human Development Indices. They had more domestic resources available to enable them to meet the Millennium Development Goals.
3. Lesotho and Mali were representatives of countries with very limited exports; they have relatively smaller populations with very low Human Development Indices. They are both landlocked countries with limited domestic resources to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

The Millennium Development Goals were simplified from eight (Swanson, 2005) and translated into five basic needs-related activities that could be easily undertaken in role play. They are particularly addressing

MDGs one and two, namely, to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty, and to achieve universal primary education. The game instructions for the players read as follows:

1. Housing. Make a house: it must be made from at least TWO colours, it must be at least 10 cms high and be 3D (three dimensional).
2. Education. Make a book: it must contain text with each page at least 10 cm x 10 cm. FOUR pages is the minimum size for the book.
3. Transport. Make a form of transport: it must be made from at least TWO colours, be a minimum of 15 cms long and 3D.
4. Food. Make examples of THREE kinds of food in THREE colours: be sure that they are in appropriate colours and 3D. 5 cms long is the minimum length for each kind of food.
5. Clothing. Make one article of clothing from at least THREE colours which the people of your nation often wear. 15 cms is the minimum length.

In the initial round, the requirements were simpler but observation from the first runs in 2005 showed that they could be considerably more complex and so ensure more intensity in the game play.

The game process of the World Trade Game was kept intact even though the ADG is more complex. The total duration was approximately two hours. The process started with a short briefing of 5-10 minutes and then five or six 'years' of game play, each year lasting approximately 15 minutes. Every 15 minutes debts to the World Bank increased at the rate of 15 percent unless oil, gold or textile products were exported through the World Bank. Credits would only be given if the products met strict quality controls as regards their size and shape. Final judging of how well the country had made its housing, food, etc., was by a small panel of United Nations Experts (the facilitators).

The UN Expert Group evaluation of the basic needs took 10-15 minutes and this was followed by a group debriefing of approximately 15 minutes. Discussion was initiated whilst the World Bank's debt figures were collated for presentation to the class. Lastly, the students were asked to complete a short free-writing exercise for approximately five minutes: 'about your experience of the African Development Game. What were your impressions, what have you learned?' The reflection exercise and material from the debriefing provided the basis for some of the evaluation presented below. Participant observation involved keeping a journal, taking photographs and making an iStopMotion movie.

Table 1 shows the real world data for 2004 that the simulation is modelling through provision of different quantities of paper, levels of debt repayment and provision of technological tools. These data, and a copy of the actual Millennium Goals, were also given to the students to facilitate their cognitive learning. Cognitive and affective learning is thus entwined throughout the game process.

TWO CONTEXTS

The first year Geography students in South Africa played the ADG in two groups on 12 and 15 August 2005. This was the week after they had played the World Trade Game and some three weeks into their course. The ADG was played to complement the theory course 'Introduction to Global Development' and the game was designed, in part, to develop their cognitive understanding, so real information about the six African countries (Table 1) was given in the game briefing. The intentions of the simulation were provided to the students as follows:

- To introduce you to the resource potential of selected African countries
- To build your awareness of the Millennium Development Goals

	External Debt (US$bn)	GDP/capita (purchasing power parity)	Population (millions)	Human Development Index	Exports
GHANA	7,4	2 300	21	0,568	Gold, cocoa
LESOTHO	0,7	3 200	1,9	0,493	Clothing, footwear
LIBYA	4,1	6 700	5,7	0,794	Oil, gas
MALI	3,3	900	12,3	0,326	Cotton, gold
MAURITIUS	1,8	12 800	1,2	0,785	Textiles, sugar
SOUTH AFRICA	27,0	11 100	44,3	0,666	Gold, diamonds

Sources: *Central Intelligence Agency (2005)*
United Nations Development Programme (2005)

- To demonstrate how difficult it is for indebted African countries to meet their Millennium Development Goals given the nature of the world trading system and their lack of resources.

The Swedish First Year students were enrolled at Högskolan Väst in the International Programme in Politics and Economics. The African Development Game was played at the very beginning of the course in September 2006 to introduce students to typical development issues which graduates from the programme would be expected to understand. The timing of the game within their curriculum is therefore broadly similar and so were the affective intentions of playing the game. The Swedish students had not, however, played the World Trade Game the week before and there was less emphasis on real world characteristics in the countries they were representing, although the game materials given were identical.

Our facilitator notes also revealed some key differences concerning student composition. The 42 students in Sweden were slightly older (average age late teens to early 20s) than the 72 South African students (the majority were aged 18 and very few were in their early twenties). Forty five percent (19) of the students in Sweden had a foreign origin, and only four of these were not from the former Yugoslavia, with the rest being Swedish from western Sweden. In South Africa, a substantial minority, 25 percent (18), of the students were from Zimbabwe and other African countries. Only 15 percent (11) of the class was black African. The majority of both groups were female; 81% (34) in Sweden and 55% (40) in South Africa.
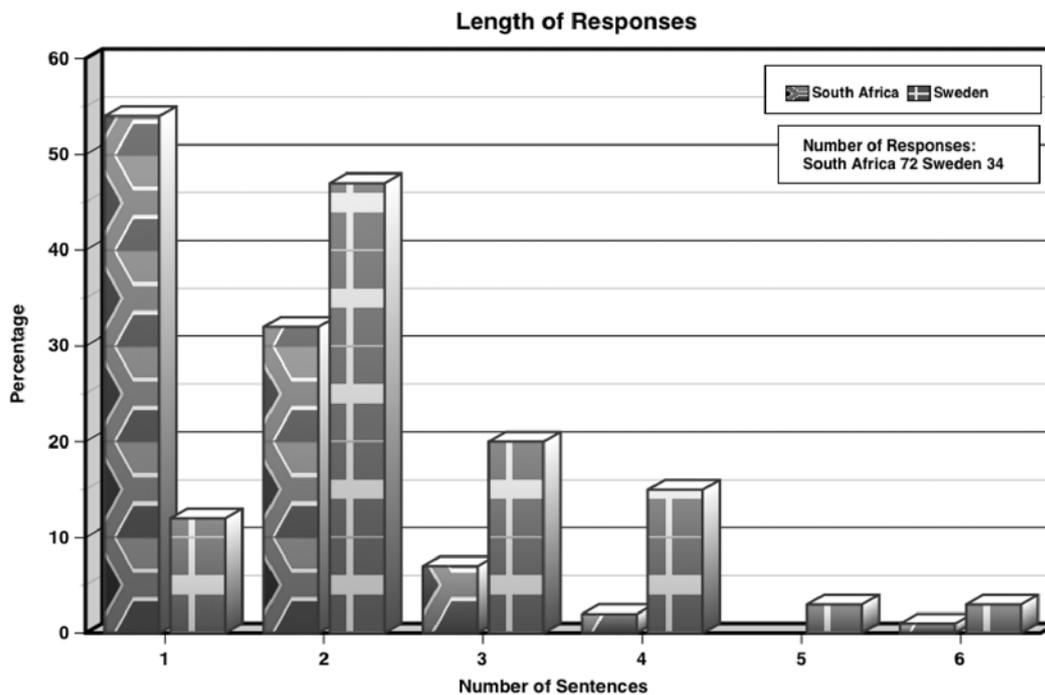
EVALUATION OF STUDENT REFLECTIONS

Length of Reflections

The first way in which we can assess the responses that the two groups made is to compare the length of their reflections, since there were immediate differences in the amount they wrote. Figure 1 shows that the mode of response for South African students was only one sentence, for Swedish students it was two sentences and a significant proportion wrote up to six sentences. This may indicate that the students playing in Sweden spent more time and care reflecting on what had happened in the game, or were more used to providing reflections on their activities.

Our interpretation that the length of response may indicate time and care, relates to the motivation of the students and timing of the simulations. In South Africa, the games were played on Friday and Monday afternoons and many of the students were anxious to leave. Furthermore, only one-third of the Rhodes students would be intending to major in the subject so their motivation for doing the course was not necessarily high. In contrast, the IPPE students in Sweden had specifically applied for this double-major. Also the pressure to leave for extra-mural activities was much less in Sweden since the games were played in the morning.

Figure 1

Length of Reflections, South Africa and Sweden

Affective responses

The two sets of student reflections can also be assessed in terms of what they said. Although learning may well have occurred which is not reflected on and captured through the reflective responses from the game-playing students, we believe the reflections are a useful form of data to enable us to analyse students' learning from the game. Bloom's revised taxonomy (Forehand, 2005) is used to examine the extent of students' affective and cognitive understanding through an analysis of the students' reflections.

In the affective domain the students revealed whether they had responded to, valued or organized their knowledge. In the cognitive domain the reflections were read to see whether the students had remembered, understood, applied, analyzed or evaluated knowledge. In both taxonomies the simplest forms of behaviour are categorized first and the categories then become more complex. There are further categories in the taxonomies of the affective and cognitive domains but we did not find evidence of these in the reflections.

Figure 2 shows responses in the three categories of the affective domain that the students exhibited. It is clear that the South African students dominated in the 'responded' category. In other words, they had actively participated and reacted positively in some way to the role play. The following quotation shows that one South African student's role play had led to the following conclusion.

SA [South Africa] has a lot of debt and the game illustrated just how hard it is to get rid of the debt.

Some of the responses in this category also indicated an appreciation of the type of learning activity itself. One South African student's comment shows that learning can take place in an active rather than a passive situation.

You can learn more in an uncontrolled active process/situation where you get involved rather than one where you sit back and listen.

Although we are not considering the role play that took place in Finland in any detail here it is interesting to note that a number of the players commented that they were unprepared, at least initially, for participation in the role play. They reported that their learning background was usually far more passive.

Figure 2

Reflections by Affective Domain

Responses in Affective Domain
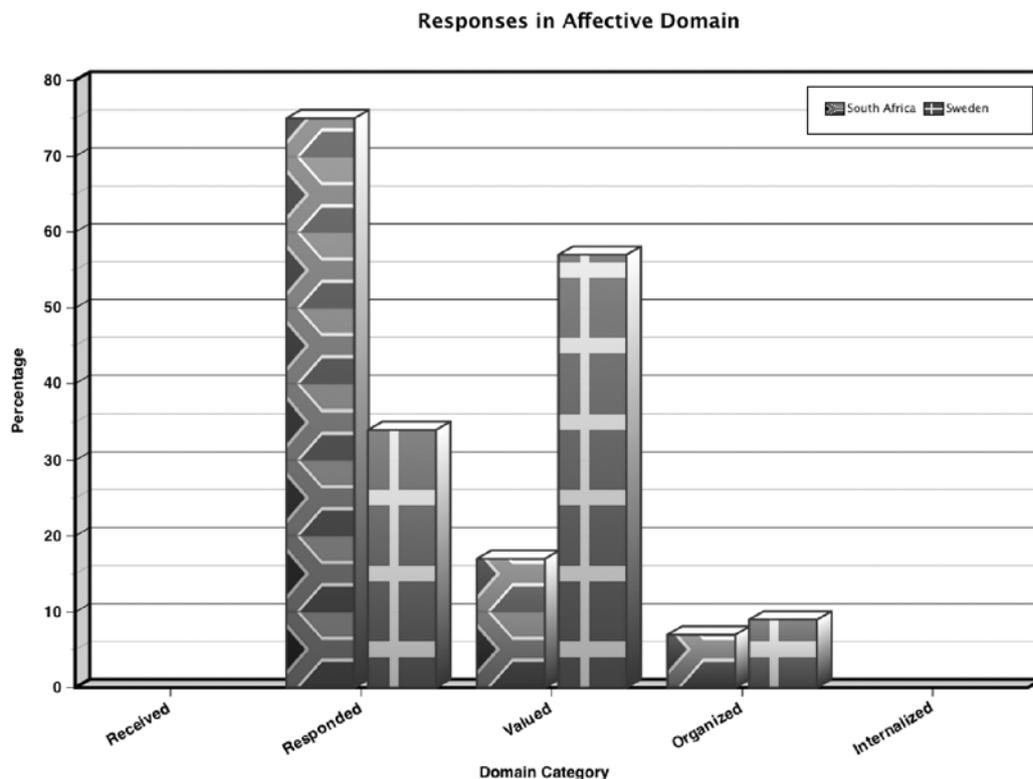
Few of the students in the South African case study had comments that could be classed in the valuing category. Only 12 responses (16 percent of the total) showed values, attitudes or beliefs in relation to the role play. A good example is this South African student's reflection.

How difficult it must be to run a poor country with little resources and the extent to which the little resources owned must be maximized. I wouldn't really like to think about how greater the challenge must be in the real life situation for these countries.

In the organizing category come the longer reflections that showed students who were arranging, comparing, integrating and trying to generalize as a consequence of the role plays. A South Africa student generalized as follows:

[It is] virtually impossible to eliminate any African disadvantage in the world economy unless there is a complete reversal in world economic banking systems. This is unlikely to occur.

Lastly comes one of the longest reflections from the South African role play. This student shows us quite clearly how effective both of the games had been as learning experiences.

I've learnt that it's easier to be the World Bank than a peripheral country. I enjoyed both games, but thought the World Bank treated us rather unfairly in the second one. I guess that shows how much poor countries are at the mercy of the WB. The games showed how difficult it is for the peripheral countries to get themselves out of the hole they have landed in.

The students in Sweden had fewer responses in the 'responded' category but a number of them had clearly reacted to the experience of role play. One of the 12 reflections that fell into this category (34 percent of the total) equated the role play with 'real life'.

The problems that look easy to solve on 'the paper', theoretically, can be very difficult in the real life. There were many more things that became issues, while playing the game, than we thought in the beginning.

The majority of the responses by the Swedish students indicated that the role play had impacted on their feelings, attitudes or values. Often they commented on the unfairness of the trading system and the difficulties in achieving goals. One student, for example, reached this conclusion and also, like the students in South Africa, commented on the enjoyment in being engaged in game play.

I found it very interesting doing this! You get to see for real how difficult it actually is with for example resources. The goals are indeed very hard to achieve and depending on your countries resources, it's not equal for everyone. Thank you!

Another student also reflected on her own behaviour in the role play.

It is really hard to reach the MDGs, because of the unfair distribution of resources. You tend to be very egoistic when it is a matter of competition. I've learned that you have to trade with your neighbours!!

Only three students gave responses that could be categorized as organizing. These were perceptive reflections, however, and indicate the power of engaging in role plays. This student shows us that the role play had brought to the foreground different points of view and also the role of greed:

I've learned to see the problems in developing countries from another point of view. There are substantial problems in the distribution of resources in the world which leads to conflict, I've also seen how 'greed' affects people (countries, nations, government) to act in a certain way.

Cognitive Responses

Figure 3 reveals similar patterns in the cognitive domain. Once more the South African role players dominated in the lower level categories: indicating that they had remembered or understood as a result of the role play. The Swedish role play, in contrast, had responses in the applied, analyzed, evaluated categories.

The following is a typical response from the remembering category. Many other students, for example this South African student, also showed that they could now recall the debt level of countries, their location, etc:

I know the highly indebted countries in Africa. The aims and objectives of MDGs for the African countries which we looked at today. The debts of each country and how they try to pay off debt.

Most of the responses from the Sweden role plays were in the applied and analyzed categories. This Swedish student gives a succinct example of analyzing:

We should have paid off more of the debt in the beginning of the game. The game really shows how hard it is to achieve all the goals and at the same time pay off the debt. We should also have traded more with the other countries. It was fun and interesting to play the game.

The fewest responses came from the evaluation category. This South African student shows, however, that a high level of understanding is quite feasible, notably through relating the two games to each other:

I gained valuable insight into how trade and debt payment and development work. In the World Trade Game I was Tanzania. It was very difficult to come across affordable resources and to sell the resources without being heavily exploited. In the African Development Game I was South Africa, rich in resources and huge debt. While it was easier to come across resources and gold for money the debt was so large that it was still difficult to pay it off. These games took a long time but definitely make the process clearer and provided me with a better understanding of how they worked in real life scale.

Figure 3
Reflections by Cognitive Domain
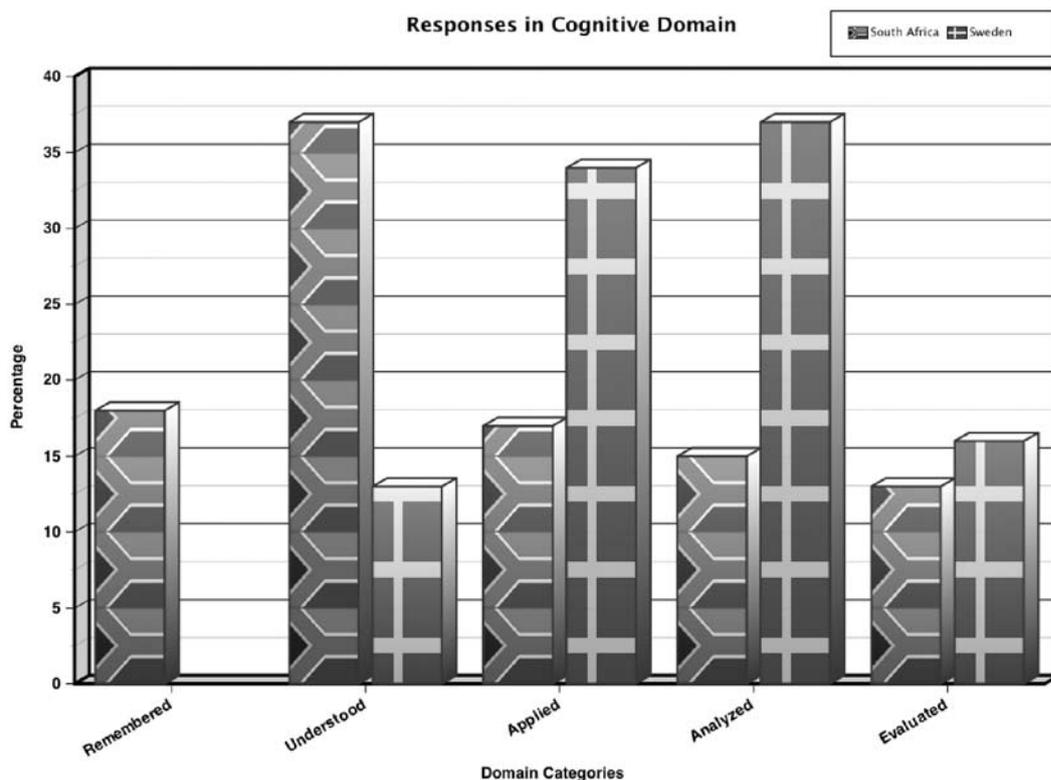
Synthesis and an ability to see the need for organizational structures is also noticeable in these reflections from a Swedish student:

> I have learned that problems with debts and resources take time to solve. The World Bank was very slow, probably the same as in real life. The trade with other countries is really important, because one country often doesn't have all the resources that is needed to build everything. It is also important to have a plan for everything and split up the jobs between the members of the country.

Spreadsheets and Participant Observation

If we examine the spreadsheet information compiled from the World Bank's trade and debt records we find a different scenario. The learners who played the game in South Africa did well at getting out of debt through the course of the game. In the two games played, two out of six and three out of six countries, respectively, managed to clear their debt. In Sweden the learners were much slower at getting the game started and their interactions were also more infrequent. Consequently in one game no countries cleared their debt while in the other, only one country managed to do so.

For an explanation we need to consider the 'imported' rules that were being brought into the games in Sweden. Crookall *et al.* (1987) distinguished between three sources of rules found in simulations: simulator rules, game rules and imported rules. Simulator rules are representations of real-world rules, game rules are non-representative or procedural in nature (make a house, etc.), whereas imported rules come from the role-players themselves since they are rule-using people from a particular cultural context.

Some of the reflections revealed that the players in Sweden were uncomfortable in a game situation when confronted with a number of unknown and ill-defined complexities. They were more used to very complete and clear instructions before attempting tasks. In this type of role play these sorts of instructions are not all given and so they were being required to act, react and strategize in unfamiliar ways. Their imported rules that they brought from their own experiences and which they were trying to apply to the game, therefore, were hampering their ability to play the game.

CONCLUSION

The African Catchment Game appears to have successfully met the cognitive and affective outcomes specified for the Geography curriculum at Rhodes University. In the cognitive sense the students said that they could recall and understand salient features of African countries and how the world trading system and debt impact on the development prospects of different African countries. They had also developed an appreciation of the Millennium Development Goals. More than one Rhodes student commented that they hadn't even heard of the Millennium Development Goals before playing the simulation. There were fewer responses for the higher level cognitive skills of analysis and evaluation, but the reflections that these students produced indicated that the role play had benefitted their learning. Additionally, the reflections show that students had become interested and appreciated learning through playing simulations.

When played in a similar context in Sweden, the reflection exercises had greater proportions of responses in higher level cognitive and affective domains. The length of the responses was also somewhat longer. These differences in the responses between the two groups of students can, at least in part, be related to their different levels of motivation and the times at which the simulations were played.

Finally, it can tentatively be suggested that the African Development Game is a suitable reflection of African reality since the most successful players of the game so far have been Africans. The players' imported rules seem to match the procedural and game rules which the African Development Game was set up to model.

REFERENCES

Central Intelligence Agency (2005) *The World Factbook.*
http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/ (Accessed 15 June 2005).

Crookall, D., Oxford, R., & D. Saunders (1987) 'Towards a re-conceptualization of simulation: from representation to reality' *Simulation/Games for Learning* 17(4) pp.147-170.

Dukes, R. (1997) *Simulation and gaming and the teaching of Sociology*
http://www.unice.fr/sg/resources/biblios/biblio_dukes_suggestions_findings.htm
(Accessed 11 June 2007).

Forehand, M. (2005) 'Bloom's taxonomy: Original and revised' In M. Orey (Ed.) *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology*
http://www.coe.uga.edu/epltt/bloom.htm (Accessed 2 July 2007).

McGuire, M.E. (2003) *Environment and Conservation: Japan.*
http://www.askasia.org/frclasrm/lessplan/1000071.htm (Accessed 10 October 2003).

Sloman, J. (2002) *Case Study: the International Trade Game.*
http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase/sloman_game.htm (Accessed 11 June 2007).

Swanson, E. (2005) *About the Goals.* http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/MDG/homePages.doc
(Accessed 14 June 2005).

United Nations Development Programme (2005) *Human Development Report.*
http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004/ (Accessed 15 June 2005).

World Council of Churches (2006) *World Trade Game.*
http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/world_trade.html (Accessed 7 June 2007).

The 'written self': writing and storytelling as a teaching and learning tool for creative and personal development

Naretha Pretorius - Vega: The Brand Communications School, Durban Campus, South Africa

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the purpose of telling our stories within an academic framework, as educators, as students and as 'creatives'. By referring to the creative arts, this paper considers the value of storytelling as a teaching and learning tool. Telling stories through writing, aids the students in finding and developing their voice and 'written self' that allows for reflection and contextualisation of the self. It unpacks how our personal narratives bring a nuanced and more relevant understanding of our own, and our students' social and historical context. It enables us to articulate, document, contextualise and reflect on our creative process, creative practice as well as our creative and personal development.

INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses the benefit of writing and telling our stories as a teaching and learning tool in tertiary education and creative practices. It explores the notion of the 'written self' within various forms of writing, and how this contributes to the understanding and unpacking of our identities. Further to this, the paper explores how telling our stories assists us to contextualise our social and historical background and personal history. It investigates the purpose and meaning of writing as a concept and how this concept promotes various forms of self-expression and self-exploration; providing a platform that encourages self-reflection and reflexivity that enables us to contextualise our 'written selves'. The paper also illustrates how this encourages a greater acceptance and reception to creative writing and with further development, a reception to academic writing.

IDENTIFYING A 'WRITTEN SELF' THROUGH WRITING AND STORYTELLING

Developing an in-depth understanding of my creative practice and examining my identity as a white Afrikaans speaking female who was raised as a conservative Calvinist, is an integral part of my profession as educator and artist. This journey of awareness explores my memories as a method to understand and contextualise my identity, personal history and as a means to understanding the meaning behind my artwork. In this process, writing is employed as a methodology for exploring memories and identity. By writing, I refer to a broader concept of writing; a method of leaving a mark, as a trace or as a text. Writing is a text that communicates through symbols or signifiers that are recognized by the reader; this recognition being dependent on the readers' frame of reference and positioning within a social and literacy context. To understand the notion of writing as a means of communication or as a form of expression, we must consider the various forms it takes such as writing on the landscape (for example the rich history of Stonehenge or act of tracking an animal), writing through architecture (for example the

Taj Mahal palace as a symbol or story of love), writing with words (the linguistic use of text), writing with visuals (referring to moving or still images) and writing with sound (for example music).[1]

This concept of writing and the application of creative and diverse styles or genres of writing such as journals, poetry or narrative is recommended by Creme (2003) as having a positive effect on students. Creme (2003: 275) explains that 'we have found that a different genre sometimes enables them to get to the heart of an issue… they haven't been afraid to play – that is, to make their own mark through their own choice of words, image or structure'. The notion of the 'written self' does not necessarily refer to the 'real self' as a socially constructed identity, but rather as an experience to establish a sense of self, 'an authentic sense of one's own "voice" on the page… and inner presence that has more to do with feeling than thinking… any kind of writing is an opportunity for bringing more of our self to being' (Creme & Hunt, 2002: 152).

Further to this, James (2004) argues that writing about the self and its experiences, creates a 'written self' developing the researcher or students' voice. The act of writing for and about the self, enables the researcher to distance herself from the audience or reader, and allows the writer to consume herself with the subject matter (the self or personal history); this allows the expression of experiences and feelings, drawing on memory and to articulate ideas. Writing for the self allows the personal development to meet academic development if one reflects on the written work and by doing so approaches it from an analytical and critical perspective to contextualise the writing or 'written self'. James (2004: 106) continues to explain that for the creative mind to engage successfully with this process, the participant should create 'something aesthetic or significant in terms of how life experiences are interpreted… at the heart of the creative arts, is the development of a sense of self; one's personal identity or myth, as it relates to the creative practices and persona of the maker'.

To illustrate the notion of the 'written self', I will refer to my presentation at a recent conference for the Independent Afrikaans Examinations Board for private high schools in South Africa where they reviewed the curriculum for Afrikaans as a second language. My role as guest speaker was to inspire educators about the prospect of Afrikaans as a creative language. The presentation addressed the benefit of telling our stories as an educational, self-reflective and creative tool. The purpose of telling my story was to illustrate the ways in which a story can be told, that telling stories is a form of self-expression and self-representation. By applying self-reflection one can then contextualise the story within a particular social and historical context.

The creative process took on four forms of the 'written self':

- The first was a freethinking and intuitive process where I started a free-writing exercise by writing down my life story and memories without restraint. This took the form of the uninhibited and intuitive representation and unfolding of the self.
- The second was to construct a visual narrative of my life story in a PowerPoint presentation. This consisted of family photographs, memorabilia and personal documents and took the form of the self as visual narrative.
- The third was to write my personal narrative in Afrikaans, my mother tongue, relating to the visual presentation by providing a creatively written narrative that was contextualized within a social and historical context. This took the form of the self as Afrikaans expressed in a textual narrative.

---

1   The understanding was illustrated by my supervisor, Profesor Joan Conolly, in a conversation we had on 20 February 2008.

- The fourth and final part was performing as an Afrikaans speaking presenter, presenting my story verbally and visually in Afrikaans to an Afrikaans audience. This took the form of the self as performer and as an Afrikaans-speaking educator presenting to an 'informed' Afrikaans-speaking audience, with a feeling of anxiety about their evaluation and interpretation.

Considering the four identities; the creative and intuitive freethinker, the visual narrator, the contextualised Afrikaans writer and the educated Afrikaans-speaking presenter, illustrates that each 'written self' took on a different form or means of expression. They each had a different role, personality and purpose by taking on a distinct position within the construction and telling of the story, and by that embedded different meanings. Creme & Hunt (2002) compare two genres in writing to demonstrate the notion of the 'written self'. They (2002: 162) explain: 'The writing identity that the writer assumes while writing in a particular genre is also informed by the different models of the person… If the university essay sets up a writing subject as "rational knower", creative writing calls up ideas of the writer as fiction-maker or image-maker'. In the preparation of my presentation, each section required a different mode of thinking and different kind of writing. My identity as writer (or the 'written self') transformed based on the genre or purpose of the narrative.

According to Bamberg (2004: 135), telling stories is a conscious act of constructing the narrative considering the positioning of the characters (the self and others) in space and time and that the act of positioning serves as 'a way to conceptualize the subject's identity as impinged by two forces, one with a person-to-world, the other with a world-to-person direction to fit; the first relying on a notion of the unitary subject as ground, the latter on a subject as determined by outside (mainly social and biological) forces. Making the interactive site of story-telling the empirical ground, where identities come to existence and are interactively displayed.' This act of positioning explains how the four 'written selves' were different characters within the development of the story. Through the telling of our stories we create a sense of self and we develop a concept of the world we live in.

REFLECTING ON THE 'WRITTEN SELF' – CONTEXTUALISATION AND SELF-REFLECTION

The rationale of writing or telling stories is partly to contextualise the 'written self' through reflection and reflexivity, but also to explore different modes of thinking, self-expression and exploration. In this section, I will concentrate on the understanding and purpose of reflection and reflexivity.

The act of reflection enables the individual to find meaning for his/her creations and to provide context for the self and the work created. According to Creme & Hunt (2002), reflexivity is a term that is widely used in social sciences, referring to a greater social awareness of the self and a consciousness of the self's role within the research process. This awareness is to place the researcher within a contextual framework of the research topic by telling her story and that of her research process. Auto/ethnographic studies operate on this principle of inquisitive research with the self as research topic that is investigated within a socio-historical context. Creme & Hunt (2002) refer to Qualley (1997) stressing that reflexivity involves engaging with the 'other'. In this case the authors are referring to the 'written self' as the 'other', and in my case the 'other' as the written or visual piece as it appears on the page, screen, canvas, or as the presenter. Creme & Hunt (2002) take this argument further by explaining that the reflexive engagement requires dialogue with the 'other' that is an internal, meaningful and intimate engagement yet an objective engagement that acknowledges the 'other'. The 'other' is the written word, the work created or the 'written self' that is investigated as 'different' and requires critical and analytical thinking in order to identify, understand and contextualise it.

This 'difference' can be described as taking on a different entity that forms a new text filled with new meaning. This new entity requires the writer or creator to establish a relationship with it and be able to reflect on the creation or 'written self' as something that is separate from the identity of the writer. In Creme & Hunt (2002: 154), Qualley (1997) contrasts the term reflexivity with the commonly used term 'reflection on practice' and describes reflection as 'a more static process; reflection may change behaviour and objects but reflexivity can change persons'. The notion of 'reflection-in-action', which Qualley referred to as 'reflection on practice', is a term developed by Schon (1987) describing it as learning through doing or experience. Such learning is not necessarily an intellectual form of learning, but rather learning through discovery, experiencing a new phenomenon, casual conversations or by making things. Holzwarth & Maurer (2001) considered the terms 'reflective' as well as 'self-reflective'. By 'reflective' they refer to reflecting on the skills and research content learned and by 'self-reflection' they refer to the reflection on self-learning and self-exploration, emotional responses, intuitive thinking and actions, the experiences and realisations about the self during the creative process.

To elaborate on my presentation and the four 'written selves', I will further illustrate the concept of the 'written self' by referring to the content of the presentation by discussing a selection of excerpts. This is to illustrate how a visual narrative that was carefully constructed by myself as the presenter provided the audience with a sense of my identity, my memories and my social and historical background, but also to illustrate the purpose of reflection, and by this I mean the ability to 'read' a 'text' and the ability to contextualise it.

Figure 1

Excerpt from the presentation: Telegram

This is a telegram sent by my Grandmother to my mother when I was born in 1974, in Pretoria, now Tshwane. The decorative use of traditional and indigenous South African fauna and flora is reminiscent of the 'old' South Africa. Although it instills a feeling of nostalgia, it epitomises Afrikaner nationalism and patriotism. Many of these flowers were used in the identities of organizations from the Apartheid era or used as a term or symbol that holds racist connotations. The Barberton Daisy (red flowers, second from top left) was the symbol used for the Blue Bulls (Noord-Transvaal) Rugby team and the Coral tree (red flowers, fourth from the top left) was named the 'Kaffir Boom'; although this refers to its botanical name, the term became expressively racist. The Protea taking the centre position in the telegram becomes a metaphor for its position in a conservative Apartheid South Africa, although known as the national flower, it was also an emblem for the Apartheid era, and almost took its place on the national flag during the ruling of Verwoerd in the 1960s (http://www.fotw.us/Flags/za_old.html).

Figure 2

Excerpt from the presentation:
Portrait of my father's family

Figure 2 is a painting of my father's family. The work is inspired by a photograph taken in the 1960s in front of their house in 'Pretoria-Noord'.[2] The act of tracing the image of my deceased father and his family (with only my aunt still alive) became a therapeutic and meaningful act of recreation, leaving a trace of remembrance behind. It illustrates the exploration of identity by interpreting family photographs through the act of tracing and by attaching personal association and meaning, with reference to own memories and experiences, and creating a new memory by doing so. This act and concept of tracing is significant considering that with the death of an individual, we lose the memories as well.

Figure 3 is a photograph taken in the 1980s of the church council where my father served and acted as an 'Ouderling' (presbyter). The image encapsulates a patriarchal, white Afrikaner, conservative and Calvinistic upbringing, providing the audience with insights into my upbringing as an Afrikaner child and the era in which I grew up.

The reflection and reflexive process requires the same approach of analyses and investigation and an inquisitive search for meaning and context.

Figure 3

Excerpt from the presentation:Portrait of the 'Kerkraad van die Gereformeerde Kerk Kameeldrift' [3]

WRITING AND STORYTELLING AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING TOOL TO PROMOTE CREATIVE AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

I now turn to the connections between storytelling and academic development by looking at the subject Creative Development. Creative Development forms part of the two undergraduate degrees offered at Vega, The Brand Communications School: BA Communications Management specializing in Creative Brand Communications and BA Brand Building and Management. An understanding of the Self is key to the subject, Creative Development. This is because for students to learn how to create for 'others', such as

---

2   A suburb north of Pretoria (Tshwane)

3   The church Council of the Kameeldrift Reformed Church, East of Pretoria (Tshwane), taken in the 1980's. My father is seated in the front row, third from the right.

a client, they must first understand how to create for the Self. This understanding is an encouragement to investigate their identity through an inquisitive journey of self-exploration and self-reflection and to develop a sense of the creative and 'written self' and to understand what inspires and motivates them; in other words, for the students to understand their 'muse'. Telling our stories contributes to this understanding; it allows students to express and explore their life stories, their personal histories and upbringing that form the very core of their being. It is interesting to consider that the Muse, in Greek mythology, was one of the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory who inspired and presided over the various creative arts.

James (2007: 107) once asked whether one should include an auto/biographical element to our personal and creative development and answered her question by saying: 'the most basic answer is that students already use autobiographical material in their assignments… doing so has helped them clarify the values and beliefs that drive their understanding'. Snyman (2000) offers further insight to the use of personal narrative by saying that: 'the driving force behind creative efforts, however, is inner motivation. Creators are involved in an activity for its own sake, not for school grades or paychecks… accessing and understanding this "inner motivation" seems to be so closely related to the personality's self image, confidence and entire personal history and circumstances…'

Fischer & Goblirsch (2006: 29) write that '[B]iographical narrations are accounts of experiences important to the person's development and to self-understanding'. They consist of small talk on an everyday basis and discussions with our friends and family about our lives. This allows us to reconstruct our biographical memories and experiences through interaction and in the form of telling our stories (written, visual or verbal narration or dialogue). Having conversations with our parents or guardians provides us with the preservation of our autobiographical memories, allowing us to preserve our memories over time.

Further to this, encouraging students to tell their stories will create interest in listening to the stories of others. Telling our stories enriches the history of the human race; it not only serves as a healing and reflexive process, but also provides a nuanced and deeper meaning to our lives and our history. Besides promoting students in telling their stories, we must encourage them to express them in any form they feel suitable. This is to encourage free and creative thinking and to instill an aspiration to explore new ideas, forms of expression and creative solutions. Students tell their stories through the myriad of works they create; be it in a free-writing exercise, in their artwork or designs, the doodles and seemingly non-relevant scribbles in their process books, as a performance piece, an audio-visual presentation, as an activist campaign, or as a creative writing piece.

In Creative Development we promote self-investigation, self-actualization and self-reflection as an integral part of the students' creative process, as well as creative and personal development. These serve as the core to their academic and practical development in the degree programme. James (2004: 105) draws on Cough (2003) to describe personal development planning as: '…improving student outcomes in terms of attainment and styles of learning as transferable skills across different academic and practice contexts, and personal skills of self-esteem, awareness and life planning'. She continues to explain that the personal or creative development process takes shape in various forms and that the reflection of one's development and the documentation thereof can be done in a logbook, sketchpad, diary, notebook, as self-assessment and in the form of a critique (James, 2004: 105). For each project, the students are required to keep a process book where all thoughts, ideas and references are documented; this book is for their own use and is not for assessment purposes. The process book assists them in the management of their creative process and serves as a reference that documents their transformation. It is useful to refer to previous ideas for new projects and to revisit their creative process and be able to reflect on it.

We have developed the concept of a Process Pathway to assist students in their self-reflection process. The Process Pathway requires students to reflect critically on their actions, their methodology, their process and the work they created. It encourages documentation of their development and provides a platform for them to articulate, contextualise and reflect on their creative and personal development. The Process Pathway proved to be a helpful tool for both learner and lecturer. The former enables students to reflect on their development and knowledge gained, creates a sense of self and self-empowerment, provides a platform to engage critically with their work and the context in which it was created, and encourages self-motivation and self-criticism. In contrast, the latter provides the lecturer with insights into the students' thinking, methodology and response to the project. Although the Process Pathway is submitted with the final work, it is not assessed, as it is believed that this will inhibit the student's thinking by becoming too focused on the structure and whether they do it 'right' or 'wrong'. The motivation for doing this should ultimately be intrinsic rather than extrinsic; Dineen *et al.* (2005) refer to the work of Hill (1991) and Talbot (1993) in suggesting that intrinsic motivation (self-motivation) is critical to achieve creative outcomes, whereas extrinsic motivation such as a test or assessment could hinder it. An informal style of writing, by allowing and encouraging students to articulate their thought processes, their ideas, their self-evaluation and self-reflection in a form like this, acclimatizes them to the idea of writing and ultimately prepares them for the demanding world of academia that is focused on the written word.

Introducing these various styles of writing and creative platforms, allow the students to explore and identify and develop their 'written selves', and by doing that, allow them to explore their identity and sense of self. Such exploration opens up opportunities for the students to engage with their academic, creative and personal development.

CONCLUSION

Writing and telling our stories are key elements to the understanding and examining of our identities, our social and historical background and personal history. Encouraging students to tell their stories also encourages various forms of self-expression and self-exploration. It also provides a platform that encourages self-reflection and reflexivity and which enables them to contextualise their 'written selves' and 'creative selves'. By doing this, greater self awareness and self actualization are created. As a teaching and learning tool, this will also encourage a greater acceptance and reception to creative writing, and with more experience, to academic writing. By understanding the concept of the 'written self', the students can become independent in their learning process by taking ownership of their creative and personal development.

REFERENCES

Bamberg, M. (2004) 'Positioning with Davie Hogan – Stories, Tellings and Identities' In C. Daiute & C. Lightfoot (Eds.), *Narrative analysis: Studying the development of individuals in society.* London: Sage pp.135-157.

Crème, P. (2003) 'Why can't we allow students to be more creative?' *Teaching in Higher Education* 8(2) pp.273-277.

Crème, P. & Hunt, C. (2002) 'Creative Participation in the Essay Writing Process' *The Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 1(2) pp.145-166.

Dineen, R., Samuel, E. & Livesey, K. (2005) 'The promotion of creativity in learners: theory and practice' *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education* 4(3) pp.155-172.

Fischer, W. & Goblirsch, M. (2006) 'Biographical structuring: Narrating and reconstructing the self in research and professional practice' In W. Fischer & M. Goblirsch (Eds.), *Narrative Inquiry* Germany: John Benjamins Publishing Company pp.28-36.

Holzwarth, P. & Maurer, B. (2001) 'Aesthetic Creativity, Reflexivity, and the Play with Meaning: a Video Culture Case Study' *Journal of Educational Media* 26(3) pp.185-202.

James, A. (2004) 'Autobiography and narrative in personal development planning in creative arts' *Art Design & Communication in Higher Education Journal* 3(2) pp.103-118.

Schon, D. (1987) *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* http://educ.queensu.ca/~ar/schon87.htm (Accessed 4 February 2008).

Snyman, A. (2000) Bluebeard's Key: *Investigating and Facilitating the Creative Process.* http://www.annisynman.co.za/content/artGallery/writBluBrd00.htm

Exploring the use of WebCT6 to provide Online HIV/AIDS related voluntary counselling and care at the Durban University of Technology

Gita Mistri - Durban University of Technology, South Africa

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the viability of offering an entry level HIV/AIDS related online counselling service in terms of design, utility and technological resources at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) situated in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It examines the possibility of adapting learning management software viz. Blackboard/WebCT6 to facilitate online counselling that assures confidentiality and anonymity to staff and students at DUT. As a feasibility study, the findings have added credibility to the idea that providing a private discussion space with a qualified online counsellor, could contribute towards transformation and behaviour change with regard to sexual behaviour patterns amongst the staff and students at DUT. The need for privacy and convenience in requesting assistance on HIV/AIDS related concerns that are difficult to share in public for fear of rejection and stigma has been reiterated. An online counselling service that would address this need seems worth the investment in human and technological resources particularly when confronted by the enormity of the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on higher education institutions.

INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings in designing and offering an entry level HIV/AIDS related online counselling service that assures confidential and anonymous access. It explores the viability of such a project, in terms of design, utility and technological resources at the Durban University of Technology (DUT).

THE CONCEPT

The idea originated whilst discussing the various ways in which the online environment deals with the shortcomings of not having face-to-face contact between learners and educator. This 'apparent shortcoming' could be utilized to our benefit by answering the need for anonymity in first stage counselling for pre-HIV/AIDS testing.

Facilitating anonymity in the online environment would encourage people to participate in text-based online counselling regarding HIV/AIDS testing. This would provide an opportunity for discussion to take place regarding the fear of being tested, overcoming this fear through sharing of knowledge, information, experience and counselling done by counsellors trained to do counselling online.

Frank and reliable discussion may also assist in countering the HIV/AIDS-related stigma which affects self-esteem, mental health, access to care, providers' willingness to treat people with HIV, violence, and HIV incidence. Interventions to reduce stigma are therefore crucial for improving care, quality of life, and emotional health for people living with HIV and AIDS (Klein, Karchner & O'Connell, 2002).

THE HEAIDS STRATEGY

It was at a presentation to the staff at the Centre for Higher Education Development by a member of DUT's Student Counselling and Health Centre on the Higher Education HIV/AIDS (HEAIDS) strategy that I learned of the Higher Education sector being disproportionately more affected by the pandemic than other sectors of the community. This is because the majority of those studying and working within the Higher Education sector are in the age group with the highest prevalence of HIV infection.

> More than 50% of the world's 14,000 new infections every day occur among 15- to 24-year-olds. The risks for a Higher Education Institution (HEI) are also heightened by the liberal atmosphere that tends to be characteristic of HE campus cultures which may be open to activities and life-styles that facilitate HIV transmission(HESA: 2006).

At DUT, we have acknowledged:

- the fear of stigmatisation, rejection and isolation as the key obstacle in the provision of face-to-face (FtF) voluntary counselling to the DUT community
- the need for more information on HIV/AIDS, Voluntary Counselling and Testing, Anti Retro-Viral Therapy; particularly related to Higher Education Institutions (HEI)
- that there are few well utilized initiatives, e.g. face-to-face counselling, on campus to motivate behaviour change that is essential in the prevention of HIV/AIDS, particularly due to the fear of stigmatization and rejection
- that there is inadequate time on campus to attend to issues regarding personal health and well being. This is a common issue with academic and non-academic staff as well as students.

The online environment provides an opportunity for communication to take place without the need for identifying oneself. To avoid incurring additional costs related to the purchase of new software, it would be worth exploring whether it is possible to adapt a learning management programme, viz. Blackboard/ WebCT 6 to create an online counselling facility that assures confidentiality and anonymity to staff and students at DUT seeking entry level HIV/AIDS related counselling online.

It is envisaged that the iSineke[1] Project (a title for the proposed online counselling facility), would provide an opportunity for effective information sharing and counselling, and would be facilitated by the excitement with which online technology is embraced by this particular age group.

THEORY

Anderson & Goolishian (1992) describe counselling as the creation of a conversational safe space where there is a consensual domain. This is where the counsellor and client can share some meanings and realities around a problem. By comparison, online counselling, according to Mallen & Vogel (2005: 764) comprises 'any delivery of mental and behavioural health services, including but not limited to therapy,

---

1   *iSineke:* a term borrowed from isiZulu meaning caring and patience.

consultation, and psycho education, by a licensed practitioner to a client in a non-FtF setting through distance communication technologies such as the telephone, asynchronous e-mail, synchronous chat, and videoconferencing'.

Although controversy has emerged regarding the effective duplication of this personal interaction in a virtual environment, Ybarra, Kiwanuka, Emenyonu & Bunsberg (2006: 1) have shown the internet to be 'a powerful, low cost method to deliver health intervention and prevention programmes to large numbers of young people across diverse geographic regions.' In the light of the above and faced with the urgent need for HIV/AIDS related pre-test counselling one cannot ignore the opportunity presented by online counselling. Already, Uys and Magowe (2002), have introduced open discussion, information-sharing and entry-level counselling on HIV/AIDS by using public Web-based threaded message boards as anonymous Q&A forums for an expert to answer questions posed by staff and students on HIV/AIDS at the University of Botswana. Their findings support the use of electronic media as an effective mode of information dissemination on HIV/AIDS, particularly when contextualised within the culture of the people using these facilities.

Mbananga & Becker (2002) in a study on the use of technology in reproductive health information designed for communities in South Africa, identified a fundamental problem which underlies the development of Reproductive Health Information (RHI). They found that vision and cognitive processes are separated from the cultural, environmental and socio-economic status of the individuals targeted by this type of information. Hence, they caution the need to develop a close relationship between the developers of visual materials and the consumers of such material for them to be meaningful. These findings reinforce the supplemental need for online one-on-one communication allowing clarification and questioning between counsellor and client.

Although the planned intervention proposed in this paper is one of providing the DUT community with a private space online to discuss HIV/AIDS related concerns, it is believed that there is a need for both open and private dialogue. The provision of a separate and safe space to enable both to occur would be advantageous. The wider aim of the iSineke project is to provide an online space for both private and public discussion and information sharing on HIV/AIDS. In doing so, it acknowledges the role of both the public and the private space.

The debate regarding open versus private online dialogue is informed by existing theory. The contrast is between, on the one hand, the 'public sphere' (Habermas, 1989; Fraser, 1990) where one is interacting with others and with society at large and on the other hand, the 'private sphere' (Gorner, 2007; Vincent, 2004; Keller, 1999) where one can be one's authentic self and realize the importance of the self. The self's relation to the world is grounded in self-reflection and introspection, as explained in Kierkegaard's existentialist philosophy (McDonald, 2004).

Postmodernists view knowledge and learning from the perspective of power and emancipation. Mallen & Vogel (2005) suggest that clients may find voluntary participation in online counselling empowering. By comparison, Inglis (1997) asserts that empowerment and emancipation are two different things. Empowerment means that people find strategies to 'exist within the existing system and structures of power', whereas emancipation involves 'resisting and challenging structures of power'. Heeding this, the iSineke project proposes to empower by providing a space for impersonal information sharing on HIV/AIDS related issues, using the public online space. The online private space, by assuring user anonymity, would allow for personal and sensitive sharing between qualified online counsellor and client.

With reference to current research on HIV/AIDS Education, Elbaz (1997), also a postmodernist, believes that learning happens when people deconstruct knowledge. His first approach is focused on the individual,

testing the ability to learn from scientific material and to apply this knowledge with resulting behaviour transformation that prevents HIV infection. His second approach adopts a social orientation by looking at economic and cultural variables that may facilitate or block the individual from understanding the mechanics of HIV transmission and thus may affect their capacity to prevent HIV transmission. Elbaz promotes an HIV/AIDS programme that functions at a multisystem level, which includes both the 'identity' focused paradigm as well as 'resource' focused, social, familial and education processes.

By comparison, constructivists like Mezirow (2000), Cranton (1994) and Baumgartner (2002) believe that learning is a search for meaning. Knowledge is not simply 'out there' to be attained; it is constructed by the learner. Learning is achieved through assimilation and accommodation. People assimilate information when they add it to an existing cognitive structure, whereas accommodation is the process of reframing one's mental representation of the external world to fit new experiences.

Although Mezirow's cognitive approach to transformative learning has been criticized for an over reliance on the individual experience without looking at the influence of societal structures in the transformative learning process, it emphasizes the effect of critically reflecting on beliefs and engaging in 'reflective discourse' in order to arrive at a perspective transformation or change in world view. He proposes that individual transformation leads to social transformation.

Using Mezirow's 10 step transformational learning process (2000), the diagnosis of seropositivity could be the first step, the 'disorienting dilemma', which could lead to feelings of fear, anger, guilt and shame. This would then be followed by a critical assessment of the assumptions one holds about life and the world. The next stage is the discovery that others have gone through what they themselves are feeling. This may be a result of sharing with others (online or face-to-face) and leads to the re-determining of roles, reviewing action plans, seeking new and related information. This would lead to the adoption of a new role and the reintegration and acceptance of the reality that is their own. Mezirow believes that accommodation requires that the cognitive structure needs to be created anew or completely reorganized. Mezirow's Perspective Transformation and transformational learning is characterized by 'a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world' (Morrell & O'Connor, 2002: xviii). Through exploring the transformation of behaviour patterns amongst young adults at DUT, it may be possible to use online counselling and information sharing to foster change, beyond entrenched patterns of thought regarding HIV infection.

The following questions emerged whilst reflecting on the assumptions made regarding the provision of online counselling at DUT. Would it be fair to assume that the users of online counselling have access to technology, are comfortable with online communication (Giannini-Gachago, Molelu & Uys 2005; Masters & Oberprieler, 2003), and are able to express their feelings and ideas in text format and are not intimidated by the online interaction? This concern is one of the classic 'digital divide', a term that describes the differential access to the internet and related to technologies because of financial and socio-economic issues (Hoffman, Novak & Schlosser, 2001).

Similar issues were explored in a qualitative study with five research participants on their experiences of online counselling (Haberstroh, Duffy, Evans, Gee, & Trepal, 2007). In particular, the effectiveness of online counselling in relation to the degree to which individuals were comfortable with the use of technology and communicating via e-mail and chat rooms was examined. From the findings of Haberstroh *et al.* (2007), and Wright & Chung (2001), it was encouraging to note that interacting online alleviated pressures to respond quickly and served as a less threatening outlet for sharing embarrassing topics. This factor would be most beneficial in addressing sensitive issues in entry level HIV/AIDS related pre-test counselling. In addition, Haberstroh *et al.* (2007) and Patrick (2004) show that online counselling offers

a unique forum for written interaction between a professional and client that can focus on the cognitive and emotional qualities of clinical issues. This would be a critical factor in consolidating the 'therapeutic alliance' (Mallen & Vogel, 2005) between therapist and client in computer mediated counselling (CMC). It must be noted, however, that in examining the dynamics of the online relationship some participants found the missing interpersonal cues limited their self expression and level of trust. For some the slower pace of the sessions seemed to encourage deeper reflection whilst for others the slower pace appeared tedious and hampered self disclosure.

Although the online intervention proposed in this paper assures anonymity of the client, information regarding the identity, education, certification and contact details of the online counsellor/s would be available to the client as required by ethical considerations of the practice of online counselling. The International Society for Mental Health Online (ISMHO, 2000, online) specifies 'The client should be informed before he or she consents to receive online mental health services. In particular, the client should be informed about the process, the counsellor, the potential risks and benefits of those services, safeguards against those risks, and alternatives to those services.' Hence, as part of the counselling orientation process, the counsellor would explain to the client the procedures for contacting the counsellor when he or she is off-line and how often e-mail messages will be checked by the counsellor. In addition, the counsellor would be required to discuss alternative modes of communication in the event of technology failure, e.g., provision of the local crisis hotline telephone number.

METHOD

For this study, action research, particularly participatory action research, is the method of choice because the research is done *with* and *for* the community of DUT, where the research is done in *partnership* with the community to achieve the change in behaviour and attitude toward HIV/AIDS.

According to Seymour-Rolls & Hughes (1995) Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a method of research where creating a positive social change is the predominant driving force. Research using PAR as its method will happen in the four moments of action research, namely reflection, planning, action and observation. These research moments exist interdependently and follow each other in a spiral or cycle.

Figure 1
Simple Action Research Model
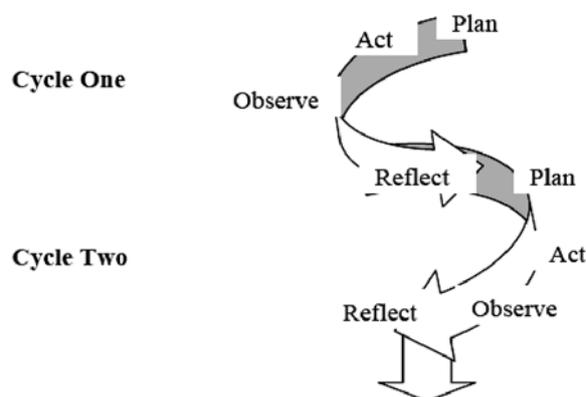
(adapted from MacIsaac, 1995)

McTaggart (1989) holds that participatory action research is *collaborative*: those responsible for action are involved in improving it. It *starts small* by working on minor changes which individuals can manage and control, and works towards more extensive patterns of change. Guided by this, the first action research cycle was done with six academic staff members at DUT who were familiar with the online environment. Data were collected from them regarding ease of access and the facilitation of anonymity online. Reflecting on this cycle, the need for meticulously planned and precise instructions that were easy to understand and follow became clear.

Adjustments were made for the second cycle, and six participants who were unfamiliar with the online environment were included in this process. The data collected revealed further shortcomings and supporting visuals were added to the instructions to facilitate ease of access.

Through the cycles of action research it has become evident that action and reflection are indissolubly united. This experience has reaffirmed Freire's (1972: 41) concept of praxis, 'reflection without action is sheer verbalism or armchair revolution and action without reflection is pure activism or action for action's sake'. Reflection and action can be done with a planned purpose that is linked to transformation.

This is reaffirmed by McTaggart (1989) in his 16 Tenets of Action Research, who refers to participatory action research *as a systematic learning process* in which people act deliberately through remaining open to surprise and responsive to opportunities. It is a process of using *critical* intelligence to inform action, and developing it so that social action becomes praxis (critically informed, committed action).

REFLECTING ON THE PROCESS AND PROCEDURE

The first intervention was to establish an online counselling space adapting the Blackboard Learning Management System to accommodate online counselling. The course, titled 'iSineke', was registered with the system administrator. The helpdesk administrator was required to be particularly mindful of the process to ensure anonymity. (The task of facilitating anonymity online was an intriguing challenge.)

The larger hurdle was that of establishing initial contact without necessitating identification, especially for the process of enrolment. The first suggestion, from an online facilitator at DUT was that of adjusting the WebCT6 software programme, with scripting using application protocol interface. This was considered unfeasible from the perspective of complexity and cost.

The second suggestion was to station a box in a suitable place in which the 'student'-cum-client could place a secret password (which would serve as the username). This would facilitate registration into the 'short course' serving as online counselling space. However, this suggestion had the same inherent flaw as the FtF counselling, i.e. it did not address the fear of being recognised to be requesting HIV/AIDS related counselling.

The making available of a cellular telephone number to the DUT community to send their secret username/ password to the helpdesk administrator via the Short Message Service (SMS), proved to be the ideal solution ensuring the anonymity of the client from the first encounter. The procedure which assured anonymity was explained to the prospective client in the marketing campaign. A simple and clear set of instructions was developed to facilitate registration and online accessing, in two stages (Annexure 1).

The Discussion tool in WebCT 6 (Annexure 2A) using the Journal topic provides the 'student'-cum-client with an individual space for his/her own writing. The Learning Management System offers the option to allow the client to keep his/her journal private between the client and the 'section instructor'-cum-client. This proved to be useful, as the online counsellor had a record of the counselling interaction that took place

via the journal entries (identified by the pseudonym), thus ensuring the anonymity whilst simultaneously being able to maintain a sequenced counselling interaction (Annexure 2B, printed with permission of 'pseudo' client).

OBTAINING FEEDBACK FROM RESPONDENTS

The first phase of data collection was done using a questionnaire within a week of online interaction. The questionnaire (Annexure 3) was designed to be administered on paper to prevent an inherent bias in favour of those familiar with the online environment. Of the 12 members of the sample, mixed in age and gender, six were unfamiliar with, and four were conversant with the online environment. The evaluation was done on two levels. The first section in the evaluation sheet focused on the measurement of the ease with which the client was able to access the online counselling service and establish communication. The second section measured their individual reactions to online communication.

FINDINGS

The participants found it easy to send the password via SMS. However, the second set of instructions to access the online journal required attention to detail and three participants did not remember to use the original password as their username when asked to log in again after being prompted to change their password.

One participant did not feel comfortable with the written assurance regarding the privacy and anonymity of the communication. Three participants were pleased that they could communicate online to a counsellor without having to make an appointment. It has been noted that five of the six participants were dissatisfied with the asynchronous communication and found the 24 hour wait too long.

It was reassuring to note that only one participant felt unsafe to discuss his/her concerns online. Two participants were unsure whether they preferred the anonymous online space to FtF counselling. Four participants preferred to communicate anonymously online rather than discuss their concerns on the telephone. Two participants found it difficult to communicate in text.

The second phase consisted of an interview with two participants. The questions dealt with:

(a) technical obstacles
(b) reflections on the counselling process
(c) relating in a nonverbal environment
(d) having to wait for a reply
(e) the convenience of online counselling.

The first participant, unfamiliar with the online environment, mentioned that it was 'frustrating' and 'tedious' to log in and not succeed 'time and time again'. He suggested that 'It would be good to arrange with the counsellor to be online at the same time'. He did mention that he 'like(d) the idea of being able to ask potentially embarrassing questions without feeling exposed', although he believed that 'the dialogue would be affected by the lack of verbal and visual feedback'.

The second participant, familiar with the online space, said 'I found it easier to express myself clearly as I could read my reply and add to it or change it, but how do I know that I can trust this online counsellor?' She also suggested that it would be 'advisable to include an emergency contact number'.

Both interview participants mentioned that although they appreciated the convenience of being able to post an online message at any time of the day, they did not like to wait ('too long') for the reply.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study are limited to the design and viability of the provision of an online service to discuss HIV/AIDS related issues, one-on-one between anonymous client and online counsellor. Based on the findings of the current feasibility study it has become evident that further investigation into DUT staff and student reactions from a randomized and larger sample would be essential to extrapolate on current findings. Further research, perhaps a 'before and after trial', would also be necessary to confirm reliability, validity and effectiveness of an online counselling service for the DUT community.

The data collected from the questionnaire and the interviews indicate that it would be erroneous to assume that

- the majority of the DUT community would be at ease with text based online communication on HIV/AIDS related matters
- the asynchronous delayed communication would not be a serious deterrent
- most people are not reliant on visual and verbal cues to facilitate communication
- people would automatically trust the online counsellor.

Hence, for the next round of implementation, (i) with regard to ease of access and technical obstacles:

- It would be imperative to supplement the short message service (SMS) based information provided to possible clients to gain access to the online counselling space. This could be done concurrently with the marketing of the online counselling service, with relevant information included in paper fliers, e.g., instructions to log in, with recognisable graphics.
- The instructions would be amended to include written instructions supported by visual cues like 'REMEMBER to use your original password as your username'. It was found that this particular step was frequently not followed and led to log in failure.

(ii) With regard to improving familiarity and comfort with text based communication, the following should be considered:

- Additional opportunities for online text based communication with non-threatening issues that can be shared in the iSineke online counselling service (for example, using the chat tool), should be included to improve levels of familiarity and comfort with text based communication.
- Encouraging academic staff to increase computer based instruction and coursework delivery via blended learning, as well as student-to-student online interaction via e-mail and other text based communication networks.

(iii) With regard to the ethics of online counselling and the establishment of a trust based online counselling relationship, it is suggested that

- Detailed explanation on the online counselling process and procedure is provided.
- Information on the qualification and certification of online counsellor/s is made available.
- The risks and benefits of the online counselling process is explained and ways of protecting oneself against these potential risks are provided.
- An existing emergency contact number, with a helpline (e.g. Lifeline), should online contact be unavailable, is provided. This may be included in the marketing of the online counselling service.

- Media facilities available at the DUT campus are used, e.g. *The Conduit* (a biweekly campus newspaper) and the DUT website to introduce the online counsellors and thereby facilitate trust building between client and online counsellor/s.

(iv) With regard to enhancing the convenience of online counselling and specifically the 'wait period' in asynchronous online counselling:

- Information needs to be provided with regard to the likely 'wait period' between online counsellor and client communication would be essential. The possibility of arranging specific times for synchronous communication via the online journal could be suggested to the online counsellors as an option.

The first two cycles of the study have been focused on the design and technological facilitation of the online counselling service. Thus far it has been an online adventure, a journey of discovery exploring uncharted territory. The use of action research has revealed the possible strengths and weaknesses in the design with new cycles to be commenced with refined attempts to improve the design and implementation. The responses from the 'clients' have added credibility to the idea of providing a private discussion space with a qualified online counsellor to facilitate transformation and behaviour change with regard to sexual behaviour patterns. The need for privacy and convenience in requesting assistance on HIV/AIDS concerns that are difficult to share in public for fear of rejection and stigma is undeniable. The opportunity provided by an online counselling service assuring the user anonymity is encouraging, especially when confronted by the enormity of the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on higher education institutions.

REFERENCES

Anderson, H. & Goolishian, H. (1992) 'The client is the expert: A not-knowing approach to therapy' In S. McNamee; K. Gergen (Eds.) *Social Construction and the Therapeutic Process.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Baumgartner, L.M. (2002) 'Living and Learning with HIV/AIDS: Transformational Tales Continued' *Adult Education Quarterly* 53(1) November pp.44-59.

Cranton, P. (1994) *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults.* San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

Elbaz, G. (1997) 'Adolescent Activism for Postmodern HIV/AIDS Education: A New Social Movement' *The Urban Review* 29(3) pp.145-174 www.springerlink.com/index/V86756042K4186T6.pdf (Accessed 27 October 2007).

Fraser, N. (1990) 'Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy' *Social Text* 24 (26) pp.56-80.

Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Giannini- Gachago, D., Molelu, G.B. & Uys, P.M. (2005) 'Facts, figures and experiences with the introduction of e-Learning in a higher education institution in developing environments - the case of the University of Botswana' *Lonaka Bulletin,* Centre for Academic Development, University of Botswana http://www.scieng.ed.ac.uk/ltstrateg/danielaresearch.html (Accessed 27 October 2007).

Gorner, P. (2007) 'An Introduction to Heidegger's "Being and Time"' Cambridge Series: *Introductions to Key Philosophical Texts.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962). (Trans. T. Burger). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Haberstroh, S., Duffy, T., Evans, M., Gee, R. & Trepal, H. (2007) 'The experience of online counseling' *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The experience of onlinecounseling.-a0166850288 (Accessed 3 November 2007).

Higher Education South Africa. (2006) *HEAIDS-strategic framework 2006-2009.* Pretoria: HESA.

Hoffman, D., Novak, T.P. & Schlosser, A.E. (2001) 'The Evolution of the Digital Divide: Examining the Relationship of Race to Internet Access and Usage over Time' In B. M. Compaine (Ed.), *The Digital Divide: Facing a Crisis or Creating a Myth?* Cambridge: MIT (pp.47-97).

Inglis, T. (1997) 'Empowerment and Emancipation' *Adult Education Quarterly* 48(1) pp.3-17.

ISMHO. (2000) *Suggested Principles for the Online Provision of Mental Health Services* http://www.ismho.org/suggestions.html (Accessed 27 October 2007).

Keller, P. (1999) *Husserl and Heidegger on Human Experience.* Cambridge: MIT.

Klein, S. J., Karchner, W. D. & O'Connell, D. A. (2002) 'Interventions to prevent HIV-related stigma and discrimination: findings and recommendations for public health practice' *Journal of Public Health Management Practice* 8(6) pp.44-53 http://www.aapcho.org/.../aapcho/PublicationsactSheets/CHAMPSResourceGuide/Element3ChampsResourceGuide (Accessed 27 October 2007).

MacIsaac, D. (1995) *An Introduction to Action Research.* Unpublished manuscript http://physics.purdue.edu/~danmac/actionrsch.htm (Accessed 25 October 2007).

Mallen, M.J. & Vogel, D.L. (2005) 'Introduction to the Major Contribution: Counseling Psychology and Online Counseling' *The Counseling Psychologist* 33:761 http://tcp.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/33/6/761 (Accessed 11 November 2007).

Masters, K. & Oberprieler, G. (2004) 'Encouraging equitable online participation through curriculum articulation' *Computers and Education* 42(4) pp.319-332 http://www.sciencedirect.com/science (Accessed 21 October 2007).

Mbananga, N. & Becker, P. (2002) 'Use of Technology in Reproductive Health Information Designed for Communities in South Africa' *Health Education Research* 17 pp.195-209.

McDonald, W. (2004) 'Soren Kierkegaard' In E. N. Zalta (Ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2004) http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2004/entries/kierkegaard-judgement/ (Accessed 3 November 2007).

McTaggart, R. (1989) '16 Tenets of Participatory Action Research' *An Overview of the Methodological Approach of Action Research* http://wwwcarbon.cudenver.edu/~mryder/itc/act res.html (Accessed 3 November 2007).

Mezirow, J. (2000). 'Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts Of Transformation Theory' In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.) *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress.* San Fransisco, CA: Jossey-Bass pp.3-34.

Morrel, A., & O'Connor, M. A. (2002) 'Introduction' In Sullivan, Morrel, and O'Connor (Eds.) *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning: Essays on Theory and Praxis.* New York. Palgrave pp. xv-xx.

Patrick, P.K.S. (2004) 'Online education: Making the impossible possible' *Social Work Today* 4(9).

Seymour-Rolls, K. & Hughes, I. (1995) *Participatory Action Research Getting the Job Done* http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arr/arow/rseymour.html (Accessed 2 November 2007).

Uys, P. M. & Magowe, M.K.M. (2002) Poster. *Breaking the silence Online: Using Web-Based threaded message boards at the University of Botswana as anonymous Q&A forums for open discussion and entry level counseling on HIV/AIDS.* XIV World AIDS Conference, July 7-12, 2002. Barcelona, Spain http://www.globe-online.com/Philip.uys/200207uyshivaidsboardsatUB.htm (Accessed 31 October 2007).

Vincent, A. (2004) *The Nature of Political Theory.* London: Oxford University Press.

Wright, J. & Chung, M. C. (2001) 'Mastery or Mystery? Therapeutic Writing: A review of the literature' *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 29 pp.277-291.

Ybarra, M. L., Kiwanuka, J., Emenyonu, N. & Bangsberg, DR. (2006) 'Internet use among Ugandan adolescents: Implications for HIV Intervention' *PLoS Medicine* 3(11) www.e433doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.0030433.

ANNEXURE 1

Instructions provided using the Short Message Service (SMS) to gain access to the online counselling service.

The first stage for the client would be to SMS a secret password to the helpdesk administrator. The username would also serve as the initial password. The process for accessing the online counselling space would then follow as a reply to the client via the SMS facility, and would also be included on the DUT website, which would allow for images to support the instructions e.g.

step one   : after 24 hours, go to http://edtech.dut.ac.za

step two   : Click on My Blackboard

step three   : to log in use your the same password that you have sent to me via SMS as both your password and username.

step four   : you will be requested to change your password.

step five   : you will then be requested to log in again.

step six   : Remember to use your original password as

                        your username and type in your new password to log in.

step seven   : In My Blackboard, in the Course List, click into the **iSineke** course
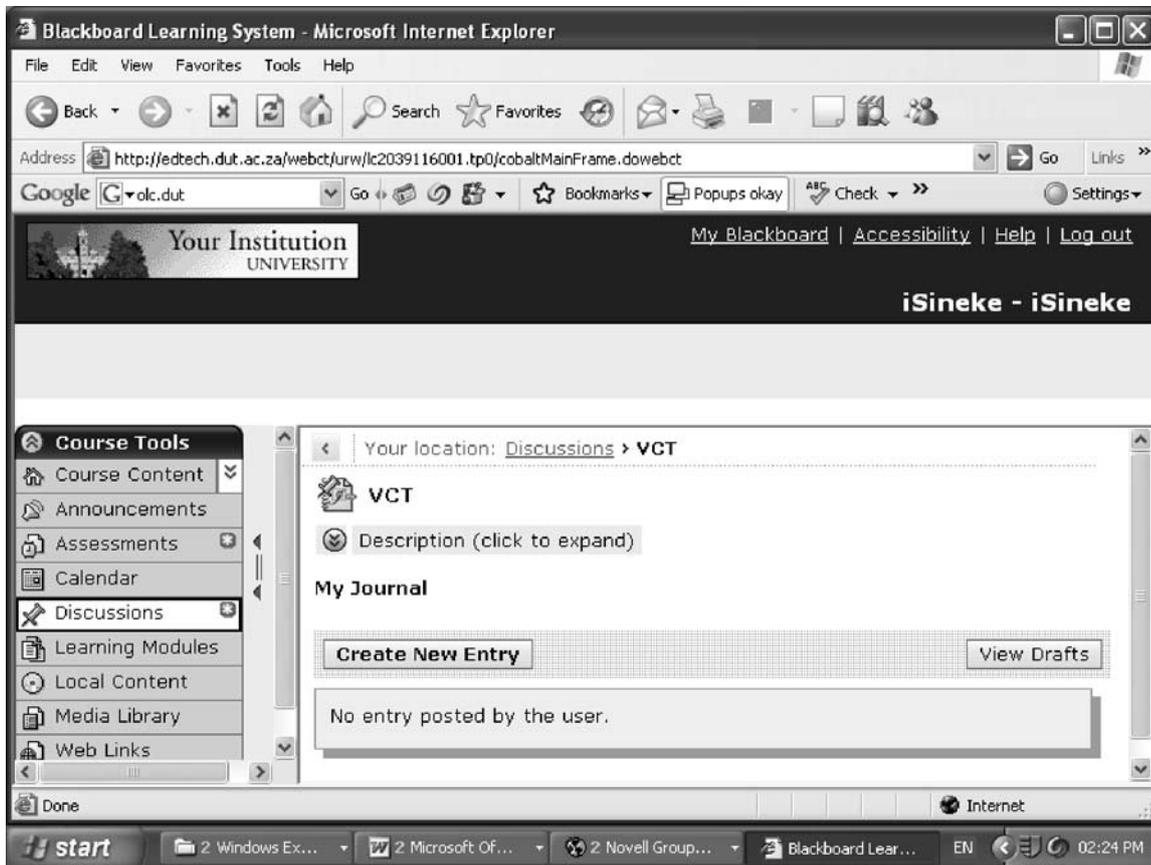
step eight   : In the Course Tools drop down menu, click the discussion tool 🖉

step nine   : In the discussion window, click on **VCT** 📝

step ten   : In the VCT window, click on the **create new entry** button to create your new entry in **My Journal.**

The VCT window with instructions to create a new entry in My Journal

An example of an online interaction

Subject:
December is
AIDS   Date: 20 November 2007 13:49
AWARENESS
MONTH

Knowing that December 1 is a **World Aids Day** and the whole month is dedicated to **Aids awareness,** my question is *how is government going to convince people to use condoms after what happened when millions of condom had to be returned?*

What if a person has been using those condoms thinking that S/HE is protected only to find that s/he was the same as the person who was not using protection?

How can we be sure that , the condoms that government is distributing now are safe to be used?

Just a concern !!!

Kayb30

Comments

Subject: December is AIDS AWARENESS MONTH

Create Comment

1   **Author:** Gitanjali Mistri

Date: 20 November 2007 14:30

Hi kayb30

I too am concerned about the reliability of the condoms. I have read in the press that the damaged condoms (government provided) have been recalled but it has already done untold damage to the prevention drive.

2   **Author:** kayb30 kayb30

Date: 20 November 2007 14:39

But still prevention is better than cure, so 1 can just hope that the commercial condoms are the way to go. in fact **abstinence is the cure**

3   **Author:** Gitanjali Mistri

Date: 21 November 2007 14:28

Yup! I agree. One partner relationships should be promoted as well, don't you think?

Section 1 : Access	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The online counselling facility was well advertised					
The anonymity and privacy of the online interaction was clear and easy to understand.					
It was easy to send my password via SMS and					
It was easy to follow the SMS instructions to access the online journal					
The fact that the online counsellor would post an online reply to me within 24 hours was well explained.					
It's convenient to communicate online without having to make an appointment.					
Additional comments:					

Section 2 : Communication Preferences	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel safe in the online space to discuss my concerns					
I prefer to meet with a counsellor face to face					
I prefer to discuss my concerns with a counsellor on the telephone					
I prefer to send an e-mail to the counsellor who would know my name and identity.					
I prefer to remain anonymous and communicate in text					
I don't like having to wait for a reply					
Additional Comments:					

Notes for Contributors

Manuscripts should be sent to the Editor. They should be typed in double space, in A4 format, in MS Word and should not exceed 5000 words in length, excluding tables, figures and references. Manuscripts may be submitted by e-mail or on a CD. Tables and figures must be typed on separate sheets and not included as part of the text. Their positions should be indicated in the manuscript. They should be numbered by Arabic numerals. Each manuscript should be accompanied by a title page and an Abstract of 100-150 words on a separate sheet. Manuscripts not conforming to these requirements will not be considered for publication.

The full postal and e-mail address of the author should be included on the title page. Proofs will be sent to authors if there is sufficient time to do so. They should be corrected and returned within 48 hours of receipt. The editor reserves the right to publish without proofs having been signed-off by the author.